

Issue 8, December 2012



ACS ALUMNI Magazine



Art Is the Answer

A Life of Purpose: Alice Zlatka Litov '42

The Bicycle Diaries

Monika Rzezniczek's Blissful Recollections



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On the outer front cover – The snow-covered statues of Dr. Floyd Black and Inez Abbott in front of Abbott Hall (Photograph by Daniel Lekov); **inner front cover** – Beautiful ACS campus in the fall (Photograph by Zornitsa Haidutova)

On the inner back cover – Tenth grader Valentina Mihailova's contribution to the current student artwork exhibition in Building 5; **outer back cover** – The College campus from above, 1936

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Greetings:

It's an exciting time for the American College of Sofia! ACS recently received a large grant from the America for Bulgaria Foundation for a new library and cafeteria, the Alumni Fund has been launched and many alumni are already participating, and it is the season where many of you come back to ACS for the Christmas Concert and the alumni reception afterwards. In addition, recent ACS international medal winners have brought recognition to the College.

My favorite time of year at ACS is Christmas when the campus is a winter wonderland, the first quarter is over, and we look forward to the Christmas program and alumni party, the staff Christmas party, and a two-week vacation. This week we have had our first snowfall of the season and try-outs are being held for the concert.

You have probably seen the announcement about the America for Bulgaria Foundation grant of over \$6,000,000 for a new library and new cafeteria as well as the renovation of two faculty houses. A planning committee last year identified a new library and improved dining facilities as the top priority for the improvement of student services. The ACS Board of Trustees has pledged \$1.6 million to complete the improvements.

After a year of planning, the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee launched the Alumni Fund with a nifty website. Already receiving attention from other development programs, the website tracks the progress of donations including the amount and participation. The goal for this year is 10% participation from each alumni class. I urge you to go to the ACS homepage, www.acs.bg, and click on *Giving to the College/Statistics* to check out the progress and make your own donation. The alumni have already donated over 4,000 BGN and the class of 2005 is nearing the 10% participation goal.

Finally, the quality of education at ACS is always a priority. From the administration of the entrance exam to the hiring of teachers, maintaining and improving the quality of the education of students is where we concentrate our efforts day after day. One of the indicators is how our students do in academic competitions. Recently, ACS was honored by the Prime Minister for its students who earned medals in international competitions. Students identified by the Prime Minister were Kubrat Danailov of the Class of 2011 for his bronze medal at the International Math Olympiad, Todor Manev of the Class of 2014 for his bronze medal at the International Science Olympiad, Veselin Karadzhov of the Class of 2012 for his gold medal at the International Physics Olympiad, and recently Mihaela Zaharieva of the class of 2013 won a silver medal at the International Astronomy Olympiad. Wow!

Please join us for the Christmas Concert and the alumni reception afterwards. It is always great to see you back at ACS.

Dr. Paul K. Johnson

President, American College of Sofia

ACS Alumni Magazine

Issue 8, December 2012

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Letters may be edited for publication.



Petia Ivanova '97

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Dear Alumni,

Never have I had such a hard time choosing the main topic for an issue of this magazine. My mailbox was full to the brim with great materials: a moving pre-war alumni story, touching former faculty recollections, exciting travel notes full of humor, and oh, so accomplished and talented alums to write about. So, I let it shape up as an issue of four equally big and important topics that I bet are also equally pleasant to read through on a lazy afternoon next to a Christmas tree.

Ever since we dedicated the second issue of this magazine to ACS drama performances through the years and then the third one to science, the one on fine arts has been shaping up in my mind. But it had to take three years before it got its full colors. ACS art teacher of many years Nia Decheva, and her former students Polly, Eliza, Didi, Lora, and Ina made it possible with their own stories and even more so with the beautiful snapshots of their art projects. I hope you enjoy these as much as my colleague Natalia and I did while piecing together this artwork constellation.

In mid-November, San Francisco based fellow classmate and friend Lisa Kostova '97 alerted me to pre-war alumna of the Class of 1942 Alice Zlatka Litov, 'a gracious and brave lady' as Lisa described her, with a fascinating story of how she fled Bulgaria many years ago. Lisa met Alice in her home in the Bay Area and you are about to enjoy the outcome of this age-difference-dissolving meeting of fellow College graduates.

This past summer when the College was sunken in greenery and silence like every year during vacation, I was greatly entertained by Psychology teacher and colleague Martyn Rowlands' humorous travel notes as he was posting them on his blog from various locations on his 4,700-kilometer-long bicycle tour through Europe. Upon his return Martyn was kind enough to choose three real-time accounts of his entries to share with you all. Beware the random laughter outbursts with this one in case members of your family are taking a siesta next to you!

The former faculty material in this issue can be traced even further back to March this year when I found, instantly liked, and posted an old image on the ACS facebook page Photo of the Day feature. I had no idea what the story behind this image of laughing young people striking a pose at the Fountain was but I wanted to find out because the smiles were both genuine and contagious. Former English Language and Literature teacher Monika Rzezniczek diligently replied and then I knew I wanted to hear more from her. The story of her ACS memories came in the last days of November – touching and soothing, as the first snow.

Merry Christmas!

Kind regards,

Petia Ivanova '97

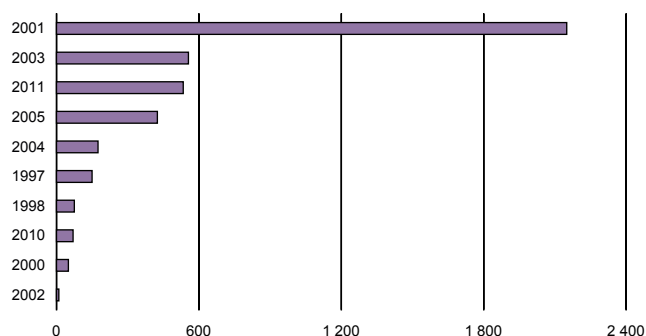
Editor

The ACS Alumni Fund: What a Promising Start!

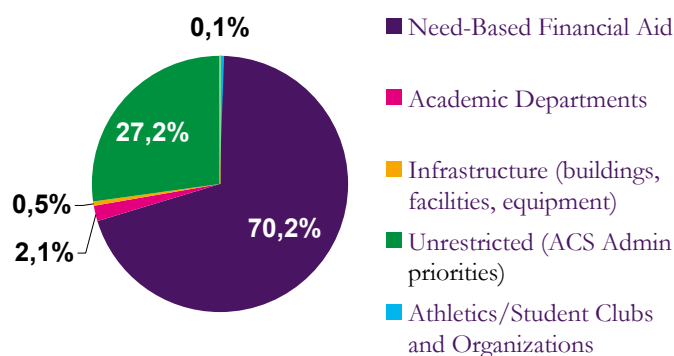
On October 22, the Alumni Fund of the American College of Sofia marked the official launch of its donations campaign. Convinced that giving back to ACS is, indeed, a great way to preserve the College's top standing among the best schools in the world

and will enhance the school's further growth, the first 30 alumni from 10 different classes have already made a donation resulting in the total amount of 4,195 leva raised. We simply can't thank you enough!

