

10th Fulbright International Summer Institute

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Official FISI Opening From left to right: Dr. Julia Stefanova, FISI Director; Petya Evtimova, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Youth and Science; Ken Moskowitz, PAO, US Embassy; Alexander Kravarov, Mayor of Bansko; Ivanka Izankova, Program Director, America for Bulgaria Foundation

This year marked the tenth anniversary of the Fulbright International Summer Institute. It started in 2002 and since then it has developed as a unique Bulgarian contribution to the Fulbright program. In 2010 the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange received the Fulbright Innovator Award by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the US Department of State 'in recognition of outstanding innovation in designing and implementing the Fulbright International summer Institute.'

Since 2002 FISI has hosted 579 participants from 39 countries. The FISI courses have been conducted by a total of 81 lecturers from 41 institutions from Bulgaria, the US, UK, Canada, and Ecuador.

The tenth FISI took place in the town of Bansko on August 8-20. It attracted 90 participants from 15 countries: Bulgaria, the U.S., Albania, Belarus, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Pakistan, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, UK and Ukraine. The Institute provided yet another example of successful collaboration between institutions: the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, Sofia University, Michigan University in Ann Arbor, *America for Bulgaria* Foundation, and the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI University) that gave ECTS credits to all FISI courses.

A total of 13 multidisciplinary courses were conducted by distinguished lecturers from prestigious universities and institutions in the US, Bulgaria, Pakistan and Ecuador: Harvard University, Michigan University, Fordham University, Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, Colorado Technical University, Universidad del Pacífico, University of Peshawar, Sofia University, Phelps Dunbar LLP, Foresight Alliance, Communications and Human Resources Development Center. Intensive Bulgarian language training was offered to the new group of US grantees. US Ambassador James Warlick delivered a lecture on US-BG relations, and PAO Ken Moskowitz conducted a workshop on practical public diplomacy. A special two-day orientation was organized for the English Teaching Assistants to help their cultural and professional adjustment in Bulgaria. The group included forty-one participants: American ETAs, mentor teachers, high school principals, and lecturers. They discussed a wide variety of topics, e.g. the Bulgarian educational system, classroom culture, teaching methodology and techniques, assessment systems, time management, cultural differences etc.

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FISI class



Orientation for English Teaching Assistants

Along with the rigorous study component, FISI 2011 offered an exciting cultural program. The highlights of the weekend were a one-day trip to the Rila Monastery and a visit to the Rozhen Monastery and the town of Sandanski. Participants had also the unique pleasure to attend jazz concerts and jam-sessions since the first FISI week coincided with the annual International Jazz Festival in Bansko.

The 10th Fulbright International Summer Institute was a memorable event that once again fulfilled its manifold goals: to promote the Fulbright idea and program; to promote international education; to improve the quality of education; to introduce the new US Fulbright grantees to the Bulgarian cultural environment; to promote Bulgaria to the world by showing its beautiful nature, long history, rich culture, and promising future.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to all FISI lecturers and students for their excellent work; to the US Ambassador and the US Embassy officers for their support of and contribution to FISI; to the members of the Commission Board for their commitment to FISI.

Special thanks are due to the *America for Bulgaria* Foundation for the continuing financial support of FISI that made possible its steady growth.



Trip to Rila Monastery



Trip to the Fish Lake, Pirin Mountains



Trip to Rozhen Monastery



Farewell party



FISI Closing Awarding certificates to 2011 FISI graduates



FISI Closing Awarding certificates to 2011 FISI graduates



2011 FISI participants

Fulbright Office News

Cultural Orientation for American Fulbright Grantees

The cultural orientation for the AY 2011-12 American Fulbright grantees was held at the Fulbright Commission office on September 30 and October 1, 2011 in Sofia. Participating in the orientation were: Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission, Ken Moskowitz, Counselor for Public Affairs and Chairman of the Fulbright Commission Board, and Thomas Huey, Security Officer at the US Embassy.

The two-day orientation included discussions, a Q & A session, a visit to the National History Museum, and a one-day trip to the old town of Plovdiv.

American and Bulgarian Fulbright alumni, US Embassy officials, and representatives of grantees' host institutions attended the welcome reception in honor of the new U.S. Fulbrighters on September 30, 2011.



The U.S. grantees in AY 2011-12



Trip to Plovdiv

U.S. University Presentations and Interviews



Presentations from Stanford University and Wellesley College



Fulbright Office News

Fulbright Accomplishments

“YARN” Website

YARN" is a story project developed by three English Teaching Assistants, Dena Fehrenbacher, Kate Maley and Hillary Traugh. A number of short audio interviews with Bulgarian high school students create one big story that showcases youth voices and relates the unique experience, as well as the universality, of being a teenager in Bulgaria. The "YARN" website <http://yarn.fulbright.bg/>, supported by the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, is a useful resource for current English Teaching Assistants.



ETAs Hillary Traugh, Dena Fehrenbacher and Kate Maley (from left to right) present their project idea at the ETA Wrap-up Seminar, Sofia, April 28-29, 2011

Bulgarian Fulbright Alumni Association Membership Form



Full name

Home address

Field, Academic Rank and Degree

Present Place and Address of Employment

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Phone, Fax

Type, Year and Duration of Grant

Place and Name of Host Institution

Please complete and return to the Fulbright Commission office address.

