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Issue 7, June 2012

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# ACS ALUMNI Magazine

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Master Class  
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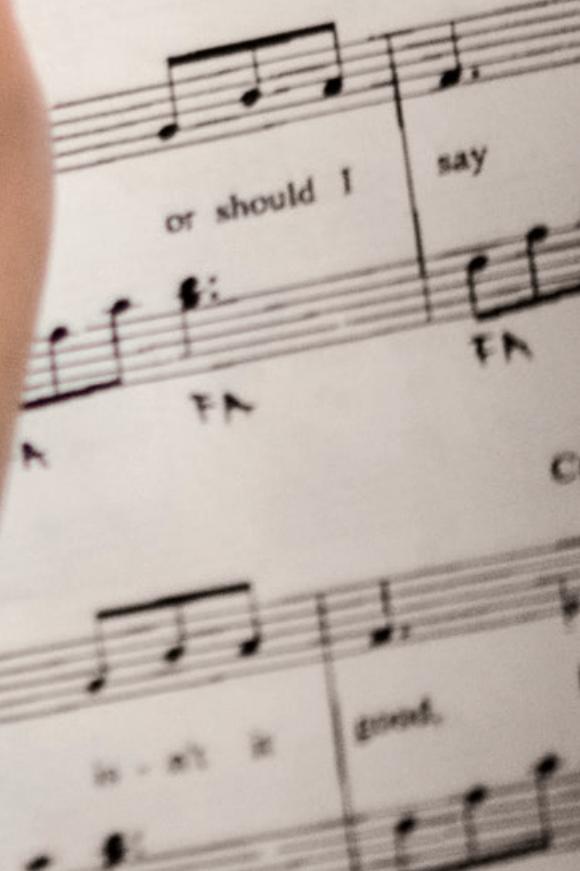
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# Norwegian Wood

& Music by John Lennon & Paul McCartney





# Contents



2 President's Note

3 Editor's Note

4 The Class Rep Project: Update

5 Meet the New Alumni on the Board - Theodora Konetsovskaya '97: The Thrill of New Beginnings; Lisa Kostova Ogata '97: The Lessons I Learned

8 Asia in Seventeen Images as Seen by Yuri Boyanin '07

12 Welcome to the Newest ACS Alumni: The Class of 2012 - Dr. Roger Whitaker and Ms. Susan Sutton's Greetings to the College Graduates

15 Those Were the Days: Vintage College Life Titles and "Biseri" That Caught Our Eye

17 Class Notes

**On the outer front cover** – Stanyo Zhelev '14 as Melchior in this year's English Drama/Musical Production *Spring Awakening*  
**inner front cover** – The Radcliffe Choral Society's Visit to ACS in June, 2012 – Photographs by Boris Urumov '15

**On the inner back cover** – Stoyan Trenchev '16 during the Classical Spotlight, ACS Arts Fest 2012; **outer back cover** – ACS Arts Fest 2012 – Photographs by Daniel Lekov



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings:

As I get to know more alumni, it seems they consistently ask questions about the admissions process, financial aid, and a few other topics. The fact that alumni ask about such topics shows their continued interest in the well-being of ACS. For this article I decided to create a FAQ for ACS alumni mainly around questions about the admissions process and financial aid.

### **Why have admissions numbers at ACS decreased?**

The most fundamental reason is that there are fewer 7th grade students overall and even fewer 7th grade students that meet the academic eligibility requirement to sit for the exam. Other reasons are that ascension to the EU has given Bulgarian students other avenues to good universities, some families don't know about ACS, and some families don't believe they can afford ACS.

### **What is ACS doing about the admissions numbers?**

We have started an aggressive initiative to increase our admissions numbers, despite the decline in eligible 7th graders. We redesigned our campaign incorporating suggestions from alumni for messaging, began using social media, designed a new brochure, increased our advertising

budget, improved our website, and changed the format of our informational meetings. This year the number of test takers increased for the first time in several years. We believe by using some of the best recruiting practices of US private high schools and colleges, we can significantly increase our candidates for admission.

### **Has the quality of students gone down?**

We don't think so. Certainly, students change. Students are changing the world over with access to technology and the flattening of the world. However, hard data and teacher perceptions suggest that, while students learn differently, the quality of our students is still at a very high level.

### **Is high tuition keeping families away?**

Tuition for a private school is a fact of life. We make every effort to keep costs down while still making the improvements to attract the best students. Families expect us to have excellent teachers, adequate facilities, updated textbooks and supplies, to offer outstanding college counselling, and to offer extra-curricular activities. We offer financial aid to those families who demonstrate that they need it.

### **Is the College doing enough to reach out and persuade accomplished and motivated students of lower income families to apply to the College?**

Probably not. We realize that we need to do more. We have emphasized that we have financial aid for needy families, but we are studying other ways to reach out. We are open to new ideas from alumni.

### **Is the financial aid the College gives to those that demonstrate need fairly distributed?**

We do the best we can. Not only do families submit documentation of their financial status, but our Business Office staff interview the families. When we review financial aid requests, we are always reviewing similar data sets.

### **Is it true that international teachers aren't happy at ACS and don't stay very long?**

Not true. Most international teachers who work here truly enjoy working with outstanding students in a well-organized, picturesque environment. Recently, most teachers sign up for at least a year beyond their original two-year contract. We now have several international teachers completing a third year, and pledged to a fourth year next year.

### **I've heard that too much time and money is spent on extra-curricular activities? Is there a good balance?**

ACS is a Bulgarian high school delivering the curriculum in an American style. Extra-curricular activities are an important part of the American high school experience. The opportunity to develop all of one's abilities and talents is an American educational ideal. Extra-curricular programs are very popular at ACS and are a draw for Bulgarian students and families who cannot find similar opportunities in any other Bulgarian high school. We are very careful not to let extra-curricular activities interfere with the fundamental academic mission of the school.

There you are. Again, I am excited about the fact that alumni are interested in, and passionately debate certain aspects of ACS such as student admissions, financial aid, and the quality of students at ACS. Keep it up. We have benefited from the many suggestions we receive from alumni.

Remember to attend the June reunions and the December concert where you can visit with College officials and judge the quality of ACS yourself.

### **Dr. Paul K. Johnson**

President, American College of Sofia

# ACS Alumni Magazine

## Issue 7, June 2012

### 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

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Dear Alumni,

A week before my own 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion since graduating the College, I find it hard to concentrate on writing this editorial, so, I turn to something less complicated, math. 15 years: how is that even possible? I add the numbers and, of course, it is possible: university = 5 years (if you're moderately ambitious), taking the career road you are expected to only to find out it is not the one for you = 5 years (if you're lucky), meeting the person you were meant to be with, starting a family together, and falling for the let's-celebrate-our-love-by-having-a-child tale = 5 years (if you're really, really lucky and equally crazy). And what are your equations? How ambitious, lucky and/or crazy have you been since graduation? We'd be happy to find out on June 29th for those of you from the classes of 1997, 2002, and 2007 that intend to drop by and are in a sharing kind of mood. Everyone else can write to [p.mironova@acs.bg](mailto:p.mironova@acs.bg) and I'll be happy to include your stories in the Class Notes (or any other applicable) section of this magazine.

