



ACCS

Alumni Magazine

Issue 21, June 2019



TSVETAN ILIEV '06

After My First Day at ACS, I Wanted to Switch Schools. I'm Glad I Didn't.

Also featuring:

Sava Savchev '44 | Joana Nikolova '19

Dena Popova '06 | Birgitta Cattelle



The American College of Sofia

ACS *Alumni Magazine*

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Alumni and Friends,

Salutations to the Class of 2019 – a dynamic and highly accomplished group of writers, physicists, mathematicians, programmers, engineers, singers, scholars, athletes, poets, orators and debaters, emerging leaders, and fine young people – who have become the newest alumni of ACS.

Even as we celebrate the accomplishments of the Class of 2019, we are enrolling the Class of 2024. We had an increase of over 60% in the number of attendees at our open houses and the largest number of exam takers in well over a decade. The number of students applying from outside of Sofia also increased significantly over last year. We are so pleased to see such healthy interest in ACS and appreciation for the value of an ACS education throughout Sofia and across Bulgaria.

Reunion classes of 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 are returning to ACS for this year's Arts Fest. A lot has changed since the most recent of these alums graduated and continues to evolve even since the previous issue of this magazine. Improving the campus facilities with the new America for Bulgaria Campus Center has significantly enhanced opportunities for

our students, including a library that rivals a US University facility, a state-of the art performance center in Whitaker Auditorium, and the SCIFI Makerspace equipped with (laser) cutting-edge advances in design and engineering.

With these dramatically enhanced facilities, we have attracted a number of high-profile and important events including Founders Day for ACS sister schools from Greece, Turkey, and Lebanon; the Third Tikkun Olam Makers Makeathon in Bulgaria; the International Association for College Admission Counseling (IACAC) European Regional Conference & College Fair; and the Bulgarian National Spelling Bee Finals to name a few. Events like these add depth and resonance to ACS's presence in the national and international educational sphere and to our enduring legacy as a place of innovation, engagement, and community.

So many of you have given generously to make these campus improvements and other enhancements possible. On behalf of the entire ACS community, I want to thank you for all the many ways you support the mission and work of our school. The gifts we receive from alumni, parents, trustees, friends, and grants organizations such as ABF and ASHA (American Schools and Hospitals Abroad) enable us to attract and retain top faculty and staff, to develop and maintain our unique and historic campus, and to sustain the values and traditions of excellence that have characterized ACS over the years.

It is also very inspiring for current students to meet you, our alumni, and see you active within your own communities and here at ACS. They benefit from these interactions, and many of you who have gotten involved in this way have shared with me how rewarding it has been for you as well. So, I invite and encourage you not just to follow the news at ACS, but to help make it as well. Find the way that works for you to get involved and be an active part of life at our school. Through your philanthropic support and active participation, you can help us continue to prepare the talented young students we have today to join your ranks as distinguished ACS graduates, just as others before helped you.

With appreciation and best wishes,

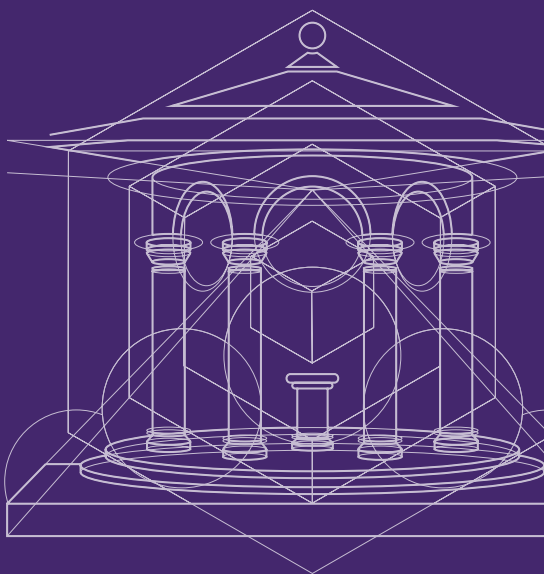
Dr. Richard Tucker Ewing, Jr.

President

ACS

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Alexander J. Tomov '04

Dear fellow Alumni,

I can't even begin to tell you how incredible my return to ACS has been. Let's just say it was an apparent piece of borderline marvelous serendipity and I am still quite flabbergasted by getting to experience the campus, my memories and my current role every day. What helps me cope is an important distinction that recently dawned on me: back in the day I anticipated the bell announcing the end of class, nowadays I am much more interested in it signaling the beginning of class. So I can go get coffee. No lines. Students aren't allowed coffee though. And they do stand in lines. Poor jokes aside, I feel like going back to ACS has turned my life around, with a little emotional and nostalgic twist, and with an enlightening one – getting to experience first hand life at the College nowadays.

For those of you I haven't met, let me briefly introduce myself. I'm Sasho Tomov from the Class of '04. If you were around about the time of this class, you might have seen me in the school musical productions, might have read some of my attempts at writing in "Fountain" (boy, nowadays' "The Fountain" is even more incredible, grab a copy of the latest edition!), you might have witnessed my spectacular failures at volleyball, or heard my thrill-inducing screaming with the Choir or bass playing with Outbreak (courtesy of a few select individuals of the Class of '03). After ACS I spent four years at Dickinson College in eastern PA (with some of you) and I returned home as soon as I was given my Bachelor's degree in Psychology. I spent the next ten years with a telco in Bulgaria, working in HR, communications, engagement and other things. I joined the Development Team at ACS in December of 2018 as Director of Communications. Since then I've been trying to live up to this new role's expectations of me. I've got to admit: it sort of reminds me of the challenges I was up against during my years as a student here. Just like back then, I got help from many of you and today I get help from Petia.

I want to give a "Shout Out" to Petia Ivanova of the Class of 1997 – one of the "Mythical" first ones. Her sincere care, authentic sense of what ACS is, and tireless mentoring have already taken me a long way. The same goes for the rest of the Development Office crew – Georgi Iliev, Georgi Metodiev and Zori Haidutova. I should also mention Roumy Mihaylova '05, whose shoes I am, in a way, trying to walk around in, and man, those are some big shoes (figuratively) and when she was in them, they left behind some deep tracks.

I want to give a special "Shout Out" to the celebrating classes: The 2004, of course, amazing class, and we all secretly know we are better than anyone else! ☺ It is an honor and pleasure for me to be close friends with many of you! Ever since we graduated, it has been the "Time of my life"! The class of 1999, where I'm lucky to have a few amazing acquaintances & friends, stay cool, you guys! The class of 2009 (new-age Millennials) and the youngest among us celebrating – the class of 2014. To all of you – congratulations on the anniversary and thank you for staying in touch!

Although the mechanics of ACS giving financial aid have changed, it is now that I'm "on the inside" that I actually appreciate what that means to students. And let me tell you – while ACS is staying current with nowadays' students, the academic standards and demands we all remember stand. I hope that in the following pages you will establish that to be true for yourselves, through my interview with Joana Nikolova '19.

I also got to speak to Tsvetan Iliev '06 and listened to the speech Dena Popova '06 delivered for the graduating class of 2019 at their Commencement. Sadly, this year we lost Birgitta Cattelle, and I am thankful to Georgi Klissurski '10 for sharing some fond memories and reflections of their friendship. On the bright side – congratulations to Krassi Tomov '05 and his wife Julia Masleva Tomova '06. In the meantime, Kosta Karakashyan '14 has been involved with some amazing projects, while the stories told by Sava Savchev '44 are like a time warp into the glorious pre-war years here at the College.

Hey, this turned out longer than I first imagined, so – thank you for holding a copy of the ACS Alumni Magazine Issue 21 – it means we made it, even though (or because) we stuck to the classic ACS tradition – "Right before it's due". Thank you for staying engaged, thank you for celebrating your anniversary by giving and thank you for who you are. It means a bunch and it testifies a lot to the College. I hope you enjoy this issue, come join us in the Alumni Facebook group, follow the American College of Sofia on Facebook and Instagram and don't forget to subscribe to our Newsletter. Because amazing things are happening at ACS to this day, and, you could be a part of them!

