



Newsletter

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK (IEW) IN BULGARIA November 12-16, 2007



Professional Development Seminar Opening Session
From left to right: Wesley Teter, EducationUSA, Regional Educational Advising Coordinator for Europe, Fulbright Commission ED Dr. Julia Stefanova, and CAO Anthony Miranda

The highlight of this year's IEW in Bulgaria was the Professional Development Seminar on „Trends in Transatlantic Exchange: Global Resources for Local Universities and Trends in EducationUSA Advising“. The Seminar was organized by the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission with the participation of the EducationUSA, Regional Educational Advising Coordinator for Europe Wesley Teter. Participating in it were 35 students,



Professional Development Seminar participants

Vice Rectors and Deans for International Cooperation, International Relations Office Directors, Scholarship Administrators, Career Officers, Fulbright Coordinators, and other interested in international education professionals. They came from 22 educational institutions in Sofia, Plovdiv, Veliko Turnovo, Rousse, Shumen, Stara Zagora, Varna, Blagoevgrad, Vidin, Sliven, Madan and Kardzhali.

This seminar was designed to give an overview of current trends and issues related to the internationalization of higher education in Bulgaria, and addressed challenges faced by Bulgarian higher education professionals working in the field of international education. Topics covered Understanding Global Trends in Transatlantic Exchange; the Fulbright Program in Bulgaria; Attracting International Students: Strategies, Policies and Best Practices; Making Use of Global Resources for Exchange; Understanding the U.S. Higher

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EducationUSA, Regional Educational Advising Coordinator for Europe Wesley Teter presenting on Trends in Transatlantic Exchange

Week, the Bulgarian Fulbright Advising Center was visited by representatives of four U.S. institutions of higher education: Hawai'i Pacific University; Kenyon College, OH; St. John's University, NY, and the University of Indianapolis. They presented their institutions and the American educational system to interested students, parents, school principals and teachers.

REAC Wes Teter inspected the Fulbright Advising Center in Sofia and the regional Fulbright info-center in Plovdiv and visited the University of Plovdiv and the American Corner in Plovdiv.

Education System; Educational Advising on Graduate Study in the U.S.A. The discussions were conducted by Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission; CAO Anthony Miranda, U.S. Embassy; Wes Teter, EducationUSA, Regional Educational Advising Coordinator – Europe, and Snezhana Teneva, EducationUSA Adviser with the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission. Each participant received a Certificate of Attendance.



Certificate Ceremony

In addition, within the International Education

BULGARIAN FULBRIGHT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM

Full name

Home address

Field, Academic Rank and Degree

Present Place and Address of

Employment

Phone, Fax

Type, Year and Duration of Grant

Place and Name of Host Institution

Please complete and return to the Fulbright commission office address.

Fulbright Office News

THE STUDY OF AMERICA AND AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE 21st CENTURY

Annual Conference of the Bulgarian American Studies Association (BASA)
December 1-2, 2007

On December 1-2, 2007 the Bulgarian American Studies Association held its annual conference on "The Study of America and American Studies in the 21st Century" at Sofia University. It was co-organized and co-sponsored by the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission. Participating in the event were 50 American Studies scholars, high school teachers, students, US Fulbright grantees, Bulgarian Fulbright alumni. They came from Bulgaria, the US, UK, Italy, Poland, Albania and the Netherlands. The Bulgarian speakers and attendees were most of them BASA members and represented Sofia University, the University of Plovdiv, New Bulgarian University, Shumen University and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Over 20 of them were Fulbright alumni.

The conference was opened by Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission, Prof. Dr. Nedyu Popivanov, Vice-Rector of Sofia University, and David Siefkin, Public Affairs Officer at the US Embassy and member of the Fulbright Commission Board. The presenters covered a wide variety of topics in keynote lectures, panel sessions and discussions ranging from



Opening Address by Dr. Julia Stefanova, BASA President, Executive Director, Fulbright Commission



Opening Address by PAO David Siefkin, U.S. Embassy



BASA Participants

Bulgarian-American relations, Atlantic and globalization studies, transatlantic aspects of international relations, modern and contemporary American literature and culture, teaching US studies etc. A teacher training workshop was conducted within the conference focusing on teaching English in Bulgaria and the use of graphic organizers in teaching reading and writing.