To Chicago and Back

As if Living on an Island in America

Prof. Oleg Gotchev

Professor Oleg Gotchev is head of the Department of Mural painting at the National Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia and lecturer in mural painting at NAFA, New Bulgarian University in Sofia, and University of Veliko Turnovo. He has participated in numerous national and international presentations and exhibitions. Oleg Gotchev is a recipient of prestigious fellowships, grants and awards in Bulgaria, Hungary, South Korea, and the United States. In AY 2010-2011 he was awarded a Fulbright grant for lecturing and research at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, PA.

I guess that for everyone the first visit to the United States is something extremely exciting. We know much more about this country than about others across the world because of the enormous success of its movie industry. Therefore, everyone leaves for America with a previously formed idea of it. It is precise or vague depending on the person's age. I set off for the US with a significant "load" of years and experience behind my back. I readily admit that I was nevertheless amazed by the real, genuine face of this country. For this reason, I would like to recommend the reader to take advantage of any opportunity to visit it, because it is just as varied as it is vast. I will make an attempt to share with you my modest experience as a contribution to that colorful puzzle called USA.

Upon my arrival I was pleasantly surprised that a member of faculty, Assoc. Prof. Isabelle Champlin, was there to pick me up from Buffalo Airport. I have a significant experience with official trips in Europe, but I was given such a warm welcome only in cold and distant Finland.

Then I was shocked by the news that there was no other way to reach Bradford, my final destination, no other means of transport, except by car (no taxi or even bus lines). After I had shared my impressions with fellow-lecturers soon after my arrival, they simply told me that there was no public transport because it wasn't necessary – everybody had at least one car. This type of solid, rational thinking has since revealed itself in all aspects of the American way of life, which I have witnessed or taken part in.



Bradford is a small city, almost at the northern border of the State of Pennsylvania. It is not only a small one, but also the coldest city in the state. The university campus is outside the city and a bus connects them, which runs every hour but only during the day. I spent two months in never-ending snowfall, and temperatures never climbed above zero (Celsius). In whatever direction you looked, the ocean of white snow spread to the horizon itself, the only thing showing from the snow being the gray buildings of the dormitories, houses and study halls of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, whose rooftops were connected to the snow cover with thousands of icicles. For this reason, they clean the sidewalks and roads every morning, sometimes even twice. I was astounded by the logic of having a standard size for everything – there are mini snow-ploughs the size of the sidewalk and others the size of half a road. The sidewalks and roads are themselves completely straight, so that cleaning by machines is made easier.

The houses and yards in America are big and the roads – wide. At the beginning this seemed rather wasteful to me. Then this too found its simple explanation – much of the American land is still wild and unpopulated. That is why all the men here have mastered either fishing or hunting, or both.

In the same way I have discovered why no one here drinks alcohol – simply because they all drive. The very few who are given a ride don't feel comfortable drinking if the others don't drink, so they all just don't drink. In consequence, alcohol is not sold or served in Pennsylvania except for just a few concrete places. When Americans don't drink they communicate in a specific (sober) way, which inevitably reveals their Puritanism and even leads to some rigidity in their relations. At the same time the harsh climate has turned the citizens of Bradford into some of the kindest and most helpful people in the world, known for their friendliness and readiness to help anytime. The same thing is what brings together these people, cast in this remote location – they literally know each other's family trees and greet one another everywhere (which in Bulgaria happens only in the mountains among tourists or in the villages) and always by first name.

Because of its scale, isolation and remoteness, cultural life in this small city is marked by single events, visited by the same fans. The events are often top-level, popular American stars (for example, LeAnn Rimes who came from Los Angeles on tour with her hit *Can't Fight the Moonlight*) and bands (for example, Rain with their amazing Broadway show *A Tribute to The Beatles*, *The Second City Theatre* from Chicago) come to this city, as well as world-famous foreign performers. I should also mention the fantastic performance of the mixed drum and brass band *Drum Line* from Atlanta, which matched 100% my expectations for a gorgeous American show, exceeding them by another 100% with surprising and unique stage effects – contemporary and innovative, but at the same time very entertaining and attractive.

Another cultural fact, both surprising and pleasing, is that this small city is very active in the field of amateur art initiatives. The citizens of Bradford take part in such activities for to the pleasure of it and to bring joy to their fellow citizens and relatives. Theatre performances by amateur actors and actresses (for example, at the Bradford Little Theatre), high school students (from the local school), students (from Pitt-Brad University), etc. always seem to bring the excitement and charm of amateur art. Another impressive fact is the attitude of the audience, who are ready to respond to any suggestions and improvisations coming from the stage, the exceptional enthusiasm for taking part and contributing to the atmosphere of togetherness in this community.

This sense of community felt in the sports and concert halls, the theatre stage is transferred to the American home, which is not only spacious and with numerous rooms, but also crowded with dogs (and dog hair) and children (and the concomitant laughter and noise). The Americans are noisy when having a party or enjoying themselves. They love to have many guests, usually friends and neighbors, or foreigners (mostly from neighboring Canada). I was invited to such a party at the place of my new American friends, Kristin Asinger and her husband Tim on the occasion of watching a Super Bowl game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Buffalo Bills. Alongside the above I managed to see what



Prof. Oleg Gotchev and his students in front of the collaborative mural "Human & Scholarship", University of Pittsburgh-Bradford

American TV commercials are like; so smartly and professionally made that they do not at all drive you out of the room, just the opposite – they entertain, give new ideas and inevitably attract. Then I realized what a huge business sector advertising is in the USA. On the following day they announced a record audience of the finals – 110 million viewers. It is perfectly clear that for the four hours of the game the most powerful corporations had broadcast their commercials shot with the biggest American movie stars.