Stay in touch,

Sasho



TSVETAN ILIEV '06:

*After My First
Day at ACS, I
Wanted to Switch
Schools. I'm Glad
I Didn't.*

Even though Tsvetan & I probably ran into each other in the halls of Ostrander in 2003, we officially met in the spring of 2019 when he got in touch with the Development Office with a request to take promotional photos of his electric push-scooter prototype against the wonderful backdrop that is the ACS campus in the spring. Over time he has developed a rather British accent and his taste for cars has evolved into a passion, which his higher education in engineering and his blog RoadHunter.bg confirm. I was very happy he agreed for an interview for this edition of the Alumni Magazine. Read on what Tsvetan Iliev '06 told me about his path after ACS, his business start up and fondest ACS memories.

Interview by Alexander Tomov '04

What have you been up to in the 13 years since you graduated?

Well, I started with a gap year in the Netherlands, then I went to the UK to study automotive engineering, and I was basically killing time at universities. After that I worked for Mercedes for a year in Germany and then I got tired of Germany and I went back to the UK to study at the University of Sheffield. After that it's been four years of work in the automotive industry, first in Bulgaria and then in the Netherlands. Later I finally got to the stage when I decided that I could now create something on my own and start working on it. That's a company for electric bicycles and push scooters where I do the design and my idea is to also do the manufacturing.

Well you've certainly been busy!

Yeah, in a way.

So, you worked for Mercedes?

Yes, that was on engine development. Basically, all my engineering work has been on engine development.

Cool, AMG* & stuff?

Emm, no, diesel vans, unfortunately. When I was in the Netherlands, I moved up to diesel trucks. But it's not been anything sporty. I left the sporty cars for my free time, because I also run a blog about cars and sometimes I test some very interesting ones.

So is it safe to say you do have a passion for cars?

Definitely. Especially since some people probably remember me as the kid who would always be drawing cars in his notebooks, instead of paying attention in class. (laughs)

Can you remember when that passion started?

I think when I was about 7 or 8 years old. Someone in my family told me that even when I was a baby, I would point at cars in drawings and stuff. But definitely, when I was about 7, I started drawing cars. A lot of cars. Actually, my flagship was called Arno Vinghen and that name Vinghen came out of nowhere, but is now the name of my bike company. After I hadn't found this meant anything offensive in the many languages I checked, I registered it and that's my company now.

Tell me, what was it that made you realize you would rather be doing something on your own instead of being part of a larger company, working on diesel trucks and whatever else?

*AMG stands for Mercedes-AMG GmbH, and is the high-performance brand used by Mercedes-Benz.

I will be honest. In a way, I am a little bit lazy and I get bored easily. A lot of these 9-5 jobs were a waste of time for me, because normally I would do proper work for 2 hours a day and for the rest, it would be more or less killing time. So I saw that as a big waste of time and I just wanted to do something on my own. Now, when I work on Vinghen, very often I start working around 11 in the morning, and I will go on until 1 at night. So I am busy now.

But then, again, you manage your own time?

Yes, I do. If I want to, I go skiing on a Wednesday, so that's a lot nicer.

Would you tell me a little bit more about your blog?

Sure, so I started it back when I returned to Bulgaria in 2014, after I earned my Master's. Once again, it was because I was really bored at work. I decided I should drive some nice cars and I started it. It is called RoadHunter. I write in Bulgarian. I tried English as well, but it's too difficult to keep two languages at the same time. So I stick to Bulgarian, because I take the cars from Bulgarian dealers. So, basically, I will get a car for a couple of days, then drive somewhere

nice, take a lot of photos, drive fast sometimes, on some mountain roads, so it's really good. Sometimes I get cars like the Mercedes SL or a Ford Mustang, or the Jaguar F-Type etc. - cars with over 400 hp, but other times I'll get small city SUVs, which I don't really like, but it's still part of the job.

What's your favorite car that you have driven for your blog?

I think, actually, it's probably the Mercedes SL-500, from the ones I have taken on the road properly. Because it was powerful, it was very comfortable and it was convertible and it just felt nice. Otherwise, I've also driven some cars on race tracks, one of them being the Ferrari 360. I didn't like Ferraris much before getting into the 360, but this car made me change my mind. Ferrari is an amazing company.

What's the origin story behind Vinghen, apart from you coming up with the name when you were 7 years old? How did you decide to go into electric bikes and push scooters?

I think in a way I saw a market possibility, because when I created the first sketch back in 2016, it was actually before, or at the very beginning of the boom of electric scooters that we're seeing in the US and Western Europe. So, in a way, I was ahead of time, but I didn't have the resources to get there quickly, because if I did, I could have had something ready for the market in three or four months. And it took me two and a half years because first of all I was busy at work – sometimes you get back from work and you just cannot stare



at a monitor for another four or five hours. I also wanted to have some Bulgarian suppliers, but then I realized it's so difficult to find people to work here and the communication with some of them was a complete nightmare, so eventually, the last two years of the project, I invited a friend of mine, who is also an engineer, to join me, just for this project, not the company as a whole. He took over communication with local suppliers and that worked out better.

Excellent. When can I buy one?

Well, you can sort of pre-order one now, because being a small start up with no resources or investment, I am going to launch with a funding campaign, which will go live in a couple of days, so it will run between early May and early June. And if we get funding through that, people who supported the project early on will start getting their bikes around August or September, depending on their location in the world. If that goes right, hopefully people will be able to buy them, starting August, but if you support the funding campaign, you will be getting a much better price.

What has been your biggest challenge with Vinghen so far? Apart from communication with Bulgarian suppliers?

Well, I think that was it actually. And then also probably some of the marketing, because I'm not sure how exactly to market the product. I mean, I've done a lot of research into my target group and what the market is, but I'm not

a professional in this area, I'm an engineer. So, for me that was also a bit difficult and I still have doubts whether I have done something wrong.

Maybe you could reach out to the Alumni community for some marketing advice. I'm sure there are plenty of marketing people out there.

I'm sure too. Could do that.

Looking back, what are your best and worst memories from ACS?

Worst memory is my first day at ACS.

Really?!

Yeah, for me it was really scary. I was in 8/7 and at the time this was the section with people who spoke the least English. So, I'm in this classroom and then Ms. Struch comes in the room and starts speaking in English and we don't understand a word. And then, Ms. Marinova came and she started in English and she realized by our looks of surprise and fear and then she said: Не разбирате нищо от това, което ви казвам, нали? And then she switched to Bulgarian. But all of that was quite bad. Then I had math class and we started, from day one, with a lot of work and for me that was something new. So, I actually went home after my first day at ACS and I told my mom: "I'm switching schools!" But I'm happy I didn't because I liked it after that. Best memories? I do have quite a lot. I must say I was really happy with the musical I was in in my senior year, "The Producers". It was a bit controversial, and it was produced

"Funny thing is, I was quite bad at math and physics, and now I'm an engineer and I actually made the top of the class at the University of Sheffield."

by students, but there was Mrs. Cattelle, who really helped us organizationally. I think, in a way, she made it happen, together, of course, with the actual seniors – producers who were also from my class.

Now that you've come back on several occasions, is there anything new that you like, or anything that you miss?

I wouldn't say I miss anything. Of course, I like the new buildings. I don't think I could get used to the new name of Ostrander, but other than that ... I mean it's a pretty nice place and it still has the same feel about it. I feel that in a way it hasn't so much changed, but rather evolved.

As a matter of fact, the two-building complex with the "Whitaker Auditorium" is the America for Bulgaria Campus Center. Ostrander is Ostrander.

Do you remember your proudest moment at ACS?

Not really, could've been the musical again, because people loved it. I mean, I have no academic achievements, in fact, I was on an academic probation. Twice. And, funny thing is, I was quite bad at math and physics, and now I'm an engineer and I actually made the top of the class at the University of Sheffield, so it's kind of funny how times change.

That's amazing, congratulations on that!

I cannot recall any sort of proud moments. More like moments of fear when my parents would go to parent-teacher conferences.

I too remember that feeling, it's a very acute one.

Do you keep in touch with many of the other alumni?

Not so many, but I do. I have some very close friends from my class of 2006. And a lot of close friends from 2008. But I mean, I do keep in touch occasionally. I wish I were more involved, but many of them are in London, and me being here makes it a bit more difficult.

What one thing would you change about the school if you could?

Good question! I don't think I would change anything. Of course, now I'm not involved with it, so I don't know what some internal issues might be, if there are any, but from what I perceive and from my memories, I don't think I would change anything.

Would you change anything about yourself?

Not really, I'm quite happy with how things have been going for me.

What is your most distinctive feature as a person?

Could be the fact that I don't want to follow the normal path of people, you know, going into university, graduating, landing your first job etc. Could be that, because, looking at people my age, of course there are many who are like me, but the majority seem to be a bit different, and I think they are more ordinary in terms of following their life path and making their choices.

