



Issue 9, June 2013

ACS ALUMNI Magazine

Accredited by



Professor Carl Djerassi '42: Science & Fiction

Presenting: ACS Faculty and Their Follies

Welcoming Our Newest Alumni, The Class of 2013



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On the inner back cover – ACS Faculty Follies 2011 (Photograph by Magda Bucior); **outer back cover** – ACS Choir and Instrumental Studio at Arts Fest 2013 (Photograph by Daniel Lekov)



FROM THE PRESIDENT



Greetings:

I think it important for you to know that my wife Teresa and I have signed a contract to stay at ACS for another two years until June 30 of 2015. After that who knows. We are enjoying our work at ACS and the opportunity to live in Bulgaria as well as explore surrounding countries. Like almost every international employee at ACS we are constantly motivated by ACS' employees, ACS alumni, and the current students and their families. We would like to see some of the improvements that we started completed in the next two years.

There have been several changes and improvements at ACS this year like every year. Some teachers leave, new teachers are hired, and hopefully all contribute. While improvements this year have been small, larger initiatives are in the planning stages.

Some of the major efforts of the Board of Trustees and I have been to conceptualize, fund, and build an addition to Ostrander, called the Campus Center, that will house a new library, dining room, and space for students to gather. During our master planning process last year a new library and dining hall, plus space for student lockers and for students to socialize, were identified as the greatest need at ACS. As you know from other articles, we have secured the funding which is a combination of a grant from the America for Bulgaria Foundation and donations secured by the Board of Trustees. We are now working to obtain a building permit.

In addition to the Campus Center project, next year we will conduct a self-study which will lead to accreditation by the Middle States Association whose headquarters are in the United States. Accreditation by a reputable US agency is crucial for the credibility of international schools. It is a signal to the world that our school meets the highest standard of effectiveness. The self-study involves surveys of parents, students, teachers, and yes, alumni. In addition, committees review many ideas to improve our school.

ACS continues to be a leader in Bulgaria. For the fifth time in six years, we have the highest results in Bulgarian and in English in the mandatory State exams. There are many other indicators. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that as a percentage we have more students than any other school in the top tier of major academic competitions.

Recently, the Alumni Relations Office presented a report on the progress of the Alumni Fund at the Board of Trustees May meeting in Sofia. As you probably know, the Trustees are incredibly proud of the achievements in this area due to the organization of the Alumni Fund Committee and the generosity of the alumni. We plan to make use of a portion of the donations starting next fall in the following three areas: to subsidize the considerable financial aid we provide to students, to finish our project of providing projectors for every teacher's classroom, and to contribute to the Campus Center project. To date, almost 5% of ACS alumni have contributed to the Fund. We only have a couple of months left to achieve our first year goal of 10% participation. Wouldn't it be great to be on target already in the first year of the Fund!

We are fortunate indeed that ACS alumni visit ACS regularly. For instance, on prom night I visited with several alumni and during Arts Fest alumni put on a great Balkan dancing show. In a few weeks I will host the classes of 1998, 2003, and 2008 in the garden of the Black House for reunions. I look forward to this every year as it gives me a chance for informal conversations with many of you.

Have a great summer!

Dr. Paul K. Johnson,

President

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Letters may be edited for publication.



Petia Ivanova '97

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Dear Alumni,

We had such an eventful spring, with many of our famous College alumni visiting! On May 10th, Professor Carl Djerassi came for the official ceremony to award him an honorary high-school diploma - his first and only high-school diploma at that. A couple of months before that, San Francisco-based alumna and trustee Lisa Kostova Ogata '97 had the pleasure of meeting the world-famous chemist in his home and learning about the many aspects of Prof. Djerassi's rich life and the special role of ACS in it. It was moving to see two of Prof. Djerassi's classmates from the Class of 1942, Professor Nikola Alexiev and Liliana Ikonopisova, in the first row at the ceremony. I had the pleasure of escorting them and currently am in the process of planning a visit to Ms. Ikonopisova's home to pick up the second package of English books that she so kindly wishes to donate to our school's library.

In March, our annual teacher talent show Faculty Follies had its fourth and very successful edition. We even caught the attention of Bulgarian National TV and the event was featured in their weekend show "Денят отблизко с Мира Добрева". You are about to find out what makes this show special from the stars themselves, former ACS teachers Michael Branch and Adam Klempa and current faculty members Ivailo Dimitrov, John Stephens, and Philip Altman.

In April, we welcomed Professor Georgi Atanasov, an 87-year-old mountaineer of the Class of 1945. As you are about to learn, he is one of a kind - skiing, hiking, and climbing summits in his 80s and joking every chance he gets.

April was enriched by another remarkable occasion: the 100th birthday of alumna of the Class of 1933 and former College Biology teacher Paraskeva Mihailova-Tosheva. She flew in from the States where she resides to celebrate with friends, family, former colleagues, students, and classmates in her dear home-town of Sofia. Together with her family she was looking forward to visiting the College, too, and only the overwhelming emotions of her celebration and her memories reverberating prevented her from realizing the plan in the end.

Sadly, we also lost alumni and personalities dear to College, with Arek Hampartzumian's passing in May and that of Leda Mileva '38 earlier in February. They are no longer among us but their legacy remains. May their souls rest in peace!

Hope is what we feel though, seeing how many of the College alumni are staying in touch, thinking of their school, and finding their own ways of giving back to it. There are those that donate time and money as members of the Board of Trustees, members of the Alumni Fund, or donors to make sure the school keeps being one of the best in its kind. There are those that take every chance to return for school stage productions, the annual Christmas Concert, and the Arts Fest, quickly assuming old roles performing or assisting back stage. And then there are those who try to improve the world at various locations around the globe, acknowledging the influence ACS has had in their life and thereby spreading the word about our unique school in the most influential way there is, by their worthy actions and example. What a great example of this Kalina Manova '98 is, whom we had the pleasure of hearing from in the Alumni in Focus section of this issue.

But most recently, I was deeply moved to be contacted by a much younger alumnus, a musically gifted member of the Class of 2012, who was busy... composing a song for the Last Bell ceremony, one of ACS seniors' favorite traditions of recent years.

Dear ACS Alumni, thank you for being **that** amazing!

Have a wonderful summer!

Kind regards,

Petia Ivanova '97

Editor

ACS Alumni Fund Report

September 2012 – March 2013

Welcome to the first semi-annual report¹ of the ACS Alumni Fund! As part of the push for accountability and transparency, ACS, together with the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee, will be sharing details on the ongoing fundraising effort and how your donations are being used.

In the first few months since launch, 67 alumni have contributed to the fund - almost 6 times more than the combined number of donors over the last 20 years! This represents almost 5% overall participation, and we hope that with your help we can achieve our goal of 10% by the end of the school fiscal year in August.

Participation is the key goal for our fund, since it is the metric that is so often followed by US state agencies that provide additional educational financing. Every donation makes an impact and we appreciate the efforts of everyone who took the time to give back to ACS. That said, we cannot ignore the fantastic support of several large donors and appreciate their generous contributions that will surely go towards making the ACS experience even more special.

We realize that with your donations also comes great responsibility. We are continuously dedicated to providing full information on how your donations are being used, so you will find increasingly more shared stories, anecdotes, and outlined future goals on the pages of these semi-annual reports. Of course, we fully welcome any feedback that you might have, as we can only hope to continue improving all aspects of our brand new fundraising effort.

Thank you so much for the support, and let us together reach our first annual goal of 10% alumni participation!

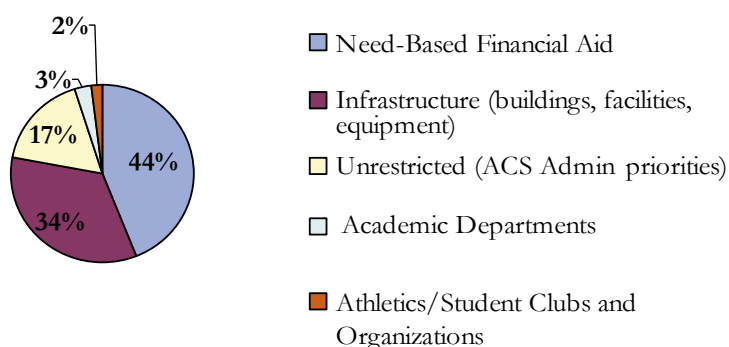
Best regards,

The ACS Alumni Fund Advisory Committee

We are proud of ACS alumni!

- ✓ 67 alumni helped get closer to the goal.²
- ✓ Alumni put 16,349 leva of their hard earned money to work and helped current ACS students by donating.
- ✓ Top 3 Classes by Participation Rate: 2003, 2005, 1997
- ✓ Top 3 Classes by Donations Amount: 1997, 2001, and 2004

Breakdown of Donations by Category



¹The complete version of the report is available on the ACS website.

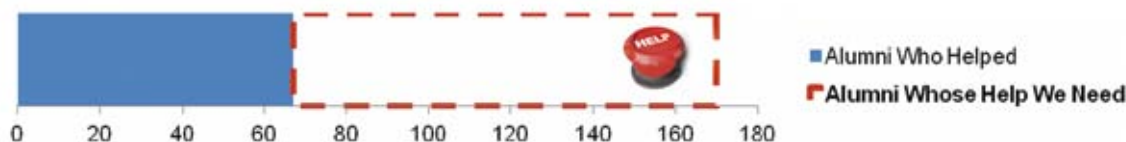
²All data as per March 31, 2013

Annual campaign goal

AFAC's first annual campaign was to reach 10% alumni participation rate across the whole alumni pool, which translates to 170 people donating between September 2012 and September 2013.

As of March 2013, 67 people have donated, which means close to 5% of all ACS alumni have already donated.

We need your HELP to get another 103 fellow alumni donate by August 31st!



What does ACS do with the money?

ACS plans on utilizing alumni donations, accrued in a given school year, in the next one. Having said that, some small scale projects have already been covered by funds raised by alumni. One recent example was half of the non-fiction titles the ACS library purchased in 2012 being funded by your donations.

