

Issue 15, June 2016



# ACS ALUMNI Magazine



*Featuring*  
*Dobrin Georgiev '43*  
*Elena Stoycheva '00*  
*Colin Boyd Shafer*  
*Angel Kozlev '16*









# Contents

2 From the President

3 Editor's Note

4 ACS Alumni Fund Report

6 Dobrin Georgiev '43:  
Children of the College

13 Elena Stoycheva '00: Your  
Granny Has Something To Tell  
You!

17 Current Faculty: Colin Boyd  
Shafer

24 Student in the Spotlight:  
Angel Kozlev '16

27 ACS Is Where We Met: Erin  
Kahle and Andrew Jones

28 Class Notes



**On the outer front cover** - *Fahrenheit 451* by the ACS  
Modern Dance Group (Photo by Daniel Lekov)

**Inner front cover** - Pop & Rock Stage, Arts Fest 2016  
(Photo by Daniel Lekov)

**Inner back cover** - Georgi Gospodinov was the keynote  
speaker at the graduation ceremonies of the Class of 2016  
(Photo by Daniel Lekov)

**Outer back cover** - Peter Shaffer's *Black Comedy* by the  
ACS Bulgarian Drama Club (Photo by Liliya Tsvetanova '18)

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Friends,

It was a great privilege to participate in the Commencement Exercises for the Class of 2016. ACS Vice Chair, Bill Williams; U.S. Embassy Counselor of Public Affairs, Brian Stimmler; and noted Bulgarian man of letters, Georgi Gospodinov joined us for the occasion. Each one of our distinguished guests spoke eloquently, and Gospodinov's remarkable keynote address has since been posted on the ACS blog and received favorable commentary in the local press.

As I noted in my remarks, our graduating class has demonstrated strong leadership across the spectrum of school life – from academics to athletics, from clubs and activities to community service, from student government to innovative student initiatives – along the way earning well-deserved recognition and distinction for themselves and for our school. There were a record number of students (thirteen) who finished with a perfect 6.0 GPA, and valedictorian honors were determined by the narrowest of margins. In athletics, this class has also helped lead us to new heights, with championships in five out of eight ACS Open tournaments, again the best record we have had. Their accomplishments were even

more noteworthy as organizers, distinguished by remarkable leadership initiatives in creating international science fairs, debate tournaments, and internship programs. Throughout the year, our seniors provided active participation and strong leadership, and yet for all of these accomplishments remained thoughtful and good young people, very appreciative of their teachers and of the opportunities they have had at ACS. They have made us all feel very proud.

Prior to graduation, we had a wonderful Senior Dinner in the foyer of Ostrander Hall, and because of cold and threatening weather, Commencement took place indoors in the Whitaker Auditorium. These were the first events to be held in Ostrander and the Auditorium since Opening Day Assembly last September. Other student events, activities, and classes had to take place elsewhere this past year. Last June, these buildings were emptied in preparation for the Campus Center construction and renovation project, and since then they have remained vacant. Resolving problems with design, budgeting, and project financing have all taken more time than any of us could have imagined. The delays have been frustrating, but we continue to be hopeful for a positive outcome from the current bidding and negotiation process and that we will be in a position to launch the project this summer.

The ACS Planning Committee, established three years ago in the last Middle States accreditation cycle, devoted its final meeting of the year in early June to a discussion of Bulgaria's new education law and potential changes to the ACS curriculum. Deputy Director Maria Angelova shared details on the new law including the "innovative schools" provision, which requires a stakeholders group to provide feedback and a forum for discussing such changes. We believe the Planning Committee is well positioned to help the College examine curriculum reform in the context of both its current goals and potentially its next accreditation process. We look forward to pursuing this work in the year ahead.

With the completion of the report by the IT Audit Task Force, this summer we will be transitioning to an IT Planning Task Force that will use the recommendations from both the audit and the report to help ACS move forward in strengthening its use of technology in support of educational and institutional activities. The new task force will focus on longer-range goals and plans. Our more immediate plans for this summer include upgrading computer lab 111, as per the IT Audit Task force group report.

Our college counselors implemented initiatives this year to help increase applications to and enrollment in major US Universities, and liberal arts programs in general. They now meet with all freshmen and sophomores in individual or small group sessions to advise them on all that is essential to a successful university application. The counseling office continues to be proactive in engaging students and their parents in all on-campus College/University events.

My international colleagues and I were most grateful to our Bulgarian counterparts for hosting a delightful, festive, and re-invigorating St. George's Day celebration earlier this spring. Since then we have had the Faculty Follies and the annual ACS Arts Fest, both fun and successful fund-raising events. After year-end exams, we will close with a final faculty party in honor of departing faculty and staff followed by a final meeting on July 1. Later that same day will be a reunion for classes celebrating a five-year milestone – the Classes of 2011, 2006, and 2001. We hope to see a great turnout of our alumni. And from that point we transition into summer. We will soon know whether we will become a major construction site over the summer. Regardless, we have plans for a major review of personnel policies, summer faculty professional development work, an evaluation of the year, a two-day administrative planning retreat in mid-August, with some planned vacation. I hope that each of you have some planned time for vacation, recreation, and re-creation as well, and I thank you for your faithful support!

Sincerely,

**Dr. Richard T. Ewing, Jr.**

President, American College of Sofia



# ACS Alumni Magazine

Issue 15, June 2016

## Published by:

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*ACS Alumni Magazine* is issued twice per year (June and December) for the alumni of the American College of Sofia. We welcome all readers' feedback, submissions and suggestions.

Letters may be edited for publication.



Petia Ivanova '97

Dear Alumni,

What a crazy month this June has been! As soon as Arts Fest was successfully carried out and behind us, just when I was supposed to be delving into the three weeks that usually take the final stage of making this beautiful thing you are now holding in your hands, the chicken pox decided to take my kids hostage, one after the other (because it's more fun that way), resulting in frustrating delays; even though great colleagues and an awesome partner were immediately there, as always, to share the load.

Does it just feel like it, or is it becoming more and more difficult with each issue to fit in all the ideas of intriguing ACS alums, former and current teachers, and students out there with their gripping stories worth sharing? Indeed, the good suggestions kept coming our way late into the week prior to deadline - including a beloved former ESL teacher who literally walked into our office 17 years after he left ACS and Bulgaria<sup>1</sup> - and we just couldn't bear missing out on any one of them. From surviving war veteran alumnus Dobrin Georgiev '43, through current Geography teacher and professional photographer Colin Boyd Shafer and his important social justice campaigns; from alumna Elena Stoycheva '00, busy preserving the beautiful culture and traditions of a depopulating village in the Rhodopes, to homework-defying juggling senior Angel Kozlev; our interviewees are very different, yet equally engaging. Working on their materials, I kept having thoughts like: "I should definitely take Colin to meet Dobrin - who knows what worthy project that meeting might kick off," or "Dobrin would be so pleased to hear about Elena and her bringing generations closer together," or "would Angel have enjoyed doing Colin's 'story of migration' assignment instead of writing the loathed 2-page essays (and answering my e-mails regarding our interview)?" Yes, Dobrin, Elena, Colin and Angel are different; but the issues of diversity and belonging, connecting people and places, finding inspiration and searching for your calling, hopefully without losing your independence in the process, kept coming up in our conversations and made me enjoy every word of them.

I am pleased with how it turned out, in spite of the chronic delays and insanely busy, impossible-to-align schedules. Feeling that there is something for everyone to take along makes me feel so smug on my way to summer vacation right now.

Remember to keep sending us those tips on fascinating ACS alumni and former teachers, and we promise to continue picking out current students and teachers you would just love to meet.

Wishing you a summer to remember with people that inspire!

Off to mine.

Sincerely,

Petia Ivanova '97

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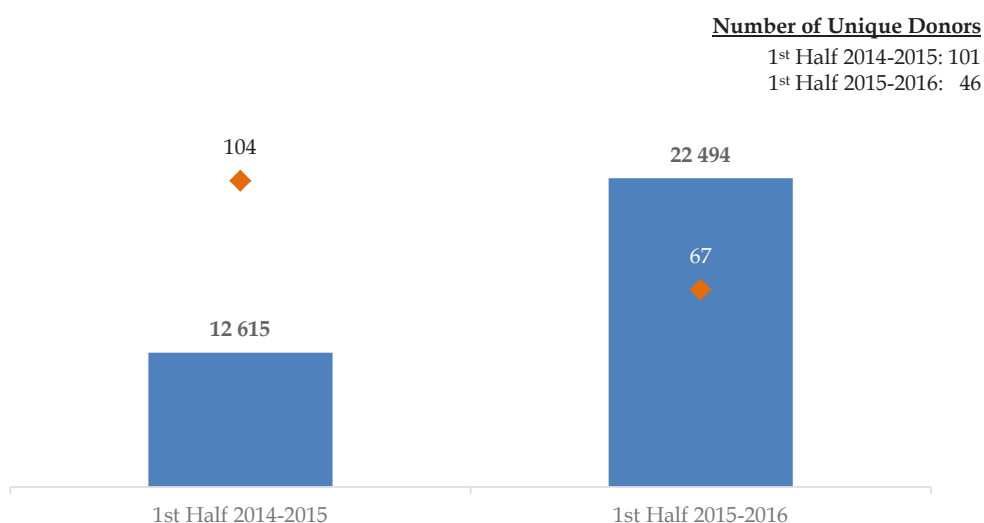
<sup>1</sup> Watch out for my conversation with John Kelly (ACS 1995-1999) on our blog and/or in the next issue of this magazine.