I was lucky to be able to attend two birthday parties. The first one was Dick Kessel's – a dignified, aging man. His numerous relatives had gathered from all over America in a restaurant, so I had the chance to witness such a family celebration. I was most impressed with a young couple with five infants – five fair-haired, sweet creatures, with whom I shared a table.

The second party, for the birthday of our lovely host, Candy Graham, was launched with a gathering in a Mexican restaurant and continued at her house. The atmosphere was completely different in that huge house of seventeen rooms (still very cozy and arranged with taste and enthusiasm) – with light, muted music in the background, we played the game *Apples to Apples*, a new and entertaining experience for me. The generally peaceful atmosphere was occasionally interrupted only by healthy American laughter.

Certainly, the reader should not be left with the wrong impression that people here throw up parties all the time. Just the opposite. In the USA hard work always comes first. Everyone performs their tasks with diligence and enthusiasm. No one shirks their duty or rushes through a job. This general attitude is contagious and I must say that in the US I worked even more than I usually do in Bulgaria (taking into account that everyone who knows me, knows what a workaholic I am). For the period of my short stay (three months so



Art lecture and exhibition of Prof. Oleg Gotchev at the University of Pittsburgh-Bradford

far) I have dealt with an immense workload. Perhaps the reason is that when one does not waste time on meetings and discussions, as well as on watching television, there is much more time left for getting something done.

I still think that a more important factor is the general atmosphere and the organization of work in the USA.

However, the situation with the students at Pitt-Brad is slightly different. I will elaborate on this subject because many universities in Bulgaria imitate or attempt to approximate the American education system as one of the best in the world.

The higher education system here focuses rather on the student's individual assignments, the so-called self-study, or as we refer to it in Bulgaria, "out-of-class activities." The students' weekly schedule consists of 18 hours of attendance, half the Bulgarian one. That is why they arrive very early for the lectures (usually half an hour) and use every second of the allotted time, which is wonderful, but also very demanding on the lecturers. Unfortunately, the above theory is in reality not put into practice. The supposed active self-study simply does not take place, and where it does (with the more ambitious students), it is rather modest. On the other hand, sports activities as well as other students' activities are highly valued and strongly encouraged. Therefore, I recommend that "the American experience" in education be reviewed when applied on other continents and in other countries, with other traditions and training system. When I was a student at the Bulgarian NAA, we had a schedule of 48 hours within a six-day work week. And they never sufficed. We used to work from 6 a.m. till midnight when working on semester or annual assignments, or when we had concrete sculpture assignments (casting). Today's Bulgarian students have 36 hours of attendance within a five-day work week, which they do not fully use - this inevitably affects the quality of the study process and the final results of art education.

Another specificity of art classes here (considered a subject here, just like mural painting) is that they are a "minor" option, i.e. a compulsory elective subject of study. As a result, none of the students has any intention whatsoever of becoming an artist and most of them have never touched brushes and paints in their lives. This definitely causes serious problems for the execution of the curriculum (which is at the same time quite ambitious), especially in terms of practice – not only the design, but also the execution of the mural on the university premises, the latter being aspired for and encouraged by the university management as represented by the President of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, Dr. Livingston Alexander, and his deputy Dr. Steven Hardin. Personally, I was very happy with their clear understanding of the significance of mural art, because there can be nothing better, more tangible and visible, notable, beautifying and enriching for any architectural environment than a mural.

Still, every disadvantage has its advantage. In my case, this is the fact that the American students are more open and enthusiastic about working as a team, under the supervision of their professor, in comparison with Bulgarian students, who are studying for professional artists and whom we encourage to work individually, on their own projects and ideas. They would find it very hard to compromise their artistic egoism and ambitions in order to take part in someone else's project or a project supervised by another author. In contemporary art, however, in view of today's globalization processes, collective projects are gaining ever more in significance and play an important role in every art, not only in mural painting. It is work on international teams and the creation of joint works that is one of globalization's manifestations. The interweaving of cultural differences and specificities, traditions and realities, different ways of thinking and feeling, and the unique end product of this integration, is the goal pursued by this type of contemporary projects. The same was the motivation behind the collective mural, designed and completed in 2010 in the Mural

Painting Department at NAA, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Kong Ho, sponsored by the Fulbright Program.

Here, in Bradford, this type of project is not only possible, but compulsory. The students attentively followed my lectures on mural painting in contemporary global cultural processes and trends and had the opportunity to witness the birth of the design of a collective mural through specially prepared lectures and presentations.

Moreover, together with Assoc. Prof. Ho we connected Bulgaria and America via a "mural bridge" by creating an open blog, to which we uploaded the above-mentioned materials. Thus the birth of the mural design became accessible for all mural painting students in NAA, UVT and NBU, who commented, asked questions and made proposals together with their American fellow-students.