In case you wonder, no, we didn't get many responses to those collecting-memories e-mails we sent out in connection with celebrating 20 years since the school's reopening this fall. Disappointed at first, we realized later those memories are probably too dear for you to share with many. I know some of mine are. But then we got the news of two alumnae joining the Board of Trustees and in the interviews we took with fellow classmates (and old friends) Teddy and Lisa, we found some of what we had been searching for. Other glimpses of ACS throughout the years, as captured by College Life newspaper, specifically in the period 1998-2003, can be found on the vintage pages of this issue. We hope you enjoy those as much as we did while preparing our selection.

Lately, with pretty much everyone on facebook, twitter, and what-not, it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep one's talent a secret. So, it was on facebook we started following the world-spanning path of Yuri Boaynin of the Class of 2007. Yuri is based in my own dream place of residence, Southern Sweden (well, in a week when this gets published this will not be true anymore) and posts updates from a different exotic country every month. As of the latest, it was Kyrgyzstan, Iceland, China, and India, only to name a few. I caught Yuri during the one week he had in Sofia before moving to Melbourne, Australia. At 23! (I bet this guy's equation 10 years from now will look different than mine.) Meanwhile, enjoy the awesome images of Asia Yuri took in the past six months!

As per concerns some of you have expressed regarding the College and whether the school's high standard is kept at the level you recall from when you were students at ACS, I believe Dr. Johnson was pretty thorough in his note. If I may simply add that ACSers still sing in the hallways, win nation-wide math/physics/foreign language competitions, fall in love with each other and have trouble because of PDA, get accepted with substantial scholarships to top universities world-wide, go hiking, argue with their teachers and/or textbooks, play basketball/football/volleyball, prepare study sheets before exams, and occasionally, come late for class. Take a look at current students' photos in this magazine, come see them perform, follow their success at various public competitions throughout our communication channels, and surely, you'll feel more secure about ACS and where it's heading... like we do!

See you soon on ACS campus!

Kind regards,

Petia Ivanova '97

Editor

## The Class Rep Project: Update

Dear Alumni,

Our community keeps growing steadily every year. In 2012, ACS marks the 20-year anniversary of its reopening, and for the first time hosts reunions for three classes, 1997, 2002, and 2007! With every additional class whose members make the transition from students to alumni, it becomes increasingly important that ACS alumni sustain the great network provided by ACS.

To enhance the communication with and within the current and future alumni classes, the ACS Alumni Relations, Development, and Admissions Office announced this May the volunteer position of Class Representative. Each alumni class was to have two Class Representatives, their duties including:

- Acting as the key liaison between their class and the Alumni Relations, Development, and Admissions Office;
- Leading their classmates by example and attending official ACS activities/events (especially reunions);
- Helping organize and promote unofficial alumni activities (mini reunions, local parties, and others);
- Helping keep a current email/contact list for your class;
- Highlighting significant accomplishments of their fellow classmates and encouraging them to submit Class Notes, both to be used in the ACS Alumni Magazine;
- Providing assistance during the September launch of the new ACS Alumni Fund for donations;
- Making sure that the voice of their classmates is heard and that the bonds forged during their student years remain as strong!

The process was quicker than initially expected as less applications came in than available positions, so voting wasn't necessary. Without further ado, it is our pleasure to present to you, also here on the pages of the ACS Alumni Magazine, the class representatives for most of the ACS classes:

Class of '97 - Hristo Lazarov and Vanya Choneva  
Class of '98 - Zornitza Lilova and Neli Koleva  
Class of '99 - Milena (Staneva) Sullivan and Dimiter Kadakov  
Class of '00 - Denitsa Abadjieva, one vacant position  
Class of '01 - Mario Prohasky and Yoanna Mitova  
Class of '02 - both positions still vacant  
Class of '03 - Yana Shtereva and Kalina Alexandrova  
Class of '04 - Kiril Popov, one vacant position

Class of '05 - Nikolai Nikolov and Mira Kovacheva  
Class of '06 - Velizara Passajova, one vacant position  
Class of '07 - both positions still vacant  
Class of '08 - Maria Kinkina and Neda Tsvyatkova  
Class of '09 - both positions still vacant  
Class of '10 - Georgi Klissurski, one vacant position  
Class of '11 - Andrey Krachkov and Aysel Kucuksu

If you are interested in finding out what motivated the applicants from different classes to apply for the volunteer positions, here are some of our personal favorites:

...My career path has taken me down the operations route, so logistics are part of my everyday life, so I feel like I can contribute in terms of organization and housekeeping...

...It will be my privilege to work towards creating a space of sharing, collaboration and celebration of not just our five years at ACS, but of the grown-up versions of ourselves...

...I doubt that we have ever been bored in each other's company...

...I cherish the lifetime friendships I formed during my college years and I am amazed how our bonds only grow stronger over the years despite the test of time and distance...

...in order to help us keep track of the continuous changes in our lives while at the same time helping us collectively to stay true to the class spirit that we have always had...

...It is our duty as alumni to ensure ACS continues to provide the best learning experience for classes to come, maintaining its status as the premier high school institution in Bulgaria....

...In fact, I believe that our class can be the most powerful network that any of us will ever be a part of, and we need to take advantage of this fact...

...It is a way of preserving the past, which has given us lots of occasions to laugh...

...I am sure you all have changed a lot but our class will always be the group of people that knew you before you could drive, had zillion responsibilities, opened a bar in Mexico and your hair turned gray...

Thank you once again to those who volunteered to play an even more active part in shaping our community! We look forward to working together!

As for the classes with one or two (seriously?) vacant positions for class representatives as we've said before they are gently advised to get their act together and apply asap to: [p.mironova@acs.bg](mailto:p.mironova@acs.bg)

Yours,

The ACS Alumni Relations, Development, and Admissions Office,  
with the assistance of the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee

# Meet the New Alumni on the Board

By now, most of you have heard the news of the two new alumni joining the ACS Board of Trustees as was announced in the March issue of the ACS Newsletter, on our website, and the school's facebook page. We got in contact with old classmates and friends Theodora Konetsovska and Lisa Kostova Ogata, both of the first graduating class after ACS' reopening, to find out for you what they have been busy doing in the past 15 years. Here is what they shared.

## Theodora Konetsovska '97: The Thrill of New Beginnings

### What have you been up to since you graduated the College in 1997?

Academically: After ACS, I went to scenic Williamstown, Massachusetts and earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Economics at Williams College. During my 4 years there, I also played the piano, acted, directed a play, edited a literary magazine, studied in Spain (with fellow ACS alumna Iva Borisova '98) and spent a semester "abroad" at Harvard College.