# ACS Alumni Fund Report

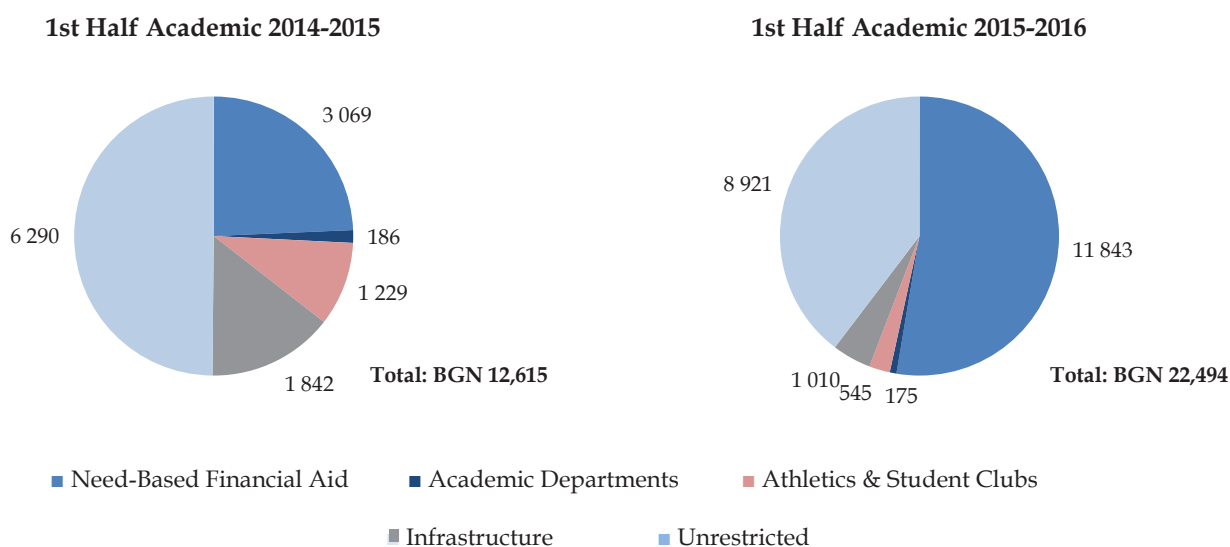
## September 2015 – March 2016

### Quick Overview

*Gifts Breakdown by Year (Bulgarian leva)*



*Gifts Breakdown by Category (Bulgarian leva)*



## Message from the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee

Dear Fellow Alumni,

We are more than halfway through the Alumni Fund's fourth annual campaign. For yet another year, the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee (AFAC) would like to thank you for joining us in giving back to ACS. We invite each and every one of you to make a gift before the end of August. Your contribution, regardless of its size, will raise the overall participation rate and will help our alumni community exceed the 10% participation target for the first time.

In the first half of 2015/2016, several exciting developments pointed to the strengthening of our culture of giving. Seven alumni are now recurring donors, seamlessly making gifts annually or monthly. Many of you have also made a gift every year since the inception of the Fund without specifically using the recurring donation option. Consistency in giving is a cornerstone of providing sustainable alumni support to the College. What is more, individuals have acted as class leaders, inspiring others to join them in giving. For example, Maria Mircheva '97 used the newly introduced Facebook sharing option to motivate classmates to contribute to the annual campaign. We invite all of you, especially if your class has not passed 10% participation, to utilize the Facebook Share button after making an online gift and tag classmates who might be willing to follow your example. Finally, the ACS alumni in New York City organized the first-of-its-kind fundraiser at the Bulgarian Consulate and raised over \$1,500 for need-based financial aid. Several informal get-togethers were organized in London and Sofia, offering even more opportunities to alumni to reconnect.

At ACS, alumni support has been felt in numerous ways. Student projects sponsored by the Student Activities Fund have made a significant impact on campus life. On March 12th, the international student-led science forum FISSION took place, turning ACS into a nuclear reactor for good ideas. Also partially funded by the Alumni Fund were the ACS Debate Invitational Tournament, the Medical Club, the Teach for Bulgaria ACS Activity, and nine other projects. AFAC encourages all alumni to contribute to the Student Activities Fund and help bring the incredible ideas of ACSers to scale.

The ACS campus is also changing physically. The Bubble will be replaced, and the construction of the Campus Center will get underway in the coming months. You can contribute to those initiatives, as well, through the Alumni Fund. Thanks to the Gipson family's generous 1-to-1 match for the Campus Master Plan, you can double your impact.

The members of AFAC love hearing from fellow alumni, so if you have questions or ideas about how to get involved, contact us at [alumnigiving@acs.bg](mailto:alumnigiving@acs.bg). In the fall, we will be recruiting additional members. Please let us know if you are interested in joining our team and would like to contribute to making the ACS alumni community ever stronger.

Sincerely,

**The Alumni Fund Advisory Committee**

**Georgi Klissurski '10**

**Kiril Popov '04**

**Zara Rancheva '14**

**Mira Kovacheva '05**

**Desislava Karakoleva '11**

**Hristo Popov '01**

**Mariya Tsvetkova '10**

# Dobrin Georgiev '43: *The Children of the College*

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

*I was surprised to find out from one of my most moving interviewees among the College's pre-war alumni that in the past, the school had a whole primary and junior high school in place for the children of its employees. Many of those young people later studied at the College. Dobrin Georgiev's parents both taught math: his father at the College and his mother to the children of the employees. Dobrin and his older brother Georgi, Class of 1939, see the College literally as a home. At first, they lived with their parents in an apartment in what is today the Science Building, and after the changes in 1942, they moved to one of the faculty villas, the construction of which they had earlier witnessed. They took part in planting fruit trees on campus; before swimming in the pool, they helped dig it; as students in junior high, they walked freely between the girls-only ("Turkish") and boys-only ("Apprentice") parts of the campus; during summers, they spent their leisure days on a campus all their own. Gradually, I learned that not only the years separate us. At 15, he dreamed of dying for his country, unlike me with the hope that my romantic infatuation would against all odds turn out to be requited. I can't say I understand him, not really, but I took in each and every word he said. I am deeply moved and so happy to have met him.*

## From Samokov to Sofia

Before the Balkan War, the College was situated in the very center of Samokov. The Bistritsa River ran through the campus and the buildings were beautiful. My mom graduated from the College in 1915 and had a perfect command of English. She attended some math courses in Kyustendil and met my father there. After he graduated from the universities of Sofia and Zagreb with degrees in math, my father was sent to Kystendil as an intern. So they met, got married and moved to Samokov, my mother's home town. My brother was born in 1919 and I was born in 1923. A year before I was born, my father, math teacher at the local high school, was offered a job at the College and he took it. The College administration carefully selected its faculty; they were looking for good mathematicians and did not mind spending money. My mother joined the junior high school, teaching math to the children of the College employees.

Years later, I took my family to Samokov to see our old house. It was in the center of the town, right next to the Babite church. We had a big iconostasis on the east side of the house, my grandfather having been part of the clergy. Levski hid



Dobrin Georgiev's family in Samokov, 1927 in that church; I was baptized there and so was my younger son. There's a monument in honor of the College in downtown Samokov, and across from it is where the evangelical church used to be. It burned down. The American faculty used to go there for their Sunday mass.

My father was the first to move to Sofia, accompanying his students in 1927. The rest of us moved in 1929. I started school in 1930, attending the primary school for children of College employees.

## First Day of School

School started in full force on September 20, as if it were any given day in the semester, not the first day after a long holiday. We received

textbooks on the same day or the day before, as well as a post card, just this big, but it would fit the full schedule of classes. The bell would toll in the morning to announce the beginning of classes, and the pupils were incredibly disciplined from period 1.

The whole school gathered in Assembly Hall and the Orthodox bishop (Stefan at the time) announced the beginning of the school year in front of the central building. The Americans were flawless in their respect of the local official religion. For instance, in the cafeteria there were tables set especially for students who were fasting. So, the bishop led the opening ceremony and classes began. He had a total of 25 minutes for his speech and was not allowed to speak longer – that's how long our break was.

## Mountain Day

The most interesting event was Mountain Day; there are plenty of photos of it in the yearbooks. My father used to sweat a lot on that day, a tall man at 192 cm. Prof. Floyd Black would choose the date, always during the second week of the semester and before October 1 because we needed the weather to be nice. It was always in a meadow somewhere in the open space



around Simeonovo village. We spent the whole day on the mountain, girls and boys together for once. That's how we met each other. A truck would bring us food. In the evening, on the hill behind which Bistritsa lies, the first form boys would write 'American College of Sofia' with torches.

### The Children of the College Staff

The Americans went out of their way to make sure that the children of teachers and servants at the College got to study. You can see in the photos that there were so many of us! The head cook, for instance, had 4 children: 2 girls and 2 boys. The second oldest was a boy, Kosta Radev, two years older than me. Later, during the war, the U.S. legation recruited him and he stayed with them for many years. Sokerov, another graduate of the College, a prominent specialist and teacher of the English language, also worked there.

Us children of the College staff could go anywhere on campus because we were small, what a perk! At the same time, the College boys were not allowed to go to "Turkish" and the girls to "Apprentice." Two security guards were there at all times; one was at the gate to "Turkish," and another was up near Simeonovo. In the evening, the two guards along with a third one made campus rounds, just in case; parents were very concerned about their daughters' reputations. Bringing a bra into "Apprentice" was quite an occasion at the College! Typical for that age, you know. So, in the evenings they would guard us equipped with trained dogs and clocks. You can't imagine how well organized it was! One night the dog wouldn't stop barking; it was chasing a student who had been to "Turkish" and the dog caught him by our building. The next day a car drove him to Sofia and he was kicked out. And all of this over a bra!

My parents were strict, math teachers, no leniency. My father was



College kids in the carpenter's room, 1930

responsible for the discipline of the boys' dorm. Every night he turned off the lights at the same time. He once slapped a boy for having almost broken the door of Assembly Hall – many boys were trying to be the first to enter the hall, and my father had to discipline them. Maybe now it's different, but back then it was extremely strict.

In the first years following the relocation of the College to a new campus, our family lived in an apartment in the south quarter of the boys' dorm (now the Science Building), with a different entrance. My parents planted 48 fruit trees and 20 poplars in the meadow behind

that building (*pointing to the yearbook*), and we, the kids, helped them by watering the trees every evening. 48 trees, 2 buckets of water for each one, and all that while we were on our vacation!

There's the pine forest behind Black house, the pines have surely grown huge by now. This is the water tower where our water reserves were kept. All this was planted by students, myself included.

When the Americans were forced to leave the country in 1942 and the operations at the College were run mainly by the Bulgarian staff, we got moved to the Dean's house, the



Fruit trees behind the boys' dorm



most southern of the faculty villas. We lived well there, with a swimming pool in the summer right next to the house.

Here is a photo of my father, my brother and me in front of the house. It was in 1943 - my brother had just returned from Vienna for Easter, and I was an officer at the Military Academy on vacation. Just look at my pose! This is a poplar planted by my father, with a terrace over it. Then my brother went to the famous fountain to pose for another



Dobrin's brother Georgi at the Fountain, 1943

photo. I also had my photo taken there. Imagine how much we must have loved the College, to use every opportunity to return there every time we had a vacation.

Somewhere I must have a photo of us College kids on our way to Piperovi, a homestead with a swimming pool near Simeonovo. One time Stolzhus organized a trip to Vitosha, in the Rezniove area, and rented a donkey from the village of Darvenitsa to carry our baggage.