The American students joined in the execution of the mural project by research, selection and creation of their own images and symbols, and are currently working on their completion on the spot – the central entrance lobby of Swarts, the main administrative and lecture hall of the university. They acquired solid knowledge in the field of contemporary mural painting and unprecedented experience, and established a true connection with this millennia-old art, which they will not forget and, as long as they live, will share the memory with their families .

All of the above, taking into account the extraordinary nature of my stay in the USA and the excess workload I have had, is fully understandable. The project presented in my application with the Fulbright Commission in Bulgaria, which was enthusiastically approved, had proposed only a lecture series and research into the state and processes in contemporary American mural art in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia in particular.

When I arrived here, however, it turned out that in addition to the lectures I was expected to teach a full-fledged mural painting course, including the design and execution in 1:1 scale of a collective mural artwork. Unfortunately, my initial idea for the creation of a two-faced, modular, mobile, and interactive mural installation was not approved for financial and technological reasons. It turned out that the modules cannot be produced in Bradford, that there isn't even a canvas printing service, so that everything required trips to Philadelphia. This necessitated the return to the classical, static, and single-faced mural.

For a month and a half I developed the design with the cooperation of my 15 students, who had to find or create 40 images each, as symbols of the 19 study disciplines taught in the building. The final design includes 396 "images" (schemes, logos, photos, historical sights, portraits, etc.), which helped me in a paradoxical and unique contemporary way to reach back through the past to Egyptian pictogram communication.

In addition to working on the mural design around the clock, I prepared and opened a big solo exhibition (of over 200 works) dedicated to my paintings, drawings and murals, displayed parallel to the recent works of 14 renowned Bulgarian fellow-muralists. On this occasion, I encountered once again the small-city problem, which made it necessary to travel to Olean in the neighboring New York State, in order to buy anything more specialized (for example, cardboard for mounts). Since I have no car here, I had to ask colleagues for help. This is how I realized that if you have no car in such remote American areas, you are completely lost.

The goal of my exhibition was not only to acquaint the American audience with the daily work and achievements of a professional artist, but also to present his milieu of art and fellow-artists – i.e. a broader and panoramic picture of mural painting in Bulgaria today. The opening included new elements for me, such as a speech and presentation of the concept behind the exhibition; answering the numerous questions of the audience; a reception with exquisite food and soft drinks. The exhibition was opened in the largest university campus building, Blaisdell Hall, which should not leave the impression of any isolation. Only 20 feet from the gallery, in the same building, there is a concert hall, where three days earlier the famous Russian National Ballet Theatre had performed Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliette. The entire art-savvy audience in the city attended the performance and the forthcoming opening of my solo exhibition was announced. My colleague and new friend Prof. Fumio Kobayashi shared with me that he was very happy because in Japan he would never be able to get tickets for an event of that scale, such as a performance of the Russian National Ballet Theatre, regardless of the price.

On March 24 – 27, 2011, a meeting was held in Pittsburgh of all current "Fulbrighters" in the State of Pennsylvania. Since Bradford has no bus transport, I was given a drive there and back by colleagues and students with their cars. Pittsburgh is not only as big as Sofia, but it also has its lively, noisy and dynamic atmosphere. The meeting gave me the opportunity to meet young people from Europe and Asia – all of them have been awarded the prestigious Fulbright grants and are top specialists in their fields, ambitious and active persons. The combination with the remarkable museums in the city - Carnegie Museum of Art and Natural History, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical garden, the discussions with colleagues from other universities and organizations - Penn State Allegheny, Urban Youth Action, the detailed presentation of the exceptional architectural landmark of the University of Pittsburgh – the Cathedral of Learning., the visit to the Latin-American Cultural Festival and Pittsburgh's night life - all of this confirmed my feeling that for the past three months I have worked on the remote, cold, and snowy island in the vast American "ocean," called Bradford, whose only warmth has come from his people.

Disclaimer:

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To Chicago and Back

Dr. Elena Marushiakova

Dr. Elena Marushiakova is associate professor and chair of the Department of Balkan Ethnology at the Ethnographic Institute and Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. There she created a specialised Romani/Gypsy Studies Library with Archive (www.studiiromani.org) and Romani Studies Center. Dr. Marushiakova is engaged in several national and international research projects and has a number of publications about gypsies in Bulgaria, the Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe. In 2009 she received the Fulbright New Century Scholars Award.



of time in various countries, documents from Romani organisations, hand-outs from the meeting, and other documents held in Romani archives, established at higher institutions.

Such documentation centres exist in several places in the world in different forms. Among the main centres associated with university and research system two of them must be emphasized in particular, which are in the background of my project: in Sofia this is the Studii Romani Centre, at the Ethnographic Institute and Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and in the United States, it is Romani Archives and Documentation Center (RADOC) at the University of Texas. The establishing of specialised archives at Universities, devoted to a vulnerable community that strives for emancipation and which are used by scholars, students and members of the minority in question shows clearly the role of the University as Innovation Driver and Knowledge Centre. Parallel with my main research topic "Beginning and Development of Romani Movement", my aim is to study also the influence and role of University archival and research work for benefit of civic society and for preservation of historical memory of the community.