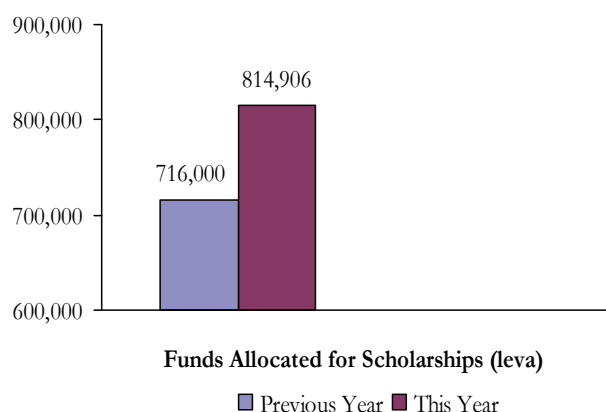
Dear Alumni, you do remember what it was like when you had to prepare yourselves for the SATs, don't you? I was delighted upon recently finding out that half of the amount the ACS library spent on non-fiction books last calendar year was in fact supplied by the ACS Alumni Fund and donated by alumni. Fact is the ACS library buys quite a few non-fiction books from American vendors yearly as exam preparation textbooks are always in demand. And when asked, students and teachers always need the latest issues which are, of course, the best, most complete, and most up-to-date. Some years students are all about the AP exams, other years it is the SATs that are most wanted or as I like to call it 'the exam fashion'. Add to these the TOEFL and the IELTS and you see how it adds up. To make things even more interesting the respective officials decide to change the exam content of some subjects from time to time and the interest in the latest textbooks peaks again. As a librarian it is my obligation, my right, and my pleasure to supply students and teachers with what they need in order to be successful. That is why I am utterly grateful for the opportunity the ACS Alumni Fund gave us all with their recent support. Thank you!

Alexandra Alexandrova

Head of Library, at ACS since 1996

In 2012/2013, ACS gave **MORE:**

- ☒ Students scholarships
- ☒ Money for scholarships



How to donate? Have questions?

You can donate online at "Giving to the College" on the ACS website or at the ACS Alumni Office.

If you have questions, concerns or suggestions, please feel free to reach out to any AFAC member (http://acs.bg/Home/Giving_to_the_College/About_the_Alumni_Fund.aspx) or to your class representative.

If you are not sure who your class representative is, please contact Petia Ivanova '97, e-mail p.mironova@acs.bg, from the ACS Alumni Relations, Development, and Admissions Office to find out.

Professor Carl Djerassi '42: Science & Fiction

Interview by Lisa Kostova Ogata '97

It's 4 o'clock on a sunny San Francisco Saturday. There's nowhere a cloud to be seen. I step into the beautiful marble foyer of one of the oldest San Francisco high rises, perched on top of a hill and overlooking the whole bay. The elevator takes me to the residence of Prof. Carl Djerassi and I step into a beautifully painted hallway submerged in rich and deep blue hues with the Scorpio constellation and the night sky above me. The elevator door closes to reveal in golden letters the words "Es tickt und tickt die Zeit und die Feder ist schon eingetaucht¹". I look around. I am at a loss as to which of the two doors to go through - one of them is open, so I gingerly step inside. "Hello? Prof. Djerassi?" As I scan the space, my mind is trying to absorb all the colors and the numerous pieces of modern and pre-Colombian art decorating the floors and the walls. Out of nowhere emerges the thin but stately frame of an older gentleman. He shakes my hand energetically and I can't help but notice that his eyes are full of life and his head is sporting a mane of thick white hair. Even though he's supported by a cane (the result of a ski injury on Vitosha, as I am about to learn), he walks so briskly that I have to hurry up to follow him through the apartment into the living room where we will be conversing for the rest of the afternoon.

I first learned about Prof. Djerassi when I was a student at the College. I knew he was the inventor of the birth control pill, a famous scientist, and an art collector. By the time I met him in San Francisco, I learned that he was also an accomplished author and playwright, as well as an art benefactor who

had converted his ranch at Woodside, California into a resident program for emerging artists. Born in Vienna in 1923 to an Austrian mother and a Bulgarian father, Prof. Djerassi grabbed the world's attention in 1951 when his science team in Mexico City became the first to synthesize the progestin norethindrone. Unlike other hormones, that progestin remained effective when taken orally and was the active ingredient in the first oral contraceptive pill. He was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in the US and is the recipient of the National Medal of Science, awarded by President Nixon, the National Medal of Technology, and the Perkin Medal. Other prestigious awards and honors of his in the US and Europe include an Austrian post stamp with his image and 31 honorary doctorates – two of them from Bulgarian institutions (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and most recently the American University in Bulgaria). Prof. Djerassi is a collector of the works of Paul Klee, among other art works, and has gifted most of his Klee collection to the San Francisco Modern Art Museum. He is the author of three autobiographies, over a dozen fiction and science-in-fiction² books and several plays, including *Oxygen*, *An Immaculate Misconception: Sex in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, *Newton's Darkness*, and *Insufficiency*, which have been staged in theaters in the United States, Austria, Germany, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom and many other countries.

These days Prof. Djerassi spends his time finishing his "third and last" autobiography, playwriting, traveling to speaking engagements, and consulting on the sets of his plays in the United States and Europe. "I work harder than most 30-year olds", he notes, revealing a glimpse of his desire to be seen as an evolving, active artist, and intellectual, and not as "a relic piece in a museum", which is how he feels society views most 90-year-olds these days.

Clearly, this is a fascinating man with a rich history, an active mind, and an inexhaustible zest for life. And clearly, we won't even begin to scratch the surface of such a long and full life in a single sitting. I am especially interested in his story and memories from the time he spent in Bulgaria and at the American College of Sofia. So, we dive into the interview.



Prof. Djerassi and members of his family during their visit at ACS in May, 2013

¹Paul Klee: (Engl.) Time ticks away and the pen is already dipped in ink.

²A term invented by Prof. Djerassi to denote a type of fiction which introduces scientific concepts interwoven with the stories and sagas of scientists and their daily lives.

Prof. Djerassi, you have had so many identities in your life, so many ways of expressing your personality – as a poet, writer, inventor, scientist, father, husband, European, and American. Which one of these identities is the strongest for you at this moment in time?

One thing is sure. It's not my scientific identity even though I was totally immersed in the field for 50 years. Scientists have no historical sense. We teach practically nothing about the history of science, we are interested only in what's being invented in science today and tomorrow. For scientists, what's most exciting is what they're doing or about to do. That is still the case with me, too. Since I left active science in 1992 (except for lectures), I focus primarily on what makes us, scientists, different. It's an oversimplification, but there is an enormous gulf between the scientific and the humanistic cultures, as there is between scientists and mass culture. My third wife, who was an extraordinary intellectual, a professor of English at Stanford³, lived in a completely different world at the same institution⁴. She had never been to the side of the campus where our chemistry lab was and until we met I had never been to the main library. Even though a culturally oriented person, I pursued these interests outside of the university, so I never used the main library at Stanford. When we met, we were very amused with some of our behavioral and professional characteristics.

So, to answer your question, I am focused totally and completely on my work in literature at the



ACS awarded Prof. Carl Djerassi an honorary high school diploma in May, 2013. - Photograph by Boris Urumov '15

moment. I tend to display an irritation when interviewers inevitably start with the invention of the pill. For Goodness' sakes, I was 28 years old and it's not as if I didn't do anything between the ages of 28 and 90. I work hard, I travel more, and I lecture more than when I was young. What I want to be recognized for is what I'm doing now, not what I did decades ago. So, when people ask me what I'm doing now, I say I'm an "intellectual smuggler". I decided to become that in 1985 when I decided to change my life and smuggle aspects of my science culture to the general public. Writing scientific books, articles, and giving scientific lectures is not the answer because the audience is specialized and usually already knows something about the subject matter. Whereas I wanted to deal with the other 99.9% of the people and I decided to hide science in fiction, and later in plays, since I became interested in using dialogue and case histories. I disguise actual facts into these works and that is what is important to me now.

This last year was a very crucial year to me, because I wrote my third and final autobiography. Who would need so many

autobiographies of a person, any person; it's ludicrous. It makes sense for me though. The first autobiography was sponsored by the American Chemical Society who was interested in describing the history of 20th century Chemistry. That autobiography was meant for chemists and is not understandable to other audiences. So, I don't count it as an autobiography. The second one, *The Pill, Pigmy Chimps, and Degas' Horse* was written in 1991 at the instigation of my wife, because she was curious about the life of her husband – especially about my life in Europe and as a refugee. Ten years later in 2001, for the 50th anniversary of the chemical invention of the pill, I wrote *This Man's Pill, Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of the Pill*, a memoir of how the pill changed me in a very different way than it changed women. It made me more concerned with issues that most scientists are not concerned with and caused me to want to communicate with a broader public.

And lo and behold, I wrote a third autobiography, which I finished in September of last year. I didn't really intend to write another one but my German publisher encouraged ►

³Prof. Djerassi's third wife was Prof. Diane Middlebrook who passed away in 2007.

⁴Prof. Djerassi was a professor at Stanford at the same time his wife, Prof. Diane Middlebrook, taught there.

me to do that in advance of my 90th birthday. I've changed enormously in the last 20 years and I've been extremely active in a new way, so I see myself as a very different person now. In these 20 years of writing plays I have been analyzing myself and talking about aspects of my life that I had never discussed with anyone or in any of my previous autobiographies. I hid those aspects in fiction. I've evolved some of my very male characteristics from 20-30 years ago and developed a keen interest in the female perspective. I'm writing largely through the eyes and characters of women. In an attempt to reflect on this period I named this book *Treading on Shadows: the Very Last Autobiography of Carl Djerassi*. It contains some 60-70 pictures some of which are from Bulgaria.

A few months ago I was diagnosed with a tumor of the tongue and underwent radiation and chemotherapy. I decided that instead of lying around feeling sorry for myself I would cope with it through exercise. I go to a very tough gym every morning and with the exception of training and my cancer treatment, I spend all my time writing. I just finished another science-in-fiction novel, a complicated one called *The Sleeping Beauty Syndrome*, which most likely will also be my last.

I've also become much more Euro-centric. I thought that my European roots had been completely petrified and that I was completely Americanized. It was true until I started writing, which coincided with the time my wife and I decided to split our time between San Francisco and London. London was the obvious city for an American

intellectual and English professor like my wife. I would have picked another place but I enjoyed London tremendously and my social life changed completely. When my books were translated to other languages, including German, TV and radio even discovered I spoke German. This was during the George W. Bush presidency, when I was embarrassed to be recognized as an American in Europe anyway.

When my wife died, which was a very, very tough time for me, I wanted to find a new social life in a new place, ideally one I didn't associate with her and inevitably with losing her. I decided it wouldn't be London and I looked for a German-speaking European city where I could get my mother tongue back. I've forgotten virtually all my Bulgarian and the few words I remember seem antiquated; for example, I say *lyubenitsa* instead of *dinya*. I looked at Zurich, Vienna, and Berlin and for a variety of reasons chose Vienna. The Austrian government made a number of reparation gestures and granted me an Austrian passport, which was convenient. So, I now commute three-ways between San Francisco, London, and Vienna. Lately, I am spending more and more time in Vienna due to its central location and the easy access to all the European countries where I lecture.