Professionally: While at Williams, I discovered an interest in finance and quantitative analysis, which led me to take a job as an investment banker at Goldman, Sachs & Co., a global financial institution headquartered in New York City. I have worked at Goldman Sachs for 11 years now, in its New York and Boston offices.

Personally: I met my husband in New York, we got married in 2009 and welcomed our first child a few weeks ago, in June 2012.



Theodora and son Svetlin at 10 days

According to you, what useful experience are you bringing to the Board and ultimately to the College and the process of shaping its future?

I have been a board member of another non-profit educational institution for two years now, where I'm also a finance committee member. That board's active involvement in the management of the organization has enabled me to develop pertinent skills and ample experience in the responsibilities of a fully engaged board member. I have particular passion for fundraising and, obviously, knowledge of finance – I hope both of these would be useful to our organization.

### What was your reaction to the Board's invitation to become a trustee?

I was humbled by the honor and very excited about the opportunity to work with such accomplished and diverse group of individuals. And of course, receiving an invitation from Dr. Whitaker to partake in any project of his is the highest form of compliment one can hope for.

### What would you say ACS means to you now, 15 years after your graduation? What did you learn at the College that you still find useful?

For me, the College will always symbolize the thrill of new beginnings – encompassed not only by ACS's own 1992 reopening, but also by the first word I learned there (Mr. Thomas Dunn's "commencement"), and various personal "firsts" that took place while I was at ACS (living away from home, visiting the United States for a summer, performing in a play, sitting through detention...). Based on my own experience, for me the College also embodies the opening of doors to students who may not have otherwise had the chance to accomplish great things (due to location, financial situation, lack of good schooling, or other.)

When I think of ACS, I think of that enduring spirit of opportunity, and I am reminded that with proper encouragement and support, almost anyone can reach for the sky. The first, critical condition to doing that is being given a chance.

### Do you keep in touch with ACS classmates?

I do! I'm in frequent electronic contact with Vanya Choneva, Boro Yurukova, Chaya Bratoeva, Nick Mazing, and Milko Todorov (class of '97). Vanya has "hosted" me in Sofia on multiple occasions, and I returned the favor in NYC a few years back, while Boro and I had a super mini reunion in Milan last June. I also get to spend time with Milena Ivanova '98 in NYC – I owe meeting my husband to her (they went to Brown together). In Boston, I've had the chance to catch up with Polina Kehayova '97 who recently organized a get-together for us with Zori Milcheva, Yordan Marvakov and Bobbie Stefanov (all class of '97).

### Any exciting future plans you would like to share with our readers?

In February 2012, I partnered with Camp Rising Sun – a summer leadership camp in Rhinebeck, New York, attended by a number of ACS students in the past – to create a memorial fund in honor of our friend and fellow ACS alumnus, Pavel Hristov (1982-2005). The *Pavel Hristov Memorial Fund* will exist in perpetuity and its resources will financially support students from Eastern Europe (and particularly, Bulgaria) attending Camp Rising Sun. The first such camper, Yoana Petrova, is an ACS student; she will join CRS this June. If you would like to support our fund by donating in honor of Pavel Hristov, please contact me at theodora137@yahoo.com.

## Lisa Kostova Ogata '97: Lessons I Learned

### What have you been up to since you graduated the College in 1997?

My path since graduating in 1997 was one that many of my classmates took. I went to the US to study at a great university that took a chance on me by offering me a full scholarship. I took the first flight of my life and landed in Philly with two suitcases and \$200 in my pocket - a proverbial start to the universe of opportunities the US offers. Just like in the College, I was part of another intimate group of students - the Huntsman Program for International Studies and Business, which enabled me to graduate with two degrees - one in Finance from the Wharton School and one in German Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. I was also able to spend a semester in Germany and travelled around Northern and Central Europe with my friends. Fast forward four years and I started my first job as a financial analyst for the in-house investment division of Swiss Re. I was able to convince the company to locate me in their San Francisco office, instead of New York, since I wanted to explore the West Coast of the US before I had settled down. The irony is that San Francisco remained my home base on and off for the next decade. I met my husband, a native San Franciscan, here and fell in love with the Bay Area and with skiing in Lake Tahoe in the Sierras.

After six years in the investment management industry, I was ready for a change. I applied and was admitted to Harvard Business School, where I spent two incredible years. In addition to continuing my world travels, the experience also opened my mind to many possibilities that I hadn't contemplated before. After years of giving advice, doing analysis and moving money from one place to another, I had a deep-seated desire to experience creating something that people would see, touch and be able to use. I wanted to go into operations and I was especially interested in Consumer Internet. I was able to pivot at business school, interning at



Lisa at the graduation ceremony of the Class of 2012, her first as a Board member

Google and doing a field study with LinkedIn.

The biggest help came from a very unexpected place, however. The financial crisis of 2008 hit my class exactly at the height of the recruiting season. The company recruiting schedule looked like a flight status board at Logan airport during a snowstorm - mostly cancellations, with the occasional delayed status. It was a very humbling experience but turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to me or my classmates. Without the pressure to accept offers at consulting firms and

banks, many more of my classmates started tinkering with their own ideas and a lot more of them founded their start-ups. Like many others, I graduated without a job. I came back to the Bay Area and started recruiting with tech firms. Companies that were too small and too busy to even do recruiting on campuses because they needed people "right now". One of these companies was Zynga, which in 2009 was several hundred people strong and today has close to 3,000 employees. Zynga was one of the companies that was willing to take a chance on me, and I was thrilled to start as a Product Manager on

Farmville, writing specs for fertilizer, dairy barn, flower crops and Instagro (dropped from a bi-plane flown by a dog pilot). Today, I am still with Zynga as a Senior Product Manager in Zynga Direct, leading a team of engineers and designers in charge of several products which sit on top of Zynga games and are used by over 20 million people every day.

**According to you, what useful experience are you bringing to the Board and ultimately to the College and the process of shaping its future?**

The biggest thing I can offer to the College is my passion and love for the school and a deep desire to see it grow, blossom and succeed in all dimensions. My experiences in technology and elsewhere have taught me the power of collaboration, creativity, setting objective goals, measuring results, testing and quickly iterating in order to learn and evolve. I am excited to see the Board adopting a framework of objectives and key results and measuring progress towards achieving those objectives. It feels so good knowing that we don't have to think of a perfect solution, conceive a complex and predetermined plan or get everything right from the get go. A lot of operational directions can be tested quickly and iterated on. There are a lot of light-weight and fast methods for gathering critical information to start making decisions and testing these decisions in the real world. The world of technology today provides tremendous and cheap leverage for the College to grow a lot of its initiatives - media presence, fundraising, awareness, community building and others. I'll be looking to leverage the work of the Board with as many of these enablers as possible. Finally, my career has taught me the value of empowering teams. The way I see it, the Board will be most successful if the team on the ground, the people doing the day-to-day work to run the school, feel empowered to solve problems creatively, to think of new ways of doing things, and to be inspired to give it their best.