The conference was a great success demonstrating the high academic and research standards of the participants and the benefits of the Fulbright exchange in the field.

AFTER THREE MONTHS IN BULGARIA

Meeting of AY 2007-2008 U.S. Fulbright Grantees with Fulbright Commission Staff



Meeting at the Fulbright Office

On December 14 the Fulbright Commission staff hosted a meeting with U.S. grantees to discuss the development of their projects in Bulgaria. Each of the Fulbrighters reported on what they had done during the first three months of their stay in Bulgaria. The topics ranged from new methods used for optimization of Internet search engines through American literature and poetry, non-profit law and minority issues to classical archaeology, folk music performances and impressions from Bulgarian high school students. The program continued with a visit to the Boyana Church and ended with a Christmas party for U.S. grantees, their contact persons, and Bulgarian Fulbright alumni.



Christmas Party



Trip to the Boyana Church

HEREDITARY RECTOR



"I have always been proud of working in the university. To me this is an institution of freedom and spirit. It must always be capable to withstanding the changing moods of society," Prof. Ivan Ilchev, a prominent expert in contemporary Balkan history and Fulbright alumnus, once said before he was elected Rector of the University of Sofia.

During the next four years he will have the opportunity to try to transform the University of Sofia into something that resembles his dreams. On November 13, 2007, he won to his rival by 218 votes and was elected Rector. It is interesting to know that Professor Ilchev's father, Professor Ilcho Dimitrov, another distinguished Bulgarian historian, also ran Bulgaria's oldest and most prestigious university from 1979 to 1981.

The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission wishes Professor Ilchev lots of energy, success, and good luck in his new and highly responsible mission.

U.S. UNIVERSITY PRESENTATIONS



Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, NH Presentation



Tuck School of Business Presenters: Andrey Donovan and Ned Zlatarev



Hawai'i Pacific University Presentation



Kenyon College, OH professor Dr. Peter Rutkoff, talking to a student after the presentation

БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН

УЧЕБНИЯТ ЦЕНТЪР
КЪМ КОМИСИЯ "ФУЛБРАЙТ" ПРЕДЛАГА:

- Английски език всички нива по системата "New Headway"
- Курсове за подготовка за TOEFL iBT, NEW SAT, GRE, GMAT
- Подготовка по английски език за кандидат-студенти в УНСС
- Курсове по бизнес английски и бизнес кореспонденция
- Разговорен курс за програмата WORK & TRAVEL
- Компютърна самоподготовка за TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT

БЕЗПЛАТНИ УСЛУГИ ЗА КУРСИСТИ:

- Регистрация за тестовете TOEFL, GRE, GMAT
- English speaking club with native speakers
- Безплатни 10 часа компютърна самоподготовка
- Отстъпки от цените при записване за повече от един курс
- Консултации за обучение в САЩ
- Библиотека с учебна и справочна литература

За информация: София 1504, ул. "Панайот Волов" №1, етаж II
тел. 944 0441, E-mail: studycenter@fulbright.bg, www.fulbright.bg



BULGARIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

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UNITED STATES ACHIEVERS PROGRAM (USAP) USAP Application For Undergraduate Admission 2009 - 2010

The United States Achievers Program, USAP, was established in 1999 with the strong belief that all talented international students, regardless of economic background, should have equal access to the admissions process to colleges and universities which offer need and merit-based international student financial aid. USAP assists highly talented, economically disadvantaged students to negotiate and finance the application and financial aid process for admission to highly selective colleges and universities in the United States. USAP students are academically talented and highly motivated youth who require full or nearly full financial assistance in order to attend any institution of higher learning in the U.S.

USAP works closely with high school students through regularly scheduled meetings and seminars to assist them throughout the application process to secure admission and scholarships for colleges and universities in the United States. The academic and social needs of USAP students are strongly considered in matching individuals with US colleges and universities which offer the best programs and opportunities to meet their future goals.

USAP expects a commitment of students to give back of their energy and time to the program and to their communities.

USAP IN BULGARIA

USAP in Bulgaria is administered by the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission and supplements its U.S. educational advising activities. The program's objectives are twofold: to make educational opportunities in the U.S. more widely known and to give economically disadvantaged Bulgarian students with demonstrated academic achievements and leadership potential the opportunity to study in the U.S.