What is perfect happiness to you, what would it look like?

Personally, it would be living somewhere where I feel I belong, partially, and then, having the time and resources to do what I like – road trips, skiing, surfing, all these things. Also, working with people. I have often thought that I'd probably like to become a university professor at some point in life.

Wow!

Well, not a professor, but a teacher probably. This would be quite nice. And, if I could combine it with a bit of business on the side, that would be perfect. I don't know how this would fit with having some free time, but it would be quite nice.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? You kind of mentioned it – teaching.

Yes, but I don't know in which country. I'd love to feel fine



in Bulgaria, but the truth is that I don't. It will probably be somewhere else, but still in Europe. I really like Europe.

Maybe teaching at the University of Sheffield? ☺

Could be, why not?

Do you have regrets from your time at ACS?

Well, I think I should have studied a bit harder, to be fair. I don't even know how I graduated. So I think I should have done that, it probably would have helped. And also, maybe I should have been a bit more social at the time. I was a strange kid. But as teenagers many people are. I think working on my grades and my social interactions would have been pretty nice.

How about anything after that?

Yeah, well, I thought about that myself not so long ago, actually. I was 28, had just graduated a year before and, in a way, I had wasted a lot of time in my twenties, but it was such a nice way of wasting time. So, I came to the conclusion that I do not regret at all the mistakes I made and all the wasted time, because I didn't do anything majorly stupid in my twenties, I just did a lot of small stupid things. But overall, I'm quite happy with how this time passed.

Where would you like to live?

I think that I would like Switzerland or Austria, because I like the Alps and I like to be close to the sea. But from experience, I feel best in the UK or in the Netherlands. I've never lived in Switzerland, so it could be a huge disappointment.

I hear it's nice.

Yeah, me too, but from what I've heard, people over there follow the rules quite closely, which is a must for me, because that's my biggest issue in Bulgaria.

I was going to ask, is that what bothers you most about Bulgaria?



Backstage of The Producers

Yes, I get in a taxi – it has no seat belts in the back. I go to a club – they're smoking inside. All these things just annoy me so much, I mean even on a daily level. Because, of course, corruption and all that sort of thing is terrible, but in my personal day-to-day life I get a lot of these things where people don't follow the rules, and also when driving. People getting out of their cars to attack me – yeah – these things happen.

Really?

It depends on what car I'm driving. When I was in my personal Mini Cooper, I got a lot of aggression. When I drive a Maserati, for example, there's none, and I drive exactly the same way. So these are things that would never happen to me anywhere else that I've lived.

Right, I will give you that I agree that we as a people are not really keen on following these rules. To us they are more like guidelines. But then have you thought of ways that this could change?

“I do not regret at all the mistakes I made and all the wasted time, because I didn't do anything majorly stupid in my twenties.”

I have and I don't think there is a possibility, unfortunately. I'm very disappointed with all this. And also, when I was living in Bulgaria before, I was a member of an organization that ran a project specifically about culture on the road. We did nothing, of course, and even some of the people who were on this project, when they were driving, they wouldn't put their indicator on, for example. So I don't think it would ever happen, not in my lifetime anyway.

I had hoped you would be more optimistic...

Not at all. I think that now I have learned, partially, to accept it. And, I mean, I know it's not right for me. Unfortunately in ten years' time, or even in two years' time I don't see myself in Bulgaria.

Although your business is here?

Well, that's actually why I came back, that and my girlfriend, and it was because I wanted to start it here, because it's a good place for manufacturing, we have a good connection with Asia for suppliers, like in Varna. Well, the location is good, labor is cheap, for now, although I am planning on paying proper salaries, unlike other small manufacturers. But the thing is, even if manufacturing is here, I could just visit it once a month, once it's up and running and just live elsewhere.

That makes me wonder, if treating workers respectfully won't be part of the change we're looking for.



It could be, but one person's not going to make a difference. I can make a very small local impact, of course, but nothing more.

Well, that could be an example to set. And next time I interview you, we could go over these questions and see how things turned out, both for you and for our society. ☺

Well, I like that optimism.

It's the coffee, it will wear off.

Did you have a favorite teacher?

I had quite a few very nice teachers. The one that I remember is Mr. Stevens for English. I had him in grade 11. I liked him and it was really funny, because the first time we had class with him, everyone was really scared, because he looked so serious and mean. And then he starts cracking jokes, but keeping his poker face on, so he says a joke and you need, like, a few seconds to realize what he had actually just said. That was very nice. And the books we were reading were fine too.

Speaking of books, do you have a favorite one? Apart from the engineering textbooks.

I really like Jules Verne's *Captain Nemo* books. There are a few of them that make for one big story, there is one where Captain Nemo (spoiler alert) dies, and it's about something completely different, but at the end, some people on an island help an old man hidden in a cave and they realize it's Captain Nemo. That's quite thrilling. I do like Jules Verne, he is a bit naive, of course, his books always start pretty slowly, but once they pick up, they are very enjoyable to

read. I like the stories and the philosophy behind some of them. So it's this one and *Dorian Gray*. I remember when I started reading that on my Kindle, I was underlining something on almost every page, it was that good.

Do you remember how you came to attend ACS?

Partially. When I was in 7th grade, we actually had the exams for public schools first, and for ACS it was in June or something. It was like my not even second choice. Because I was quite poor as a student, up to 7th grade, I didn't have good grades or anything, but I still got in. I think my parents probably suggested it was quite a nice school. I still remember them telling me when I got accepted, I was riding my bike at my grandma's village, and I was quite happy. I never planned for it, it was just something that happened.

This is the second thing that "kind of just happened," that potentially made a huge impact on your future, coming up with Vinghen when you were 7 being the first one.

Could be, yes. I mean, I hope Vinghen has a huge impact on my future.

I do wish that for you as well.

What would you like to wish/tell whoever's reading this, mostly alumni?

Be fond of your memories at ACS and not only that. Come to the Christmas Reception and the Reunions, because it's nice to see how everyone is now.



SAVA SAVCHEV '44: *My Children, Grandchildren, and Great Grandchildren Are My Fortune*

Everyone in the ACS Development Office loves Sava's short notes that are as informative as they are thoughtful, always signed with respect, and sent our way regularly. Sava writes them on a typewriter that only has Cyrillic letters but he still uses some English phrases, only transcribed in Cyrillic. He always calls to thank us, to let us know that our card or invitation has arrived, and whether or not he will be able to come to the Christmas Concert or Graduation Ceremony. We've counted on Sava for so many years now to tell us who of the Class of 1944 is still around, interviewing him was always on our to-do list. I'm so glad, in July 2016, I finally managed to pay Sava that visit in his cozy flat across from the beautiful Zaimov Park. Our correspondence even intensified afterwards, as Sava was kind enough to send us several files of great value to ACS from his personal archive, among them, his speech at his class reunion in 2003 and the first ever alumni database of the College, covering Classes 1925-1943! Дуър Сава, we thank you to the moon and back!

Sava, how did you come to enroll at the College?

One of my cousins, Siyka Savcheva, Class of 1928, graduated from the College in Samokov. Actually, many boys and girls in my home town of Cherven Bryag had graduated from the school, so it was well known there. Additionally, my mother was a close friend of Venera Yankova, math teacher at the College, whose husband Konstantin Yankov also taught math there. In the summer of 1938, I attended a summer camp in Chamkoria, organized by the American Embassy. They used to organize such camps by the sea and in the mountains. One of the camp supervisors was Mr. Allen, the husband of one of the English instructors at the College, Mrs. Ada P. Allen. My camp experience allowed a sneak peak of a different atmosphere that I liked. So, I expressed my wish to go see the school for myself. Later that summer, my mother and I visited the College and the Yankovi family. My impressions from the visit reasserted my decision to enroll at the College, and so it happened.

Was it hard for you to live away from home and family for the first time when you started at the College? Did you make friends quickly?

I had classmates, who especially in their first year hid in the lockers built in the walls of our shared bedroom and cried for their families that they were missing terribly. But that wasn't my experience. Several weeks into the school year, Mr. Yankov asked me if I already had made friends. The truth was that, clumsy and hopeless as I was, much different from the sociable kids from Sofia and those of Jewish origin, I hadn't made any friends yet. Mr. Yankov approached me once saying, "Look, there's this nice kid from Lovech in the bed next to yours. Why don't you become his friend?" That's how my friendship with Mihail Radionov started. His father was member of the Parliament before the communist regime.