**What was your reaction to the Board's invitation to become a trustee?**

I was humbled and honored.

**What would you say ACS means to you now, 15 years later? What did you learn at the College that you still find useful?**

ACS holds a special place in my heart. It was a magical place, which in my prep year I imagined as Sleeping Beauty's castle coming back to life. For me, it was a place of miracles. A place where I could be myself, where I could grow safely, where I was judged by the quality of my work and ideas, and not by the depth of my parents' bank accounts. In the turbulent years of the 1990's it was a safe haven in many respects. It was the place that launched my work into the world, enabling me to reach higher and higher every day. But more than academic knowledge, what I learned at ACS was the value of trust, integrity and respect for others. I will never forget the American faculty, who looked at the scrappy students, the "nobodies" in the highly cynical post-Communist society, and saw bright human beings with potential to be amazing creators, thinkers, teachers, leaders, influencers, and world-changers. The value of looking at a human being, be they either a CEO or a janitor, and seeing their highest potential, is the most valuable lesson I learned at ACS.

**Do you keep in touch with your ACS classmates?**

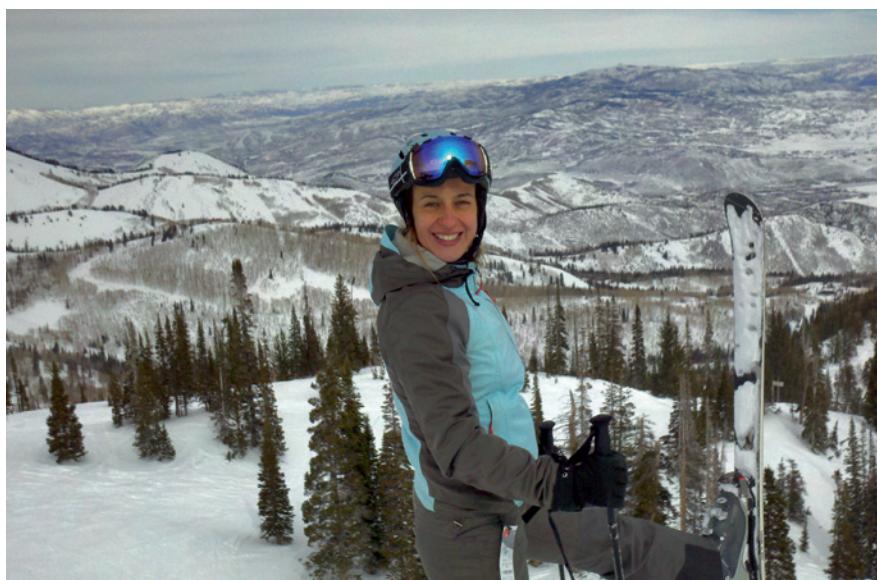
Yes! ACS alumni are everywhere. In fact for three years in San Francisco, I shared an apartment with Nadya

Direkova (ACS '97), and we lived three blocks away from Maria Mircheva (also ACS '97). The three of us had a tradition of a Saturday brunch at a French bakery. One winter, Ana Milanova (ACS '97), a very talented journalist based in Bulgaria, stayed in my room and wrote a beautiful article about experiencing San Francisco for Dnevnik, while I was in Europe. I also briefly overlapped with Zori Miltcheva (ACS '97) and Boris Stefanov (ACS '97) at HBS. Of course, I also keep in touch with many other ACS classmates via facebook, including Dara Nikolova (ACS '00) who I helped recruit into the Huntsman Program at Penn after ACS.

**Any exciting future plans you would like to share with our readers?**

It's hard to predict my next steps career-wise. I've caught the startup Internet bug, so you will likely see me doing something creative and exciting in that area, either with Zynga, on my own or with another startup. I want to keep learning code, practice my web design skills, earn my black belt in Aikido and write at least one book. On a personal side, my husband Ryan and I are spending a lot of time in Tahoe skiing, so at some point we are planning on living part-time in the Sierras. I also want to keep traveling. On the bucket list are Africa, Nepal, Mongolia and Antarctica.

*The interviews were taken by Petia Ivanova '97.*



Lisa dedicates a lot of her free time to her hobby of skiing

## Asia in Seventeen Images as Seen by Yuri Boyanin '07

*Yuri Boyanin has studied History - in Newcastle, UK and Turku, Finland - Asian Studies, and Politics in Lund, Sweden and has been to 48 countries before he has even turned 24. But he especially caught our eye with the breath-taking images from his exotic study travels. Here is a small selection of what impressed Yuri during his six-month stay in Asia.*

# China



A Lantern Festival during the Lunar New Year in Beijing



Dalian's impressive new skyline as seen from the sea, Liaoning Province, Northeast China



The 13<sup>th</sup> Snow and Ice Festival in Harbin, Heilongjiang (Amur River) Province. Harbin still feels the most Russified of all Chinese Northeastern cities.



A stunning Dong village in Rongjiang County, Guizhou Province

# Southeast Asia



Riding along the remnants of the Thailand-Burma Railway, hanging above the River Kwai

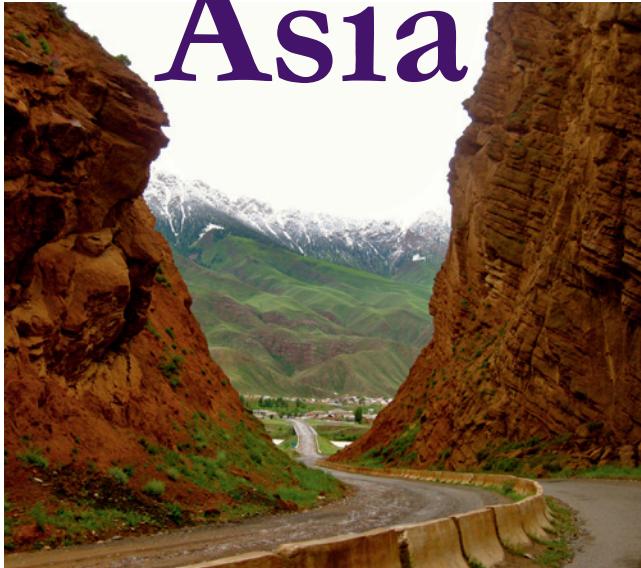


The fine Portuguese centre of an otherwise claustrophobic Macau



Stunning tea gardens at the Cameron Highlands Hill Station, Peninsular Malaysia

# Central Asia



One of the gentle S-curves on the road to Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, designed to block a possible Chinese invasion during the Sino-Soviet split



The At-Bashy mountains at nearly 20 000 ft, spurs of the great Tien Shan range. The Chinese Autonomous Region of Xinjiang is on the other side of these peaks.