THE FULBRIGHT ASSISTANCE

The Bulgarian Fulbright Advising Center works closely with successful candidates and their schools in their junior and senior year of school education to assist them with every step of the university selection, application and orientation process. In addition to providing these students with access to extensive information and advising, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission finances and provides tutoring for any necessary entrance exams required for admission.

TARGET GROUP

We will be looking for talented but underprivileged students as well as for students from diverse backgrounds who demonstrate the greatest potential of significantly contributing to society if given the educational opportunity to further develop their knowledge and talents.

With the objective of developing a broad, successful program for students across Bulgaria, this year's pilot program will be test-run with a particular focus upon economically challenged communities in Sofia, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Vidin and Smolyan where most of the candidates to American colleges and universities come from as well as in the underserved regions of Kardzhali, Haskovo, Momchilgrad, Madan and Rudozem where most of the minority population of Bulgaria lives. USAP candidates will reflect the best of Bulgaria's youth, both academically and in terms of involvement in leadership roles,

community service and extracurricular activities. We will be looking for students who aspire to broaden their horizons and share ideas with a diversity of people, returning to Bulgaria to apply their education and experiences to their lives and careers.

USAP 2007

For the 2007 USAP in Bulgaria ten successful applicants will be selected to participate. The program is open to applications from Bulgarian high school students in the 11th grade who intend to enter their undergraduate studies in the United States the autumn of 2009. In addition to possessing an excellent academic record, applicants will have participated in extra-curricular activities and will possess a demonstrated financial need.

Although we do not limit the program geographically, students **MUST** be able to reach the Bulgarian Fulbright Advising Center on a regular basis during the school year, throughout school holidays, and after finishing high school, for full participation. Junior high school students will work with our educational advising staff over this year and the next year to try to secure places and financial assistance to begin study in the US in August 2009. **ENTRANCE INTO THIS PROGRAM IS NO GUARANTEE OF A SCHOLARSHIP OR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES.***

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To apply to USAP, you must currently be a highly-determined and hardworking JUNIOR student who is going to graduate from high school in May 2009. To be eligible for consideration, you must have a VERY strong academic record, be active in co-curricular and community activities as well as show well demonstrated financial need.

HOW TO APPLY

Please complete the application form and return it by post together with the required documents listed at the end, no later than January 15, 2008 to:

Mailing Address:

USAP
U.S. Educational Advising Center
Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission
P.O. Box 288
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria
Tel: 359 2 981 6830
Fax: 359 2 988 4517
E-mail: steneva@fulbright.bg
Web: www.fulbright.bg

Physical Address:

USAP
Snejana Teneva, EducationUSA Adviser
Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission
17 Alexander Stamboliiski Blvd.
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. We will reply to successful students in January 2008 and may invite finalists for interviews. Successful applicants will begin the USAP in the beginning of February 2008.

Application forms can be downloaded at: www.fulbright.bg, Educational Advising, U.S. Education, Undergraduate Study section, or received via e-mail to: steneva@fulbright.bg. Forms can also be obtained at the Bulgarian Fulbright Advising Center, 17 Al. Stamboliiski Blvd, 1st Floor, Office #15, 1000 Sofia.

**Note: As the criteria that will be utilised in assessing candidates' suitability to the USAP programme will be fashioned on that utilised by universities' admissions offices and funding bodies, successful USAP candidates can be confident of their marketability as highly desirable students to US universities. However, it is important to note that though every effort will be made by the Bulgarian Fulbright Advising Center to assist in securing a place at a US university, the Bulgarian Fulbright Advising Center has no privileged relationship with universities' admissions offices or funding bodies and, therefore, cannot guarantee that USAP participants' applications will be successful. This is not meant to discourage students from applying, rather it is meant to give a practical understanding of the competitive nature of the application process.*

**BULGARIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION
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**BULGARIAN FULBRIGHT GRANTEES
IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2008-09****SENIOR SCHOLARS***Principals:*

1. **Boyan Alexiev** – linguistics/lexicography
2. **Tolya Stoitsova** – social psychology
3. **Stoyan Nedelchev** – chemical engineering
4. **Margaret Draganova** – Slavic studies
5. **Temenuzhka Seizova** – linguistics
6. **Nikolay Bonev** – geology