What are the memories you keep from the years spent at the College?

I remember the pool. Every time I visit the College, I plan to go look for the pool, yet the time is never enough to actually do that. Our campus escape route to Sofia started right there.

I recall this one incident – at the time I considered it embarrassing, though now, with the distance of time, I find it funny. My close friend Radionov – he later even

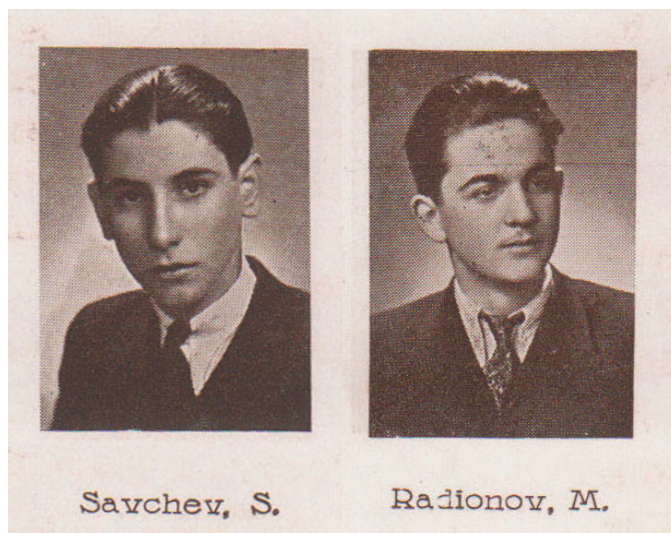
“I remember the pool. Every time I visit the College, I plan to go look for the pool, yet the time is never enough to actually do that. Our campus escape route to Sofia started right there.”



became my best man, we had an agreement that the first one to marry will have the other one as their best man and I was the first to tie the knot – and I escaped from campus one weekend during the day. I don't recall why anymore, could be it was just for the challenge of doing something forbidden.

But Mr. Black found out, and on the following Monday we were summoned to his office to explain. Radionov started stuttering an apology when Mr. Black interrupted him saying, „Before you speak, you better button your trousers.” Can you imagine the embarrassment Radionov felt! No wonder he didn't manage to formulate a meaningful answer to Mr. Black's question after that. I think that I escaped again after that though, on at least 2-3 other occasions.

“Every school day until Mountain Day, we would sing “Mountain Day” on our way to and inside the cafeteria, we could hardly wait.”



Field Day, the sports holiday, was our favorite event in the school calendar. We elected a Field Day queen, too, usually a girl in her senior year. I was a good long-distance runner and participated in hurdle competitions, too.

Mountain Day was a favorite, too, held at the beginning of the school year, sometime in the end of September, beginning of October. Every school day until Mountain Day, we would sing “Mountain Day” on our way to and inside the cafeteria, we could hardly wait. On the actual day, both students and teachers went to Vitosha – we walked till noon, at noon we ate, and then we played.

Which one of your teachers made the biggest impression on you and why?

I remember math teacher Mr. Zlatanov vividly. He was a war veteran, had been wounded, and had some tics as a result. Maybe it was out of compassion that I developed these warm feelings towards him.

I wasn't a very good student and have never been on the Bulletin Board for instance, unlike Kolyo of my class, always heading the list. I wasn't on the list at all, not even at its bottom. I wasn't into studying, not that it was hard or anything. I just lacked the ambition.

Did you ever appear on stage?

Yes, one year I played Father Tarapontiy¹ in a parody on Stunt Night.

Which classmates do you remember?

As far as remembering, I remember less and less, but take a look at this booklet here. I don't know how it found its way here, but since I tend to keep way more stuff than I should, here it is. (He hands me a booklet of about 20 pages where the American College graduates of the period 1925-1943 are listed along with their university, major, and work place, where available.) Here is Dimitar Goncharov, our music teacher who was also an alumnus of the class of 1925 from the period when the College was in Samokov. I have highlighted everyone from my home town, Cherven Bryag: here is Tsenka Etropolska '30, her brothers were masters of fencing, here is one of them – Tseko Etropolski '36. And here is Vlado Palankov '42, who was a major factor in the school's reopening, he helped a lot. Take the booklet, no need to give it back, it's more useful to you than it would be to my relatives one day.

What do you recall from 1942 when Americans were forced to leave the College and Bulgaria?

The first thing I did upon hearing of the Americans leaving was to write to my parents and tell them I didn't want to stay at the College. They insisted I stayed though, and so I graduated from the Simeonovo Foreign Language High School which was the new name of the College. Radionov and Kolyo stayed until graduation in 1944, too.



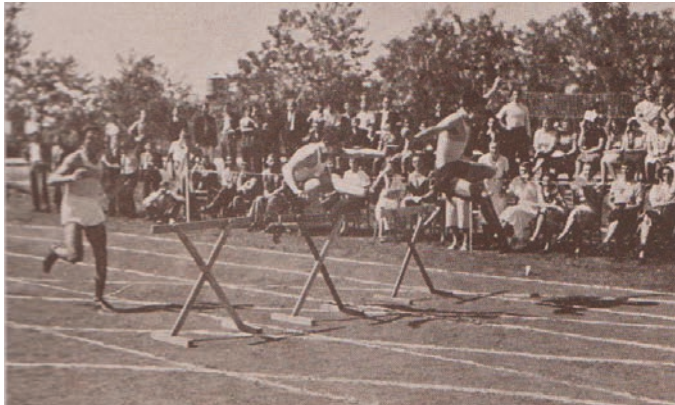
Mountain Day 1939 – Sava is standing in the middle

¹ A character from Rayko Alexiev's satirical newspaper „Илѹеу“, or Cricket (1932-44)

As the war broke out, a negative attitude towards Jewish people emerged and spread. It was felt at the College too, where there were some students bullying our Jewish classmates – always away from teachers' eyes, so that teachers never found out and intervened.

After the events in September 1944, anyone connected to the Western educational system experienced difficulties. Was this your case too, as a university student and in your career afterwards?

No, I had no difficulties. I got into university and graduated from the Economy Higher Institute



Field Day 1939

with a major in banking, and so did my College buddy Radionov. Afterwards banking became my profession.

Finding work wasn't difficult either. Accounting specialists were much sought after and I immediately got a spot at Sofjilfond, the state housing fund. After spending a couple of months there, I was made head of the accounting department of their Kolarov area branch, close to the Central Railway Station. Next, I started at the State Computing and Organizational Technology Institute, today situated at the 4th kilometer. I was promoted to Head of the Financial Department there and a couple of years later, I transferred to the State Economic Union for Plastics and Rubber² up in the Krasno Selo neighborhood. I worked in the field of accounting until the end of my working days, slowly but surely climbing up the career ladder. At the end, I joined the Central Labor-Union Council as a main economy and accounting expert and accountability methodologist. Part of my job was to manage the financial aspects of the recreational facilities in the whole country, in addition to managing the accountants at the facilities who reported to me. I retired after 11 years of employment there.



“For me, it was as if a different period started when I enrolled at the College in 1938. This period lasted long and was spent in a very beautiful Bulgaria.”

I recall how I once stood on Vasil Levski Blvd. chatting with my direct manager at the Labor-Union Council. A woman I was acquainted with passed by and the two of us greeted each other and exchanged a few sentences.

When she went her way, my boss asked me: “How do you know her?” “From my days at the College,” I replied, and he exclaimed, “But why didn't you mention the College in your application then?” “Well, I did write that I graduated from a Foreign Language High-School, which is what I did.” “How smart of you!” he said.

²State economic unions are organizations created in the 1960's and 1970's in an attempt to improve industrial factories' efficiency by centralizing their management by field. The unions were a stratum in the state management of industrial factories, they managed factories and research institutes and reported to their respective ministry.



Where does the one who manages all recreational facilities in the country go on vacation?

Sava going through the alumni data base

Everywhere.

Which was your favorite spot though?

The seaside. Nessebar was where we used to go the most.

You have lived in three very different time periods – the one before communism, communism itself, and the so called “transition” after the changes in 1989. If you could choose one period to have spent your whole life in, which one would you choose?

I was too young and immature in the first of the three periods, I keep too few memories, even if most of them are good ones. I don't know about the second one. For me, it was as if a different period started when I enrolled at the College in 1938. This period lasted long and was spent in a very beautiful Bulgaria.