How does Bulgaria play into the picture? What do you associate with Bulgaria?

Bulgaria has been important to my life in many respects. I romanticize the country because unlike my memories from Vienna, I only have pleasant recollections from Bulgaria. My parents got divorced very

early without telling me about it. As a boy, I always spent summer vacations in Bulgaria where I had a wonderful time. I was an only child who lived with a very possessive mother in Vienna most of the year, while in Bulgaria there were oodles of cousins, uncles, and other relatives. We would go to Chamkoria⁵ or Varna together and I loved that life.

When the Nazis came to Vienna my father returned to Austria and re-married my mother, so we could get Bulgarian passports and leave immediately. They divorced again afterwards and my mom went to London to wait for the American visa while I stayed in Sofia and attended the American College of Sofia. Everything about that worked well. I made a lot of friends and I really liked my classmates. I stayed at the boarding school and came to Sofia only on weekends. The American College was also the only school where you didn't have to wear a uniform, just a blue suit, and we also didn't have to shave our heads.⁶ I also learned English at the school, so when I came to the United States I had an enormous advantage speaking good English. I also managed to skip the last two years of high school in the US because the authorities in the US thought I had already attended a "college."

At the American College, I also felt secure as a Bulgarian Jew, a feeling that was mostly justified. Some people give all the credit to Tsar Boris, but the fact was that Bulgaria was not an anti-Semitic country. For centuries, Jews had lived together with Christian Bulgarians there, including during the years spent under Ottoman rule.

I left Bulgaria in 1939 and didn't

⁵The Rila mountain resort Borovets was known as Chamkoria until the middle of the 20th century.

⁶Bulgarian schools at the time mandated shaved heads for lice control.

come back until 1968. Almost every single time I've come back to Bulgaria ever since, I've visited the American College. ACS President Tom Cangiano had me give some talks to the students while I was there a few years ago. My grandson and my son will accompany me on my trip to Bulgaria this May and I want to show my family the American College. Also, I just found out that the College has decided to award me an honorary high school diploma while I'm there, which means a lot more to me than anyone would guess, because I never graduated from any high school.

What is your strongest memory from the American College?

It was so long ago that I only remember the good things. I felt that the instruction was first class and the teachers were wonderful. President Black and other teachers went through great trouble to accommodate me in light of my circumstances. They knew I was not there to graduate, that I was there waiting for the American immigrant visa which took about a year and a half. Generous concessions were made for me, like not requiring me to take any Bulgarian classes, aside from math classes, of course, where the Bulgarian instruction was considered superior. They really leaned over backwards and gave me letters that made an enormous difference when I came to the United States. One of my American teachers also sent me to a friend of his at New York University who helped me get into Newark Junior College without having to finish the last two years of high school.

I also had my first serious girlfriend at the American College of Sofia. If you look at the campus here (pointing to the main campus building on a yearbook photo), the dining hall was situated so that the boys ate on one end and the girls on the other one. The only people who would cross over would be the student waiters. I would exchange messages with my girlfriend, Alice Astrug⁷, on little pieces of paper which amazingly I still have. Alice and I would also sometimes meet up secretly in the park in the evening.

Also, I remember going hiking in the woods with my classmates where there were always peasants selling among other things lukanka. To this day, every time I taste lukanka, I associate it with that memory.

The first friend that I made was Moritz Yomtov, a junior at the College, who spoke German. Initially, we conversed in German since my Bulgarian was still poor and we became good friends over time. Later, Moritz became an important journalist, a Bulgarian press attaché in Washington. I made more friends at the College and started feeling at home there. Sometimes I would go skiing on Vitosha which is where I had my ski accident that ultimately left me with a stiff leg.

I left Bulgaria in December 1939. When I came back to Bulgaria in 1968, I stayed in the Grand Hotel Sofia, across from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and Moritz's was the only name I could remember. I asked for a phone book, I found his name and dialed the number. We had seen each other only once in Washington



Carl Djerassi in the College Yearbook, 1940

in the 1950's. So, he picks up the phone and I say: "Moritz"? There is a short pause and he immediately says: "Carli"? That was the type of friendship we had.

A few years ago, when I was visiting the College, President Tom Cangiano had prepared a surprise for me. He found six Bulgarian classmates of mine, and all these people showed up to have lunch with "Carli." We sang the American College song and they told me how they met at an annual underground alumni meeting during Communist times. A few of the Jewish alumni, who had immigrated to Israel, would also make it back to Bulgaria for these gatherings, including my college girlfriend Alice.

So, you see, I've been extremely grateful to the American College for everything that it has given me.

San Francisco, March 16, 2013

⁷Alice Astrug '42 passed away in 2009 in Israel. She was married and has a son who is a successful doctor.

Presenting: ACS Faculty and Their Follies

Each spring since 2010, the faculty and staff of the American College of Sofia has been entertaining students at the teacher talent show known as Faculty Follies. Only four years of history, but this event has gained ground among students and faculty alike and is now a highlight of the school calendar. In the fourth year of the show it even made it all the way to Bulgarian National TV where the show “Денят отблизко с Мира Добрева” covered it with footage and interview with History teachers and Faculty Follies stars Philip Altman and Ivailo Dimtron. In year three, the show included a unique intercontinental video of eight former faculty members (and two ACS-campus-born dogs) dancing to Beyonce’s “Move Your Body” at as many as five different locations including USA, Canada, and China, the footage being edited by one of the featured dancers while she was in labor. We are pretty sure their students are still talking about this one!

We contacted five of the most avid Faculty Follies performers, some of them responsible for organizing the show, as well, to learn about their experience with it. We started with Philip Altman, Coordinator of the Faculty Follies Fantastic Four show in 2013, then turned to Mike Branch, former English Language and Literature Teacher and the person responsible for introducing it to ACS in 2010, his successors Adam Klempa, former ACS History Teacher, and comedy stars John Stephens, English Language and Literature Teacher, and Ivailo Dimtron, History Teacher. Here is what they had to say:



Michael Branch, 2011 - Photo by Magda Bucior

Philip: It was my great honor to help organize Faculty Follies in its fourth year. Thanks to the hard work and excellence of the previous three years, the work was a pleasure. This year, we emphasized the beneficiary of the fund-raising, Protected Home Together Foundation (Фондация "Защитено жилище ЗАЕДНО"). Dr. Zornitsa Semkova and the International Baccalaureate candidates traveled to the Home and made a documentary about the terrific work that is being done there that was then screened during the show. The great beauty of Faculty Follies is that even if it were simply a fund-raiser for such a worthy cause, it would be well worth our time and effort. On the other hand, if it were just an entertainment, it would still be a wonderful time of celebration for our community; walking out of the show, I think that everyone feels a deep gratitude to be part of the College. But, as a combination of both of these, it not only brings our community closer together, but it brings the college closer to the larger community of Bulgaria. It was the passion and creativity of Mike Branch that created this enduring institution. I have never met Mike, but I think that even from the other side of the planet, our school remains deeply in his debt. Thank you, Mike.



Four clandestinos, 2013 - Photograph by Konstantin Karchev '15

John: In my mind, Faculty Follies is one of the most memorable and enjoyable aspects of outside-the-classroom life at ACS, and an enormous contribution to the school community, so I am delighted to contribute by sharing my thoughts about it.

Mike, when and where did you first hear of a faculty talent show?

Mike: I participated in my first Faculty Follies in the spring of 2002 at Santa Monica High School, in Los Angeles, California. A group of teachers each year performed this sort of talent show for students. It was a small production, with about 20 teachers participating, and just a hundred or so students attending. I was just a back up dancer, but it was the type of school event where I can thrive and truly enjoy, and one that works well with my philosophy that teachers can build stronger relationships with students through these types of events that truly celebrate community.

Were you worried at first that it would not work out at ACS for some reason?

Mike: Actually, the reason that I finally pushed it through at ACS was because, after my first year there and seeing the types of students that are a part of the ACS community, I knew that they would love something like this, and so I finally went for it in the spring of 2010. ACS has a great theatre space (one that had been absent from my two previous international school jobs), and it was just the right time and place.

Was it easy to convince the school administration to go for it?

Mike: Yes. Could be they didn't really know what it was. I just presented the idea, got it approved, and the rest is history.

Did you plan this as a one time event originally?

Mike: You hope an event like this will become a part of the school culture, so the idea was that, if successful, this would be something that takes place annually.

Everyone, what was your biggest challenge when staging the show at ACS?

Mike: The number one challenge when you set off for the first ever Faculty Follies (FF) show is to get teachers to dedicate their valuable time to get up on stage and participate, especially without any idea how the event will be received, without ever having heard or seen other teachers doing something like this. All of those teachers who, in year one, took a risk and did this, then saw how amazing it can be, ensured that this was only the first year challenge. Once that happened, it was easy to build on that foundation.

The other big challenge was convincing the Bulgarian faculty to participate. We had minimal participation in year one, but once they saw what FF was all about, the second year there were more, and now it is a well balanced show with both the international and Bulgarian faculty fully participating. This is wonderful to see.

Ivo: The biggest challenge is overcoming the stage fright. I always feel quite nervous before performing and I have stomach ache after it. Choosing what to perform and how to perform it isn't easy either.

Adam: The biggest challenge is actually not being able to include all of the talented acts that wanted to be in the show. In my last year we had to decline a few of the acts because the show was already pushing two hours. After that, I'd say staging the lights and sound. We were lucky enough to have very talented students (Micki and Duc)¹ working with us that year, and they really pulled off some tough requests in a very short time.

John: Actually, I have had very little to do with the



Teodora Todorova, 2013 - Photo by Konstantin Karchev '15

organizing of any FF show, regardless of what people may think. I worked a little bit with Mike Branch behind the scenes in 2011, the second year he staged it. When Mike departed, I was bound and determined that the tradition should live on, but as it turned out it was Adam Klempa who did nearly all the actual work. This year, too, Philip Altman ran everything pretty much single-handedly. Each year I've been happy to help out behind the scenes, but my contributions have been minor.

When it comes to participating in the show, I can say without reservation that the most challenging thing was the dance routine I was part of in 2011. It was a copy-cat of the highly choreographed routine the band OK Go do in the music video for their song "A Million Ways." Adam Klempa, Martyn Rowlands, and Jeff Jewett were all able to get the dance down, or most of it, fairly quickly, but learning those moves was one of the hardest things I've ever done. We rehearsed relentlessly through the late winter, but our dress rehearsal the night before the show was full of fail, and I recall that even minutes before we went on, we were frantically practicing in the Arts Building lobby, sweating like hogs. Going on stage for that was nerve-wracking, but in the end we really nailed it. The students went NUTS. To this day I still watch that video when I need a little ego boost.