Donations by class year through November, 2012

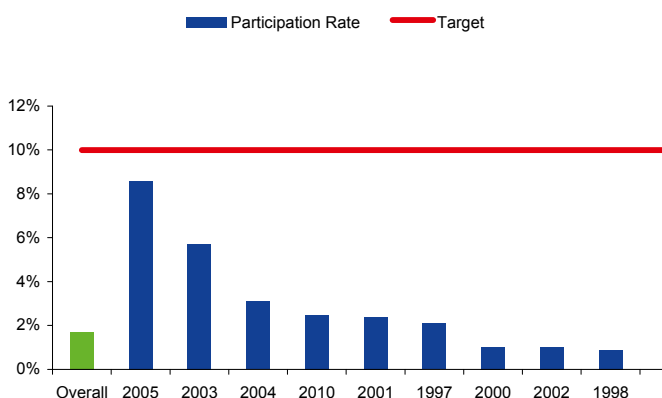


Donations by category through November, 2012



Impressively, the goal of 10% participation rate in the first year which the members of the AFAC (Alumni Fund Advisory Committee) set initially, is already close to have been achieved by one ACS class. With their 8.6%, the **Class of 2005**, has taken the lead in that ranking followed by the Class of 2003 with 5.7%. Way to go, guys!

Participation rate by class through November, 2012¹



¹The class donation of the Class of 2011 made towards the Fund long before its launch is not included here

Alumni from classes holding places 3 and down in the participation rate ranking (available on the Reports page of the Giving to the College section of the ACS website), should by no means despair though, as numbers are changing by the day, and your class may very soon take the lead. Again, more than anything else, we expect **involvement** in this first year of the Fund. As most of you know, many foundations consider the number of individual donors a school has in deciding which schools deserve grants. So, all you need to do to help ACS is keep in mind **no donation is too small**, spread the word to your classmates, and hit the Donate-Now button displayed handy on all pages of the Giving to the College section of the ACS website.

Thank you all for the support and happy holidays!

Yours truly,
the Alumni Fund Advisory Committee
and the ACS Alumni Relations, Development, and Admissions Office

A Life of Purpose: Alice Zlatka Litov '42

Interview by Lisa Kostova Ogata '97

On a crisp and sunny morning in November, I drive across the Bay Bridge in San Francisco. I'm headed for Castro Valley, a quiet and cozy residential neighborhood in the East Bay, a calm patchwork of one-story simple homes with Spanish motifs and sunny yards. I'm going to visit Alice Zlatka Litov, an 89-year-young writer of the book *From Dawn to Daylight, My Life in Bulgaria*. Alice is a 1942 graduate of the College, the last class that managed to graduate before the school was closed. I'm from the Class of 1997, the first class to graduate after ACS reopened. Alice and I have already met once before - the 45 years that separate us dissolve as we share experiences and stories of defining and uncertain times and the people who touched our lives.

Alice opens the door and I'm greeted by a sunny elderly lady - her stature is small but there is a bounce in her step, and her hazel eyes twinkle with kindness. They light up with her open, infectious laughter and grow sad and thoughtful when she talks about the days long gone and experiences that are too vivid to forget. Her house is warm and inviting. The living room opens to a sunny deck full of flowering plants - geranium, alstroemeria, and other varietals, and to my amazement they are all in bloom at the same time. The walls are adorned with petit point embroideries and Bulgarian plates Alice made herself, as well as Madonnas, rugs, and scenes from the Bulgarian countryside. The grandfather clock in the dining room makes a comforting ding-dong sound every half hour and a deep sonorous sound at the top of the hour. I feel at home.

Alice, how did you come to attend the American College of Sofia?

Both my parents spoke English – my dad had been to the US to study and then he returned to Bulgaria. My mother had gone to an American school in Bitola, in Macedonia, where she was from. My sister and I went to the American Grade School from Grade 1 on. My brother went to a German School because most of the trade in my dad's business was done between Germany and Bulgaria at that time. I went to the American College as one of just a few of my graduating grade school class who were selected to continue our education at the College.

Do you have a vivid memory from your time at the College?

I have several precious memories. One of them is of our sing-alongs on the steps of Assembly Hall¹. On Sunday evenings, our choir director Mr. Goncharov, a Russian who had fled Russia after the revolution and who was an accomplished musician and mathematician, would lead



Alice in her home in Castro Valley, USA in November, 2012

¹Nowadays Ostrander Hall

the sing-along. We used booklets called *101 Best Songs*, which had a selection of American songs, spirituals and other ones like *Yankee Doodle*, and some Hawaiian tunes as well. It was in the evening hours, so when the sun was setting, it was a fairyland experience.

Another very vivid memory had to do with the dormitory life. For me it was a wonderful opportunity to get to know my peers – girls who came from different backgrounds and had varied interests. The dormitory where Tsetsa, my best friend from the grade school, and I were eventually placed housed twelve girls. Four of us were from Sofia and the others came from different parts of the country. The girls were all different, but all of them were so interesting to be with and we stayed together all of the five to six years we were there. I also remember the visit of Princess Eudokia, the sister of King Boris III, and how a few of us, choir members, went caroling in the dark outside professors' residences. We also had a costume ball (not Halloween), which was a staged performance in Assembly Hall.

How did you experience 1942, the last year that the American College of Sofia was open and the year that you graduated? How did the College staff explain to the students what was going on?

At our age at the time, we were more or less sheltered. We knew there was a war, but it was not in Bulgaria, so it didn't affect us directly. A great part of the year was spent in the College and we were not even aware of the food shortages going on. The College personnel were so good in continuing to provide for us and cook for us. We didn't have the food coupons that the general population had to use and

the College caretakers were able to find provisions for us from neighboring villages. Even though we knew that some teachers had left, the College continued – same subjects, same hours – and our teachers who remained were very calm and reassuring. And that was a wonderful thing – they proceeded as usual and didn't frighten us. Later, when I read President Black's book, I learned that he had to withdraw the College's money from the bank at the last minute so he could continue providing the supplies. He had to walk on foot the distance from the bank in Sofia to campus because cars were not allowed for traveling at that time. That was 1941. I graduated in the spring of 1942 and the College was closed half a year later by the Ministry of Education.

What happened to the ACS students who were still at school?

Most of them went back to their hometowns and finished school there.

How did you find out the College was closed?

We heard about the Americans leaving campus by word of mouth. I was attending classes at the University of Sofia when the last train pulled out from the train station with all the personnel – the Blacks and some of my grade school teachers. But the American Embassy had closed even earlier, in 1942, before I graduated from the College.

In Communist Bulgaria, anyone who was previously affiliated with a Western or American educational system faced extreme scrutiny. What was your initial experience with the Communist regime?

The regime was smart because

they didn't change things right away and put a stop to everything, they proceeded gradually. The Agrarian Party, for example, was allowed to function as if there was really a two-party system. But the reality was different. My cousin and a friend of hers had put up some posters calling to people to vote for the Agrarian Party. But the secret police caught them while they were putting up the posters and sent them to prison – we didn't even know where my cousin was. And eventually, the head of the Agrarian Party, Traicho Kostov, was hanged.

My father's leather goods store was not closed right away but little by little. At first, imports were not allowed and it was more difficult to get supplies even from the countryside. Eventually, all private businesses withered away or were ordered to close. Another tactic was to install one person in each community of ten who would report to the Communist Party about these people – who they talked to, what they said, where they met. Everybody had a dossier. They also installed loudspeakers at every corner – that was the only news source for us, since all the radio stations were shut down except for the Communist station. They had us study Marxism in the community – it was compulsory for everyone. At that time I was 18 years old and I had no idea what Communism really was.

Because our store was closed, I had to find another job. I had an accounting background and I found a job with CARE, an American company distributing aid, food, and packages to the war-stricken countries. But the Bulgarian government closed CARE after a few years. I found a position with UNICEF and since it was an international organization, I felt more or less



Alice Zlatka (Vlaycheva) Litov '42 as Class Representative for her class in the 1938 Bor

safe. Originally it was headed by a Swiss physician, but then Ann Laughlin, an American, came to lead it in Bulgaria. I worked for them as an interpreter and we met with many Bulgarian officials to promote the distribution of medicines and milk in the country. We had inspectors observing the proper distribution of these products. I enjoyed working there – the personnel were very international, from places as far away as Brazil.