What makes you happy?

I'm blessed with many grandchildren and great grandchildren. I have two kids, a son and a daughter, and four grandchildren, two girls and two boys. One of my grandchildren lives with her husband and their two daughters in Edmonton, Canada. I have seven great grandchildren so far, the youngest one is three years old. The greatest fortune and happiness!

I met my wife in our hometown of Cherven Bryag. Her sister K. Ivanova studied at the College in my class while my wife was four years younger and graduated



At the Graduation Ceremony of the ACS Class of 2013

from the English Language High School in Lovech. She used to tell stories about the school director Ms. Carhartt. During summers, we used to hang out with friends at the beach by the Iskar River and that's how our relationship started off. She almost made it to our golden wedding – she died in 2001.

In 1972, my cousin and her Armenian husband emigrated from Bulgaria to the US via Paris. The parents of her husband actually paved the way 2-3 years before, though they took an escape route through the Middle East. (pointing at a photo on the wall) This photo here shows my cousin in 2009, she had just given me this cowboy hat. I was so moved when she flew here from the US 2 years ago again especially for my 90th anniversary celebration.

Did you keep in touch with College classmates after you graduated?

Our first class reunion was held on 22 November 1969, 25 years after our graduation. We felt some change of attitude towards us American College alumni in the period 1955-1960 and thus more at ease to get together. 34 of the 73 of us based in Sofia showed up. Many must have still been afraid. And 34 had already moved to Israel where they had started their new lives.

I became a driving force in organizing those reunions over the years. For that first one in 1969, my classmates Vicho Mehandjiev, who was our former class secretary, and Tanka Chakalova helped a lot.

We kept getting together for other anniversaries. At the one in 1994, celebrating 50 years since graduation, the turnout was smaller and it has been growing smaller ever since. In 2003 we celebrated 65 years since enrolling at the College, and in 2004 – 60 years since graduation. We were so happy to be able to hold these last two reunions at the already reopened College. I recall turning to my classmates on our get together in 2003, describing us as “a not very happy generation,” and the years past – as “not the lightest” for us. We had no tongue-in-cheek competitions because who would have found competing who had the most pain or the most diverse diseases amusing!

Now it's just a handful of us living graduates of the Class of 1944. I am the one keeping track of who's still around, who's in Sofia, etc. And I keep you informed. Dimo Boychev spends most of the year with relatives in Bankya and I have the hardest time persuading Kolyo to come with me to the College alumni events. But why not meet at the College this upcoming Christmas! I would come even if I'm the only one among the old alumni.

We sing the College anthem together. There are spots where we both don't quite recall the words. It ends in laughter.



At the ACS Alumni Christmas Reception in 2014 with fellow alumnus Georgi Atanasov '45



JOANA NIKOLOVA '19:

I Want to Be an Aerospace Engineer

Since my first day as a staff member at the American College of Sofia, I started following the school news even more closely, and eventually – putting many of them together myself. In many of the articles about various victories in math competitions, Model UNs, science fairs and whatnot, one name kept appearing again and again: Joana Nikolova. After digging up some background information on her, I found out she is a member of the graduating Class of 2019. It was then that I decided to further introduce her to the alumni community in our Alumni Magazine. During the traditional Senior Dinner she was awarded with three Departmental Awards: Bulgarian Language and Literature, Science, and Math and Computer Science. Moreover, she is the recipient of the Floyd Black Award. I was happy to find out more about her experience at ACS, her past achievements and future aspirations. So, here goes.

Interview by Alexander Tomov '04

What is the life of a senior such as yourself like today?

I've been pretty busy the whole year. It has been an amazing experience to have a senior year in which we've been doing everything and until now I almost haven't had a single moment to consider that I'm graduating. I've been organizing FISSION and it has taken a lot of my energy, both physical and psychological. I was President of the Model UN club, Chair of one of the committees at the ACS MUN conference, I've been going to math and physics competitions which also requires a lot of preparation. I've been going to other clubs, just to relax. Those were my main things this year.

Sounds like a busy year!

Yes, really, and this is on top of my applications, writing essays, and school life, which we all know is not easy at ACS.

So, you mentioned essays and applications, what is next for you?

Next year I'm going to be studying at MIT.

Wow! Congratulations!

Thank you! I couldn't believe it myself! I remember the morning when it happened. As the results are released at 1 AM, my mother was asking me the previous evening if I was going to stay up to receive the decisions as I had applied early. Then I looked at her: "No, why would I waste any sleep on that, I know what would happen. Nobody from ACS has been accepted in, like, forever, only one has in the past. Why would I even think about it, I could tell you now what they are going to tell me." And then I woke up at 6 AM in the morning and my first thought was: "They are out. The results are out!" Then I scolded myself: "What are you doing? You know what will happen. You know that you are not accepted." And I started thinking about reasons why I should look at them at all. Then I started reading and the first sentence goes like: "We are very proud to..." And in my mind I finished the sentence with: "have had such a bright pool of candidates." Or something along those lines. I thought this was how it was going to end. And instead, it was something like: "We are very proud to accept you." I was like "What?!" And I read the sentence maybe 5 times, until I understood that it was actually true. For the rest of that day I kept thinking: "They made a mistake. They didn't really mean that. Something must be wrong with the system."

Wow! I meant to ask you about your proudest moment at ACS, but is it safe to assume this is it, or was it something else?

Well, this is an amazing moment, but not so much as an ACS student, but more so as something about me. Something

I did on my own, mostly. As an ACS student it must be FISSION because we created such a wonderful event and it was quite large. I don't think many people have such an experience throughout their whole lives – to prepare such an event and to be responsible for so many things and people and for the final result. It was a very interesting and unique experience and just seeing it come to life with no major issues made me very happy. We held a wonderful opening ceremony, which featured performances from ACS singers, some speeches, remarks from Dr. Ewing, then we held a reception and all this was never done for FISSION before. And it went without mistakes, mostly. Everyone got what they were supposed to – certificates, gifts, everything. And I was so proud just to see this come to life. After the event people came over to me and thanked me for what we did. Even some little kids came and thanked us for organizing it and promised us to show up next year as well.

That is quite the thing. I attended on Saturday and I loved it. We've had a Science Fair tradition since 1996, but what you guys are doing with FISSION is going above and beyond to make ACS more open to others as well. It's just incredible. It's a wonderful way for Alumni

to keep in touch as well! You might be judging next year!

We've had previous organizers come and judge, especially the junior category. None of the organizers until now have graduated from college, so they come only for the Junior

participants (Junior High Schoolers). And I'd love to do that, because even in the Junior category we have such wonderful projects. There are students in the 4th and 5th grades who come in and know what they are doing. They have done the electrical circuits on their own, or like, this one girl this year – a whole guitar. So, they've had many interesting projects in all categories. I really hope that the future teams manage to draw in a wide variety of different projects as well.

It was very funny – around FISSION, I was receiving calls from all over Bulgaria, and I had started to pick up the phone with: "Hello, this is FISSION speaking?" (laughs)

Sounds like FISSION is where it's at for you. You have been involved with a lot of things at ACS. Do you have one true passion though?

I love all of those things. All of those things that have made news at ACS are actually things I've spent a lot of time preparing. They are part of my life, of who I am and they have built me to be a very different person. Coming to ACS, I was quite introverted, I was very timid, I couldn't speak in front of people. Then I joined the Model United Nations club and this year, especially with FISSION, being in a leadership role and in charge of so many people and things that need to happen, it just builds you as a leader and

"I want to be making satellites and outer space projects that expand human knowledge."

makes you just take everything in control and be the person who makes things happen.

One day I want to be an aerospace engineer. I plan on working with electrical engineering as well, because I want to be making satellites and outer space projects that expand human knowledge.

So, in other words, I understand that ACS did change you, hopefully for the better, with leadership and other pursuits. How did you come to study at ACS? How did you choose to go here?

My parents did it. It was very funny, because before that I was in the math school and I really didn't want to leave. I love mathematics, especially competitive mathematics is very interesting to me and it was my life back then. And so, leaving that and coming here, I was so afraid, because – what was I going to do here? I still wasn't into event organizing, debating... it was all about mathematics for me, and maybe physics. So it was very scary, because my parents



Joana during Science Fair 2015 showcasing Models of Tesla's Experiments

really wanted me to come here, they knew that this was a wonderful school that would give me great opportunities. And it's not that the math school is not competitive or anything, it's just that it's so focused on the mathematics that students there don't really get to explore other things they may like. This is why I really like that I changed my school and came here.