Alternate:

7. **Nikolay Naidenov** – political science

GRADUATE STUDENTS*Principals:*

1. **Polina Slavcheva** – creative writing and journalism
2. **Georgui Iliev** – business administration
3. **Galina Nikolova** – public policy
4. **Chavdar Chavdarov** – business

administration

5. **Ani Gesheva** – economics
6. **Myuzhde Myumyun** – international relations

Alternate:

7. **Gergana Antova** – sound engineering
8. **Tsvetelina Lazarova** – law

H. HUMPHREY FELLOWSHIPS

1. **Svetlozar Ivanov** – sociology
2. **Leda Shiyakova** – public policy

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Ph.D. AWARDS***Principals:*

1. **Milena Lesseva** – molecular biology
2. **Boris Kirov** – systems biology

Alternate:

1. **Philip Shushkov** – computational chemistry

To Chicago and Back

The Prestige and Challenge to be a Bulgarian Fulbrighter

Vesselina Ivanova

Fulbright Exchange Teacher of English Language
Falls Church High School, Falls Church, VA, U.S.A., AY 2006-2007

Much as I knew about the prestige and honor of the Fulbright program, I was double honored to be interviewed and to have an article in the local newspaper, covering my Fulbright teacher exchange. It was a wonderful way to let the community know about me, to find other Bulgarians, living nearby, and to make me feel proud and obliged to act as a Fulbrighter. Following a month I gave an interview and was photographed for the school newspaper, which was to inform Falls Church High School students (I had already been presented to the faculty and regional schools colleagues more than once) about the „strange teacher“, coming to school by public transport and always carrying a bag with books. A week ago at the last faculty meeting I took the initiative to write an article in appreciation for the welcoming and supportive atmosphere, which the principal Mrs. Janice Lloyd and my colleagues had provided for me to help with the success of the exchange.

In fact, my school year started as early as August 10th 2006, with the attendance of various new teacher orientations, at school and county level, at which I presented myself and the Fulbright program, got acquainted with colleagues and the teaching requirements, as well as with the teaching materials. Mrs. Diana Poodhiak took me to the ESOL library, which has been of immense help, as I borrowed a lot of audio books, fiction and non-fiction materials to diversify my literature classes. I had to forget about 15 years teaching experience and change my whole teaching approach. It was teachers' Internet websites with puzzles, crosswords, word finds and graphic organizers that I used to consolidate the key vocabulary and to make students' learning fun. I had to realize that unless the teachers presented new vocabulary in at least 7 different ways, they were not to test the students on it. This was totally different from the way



Vesselina's class

language is taught in Bulgarian high schools, where the textbooks and workbooks provide exercises and consolidation, and especially with high school students, the approach is more academic rather than fun. My ESOL students came from different countries, with different educational and family background and could not be taught in the way I was used to.

In addition, I had to be flexible to adjust not only to the students' needs and diversity, but also to the expectations that a teacher had to give up his/her authority and regain it by establishing a good relationship with the students, rather than take his/her authority and students motivation for granted. Having the heart of a mother and that of a teacher helped me to find the right way to the hearts of my students and to succeed in preparing them for the reading and writing tests, on which they showed remarkable improvement to move to the upper level of ESOL. I also appreciate the help from my department chair, Suzanne Thompson, and my colleague, Susan Wiswell. After observing some classes which my students attended, I

gained confidence .I started doing projects , using more technology and visuals. What I actually expected at the beginning was a special IT training for me, but instead I did not even go through the routine training for new teachers, as the problem with my teacher ID number prevented me from getting logged in the Fairfax School System, with all the consequences it entailed .Despite the initial problems, with the help of my colleagues, ad hoc, I learned how to do the grades, to take attendance and derive information about the students from the computer.

My first visit to the US presented me with a lot of challenges in my everyday life as well, I solved the problems with the assistance of my mentor , colleagues , my Bulgarian friends and my partner’s family. It should be made known that without a car, having your family with you in the US is not a good idea, unless you live and teach in a place like New York,for example .Friends gave me a ride to the shops , my mentor helped me obtain the Social Security Number , the office of which was located in a place I would never have accessed by public transport, not to mention that in America the Social Security Number is essential for opening a bank account , telephone , Internet and TV connection. I was lucky to have exchanged housing with my partner and to live in a nice location with a park, bicycle trail, swimming pool and a metro station about 40 min away on foot. Still, distances in America were the first thing to stun me as a European. Another surprise was the fact that I could not see people in the streets .Luckily; I lived near the local library, a fact that enormously helped me when I needed the Internet, a printer, books and DVDs.