My trip to the U.S. was conducted within the Fulbright New Century Scholars, VI Selection, 2009 Award from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State and the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, and will end on March 28, so I am writing these lines from my temporary home in Texas. The topic of my research is: "The Beginning and Development of the Romani Movement". For centuries after they came to Europe the Romanies ("Gypsies") were subjected to various types of state policy. Gradually and relatively slowly ideas emerged in the Romani community about their place in the society where they are living and the potential for their development as a united community. The Roma are internally segmented as a community and live in different countries with different social and political environments, nevertheless the idea of the unity of their community and its equality to the rest of the nations has emerged in modern times. This conceptual development is complex, multidirectional and influenced by various factors. The ideas are most often perceived under the "outside" influence of the social environment and the Roma often seek analogies with other nations.

My project includes an overview of the main political ideas for development of the Romani community – from the first historical accounts till the recent created concept of the Romani "nation without a state" (non-territorial nation) as opposed to the "nation-state". The project analyses whether we can talk about a straightforward and unidirectional development of one underlying paradigm, which would gradually develop over time, or not. The phenomenon of a long search and testing of many options, mutually crossing, complementing, combining and sometimes even contradicting one another are analysed on the basis of respective academic literature, Romani journals and/or newspapers published in different periods

I arrived in Texas in January, escaping from the European cold, snowy winter into a beautiful warm time, according our perceptions into real spring. After an initial period of adaptation, of resolving accommodation issues, Internet connection, telephone, etc. which were promptly arranged with the help of my host Prof. Ian Hancock, head of the Romani Archives and Documentation Center at The University of Texas at Austin, I started my research work. RADOC is located on the campus in Calhoun Hall 420 and it is the largest collection of its kind in the world. It consists of over 10,000 books, monographs, bound articles, papers and letters, prints, transparencies, photographs, audio- and video-recorded material, framed and unframed prints and documents as well as many other non-media items. It began to be assembled in London in 1962 and has existed as an accessible academic repository since 1976, the first year that Romani Studies was taught at The University of Texas. The Department of Linguistics has kindly provided larger premises to house some of the collection, it has now seriously outgrown them and the need for special and staff expansion is clear. As the only university-based body regularly to receive governmental and other official reports on the condition of Romanies throughout the world, it remains the leading U.S. facility for Romani Studies. The university's Humanities

Research Center (the Harry Ransom Center) houses in addition the Rupert Croft-Cooke Romani collection, while both the Perry-Castañeda and the Undergraduate libraries on campus also have substantial Roma-related holdings. Additionally, some music- and art-related materials are located in the Fine Arts Library.

The University of Texas is in the process of creating the country's first PhD in Romani Studies. A doctoral portfolio in this area already exists in the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies. Together with this an undergraduate course in Romani Studies (listed as "Gypsy Language and Culture") is offered nearly every year in either the Fall or the Spring semester, while specialized seminars are periodically available as conference courses at the graduate level. The home department is Linguistics, and the undergraduate course is cross-listed with Asian Studies, European Studies, Ethnic Studies, Radio-Television-Film, Religious Studies, Anthropology and Sociology. Interest in the subject is extremely high not only

in the United States, but also worldwide. The Romani Studies course has a clear potential to develop into a separate discipline or interdisciplinary study track, through which could be prepared specialists not alone for needs of the United States, but also for other countries in the world. The University of Texas has established excellent cooperation with colleagues working in the same field not only in the U.S. but also in other countries around the world and thanks to the accumulated material and documentation facilities could further expand its activities as a world center for training and specialization in Romani studies. This unique center is visited each year by scholars from different countries; there are excellent computer and work-space facilities, which also I am using actively.

During my work at the University of Texas I was constantly bothered by parallels with our situation in Bulgaria. The Studii Romani Center at Ethnographic Institute and Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences has also a significant library and archive (although not so rich as the RADO), offers training to graduate students and post-docs, is annually visited by scholars, PhD and Postdoc students from around the world, but unlike Texas, it receives neither government nor the Institute support, and in the current situation of imminent reforming of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences normal operation became almost impossible, and his entire future existence is under question. Throughout my stay in the U.S. I received alarming news from Sofia, which only furthers my growing worry about the future development of Europe's only research, documentation and educational center in the field of Romani Studies set up in Bulgaria.

During my stay in the United States I visited also other institutions that offer limited courses in Romani Studies or courses with Roma content - Chicago University, where Romani Studies is taught as a course of lectures in the Center for East European and Russian/



Dr. Elena Marushiakova with Prof. Ian Hancock, University of Texas at Austin

Eurasian Studies and University of California, Riverside, where the Romani studies are included in Global Studies. At both universities I gave public lectures on Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, which were met with great interest not only by students but also by professors and University staffs and the general public. While in Texas I participated in an international symposium on Roma organized by The Center for European Studies and by RADO.

I was impressed by the exceptionally good working and living conditions for teachers and students, excellent facilities (each auditorium equipped with multimedia, student laboratories, libraries, student centres, etc.).

The variety of forms in which the Roma topic is included in the university teaching system in the United States is impressive - as a separate course, open to students from several disciplines (the Texas case), or as part of a course of lectures of individual professor, interested in the topic (case in

Chicago and California). The most comprehensive is the approach of University in Texas.