Do you remember how you changed your mind?

I do. My parents and I came to the open house days and I was very impressed with the campus, the labs. I remember I was very impressed by the chemistry lab. We didn't have such labs, nor the opportunity to work with experiments ourselves. I missed the stronger math program at my previous school, after the initial disappointment over not getting a scholarship for scoring the highest among girls on the admissions exam. And it wasn't easy for me to do this because, as I said, I had branched into other things and I couldn't become part of the big team. I only managed last year to join the Girls National Team. So,

this was part of what allowed me to entertain the idea of coming here. And then the other things. I didn't like the idea of coming to a private school and my parents having to pay a lot of money for education and I had heard that the scholarships are for the first people in the rank list. Believing that, I said: "If I become first, I have this scholarship – I will come." I was very sad, because

"Every single moment I was here, if there was a need, I've been volunteering for everything."

I became first and then – there was no scholarship! The test itself was very interesting and challenging, which was something unexpected. Because of that, when the results came out, I was very happy to have gotten in. Back in 7th grade I didn't care for the state exams either, just like I don't today. It's a good tendency.

If you could, what one thing would you change about ACS?

Just one thing?

Oh well, top 3 things. 😊

I would like a stronger focus on school spirit, for students to get to know one another beyond their grade levels. I've heard that the blocks used to carry heavier weight and there were points for participation, which I think is an interesting idea. I'd also like to see how more traditions continue, for example the Senior corner at the Cafeteria – there's no such thing nowadays.

Really? Isn't it the tables with the beautiful view, by the windows facing the Fountain?

No, we only just fought for them! (laughs) And we were very intimidating and were able to get some, but anyone just sits there, which is very annoying. We are the last class that actually remembers them, because 11th graders have never been in the old cafeteria, only in the temporary one. In the temporary one there was still something, but I don't think they understand it in the same way. So when I come back in 10 years, I'd like to see this or something like this continued, so students come here and feel part of the community.

Also, organization-wise, I've had moments when I felt rather lost, as if hardly anyone knew what was happening and some things, we as students feel, are not very well thought-out. There are things that I feel need to be improved, so that students can come here and actually want to study.

We all are teenagers and we like to complain a lot, so we tend to share our complaints with each other. I know a lot of

people feel discontent with some aspects of the school. But, as a whole, I think it's a wonderful place and my experience has been amazing. It's important to note, though that this is because I took everything from ACS that I could. Every single moment I was here, if there was a need, I've been volunteering for everything. For example, I've been a tour guide since 9th grade. It's been amazing. First, I know a lot about my school, and then it has been great, being able to share it, to highlight the good parts about the school. For example, yesterday I was making the tour around campus for the visiting college counselors, and it was the first time I did it in English. It was so much fun and I'm so happy that this was my last tour. I've been thinking – this whole experience, and doing everything that I can to improve it, and taking everything that I can and improve myself. I think this is part of the ACS experience, with all the opportunities to explore, and I took some of them. If you don't, there's nothing that can give you this experience. If you don't do it, there is nothing that can give you this experience.

The power within?

Yeah, of course, there are students at ACS that just don't do anything with the school, don't participate and they don't have the same experience. ACS gives you as much as you give to the school.

This is very mature of you!

I'm very mature! ☺

Regardless that I look like a 7th grader. (laughs)

I'm under the impression that you are very successful at ACS.

Well, yes.

So, how does one succeed at ACS nowadays?

Well, I feel like it's a lot of small things that one has to do. Just paying attention in class, doing your things on time, putting in effort. It's a lot of effort. I always, always, always, whatever I do, I give everything, all my effort in it. And it doesn't matter if it's the beginning or end of the school year. It shows a lot, not only in my grades, but also in my relationships with people. I respect all of my teachers and they respect me, because they know they can count on me, they have seen I work very hard. And they know that what I do is maybe the best that can be done in this case. For example, if I don't understand something, chances are no one else around does. This is because I'm always paying attention. I'm just organized as a whole. It's a process, I didn't come in 8th grade like this. Now I'm a senior and I know, I've had this experience for 5 years and I have to be better than in 8th grade. With time I've learned that trying to listen is natural for me, it's not something I have to push myself to do. I just sit in class. I may not be taking notes, I may be doing something else, but I'm listening and



Joana practicing some tricks for the Circus Club

I'm asking questions, I'm paying attention. For example, in mathematics, even if I seem to not be paying attention - writing something else, or preparing something or just like, doodling, I know where the class and the problems are going. I know when there is a mistake on the board. I know when there is something that needs to be changed. I'm always explaining to the people around me when they need help. And this is what I've been doing, but I don't think it would work with everyone. The thing is that everyone has to find their way of learning and doing things. Because not everyone can learn in class. For example, I cannot learn at home. I cannot stay at home and learn from a textbook and just read and just know what's happening.

Oh, you'll learn! ☺

I hope so! The thing is that I learn 90% of the material in class. And it's just from paying attention and doing the things that are expected of me. It's very important for students to understand that teachers are not there to torture them. The things we are doing, they are for us. Teachers don't want to check more work or to give lower grades, it's not good for them. These are just things we need to do in order to improve. If you think you don't need it – OK. But, you don't get to complain after that.

Fair enough. Which was your best day at ACS?

I have no idea.

Maybe it's yet to come? Could be Graduation? Prom?

Well, for prom I'll be in heels, so – no. ☺

Oh, I know! It was when I got into MIT and everyone was so supportive – teachers, students, everyone was hugging me, while I was in shock. It was a very wholesome experience, just to be supported so much by everyone. I remember this was so amazing and I couldn't wrap my head around it. People congratulated me even before I had told them. I got an e-mail from Mr. Ward: "I've been hearing some stuff, do I need to congratulate you?" I have friends who also applied to MIT but didn't get in. They knew how much work I'd put in and they showed no envy, no jealousy, they just supported me. It was a wonderful day.

That is a great story, how about your worst day?

Oh, I have so many worst days! (laughs)

Those were days we've had, like, 2 tests, 2 projects, and you don't sleep until 4 AM and then you get up at 6 and then you have to come here and go to school and concentrate in order to do your best on the exam, and then you have something else. There have been times when I go home and just drop on the bed and I can't do anything. This is exhaustion, it's not like I hate it. And I know that it happened because I didn't manage my time well or something like this.

What's one thing from ACS you are definitely going to take with you on your way forward?

I don't know...maybe the person I've become, because I really feel I can do anything. I can manage every situation

that comes in front of me and defeat any challenge. I've done so many things here, things I never even thought possible for myself. I used to be a little bit artistic and I had forgotten it for many years, and now this year I just decided to make the countdown until the last class.

"I really want to be making a difference, because that's the point of everything – to come up with technologies to make the future better."

Oh, that was you? It was really beautiful!

Yeah, it was so strange, because I had really forgotten that I'd loved to do different artistic projects. And then I had this idea and it was so wonderful. This was something that I did and I think it's good for my class as a whole. Everyone was very excited and seeing that days go by, actually, like, physically. I was challenged here and I remembered and I managed to do this whole project on my own. All of this, I think, is invaluable. And it will help me no matter what I do. Even if I decide to completely change what I do in the future, it's just any challenge that comes, I will not be in despair and I know that there is a way to go forward.

Cool, then what's one thing you are definitely leaving behind, shedding?

Heavy textbooks, heavy backpacks. Oh, how I hate this! My backpack has been weighted the heaviest, for all of my time here. I have no idea how that happened. No matter how few things I take, it's always the heaviest and it's so annoying,



because my back hurts and I don't even know what I have in there. It's like I've been carrying rocks, and it's just two textbooks and the Chromebook. I hope that I manage to do this better from now on, bring just one thing.

I have a cliché question for you: where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years I hope to be working with the European Space Agency. I don't know if it's a viable plan, but let's hope so. Until then I should have finished any bachelor's and master's degrees, and I think I should be able to be working there. I really want to be making a difference with that, because that's the point of everything – to come up with technologies to make the future better (another cliché).

But it's true!

Yes, and I really hope I'll be working like that, because as a whole, space work is abstract, intuitively it doesn't seem to be directly affecting our lives, but many technologies that have been developed for space, are then transferred to earth and are actually very helpful, for example, water purification. Things like this can be crucial for different societies.

What would you like to say to the incoming class of 8th graders?