My partner brightened my Christmas with a gorgeous bouquet, ordered on the Internet In addition, his sister invited me for Christmas Eve and took me to New York, accompanying me to a Broadway show. In return, I invited her family to a Bulgarian cuisine dinner .I also treated my



Vesselina (in the middle) and her students



Vesselina (third from right to left) and her colleagues from the Falls Church High School

students and colleagues at school and at home to Bulgarian food on several occasions, thus popularizing Bulgarian culture. I also showed them photos of my country, of my Bulgarian students and a slide show, which the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission had given to us. I made copies of the Fulbright CD for my principal, administrator and colleagues , which together with a traditional Bulgarian table cloth and brandy, were my Christmas present for them in return of their generous gesture of taking me to a Bulgarian restaurant . There they presented me with a plaque for my Fulbright exchange. I socialized with my colleagues, who invited me to a field trip to DC, took me to Mount Vernon and enjoyed the pot luck lunches with my participation.

All in all, looking back from the present day perspective, I can see the change and development of my whole view to life and teaching. I do remember the lecture at the Fulbright orientation in DC upon our arrival .It was about the up and down going graph of our emotions, about the different perception of time in different cultures and I totally agree that it is correct and realistic. I kept in touch and invited for New Year’s Eve a Slovakian Fulbrighter, who struggled with similar problems. My thirst for communication and exchange of ideas made me attend the fall Fulbright Conference in Baltimore and the spring one in DC , where I met with Fulbright staff , international and American teachers in a friendly atmosphere. It was also a good opportunity to observe classes in a Baltimore high school. I do believe that it is through communication that teachers as intellectuals can make a change and work for world peace .I have improved both professionally and personally. On my return I am going to utilize the hands-on techniques and teachers’ websites, to apply more technology to diversify my classes. The exchange has broadened my mind with knowledge of world cultures, of my own identity and my own character. I feel stronger, full of ideas and energy to work.



Out of America

Az sam amerikanka

Yee-Tsun Jean Lee

Fulbright Exchange Teacher of English Language
 „Bertolt Brecht“ Foreign Language High School, Pazardzhik, Bulgaria
 AY 2006-2007

Last week, I accidentally found myself at a mandolin band concert. I was in a beautiful yellow room, with moulding around the edges, a little rococo on the ceiling, a little plain everywhere else. Elderly Bulgarians surrounded me as I stood next to the wall, and we listened to traditional music created by a band of mandolins, guitars, accordions, and the most deadpan drummer I have ever seen. (He came to life briefly when he switched to the tambourine, emitting a piercing whistle as he picked it up.) My student had invited me to hear her play the piano before the band, not knowing that I would consider myself lucky to stay for the main attraction. I grinned, tapped my foot to the upbeat music, and wagged my head sideways like the rest of the audience.

* * *

I applied for the Fulbright last October, knowing that there were greener pastures outside of New York City, but not sure where. Having traveled throughout western Europe and bits of Asia, I thought that my next target might be Eastern Europe. In spring, I received the call from the Fulbright offices.

„Hi Jean, this is G. from Fulbright. We have a possible placement for you in Bulgaria.“

!!

Well why not? I thought. I bet I have a lot to learn in Bulgaria.

* * *

On the first day of school, I stopped outside the classroom. „Here we go,“ I thought, took a deep breath, and wielding my gradebook like a shield, opened the door and strode in. Shining faces turned toward me, and the students who weren't standing quickly popped up. They fell utterly silent and stood at attention as my stride turned into a tiptoe to the desk.

„Uh... good morning.“ I muttered to the desk.

„GOOD MORNING!“ They chorused, and beamed as I looked up.

Hm, I thought. I could get used to this.