What changed and what prompted your difficult decision to flee the country?

After a while the secret police came to me and wanted me to report to them what was going on in the office, who said what, who Ann Laughlin met with, and what she talked about. I felt very uncomfortable because even though I knew nothing improper was going on, I was aware the Communists could twist things around. The infamous trial of protestant ministers in Sofia was staged. They were accused of spying for the Americans and there were so many falsehoods

said about them. Several interrogators spoke to me and I knew that if they continued to pressure me, no good was going to come out of it, so I had to decide what to do next. It was the most difficult decision of my life. It was a matter of morality and I could not see any way out.

I didn't want to tell my family, not even my mother, what was going on because I did not want to worry or endanger them. The only person I spoke to was my brother-in-law, another graduate of the College. I told him I wanted to find a way to flee the country. I knew of several people who had attempted it – the office manager of CARE had tried to cross into Turkey by boat, but he and his friend were caught and sent to Belene, a diseased-ridden labor camp on an island. I knew of other people who tried to flee and who were either shot at the border or sent to prison or labor camp. And yet, I had to do something. My brother-in-law's younger brother, who had been released from labor camp, also wanted to flee, so we decided to attempt together.

The day before I was to leave, I had some time to sit on the bench in front of our house and think about what I was about to do. It was a warm evening and I cried inwardly – how am I going to leave my mother, my sister and my whole family, the wonderful country I lived in? I didn't want any harm to come to them, that's why I didn't tell anyone. I had told my mother that we were going on a hike in the mountains, and that was all, and that's why we had packed some food. We were leaving the next day. It was a heart-wrenching and agonizing decision. There was fear and anxiety, not only for myself, but also for my family and friends. During the last few years I

was in Bulgaria, I was avoiding seeing friends, so they wouldn't be interrogated later. I was brought up to believe that God is in absolute control. There is a saying "I have unshakable faith in the perfect outcome of every situation in my life for I know that God is in absolute control."

How did you manage to escape?

We planned to cross the border in the Rhodope Mountains. There was a 100-mile width of land around the borders that was "no man's land", so we steered as far away as possible from any inhabited places and walked mostly during the night. We had a few narrow encounters – once we were submerged in water under a bridge as we hid from an army convoy passing overhead. Fortunately, we had enough food for the ten days we walked, but the last three days we were out of water.

We were exhausted when we came to the border. We realized it was the border because we looked up and saw the two outposts on top of the ridge, facing each other. We saw more outposts further along the ridge. We had to make a decision – to cross the border that afternoon or later. We were afraid there might be detection dogs and there were no trees on the Bulgarian side, so we were exposed. We decided to make a go for it and as soon as we were at the border both sides started shooting at us with machine guns. We hid behind some boulders on the Greek side and fortunately we were not hit. We were told later that the Greeks fired at us because they were afraid of Communist infiltration.

We remained in that area all night. On the next day, we started going downhill and very ►

quickly we were intercepted by the Greek border patrol, who took us to be questioned in the village. They separated us and questioned us. We were fortunate that, unbeknownst to us, shortly before we fled, a United Nations Committee had been established in Greece to interview the refugees from Bulgaria. Before then, the Greeks had turned over any person caught fleeing to the Bulgarian authorities, the same as the Yugoslavians. It was a miracle that we survived.

Do you know what happened to those classmates of yours who remained in Bulgaria?

They were very reluctant to talk about their painful experiences, although eventually they shared some of them. One of my friends, who had become a dentist, was deprived of residency in Sofia because she was an American College graduate. She had to go to another town where she couldn't practice dentistry. Eventually she returned to Sofia and found another job. Her husband, another ACS graduate, was sent to labor camp. The only thing that saved him was that he was a gifted skin cancer specialist. Another ACS friend, who was deprived of residency in Sofia, had a difficult life in a small village and could not return for many years. Yet another was sent to the labor camp in Belene and his family did not know where he was. Nobody really talked about their feelings – it was too difficult to relive all these hardships.

What did you do once you got to the United States?

When I did come to USA I worked for over 25 years as a Reading Specialist. In 1986 I was honored to be named

“The Teacher of the Year” for the Hayward School District and another award I received was “Teacher of the Year for Alameda County,” California, chosen among over 4,500 teachers.

You visited Bulgaria in 1992, many decades after your escape. What was that experience like?

That was truly wonderful – as soon as I got off the plane, I was met by a big crowd of happy faces and flowers. In addition to family, all my classmates who lived in Sofia had come to welcome us. It was a delightful, yet tearful and heart-warming experience. I was overjoyed. It was simply one of the highlights of my life seeing all my friends again.

What were your impressions of Sofia and Bulgaria?

Sofia was entirely different from what I remembered. The rest of the country had not changed much. There were so many block houses, gray and harsh-looking. Streets covered with potholes, it was heart-breaking. You could tell people were unhappy – they had gone through so many deprivations, so you can't blame them. It was so sad, and yet at the same time I loved it, because it was my country, my city. The American College looked very different – the secret police had just left and we could see these old films scattered on the ground, everything dilapidated. The only thing they had improved was the Assembly Hall which was enlarged. There was a padded room on the side of the Assembly Hall and one can only imagine what it was used for. The bathrooms in the cafeteria were flooded. One of my

classmates, Vladimir Palankov, was a building engineer and was helping reconstruct the campus. When we came back again in 1997, it was much different.

In 1997 you saw the first graduating class and you saw the College open and functioning. What did that feel like?

It was absolutely delightful – so good to see young people on campus. The future looked bright and the whole place was full of life. The campus was different compared to 1992, but the old buildings were there and I had a lot of sweet memories touring campus.

Alice, it's amazing that after all these difficult experiences, you're so radiant and young at heart. What is your secret?

I don't know if there's a secret. I've always been interested in learning new things, learning what is going on in the world and staying connected with people. The College helped me so much to blossom not only academically, but also personally. I became more confident. My College enabled me to forge friendships throughout my life which has been a wonderful blessing. It fostered in me a desire to have a broader view of the world and to help those who need help. I have been very fortunate to live the life that I have lived. America has given a great deal to me and I'm forever grateful. I'm also grateful to my Bulgarian heritage because Bulgaria is where I started my life and is still very dear to me. It's like a mother having children – every child is precious in his/her own way.

Art Is the Answer

ACS Alumni in Arts

By Natalia Manolova & Petia Ivanova '97

'An artist cannot fail; it is a success to be one'. ~Charles Horton Cooley

Students have plenty of opportunities to develop their art talent at ACS – in class as well as beyond the classroom through drama, music, dance, and art activities. One of the first things our guests see when visiting ACS while looking for the reception desk is the students' art exhibition on the first floor of Building 5. Right after a series of enthusiastic exclamations they pose the question, „Are those really artworks of your students?” Though used to the colorful atmosphere with the exhibitions both here in Building 5 and in the Art Gallery of Sanders Hall we are far from taking our students' talent for granted. Quite the contrary – each new exhibition manages to surprise and excite us. Inspired by the newly arranged students' artwork created during their art classes and Art Club activities, we decided to find out what had happened to our young artists after graduating from ACS. Naturally, we asked our colleague and Art Teacher Nia Decheva to help us with information and she put us in touch with the alumni whose stories we present below. On the brink of university life, young people undoubtedly seek the answer to the question, “What shall I do with my future?” As you will read next, Eliza, Ina, Didi, Polly, and Lora are happy because they found their answer in art.