Probably my brightest memory is from the lakes north of the College. The meadows of Darventisa village, after it rained, turned into a lake. When the lake froze in winter, I went there skating with Velko Petlyanov, the older son of the guy maintaining the heating. The Petlyanovi were very poor people. Sadly, Velko fell in the first battle near Koumanovo in the war against Germany. There, in Koumanovo, I accidentally found his grave.

Serjozha Bezak was another child of the College and a friend of mine. His father, Nikola Bezak, was a teacher at the Military School in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg). In 1919, the

whole family fled Russia, taking with them an original portrait of the Crown Prince of Russia. It was well-known that the Crown Prince suffered from hemophilia. How much they treasured that portrait! At the College, Nikola Bezak taught physics and math in English. They lived in "Turkish."

### **Prof. Black**

Prof. Black was a great leader. The project of moving the College to Simeonovo, with all the construction work, surely cost millions. He chose a place in the empty field between Darventisa and Simeonovo, installed heating pipes everywhere, and all the villas had heating.

He was very strict, too. If they caught you smoking, you had to do 50 hours of running. This was a waste of the precious time we needed to prepare for school. The smokers still smoked, you couldn't stop them.

In the cafeteria, Black always sat at a round table in the center, while all other tables were rectangular. The waiters were students and two of them served Black's table. For about 40 days each year, two girls and two boys would sit at the table with him. Black wanted to speak with them, to see how they ate, everything, to see if they had manners.

Dr. Black and his wife Serafinka had big hearts, too. They took a girl named Slavka under their wing when she was left an orphan at the age of 12 in 1928, after the big earthquakes in Papazlii (today Popovica, Sadovo

municipality). Serafinka was a Bulgarian protestant from the region. Slavka lived with the Blacks until she graduated. They schooled her and supported her. When they left in 1942, Slavka stayed here and became a nurse at Alexandrovska hospital.

### **The College Experience: Classes, Extracurricular Activities, and Teachers**

I wasn't a very good student, so I never had a perfect GPA. It was because I was into sports and that took up a lot of my time. Math, however, was my favorite subject and I was impeccable at it, to the joy of my father and mother. They knew everything. Teachers were close with one another, and the bar was set higher for me. There was a Bulletin Board where, if your GPA was over 5, they put your name on it. I felt obliged to be there as the son of Metodi Georgiev. My father even taught my brother. Fortunately, Georgi was a good mathematician, too.

Out of all my teachers, I respected Mr. Stefanov, the Bulgarian language teacher, the most. He came to the College upon retirement, and before that he had taught at high schools in Sofia.

Besides math, I loved sports. My best teacher was Krum Konstantinov, a graduate of the College from the Class of 1931. Besides teaching us, he was the goalkeeper on a Sofia soccer team. He married Fey Tobias, a gymnastics teacher and



Fey Tobias, PE Instructor, and Krum Konstantinov, Physical Director



the daughter of a Native American chief. In 1937, they left the College and moved to Chicago. Two years later, he became the number one gymnastics teacher in Chicago – in high schools, at universities... Can you imagine what it's like there, with their swimming pools and amazing sports facilities?

At the College, if you pushed an opponent in PE class while playing soccer and scored, you got a "fail." "Don't score!" they taught us. "Go back and help the one who fell down because of you." What high moral values!

Like I said, out of all my extracurricular activities I was most into sports. Basketball was my main sport. The basketball court at the College was the most modern basketball court in Bulgaria. Basketball in general was great at the College. You should've seen our uniforms - purple t-shirts, white shorts with red trim and SAC branding!

We participated in the race around the Palace, and we wore our basketball jerseys then, too. We won every time. Ivan "Krapeto" Krapchanski, Bobi Serafimov, Vlado Palankov and Lyubcho Popovski were superfast. The race was a huge event. It took place in October or at the beginning of November and attracted high school students, club members, and military men. We competed against other high schools and always ranked first. The route was fantastic: it started in front of the National Assembly, then from the National Assembly to Alexander Nevsky cathedral, and from there to the Russian embassy on Rakovski St., then along the western side of the Palace where there was a fence and a big square, and finally, to the west gate of the Palace. By the way, the big square was where the water consecrating ceremony of the Epiphany took place; the bishop would raise his hand and hit the king with the geranium bouquet, and we would see ice fall onto him.

There were traditions for every



Annual Relay Race, 1936

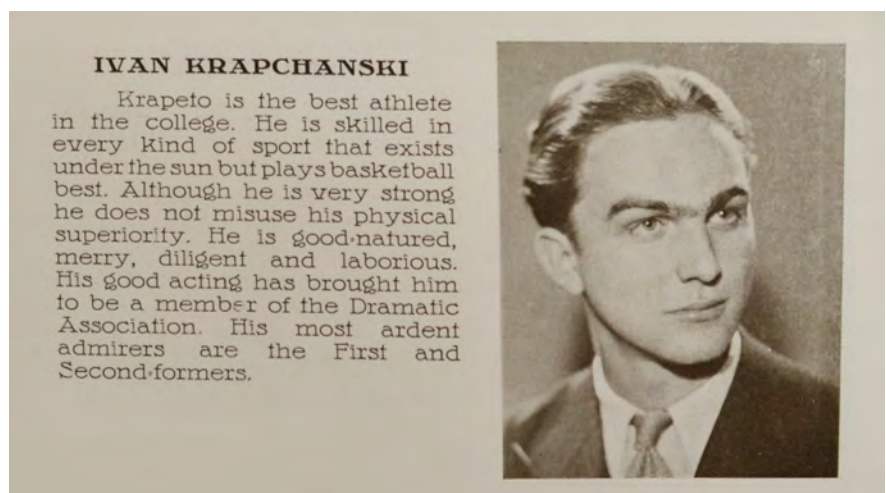
single thing at the College, and we preserved them – from the beginning of the school year, through exams, to celebrations, everything at the College was done at the highest level. There were Olympiads and sport tournaments, for instance against St. Augustine, the French college in Plovdiv.

I skied, too, of course. We College students, used to go to Aleko to ski. Being from Samokov, I was born on skis, as they say. In 1942, I took part in a ski competition for youths in Garmischpartenkirchen. The last time I skied was in 1983 in Borovets. I remained active in sports until late in life, so maybe I owe my longevity to it.

The funniest thing I remember was

the performance of *The Beautiful Helen*. The entire College had gathered in the Assembly Hall. The student actors came out carrying the beautiful Helen in a wooden tub full of water... and in it lay Parker Mishkov, a senior with the hairiest chest - and everybody was laughing themselves senseless.

There was terrific entertainment - there was the pool, basketball, a sports night of jumps, everything. No one stopped me from doing anything. Life was full, Saturday and Sunday included. On Sunday mornings, at ten, we would go to prayer in the Assembly Hall, with everybody dressed in their Sunday best. It was over by 10:20, and afterwards we would go to lunch



Ivan Krapchanski, 1936

in our Sunday outfits, the girls in their blue dresses with collars. The traditions were really fantastic.

### Memorable Alumni

We had famous people in our Class. Dancho Malinovski, for example, became Head of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Our most excellent student was Lyubomir Merdjanov. But perhaps out of ambition to receive a medal of valor, he rushed first into battle and was killed on the frontlines. Georgi Mihaylov became a doctor. Nikolay "Kondeto" Kondov was bodyguard for one of the prime ministers. Petar Gornev's brother graduated with my brother's Class of 1939 and worked for the U.S. Department of State. Zografov was ambitious. And Penka Lukova, the general's daughter, was in my Class. They weren't ordinary people; their fathers were all hot shots.

There were poorer ones, too. They worked as waiters while studying at the College. And one of them rang the bell. Avram Avramov sat next to me, and later became the head of the largest children's hospital in Jerusalem. Blaga Batouleva left for England.

I had two girlfriends in college. Slavka Kraveva was my first. Her family was able to pay the tuition, as they had great stands in the Hali market hall. The second one, Lilly Furnadjieva, was a big ship captain's daughter. She's changed a bit here, these photos are from 1940 when I was already in the Military Academy. Her mother had died and she lived with her father. Maria Kaneva was another interesting woman.

The most accomplished student in the College was Hazurbasanov from the Class of 1937, remember that name. He was a smoker and in order to smoke he had to hide somewhere in the woods, and that meant he had to spend at least an hour of his free time hiding. And so he did, and nevertheless he received the highest marks across the board. The best student the College ever



Dobrin as a second form student at the College, 1938

had, I believe.

Another excellent student was Karlo Ognyanov. He became a famous doctor, director of the natology hospital on Sheynovo Street. His father was the brother of the great actor Sava Ognyanov.

We had terrific basketball players at the College, like Ivan Krapchanski. And the oldest player was Kosta Shamandourov from the Class of 1933, a magician of basketball. Later he won a great distinction in Canada, where he studied engineering after the College.



Dobrin with his father and brother in front of the faculty villa they lived in after 1942

### The Military Academy and the War

I entered the Military Academy in 1939 after I finished first and second forms at the College. The juniors from the Military Academy were considered to have completed their military service and were granted the rank of private. The entry exam was intense: mathematics, Bulgarian, history and an entire day of physical examinations to test the eyes, nose, chest. Out of 1800 candidates only 170 made it in, with 600 failing just the physical exam. Then came the math. The math exam at the Military Academy was frightful. The head of the math department was called Ivancho the Evil. You must know that mathematics is the basis of artillery. An artillerist is nothing without math. To hit over the hills, you need mathematics. I was number one in math, 11.75 out of 12. Why 11.75, you might ask? Well, I got fed up with the last problem, and I just put down the answer – and how I got there, none of your business. And they shaved off 0.25. And mathematics carried the greatest weight.

With that exam they were selecting the elite of the Class. It builds character. A Bulgarian officer. Have you been to the Military Academy? You know what an edifice that is, what the Tsar's halls in there are like! Nobody could just walk in there. They turned on the heating after we got out of bed. How we toughened ourselves up... and got everything done on the clock. When we went out on home leave we walked through a door that said, "Guard the traditions of this home, carry them with passion and pride." That was the Bulgarian officer. In the early days when I was there I wrote in my journal that I was ready to go die in the frontline for my homeland. I was 15. Who do you think won those wars? The Bulgarian officer and soldier. We were true patriots. There is no such thing nowadays, nobody values that. I can't figure you people out, these days. But that is how things are, unfortunately.