The main lesson from what I saw in the U.S. and what I would like to be introduced in Bulgaria is the clear understanding and combining of the three main missions of the university - education, research and work for the benefit of the civic society and the communities. In Bulgaria, the universities are mostly carried out for educational and to some extent research activity; the Academy of Sciences places first research and teaching (PhD students teaching) work, while the significance and importance of the third mission is undervalued. Effort in this direction (such as made at the Studii Romani Centre of Ethnographic Institute and the Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) is overlooked and often faces difficulties, which are hard to overcome. Even my current research stay in USA was not accepted as an official trip by governing body of the Ethnographic Institute and I was forced to use for it my holidays and my New Century Scholar Award was not included in the Annual report of my institute at all.

Naturally, during my stay in USA I gathered also many impressions purely as a tourist; I rented a car on weekends and travelled around, unforgettable will remain the Arizona desert, the huge and beautiful Lake Michigan, the Gulf of Mexico and many other places. As an ethnologist I was everywhere paying attention to the diversity of the population, which has preserved German, Czech and other languages and cultures in various towns in Texas. The bilingualism environment was of special interest; English is heard everywhere parallel with the Spanish language.

After nearly 3 months much remains still to be seen and many books and documents still to be read, so I am very much looking forward to the opportunity to return again to Texas.

Disclaimer The text is published in its original and unedited version.

Out of America

Dena Fehrenbacher

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AY 2010-2011

The Headmaster at our school doesn't speak English, and I still don't speak enough Bulgarian, so our interaction always falls into this delightful template; he bursts into a room with enormous energy, shouts several things in Bulgarian at several people, singles in on me, and begins shouting in Bulgarian at me. I panic, I wince and I stammer a few words that are most likely not what meant to say, and most certainly not related to anything he is talking about. Then, when I uncurl my posture and look around, the Bulgarians surrounding me are always laughing—and they translate the shouting as his newest joke.

"He just called you "Deenya." That means "watermelon," someone explained, and everyone laughed again. By this time the headmaster has already paced away with his usual energy, his long coat sweeping into the air behind him—leaving me in a cloud of awkward confusion and a preoccupation with oversized green fruit.

The initial awkward moments of living abroad need no explanation—American ex-pats universally experience the phenomenon of buying the wrong bus ticket, forgetting to weigh their fruit at the supermarket, and not understanding what the Bulgarian Headmaster is insistently shouting to you (eventually realizing that this is his normal tone of voice). But these moments center on superficial norms and linguistic confusion, and to recount only them is to ignore the fundamental differences between cultures—to never rub against any of the baser qualities that distinguish a people.

Popular travel writing, in my amateur opinion, is dishonest about this more substantial form of ex-pat awkwardness. The uncomfortable cultural disconnect, the self-conscious disparity in world views—these challenging situations are represented in pop-travel to be as weighty as a "National Lampoon's" Vacation movie with Chevy Chase, and as resolvable as the plot conflict in "Eat, Pray, Love." Real life – and particularly the life of this American ex-pat—is never as simple, predictable, or resolvable as pop-travel displays. Perspectives and emotions and fundamental beliefs are at stake. Life—and a year abroad—is a lot more random, confusing, and involved.

"You think like an American"

In September, I went to the Troyan monastery with a Bulgarian friend, the first monastery I visited in Bulgaria. "Troyanski Monastir" is nestled in the Balkan Mountains, the Stara Planina, in a place so green it brought back memories of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Smaller and less restored in com-



parison with larger tourist destinations like Rila Monastery, Troyan Monastery feels more intimate, humble, and, ultimately, more of a spiritual sanctuary.

What made even more of an impression was that Troyan Monastery stood in contrast to a diverse range of institutionalized religious settings I had encountered in America—many of which are marked by arguably American brands of corporatism, commercialism, and overwhelming numbers. I brought this up with my friend, attempting to draw out supporting anecdotes, but beginning to ramble—after a while I didn't know what point I was making, much less how to conclude my condescending rant.

His non-sequitur response caught me off guard—

"I think—I think you think like an American."

He drew the conversation away from the visible cultural differences to the idea that Americans and Bulgarians might have different expectations for religious experience in the first place. In this, he implied that while I was critiquing

American experience, the presuppositions in that critique were themselves fundamentally American.

"Maybe these things that Americans do...maybe that's what they need? Maybe that is what fits them?"

He saw what I didn't see—and so the conversation became awkwardly silent. We changed the subject and went to admire an exhibition of Troyan pottery. And his point set me off into quiet contemplation.

Though that moment and that conversation in Troyan were simple, it set an important precedent for the rest of my year. The cultural disconnect, confusion, discrepancy in expectation, and general awkward moments that would arise in the following months—though sometimes merely silly or ridiculous—all had something deeper at stake: I (usually) think like an American—and as diverse as the US is, there are (usually) dominant ways of thinking. And I can (usually) never fully anticipate what "fits" others, or how they think.

Months later, as the winter approached, the American Fulbright girls noticed that Bulgarian girls were beginning to wear leotards under their clothes to combat the cold. We agreed that it was a very clever idea, and a leotard would make a useful purchase.

But, alas, this resourceful trick only worked in theory. Simply put, I do not have a Bulgarian torso—I have a very non-Bulgarian genetic makeup which results in the fact that I just can't wear whatever Bulgarian clothes I see. And through this rather lame and cheesy metaphor, I can't just "put on"

the conventions of another culture and expect it to fit—and neither can I anticipate what might fit another person.