A drawing for a Whitney George poster by Eliza Ivanova '06

Eliza Ivanova '06: A Dream Came True

I graduated from ACS in 2006. During my time at the College I was an active member of the school community contributing to *College Life* with artwork. I also participated in the Arts Fest and various art events. With the help and support of Ms. Nia Decheva, my artwork was exhibited not only on campus but also in multiple art competitions around the world, winning awards and honors internationally. This way I was able to dive into

the global art community and get recognition very early on in my career as an artist. In 2006, I received the ACS Arts Department Award and went off to pursue an education and career in the arts, particularly in animation.

I received my BFA in Animation at the California Institute of the Arts. The school was originally established by Walt Disney himself and has a long history of successful film and animation alumni. During my third year at Calarts, I received the Walter and Gracie Lantz Award for best film in the school for my short *Piece of Cake*. That year I was also offered an internship at Pixar Animation Studios.

Currently, I am an animator at Pixar and have worked on three of their latest feature films, *Cars 2*, *Brave*, and the upcoming *Monsters University*. It is an absolute dream come true to be where I am right now, and looking back I can't thank Ms. Decheva and the former Arts Department enough for the unconditional support on this epic journey that has been the last 6 years of my life.

Some of Eliza's awards and recognitions include:

- *The Real McCoy* (2011) - Student Academy Awards regional finalist



Mask (mood swings) by Eliza



Eliza Ivanova '06

Ina Nikolova '08: Ar(t)chitecture

The five exciting years spent at the College taught me a lot and gave me numerous opportunities to experiment in different fields, including the arts. In 8th grade, I established the Applied Arts Club and was president of the Art Club at the College for the next five years until my graduation in May 2008. It was important to us that we not only gave ACS students the opportunity to creatively express themselves but also helped represent the College through the art competitions that we organized and through our club's stand exhibiting students' work at the annual Arts Fest. I am very thankful to Ms. Nia Decheva, who guided and supported me through my art education at the College. Receiving the Arts Department Award at the graduation ceremony was a great honor. The valuable experience that I gathered gave me the confidence to pursue my goals after graduating from ACS.

I am currently doing my Master's in Architecture in Stuttgart, Germany. During the time spent at university, I worked on numerous projects involving interior design, among them designing a television studio, furniture design, and exhibition concepts. I designed residential houses, public buildings - for instance a university library and a greenhouse - and I got involved in urbanism. As part of a project for a pavilion in Venice, I had the opportunity to spend some time there and get to know the city. In the summer of 2010 I participated in a university project which was exhibited in the Austrian pavilion at the Architectural Biennale. I also gathered practical experience as a student assistant at the university where I currently act as a tutor to younger students. In addition, I was a trainee at an architecture firm for six months. Despite the busy schedule, I still try to find the time for my hobbies: dancing classes, sports,

- *Piece of Cake* (2009) - Student Academy Awards national finalist; Walter and Gracie Lantz Animation Prize, 2009
 - CG Choice Award Winner, www.CGTalk.com, Creative Computer Graphics Forum, 2005, Adelaide, Australia.
- For more information on Eliza's current and old projects check out her website: www.elizaivanova.com



A greenhouse for a university campus by Ina Nikolova



An exhibition pavilion of the European Union for the Venice Biennale by Ina

theatre, and visiting exhibitions. That is why I am really happy to be living in a city like Stuttgart, which offers such a rich cultural life.

Didi (Mitova) Hatcher '03: Making Education Fun

The most lasting impression ACS has left in my mind is the way it redefined education for me. The rote memorization and mindless drills of my elementary and middle school experience were replaced with creative, engaging, and challenging



Didi's latest work in progress is a hand-painted Matryoshka doll set that presents folk costumes from different regions of Bulgaria. The first doll got the Shopski costume. Didi recalls with fondness performing with the Balkan Dance Ensemble at each ACS concert, she and her friends wearing various beautiful costumes.

new ways to teach and learn - through games, collaborative and individual projects, mini-plays, and so much more. I saw that school could be fun, and in that I saw an outlet for my

artistic talent. I've never

wanted to be an artist per se, doing art for art's sake. I wanted my art to be useful and helpful in some way. At ACS, I greatly enjoyed illustrating my notebooks so as to help myself and my friends learn the material better (a cartoon fight between pathogens and antibody cells springs to mind), making science projects come together in creative and visually engaging ways, putting ideas into images in *College Life* cartoon, or just freshening up the basement that held the art and music rooms by decorating their doors with 3D paintings for the SIHP project that Mimi (Nikolova '03) and I shared. Art helped me illustrate my point when tutoring fellow classmates. The convergence of art and education seemed like a match made in heaven, made for me.



One of Didi's animation projects with FableVision, a computer program* that helps teach troubled learners to read with the help of cartoon characters (*property of Lexia Learning)

After ACS I went on to study Animation at Harvard. An odd combination of school and major, but I wanted a broader experience, and that I got. After graduation, I was hired as an animator by a local educational media company – FableVision (www.fablevision.com), founded by New York Times bestselling children's book author and illustrator Peter H. Reynolds and his twin brother Paul. That's where it all came together. I've been with this company over five years now. I am currently a Lead Animator, working towards the goal of making education fun, engaging, and rewarding through art and creativity. We make animated educational films, games, websites, apps, educational software for schools and museums, and a myriad of other products targeted at troubled learners who need to approach the subject from another angle. It's not Disney, but it has a worthy mission that resonates with me. The creative approach made a difference for me, and I am happy to be making a difference for other kids down the line.

Polina Kocheva '07: Finding Art in Technology

After graduating ACS in 2007, my life took a very creative direction: I went to an Art Academy in Utrecht, the Netherlands, to study Illustration. The course consisted mainly of painting and drawing, but it also included printing, sculpture, typography, and experimentation with different new techniques. As some of you may have read in a previous issue of this magazine, in 2010, I also had a small exhibition in an art café in Sofia.

Although I love traditional art with all my heart, at one point I found myself searching for something more innovative, interactive, and unexpected, something more design-oriented. This is why I came to the decision to change my study and start over. I switched to a course called Art & Technology. I am currently in its third year.

Now, when I tell people what I study, usually their initial reaction is, "Art and what?!" Yes, art and technology seem to make a strange combination at a first glance. However, nowadays they go hand in hand, and, if you ask me, soon one will be inseparable from the other.

Some of the things I do include web and graphic design, animation, 3D modeling, video editing, and postproduction. I bet some of my subjects sound unfamiliar to most: say interaction design, game design, gamification, working with Arduino and

sensors. Arduino, for example, is a little processor which can be connected to different kinds of sensors and devices, and then programmed to create interactive installations, games, even simple robots. I have also been working with 3D printing and 3D scanning, quite an exciting technology, I dare say.

Currently, I am doing a 6-month internship in Barcelona, in a mobile app company. It is a great experience, since we produce phone and tablet apps for world-renowned clients such as Heineken, Mango, and Jaguar among many others. I am working on various web and graphic design projects, as well as some User Interface/User Experience.

On the personal side, I was planning a second exhibition, this time in the Netherlands. However, as I had to relocate to Barcelona, I decided to postpone it. Sadly, right now I hardly ever find time for my personal art projects. I hope that this will change in the near future and I will be able to continue working on them. I have also developed an addiction for traveling. In the summer I did a two-month trip around southern Europe which was amazing! I have even bigger plans for next year: two months in Southeast Asia.



Dreams, by Polly



Closer, by Polly Kocheva

Lora Ivanova '98: Paving Your Own Way

After graduating from ACS in 1998, Lora Ivanova enrolled in the Acting Program at New Bulgarian University and went on to receive a BA from Washington University in St. Louis' schools of Theatre and Film with a focus in Directing along with a BBA from Thames Valley University London. In 2003 she relocated to Los Angeles where she became a founding member of the Art Players experimental theatre and the MindshareLA think-tank.