According to you, what was the least expected or, say, the most exotic combination of teacher and talent?

Ivo: The first time I heard Iain McClinton play the violin, Teddy Todorova the trumpet, and Kevin the guitar, I was amazed at their talent I hadn't had any idea about until then. Philip and Kevin's performance of "Dim da me nyama" this year was one of a kind, as well.

Mike: Unexpected combinations happen all of the time, but one of the most memorable would have to be the ensemble cast who performed the first scene from



The Importance of Being Earnest, 2012 - Photo by Konstantin Karchev '15

¹Mariya Angelova '13 and Duc Do '12

Arcadia. Everybody knew Mr. Richard Braithwaite's theater background, but then you had some breakout performances from Ms. Liu, Mr. Rob Braithwaite, and many others.

Another memorable act that same year and what might be the most epic performance in the history of all Faculty Follies, was the dance performance by the super dance troupe, a troupe that could probably win *So You Think You Can Dance*, consisting of Mr. Klempa, Mr. Jewett, Mr. Stephens, and Mr. Rowlands doing the most intricate of routines to OK Go's "A Million Ways." This performance blew the roof off of the auditorium.

Adam: There really are so many that could fit this category. The *Silver Springs* montage was great, as was the scene from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Mike Branch's "I Can Dance" piece, and Mary Ward's tap dancing. But I'm actually pretty proud of the Dobre Go dance routine, mostly because of the teachers in it. When I originally sent around a request to see if anyone was interested in doing it, I got back quite a few responses, but most



"A Million Ways", 2011 - Photo by Magda Bucior

of them were from the naturally talented dancers. But the idea to cast it with the teachers who were probably least expected to pull it off was, what I think, made the routine.

John: The first time I saw him, Ivo Dimitrov really surprised me with his comic monologue. I knew he was smart, but the way he had all the students in the palm of his hand was really striking. I understand why they have such high regard for him much better thanks to FF.

What was the atmosphere back stage?

Adam: The atmosphere backstage has always been fun and supportive. Once the show gets started, everyone is so excited and focused on having a great show. There's a

nervous energy that gets focused into everyone bringing out the best in each other from making sure that cues are met and props are always in place.



Ivailo Dimitrov, 2012 - Photo by Konstantin Karchev '15

John: The atmosphere backstage is also a little chaotic, in a good way. But I think it would surprise the audience how little the performers get to experience the show. You can barely hear, and you can't see anything, so you have no understanding of how any particular act is going until you hear the audience react. Then you know how well your colleagues out there are rocking their talents!

Working on the video shorts for the last two years of FF has been a lot of fun for me, and because I have to be out in the audience to run the equipment means that I have gotten a much better feel for how well the whole show goes over.

Ivo: Most of us are very nervous. By the way, I always watch the rest of the show as I don't want to miss a thing. And the actual show is very different from rehearsals, which helps me to at least partially overcome my stage fright.

Mike: You've never seen so many nervous teachers. However, as soon as the show started, it was all smiles, especially when each act finished and there was both a sense of relief, and the pure thrill from the crowd's enthusiastic reaction.

When did you know it was a success?

Mike: In the very first show, with the parody of the *Silver Springs*' opening, after the ten or so seconds it took the students to get what we were doing, and then the roar of laughter that ensued, both the students in attendance, and the faculty participating, knew that this would be a great, great show.

Adam: Yes, it was in the very first show. Actually, before that. From the dress rehearsal of the very first show. Watching everyone prep the day before, it was hard not to believe that this was going to be successful.

Ivo: Naturally, the reaction of the audience is the best indicator. Talking about my performance and I am not a good example of modesty, I am almost always sure in my success in advance. My secret strategy has always been to portray hilarious things in a somber manner, something I've seen John do wonderfully, too to the great appreciation of the audience.

John: Like I said: it's all about the sounds coming from the audience. Also, the number of students who come up to you the next day to say, "Faculty Follies was so AWESOME! THANKYOU THANKTHANKYOU"! That happens even when I do very little in the show itself.



John Stephens, 2012 - Photo by Konstantin Karchev '15

If you were to stage or take part in an ACS Faculty Follies show again what would you perform?

Ivo: In 2010 I dedicated a poem to the graduating Class of the same year. So far, I haven't had the chance to perform it but I am looking forward to doing it.

John: Every year I feel twinges of regret about what more I could have done. There are a few absurdist comedy things done by performers I respect which I've always meant to do but have never managed to work out in time for the show. For me the most rewarding aspect is the rehearsing, and laughing, with colleagues as you are terrible on the way to becoming good, and I always wish to have made more time to do that, both in rehearsal and on stage. In that respect

the tech and dress rehearsals are even a bit more fun than the show itself, when everything is supposed to run so smoothly. The rehearsals that we run the two nights before the show last for hours and are hilarious, though with occasional stretches of boredom. Which some teachers fill with marking papers, supposedly slightly less boring.

Adam: With all due respect to my partner in humorous crime, Martyn Rowlands, I'd want to put together a sketch poking fun at the UK's ridiculous portrayals of Bulgaria and Romania in their news. It could be the source of some great satire.

Mike: I would do a Boyko Borisov vs. The Terminator vs. Rambo vs. Godzilla epic battle royal skit.

Who among your colleagues at ACS do you wish to see and in what role?

Adam: I sincerely hope that Ivo Dimitrov never stops contributing his one-man, side-splitting act to the show. He is without a doubt the best thing, and the act that the students love the most. Also, John Stephens in more dance routines.

John: There are still some faculty members who have yet to take part, but I think the message has truly gotten across that this is one of the most enjoyable evenings in the calendar for both students and faculty, and that being on stage is one of the best ways of bonding with your students. So, I hope more and more staff will participate in this event as it continues. Which it must.

Off topic, I'll say that I know Branch has brought FF to his current school in Shanghai with huge success, and I have every intention of taking Branch's entertainment DNA to my new school to adopt it there, too. Actually, I've already mentioned it to the headmaster there and he was intrigued.

If I could have any FF fantasy come true, it would be to have Branch and Kate McKenna come back to ACS for a command performance of "Don't Go Breaking My Heart", the Elton John and Kiki Dee duet from my childhood. They would need giant sunglasses, which is always a FF plus.

Mike: The return of Mr. Branch and Ms. McKenna to the ACS stage in 2020, their first year back as ACS faculty **it is**.

The interviews were conducted and compiled by Petia Ivanova '97.

Welcoming Our Newest ACS Alumni, The Class of 2013



Keynote Address by Lisa Kostova Ogata '97: Giving Back

Lisa (Elisaveta) Kostova Ogata '97 is an ACS alumna from the first graduating class after ACS' reopening and a member of the ACS Board of Trustees since 2012. She holds an MBA from Harvard Business School, a BA in International Studies & German Studies and a BS in Management & Finance from the University of Pennsylvania. Lisa lives with her husband in San Francisco where she works as Vice President of Product at Bright.com

Hello faculty, Mr. President, Board of Trustees, family and friends and honored guests. Above all, hello dear ACS graduates, Class of 2013!

I am deeply honored and very happy to be here with you today. Yet I find myself on this podium almost by chance. When I received the call from Dr. Whitaker about the opportunity to speak to you today, I asked him "Are you sure?" to which Dr. Whitaker replied "Lisa, it has been 16 years since you graduated". No woman likes to be reminded how very long ago she graduated high school. And yet it feels like it was yesterday...

The truth is I almost never graduated from this College. To begin with, I barely made it on the admissions list. On the day the results were released, my father was standing in

the courtyard of Sofia University with thousands of other parents when the admission sheets were posted on the wall. As he was making his way through the crowd to the lists one of his colleagues at the hospital, whose child was also applying, came out in the opposite direction. She saw my dad and said: "Ah, Dr. Kostov, your daughter is last on the list". Of course, what was important to my dad and what he heard was that I was on the list. But, you see, I barely made it.

But that was just the beginning. I almost didn't make it on several occasions. The reason I managed to graduate was the support of so many people in the community - the president, staff, teachers, friends, and even parents of classmates.

In my junior year, October of 1995,

my father, the provider of the family, died in a car accident with two other doctors. The first person to show up on our doorstep the morning after the accident and comfort us was the mother of an ACS classmate of mine.

For various reasons, the case dragged in the courts for several years while my mother and I were left with no support. These were very difficult years for us. In the year following my dad's death, Bulgaria experienced a hyperinflation and the dollar went from 16 leva for 1 US dollar in April 1996 to 3,500 leva for 1 US dollar in January 1997. That month, the monthly pension I was receiving for my dad's death was the equivalent of \$2, enough to buy a cheap bottle of shampoo, nothing else.

Unbeknownst to me, my mother



Lisa Kostova Ogata '97

went to see Dr. Charles, the ACS President at the time, and told him she could no longer afford to keep me enrolled in the College. Dr. Charles wouldn't hear of it and promised that even if he had to pay for my tuition himself, I would continue my studies at ACS. Teachers like my math teacher Ani Ivanova, offered to postpone exams and meet with me privately so I could keep up with the material. One of my classmates' fathers, Mr. Blagoev, found a wealthy boy I could give English lessons to for a couple of hundred dollars, which was a tremendous amount of money at the time and a huge help to my family. And my classmates decided without my knowledge to pitch in and pay for me to attend my prom night.

Americans have a saying: "It takes a village". And it really does. I wouldn't be sitting here today if that was not the case. None of us would be sitting here if it wasn't for Professor Black who walked miles in the snow during the years of WWII just so he could withdraw money to keep the College open. Or without the trustees who for 50 dark years held out hope and kept the American College funds intact. Or without the courageous and idealistic teachers who came to Bulgaria in 1992 led by Dr. Whitaker and with their own hands rebuilt this building before

you. Andy Robarts, one of those teachers, is here today and I can tell you that he and those he was with really put their hearts into this place. In the face of personal threats and tremendous political uncertainty, they found a way to re-open the school and give us this gift.

Today is a special day for you, dear ACS graduates! But it is also a special day for your parents, your family, your friends and your teachers - the whole community who have sacrificed so much and helped you in countless little and big ways. Let's all stand up turn around and give a round of applause to the silent heroes, to our village, to your family, friends, and neighbors. We wouldn't be here without you!