I really hope for them to take this advice to take everything from the school. And it will change their lives. As long as they take their whole experience here as an opportunity and not as something they just have to do. And I really envy them for the opportunities that are opening, for example the SCIFI center. This year I've been spending so much time there, just trying to soak in what's happening. And they will really have the opportunity to work there, as the current 8th graders already do. They will probably have a completely different experience from mine, everything will change in 5 years. But, this spirit of the school, of pushing you farther, opening your mind, making you a global citizen – I don't think it's going away. People need to take that and actually make it part of themselves, understand it and it will be a lot easier to be here, a lot more enjoying and pleasant, something they will remember fondly, to have all these experiences, and they will always have something to say and to talk about, to be doing. It's just experiences have to be experienced and they will define what they do here and what their memories would be. Nobody can do it for them.

What about all the people you are leaving behind, the current students?

Well, for the 11th graders – my message is that it will soon be over. For the 10th and 11th graders, I feel like the future is not so far away, which is the most important. And, they are going to leave the school, most probably Bulgaria, and I would advise them to just be the people they want to be here and to act in such a way that when they remember

their years here, they remember wonderful friends and amazing projects and things they can really be proud of, not just existing somewhere.

We will soon be welcoming you to the huge circle of ACS alumni. What's your message to your then fellow alumni?

Don't forget your school, because there are amazing things happening at ACS, amazing students from all grade levels doing wonderful work for the community here, for Bulgarian society. Everyone has such interesting ideas and they put them into practice, it's not just theoretical. We have so many people willing to help. I remember during the blood drive when the blood donation people came, they just started complaining at the end because there were too many ACS people wanting to donate. You can come to all of the events, the musicals, the BG drama, the English drama. It's just – ACS is full of life and it's, as I said, it's changing so rapidly, so no matter when you have graduated, you will find something new here. So, even for myself, I wish that I don't forget that and that I manage to come here often and follow what's happening at the school.



DENA POPOVA '06:

Welcome to the Alumni Community, Class of 2019!

Your Excellency, Ambassador Rubin,

Dear Dr. Ewing,

Dear Faculty,

Dear Members of the Board,

Dear parents of graduating students,

Dear Class of 2019,

It is a truly cinematographic perspective to look at you all and see the coming rain. This is most probably going to be a very special rain to remember. It is a big honor to be here and address you as the alumni speaker, to see the faces of some of my most favorite teachers, and seconds after the beautiful speech of Teodora Dimova.

This is a big day for you seniors, but also for all your teachers and your parents.

Preparing for today, I realized that it was in 2014 when I reconnected with ACS, after coming back to Bulgaria. You must have been prep students then, right? I'm happy and proud to know a number of you personally from meeting or working together with you as part of different ACS clubs, student projects and initiatives.

It was about 4 years ago when Lily Yovnova, ACS alumna and a talented poet, together with Nikola Nenkov, organized a huge literary reading event as part of their SIHP. Among the names of the most acknowledged contemporary Bulgarian writers, (Georgi Gospodinov, Alek Popov, Deyan Enev) there were also 3 ACS alumni, Alexander Shpatov, Dimitar Kenarov and myself.

Three years ago, for Christmas, a group of students from ACS were behind an initiative to collect Christmas presents for mothers and their children at the Crisis Center for Victims of Domestic Violence of Animus Association Foundation. Each beautifully wrapped box was accompanied by a personal letter giving warmth and hope for the holidays for those in need. This year, I had the pleasure to mentor another SIHP project focusing on charity. Tsvety Ashova

made it possible for a group of children without parents to pursue their love for drawing and painting.

In 2016 a number of students from the ACS debate club, also selected for the national debate team, became key figures for the renaissance of competitive debate culture in Bulgaria. Kristiya Navushtanova, graduating today, is one of them.

These few examples that I share right now are a very tiny part of the many projects created and produced by students here each year. All of them demonstrate that you, the students behind them, have courage, creativity, sensitivity, and willpower to address, discuss and fix problems we face in our society, making our very much imperfect world a bit better.

Looking back at the years when I was a student at ACS, I was eager to join Beseda literary magazine, College Life newspaper, and the Musical Production club among others. It was specifically in those contexts that I not only fostered my interests in writing, photography and journalism, but also met some my best friends for life.

Continuing my studies in a small liberal arts college on the West coast in the States, surrounded by beautiful nature and located on a historic campus, I quickly felt comfortable and happy there. It reminded me a lot of ACS. I joined the Blue Moon literary magazine, the college newspaper, and the documentary film-club. It was easy to meet my new friends and find inspiring mentors for that new part of my life.

The wide variety of interesting courses and programs I could choose from was a natural continuation of my humanities academic path at ACS. I took courses in Ethnographic fieldwork, the Chemistry of Art, Black and White Photography, and Community-based research among many others. Without planning it too much, I was starting to explore my topic of interest, namely multiculturalism, from a multidisciplinary point of view.

I pursued opportunities for studying abroad and conducting research in Argentina, France, Ecuador and Spain. Together with all the new people and cultures I met, I was also happy to cross paths and create new memories with some of my old and dear friends and teachers from ACS. This time we took classes in the aulas of Universidad de Buenos Aires, La Sorbonne or studied all night in a 300-year-old castle turned into a library in Barcelona.

In the years since my graduation in 2006, ACS has popped into my life so many times. I have rediscovered ACS in moments of academic or social dedication. Or in the numerous planned or surprise encounters with ACS not only when back on campus, but across the whole world.

Now is the time that ACS will go beyond the borders of the campus for you too, seniors. It will turn into a web, or space, or hyper-community, or platform of people, friends, mentors, memories, experiences and inspirations that you will be discovering and creating one at a time in the years to come.

Welcome, officially, to the ACS Alumni community. I dare you to join the ACS Alumni Facebook group.

Congratulations, class of 2019!

Thank you.



About Dena

Dena graduated from the American College of Sofia in 2006. During her years at ACS Dena was part of Beseda Literary magazine, College Life, the Musical production Club, and the Hiking Club... She continued her studies at Whitman College, WA, USA, where she majored in Rhetoric and Film Studies. Following that, she pursued a M.Sc. in Political Science at Pompeu Fabra University, Spain.

During her studies, Dena was an Abshire grant fellow researching traditional birth practices in the Highlands of Ecuador; Labor Trajectories for Latino Farmworkers in Washington State; and Multilingualism across Europe.

She is currently working as Research Associate for the Trust for Social Achievement and pursuing a PhD program in Memory and Narrative Studies at Sofia University.

Dena sits on the board of NisiMasa, the European Network for Young Cinema. She is a published writer of two collections of short stories. During the 2018-2019 academic year Dena has been serving as the alumni co-chair of the Students Activities Fund at ACS.

IN MEMORIAM: BIRGITTA CATTELLE

“Mrs. C. had an enviable sense of smart, incisive humor, a true appreciation for a job well done, and zero tolerance for nonsense.”

Mrs. Cattelle and Mr. Cattelle in their lake house on Branch pond near Ellsworth, ME, March 2009.



Mrs. Birgitta Cattelle was the most important educator I had at ACS and my best friend from all international teachers who taught me. After graduation she insisted I call her Gittan, but at ACS her 8th grade ESL students affectionately referred to her as Mrs. C., so I will do the same here.

Mrs. C. taught me English. Fluency in English is one of the most fundamental skills a student needs in the 21st century for success in a globalized world. English opened doors to me that would have remained firmly closed otherwise, and for that I am truly grateful to her.

As a person, Mrs. C. had an enviable sense of smart, incisive humor, a true appreciation for a job well done, and zero tolerance for nonsense. She disciplined us with an unquestionable sense of unquestionable authority and friendly warmth at the same time. She taught us “common sense” not only as an expression in English but also as a practice in life.

Mrs. C. instilled in us a true love for reading. If my memory serves me correctly, she was the first ESL teacher to start a daily reading competition among prep students. Everyone was required to read a minimum number of pages per day from a book of their choice (gradually increased from 10 to 25 pages every quarter), and the section which had read the most pages by the end of the year won the competition (and a pizza party, of course). Mrs. C. had a really sweet mini library in her classroom which stored over 200 titles from her personal collection, featuring timeless youth classics like *The Giver* and *A Wrinkle in Time*, as well as the latest buzz like the Harry Potter

“Mrs. C.’s contagious push for reading turned into a passion that I carry with me to this day.”

series and *Eragon*. Mrs. C. had also organized a book-ordering system through which we could purchase titles monthly from the rich and exciting catalogue of the American publisher Scholastic. And while this all may have started as an onerous homework assignment, Mrs. C.’s contagious push for reading turned into a passion that I carry with me to this day.