The process of living abroad for an extended period of time is the process of trying on a different country's leotards—or language, or customs, or melon-themed nicknames.

Sometimes these things fit, and sometimes they don't. You realize that your torso is just too long, or that you have been irremovably conditioned by the constraints expanses of American ideology and American expectations.

And the resulting process is tremendously awkward.

“Funny”

In October, I was asked to be a costume judge at the school's Halloween Dance. When I arrived, I was handed a paper on which I would evaluate the category of “sexiest costume.” I went to a conservative public high school where parent chaperones shone flashlights onto the high school dance floor to stop students from “freaking,” and where dress codes were designed to eliminate any pushing-the-envelope apparel; I didn't even think teachers were allowed to acknowledge the appearance of their students, much less give them an award for it. When it came to be my turn to judge, I shut down with awkwardness, and mumbled the only name of any of the contestants that I knew—a contestant which, unfortunately for me, was the most child-like, and to call the student sexy was far into the red zone of pedophilia. The other teachers were unenthusiastic about my decision—understandably so—and decided to give the award to a much sultrier angel and devil pair.

I didn't get any better at dealing with situations of cultural disconnect. In January, one of my classes asked me about the American suburbs. Having now observed teenage life in a small Bulgarian town for a handful of months, I jumped at the opportunity to draw comparisons with small-town American and small-town Bulgarian teenage life. At that time Arcade Fire's *The Suburbs* was nominated for a Grammy for “Album of the Year” in the US, so it seemed like a perfect means to explain American teenage discontent with planned cities, urban sprawl, and an adolescence supposedly summarized by wandering around a place of homogeneity with nothing to do.

Yes, yes, cultural exchange! I thought.

I printed out the lyrics, passed them out in class, and, with enthusiastic expectation, played the song over a portable speaker.

The class stared at me blankly.

“I just don't get it—why do people sing about this?” one student asked.

“People would never sing about this in Bulgaria,” another added.

I didn't know what to say—and then I realized what was going on. My students mostly live in block apartments. And most had never been outside of Bulgaria. And the American expectation of mobility is a distinctly American thing and so engrained in the concept of the American suburb. I was self-conscious and immediately shut the lesson down. Confused, the students still bore with me and the somber mood I suddenly threw upon the class.

Arcade Fire won the Grammy for Album of the Year a few weeks later. It felt like a kick in the face, a painful reminder of how insular my American perspective of teenage life was—and, since the band won, assumedly is for many Americans. An album that seemed so refreshing when I first heard it now seemed melodramatic, immature, and pretentious.

Yet—those words spoken at Troyan Monastery echo back. “Maybe that's what they need? Maybe that is what fits them?”—Them? Americans? Me?

As the year went on, I endeavored to clamp down on the perpetual awkwardness that burst up in these instances when cultural currencies just didn't equate. Figuratively, I wanted to trade my dollars in for leva—I endeavored to get inside the mind of not only Bulgarians, but *teenagers*. When I was a teenager, what did I really like to do? What would a genuinely fun experience in class involve?

Laughing, of course. Laughter is a global phenomenon.

I already had attempted to bring my own version of humor into the class—a particularly self-deprecating version. I frolicked and leaped in front of the board, making a fool of myself in my attempts to speak Bulgarian, and



Dena with her students

getting students to laugh—with me, or at me, but they laughed. But in February I decided to bring in more comic material, and I printed off pictures from a blog called, “Awkward Family Photos” as source material for English conversation.

I thought of myself in third person and anticipated their responses. Dena-turned-expert-cultural-voyager, aka the Watermelon-nickname-embracing under-age teacher, enthusiastically passed out the photos to groups of students in the first class.

Yet again, the class stared at me blankly—and this time, there were even a few gasps.

After I explained the assignment (to write captions for the photos) and attempted to dispel their shock by conveying that I was trying not to take myself or this assignment too seriously, some of the students loosened up and started laughing at the absurd pictures. One student in particular got really into the assignment—though one of the captions he wrote involved the phrase “satanic death vessels.” This student also once suggested in class that we talk more about death and pestilence, so I wouldn't say he is exactly a representative example.

Overall, there was a mixed reaction to the photos that I had originally thought were so funny. At the end of the class, one student approached me kindly: “If you want, I can send a link to some photos that are actually funny.” She was being very earnest and genuinely trying to help the poor Watermelon who didn't understand what was actually *smeshno*, or laughter-inducing. At this point I didn't even understand the difference between *smeshno* (funny) and *zabavno* (fun).

Looking back at these experiences and many others like them, they are “funny” in the denotation that they are odd and peculiar. But as I retell the anecdotes, I attempt to portray them as funny (humorous) through the fact that they were so funny (odd) against my American expectations. But perhaps a Bulgarian might find it funny (odd) that I portray them as funny (humorous), and so that oddity in itself might be funny (humorous). It became apparent that there is some strange blur between the odd and uncomfortable nature of a situation and the laughter-inducing quality of that situation—awkwardness preoccupies Americans, never ceasing to fuel the laugh-tracks of American sitcoms. But is simple awkwardness enough to entertain Bulgarians?

I brought the scenario up with an older class the following week: “What do Bulgarians find funny? What is Bulgarian humor?”