The second thing I wanted to share with you today is the importance of nurturing a feeling of gratitude and the importance of giving back. Achieving great things in life takes hard work, a vision of where you want to go, and persistence. And I have no doubt that you know how to work hard, you know how to persist and persevere. So, I'm very confident that wherever you go you'll achieve great things and you'll be successful. But if you take just one thing from my message, it is to not let ambition and focus overshadow the present moment as it is only in the present moment that you can see and feel grateful for that what you have, for the support of your community and that of your village. Nurture and cultivate that feeling of gratitude and you will be inspired to give back.

Giving back takes many forms - big ones and small ones. I see the example of giving back every day with my ACS classmates. Evgeniya Peeva, who started *Teach for Bulgaria* to provide high quality education for all Bulgarian children and who this year will send 50 teachers to remote parts of Bulgaria where they don't even have a single teacher. Theodora Konetsovska, who together with her husband founded a scholarship for one Bulgarian child to attend Camp Rising Sun in the US every year. Borislav Stefanov,

who came back to Bulgaria to lead the Foreign Investment Agency and who instead of sitting in his office all day like his predecessors speaks, writes, travels, and works tirelessly towards promoting investments in our country. Maria Mircheva, who now lives in Lake Tahoe in California and who has dedicated her life to replanting Sugar Pine trees that have been lost to disease and deforestation. It is also Petia Ivanova, who, together with other parents in Bulgaria, is pioneering new and sustainable ways of parenting. Petia also heads the alumni fundraising initiative and reminds us every day of the importance of giving back to our community.

My ACS classmates are journalists, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, scientists, and authors. They are entrepreneurs, movie-makers, and policy makers. But what unites them, what unites all of us as graduates of the American College of Sofia, is finding our own way of giving back to our village. Giving time, money but most importantly, giving love and care back to our communities. And back to our village.

So, take time every day to exercise this very, very important muscle in your body, the most important muscle in your body - your heart. The feeling of gratitude will light up your whole life, it will fill your dreams, it will help you expel the daily worries, anxieties, and fears. It will let you experience happiness every day instead of chasing it into the future.

I will close today's message with a quote by Jonas Salk who said: "I have had dreams and I have had nightmares. I overcame my nightmares with the help of my dreams". May you have the feeling of gratitude and appreciation in your hearts, may you always remember your village and give back to it, and may gratitude always make your dreams stronger than your nightmares.

Congratulations, Class of 2013!

Magda Bucior: Use a Mirror Wisely!

Magda Bucior (ESL Teacher 2008-2011, Dean of Students 2011-2013) was chosen by the Class of 2013, who had her as their English Teacher as preps back in 2008-2009 and as Dean in their junior and senior years, to address them at their official Senior Dinner event. Much like the Class of 2013, Magda is leaving ACS this summer to move with her husband and their two boys to the United States. Below are excerpts from Magda's emotional speech that caused tears in both hers and her former students' eyes. "I feel that I have graduated together with this class. They were my first "babies" at ACS. And, in a way, they will always be mine," Magda shared with us while we were preparing the following material.



Magda helping the graduates with their attire

Dr. Johnson, Dr. Whitaker, Honourable Guests, Colleagues, and above all the graduating Class of 2013!

(...) You have learned many things in your time here. I think that among the most crucial to your success as a person is respect. Respect for others' opinions, respect for those you agree with, and for those with whom you differ. But most importantly, for yourself.

If I were to give you just one particular tip for the future, it would be learn to use a mirror wisely.

(...) From my experience as an adult who

has been in this world for twice as long as you have – trust me, I've done the math, - I want to say that you must **believe in** what you see in the mirror. Behind the skin – the make up, the hairdo, the matching neck-tie, the perfectly spinach-free teeth, there is the essence of the person you are in the process of becoming, or you have already become. Maybe what you see in the mirror pleases you, and – rest assured, that reflection will please many others too, but you know that this is not what I am here to talk about tonight. You all look gorgeous, but what impresses me the most tonight is that the light you shine is the reflection of the beauty you carry inside.

(...) I have seen you shine. What an exhilarating feeling it was for me to see Alex and Ioana all excited and deeply focused while organizing the Day of Silence; Sava and Kalin running their prep for Future Shorts, Ivan playing the saxophone, Kristina, Maria, Elizabeth and Preslava singing, Vessy smiling brightly after 4 hard hours of parent-teacher conferences, or Sashko proudly waving his Honor Roll certificate right outside of Dr. Johnson's office. I hope you all knew how beautiful you were

right there, how much truth there was in you. I am grateful for such moments, and could easily list one for each of you in this room tonight.

One of the most memorable moments of my career at ACS, and one I single out tonight because it underlies the very theme I'm addressing here, will always be the moment when – while I was teaching a unit aimed at presenting ourselves in public – Bozhana walked into the classroom wearing a paper crown on her head. "Look at me", she opened her speech, "I am a princess, and this is what you see. But if you care to look at me without focusing on my physicality, you will see how much more there is to Bozhana". I have been privileged to see how much more there is to each of you beyond that symbolic crown, or hoodie, or sunglasses that you show the world.

(...) Class of 2013! Thank you for five years of sharing your light with me, and for being my mirror. You have inspired me. Now the time has come to spread your beauty, and to be the mirror for others in new, exciting places. Uspeh!

Valedictory Address of Teodora Mihailova '13

Teodora's five years at the College have been marked by consistent academic success. She has been a strong student across the board, always on the President's List and demonstrating a keen interest in the world. Teodora's numerous extracurricular activities – she completed 620 CAS hours in grades 9-12 – include active membership in the Science Club and involvement in its Support-Rozhen-Observatory initiative. Additionally, she was involved in the Japanese Culture Club and the Publications of Amateur Writers Club. Outside ACS, Teddy is a bass-guitar player in a band she recently performed with at an ACS Arts Fest. Next, Teodora will pursue her studies at AUBG.

Wow... It's way past Last Bell, and I've still got homework to do right now...

A tenth grader walked up to me this week and asked me if I get to say whatever

I want in my speech. He said he was already thinking about his speech when he graduated. It may seem cocky or overconfident, but this is precisely the type of motivation that the College cultivates in its students – setting goals and pursuing them with daily effort, challenging oneself,

being responsible to one's future. This is the very ambition that gathered us all here in eighth grade, but it's not enough to have it in eighth grade. We have been working up to this moment for around eight hundred and seventy-six school days, if I got the math correct. Because



of the long and persistent effort that is required, I know that it is never too early to start. That is why, when this future valedictorian told me he was working on his speech, I did not laugh. Also, I have to confess, I myself had this ambition for years. Even though the achievement is what mattered more to me than the actual talk, I have thought about this moment in the past more times than I would like to admit. However, as dictated by an old ACS tradition, I was not ready with the details up until the very last moment.

And the reason why I was not ready is not procrastination or lack of involvement. The reason is that it is hard to summarize what the College has given me for five years in five minutes. It has given me things like the ability to choose. Education does not readily give us the world on a silver platter, as we would sometimes like to think it does, but it does provide us with better choices. We can handle the rest – with a little complaining here and there, like when we had to stay up until three a.m. to finish those projects, or our most favorite research papers; with some procrastination, like when we would check out the brand new episode of some sitcom before getting started on our work; with some skepticism and so on, we will push through and achieve what we want, as we have been taught to do over five long years. But we have also been taught that it is up to us to keep on pushing. If we don't seize it, no one can make us better – not with a thousand memos and threats from our parents, not with countless hours of community service and visits to the Dean's office. We have also learned that if we do fight for

our free will and free choices, nobody can take it from us. If they tried, it would be plagiarism, after all.

Towards the end of last year, one of our teachers, who now teaches in another country, wrote on his board one final homework assignment for us to do. It said: "Do great things". Finishing high school might make us feel like we are done already, celebrating, waving our diplomas in a little while, printing the former dean's face on t-shirts, counting over and over. But this ceremony is called commencement for a reason. We cannot expect the whole world to be out there waiting for us with open arms. For years we have been told over and over to follow the directions, to figure out what is required, but out there there are no directions to follow. There is no grading rubric for life. There is no such thing as "zero points – dead, one point – alive, two points – happy". So, in order to complete our last history homework from last year, we need to fight by ourselves and to believe that we can do it. Just like here at ACS no one gives us achievements readily. Out there we will need to accomplish what we want with no lesser effort. And although this can make us feel a little scared, particularly knowing that we will be like castaways, scattered all over the globe, we can take comfort in the fact that even though we cannot expect anybody to be waiting for us up ahead, there will always be someone for us back here – ourselves, all our friends, the younger grade levels, our teachers, our families. We will never be alone.

Enough 'wisdom' and perspectives on

the future. It does not seem right to me that one person out of one hundred and thirty-four equals should speak and pretend to be so insightful and aware of what is to come. I would like to spend my last minute congratulating all those other equals, each worthy of recognition.

To all our math and science teams: congratulations for being so determined and so good at what you do despite the fact that ACS is seen as a language school. I have had the chance to know you and compete with you, and you have represented us outstandingly, coping with all sorts of hardships on the way, such as those terrible competition schedules, or those awful fried cockroaches in Korea.

To all our writers and poets: congratulations for your diligent and imaginative work, and for your new found cure for writer's block – after four years of creative writing club, you finally got a book published.

To all our sports players: congratulations for your team spirit and enthusiasm. I hope the men athletes among you haven't taken it too personally that this year's sports department award was taken by a girl.

To all our student council members and all those people who take care of organization because they wanted to make life better for everyone at the College: compliments for your involvement and enthusiasm.

To all actors and dancers and musicians: congratulations for your creativity and artistic talent, and for managing to use our not entirely brilliant stage technology and sound system to create truly remarkable experiences.

To those of you who are happy to leave, and to those of you who aren't, not that either of you have a choice anyway: our time here is about to end.

To our parents: thank you for being with us when we were at our best, as well as when we were at our worst.

And finally, to our teachers: thank you for enduring us for five long years, and thank you for inspiring and motivating us. I hope you'll remember us when we return as alumni.

Thank you all.

In Memoriam: Leda Mileva '38 (1920-2013)

Prominent Bulgarian writer Leda Mileva of the Class of 1938, who passed away on her 93rd birthday last February, is arguably one of the most famous College alumni of all time. It is impossible to list all of her achievements as a writer, translator, and diplomat. After graduating from the College, Leda, who was the daughter of renowned Bulgarian poet Geo Milev, continued her studies at Sofia University.



LEDA MILEVA

"Hope is brightest when it dawns from fears;
Love is loveliest when embalmed in tears".
Due to her aptitude in becoming amiable with everybody, Leda, the immigrant of our class, has never felt solitary. The number of her girl-friends has been constantly increasing, directly proportionally of course, to that of her votaries. Her marks have been also improving unceasingly, revealing her great talents and rare intelligence. But Leda has never been a "book worm", for she has always paid a keen interest to many other things besides her lessons. Literature being her favorite interest, she became the president of the literary club "Napredak" and an efficient editor of "Ritski Shepot".