Naryn town, Kyrgyzstan: Soviet era buildings look monstrous but they have several amenities yurts and high-altitude sheds lack: running water, heating, and electricity.



An elderly Kyrgyz, enjoying a capitalist (rather than socialist collectivised) semi-nomadic, semi-settled lifestyle



At the stunning Son Kul mountain pastures at around 13 000 ft

# India



Probably one of the most impressive Indian skylines: Mumbai



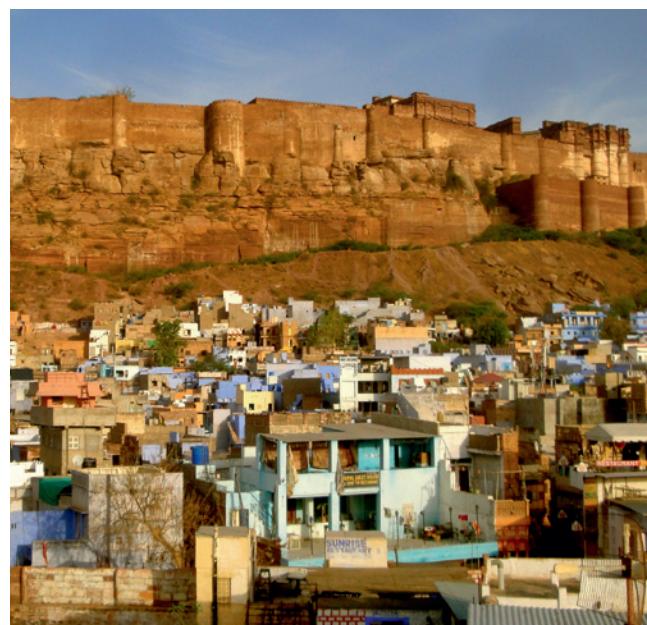
Traffic along the streets of Delhi's old town



The horribly overgrown lower reaches of the town of Darjeeling, West Bengal: The higher parts still retain some of their British colonial hill station atmosphere.



Orchha, Madhya Pradesh: Bargaining for the sake of bargaining at an Indian market



The town and fort of Jodhpur, Rajasthan, during a cool dry season morning

# Welcome to the Newest ACS Alumni: The Class of 2012



## Dr. Roger Whitaker's Greetings to the Class of 2012

*Dr. Roger Whitaker, Chairman of the ACS Board of Trustees, is a Professor of Educational Leadership and Higher Education Administration at The George Washington University in Washington D.C. His international experience includes teaching for two years in Ethiopia, conducting dissertation research in Bulgaria in 1975-76, and serving as the founding President of the American College of Sofia when it reopened in 1992. Here his address to the Class of 2012 with abbreviations.*

...

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the reopening of the American College and therefore, after the first class graduated in 1997, today marks the 15th graduation ceremony for the College. Today we will welcome 126 seniors to join 1,571 others who have graduated since the school reopened in 1992. I have no doubt that whatever paths our graduates will pursue after today, they will distinguish themselves - just as have those who have gone before them. Congratulations.

Of course, much has changed since the school reopened with a simple ceremony on the steps of this building,

named in honor of Dr. Irwin T. Sanders. Professor Sanders was the Dean of Students at the American College in the late 1920s and early 1930s and he was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees when the decision was made -- 20 years ago -- to re-open the College. Yes much has changed:

In 1992....

George Bush and Boris Yeltsin declared the end of the Cold War and USA lifted trade sanctions against China. Today, it is much more common in the States to find

something made in China than made in America.

That year (1992) the Czechoslovakian parliament approved separation into two countries and the Yugoslav Federation was broken apart.

The Olympics in 1992 were held in Barcelona and Germany competed under one flag for the first time in half a century.

Isaac Asimov died, EU was founded, and McDonalds opened its first restaurant in China.

Bulgaria had a population in 1992 that was one million more than shown in the latest census.

In 1992, Hristo Stoichkov was leading Barcelona to winning gold at the European Cup and the Premiere League was formed in Great Britain<sup>1</sup>. And who was the champion that first year? Indeed, Manchester United<sup>2</sup>, their first club championship in 26 years. We won't discuss the results for the current year, decided last Sunday.

And what about the American College? Well, in 1992, it opened using one building – this one. And we had 100 students, now more than 700, and we had 12 teachers whereas today we have more than that just in our math and computer science department and the total is over 80.

In terms of technology, 20 years ago it was nearly impossible to make a phone call from the College to the U.S. You had to go to the Telecommunications building in the center to even try. By contrast, since its launch six months ago, the College has over 500 friends from 20 countries on facebook and the numbers continue to grow as the College posts various messages, pictures, and announcements every day.

Yes, new facilities, new teachers, new trustees, new developments, and new challenges come along as Bulgaria, Europe, and the World continue to see breath-taking changes. But some things stay the same and in our case today, we see the continuity in the College mission and the tireless dedication of our teachers, administrators, students and parents to make ACS the best possible learning community.

Some individuals who were at the College the day it opened have found ways to reconnect professionally. Two of the students from the first year and one teacher from that year have joined the Board of Trustees. Two others from the first class of students have now returned to the College in to join the administrative staff. But, I believe there are only two individuals who were with us on Day 1 and have had continuous

service to the College, every day for the past 20 years. These two are Stefka Papazova and Maria Angelova.

Stefka is the head of our sports department. I recall the first week the College opened giving Stefka a couple of tennis balls and wishing her good luck. She managed wonderfully then and she has been doing that every since.

Maria joined the first faculty as a music teacher and later transitioned into service in the administration. She has worked with all five of the presidents of the College and done so with great dedication and expertise.

Please join me in thanking these two members of the ACS community for their two decades of uninterrupted service to the College.

Although it is right that we pause for a moment to think about the past 20 years, the focus today is really on those who graduate this afternoon. And so, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the American College of Sofia, let me simply say: Congratulations and best wishes to each of you as you start to construct the next phase of your life-story. It promises to be very exciting and we will follow your development with great interest, high hopes, and strong confidence in you as graduates of the American College of Sofia.

Thank you.



Dr. Roger Whitaker

<sup>1</sup> The competition formed as the FA Premier League on 20 February 1992 following the decision of clubs in the Football League First Division to break away from The Football League, which was originally founded in 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Dimitar Berbatov (of Manchester United) was the keynote speaker at the Graduation of the Class of 2012.