Lora and her TEDActive Interactive installation *Recreating Wonder*

Lora's unique focus on art and art management propelled her career of innovation and thought leadership. Her professional highlights include spearheading PR and communications for the largest tech pure-play retailer online as well as top entertainment and design brands. She currently operates a successful publicity consultancy for artists and entrepreneurs empowering them to build identity and engage a broad audience.

In 2011, inspired by her love of Halloween, Lora joined the Haunted Play Theatre Company and set off to get the world on fire about the premiere of *Delusion*, a cutting-edge interactive horror play combining stunt work and illusion. Named "Best Haunted House in LA" the show is produced by Neil Patrick Harris and Jon Braver and has welcomed close to 10,000 visitors to-date.

Today, Lora lives and works in Hollywood, CA, where she develops original new works of theatre. She exhibits and performs solo art work in various venues and galleries. Her versatile vision engages technology, digital media, and a broad spectrum of performative techniques to explore issues of identity and perception.

When it comes to her personal motto, Lora is a dreamer and a doer. She believes in paving her own way and choosing the road less traveled. When asked about the key to creative success, she urges: "Don't just look for opportunity - create it!"



Lora performing at Dance.Opera.Draw by Jocelyn Foye

Nia Decheva: 18 Years of Expanding Creativity in ACS Arts Classes

I feel really proud of my former students who have chosen arts as their profession, but also of all the other students who have developed an interest in art and culture because I strongly believe that



art is as an important part of each and everyone's life. During my 18 years at ACS, I have been doing my best to encourage our students to find their talent and try different drawing techniques, to help them forget about their fears and develop their imagination, so that they become able to express themselves through art. At the end of the day, students are always pleasantly surprised by their achievements, and I feel satisfied because I have managed to make them think like artists and be different. Giving wings to your students and seeing them fly – what better prize for a teacher to dream of?

Nia Decheva at the opening of the *Fusing Cultures* Exhibition in Pat Doran Gallery, Boston USA, 2009



Nia's *Protection* Art Installation in Ducktrap River Preserve, Maine, USA, 2000

Martyn Rowlands: The Bicycle Diaries

Martyn Rowlands is a Psychology Teacher and a UK University Counselor at ACS since the fall of 2010. He was born and grew up in Warrington, England, not far from Manchester, and has a BA in Philosophy from the University of Hull and a Master of Science in Human Rights and Human Values from the University of Birmingham. Prior to ACS, Martyn has worked and resided in Sofia for 4 years but his first teaching experience dates back to when he was only 19 and a volunteer teacher of English to Tibetan Buddhist Monks in the Indian jungle. Martyn loves hiking and is an avid long-distance cyclist, having cycled from England to Bulgaria via Italy and Albania in 2011.

On the morning of July 3rd 2012, most teachers were eagerly awaiting the 4th of July celebrations on campus and looking longingly into space, counting down the days until their six weeks of relaxation, spending time on the beach soaking up the rays with a good book in hand. I, on the other hand, had my mind on other matters, mainly checking and rechecking my equipment to ensure everything was perfect before I embarked on my adventure, heading into 35 degrees heat and 44 days of grueling cycling, pedaling 4,700 km across Europe. For the next 44 days, there would be no sea breeze, no good book to read as I lazed on a beach eating shrimp. Instead I would be in blistering heat, drinking warm, plastic-tasting water, eating plain pasta, staring at tarmac for 12-hours a day. And truth be told, I was rather excited by this prospect.

I was doing this trip for fun and the joy of adventure. And the best way to explain what it was like, cycling day



Where it all began

after day from Bulgaria to Finland, across to Sweden and then down to Belgium within 44 days, is to show real-time accounts. Therefore I am sharing here three excerpts from my blog, written at the time, accompanied by photographs from the day each installment was written. For more details feel free to check: <http://wandershot.com/stories/bulgaria-to-belgium-via-finland-and-sweden-charity-cycle>

Days 3 & 4: Never trust route advice from motorists that don't cycle.

As the title suggests, the tale of events to be described,

for better or worse, originates from 'inaccurate' advice from the lovely Milos, the Guest House owner of the 'Garden', the place I stayed at in Nis, Serbia. Who incidentally used to be a sports doctor for the Yugoslav National Handball Team (that won the Olympics, I think) and the doctor to the Royal Family of Kosovo. Upon perusing my maps deciding on the best route for the next day, Milos asks me why I was looking at cycling to Belgrade, when I could cycle half that distance North East to Zajecar instead and save over a 100 km. I raised my concern about the mountains and that it may be more efficient to stay on the flats. "Oh no, no, no mountains, just a few little 'ups and downs' and then flat all the way," he said, with disarming confidence. So much so, that I changed my plan again and decided to go for the shorter route, to get up at 5 am, cycle at 6 am and hope to arrive in Zajecar by midday. Little did I know that he was speaking 'car speak' where "a few little ups and downs" when translated into cycle speak, actually means means "3 hours of intense climbing, followed by a sharp, scary downhill stretch with lots of bends and braking, followed by four hours of relatively flat but still uphill road" this combined with the heat (37 degrees Celsius). Made for an absolutely exhausting ride, I rolled into town around 5 pm and into a nice, little boutique hotel with an actual bath, albeit the tiniest bath I have ever come across, to the extent that I was doubting whether it's actually a bath, as literally there was only enough room to sit cross-legged. At one point, I began to wonder whether I had a shower/bath in an over-grown floor-sink. Anyway, I digress.

Regardless of the incessant uphill slog, it was still the most eventful day of cycling I have had thus far and the scenery was beautiful, which is what cycling is all about. As yesterday's ride was the first time in this trip that I had come across a long uphill section, I had to take several breaks in the shade to drink, eat, and rest. During one of these moments, I look down the hill and see a little white speck, bobbing about, slowly climbing. I couldn't make the person out, but knew it was a cyclist. I then made out the white cap and full cycling gear, and got excited as I thought it was another tourer, but noticed that there weren't any panniers. I was intrigued to know more, so I pretended to look at my map a little longer until he caught up. To my surprise, gradually climbing this huge hill, fully clad in cycling gear wasn't a tourer or a young racer, but a 73-year-old man on an old mountain bike with nothing more than a little old leather pouch strapped to the back of his bike. He saw me standing

there in awe, and all he said was “Хайде, хайде!” which, given his tone, loosely translates to “Come on you lazy young so and so, follow me!” I jumped on my bike, caught up, and stayed behind this old man who, without pausing, crawled up the mountain at 3 mph¹. This reminded me that climbing up such roads is about patience and slowly hauling yourself up. I admired the old man’s patience until he started shouting, swearing, and gesticulating at cars that he deemed were going too fast or too close to him. I still admired him, and his Serbian profanities, some of them universal. We then reached the peak and both glided down at pace, avoided pot-holes and cars until he pulled over, we shook hands, he told me his age, I told him mine, we laughed and then went our separate ways.

This type of cycling is full of tales like this, events and chance meetings which normally last no more than ten minutes, but make a lasting impression, simply because they remind us that inspiration can lie in the smallest of ways and the most unexpected of places.

Day 19-21: The Baltics: where beautiful cities and amazing sunsets live, but where open gas-stations and restaurants do not

It’s currently 9 am and I am in Hostel Gate in Vilnius having enjoyed a blissful sleep in, and ready to experience what appears to be a wonderful city. I arrived yesterday at about 6 pm. However, after two hard days on the bike, 86 miles from Bialystok to the Polish-Lithuanian border and then another 96 miles yesterday, I was barely functioning when I booked into the hostel and then went out for food. I had actually planned initially to take three days to cycle from Bialystok, however that would mean I would simply arrive, tired, would walk around a little bit, sleep, and then leave at 7 am the next day. But it would be a travesty to finally arrive and not take a little bit of time to investigate the little city bursting with artistic flair and bohemian swagger. Therefore, I decided to make a concerted effort to do the extra miles in order to free up a rest day where normally I would not have one.