In her long and full life she worked as a children's program editor for radio, an editor for literary and children's magazines, and director of Bulgarian National Television – the first female to serve in this role. She also worked in the Foreign Ministry, was the Bulgarian UNESCO ambassador in Paris, and founded *Panorama* literary magazine for foreign literature. Interestingly, her second and last marriage was to a fellow College alumnus of her class, Nikolay Popov, though they were not together while at the College. Leda Mileva hasn't always talked openly of her College past but we were delighted to welcome her to campus just a couple of months before her passing. She came to be interviewed alongside classmate and journalist Petko Bocharov by young TV journalist Petia Dikova '03. Although not with us anymore, Leda Mileva lives on in her unforgettable children's rhymes, which anyone raised during and after 1940 knows by heart.

We bid farewell to Leda Mileva on the pages of this magazine with a selection of her translations of some of the most moving American poems ever written. May her beautiful soul rest in peace!

Emily Dickinson

ОТ КНИГАТА ПО-ХУБАВА ФРЕГАТА НЯМА
за пътешествия далечни.
От страницата с вихрена поезия
коне по-бързо полетели няма.
Така и бедният, без бreme от прегради,
пресича разстоянията леко.
Как скромна с каляската, понесла
душата на човека¹.

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.
This traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of toll;
How frugal is the chariot
That bears a human soul²!

ДА СЕ НАПРАВИ ПРЕРИЯ, е нужна пчела и детелина,
пчела и детелина
и една мечта голяма.
Дори мечтата само стига,
ако пчели и детелина няма.

TO make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few.

НАДЕЖДАТА Е МАЛКА ПТИЦА,
гнездо в душата свила,
тя пее песничка без думи
и пърха лекокрила.

HOPE is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

Най-нежно в бурно време пее.
Безмилостна стихия
могла би само тази птица
в душата да убие.

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

В земи смразени ми е пиял,
в морета разярени,
в замаяна без да пожелае
една троха от мене.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

¹Bulgarian translations of the poems taken from the anthology *American Poets*, selected by Leda Mileva and her husband Nikolay Popov, Zahariy Stoyanov Publishing House, Sofia, 2010. All poems in this selection are translated by Leda Mileva.

²English originals taken from the following websites: bartleby.com, poets.org, poemhunter.com, goodreads.com, thesisterarts.wordpress.com, and betweenpoems.tumblr.com

Edna St. Vincent Millay

ЕЛЕГИЯ

Деца мои, слушайте:
баща ви умря.
От неговите стари дрехи
ще ви упия хубави палтенца.
Ще ви направя къси панталонки
от неговите стари панталони.
По джобовете ви ще има дреболии,
които той е слагал там –
ще има ключове, ще има и стотинки,
полепнали с тютюн.
Стотинките ще вземе Ден
за малката си касичка.
За Ани – ключовете,
да й дрънкат.
Животът трябва да върви,
а мъртвите – да се забравят.
Животът трябва да върви,
макар добрите хора да умират.
Изяж закуската си, Ани.
Изпий лекарството си, Ден.
Животът трябва да върви,
ала защо – не помня точно.

LAMENT

Listen, children:
Your father is dead.
From his old coats
I'll make you little jackets;
I'll make you little trousers
From his old pants.
There'll be in his pockets
Things he used to put there,
Keys and pennies
Covered with tobacco;
Dan shall have the pennies
To save in his bank;
Anne shall have the keys
To make a pretty noise with.
Life must go on,
And the dead be forgotten;
Life must go on,
Though good men die;
Anne, eat your breakfast;
Dan, take your medicine;
Life must go on;
I forget just why.

ЛЮБОВТА НЕ Е ВСИЧКО

Любовта не е всичко: не е нито хляб, ни вода,
не е нито сън, нито стряха в дъждовния мрак,
не е за удавника малката здрава греда,
която потъва, изскача и плаува към тихия бряг.

Не дарява тя с въздух, когато умира гърдата,
кръвта не прочиства, не лекува след удар суров;
но всеки миг някой подирва утеха в смъртта,
не за друго, а само защото му липсва любов.

В живота ми може да дойде най-трудният час,
когато ще стена от болка пред чужд и пред свой
когато ще трябва, зарад нещо по-силно от моята власт,
да сменя любовта ти за малко покой.

И от тази нощ спомена скъп аз за хляб бих продала
в оня час може би. Може би. Но едва ли.

LOVE IS NOT ALL

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.
It well may be that in a difficult hour,
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,
Or trade the memory of this night for food.
It well may be. I do not think I would.

Charles Simic

СТРАХ

Страхът минава от човек на човек
неусетно,
тъй както лист предава
своя трепет
на друг лист.

Изведнъж цялото дърво затрептява,
а от вятър няма и следа.

FEAR

Fear passes from man to man
Unknowing,
As one leaf passes its shudder
To another.
All at once the whole tree is trembling
And there is no sign of the wind.

E. E. Cummings

Милата ми стара и така нататък
леля Люси можеше
да каже точно
за какво се бихме
през последната
война
а сестра ми
Изабела правеше стотици
(и стотици) антибълхови наушници
не казвам нищо за чорапите
и така нататък
ръкавици ризи и така нататък
майка ми пък се надяваше
да загина храбро
и така нататък
у баща ми не остана глас
да обяснява
че това е чест
и че сам би тръгнал
и така нататък
докато самият аз
и така нататък
тихо си лежах в окопите
и така нататък
(и сънувах
и така нататък
твоята усмивка
и очите ти и коленете
и така нататък).

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent
war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting
for,
my sister
isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds) of socks not to
mention shirts fleaproof earwarmers
etcetera wristers etcetera, my
mother hoped that
i would die etcetera
bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he
could meanwhile my
self etcetera lay quietly
in the deep mud et
cetera
(dreaming,
et
cetera, of
Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera)

Felix Pollak

ГОВОРИ ГЕРОЯТ

Аз не исках да замина.
Те ме мобилизираха.

Аз не исках да умирам.
Те казаха, че ме е страх.

Аз се опитвах да избягам.
Те ме изправиха пред военния съд.

Аз не стрелях.
Те ме нарекоха подлец.

Додоха команда за атака.
Един шрапнел разкъса корема ми.

Аз виках от болка.
Те ме отнесоха на безопасно място.

На безопасно място аз умрях.
Те обявиха траурно мълчание.

Зачеркнаха ме от списъците
и поставиха кръст върху гроба ми.

В родния ми град държаха прочувствена реч.
Аз нямах възможност да извикам: "Лъжци!"

Казвах, че съм дал живота си.
Аз се бях мъчил да го запазя.

Казвах, че ще служа за пример.
Аз се бях опитал да избягам.

Казвах, че се гордеят с мен.
Аз се бях срамувал от тях.

Казвах, че майка ми също трябва да се гордее.
Майка ми плачеше.

Аз исках да живея.
Нарекоха ме страхливец.

Умрях като страхливец.
Обявиха ме за герой.

SPEAKING: THE HERO

I did not want to go.
They inducted me.

I did not want to die.
They called me yellow.

I tried to run away.
They courtmartialled me.
I did not shoot.
They said I had no guts.

They ordered the attack.
A shrapnel tore my guts.

I cried in pain.
They carried me to safety.

In safety I died.
They blew taps over me.

They crossed out my name
and buried me under a cross.

They made a speech in my hometown.
I was unable to call them liars.

They said I gave my life.
I had struggled to keep it.

They said I set an example.
I had tried to run.

They said they were proud of me.
I had been ashamed of them.
They said my mother should also be proud.
My mother cried.
I wanted to live.
They called me a coward.

I died a coward.
They call me a hero.

In Memoriam: Arek Hampartzumian '44 (1925-2013)

A great friend of the College Arek Hampartzumian passed away on May 3, 2013. Dr. Eng. Karekin (Arek) Hampartzumian was born on May 31, 1925 and had a complete American education, starting with the American Kindergarten, the American Grade School, the American Pro-Gymnasium – all in Sofia – and finally the American College of Sofia.

Dr. Hampartzumian received a degree in chemical engineering from the Technical University in Sofia. As a young chemical engineer he worked in industrial enterprises until 1959, when he joined the Institute of Physical Chemistry of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Dr. Hampartzumian was later appointed Senior Research Fellow at the Central Laboratory of Electrochemical Power Sources, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He has been awarded many prestigious military and civil orders and medals. Additionally, Dr. Hampartzumian served 29 years at the Chemical Abstract Service of the American Chemical Society, published many papers, and was awarded a certificate by the society for outstanding contributions to the advancement of chemical science and technology. Between jobs in the chemical industry, Dr. Hampartzumian worked intensively as an interpreter and simultaneous translator serving official Bulgarian institutions.

During the years after the reopening of the College in 1992, Arek Hampartzumian was often our guest. In 2007, he was invited to deliver the key-note speech at the Graduation Ceremony of the ACS Class of 2007. Below are excerpts from his address we wanted to share with you. Rest in peace, Arek!

“Dear graduates, on this solemn day, the tradition is to address you and give some advice for the new life you start, but I realize that our generation has become rather

obsolete in the new era. I find nothing more appropriate than to reiterate the advice which in, our time, the President of ACS, Dr. Floyd Henson Black, used to give us on different occasions:

“Boys (sorry, but segregation between boys and girls was in full swing at the College in my time), no matter what happens, keep smiling and if you are sometimes wrongly treated, don’t react immediately – you will be the loser. Be calm, wait, and your turn will come”.

I have followed this advice during my life, and I assure you, it proved very helpful in the tough and turbulent times our generation endured – war both hot and cold, transitions, revolutions, and more. I often wonder if Dr. Black was a prophet or simply well-informed to give us such useful advice, something which I feel is an eternal legacy.

Dear graduates, I am afraid that I can’t offer you anything better than to reiterate Dr. Black’s words and hope that they will be a legacy for you, too. So, good luck, successful start, and remember – keep smiling”!