Dobrin at his home, 2016

I was very badly wounded. I have three bullets in my chest; they went in the one side and out the other. I go to the German lines when, during the last exchange on the Drava, we get sent out at 4 in the morning to get a prisoner. Out of 12 people, just us two return. And when I get shot the last time, a soldier of mine throws himself on top of me and saves my life. *(his voice has been shaking for some time now)* The German soldier not only fires and wounds me, but also throws a bomb which tears apart my soldier who saved me. *(trying to dry his eyes)*

We've got our prisoner. The date is February 18, Thursday. The shore is 70 cm above the Drava. The river is 60-70 meters wide, carrying ice blocks as big as half this room, and there's a terrible chill. They took our boats, and for two kilometers another soldier of mine is pushing me and the prisoner we caught, and that is how we reach the Bulgarian shore, in that cold. Over a liter and a half of my blood pours into the river. And when we get to the Bulgarian shore the patrol doesn't know about the raid because we are too far from where we started from. We had left our wallets and everything there, just those who smoked had taken their cigarettes along. As he steps onto the Bulgarian shore, dragging me and the German prisoner, who

is tied up, knocked out by a blow to the head, my comrade steps on one of our mines, and half his leg is gone. It throws dirt on me, and I pass out. I wake up in the hospital in Vajszló, a Hungarian village. There, this Serbian partisan is a sister of "mercy." They tell her, "You will open his eyes at sunset in the eastern room, and in the morning you will put him in the western room to open his eyes." She does exactly the opposite of what she's been told, and I get a cataract in the eyes. It turns out that she has done this for a second or third time to Bulgarian officers, because she hates Bulgaria. And we went there to liberate them. They shot her. War is a horrific thing. I have many albums from the war. I led 128 soldiers. They would die for me. The one who threw himself on top of me to save me used to live behind the Military Academy, at 45 Cherkovna St. His mother was a widow, and he was her only son. A horrific thing.

Another time, they send me to Koumanovo, and they tell me to save the bridges. How am I supposed to save the bridges – I'm an armor-fighter artilleryman, not a pioneer! And the bridges blow up behind me. I remain in Koumanovo. We are three bikers, we enter the town and one truck full of Germans does escape us, but we capture the second one:

thirty Germans and two officers, all tied up by us, ready in the truck just waiting to be captured. For that I was awarded the first medal of valor. I have two medals for the highest rank, officer's, and a Russian, very great medal, but it doesn't matter at all. What does it matter?

### Life after the War

After the changes of 1944, I was shortly an adjutant in the Military Academy. My commander took me on because of my English, but he got fired on January 31, and I followed on February 2. They threw us directly in the street. Why, we are His Majesty's Military School and the regime is communist! There is a big difference.

And I became supervisor of sports at the Central Cooperative Union (CCU) with the lowest possible salary. And gradually, one thing after another, I got involved in sports, this and that. With the support of a Party Secretary whose husband was a big shot at the State Insurance Institute I got pulled, with the approval of the Central Committee, so eventually I became one of the people of highest regard in the Bulstrad insurance agency. And I went all over the world – Trieste, Greece – because I was the only one who spoke English. And insurance, especially reinsurance, is nothing without English – all the reinsurance business goes through London. We insured the whole air fleet, the ships and the shipyards. Little by little I started to move up, just five months into my marriage.

I met my wife through a cousin of mine. She is from Pleven, but she attended some courses in Sofia and that's how we met. I was the only officer allowed home from the front then, on account of my injuries. So they arranged for me 12 days leave from the day I left Belgrade to the day I got back there, and that is when our relationship started.

When I returned here an officer, we got married. And my wife started to carry the burden along with me. The

first five months after the wedding I had no job, we literally starved, we lived in the attic, one room with a bed in it – and that was it, we had no right to anything else. Later, I called some friends from CCU to help me put up a cardboard partition, - you see, it's that wall over there - because my aunt lived in the next room, so that she could go in from a separate entrance.

After the war the fact that I had studied at the College was a negative, but the people in our neighborhood had very deep respect for our family.

As you can see, out of all the private houses only ours is still there. My father's yard reached to the end of the Chinese embassy. It was full of trees that my father, my brother and I had planted once again. Our lot extended over 1500 square meters.

### Keeping in Touch with the College and Fellow Alumni

A few years after the end of the war, in 1948-49, Americans came to stay on the College grounds, soldiers and officers, and I got in touch with them. And since I was captain of

the Omurtag basketball team, I got to play basketball on the same court where I played as a student and as a child of the College. Maybe you don't know that the Americans had asked Switzerland to maintain the interests of the American College after the war on behalf of America – that's millions right there. And so, those soldiers came, I immediately got in touch with them, and we had basketball dates. They lived there, but didn't know who we were, or what we were. I kept it to myself because it wasn't something to talk about.

We continued to get together with the other students after we graduated, too. I remember the 1988 reunion on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of our graduation, just our Class of 1943. (*pointing at a photo*) Here we are with College people who came from Israel, South America and all over, in a Bulgarian restaurant. Look how united we are. This here is Habel, one of the largest oil tycoons in Venezuela.

I care for the College. I keep following its developments to this day. Look, your Christmas card is over there. But I can't get to you. I have no strength; I can barely go get a paper, and my wife is bed-bound, so I have plenty of chores to help her with. Our two sons, both university graduates, are busy. They get home late from work. The little one speaks excellent English - he also works in insurance and often travels to London.

I'm an invalid with these wounds of mine, the pleura - torn back there on the shoulder blade, and in spite of it all I'm in my ninety-second year. The College, the College – all of those sports, the work. We worked at the College, there were no slackers. We'd say, "Let's make ourselves a pool," and we all went to dig it, and then we swam and competed in it. And what a place to go in the summer – Samokov, yes, nothing beats the Iskar.

February 2016



Dobrin going through memories



# Elena Stoycheva '00: *Your Granny Has Something To Tell You!*

*We are so thankful to gifted ACS alumna and published author Dena Popova '06 for alerting us to the fascinating projects her fellow alumna Elena Stoycheva has been busy with lately here in Bulgaria. We got in touch with Elena in early spring, and as soon as her busy schedule between the Dryanovski Babi<sup>1</sup> audio recording and her participation in One Design Week in Plodiv allowed for it, we managed to talk a little bit about living in a village and the importance of preserving culture and traditions.*

**Elena, what have you been up to since you graduated from the College in 2000?**

I studied architecture in Berlin, and afterwards I did a postgraduate master's in urbanism at the Bauhaus University in Weimar. Presently, I live in Vienna and work at Thomas Sturm Architecture Office.

**What provoked your interest in architecture?**

I am actually a third-generation architect. My grandfather Boris Kamilarov was a talented architect who, together with his two partners, planned emblematic buildings like the opera house in Burgas and the university in Veliko Tarnovo. I myself have discovered my special interests in the conceptual part of architecture on a broader scale, as well as in social interaction processes and the interrelationship between the city and its surrounding landscapes. This includes themes like food production and independence, or regional development in rural areas.

During my university years I was in China for a project concerning low-scale, low-cost housing in a village and emigration from rural areas. Last year, as soon as I heard about the project Baba Residence (Резиденция Баба), which addresses the very serious problems of depopulating villages in Bulgaria in a nice and free-spirited way, I knew I wanted to participate.

**What did you expect to find in Dryanovo? Were there any surprises?**



Preparations for weaving in Dryanovo. The grannies always gather together to assist each other (Photo by Elena Stoycheva)

Dryanovo is a remote village in the Rhodope Mountains. I lived in granny Sofka's house together with two other "residents" for a whole month. And yes, there were many surprises!

The first surprise was to feel how difficult it was to be accepted by

the local community when you come from the outside. Dryanovo was quite isolated in the past, not only because of a lack of roads, but mostly as a Bulgarian-Muslim village. People here tend to be suspicious about visitors from elsewhere while trying to preserve their vulnerable identity. Many times in history,

<sup>1</sup>Grannies of Dryanovo





Dryanovski babi preserve their original costumes and beautiful songs (Photo by Elena Stoycheva '00)

outside policies were imposed here and people were forced to change religion, or even to change their names. In communist times, the mosque was displaced by a big school, and nowadays this building has lost its function because young families have left. Nevertheless, the positive effect is that old people still preserve their local culture, dialect, stories, and songs. This cultural richness is what we at the Baba Residence try to collect and pass on, so it is not lost forever.

So, there comes the next surprise! As granny Sofka took us to the Pensioners' Club one evening, we were all of a sudden immersed in the music of the mountains! The local granny folk singing group, which we didn't know existed, had a rehearsal. We fell in love with the old songs, which carry old stories about love and hard times and are sung in the local, gradually disappearing dialect. Dressed in their colorful traditional

costumes inherited from previous generations, the old women often win medals at folk festivals.

My spontaneous reaction was: "Wow, we need a recording of these songs!" With the assistance of the Ideas Factory (Фабрика за идеи), I made a crowdfunding campaign; it was successful and enabled a professional music recording in Sofia. Presently, we are producing the first CD of the Dryanovski Babi! And now, one year later, after quite a lot of work and many trips between Vienna and Dryanovo, the grannies want to make me a Dryanovo citizen!

**You have volunteer experience on an Austrian organic farm. How is life in an Austrian village different than in a Bulgarian one?**

Luckily, volunteer work is getting more acknowledgements lately, because it is important to have a society of social interaction, openness, and assistance. Thanks to

volunteers, many cultural events can happen. A good example of this is One Design Week in Plovdiv, where I was invited to create an exhibition this year. In a small gallery in the Kapana district, I presented the project I am currently working on together with the grannies of Dryanovo. It is called *Chergodeiki!*<sup>2</sup> and it aims to revive weaving, which is a disappearing handicraft in Bulgaria. I am searching for ways to make it more attractive through new design interpretations based on the traditional techniques and knowledge.

Volunteers, mostly schoolgirls in higher grades, were responsible for looking after the exhibition and explaining the concept to visitors, which is in my opinion a great way to engage young people in different fields. And I was very happy to see how interested they were to learn about and understand the topics.

<sup>2</sup> Rug weavers – word play with „чародейки“ or „enchantresses“





Elena at One Design Week in Plovdiv decorating public space in front of the gallery (Photo by Dessislava Bankova)

The comparison between Austria and Bulgaria is very interesting because the two countries have similarities in many ways. Austria is also an agriculturally-oriented country and faces the same problem with depopulation of villages in some mountain regions. But in Austria there are a lot of functional programs and subsidies for landscape preservation, for promoting local products from small farmers, or for vacations at farms. The standard of life in rural areas is therefore much higher than in Bulgaria. At the beginning, I was very surprised by how well preserved old farmhouses appear on the outside, but how city-like they look on the interior. At the same time, people in the Rhodope villages still use donkeys for agriculture, still have a family cow, or just a small path leading to their house. Even though this makes life harder, it still makes up a lot of the charm of Bulgarian villages.