Vilnius, Lithuania: a Bohemian paradise

¹mile = 1.609 km



Finland when cycling: glorious weather

The ride from Bialystok to the border, was relatively uneventful, the hills continued to roll. At 65 miles the road split, the main road taking with it the trucks and buses and my little old road making its way through ancient Polish forests. For 15 miles there were no houses, no signs of ordered habitation, other than the vast number of insects, birds, deer and - according to the signs - wolves. It was at the same time wonderful and a tiny bit daunting to be cycling through my first taste of wilderness on my little bike, pine trees towering over me from both sides as evening approached. I knew that the apparent wolves would be deep in the forest and nowhere near the road, however this knowledge does little to prevent your imagination from running away with itself.

Knowing I have about 100 miles to do the next day, I set my alarm for 4:30 am. Which was fortunate, as my phone asks me whether I want to allow it to change my time as soon as I cross the border. I agree and it promptly steals an hour from me. It is now 5:30 am. I forgot about the time change. So, without breakfast, coffee, food supplies or local currency, I set off into Lithuania on a Sunday.

I stop at the first petrol station I see, lock up my bike, stretch a bit, stroll up, and reach for the door. It’s locked. I shake my head, walk back to my bike, unlock it, just about to set off when I see a car pull up, a man get out, I watch on waiting for him, too, to be disappointed but he walks straight through into the shop. Baffled, I look around the corner and realize the door is now open. (No, he didn’t walk through the door like a ghost). Delighted, I buy a huge baguette and coffee for breakfast, and three croissants, two Snickers bars, and a big bottle of water for later and pay by card. Little did I know that this would be not just the only petrol station with a shop, but the only open restaurant I would see for the next 80 miles.

Those that cycle or do any stamina-related activities know that two Snickers and three croissants aren’t really sufficient for 7 hours of constant exercise. I had read the night before in the Lonely Planet that Lithuania is a

‘wonderfully flat country’. This person obviously isn’t a cyclist and must have been referring to the wonderfully flat motorway. The cycling was fantastic though - little winding roads up and over hills, through forests, and over meadows with little traffic – bliss. But it was tough without sufficient food. To put this into perspective, normally when I cycle more than 80 miles I have breakfast twice, then brunch at a café or pub, followed by two lunches, the second one at around 5 pm, and when I arrive at my destination I usually have my evening meal. This all the while is supplemented with Corny bars and lots of water. Therefore, the supply I had bought at the petrol station was intended to be second breakfast in an hour or so. After 80 miles I rolled in, literally running on vapors, into Trakai, a historic city just outside of Vilnius.

Day 31: Finland: Storm-Chased

I have mixed feelings about cycling through Finland. The countryside is outstanding, lush ever-green forests, never-ending hills, ‘beware of the moose’ signs everywhere; it’s a wonderful place to cycle. However, what tainted my experience was the fact that I was ill with some kind of stomach-bug that had forced me to take a rest day in Helsinki. I had hoped to cycle 104 miles in a day upon leaving Helsinki, arrive in Turku, and then hop on the ferry to the Åland Islands. Spending an hour of being quite lost in the Helsinki suburbs with an entirely inadequate map meant that I wasn’t going anywhere fast.

Once I was finally out of Helsinki, I hit the hills. I knew I wasn’t going to make it to Turku but was determined to at least make my minimum average of 75 miles and therefore I put my head down, slowly ground up the hills, and tried my best not to vomit. After an hour of this, I began to develop a sense that something was slowly following me. I stopped briefly for a snack, looked behind me, couldn’t see anything, turned back, and finished my ‘Corny Big’ cranberry oat bar, upon which everything became very, very dark. An intense sense of impending doom enveloped me and I quickly did the only thing I could do in that situation: I put on my flimsy, paper-thin, torn, stained, “water-proof”, luminous yellow jacket, and started cycling again. A flash of lightning, instantly followed by what sounded like the entire earth being torn apart... and then I was hit in the ear by a hailstone the size of a Swedish meatball. Thousands more followed. The wind, rain, hailstone, thunder, and lightning became so bad and so painful - and I became so concerned that I might actually be struck by lightning or at least knocked off my bike by the other elements - that I darted across the road to my salvation, a very conveniently placed bus shelter half way up the hill. By this point even the cars had parked up deciding it was too dangerous to drive. Huddled in my refuge, I peeled off my soaked top layers and dug out warmer clothes to prevent me from shivering too violently. After 5 minutes the rain ceased completely and everything went back to normal.



Finland when resting: apocalyptic

That was my first experience of Northern European weather. When it didn’t rain as if there was an apocalypse the weather was actually very nice and warm. I did however spend the rest of the day literally being chased by storm clouds. I would look up and around and see only beautiful blue skies with a few gentle wispy white clouds. However, every time I would stop for more than a few minutes, I would feel the wind pick up, I would look up behind me and see an ominous, thunder cloud that stretched for miles behind me, simply looming. I’m sure if clouds could speak this one was saying “Move!” A few gentle drops of rain in the sunshine was all it took for me to leap onto my bike and pedal faster than normal. This happened about four times throughout the course of the day. By 72 miles I had reached my limit and fortunately I had also reached the town of Sala.

And the summary of it all: 2,864 miles or 4,608 km in 43 days and 15 minutes. In other words, 14 countries, two tumbles, lots of friendly people, two very angry dogs, millions of mosquito bites, and one cycle-tan. Done.



Tired but happy Martyn at the end of his journey in Zeebrugge, Belgium. Two minutes after this was taken, he was gorging himself on seafood pasta, pizza, and cake.

Monika Rzezniczek's Blissful Recollections

Monika Rzezniczek taught English Language and Literature at ACS from 1999 to 2001. While at ACS, she was actively involved in the school community among others by being the choreographer and set designer for the musical performances and teaching the Women's Circle elective class. It was a picture taken during that very class that drew our attention to Ms. Rzezniczek and made us want to find out what she has been up to and what ACS memories she keeps.



The Women's Circle Elective with Ms. Rzezniczek, here holding a copy of Germaine Greer's 'The Whole Woman', after a very interesting discussion on beauty and how its definition differs from culture to culture. 'I will never forget this conversation because the young men and women had some very strong opinions about it. A freelance writer who was preparing an article about ACS took a few photos of us at The Fountain and then someone, probably Trayan, said something funny while we were posing', Ms. Rzezniczek recalls.

As I think back to the time I spent at ACS, I can hardly believe that it was over a decade ago. Is it possible for something to feel like it happened a lifetime ago, but only yesterday at the same time? I lived at Pink House with Julie Ham and Darlene Frketich and it really felt like we lived a fairytale life in a gingerbread house. I loved living there so much that I stayed both summers so I could enjoy the beauty and serenity of the campus year-round. When I am blissfully transported back in time, I recall that twelve years ago I used to wake up early on Saturday mornings to the sound of birds chirping melodies outside my bedroom window. In summertime, I might lie in the hammock outside in the garden and be swept away by a new novel, lazily enjoying the solitude and the beauty of the orchard surrounding Pink House. I could hike and visit with my ancient, stoic friend Vitoshka. Possibly I would take bus 76 downtown and window

shop on Vitoshka or browse for a new treasure like a pocket watch or painted saint in front of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. I might tempt one of my housemates to join me for a weekend getaway to Melnik. In the summer we would spend our holidays travelling to Varna and Nessebar, take a train to Istanbul, or rent a car and drive to Greece.