Arek Hampartzumian at the Alumni Christmas Reception in 2011

Professor Georgi Atanasov '45: Passion for Heights

Text by Petia Ivanova '97



My first encounter with Prof. Georgi Atanasov '45 takes place at the traditional alumni reception following the Christmas Concert in 2012. He is on his way out but stops and waits patiently by our desk until I finish chatting to a couple of much younger alumni. The professor is very friendly yet his impatience to be contacted and asked all about his mountaineering career shows, so I make a mental note to google him. Later that same night I learn about the College alumnus of the Class of 1945 by the name of

Georgi Atanasov, known among his friends as Geegee. It turns out he is one of the most prominent figures in the history of Bulgarian mountaineering with several achievements above 7,000 m. He and his fellows are responsible for building the foundations for future generations of mountain climbers in our country by among other things drawing routes on all difficult mountain faces in the country. During his long mountaineering career he has climbed numerous peaks in the Alps, Pyrenees, Caucasus, the

Tatra, Pamir and Atlas Mountains. Moreover, Prof. Atanasov has started up the department for mountaineering and tourism in the National Sports Academy, today known as Department for Tourism, Alpinism, Orienteering, and Skiing. He is also the author of several books his latest being *Steep Summits* (2008) and as I am about to learn a very interesting, yet down-to-earth person.

We meet again when he comes to visit his old high school in spring. He insists on taking care of the logistics of the visit himself and on the appointed day and hour shows up all smiles on the steps in front of Building 5 after somehow charming the female police guard at the gate into permitting his taxi all the way there. At first he seems shy and a little worried for not being as worthy as other pre-war alumni we have interviewed on the pages of the magazine so far. As we will soon learn, this is just the professor's humbleness speaking though.

One of the first things we learn is that Prof. Atanasov did not have a chance to actually graduate from the College. In 1942 when the school was closed, he transferred to the Fifth Male High School. For a long time he kept his College past a secret in order to be allowed to travel around the world and climb mountains on three continents¹. Yet, according to him the

¹ Europe, Asia, and Africa

communist government readily made allowances for sportsmen and other accomplished professionals in order to be able to pat themselves on the back for their achievements.

But let us start from the beginning.

Prof. Atanasov, you spent three years at the College between 1939 and 1942. What are the memories you still keep from this time?

At the College I learned everything about order and cleanliness I know and still practice today. There was actually someone in charge of checking how well we made our beds in the morning. Needless to say any crease was a reason to make us go back and correct it. Even today, I can't leave the room in the morning before I have made my bed properly.

Some say it was generally very tough at the College, you know discipline-wise, but I didn't think so. There was a list of community work type of tasks put up, so it was all out there and everyone knew the risks they were taking. Usually you had to put two hours of community work for minor misconducts. For instance, once I had to even out a running track. For bigger things like running off to the city on a weekend², you could get up to 15 hours of community work. For three years I only got caught once though, when escaping in order to meet with a female classmate downtown, of course.

I remember distinctly being proud to have been chosen to represent my class not without the support



Prof. Atanasov at ACS, 2013

of my Jewish classmates, who being objects of some bullying by some members of the student body at the time saw a patron in me. Well, there was one Jewish girl I had an eye for but you don't have to write that down (*winking*). Once a week the Dean would gather us class representatives to discuss issues we've had and he treated us with delicious cookies.

I recall my parents receiving letters from the College on two occasions; one saying I was a brilliant student and one saying I beat up a younger student, or was I the one that got beat up, I don't know anymore.

I also recall us students waiting in front of the cafeteria for it to open and singing the song *Mountain Day* at top of our lungs. It must have been springtime as this one-day outdoor event on a hill near the College always took place in spring. We could hardly wait for Mountain Day and all the excitement connected to it.

I also remember staying after classes for two hours that were meant to be used for preparation and doing homework but those were the most boring two hours of the day for me.

As for teachers, aside from our Sports teacher Dimitar Grigorov,

² Boys and girls had alternate weekends for visits to downtown Sofia. So, if you were a boy who wanted to meet a girl classmate back then, you had to escape on a girl weekend.



Georgi Atanasov as a first year student in the 1940 Bor

who later taught me in the National Sports Academy, as well, I only recall Ms. Monedjikova, our History teacher, very well at that, maybe because she was both beautiful and had a great personality.

Until recently I used to meet up with former College classmates but unfortunately, we haven't met lately, maybe because there are so few of us left now.

You mentioned escaping to meet a female classmate downtown. But you must have had other, less risky, means of communicating while at school?

Yes, of course. One of the two places where boys and girls could at least throw glances at each other was the cafeteria at mealtime. The student waiters were our messengers and helped us exchange notes. We respected them enormously for this favor they were doing for us. Sometimes we covered for them

when they were sick. The other place where we met the girls was at choir practice. Needless to say, I was a member of the choir.

When did you know it was sports that would be your path in life?

Sports has always been in my blood but I owe much of my sports achievements later in life to the possibilities for sports practice I had at the American College. I became an athlete here, on these running tracks. I am not sure whether you know that the College had sports traditions equal to those of teams such as Levski. The College sports teacher, Mr. Grigorov, later became the first Professor in the National Sports Academy. Sports competitions were being organized all the time between our College and other schools like the French one in Plovdiv for example. I was honored to be on our athlete team and on the basketball team. I had several victories from running competitions as a student at the College, later on also as a student at the Sports Academy, and during my stay in the army, as well. I even set a Bulgarian record on the 4 x 400 m relay team at the Balkan Games in Tirana (1946).

We had opportunities to ski near the College, as well. We would do it either on the slope behind the pool – by the way, is the pool still there? – or up on Vitosha near Aleko on weekends.

I knew I wanted to develop in the field of sports but for my father it took quite some time to accept that notion. Before the war, he was the President of the Board of Directors of Granitoid, the

largest shareholding society in Bulgaria at the time governing water power stations, mining industries, cement production, etc, situated in the village of Batanovtsi near Pernik. After the changes they kept him as the Head Manager of Granitoid. My father had dreamt of me becoming an engineer and taking over his factory one day. That is why he had not really been supportive of my sports inclinations. However, after the changes on September 9, 1944, he came to me and said: "Listen, son, why don't you go ahead and enroll in the Sports Academy"?

On our way to the pool, now rather overgrown, we meet a boy and a girl holding hands. The professor is startled at first but is quickly reminded of how things have changed in the past 71 years and in this matter, we agree, for the better.

And how does one get a degree in mountaineering?

Well, in my case, just like that. Once, I was already an avid mountaineer as a student at the Sports Academy, I took part in a climbing festival near Lakatnik, you know where that little house is hanging on the rock wall. The most acclaimed in the field such as the academy rector Prof. Mateev and Alexander Belkovski, the doyen of Bulgarian mountaineering, were there gathered along the river. Belkovski had studied somewhere in the Alps region, had experience as mountain guide, and had come to Bulgaria afterwards to offer the first course in mountaineering. An acquaintance of mine overheard the two discussing that this young talent Georgi Atanasov should be involved in starting up

a department of mountaineering at the academy. Two weeks later, the rector called me up to offer me a spot as assistant professor which I immediately accepted. My dissertation was on fear within mountaineering and fighting it successfully. Within my academic career I was twice rejected on the basis of my father's wealth by the Higher Attestation Committee responsible for overseeing awarding of advanced academic degree. Our rector called me up again and said to me frankly: "They will not let you become professor just like that, so why don't do it the creative way and get a DSc in Pedagogy first; after that they won't be able to interfere". And this is exactly what I did.

How often are you up in the mountains nowadays?

I still hike and I do it mostly alone. I start from Knyazhevo and continue as long as I am able. Seven years ago I climbed up Olympus and I was the oldest one to have done it at that point. I was reluctant at first but my fellows were prepping me saying it's not as high as Musala after all and I've been on Musala many times. Well, the difference is that there's a perfect track leading up Musala while the 'way' up Olympus consists of inclined stone plates and cemented wedges for the ropes. It was a rainy day so I saw nothing at the top. It was as if Zeus deliberately hid his Hera from me. On the way down my students had me tied at the end of a rope much like a pet dog. It was so funny I would have laughed if I didn't fear for my life every time I peaked in the abyss surrounding us. This year I climbed Mount Etna.

People find my lifestyle odd for my age. On my latest regular visit to the doctor when I mentioned I was just returning from skiing in Chepelare, she immediately decided I, at 87, must be hallucinating and prescribed 'no women and no skiing' for me. But you see, after having been married four times, my current life partner and I are not married and we've been happy together 35 years now, maybe exactly because of that.

Have you had any injuries in your rich climbing career?

Yes, as a matter of fact, I have a broken thigh bone. Ironically, it happened while I was crossing Tzar Osvoboditel Blvd. at the wrong spot. The lady behind the wheel tried to stop but it was raining and the wet street prevented her from doing so on time. I ended up defending her from the on-lookers who were trying to blame her for the accident.

Do you have any other projects on your mind you would like to tell us about?

Somebody gave me a book by another mountaineer recently, called *Peaks and Lowlands*³, the author of which says his sole reason for climbing was enjoying nature's beauty and the shared experience with friends. And I got to thinking and felt a pang of shame for my own pursuit of fame and degrees. Ever since, I have been contemplating on writing another book, this time one about all my fellow climbers and our wonderful shared adventures; I have 120 of them, you know, and it is only fair to acknowledge them as I would be nothing if it wasn't for them. I basically owe everything to them.

And since I have come to the acknowledgements part of this I am so, so thankful to the College where it all began for better or worse.

The interview was conducted in April, 2013 by Natalia Manolova, Zornitsa Haidutova, and Petia Ivanova '97.



Mountain Day, 1939

³ „Планини и низини”, Огнян Петков – Огата, Издателство „Къща за книги и приключения”, София, 2012

Kalina Manova '98: The Wonders and Wanders of Life after ACS

On her ACS graduation back in 1998 Kalina Manova was the one to address her classmates as valedictorian of the class. Additionally, she received the Irvin T. Sanders Award for Service. During her time at ACS Kalina took part in numerous extracurricular activities including Balkan dancing, editing the school newspaper College Life, and staging Alice in Wonderland where she played Alice to only name a few. Currently, Kalina and her husband reside in the United States where she is an Assistant Professor at Stanford University, Department of Economics.



Kalina in London for the 2012 Olympics

It is a winter wonderland in alpine Villars, and I am enjoying fondue with a view before riding the cozy train back to Geneva through a fairytale of mountain passes and village streets so narrow I can touch the chocolate display in the shop windows. Only months earlier, I am cheering the Olympic marathon runners along the Thames and watching *The Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Rewind, and I am savoring every scone crumb, macaroon bite, and drop of Darjeeling at the Paris Ritz, where high tea emerged as a social phenomenon and bohemian revelry in the roaring 20's inspired "Puttin' on the Ritz". Tapas bars in Barcelona, palace concerts in Munich, adventurous dim-sum in Hong Kong, glass galleries in Venice, fantastical circus in Beijing, cardamom pastries, smoked-fish galore, and eccentric design stores in Stockholm ... How did I get so fortunate? How is it that I am allowed to jump from one postcard picture into another?