One of my fondest memories of my prep year at ACS was serving as the “curtain boy” in the musical *The Producers*. Mrs. C. supervised the musical, as she did for all of her five years at ACS. She was instrumental in supporting student producers Theo Popov ’06 and Velizara Passajova ’06 as well as all of us in cast and crew, resulting in a fun and memorable show!

Mrs. C. was an incredible teacher, advisor, and educator, but I was lucky enough to have her as a true friend as well. I kept in touch with her by email after Bill Cattelle and she left ACS in 2006. In my junior year, I studied abroad at a boarding school in the U.S. and Mrs. C. made sure to remind me regularly that I was welcome to visit the Cattelles up in Maine. So I did that over spring break, and we had a fantastic time. This was in March 2009, and at that point, the Cattelles were transforming their lake house on the shore of Branch Pond outside of Ellsworth, Maine into a home where they would retire and



Mrs. Cattelle and Georgi Klissurski '10 at ACS graduation, May 2010.



Mrs. Cattelle, Maria Boshnacova '10, and Ms. Elka Dacheva at ACS graduation, May 2010

spend quality time with grandchildren and friends. Even before the house was fully ready, Mrs. C. and Bill Cattelle welcomed me enthusiastically, and we had lots of fun reminiscing about the good old days at ACS and thinking fondly of all of our Bulgarian friends, classmates, and colleagues.

A year later, in 2010, when my class at ACS was graduating, Mrs. C. and Mr. Cattelle made the trip over to Bulgaria so they could celebrate us, the last class they had taught at the College. We had already become good friends so I was excited for my parents to meet the Cattelles and take them out to dinner in Sofia. And so it continued... We kept in close touch over email, and I visited Mrs. C. again in Maine for Thanksgiving in 2011, then we met up in New York in 2016 with fellow ACS alum and good friend of Mrs. C., Stan Andreev '07.

Through all of those years, Mrs. C. and I communicated actively over email. Our conversations mostly revolved around plans to meet up, either in Maine or elsewhere, my educational and professional development, her pride and love for her grandchildren and family, and, sadly, her fight with cancer. Mrs. C. was above all a heroic fighter. She battled cancer for close to two decades and just like in her ESL classroom, she faced the challenge with poise, strength, and resolution. There was no complaining or nonsense. Mrs. C. simply did her best and inspired all around her in that process.

On behalf of my family and my classmates, thank you, Mrs. C.! We will always remember you fondly as our amazing teacher and loyal friend.

CLASS NOTES

On July 7th 2018 in Balchik, Bulgaria - Krasi Tomov '05 married Julia Masleva Tomova '06.

ACS graduates included:

Vassi Tomova '02 (Sister)

Lyudmila Zhivkova '06 (Maid of Honor - Captured in the photo)

Svilen Manchev '05 (Best man - Captured in the photo)

Yana Georgieva '06

Elitsa Gosheva '06

Vanya Andonova '05

Nikolai Nikolov '05

Mihael Mladenov '05

Roumy Mihailova '05



Mila Minkovska '05

Victor Fachev '05

Hristoslav Tsonev '05

Miryana Moteva '08

Alexandrina '04 and Veronika '02 Koykovi

Pavel Stoyanov '06

Miroslav Tsvetkov '05

Congratulations!



Kosta Karakashyan '14 and Lora Beltcheva '15 are currently collaborating on the site-specific dance film *A Glance from the Edge*, to be filmed this summer across 12 different cultural-historical sites in Bulgaria – Sofia, Plovdiv, Prohodna cave, the Black Sea coast, the Ovech fortress, and many others. Kosta is directing and choreographing the film in collaboration with fellow Bulgarian dancer/choreographer Stephanie Handjiiska after they worked together on a project in Egypt last year, and Lora is their invaluable line producer making sure the budget, travel and filming logistics are all in order.

Kosta and Lora both just graduated from Columbia University in New York last month with their respective degrees in Dance and Economics/Sustainable Development.

The film explores the spatial dialogue between contemporary dance and the environment in which it is realized. With a team of six dancers including the two choreographers, the film will investigate our collective memories of different historical spaces and ask the question whether spaces have a memory of their own.

We can't wait for the movie premiere, to be presented in Sofia and Plovdiv in the autumn of 2019!





At the end of May we were thrilled to hear from former ELL teacher (2015-17) **Isabel Norwood**:

“Since leaving Bulgaria, I’ve spent the last two years working on my Master’s degree in English literature at the University of Mississippi. Mississippi has been a blast, and I’ve been lucky enough to see a couple of other ACS teachers while I’ve been here! Mr. Boyd Shafer and Ms. Kamo-McHugh visited me last year on their trip around the US photographing immigrants in every state. And Ms. Hood lives just one state away in Arkansas, so I’ve gotten to visit her.

While completing my Master’s, I have also been working as a teaching assistant, helping to lead English classes

at the university. Though it has been fun to work with college students, it has definitely made me miss ACS. I can honestly say that ACS students are graduating with better reading and writing skills than many of these students who speak English as their first language!

Next year I will be heading back to my home state of Colorado to go to law school, but first I’ll be headed back to Bulgaria for a short visit this summer. I can’t wait to see some of my favorite spots again like Borisova Gradina and Vitosha. I also left before the new building opened on campus, so I’m excited to see all the changes (and I’m sure feel a bit jealous that it wasn’t there when I was teaching). I hope to see some old students and colleagues while I’m there as well! By the way, congrats to the class of 2019, and good luck next year!”

THANK YOU FOR GIVING!

Alumni have traditionally been the backbone of philanthropy at the American College of Sofia. Many contribute every year, whether AFAC-inspired or grassroots enthusiastic. That is an indispensable addition to ACS's role as a leading school in this country and beyond. Tuition covers curriculum, but we know that the ACS experience goes so much beyond that.

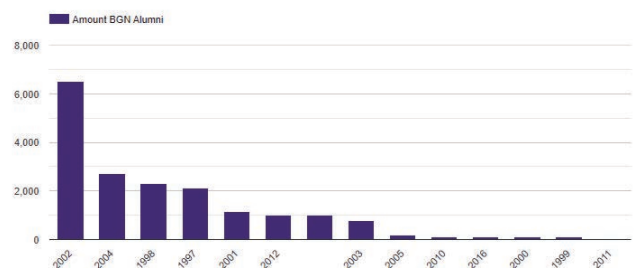
In that respect, this school year has been tremendous. The College has really blossomed into a community center of national and international significance, attracting TOM Makeathon, the national English Spelling Bee finals, the International Association of College Admissions Counseling's European Institute, and Founders' Day, just to name a few from 2019.

Of course, our students are what it is all about, and they keep excelling at both academics and extracurriculars. Their FISSION international science fair, the Model United Nations conference, victorious sports trip to Israel, the European Court of Human Rights Mock Trial, TEDx, various charitable initiatives, and so on build on the traditions of ACS excellence that you have supported with your gifts in the past.

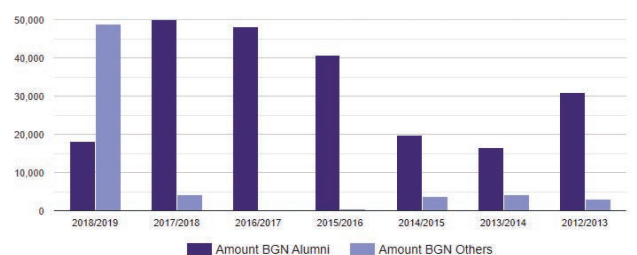
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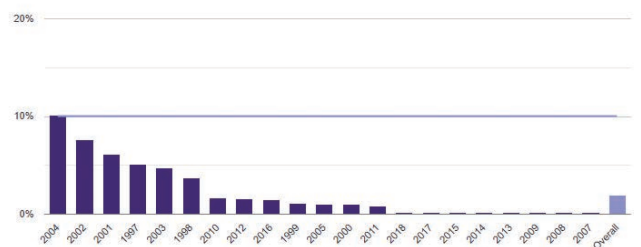
GIFTS BY CLASS YEAR - 2018/2019



GIFTS BY SCHOOL YEAR



PARTICIPATION RATE BY CLASS - 2018/2019



Information as per June 2, 2019





ACS *Alumni Magazine*



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