During the school year, on weekdays, I hurried across the field past the fountain and into Sanders Hall to say 'hello' to my colleagues. I would head over to Ostrander Hall and race to my classroom on the second floor to anxiously await the arrival of my students. I might spend the morning reading poetry, or *To Kill a Mockingbird* with my Grade 9 students, acting out new English vocabulary like a professional at charades. In the afternoon my grade 12 students, having mastered English in a few short years, would join me on an adventure through American

history with Huck Finn. I knew even then, as a young teacher at the start of my career, that these students were special. They were intelligent and thoughtful – yes; but most importantly they were enthusiastic and engaged in learning. These students would shape tomorrow's world, and I felt so fortunate to spend my days in their company. I wonder if they knew that I cherished every moment I devoted to them. I especially enjoyed electives and extra curricular activities because I could really get to know my students. I remember warm and sunny afternoons in the spring spent at the Fountain during the Women's Studies elective, populated by both boys and girls engaged in discussions about feminist literature.

I think the most exciting moments, though, happened in the Auditorium. I recall long rehearsals for *Fiddler on the Roof* and *West Side Story* in Whitaker Auditorium and the magical performances that followed those endless rehearsals when the choreography finally came together and the students sang and performed beautifully. Ah, but first I had to rebuild the entire *Fiddler on the Roof* set from wood a week before the show, because it was lovingly but unfortunately welded from iron by the maintenance staff who did not understand my Bulgarian when I tried to convey that the set pieces had to be moveable. Maribeth Milkowski directed, Nancy Keech was the Stage Manager, and I choreographed and designed the sets for both musicals.

For *West Side Story*, when we teamed-up again, and this time Nancy Keech directed, we decided on a permanent set made from the scaffolding already on campus due to the extensive

renovations planned for the school buildings. At least this would save us from a comical weekend trip to the local lumberyard in the school van and having to gesticulate that we would need a lot of two-by-fours.

I'm sure these side trips provided some comical relief in the administration office, especially for Maria Angelova or President Perske, when we relayed our stories in great detail on the following Monday morning. Maria loved the model I made of the set (to convince her to let us use the scaffolding I built a model out of straws for her). I could not find any gels for the lamps so I made it my mission to find some when I visited a friend in Oxford. That year our lamps would not be naked, and we had cool and warm scenes – not just a spotlight. Of course in the end all that mattered were the shining stars on stage. Who could forget Mila Boyadjeva's *Golde* or Pavel Hristov's *Tevye*¹? The following year Petia Dikova '03 and Vladimir Nedkov '02 were moving as star-crossed lovers, and the entire cast danced brilliantly.

It seems like yesterday when I think of it, but this was a long time ago – before supermarkets that carried Cheddar cheese came to Mladost, when the closest restaurant was a Chinese one in Mladost 2, and the next closest was Troll Pizza, a few bus stops away. We could buy a kilo of peppers for 1 leva at the local market and supplement that with some overpriced imported frozen food at Shell station, a short walk from campus. Those were days filled with adventures I will never forget.

The evenings were fun-filled, as well. There were Bulgarian folk dancing classes to attend thanks to Stoyan Karadjov, and Bulgarian language classes to muddle through thanks to the very patient Bulgarian language teachers. There were staff socials that lasted well into the night because Roumyana Ivanova from the ESL department kept us dancing, and Vlado Marinov kept us singing famous Bulgarian ballads under the



Monika with husband David (McLaughlin), daughter Maya, and son Liam

moonlight. My time in Bulgaria was greatly enriched by the Bulgarian staff members who lovingly and open-heartedly accepted us and hosted us so graciously. Their generosity will never be forgotten and I often think of them fondly, wishing to return, and reminisce.

I left ACS in 2001 reluctantly. Nonetheless, I knew it was time to go for I had fallen hopelessly in love. David and I are now married and have two children. We lived in Toronto for many years but we have recently moved to a quiet rural town north of the city. I wish I could just hurry across the field and past the fountain – instead, I must drive almost an hour to get to my school. I still race to my classroom because I am just as enthusiastic about teaching and coincidentally I will be starting *To Kill a Mockingbird* with my Grade 9 English students next week. I still wake up early on Saturdays but my days of lying in a hammock are a distant memory. Usually my daughter Maya, who is four, has other plans for me. I spend my Saturday mornings with my husband watching both children at Gymnastics class, and then swimming classes in the afternoon. Liam, who is six, will then want to play chess or take turns reading a novel together.

While I do not have time to choreograph a musical or design a set for a school play right now, I get to sing and dance with two very talented performers all the time – the living room is our stage and we use the couch cushions to build our set. Still, no matter how different my life is now, ACS will be a part of me forever. I lovingly display my treasures from Alexander Nevsky market around my home. There are painted boxes in my bedroom, Bulgarian dolls in the playroom, and a beautiful icon of St. George hanging in the hallway. I have cast pictures and programs from both musicals framed as well as the most cherished certificate I have ever received: Most Enthusiastic Teacher from the graduating class of 2001. Also, I have woven some Bulgarian traditions into my life. On my birthday I bring a box of chocolates for my colleagues at work and on the first of March I wish everyone “*Chestita Baba Marta!*” Luckily, over the years students have contacted me to let me know how they are doing, so I have been able to keep in touch with ACS through their stories. I wish I could embrace all of the students I had the privilege to teach while I was at ACS. Perhaps I will be lucky enough to visit one day, when there is a reunion. Until then, the memories and the pictures will have to console me.

¹Mila is from the Class of 2001, Pavel – who we sadly lost in 2005 – of the Class of 2000.

CLASS NOTES

Ex-faculty

Betsy and Brett Potash wrote to us in the end of November upon getting back from a big trip to New Jersey where their soon-one-year-old son Nathaniel was the ring bearer in Brett's sister's wedding. We found out Brett is currently working as the Dean of the boys school at Webb in Claremont, CA. Betsy recently finished her master's degree and is doing some educational writing for magazines and websites, but mostly just concentrating on Nate. 'He takes all of my attention, and I love having the chance to spend so much time with him', Betsy adds.



Ex-faculty constellation including (from left to right) Barbara Graham, Meghann Hummel Green, Jennifer Lawrie-Tellis, Derek Tellis, Sarah Howell, the lucky groom Andy Jones, the happy bride Erin Kahle, Kate McKenna, Mike Branch, Matthew Brothers with wife Diana and daughter Emelia, and Ted Graham.



Betsy, Brett, and little Nate in New York City

Erin Kahle and Andy Jones shared their latest news:

This past summer, we were married where Erin grew up in Vermont and were incredibly lucky to have so many of our friends from our time at ACS in attendance! We incorporated many Bulgarian touches into the weekend, including some Bulgarian in our vows,

mavrud and Shumensko at our rehearsal dinner, and a Balkan dance for our first dance! Many thanks to Stoyan Karadjov for originally teaching us the steps in Christmas concert preparation and for sending us the music! We had an amazing honeymoon trip to Asia, visiting **Kate McKenna** and **Mike Branch** in Shanghai as well as other friends we've met abroad. We are now back home in Chicago, where we've been for a year now. Andy is teaching and coaching basketball and Erin is currently working with a nonprofit. We think of our former Bulgarian colleagues and students often. We send our best and welcome any of them passing through Chicago to get in touch with us!