It all started with ACS. I don't

fear the cliché when it rings so true. That is where I was inspired to be curious, to explore different interests in order to find myself, and to trust that working hard will prove rewarding, that it is the only way forward. I remember obsessing about English essays well into the night, solving extra math problems – for fun, and memorizing chemistry formulae. I don't think I often wondered why I did this. The exacting standards and stimulating environment at ACS instilled in me this drive and discipline. While I am now much more aware of what passions I pursue, I apply that same energy and work ethic.

I believe that discovering one's true passion is the first step to being happy – the second its pursuit. ACS gave me the opportunity to try on a different hat every day. I remember the long afternoons and occasional nights of editorial work on *College Life*, the endless folk-dance rehearsals, the impossibility of learning "The Jabberwocky" for *Alice in Wonderland*, the math competitions, and the volunteering

in local schools. Sure, there were organizational flops, money hick-ups and make-up messes. But I remember only the fun and excitement (and proper dose of embarrassment!) of finally seeing the newspaper in print or performing on stage. I credit this rollercoaster of afterschool activities with teaching me how to take initiative and manage multiple responsibilities. But much more important to me is the intangible: These extra-curriculars helped me figure out who I am, what I enjoy, and who I want to be. They were also my sanctum of normalcy at a time in Bulgaria when we all had to queue for an hour to get a loaf of bread.

Addressing my classmates at graduation, I was overcome with emotions and impressions of ACS I wanted to share before we all threw our caps in the air. I concluded with a line that has stayed with me since: "You can only fail if you are courageous enough to take a risk. But just as well, you can only succeed if you are courageous enough to take that risk". Yet another ACS lesson I hold dear. I don't know that I always am successful, but I try.

It was both incredibly exciting and terribly scary to leave ACS for the wild wide world. But I knew what to do at Harvard College to find my path: explore different classes and activities, work hard and play hard. I chose economics, with a focus on international trade and development because I was, and remain, fascinated by the range of exciting topics one can study that have first-order policy implications. Just as I am passionate about economics, however, I am

mesmerized by the diversity of world cultures. So I took courses in Renaissance architecture, Hinduism, Islamic cultures, French arts, and media. I dabbled and babbled in French, Spanish, and German. I took up Mexican folk dance and ballroom, and was front row at every a cappella concert on campus. I studied genetics and philosophy, and spent nights eating fried bananas and watching European indie movies with as international a group of friends as one can imagine. I saved up from research-assistant jobs and spent spring breaks in Paris, Madrid, and Rome-Florence-Venice. Yes, those trips were spartan bordering on ascetic, but they opened my eyes to the wonders of traveling and experiencing cultures first-hand.

After college, I stayed at Harvard for my PhD in economics. The first year of core classes was absolutely grueling, but I started finding my footing in the second year when I could choose my fields of specialization. I remember how incredibly exciting the next three years were: working on my very first research projects, attending cutting-edge talks by leading economists, getting inspired by the bubbling intellectual environment. I realize how numbingly nerdy and boring this will sound to many, and even worse - insufferably naive. But to me it meant that I had found a passion that could become my profession. I could be uncovering new facts about the world and understanding current events in ways that could benefit developing and advanced countries by informing economic policy.

I have now been an assistant professor of economics at Stanford for 6 years. I enjoy teaching and thrive on being surrounded by young bright students on the verge of their own self-discovery. I love the research that I do and the interactions with colleagues when I present my work at academic conferences or other universities. I get to share my ideas with

researchers and policy makers at the World Bank, the IMF, and the ECB. I often have to pinch myself (very professionally, of course, when no one is looking) to check that this is really happening to me.

Now for the low-down. Research gives you boundless freedom, so you are welcome to make your own mistakes and be lynched at the next conference. Convincing discussants, referees, and editors of the merits of your work is difficult both intellectually and psychologically. Given the publish-or-perish reality of academia, and the fearsome credo that you are only as good as your last paper, stress is constant and expectations can seem ever rising. As an assistant professor, you have 7-8 years to dazzle the profession before your university decides whether to offer you a permanent (known as tenured) position as a grown-up professor. Should the 15 letters from top scholars in your field raise any doubts that you are the next best thing since sliced bread, you are “on the market,” hoping for offers from other universities. Since you are your own boss, your work is never done and your mind doesn’t switch off at 5pm. I work most evenings and Sundays, trying to not worry about what university, city, and lifestyle I might have to adopt next. “Stressed” and “overwhelmed” are the most common responses to “How are you?”. Tangible outcomes to celebrate (article publication, conference invite) are dwarfed by months of “What exactly did I accomplish today?”. As exciting as amassing vast quantities of air miles can be (and using them to pay for your Hawaii vacation), jet lag, flight delays, and crummy food take their toll.

Having said all that, I couldn’t be happier with where I am now. Professionally, I have been very fortunate and given career opportunities that are up to me to make the most of. Privately, I have found an amazing life partner in

my husband (of 11 years no less!). Experiencing all that life has to offer and discovering the world together is better, bigger, more perfect than I ever thought possible. An assistant professor at Stanford’s business school himself, he and I share the same joys and challenges at work. We also share the belief that variety is the spice of life, and make sure ours is flavorful. At Christmas, we sip Glühwein with his parents’ home-made cookies in Germany, and feast on my parents’ *капама* and *баница с късмети* in Bulgaria. In California, we enjoy farmers’ markets and ethnic cuisine, long redwoods hikes, scenic coastal rides, and the occasional wine-tasting trip to Napa. I go to zumba, pilates, and Argentine tango when he goes running. We follow jazz concerts with flamenco shows, Japanese drummers with Irish tap dancers. In the summer, we spend 1.5 months in Europe, bringing our work along to family and university visits.

ACS still holds a special place in my mind and heart. When I travel, I like reminiscing about different stages of my life that have led to this trip, and ACS has its spotlight in my mental film of memory flashes. Something about these fond memories keeps me grounded, motivated, and happy. I keep in touch with my closest ACS friends and treasure news of other alumni. I celebrated my wedding with ACS teachers and devour every *ACS Alumni Magazine*. I tell my colleagues and friends about ACS. When applying for jobs after grad school, I was once interviewed by Dr. Black’s grandson, who cared more about ACS than my dissertation.

As for all those moments lived in postcard pictures and fantasy worlds? The happy accidents of biz-cations: stolen weekends of embracing the local culture on work trips. Variety is the spice of life.

Palo Alto, May, 2013

CLASS NOTES

Former Faculty



The Perske family at Thanksgiving, 2012, Coll '03, wearing Dad's Clan Gordon kilt and Skye '98, looking beautiful as ever

We were thrilled to get an update from former ACS President **Lou Perske** and his family:

Coll is a marine mammal trainer for the U.S. Navy in San Diego. **Skye** is Marketing Manager for Development Alternatives International in Washington, D.C. **Deana** works part-time at the local library in Monterey, where Perskes live. **Lou** is fully retired, but serves on the Monterey Parks and Recreation Commission, does other volunteer work, and spends his time playing baseball and golf, kayaking, and running on the beach and in the forest with the dog. Their house is filled with momentos of Bulgaria: icons, photos, kilims, paintings, pottery, palla boxes, etc. They really tremendously miss ACS: the staff, the lovely campus, snowy campus, Floyd Black House, games in the Bubble, Science Fair, Senior Projects, Graduation Ceremonies, and so much more, but most of all, the amazing students. Mr. Perske was always inspired by the students, especially those with whom he was fortunate to work closely with, such as Essay Group, Student Advisory Committee, etc. but he often thinks about the students in general, who are so brilliant, motivated, ambitious, hard-working, involved, and fun. He says it was the professional thrill of a lifetime to work with and for all those wonderful students for 10 years! He wishes continued success for ACS and its students!

Meghann Hummel Green sent us an update on her life with husband and fellow former ACS teacher **Cooper Green**:

Cooper and I are still living outside of San Francisco. We recently welcomed our sweet little peanut, Lucy SOFIA Green. She was born on December 13 and was just over 8 pounds. Her favorite activities include drooling, eating, sleeping, and listening to techno (it seriously calms her). We hope to bring her to Sofia soon; not only to visit ACS, but also to introduce her to the city of love, which is Sofia for us. Cooper is now a lawyer and works at a firm in the city. I am still teaching high school in the middle of Silicon Valley. We send our love and well-wishes to the ACS faculty and students. We miss y'all!



Lucy with happy parents Cooper and Meghann

Richard Blackburn Braithwaite also shared with us the latest from his exciting life with **Jaime Johnson**:

Jaime and I have enjoyed our two years since moving from Sofia. We got married in the summer of 2011 in Ohio, a big three day party replete with water skiing, soccer, and, of course, lots of dancing. Two weeks later we moved to Hawaii where we work at the Hawaii Preparatory Academy, a boarding and day school in Kamuela on the Big Island. We live in Robertson's Dorm, so we get to interact with the kids all the time, and get to walk across the beautiful campus to our classrooms, which face the volcanos! From our classroom porches, we can see the ocean, the volcanos, and lots of lava rock! We welcomed our first child, Eli, in December and he's been the best addition to our lives. We love taking him to the beach where he can play in the tidal pools, Jaime can snorkel, and Rich keeps an eye out for breaching humpback whales. We fondly think back

on our time in Bulgaria and we hope to some day bring Eli to ACS and the top of Vitosha!



Family portrait of Rich, Jaime, and little Eli

Alumni

Irina Dimitrova '98 wrote to us, as well:

It's been a while now that I have been back in Bulgaria after spending 6 years in London. For 2 years I have been involved in the internet media and the digital innovation space – I have been the CFO of the company holding bg-mamma.com and part of the LAUNCHub Fund team, as well. LAUNCHub is a €9m fund that invests in start-up companies, mainly ICT sector ones from Bulgaria and the region. We've already invested more than €1.5m in 20 promising teams from 5 countries.

And here is what we were recently thrilled to find out about **Mariya Shoteva '08**:

Mariya is the proud recipient of the *Valedictorian Award* from Boston University which she just graduated from with a Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance degree. For her academic achievement, Mariya was recognized by serving as the *Student Marshall* at the Commencement. Additionally, Mariya is the recipient of the 2013 *Departmental Award for Voice* and was elected by the School of Music faculty to membership in the National Music Honor Society *Pi Kappa Lambda*, recognition indicative of superior attainment in music. In the fall, Mariya will be joining the New England Conservatory to pursue a Master of Music in Voice and Opera degree with a merit award and scholarship.





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