**Tell us more about the Baba Residence project. I have a feeling I know people that would be interested in joining.**

Baba Residence is a project by the NGO Ideas Factory based in Sofia. It connects the potential of young city people with the knowledge of

the elderly persons in depopulating villages. It allows for communication between generations and, in this way, strives against the feeling of loneliness and uselessness among the elderly. “Residents” apply ethnological techniques to collect information from locals. They are assisted by the ethnological organization Ongal, who bring in their year-long experience from field work and also sort the material scientifically.

This year, Baba Residence will happen for the second time from September to October, but we are

still searching for financing! We think this is a more suitable time of the year, since we discovered that summer is a very busy period for the grannies that have to work hard in the fields. We are probably heading towards the mountains in the very Northwest of Bulgaria, which is an underprivileged region and still has not been ethnologically researched in-depth.

Applications are open for students, the unemployed, and freelancers up to 35 years of age. They apply with their own idea of how to bring new life to the village. But over the course of the month they spend in the village, this idea might thoroughly change with respect to the specific problems and potentials on site, and may even develop in the form of social entrepreneurship. After all, every village is a small universe with its own culture and traditions, endless stories, and interesting characters.

**What is the most interesting place in the villages you have visited?**

One of the most interesting places is in Yugovo, another village from the Baba Residence program with only 50 inhabitants. In one of the houses, in a dim space, there is a shrine called Zdravichkite<sup>3</sup>. People here believe that these are good



Two ACS alumnae, Elena and Velina, together at the Sofia Session Studio (Photo by Boris Bonchev)

<sup>3</sup>The little healthy ones



Dryanovski babi at Sofia Session Studio (Photo by Velina Tsankova '05)

ghosts of young girls, who inhabit the house and streets. The house owners put candles on the shrine and sacred bread to care for the good ghosts. This place not only feels somehow magical, but also connects to the beliefs which formed people's philosophy of life in the past.

### **Sofia, Berlin, Weimar, Vienna or Dryanovo?**

I have my parents in Sofia, my boyfriend in Vienna, my sister in Berlin, and my newly-won grannies in Dryanovo. I would rather not choose one of the places, but work on projects that connect places and people.

### **Share with us your most precious ACS memory.**

At ACS I had four best friends – we were a clique of five girls and some classmates even called us The Agents. We were all artistically-oriented: we wrote poems, drew pictures on the glass of the canteen entrance, and even made an exhibition of our creations in Sanders Hall. Together we developed a comic-like style and drew funny sketches of animals and people, but most often of sheep. And so we called ourselves 'Sheepophiles,' which was very funny. The thing is that I still

like sheep! It turns out that now the sheep theme is also a part of my work, because in a broader way they are responsible for the maintenance of the cultural landscape, as well as for wool production, which in the end goes into the manufacturing of rugs. I find it so helpful to keep my sense of humor, even when working with serious topics!

I also have very nice memories of our ESL teacher in prep year, Mrs. Kelly Corcoran. I enjoyed her classes very much. And it was quite amusing when she taught us to bake chocolate chip cookies.

### **What inspires you?**

Sometimes when I hold a transparent glass of water in my hand – I stop to admire it. It is something so ordinary that we barely notice. But it is so pure and beautiful in its simplicity. At the same time, it has a complexity we cannot see – water crystals are sensible to music and have memory. So beauty inspires me, and so does the ability to contemplate and notice fine details.

### **What makes you happy these days?**

Conversations make me happy – deep, concentrated conversations. When I meet somebody and we start

speaking and discover that we have common interests and ideas, and we are able to connect on an emotional level – this is very touching for me. Since I started working together with the people at Ideas Factory, I have been lucky to have had even more enriching encounters – with elderly people as well as young ones. Among them is another ACS alumna, Velina Tsankova '05, who is dedicated to the cause of promoting social change and networks in the Ideas Factory. I am thankful to Ina for being such a good partner.

### **Any exciting future plans you want to share with our readers?**

I am very motivated to continue my work on the design and weaving project together with the grannies, and I want to involve more young people through workshops or films. I plan to be a mentor to the new residents of the Baba Residence this year.

### **Tell us your biggest dream.**

My dream is that more people would start caring and sharing! Everybody needs to take responsibility, now that we know how human activities influence the environment. I think that we do not need to own so much; we can use things again and share, instead. We can invest more in experience and togetherness. We should be more sensitive toward the environment and each other, and we should care about beauty.

### **Do you have a message to other ACS alumni?**

Even if you live abroad, studying or working, it is possible to engage in positive social change for Bulgaria. It might be on a very small scale; it might be that you help only a single child or an elderly person. In my opinion, these are the projects that will give you the most back, because you can experience a deep, personal relationship.

And don't forget to call your granny – she has something to tell you!



# Current Faculty

## Colin Boyd Shafer: Issues Bigger Than the Classroom

*We knew we would be interviewing ACS geography teacher Colin Boyd Shafer for the next alum mag as early as November of last year, which was when we heard about his Cosmopolis Toronto project (2013-14). In it, he tells the stories of 195 immigrants, as he attempted to photograph someone from every single country of the world who now calls Toronto home. For the project he took two pictures of each person - a portrait where they feel at home in Toronto, and another of them holding something/ someone connecting them to their past. What an ingenious way to show and celebrate a city's, well, the world's, diversity, we thought! We then found out about Colin's next photography project, Interlove (2015-16), another portrait series, this time telling interfaith love stories in black-and-white. Alongside his teaching of grades 9-10 at ACS, Colin managed to present his work at the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) conference in Baku in April, and is currently taking portraits of influential Canadians for a book that is due to be released for Canada's 150th birthday (2017). Colin coaches basketball and advises the American Football Club and Short Film Club, too. In his Geography classroom he really tries to get his students to think outside the box. Walking the stairs of Abbott Hall last spring, we enjoyed his grade 10 geography students' "stories of migration," where students got in touch with people outside the school community who migrated, then interviewed them, and presented their story by making a creative map of their migratory path. Did we mention that Colin's work has been featured in National Geographic, The Wall Street Journal, BBC News, The Globe and Mail, CNN and many other media outlets? Yes, Colin is busy, so we waited patiently until one morning in mid-June when we could spend an hour discussing storytelling, diversity, and belonging.*

**Colin, tell us what you were busy with before coming to Bulgaria to teach.**

I had taught overseas before, in Malaysia. And I'd been two years out of teaching, because I was working on photography projects in Canada. They were large scale, independent, crowdfunded projects, not for the money – I like to do photography that I feel good about and isn't economically driven. The first was Cosmopolis Toronto: taking pictures of people from every country in

the world. That was successful, so I decided to do a second one, Interlove, which was photographing interfaith couples in Ontario, my home province. And that was all after doing a Master's in Violence, Conflict, and Development in the UK, so I'd spent three years in total out of teaching and doing other things. But going back to teaching, it is my career, it's what I studied. It doesn't mean I'm going to stop doing photography.

**So is photography your super**

**power, then?**

I definitely don't think it's my superpower. But I started getting into it about ten years ago. I did a big trip around South America and took a lot of photographs with a camera that my mother bought me for Christmas. I thought they were decent, people seemed to think so. I started wanting to do it more. So I started traveling and taking pictures. That got me into it at first. I just found a decent camera, and tried to put in a concerted effort to take pictures while I was traveling. Looking back, I don't think they're necessarily good photos – I mean, there are beautiful places and it's easy to take a good photo, – but I wasn't what I would call a photographer until maybe 2009. I didn't study photography. My art knowledge in general is pretty minimal. For me it's just the process of doing it and being interested in it. Is it my best skill? There's nothing else I feel as passionate about.

**Does photography help your teaching?**

It definitely does. The projects that I've done have all been related to



Colin with children from Regents Park in Toronto who are learning about photography and discussing his book

what I teach. In one sense, the kind of photography I do involves talking to people; being able to talk to another person is a great part of it. I think that's very relatable to teaching. But then the actual content of what I photograph creates conversations in the classroom. Specifically, obviously, with geography, having photographed a person from every country in the world is a very directly connected thing.

**We just saw and marveled at the Stories of Migration projects of your grade 10 geography students. What a simple yet ingenious way to humanize migration. How do you choose the assignments you give to your students?**

Obviously, there is a curriculum that needs to be covered. So I guess the challenge for me is deciding how to get students to do something that isn't just like a textbook, filling boxes, or remembering terms; how to get them to do something that would hopefully lead to bigger ideas, or that maybe outside of my classroom would get them involved with an organization or continue a connection to a person who is probably in a very different situation than themselves.

At my previous school, I led a World Issues conference because I was the World Issues teacher. It became more than just a class project. It became a huge thing where people from around Malaysia and organizations that were doing important work with refugees, women's rights, etc. would come and present. It was really great and is still going on today. These types of activities, just like the Stories of Migration project, are definitely bigger than the class. For some students it might be seen as extra work, but I think it's really rewarding. It's more rewarding than just reading about someone migrating, or making a map about some fictional person that I give them – they're actually meeting the

person and telling their story. It's pretty cool. In Geography, migration is a crucial topic, and we can sit and talk about push and pull factors, or various statistics, and it gets kind of dry. So I guess the challenge is to find a way to make it more personal. As you said, humanizing migration, especially in this part of the world.

Migration can be a one-day topic and that could be the way that a teacher takes this course. But for me, it is something that's been treated throughout the second semester. Because I think it's as important as any other topic.

I just had a student present her father's migration story. There were a lot of tears, and it was very real for all the students. And it was very real for me to realize that not only is it “over there” but sometimes it’s “right here.” A lot of the people that were interviewed had left Bulgaria in the late 80's or early 90's, and many of them had come back – I would be surprised if they had had a lot of people reach out to them before and say, “Hey, I want to tell your story and I want to tell it in a way that's respectful and honest and not sensationalized. I'm just interested.” Having someone tell your story would be an honor for anyone.

**What's the worst thing about teaching and what's the best?**

The worst thing is the grading, the marking. I have 220 students.... it's too much. The best thing is those moments where some learning is happening about bigger issues than the classroom.