We knew **Karen (Hillis) Steed** also had a great deal to share, so we were happy to get her letter full of news:

Warm greetings to my ACS friends! My husband Colin and I have two children. Our son Finnian is 15 months old and we welcomed our daughter Lillian into the world on

October 6. We are moving from Maryland to New Mexico next month as my husband is retiring from the US Army and will be starting a new job in January. I am finishing up my Masters in Education from Lehigh University next month and look forward to spending some quality time with my babies once we get to New Mexico. Believe me when I say that we are keeping busy. And we wouldn't have it any other way!



Karen (Hillis) Steed with her husband Colin and their children Finn and Lilly

Alumni

Petia Dikova '03, a second generation journalist, has been working in TV for 13 years now. Until recently, her biggest professional dream was to interview Leda Mileva and Petko Bocharov, two of the most emblematic ACS alumni and the only living representatives of their Class of 1938. Together, Petia's love and nostalgia for the College helped her along in getting the two pre-war alumni to meet for an interview on campus. 'It was so fascinating to hear 92-year-old people speak fluent English and joke about their first dates at the American candyshop downtown,' Petia shared. 'It's not often that you hear two elderly people who have preserved the witt, enthusiasm, and remarkable

memory of a sophomore.' Indeed, both of them remembered the names of their dean, teachers and friends, including who fancied who, and who used to receive the most love letters. 'I'll never forget this long-awaited interview but what will most vividly remain in my memory is our farewell when both Ms. Mileva and Mr. Bocharov broke into singing the ACS anthem, once again impeccably.'

Gani Petelov '11, currently studying Aeronautical Engineering in the University of Glasgow, is involved as of recently in a rather interesting activity. Formula Student, as it is known in the UK or FSAE, as known in the US, is a competition organized by the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE). It is held in many countries around the world, among them USA, UK, Australia, Japan, etc. The idea is that engineering students from different universities get together in order to design, build, and race a formula-type car. Even though it is his first year in the competition, Gani is the leader of the Aerodynamics/Bodywork Team working on the 2014 vehicle. There are many challenges ahead as the group has set their goals high.

Gani seems quite busy also due to participating in another contest. The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics is organizing for the first time this year an Undergraduate Team Space Transportation Competition. The goal is to design a reusable space transportation vehicle. Gani and his friends have already started working on the project, but the final results will be known only in September next year. Let's wish him good luck!

Boyan Levchev '11 is an ambitious boy. His grand ambitions bolster his personality and make him all the more thrilling. When he grows up, as he says in his own words, even though many would argue he is quite grown already, he wants to be a world-renowned musician

who runs a multimillion-dollar company. Also, he is not very modest.

Recently, he has been working hard to get his name out as a performer. Earlier this year he befriended an amazing singer from the small, Eastern European country of Kosovo. Almost immediately, they got together and put out a song that garnered a lot of public interest in Kosovo. People began asking about Boyan and who he was, but it was still not his time to come out, guns ablaze. He collaborated with another famous Kosovar music star, Blero, and wrote a song for him, sparking even more interest from the Kosovar public. Although he'd be invited to events and interviews in the small country, he, unfortunately, could not fully step out into the country's music scene due to his constant travelling.

Since his work in Kosovo, he has been hard at work putting together two albums with which he hopes to kick-start both a small business and his ascent to world-fame, bringing him one step closer to his goal. Daily, he sits and organizes all of his business ideas into one big plan of action. And in between his business brainstorming, he composes and creates what his in-depth analysis of all styles of music has taught him are quintessential pop songs, touching them up here and there with his own little flamboyant flourishes.

Be on the look-out for Boyan's work when he releases it. He would not mind if you were to, say, whisper into a few friends' ears about how awesome he is and how amazing his music is. Actually, Boyan is not a fan of understatement. Boyan would more than just not mind. He would share with you the best hugs a human being has ever embraced and give you love parallel to that of a thousand puppies.

Find him as Boyan The Poet on facebook and youtube.



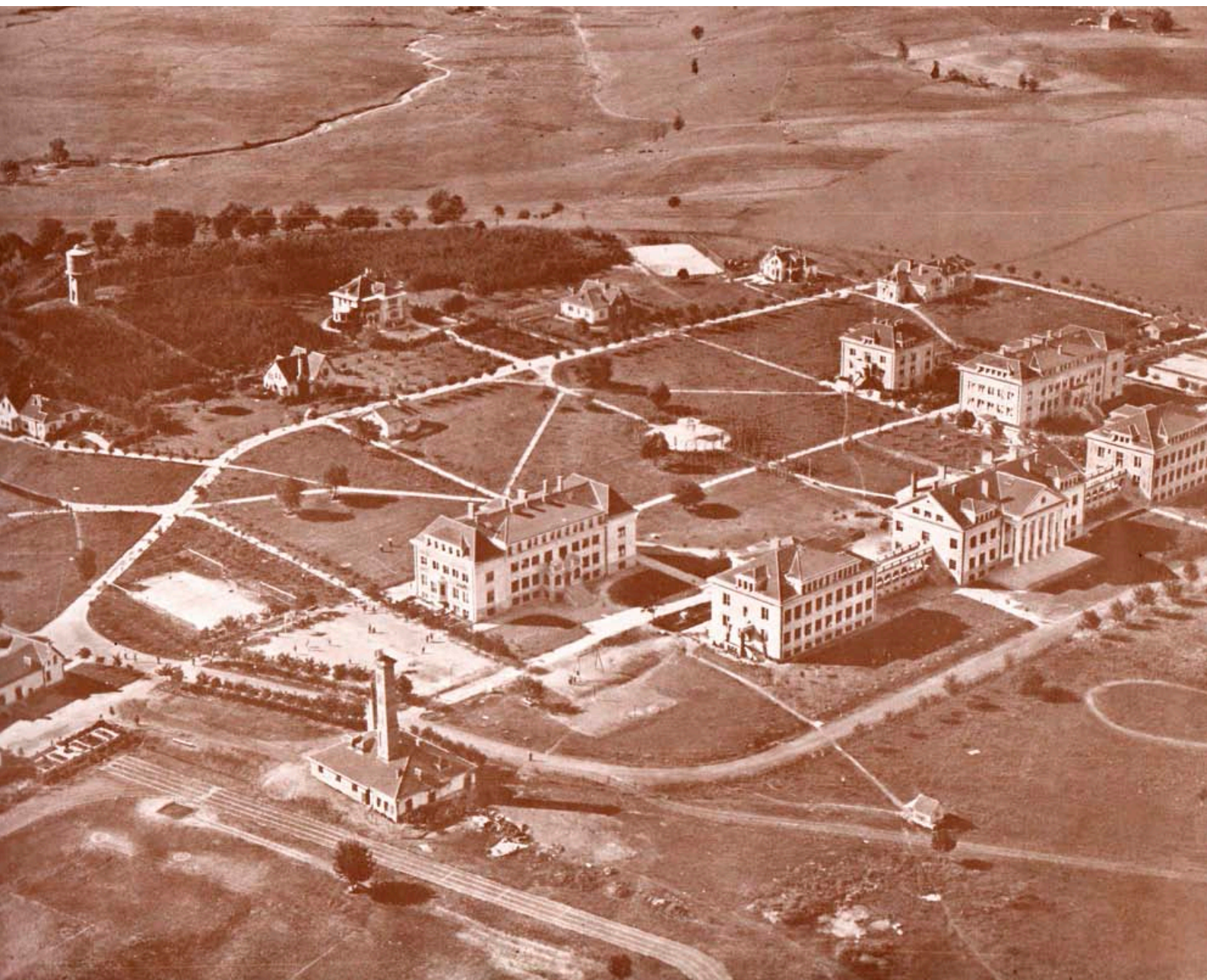
Petko Bocharov '38, Leda Mileva '38, and Petia Dikova '03 at the Fountain



Valentina Mihailova 10/1



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