* * *

The other day, I singlehandedly stopped an entire playground full of elementary schoolchildren during recess, simply by attempting to slump by with my Billa bags. I had decided to take a longer, as yet unexplored route home (why I would do that while carrying grocery bags and a maxipak of toilet paper is still beyond me), and trudged by the school. When the little girls called to each other to stop playing and check out the Kitaika (Chinese girl) walking by, I smiled bravely and lifted one grocery-laden hand, while continuing to walk. They held their rubber balls and watched. One waved back tentatively. „Not bad,“ I thought. I had almost made it to the outside

perimeter of the school when a gaggle of eight year old boys caught up with me.

„Kak ce kazvash?“ A towheaded one asked me, leaning back to look into my face.

„As sum Jean,“ I said.

They continued to cross examine me, and I continued to answer in my beleaguered baby Bulgarian (phrase accredited to Brian Grandjean, of „New York“ and Sofia fame). After a few adrenaline laden minutes, a teacher came by and gently freed me from their verbal grasp.

One escaped briefly and ran back to toward me. „Kak ce kazvash?“ he said again, urgently.

„Jean.“ I smiled fondly at him.

„Djiyn,“ he repeated, furrowing his brow in concentration as the teacher returned and drew him gently away.

* * *

Albana wouldn't let me go. The director tried to body block her and shoo'ed her away as we danced to Tupac in the Roma Fondatsiya, but she darted around him and grabbed my hands. She towed at me with great determination until we arrived at the same spot we'd been dancing in all night, four meters away. Smiling up at me, she grasped her plastic cup of fanta, and indicated my plastic cup of rakiya. „Lazdrave,“ she said, tipping her cup against mine, and we grinned and drank.

Earlier in the evening, the Peace Corps Associate Director of the Fondatsiya drew me into the building. „This is Jean,“ she said, introducing me to everybody. They smiled and pulled at their cigarettes, asking me „Otkade?“ and expressing gratification at the „New York“ answer.

On the wall, there was Chinese writing on red paper, with simple frames. „What's this?“ I asked the director excitedly. „Ah, they're from China,“ he said, as the Peace Corps volunteer translated. „They say Roma Fondatsiya . Another Peace Corps volunteer brought them back from her travels.“ I told him they were beautiful. He replied, without correcting me, that they're beautiful because they're from a friend.

* * *

At the vegetable bazaar in Pazardzhik, there were chestnuts. A beckoning milk chocolate brown, they gleamed and winked in the sun, and at me, I thought. „Well, who needs an open fire?“ I said aloud to myself, causing some people to cast sidelong glances at the crazy Amerikanka. „I'll just roast these in my oven. It'll be a nice fall treat.“

After I popped them in the oven, I realized that I was unfortunately sans nutcracker. My shoulders slumped, until I remembered my hammer.

„All riiight,“ I thought, reaching into my hardware cabinet. Hammer in hand and grin on my face, I headed back to the kitchen, put it down on the counter. I was ready.

An hour passed. I was on the computer chatting on the internet with my brother when I heard the first pop.

„Something in the kitchen exploded. I think it was a chestnut.“ I wrote.

„Go go go!“ He wrote back immediately. I think he was still fresh from our conversation last week when I informed him that I had set fire to my apartment. (How was I to know that the outlet couldn't support a computer, a mobile phone charger, a television, an oil heater, and my brand spanking new electric heater? The fire was quickly put out with my flailing sweatshirt, and there are only minor marks on the linoleum. The double shot of rakiya I had immediately afterward saved me from any emotional scarring.)

Comparatively, I was only mildly worried about the chestnuts. Running into the kitchen, I grabbed my mitts and opened the oven door cautiously, shielding my face with one hand. A moment passed. Another. Giving up on sheltering myself, I reached into the oven and took hold of the tray.

A chestnut promptly exploded, showering me and the kitchen floor with bits of itself.

Well, that wasn't so bad, I thought. Good thing I wear glasses.

Another one exploded.

I dropped the pan on the counter and ran for the living room, listening to a few more pop and christen my floor. When the dust had settled, I tentatively stuck my head around the corner of the kitchen, retrieved the pan, banged a few open with my trusty new nutcracking device, and feasted.

Out of America

What Am I Doing Here?