The challenge is always going to be to get students to do something for more than just marks, which in itself is understandable because they're trying to survive in this environment. When you experience those moments, when you realize that they've actually done something for another reason - that's a pretty cool thing. When I was their age, I

was doing the same thing, I'm sure I wasn't excited about doing extra work. But Geography is definitely the type of class where, after reading about something, they'll continue reading about it, and it could stay in their life, at least that's my hope. 99.9% of my students aren't going to be geographers; but hopefully these ideas and these little bits of information will permeate throughout their careers and general thinking about the world.

**What's the worst thing about photography and what's the best?**

The best thing about photography is that it gives you the ability to explore important issues in a visual way. It's a tool to tell a story. And that's really good for me because I want to do that.

The worst thing about it, I think, is just the way people perceive photographs. They sometimes read into them too much, this whole idea of the picture telling a thousand words. I think that's problematic, especially in today's environment. There are a lot of misconstrued messages. It's a very powerful thing, but it can be misused. There are a lot of conversations about images being manipulated and documentaries that are supposed to be telling a true story, but there's also another side to it. In some small way, every image is manipulated to some degree. I think that the big message should be that photographs can only tell you so much, and they are always going to be subjective. And there's probably going to be an angle to some degree, but as a documentary photographer you try to tell as clear and honest a story as possible. Especially in my portrait projects, I really wanted the people to be happy to be in the picture, and I didn't want anybody to feel misrepresented.

**The artistic projects you undertake draw attention to important social issues like**





Cosmopolis: Eileen from the United Kingdom

**discrimination. What guides you when you choose your photography projects?**

The big thing for me was that I was taking a lot of nice pictures, and I realized I wasn't really doing anything with them. So I wanted to use photography as a way to explore issues that I thought were important. In regards to selection, the issue is the thing that drives the photograph. It's not like, "Oh that's beautiful, I'm going to take some pictures of it." It's "I want you to talk about this, so I'm going to take a photo" – because that's what I know.

On choosing Cosmopolis Toronto, I knew that diversity was the hot topic, the big conversation being had in Toronto, maybe the most diverse city in the world. So I thought about how I could present that in a way that would be more than statistics, and would be honest and real and not treating the people behind those numbers as subjects, but instead as participants in the telling of their own stories.

It's important, as in any sort of research, to be open to what you find. I definitely didn't want to tell only stories of diversity that were positive, just like I didn't want to photograph only couples that were

having a really, really wonderful time in their relationship. I was open to whatever they said. That is important. But a lot of it is not told through the photographs, it is told through the stories that go along with them. That's why I think if you were to take these photo projects out of any sort of context, they might not make sense – you do need the stories with them. And the narrative is made by the person, not just me making up ideas about what I think they might be like.

**How did the Cosmopolis Toronto project come to life?**

I needed to go back home and be with my grandmother (pictured),

91 years old as of this June. I needed to live with her and I needed to do something while I was there. And diversity seemed to be the most important topic in Toronto.

**And how did you come up with the Interlove project idea?**

While I was doing Cosmopolis Toronto, I started thinking about diversity and the ways it is complicated in itself – there are so many different aspects of diversity beyond what country you're from. And so the diversity of relationships got me thinking about it. And I still don't think that anybody has made a concerted effort to listen to – or more specifically, to photograph portraits of – people who are in interfaith relationships. Interracial, intercultural relationships are a common story; it's been told. And in that context, it's not controversial anymore. So a project like that would have had much greater importance thirty years ago, but I think that interfaith relationships are kind of where it's at right now, that it's still not a comfortable territory for a lot of people.

It was interesting, but also hard to find people because a lot of them don't want to publicly tell their stories about something so controversial or private. Some of the people I got connected to through friends, or



Cosmopolis: Eileen's memento



Interlove: Najwa & Samir

they had heard about the project on the news or whatever. First they would fill out an application in which they would tell me a bit about their story and why they wanted to be in the project. And then, because it was across Ontario, we had to figure out how we would get to them. Distances are pretty expansive in Canada. So, I organized a few couples in clusters, then made a few trips to go meet and photograph them. It could be anywhere from a few hours to spending a day together and figuring out where the best place to take the picture was. No one was coerced into doing it. And many people backed out. Since it was a couple being photographed, if one person doesn't want to do it, it doesn't work. Or I photographed some couples and never published their story. That's fine.

### **What is the most moving interfaith love story so far, in your opinion?**

The most moving one was definitely Samir and Najwa's story. They're a couple from Lebanon. They're quite old now, but when they were young, the short story is that he was an expert in math and she wasn't very good at math, and so he tutored her. He went over to her house.

The complicated part was that he's Catholic and she's Muslim. Every day he would be there helping her with her math, and her mother would be there, looking over their shoulders, making sure they were on task and nothing funny was happening. And then, within the math they started writing love notes. It turned into a relationship, and they had to hide it for over a decade, finding creative ways to see each other. During these ten years there was a point when her parents found out, and she was pulled out of school, and kept under lock and key at home. Now they are in Canada, married. Neither of them

converted; they're still practicing their separate faiths. They've got a son who is agnostic and is married to a Buddhist woman. They celebrate Muslim, Catholic and Buddhist celebrations as a family. It's a really cool story that sticks out for me.

### **Are you looking for a next project?**

I'm really interested in Roma issues here in Bulgaria and across the Balkans and Europe. This could result in a very important project. But I've been busy, so I haven't been able to figure it out or connect in ways that are necessary for a project like that.

I'm also interested in bullying and doing a project around the subject. There are so many ideas, but when you embark on something like that, you really have to think it's important, otherwise it would be painful. It's a long process, too.

### **Has your Bulgarian/European experience influenced your photography?**

The thing with Roma people, that's not an important issue in Canada. When I was in Malaysia I got interested in the situation of Burmese refugees there, and I never would have thought about that if I wasn't in Malaysia. So it's the same



Bolivian Salt Flats, 2007





Cosmopolis: Nadia from Bangladesh

thing here: seeing the degree to which one group of people is otherized. I'm interested.

**What is the most beautiful place in Bulgaria you've been to?**

I am excited about all the places I still have not seen in Bulgaria. Bansko, and climbing the Pirin Mountains, was breathtaking – so, so far that is the winner!

**What is the most beautiful place in the world you've been to? Did you take photos?**

Beautiful, it's hard to say. But for sheer "Wow, this place is crazy and beautiful," I guess Salar de Uyuni, the salt flats in Bolivia. That's pretty crazy. And that was on the trip where I first took photographs. I'd say that's a pretty impressive place that sticks out in my mind.

**If you were stranded on a deserted island, what three things, well, two besides your camera if we may assume, would you have and why?**

The camera would be kind of pointless on a deserted island because I wouldn't have a computer or anything, but sure, I'd take it. And I'm not that stuck on a particular camera – I mean, I love my camera,

but some people have a particular camera that's been passed on to them. I don't have any material items that are really crucial to me.

**If someone came to you with the Cosmopolis assignment, what or whom would you choose to hold?**

That's why one of the options I did give people was holding on to something that connects them to their past, so I did have a few people that held on to a person. My participant from Cambodia held her brother's hand, and my participant

from South Africa held his sister's hand. I think I would probably hold my mother's hand.

One cool thing is that my great-great-grandfather was a photographer. I have his old slides. I'd hold on to the old slides, that'd be cool. That would have been the end of the nineteenth century. The photographs I have are from the 1890's or something. He shot portraits. He opened the first photography store-slash-portrait studio in the town that my American side, my dad's side of the family, is from – Germantown, Ohio. That building's no longer there, but I have pictures of it. It's an amazing thing to think about. And the pictures I've developed are really cool. But they're just standard portraits, just people dressed in really old-fashioned clothes. I have no clue who is in the pictures, but they all look serious, there are no smiles.

My mom's from the UK and my dad's from the US. My father takes a lot of pictures, and my mom was a photographer putting herself through university. She used to take pictures of kids on ponies. She would go door-to-door with a pony, and then the children would rush out, get on the pony for a picture and



Cosmopolis: Nadia's memento

then she'd offer it to the parents. It was a very lucrative business that she created for herself. She was taking pictures then, but she never would have said she was a photographer.

When I was given my great-great-grandfather's plates, probably about 70 of them, they were in a farm somewhere with bugs. Some of them were broken, and some had pieces missing, but it kind of adds to the effect. Today some photographers are trying to create that look. I found his camera, too, and it was homemade and just rotten. There was nothing worth keeping... but I have his slides.

### **What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your life?**

Biggest challenge, I don't know. But I do think money is a bit of an issue when it comes to this type of work. It sucks that I have really, really great ideas but the things that I think are important are not necessarily lucrative. That's a thing that photographers have always had to deal with: the issues that are important to them aren't going to pay. So how do I deal with that, and how do I find ways to make money, or be economically successful? Maybe someday I will just be doing photography, but that day will only come when I can truly say that I am doing the photography that I think is important, not the stuff that is dull, and that I can do these important issues, but also find ways to make money.

And it's not like there wasn't any interest in the issues Cosmopolis and Interlove dealt with, it was fine. I sold all the copies that were made. But photobooks these days are like a dying thing. If you are going to make exclusive art photobooks, that's one thing - yes, there is a market. But it's still going to be a limited edition of 200 and you're selling them for a very high price, and they go to collectors or whatever. But the purpose of this project, the idea of it, is that it's

supposed to be accessible and not inaccessible to average people. So I didn't want to make a book that would be too expensive for anyone to buy. But to get a major publisher and to get it into all the bookstores in Canada, you have to be able to show that this is something that's going to sell like wildfire. And that is only going to happen if it's Humans of New York, or something really popular.

Actually, I cannot think of another photography project in Canada related to culture or diversity that has been as successful as Cosmopolis. But it doesn't necessarily translate into money, no. It has led me to get other jobs, and it has helped me to get credentials that may end up leading to other projects.

The National Film Board even did a TV documentary about it. I've done probably 50 interviews; the photos were published in many newspapers. But I didn't get paid for any of those. It's just not the way it works. Money would be nice. The argument is that it's free content, but its publicity. I am always going to try to find a way to make it not a losing venture, but I think - and this is a very Canadian way of thinking - if you only do things where the money is, you'll end up missing out on a lot. In Canada we have our public radio CBC, and people who have a more conservative view think like this: "Let the free market take care of it. The country doesn't need to have the government support the CBC. Let the people decide." And when you listen to the radio in Canada, it's just crap, crap, crap, Top-40, Top-40, Top-40, and then the CBC, which is delivering really, really important content about a lot of things that wouldn't necessarily be talked about in the free market world. I think that if I just let money drive my photographs, then the stories would be very, very sad.