## Ms. Susan Sutton's Remarks to the Class of 2012

*Susan Sutton assumed her responsibilities as Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the United States of America in Bulgaria in July 2009. She is a career Foreign Service Officer in the United States Department of State. Prior to her arrival in Sofia, she served as Political Counselor in Bangkok, Thailand and as Deputy Chief of Mission in Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic. Ms. Sutton began her career in the Foreign Service in London in 1985, and subsequently served in Romania and Moldova. In the State Department, she served as country officer for Bulgaria and Albania 1989-1991, as an analyst for Southeast Asia in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and as Deputy Director of the Bilateral Affairs Office in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Ms. Sutton has a BA in German Studies from Boston University and an MA in German Literature from Tufts University.*



Distinguished graduates, parents, friends,

It is my great honor to be here to present my greetings and congratulations on behalf of the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, and on behalf of the government and people of the United States. The American College of Sofia has a special place in our hearts. It is an old and powerful symbol of the long friendship between the American and the Bulgarian people.

Many of you graduates, after a few weeks of vacation, will head off to someplace strange and new to continue your education, leaving behind the safety of this familiar place.

I thought and thought about what words of wisdom I could share with you on this occasion, and I decided to quote from a book that I have found to be a great help and guide to me, as my career has carried me around the world. I turn for inspiration to Alice Through the Looking Glass, the sequel to Alice in Wonderland, and especially to the excellent advice the White Queen gives to a confused young Alice, when she finds herself in a strange, new place.

The White Queen says to Alice: "I'll give you something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day."

"I can't believe that!" said Alice.

"Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

"There's no use trying," Alice said 'one can't believe impossible things.'

The White Queen answers her: "I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

You, as graduates of the American College of Sofia, should know better than most people the power of belief. Who would have believed that Americans would come to Bulgaria in 1860 and successfully start a school? Unlikely. Who would have believed that this College could be resurrected after more than 40 years of the Cold War? Impossible. You graduates sitting here in your robes and mortarboards are the living evidence of the power of believing - believing, even, in impossible things.

So, we expect great accomplishments from you. We believe you will fight for justice, and work for peace. We believe you will take your place as leaders of your community, in business and in society, and apply what you learned here to solve the problems your generation has inherited from mine.

And if that seems impossible, when you find it just too hard to believe in yourselves -- remember the White Queen. Practice. Try again: draw a long breath,

and shut your eyes,

and believe.

Good luck.

# Those Were the Days: Vintage *College Life*<sup>1</sup> Titles and “Biseri” That Caught Our Eye

Selection by Zornitsa Haidutova and Petia Ivanova '97



<sup>1</sup> Taken from College Life issued between December 1998 and March 2003.

## Biseri

“Кирил завършил Магнаурската школа, която на времето била много повече и звучала по–реномирано от Кеймбридж и Оксфорд.” (December 1998)

•  
Tihomir Dimitrov (Tisho): Psychology - a modern science, which thinks it's modern and that it's a science. (November 1999)

•  
Час по география, tandem Яна А. – Светла Т (9/2). Обичайна забележка и още по–естествена реакция:  
- Яна, мъкнете там със Светла!  
-Да, само да ѝ кажа нещо! (November 1999)

•  
Гаврил решава задачи на дъската. Търси лице на трапец. Г-жа Брайнова изтрива нещо от написаното.  
-Е, госпожо, защо ми изтрихте лицето?! (November 1999)

•  
Mr. Danchev's Physics class:  
-Did I confuse you?  
-Yes.  
-I confused myself... (March 2000)

•  
(History class. A student raising her hand.)  
Mr. Crumbie: Are you drying your nails or do you actually have a question? (April 2000)

•  
(Час по български език, винаги извор на мъдрост и просветление)  
Г-жа Димова и ученикът Спиров осведомено спорят:  
Спиров: Да оставим тази мисъл да поулегне.  
Г-жа Димова: Е, така ще вземе да ферментира. (April 2000)

•  
(Час по испански език)  
Г-жа Велева: О, аз вече съм ви ги приготвила summary-тата и съм ги оставила да се размножават. (April 2000)

•  
(Час по български език)  
Ученик: Госпожо, какво значи „ужасяващ стил”?  
Преподавател: Ами нещо като твоето есе. (June 2000)

•  
(Час по история)  
Целият клас недоволства, че Mr. Crumbie приема правилото да не се говори на български език в час буквально:  
Ученик: Can we laugh in Bulgarian then?  
Mr. Crumbie: Only if it's done with an English accent! (June 2000)

•  
(Час по спорт. Теория на волейбола.)  
Преподавател: Как са номерирани зоните?  
Хорово: Обратно на часовниковата стрелка.  
Преподавател: Как се въртят играчите?  
Хорово: По посока на часовниковата стрелка.  
Преподавател: А кой изпълнява сервиза?

Константин: Часовниковата стрелка. (November 2000)

•  
(Час по физика)  
Коментира се върнат quiz.  
Г-жа Чакърова: Ама Богдане, ти и диаграма нямаш!  
Богдан: Как да нямам, госпожо, почти имам!  
Г-жа Чакърова: Нямаш; имаш тук една река пресечена от вектор!  
Богдан: Да, ама и крокодил има вътре! (November 2000)

•  
(Час по български език)  
Г-жа Димова говори.  
Неда: Какъв час имаме?! (December 2000)

•  
(Час по математика)  
Радо: Ама госпожо, като ползваме вашите handout-и като източници, как ги reference-ваме? (December 2000)

•  
-Mr. Dinkov, may I go to the bathroom?  
-What? Are you going to take a shower now? (November 2001)

•  
(Час по математика)  
Петя: Господине, тази задача е ужасна!  
Динков: I understand your feelings! (June 2002)

•  
(Час по български)  
Енчев: Като чета на глас чувам гласове! (November 2002)

•  
The ex-10/2. English Literature class.  
Mr. Korling: What's your name?  
Momchil: Momchil.  
Mr. Korling: Great! Can I call you Mom? (December 2002)

•  
Mr. McClinton: What is the opposite of “transparent”?  
Gergana: Parent?!  
Ms. Decheva: Този шейп е много уиърд! (March 2003)

•  
(Час по български език и литература)  
Г-жа Русева: Чел ли си „Робинзон Крузо”?  
Мишо: Донякъде...  
(кратка, мъчителна пауза)  
Г-жа Русева: А много ли си се отдалечавал от заглавието или...? (March 2003)

# CLASS NOTES

## Ex-faculty

We heard former English teacher and basketball coach **Mr. Andrew Jones** is in the process of writing a memoir on coaching basketball at ACS and we couldn't help but write to Mr. Jones asking for more details on this exciting project. Here is what Mr. Jones shared:

I'd coached basketball for seven years in the United States before I came to Bulgaria. I was really excited to have the opportunity to coach the ACS boys varsity team, but I also had no idea what to expect. With each new practice and game, I realized that I was getting an exciting new education not only about Bulgarian basketball, but Bulgarian culture as well. We improved dramatically on the court over the course of two years, and I felt that my bond with the team grew more and more just as they grew closer as a team as well. As my time in Bulgaria wound to a close, I started to realize that of all the incredible experiences I'd had in this new country, my experiences with the ACS basketball team were some of the most meaningful and impacting. The relationships we'd all formed as a team while working so hard together weren't ones that would ever be forgotten. The lessons we'd all learned from competing together and growing together were ones that would stick with me for life. So as I was leaving Bulgaria, I started scribbling down as many notes and memories from my two years as basketball coach as I could. I've always been a writer, but in the past, I'd just written shorter pieces. In this case, the ACS basketball team and my experience in Bulgaria had affected me so much that I felt I wanted to write much more than just a shorter piece. So for the last two years, I've been working on my memoir of life as a basketball coach and a foreigner in Bulgaria. I wanted to tell the story of our two years together and how much it affected me as a person. One of the most rewarding parts of the writing process has been that I've had a chance to relive so many of the incredible moments that I experienced while in Bulgaria. A draft of my memoir is finished, and

now I'm in the process of revising and editing in preparation for it becoming a final product -- hopefully soon!

Memoir aside, while school is wrapping up here in Chicago, **Erin (Kahle)** and I are really excited getting ready for our wedding in July to take place in her hometown in Vermont. In case you are wondering, I am planning a rakia toast on the day of the wedding as there's a great Bulgarian liquor store in Chicago that has supplies of Burgas 63.

•

Former faculty members **Jeff Jewett** (Biology 2008-2010) & **Dr. Shannon Savage** (Geography) sent us a letter full of news, as well:

Socha Sage Jewett Savage was born on March 22, 2012 weighing 3.14 kg (6 lbs 14 oz). If you were lucky enough to catch Faculty Follies this year, you saw a video of many recent ACS faculty alumni dancing to Beyoncé, all digitally spliced together from around the globe. A very pregnant Dr. Savage and Socha (still in utero) contributed their best moves, and Dr. Savage was editing the video at the hospital as she began labor!

Immediately after the end of last school year, we traveled to Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, and Serbia before moving back to the United States. Socha's name comes from the Soča River in Slovenia, which we visited on that trip and think is the most beautiful river we've ever seen. The Soča River



Jeff Jewett, Dr. Savage, and little Socha

Greetings ACS!

We have had a remarkable year since we left Sofia. I am teaching environmental science at Deerfield Academy, a boarding school in western Massachusetts, and Dr. Shannon Savage is able to spend all of her time taking care of our new baby daughter.

has crystal clear water in a ridiculous minty-green color, reminiscent of the Caribbean. Her middle name Sage is a connection to the western United States (the smell of sagebrush is ever present in many of the wide-open landscapes of the West), and the city of Sofia. Both sage and Sofia have roots in the word for wisdom.

Socha has already provided us many hours of joy, amazement, and sleep-deprivation, and we look forward to each new developmental milestone. She's already been hiking (in a carrier) up to top of the local mountain and down to our river, so we hope she'll be ready for the ACS Hiking Club someday.

When I am not changing dirty diapers or helping Dr. Savage with late night feeds, I've been teaching, monitoring the dormitory, coaching an outdoor program (somewhat like the ACS Hiking Club, but we meet 4 days a week and do many activities beyond hiking such as canoeing, rock climbing, and white water rafting), and working as the campus sustainability coordinator. As sustainability coordinator, I help organize efforts to make the campus a more environmentally friendly place, which is turning out to be a challenging but interesting endeavor.

This summer we hope to visit **Brett and Betsy Potash** at their cabin in

Minnesota, where Socha can meet up with her "Bulgarian cousin," their new son Nathaniel. We miss

everyone in Sofia, and thank you all for helping make our time in Bulgaria unforgettable.

## Alumni



The May Boston reunion that brought together **Jordan Marvakov '97, Zori Milcheva '97, Teddy Konetsovka '97, Polly Kehayova '97** (the kind host of the event), **Bobby Stefanov '97, and Irina Mladenova '04**

Have you ever wondered how many alums went ahead and married a fellow ACSer? Well, we have, so we contacted those three couples we were aware of and here are their news in images:

**Hristo Lazarov '97, Vera Hristova '99**, daughter Mina (born August 2007), and son Nikola (born December 2010) in Rila, September, 2011. Amazingly enough, Vera's grandparents met at the College, as well, only some decades ago, when girls and boys had to pass notes during choir practice to communicate their feelings. How about that?



**Lubomira Zafirova (Lucky) '98, Angel Dimitrov (Acho) '98** with their two-year-old son Vesko in February 2012



**Eva (Encheva) Rangelova and Svilen Rangelov** - both Class of '97 - and their daughter Maya, November, 2011



On her way back from a conference in China to her home in Rio de Janeiro, **Ira Nasteva '97** organized a Washington D.C. reunion with fellow classmates **Nikolay Kolev, Katya (Gecheva) Damianova, Iva (Zaharieva) Maxwell, and Stanka Ilkova**.



**Nedko Kyuchukov '03** wed his long-term girlfriend **Irena Tzekina** in a ceremony on June 2nd, with Vihren Jordanov '02 serving a duty as the best man, and **Konstantin Boychinov** and **Boris Michev '03** accompanying as groomsmen (Photograph courtesy of Ivo Popov Photography - [www.iCaptureDreams.com](http://www.iCaptureDreams.com))

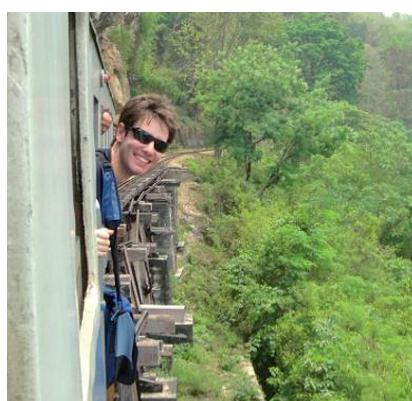
**Yuri Boyanin '07** whose incredible photos are included on pages 8-11 of this same issue sent as a brief report on his extensive travels around Asia, as well:

Five years passed since graduating from the American College of Sofia, during which I received my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in England and Sweden. During the last five years I was in the hands of some of the best specialists in my field - history, area studies and politics - and I was also given great freedom to pursue various other courses and subjects. I ended up studying in Turku (Finland), Uppsala (Sweden), Copenhagen (Denmark), Beijing (PRC) as well being affiliated for research at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek and Delhi University, in addition to my regular degrees at Newcastle and Lund

Universities. It was a great time and I am looking forward to Melbourne now. In the next three to four years I should be regularly plying the roads between Kyrgyzstan and Moscow. I also visited 48 countries, soon 50, became quite a good writer (despite all former literature teachers convincing me of the opposite) and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society some three years ago.

However, of all achievements and experiences, the last six months were by far the most rewarding. I learned to fight for my ground, to survive in one room with as many horrifying insects as you can imagine, to find common language with all people there are - even if we do not understand each other in words, and to bargain hard.