Brian Grandjean

Fulbright Exchange Teacher of English Language

National High School for Ancient Languages and Cultures, Sofia, Bulgaria

AY 2006-2007

For the past six months, I've been a Fulbright Exchange Teacher in Bulgaria. I live in the capital city of Sofia and teach English at the National School for the Study of Ancient Languages and Cultures. So far, my Bulgarian Fulbright experience has been very positive. I've discovered Sofia; traveled around Bulgaria; visited Istanbul; and made friends with many interesting people. Thankfully, my job is challenging and rewarding. Each day is a new adventure, and I'm finally starting to feel at home in Sofia.

Living here has made me feel more alive, more relaxed and more sensitive to the impacts of globalization. I haven't experienced many physical hardships in Bulgaria, but one must be mentally tough to survive here. The Iron Curtain fell in 1989; but the mental, physical, and cultural effects of four decades of Communist dictatorship are still visible in Bulgaria. One has only to spend a day roaming around Sofia to feel that- not so long ago- something went terribly wrong here. You can feel it and see it in the eyes of the people. If you live here long enough, it becomes a part of you-



the hope, the anxiety- the deep self-awareness. At times it can be quite unsettling to be in a country where smiles are rare; the customer is always wrong; cars trump pedestrians' rights; and people gather in large numbers to protest nature conservation. She may be a little rough around the edges, but Bulgaria is also full of many wonderful surprises. I feel very privileged to have lived in such an amazing albeit misunderstood country. She will always be a part of me.

I first came to Bulgaria in June 1999,

arriving on the day the Kosovo War ended. Sofia's airport still resembled a bleak military airstrip, and NATO planes flew overhead. Perhaps it was ironic that I had landed in this troubled region as a Peace Corps Volunteer. For the next three months, I lived in a small town with a beautiful Bulgarian host-family. I attended Peace Corps training sessions- eight hours a day- with sixty other Americans. Then it was onto the Black Sea for two years, where I served as an English teacher at a technical school. This was all happening at a time when an American living in Bulgaria was still something of an anomaly. It was also a time of great despair for the Bulgarian people. At times, the despair became palpable and contagious, and it caused me quite a few anxiety attacks. But whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger, right?

Looking back, my Peace Corps service was a very happy and fruitful time in my life. I lived in a new culture; learned Bulgarian; made friends; met President Clinton; got a dog; fell in love with a girl- and a country. Amazingly, after getting my French bulldog, I never did have another anxiety attack.

When my Peace Corps service ended in 2001, I returned home to the United States (with my bulldog.) I fell into a teaching job; made money; gained weight; lost the girl- but still have the dog. And I still love Bulgaria. She has taught me so much about life. Now, as a Fulbright Exchange Teacher in Bulgaria, people often ask me: „Brian- why have you returned to Bulgaria?“ Well, it's not an easy question to answer- but I'll try.

After five years of teaching ESOL and Social

Studies at the same high school in the United States, I felt competent but complacent. I was ready for a change. I didn't want to quit my job- it's still fun. I just wanted to get away for a while and recharge my batteries.

The Fulbright Teacher Exchange has given me the opportunity to put my American job on hold for one year and teach in Bulgaria. I still get paid my American salary, but now I'm getting paid to teach in a totally different environment. It hasn't been easy- I work a lot harder in Bulgaria than I did in the United States. But the everyday challenges of living and teaching in Sofia have shaken me out of my American complacency. Already I believe this experience has made me a much better teacher, forcing me to use skills that I haven't had to use since I was fresh out of graduate school- eight years ago!

Like many of the American Fulbrighters here, this is not my first time in Bulgaria. There is something unique about Bulgaria that draws Americans back here. To be honest, I feel a bit offended when Bulgarians call me crazy for returning here. For me, the fast-paced life in the United States was driving me crazy. I love my country, but like many Americans I often feel isolated and overworked in the land of the Protestant work ethic. In Bulgaria, I feel comfortable- mentally and physically. Bulgarians seem more hospitable and down-to-earth. In Bulgaria, there is a strong tradition of making time for family and friends; there is a deep love for the arts; and the cafe culture is alive and well.

Today, Bulgaria is still in a state of social and economic recovery. For many Bulgarians,

life is filled with stress and anxiety; but for me, Bulgaria is the place where I feel at peace. I feel optimistic and free here. This is very strange because Bulgarians have been labeled the unhappiest people in the world- yet they are also the most hospitable.