### **Who has inspired you in your life**

### **and why?**

My mother, just because she is independent, hard-working, interested in the world, open-minded and very giving. There is no one else who is even a fraction as close to her in inspiring me. She is British; my father's an American. She was born in London. My grandfather was born in Spain and my grandmother was born in England, they met in London. My mother has lived long enough in Canada so that she doesn't have a British accent, unless she is talking like my grandmother. Canada as a whole is so young and its identity is so open to debate. There is still a lot of pride.

### **So Canadians are individuals, people who just live there?**

No, there is still a lot of pride. But part of the pride is that it is fluid, open and very complicated. So there is not just one story, but it depends on who you are talking to. I am sure that if you went to a rural community they would have a very different opinion than someone who grew up in Toronto, like me. Either way, what is considered historical in Canada would just be recent in another part of the world. We talk a little bit about that in my class - what it means to be Bulgarian.

### **What personal quality helped you the most to get to where you are?**

I think I am very good at having an idea and following through on it. That's probably one of my strongest suits. When I want to do something, I generally do it. And it usually works out alright.

### **What were you like in high-school?**

I was a quarterback, and I was very involved on Student Council. I loved my school, even though it wasn't a very great school from some perspectives. It didn't have a lot of money and it was in a pretty rough neighborhood. I played a lot of



sports, I was the head of Spirit for special events organized by Student Council, and I was in musicals, which was a very rare thing for athletes. There were no other jocks who were doing that. I am actually bad at singing; I just did it so that I could participate. I would have a speaking role in the musical, but I sang in the chorus. Those types of decisions have made me open to different people.

### **Do you still do sports?**

Yes. I joined the Dudes, which is a Bulgarian basketball team here, but we're just starting. Next year, I'll be playing for real. They take it pretty seriously. I am on the ACS American football club and I'm coaching basketball this year. I'm a huge NBA and NFL fan.

### **What do you work toward in your free time?**

A lot of editing photos, a lot of thinking about certain issues that I have become interested in, like migration or various environmental issues.

As my students know, I think our school has a problem with bottled water. At least now we have reusable bottles<sup>1</sup> – there's like 250 of them circulating campus now. But in order for these to be truly successful, you need to have the other side, to downplay or discourage the use of the other stuff (bottled water). No one is going to start using these as much as I think they should, as long as there is bottled water being shoved at them. But for me one of the challenges is having the time to think about this other stuff instead of just marking – which, at 220 students, is a problem.

### **What do you think is the most important lesson that you teach your ACS students?**

They would probably think that it has something to do with bottled water. Because that is, I think, the very clear message. I hope that the message that I teach them is that they can have an impact on some of these crucial topics... not just learn about them and do nothing. I hope that they get that from me,

whether from the class or from the content, that I show them through my own life that they can make a stand. If you are in a position of any sort of privilege, that is the perfect opportunity to look around yourself and say, "Where can I make a difference and help?" Not being a savior, not going and rescuing the other, but instead just trying to recognize that you are lucky and you could be in another person's shoes in the future. Hopefully, by learning about the world and Geography, you are not just learning about things out there, but you are realizing that you are connected to them. And that you could be a part of whatever story you want to.

### **Where do you dream of going to?**

Well, there are Balkan countries I haven't seen and I bet that every place has something to offer. But if I have to name one place, I guess for me it would be the Western part of Myanmar, Burma, where the Rohingya are, which is a group of people I did my Master's thesis on, and they are probably the most persecuted people in the world. My dream would be that I would go there and they would all be living there again, as if most of them weren't pushed out. That would be a nice day, in the future, which would probably never happen. Burma has opened up to the West, but with the Rohingya, they've just been regarded as invaders, not as native to the area, which is not the truth. So they've had their villages burned, they're very restricted on where they can go, they have no access to documentation and they're not able to vote. So many of them are in refugee camps and so many are stuck in really, really horrible situations. So that's where I want to go and be able to say, "Isn't it nice how things have changed?"

*Petia Ivanova, Georgi Iliiev, and Roumya Mihaylova worked on the material.*



Surva Festival, Pernik

<sup>1</sup>An ACS student project aims to limit the use of bottled mineral water on campus, among other things, by providing as many students as possible with a free/affordable reusable metal water bottle.

# Student in the Spotlight

## Angel Kozlev '16: When I Grow Up, I Want To Be Free

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

*Choosing whom among the over 700 talented ACSers to interview is never easy. Even after narrowing the pool down to the senior class because it's their last chance, you know, before transitioning from ACS students to alumni, this still leaves 140 wonderful young people with interesting stories to share. This year, senior Angel Kozlev caught our attention, and he didn't even have to hit us with one of his juggling props. We saw him handling his flying objects, got acquainted with some of his photography work, and on the day of his matriculation exam ("It was OK"), he was kind enough to stop by and share his hobbies and dreams with us.*

**When did you start taking pictures? Did you instantaneously fall in love with photography, or was it an acquired taste?**

I started taking pictures in 9th grade when I joined the ACS photography club, which is run by students from the upper grades. It was kind of boring with the same five people attending week after week. The next year, I took over the leadership of the club and, together with my friends Konstantin Gerov (Kosyo G.) and Konstantin Karchev, I introduced some changes. The new advisor, Thomas Houston, is a photographer with a lot of experience and was a welcome upgrade. Kosyo G. bought proper photography equipment first, so he was better than me and I was kind of following his lead there.

I have always been interested in visual arts. When I first started yo-yoing in 6th grade, back in 2009, I attended the national championship and won the junior competition by a long shot. I got sponsored by Nestle and went to the first European Championship. At a yo-yo competition, you are assessed in terms of technique, not making mistakes, musical choreography and stage performance; all these things combine to award you points. There are one-minute qualifications followed by a three-minute freestyle, which is your main performance. An important part of yo-yoing, and something you need in order to be involved in the yo-yo community, is making videos of yourself doing

tricks. I set up the camera and do my own video editing, so that got me into editing and visual arts.

Another friend from my class, Anthony Kirilov, is interested in movies. That was another thing that brought me to visual arts and photography in particular. I joined the cinema club to just try it out, but it has definitely turned into a passion of mine. You see, it is a unique way to present reality, and the possibilities you have are endless.

**In photography these days, is it mainly the quality of one's equipment that determines the quality of the outcome?**

I don't think so. What is important in my opinion is the sense, feeling and meaning behind the photo. Even if it's not a high-quality one, a photo can be great. One of our beliefs in

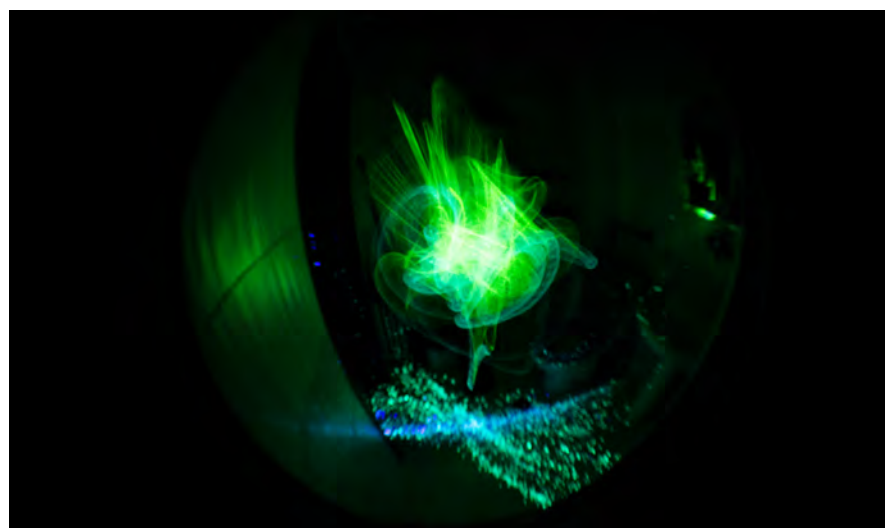
the photography club is that you don't need a good camera to take a good picture.

**Is there an image you have always wanted to capture?**

Well, everything. When I started taking photographs with Kosyo G., we were just trying out different things, like light, techniques, portraits, landscape, everything. I just like the idea of taking the image of something and showing it to others through my eyes. What we wanted to show people was not something certain or predetermined, but just the world as we see it.

**When did you start juggling and loving it?**

When the yo-yo shop in Sofia started selling juggling props, I bought balls, rings, and clubs. And



Light-painting with glowing yo-yo - Photo by Konstantin Gerov '16



then for 2 years I didn't do almost anything with them; I just had them and practiced some tricks every now and again. And then this year, Misho Milev from Grade 11 came up to me and said, "Let's start juggling." So, we started practicing together and now we go to intersections with traffic lights, which is actually illegal, and earn some money juggling.

**If it's not a secret, how much money can one make by juggling at traffic lights?**

Well, it depends on how good you are in terms of technique, how likeable you are in front of people, and how many cars there are. But I have managed to buy more juggling props with the money raised, so it is definitely something.

**Has juggling helped your photography? Has it helped you with school assignments?**

Juggling teaches you a lot about concentration, how to set goals for yourself and practice until you reach them. The tricks you do with your props in the air - you don't know how to do those (well, in theory you know) - but in practice you have to teach your muscles to act in a certain way and to control your prop in a certain way, so that when you throw it your mind can calculate the trajectory and move your hand to catch it.

Juggling teaches you hand-eye coordination, and with enough practice your throws become so accurate that you can control their rhythm and height. What I like most about it is that you can be really creative with tricks because every single move can be commanded with the mind and there are a lot of possible things to do. Juggling is like art but is much more physical than photography and, like dance, is complicated to explain. It's funny because the most general definition of juggling is object manipulation, and object manipulation is basically everything.

Juggling helps me relax, too. I get into my zone, start thinking only about the tricks, and feel isolated from the outside world.

**Maybe that is what makes it dangerous at traffic lights?**

No, the cars do that. I've seen cars



8:55 (Angel playing with poi)

making a left turn all the way from the right lane. There are some crazy drivers out there.

**Teach us something about balance.**

Well, balance is a broad concept. When you balance something in juggling, you do that on your face - chin, nose or forehead - the props being balls or clubs. So, in order to maintain your balance you have to look at the top of the object (*demonstrating with a club*). When the balance shifts one way, you have to shift the other way to restore it.

**What if something falls down?**

You pick it up and keep going.