It all started with a fantastic last weekend in Stockholm. I think all lifetime journeys should start at or at least include Stockholm. Hopefully, I will get to live there one day. Continuing



**Yuri** on the Thailand-Burma railway (a.k.a. Death railway) near Namtok

through northern Poland - where I got my last food poisoning before the epic poisoning in the Himalayas five months later but that's another story - then onwards to Turkey, my home Bulgaria and Ukraine, before setting off to Beijing, the People's Republic of China. Not my first visit to the Middle Kingdom, as this communist state is still known as, but then my previous stay did not leave the time to explore rarely seen villages and towns, places with no other infrastructure but a dirt road. I should perhaps mention here that I am incredibly fond of village life, well, especially Swedish village life. And I had always taken for granted things like electricity, running water, and sanitation facilities. As you can imagine, China does not always offer the most comfortable village experiences. And I am not even mentioning village life in India and Central Asia here!

I was in China not for pleasure though, but for researching on my masters thesis on Sino-Indian overland border trade via Tibet and Sikkim. The fieldwork on the Chinese side of the border was not as useful as I had expected. There are certain limits a researcher, especially one at the start of his academic career, cannot bridge. I still met and talked to scholars and officials. Sometimes they had little knowledge to offer on my field but more on other fields: such as corruption and the future of the Communist Party of China. Being a first-hand witness of the recent Chinese economic surge, I cannot but be quite pessimistic of its future under the present shape. Of course, there are things to cheer about: an amazing effort to lift so many out of poverty, a rising middle and entrepreneurial class, an improving physical and social infrastructure, and logically, rising consumerism (nothing really wrong about having that IKEA bed or new dishwasher, is there?) And yet, all those go hand in hand with obvious mismanagement of financial resources and human capital, lack of dominating political or spiritual ideology but that of political survival day for day. The building boom makes the European Eastern bloc and Soviet urban development dwarf in comparison. Seeing huge apartment buildings rise in towns and villages with no asphalt or fitting infrastructure reminded me of the Icelandic building boom, but a

thousand times worse. The high rises in Reykjavik could at least be used safely in another 25 years time. I very much doubt the same for the monsters found in Chinese settlements.

I traveled along some back roads, hitchhiking on my own (mind you, without speaking more than three words in Chinese!) I also traveled some highly impressive motorways built high up in the hills, made possible by extensive tunneling and bridging. Have you ever been boating through a rough sea? Have you traveled along a Chinese road? Well, not much different. But then not much different from some of Sofia's boulevards either (though at least we do not think ourselves the world's leading economy, if I may add).

Let me not be a pessimist though. I very much hope the Chinese of today will live to see their country transform into a fully industrial nation. Its people do deserve a better life after all hardships they have endured. And when we speak of Chinese development, let us not overlook the other nations in Asia. Even the ones seen as most developed - South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, are still surging ahead. Others, like Vietnam and Indonesia, are not staying idle. If the 21st century is to be an Asian Century, it will not just be China's century. Mind this when you suggest to your children to learn Chinese: they might just as well focus on Melayu, Vietnamese, Russian or Portuguese.

Now turning to India, it is a different issue. Truly incredible, it deserves not be compared with any other. Doing research on the Indian side of the border was an enriching experience. With no language barrier there, I could meet and speak with scholars from across the country. Library resources offered hundreds, no, thousands of books on all aspects of Chinese politics, economy, military, and society compared to just seven books on India in the Beida (Peking University) library on India! In the eyes of India, China is a potential, an ally, a partner, but also a threat, foe, political and military adversary. I noticed how an Indian always takes pride as the world's largest democracy, and the media daily reminds its 1.1 billion readers of the Indian

moral superiority over its "corrupt autocratic neighbour hiding behind a mask of socialism". However, India's democracy might not be fully inclusive either. I suspect some village-level elections in China might be more fair and open than those staged in an Indian village, where despite regular 100% voter turnovers, the majority of voters might not know they were even enlisted to vote on that special day.

Of course it is not news that India faces enormous poverty still awaiting to be lifted out of the dirt. It is not news either that it possesses an enormous human capital which already helps the country surge forward. And yet, together with China they spent hundreds of billions on defence matters. Money that can and should be spent better elsewhere, if you ask me. Perhaps it is not unlikely that we witness a new Cold War between these two (regional) powers. As unpredictable as the one of the 20th century's second half but with even more actors and interests involved. The Chinese 'all-weather friendship' with Pakistan and the new alliance between Delhi and Washington only make the game, or the puzzle - as you wish to see it - more difficult to predict.

In India I had some of the most intellectually stimulating time. I still have not found the time to put in writing all the experiences: and there were many of them. I am glad I got to stay and eat with some of the country's poorest people, but also with some of the country's richest. The 7996 km I traveled by train or road in China were surpassed by the 9678 in India. It is a land incredibly diverse, even if often challenging to understand. I will be looking forward to the next opportunity to come back here. I would also be looking forward to returning to Southeast Asia and Arabia, as well as Eastern Siberia, hopefully next year.

I hope this very brief, yet honest and spontaneous record of six fabulous past months has been of interest. I hope the future will similarly hold unforgettable moments for us all. As for me, I will be spending the next few months in Melbourne then off once again to Central Asia and Moscow, all working to complete my doctorate degree, and as in the past five years,

being involved in other work and study projects. Hopefully, I will find the time to also complete my first book.

•  
**Mariya Shoteva '08** wrote:

I am currently in my junior year studying Voice and Opera Performance in the Boston University College of Fine Arts School of Music. I just wanted to share with you some very exciting news: I was elected recipient of the 2012 Ella Lou Dimmock Award for outstanding promise on the operatic stage. This award is given to the student, who has demonstrated a superior achievement in performance and vocal excellence. In addition, I was selected to perform in the American National Bel Canto Festival.

For those of you who haven't met Mariya, at ACS, she was Eulalie Mackenzie Shinn in the musical *The Music Man* (2004), Angel in the musical *No Day But Today* (2008), Armand in the 2006 Bulgarian Theatre Production of *Educated Women* by Molier, and the Nurse in the 2006 English Drama Production of *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare. She was also a soloist of the ACS Choir and ACS Chamber Vocal Group. You may remember her performances in the Christmas Concerts, Arts Fest Concerts, and Talent Shows, as well as her solo a capella performances of the American National Anthem at the ACS Graduation Ceremonies. Mariya represented ACS at the 2006 and 2007 Hotchkiss Summer Portals Vocal Ensembles Program at the Hotchkiss School in the US.



Boston University Opera Institute's production of Poulenc's opera *Dialogues of the Carmelites* which premiered in April 2012. Mariya (fourth from left to right) sings the role of Sister Martha





# ACS ALUMNI Magazine



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