In Bulgaria, my days are always full. I teach English four days a week- from 8 to 2. After school, I usually eat lunch and try to do some work: build my website, write, grade papers, or just do chores around my apartment. I meet with my Bulgarian language tutor one day a week. Then there is always some task that requires me to wander the streets of Sofia only to discover some new part of this gritty and historic city. I walk almost everywhere, though Sofia's public transportation system is very safe and dependable.

My evenings are usually spent going out with friends, or sitting at home watching American movies (with Bulgarian subtitles.) On weekends, I like to relax and/or travel around Bulgaria. The buses and trains here are quite comfortable and efficient, and one can usually get to any place in the country in eight hours or less. Also, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission has been very good about organizing fun field trips for us.

I cannot stress this enough: Bulgaria is a beautiful country, rich in natural beauty and cultural traditions. There is no shortage of interesting places to visit in this hidden jewel of the Balkans- and yet most Americans can't even find Bulgaria on a map!

It's been seven years since I first came to Bulgaria as a young Peace Corps Volunteer.

Now, as a Fulbrighter, I've noticed many changes between the old Bulgaria and the new Bulgaria. In the old Bulgaria, there was very little new construction; now, in the new Bulgaria, there are countless new construction projects, especially in Sofia. Until this summer, I had never seen so many Bulgarian men working in one place before- one would think that they were getting ready to host the Olympics, or join the European Union. In fact, I was lucky enough to be in Sofia last month when Bulgaria did join the European Union. On that cold New Year's Eve in Sofia's main square, surrounded by crowds of cheering Bulgarians, fireworks bursting overhead, it felt wonderful to be an eyewitness to Bulgarian history. Never before had I seen so many smiling Bulgarians!

Other changes I've noticed include the appearance of American-style malls and supermarkets; an apparent boom in the number of Bulgarian babies; and an increase in the number of pet dogs. Could these be signs that Bulgarians now have more money to spend? Unfortunately, I've also noticed the rise of a new nationalist undercurrent in Bulgarian society, a right wing, populist mindset that includes racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment, and a hatred of the European Union.

Although many Bulgarians are afraid to be optimistic about their future, I believe Bulgaria is on the right road to creating a better quality of life for all Bulgarians. However, there is still much work to be done. Corruption, organized crime, poverty, and street dogs remain persistent problems. I am very concerned about the overdevelopment of buildings and

hotels on the beaches and in the mountain regions. These ugly package-tourist complexes are an example of the kind of disgusting, shortsighted capitalism that threatens to destroy Bulgaria's natural beauty. I hope that Bulgaria's entry into the European Union will help to address these problems. Yet despite my concerns, I am still very hopeful about Bulgaria's future. I have seen first-hand how far Bulgaria has come in just five years, and there are many good people working here for positive change.

I would like to think that I am one of those people working for positive change in Bulgaria. In my own small way, I hope that my Fulbright exchange will help to foster world peace and mutual understanding, or at least widen my own view of the world. As I write this, my Bulgarian exchange teacher in the United States, Vesselina, is teaching my students and living in my apartment. I hope that- at the end of one year- Vesselina will have gained an honest appreciation of America. I hope that she returns to Bulgaria a better teacher, more enlightened and more sympathetic to the human condition that we all share. In the meantime, I will continue to do my best for her students in Sofia.

Just the other day, after a particularly offensive remark made by one of my Bulgarian students, I was lecturing the class (again) on how wrong it is to label all Roma (Gypsies) as criminals. Even if there is only one Gypsy who is not a criminal, I reasoned to them, then you cannot rightly say that all Gypsies are criminals. The students admitted that they all know some Gypsies who are not criminals. After class, one of my students approached me. She's a young girl with blue eyes and blonde hair. She told me that she's half-Gypsy. „You are a good man, Mr. Grandjean,“ she said. „Bulgaria needs people like you.“

On my walk home from school that day, I stopped to feed some street dogs. I always carry meat in my pockets for the street dogs, even though I'm normally a vegetarian. Most street dogs are very wary of humans, having been beaten and starved for so long. But I find that if I bend down and speak softly, the dogs come and eat from my hand. Alas, there are a hundred reasons to despair in Bulgaria, but when I have a good day here it really stays with me. And for some reason, I tend to only remember the good days.



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