**What do you want to be known for?**

I have two idealistic ideas of things I would love to do. First, I want to be a video game designer and create the most amazing games ever. I don't know what they'll be about except that they will be amazing, reach everybody, and teach them something. Video games are gaining huge popularity as we speak; everybody plays video games on their phones. There should be more creative space for designers to create more experimental games and teach players something not only about the game itself, but about the world. Fortunately, there have been great games like this made recently.

There was this experiment done in the US, I think, where they created an educational game about historical events. The game did not state the facts, but only gave you an impression of what it was like to live in that period and what the problems of the people were. Later, when they tested the students on the subject, the impressions of daily life and ordinary people's problems were the only things they had learned.

My other idea is to create a performance act combining many different disciplines - dancing, music, photography, animation, circus arts like juggling or acrobatics, well, everything.

**Describe the color yellow to somebody who is blind.**

What a hard question! Well, it would have to be something like the sound of birds singing or water running. No, wait, that's rather more green



Angel is a machine (playing with flowersticks on campus) - Photo by Konstantin Gerov '16

than yellow. When you wake up in the morning and you go outside, and it's quiet, just the sound of bugs, there's your yellow.

### **What inspires you?**

Everything inspires me: good movies, good books, good music, good juggling, good teachers. Everything I can draw on. I have always tried to explore different arts and sciences that I don't know anything about, just to learn a little bit about them, and see how they can help me find my path in life.

### **What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your life?**

Writing homework assignments. I have no motivation to do my homework and it's very hard to see the benefit of it when I know that I have a good grasp of the material, I know the theory, and someone just tells me to do a two-page essay on it.

I have always been a visual and auditory learner and writing doesn't really help me. I cannot see it as helpful for me. I know it is for many, though. I do regret that, but I just never learned the habit.

### **Who helped you the most get to where you are?**

My parents have always been supportive, always interested in the things I like, and they have financially supported my hobbies. They almost never set an expectation for me that I have to strictly follow, but instead we have a lot of discussions about conflicts and problems. My parents and my friends are my biggest supporters.

### **What were you like as a kid before yo-yoing and juggling and all that?**

I have always been interested in science and theory. In the last 3 years, I have turned to more creative activities. I don't know why, but they make more sense to me now. I find something I like and start doing it. If something bores me, I drop it and find something else to do. I have tried lots of things, maybe too many. My greatest regret is that I don't play an instrument, so there's something to try and learn.

### **Who would win a fight between Spiderman and Batman?**



Angel playing yo-yo on a tree - Photo by Konstantin Gerov '16

Spiderman. I don't like Batman. He is just rich. I love the Dark Knight though; it's the best superhero movie, in my opinion.

### **Do you recall your worst and best days at ACS?**

No. My weeks have always been filled with extracurricular activities – between the photography club, the cinema club and the fortnight theater club. This year I have been juggling during almost every break, anywhere there is space to juggle. I've noticed that there are people who are like magnets for my props and there are people I never hit, just like I have never hit anyone in my family even though I juggle around them a lot. My grandparents live on the floor above our apartment, so I suggested that we make a hole in the ceiling so I can practice properly.

### **What will you take with you once you leave ACS?**

Everything: the amazing people I met here, the people from the photography club, juggling club, circus club and my friends who have always supported me. I love the memories of parties and of those few teachers that understood me even if my grades weren't great.

Also, one of my favorite things here at the College was being part of a community. I have attended most school events, taken photos of them just for the fun of it, not as an organized assignment. It is interesting, cool, helps me practice and it does the job, so it's perfect. I've always tried to be part of this community and to pass my skills and knowledge onto others, teaching

them what I can.

### **What is the best lesson you learned at the College?**

Sometimes you have to do things you don't like or want to do.

### **Where and what next?**

I'll be studying in the UK, but I'm still deciding between two universities. I will be studying Computer Science and after that I hope to start making video games. I don't really need a degree for that but if something fails, I'll still have job opportunities this way.

### **What do you want to be when you grow up?**

I want to be free. And a video game designer is the perfect job because it will let me work in my creative medium. My ultimate goal is to be my own artist, musician, developer, designer, everything. I want to be able to work on everything in the game. I don't think it's possible, but I want to do it. I think that in order to reach a level of cooperation with others that makes for the perfect result (that amazing video game I told you about earlier) would be extremely hard. If I work alone it will be much easier because I will know what I want to portray with the visuals, audio, design, everything. This will be the easiest way to do it in theory, but I suspect it will be more difficult in practice.

### **Do you have a message to our alumni?**

There are great people at ACS with amazing goals and skills, and I want to see and know and eventually learn from all of them.



# ACS Is Where We Met

## Erin Kahle and Andrew Jones

Interview by Petia Ivanova '97

*For quite some time, I had been contemplating starting a feature on ACS faculty couples who met at the College and stayed together, happily ever after. Well, I felt the time had come, and it was only natural that I would begin with two dear friends of mine, Erin Kahle (former Biology teacher, 2007-2009) and Andrew Jones (former ELL teacher, 2007-2009). Back in March, when Erin, Andy, and their daughter Eliza were still within a 1-hour flight distance from Sofia, I spoke to Erin online. Now, 3 months later, she is in the US where their family welcomed their second child, Clark, and, with some luck, maybe has even started packing for their upcoming move to Brazil later this summer. But now, let's go back in time, to around 2007.*

### How did it all begin? When did you know he was the one?

The funny thing is that it took us a while to decide to start dating. We arrived together as new teachers in August. Though we were in the same group of friends on campus, we both started dating Bulgarians in the fall. We gradually became better friends, going on regular runs together through Mladost. At some point, we realized that we would rather spend time together than with the people we were actually dating, so we decided to give the relationship a chance. In such a small community, it felt like a risk if it didn't work out, but we've been together ever since!

I have so many favorite campus memories. The things I miss the most were the things we did so frequently, like walking down to Lachoni's for pizza and shopska or our frequent bowling outings. I loved taking Balkan dance classes with Stoyan Karadjov and performing in the Christmas concert. Despite wanting to blend into the background, Andy

was somehow prominently displayed out in front during the video. We performed parts of the dance for the first dance at our wedding and he now has them down! There were many great moments from faculty gatherings on campus and the time that some of us had to speak Bulgarian on a live TV gameshow.

### Aside from being the place you two met, what do you think makes ACS and Sofia special?

ACS was the first teaching job I had, so I didn't realize until later that the level of camaraderie among faculty and students was really quite remarkable. I liked that Sofia and ACS both feel like hidden treasures. Not many travelers end up going to Bulgaria, or can even attempt to speak Bulgarian. I felt like I had an inside view on a place that was really unique and special. I also liked that Sofia was small enough that I would frequently run into students or people I knew when I was out and about.

### Where in the world are you today? What are you up to?

I'm currently writing this from Istanbul, where we've been teaching at Robert College. However, in the next few months, I'll be in the States to have our second child and then we'll be moving over the summer to teach in Brazil.



Eliza and new-born little brother Clark, May 2016

### When are you coming to ACS and Sofia again?

I was really disappointed that I couldn't make it back to Sofia while living in Istanbul. I thought I would have more time available to travel until I got pregnant and we decided to move. I definitely want to come back and visit the campus and Sofia to show our children where we first met!

### Do you have a message to ACS alums?

I have many great memories from the different places I've lived, but I will always consider the period of time I lived and worked at ACS as some of the best years of my life. I love hearing about what former students and faculty are up to, encourage them to get in touch, and hope I'll see them again someday!



Erin and Andy's wedding, 2012

# CLASS NOTES

**Youli Petkov '97** sent a quick update our way:

"My wife, Melissa, and I just had our second daughter Lillian on June 11th. She's a happy baby that really enjoys sleeping, eating, and cuddling. Melissa and I met at Stanford Business School while studying for our MBAs and have lived in the San Francisco Bay Area ever since. I work for an investment firm and Melissa is an entrepreneur. Our oldest daughter, Eden, is 2.5 years old and loves everything *Frozen*. She's also incredibly proud of being a big sister and is doing great with little Lily. If you're traveling through the SF Bay Area, ping me to say hello."



Youli '97 with wife Melissa, daughter Eden (2.5), and newborn baby Lillian



Once again, multiple generations of ACS alumni (from 1997 to 2016), both current and former teachers (and beloved dog Dudley), and students from every class attended Sofia Pride 2016 on June 18th, though not everyone made it into the picture. The tragic events in Orlando, as well as the presence of a counter protest lent a somber note to the event, but the solidarity of people from our community of

all backgrounds coming together to celebrate love and diversity and fight for equal rights made it joyful above all.



ACS Pride



**Lillyana Georgieva '13** wrote to us with some good news:

"I am currently an Economics Student at Sofia University and I am simply having an amazing time here! During my first two years, I was an active participant in our department's Business Club and on the Student Council, where I was elected Executive Secretary and served as a Member of the Management Board. Last year, with the support of my colleagues and professors I founded a new student organization, "Spectrum" (<http://spectrumsu.wix.com/spectrumclub>). Since then we have organized numerous events with Bulgaria's most prominent figures, aiming to educate and expand social awareness. Among our star guests were the Bulgarian astronaut and national hero Mr. Alexander Alexandrov, the prominent mathematician Prof. Mihail Konstantinov, Mr. Andrei Raichev, Prof. Ilia Todev, the head of the Historical Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the young team of the popular initiative "Bulgarian History" -

Mario Mishev and Ivan Kunchev. In our club's portfolio, we are also proud to feature many diverse social events such as theme parties, Buddy Bowling, interviews with celebrities, partnerships, and career fairs.

So far, my studies at SU seem to have been successful: last year I was the recipient of the special award for "Exceptional Performance, 1st place" awarded to the best students in each year/course of our department. At the end of May 2016, I participated in the National Mathematics Olympiad for University Students, where I was awarded a bronze medal and my team ranked first. Additionally, last Friday I was incredibly honored to receive the award, "Student of the Year" in the category of "Economic Science." Among the jury were the Rector, Prof. Atanas Gerdjikov, Prof. Ivan Ilchev, the deputy ministers of Education and Healthcare, Prof. Daniel Vulchev, Ms. Elena Marinova, BNT's director Viara Ankova, and others. It was such a pleasant surprise and honor to receive such a recognition!

Currently, I am looking forward to acing my upcoming exams and having a great summer afterwards, hopefully practicing my foreign languages in the meantime! I send my warmest regards to all fellow ACSers and faculty members!"



Lillyana '13 at the Math Olympiad with her teammates







# ACS ALUMNI Magazine



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