“Black humor,” they responded authoritatively.

“Oh, what's that?”

“Laughing at things that are tragic—like death,” they all said, with serious faces, in near unison.

“Oh...”

“That's funny.” I laughed at how much they terrified me.

Wearing Bulgarian Clothes

To play the Watermelon teacher and playfully moralize, I will conclude with this truism: clothes designed for Bulgarians will not always fit the average American. But, if trendy US hipsters can wear oversized Buddy Holly glasses, and if my 14-year-old Chalga-listening female students can look so suave with hair crimped like it's 1985, then I think there is some truth to this next adage: If one is self-aware about what they are wearing, one can pull off anything.

Earlier in the year I had the opportunity to take a weekend trip to Istanbul, where I met up with an old friend, a British student studying Art History at Cambridge who has an overwhelming love for Ottoman Art. I asked him how he felt about being English but loving all things Turkish.

"Well, as much as I say I want to be Turkish, I know that I can never be Turkish, and—in the end, there has to be some sort of playfulness in it. I can't take myself too seriously."

I understood, and pocketed this wisdom.

In February, the school had a second dance—a Valentine's Day dance. Still remembering the awkwardness of costume-judging at the Halloween Dance, I immediately shut down the idea of attending when some of my female students asked me to come. Yet, they persisted—offhand comments, facebook messages, etc—and I finally conceded. I was terrified, of course—I didn't know if it would be worse if they expected me to be a teacher there, chaperoning as the helicopter parents chaperoned my school dances, or if they expected me to attend as their friend. Both would be significantly uncomfortable.

But when I arrived a group of girls surrounded me, overjoyed that I had decided to come. They grabbed my hands and dragged me onto the dance floor—which was just the floor of the canteen rigged with lights to look like a club. Surrounded, I had no choice but to attempt to dance—err, to wobble in a way that no one might find inappropriate for a teacher. Dated hip-hop songs came on that had been played at my own high school dances, and I was able to feel comfortable in my own teen nostalgia.

But then speakers began pumping 80s rock songs that I had no experience dancing to outside of a non-goofy, non-ironic context. How *are* you actually supposed to dance to "The Final Countdown?" I tried to twirl an imaginary rave stick, and then I tried to dougie. Neither of these satisfied the throng of teenage girls that surrounded me, and several grabbed my hands and started moving them to the music for me. Feeling a bit like a puppet, and with three of my students yanking my arms to the rhythm of "The Final Countdown," I felt the potential for awkwardness escalating...

But then—*Vse Taya*. Over the course of the year, this has become my favorite Bulgarian phrase. *Whatever. It doesn't matter.* I attempted to dance with the pubescent teens, to not take myself too seriously.

At the end of the dance, the song "Kletva," by Shturcite came on. It's the school's song, the theme song to the movie *Vchera* made in 1988 about the school. All the students formed a big circle, put their arms around each other, and sung aloud to the music. They pulled me in and, stuck in their hug, I swayed and sang with them—err, I "sang." I awkwardly mouthed made-up words to the song like a blubbering idiot.

But no one cared. *Vse Taya*. I ended up having a very fun time.

The Process of Cultural Exchange

A common mistake for my Bulgarian students in their English language classes is confusing the words "funny" and "fun." Instead of saying, for example, "Learning English is fun," students might say, "Learning English is funny." In Bulgarian, funny and fun are the words *smeshno* and *zabavno* that I mentioned earlier, and aren't phonetic cousins like the two English words.

At first this students' mistake only had a grammatical significance for me. But now it seems to embody a lot of the situations I found myself in this year.



Martenitsi

Linguistic lessons and cultural exchanges don't always transfer the way that you want them to—and sometimes the sentence construction you arrive at doesn't exactly mean what you intended it to. Still there is something to be said for the process of perceiving this disconnect—it reinforces that there is some deeper exchange at work between two people. *Something* is being actively engaged. Cultural exchange isn't a fashion show—it's the difficult process of actually trying on someone else's clothes. Living abroad brings experiences that aren't linear, resolvable or comfortable—but in the inevitable awkward points, exchange is happening.

Recently I recapped a few of my more "awkward" Bulgarian moments with some students. After all the recounting, there seemed to be two pointed questions: "So you don't feel comfortable here? You don't like it here?"

No, no—I insisted. This also could be considered awkward—they were mistranslating my narrated moments of discomfort as a general dislike for Bulgaria. I tried to convince them to trust me—beneath it all, even when I don't know how to dance to The Final Countdown, I feel very comfortable here, and I have had so much fun here. I just don't always know what is going on around me...

And so they explained a few things:

- Having a "sexiest costume" category is very strange, and not at all normal to them.

- Bulgarian girls don't like black humor as much as the boys.

- Waving someone's arms while dancing is a friendly gesture, an extension of trust that everyone wants to dance with you. It is not an implication of inept dancing.

- Also, who knows how to dance to the final countdown? No one does. It's all about not taking yourself too seriously and just having fun.

The students waited to hear my response to these clarifications—

And in the silence it all came together: we all don't know how to dance to The Final Countdown.

What is *smeshno* is also *zabavno*. *Vse Taya*—the point is that grammar lessons only go so far. Trust builds the most accurate translations, a trust that there is more involved in a situation than may be apparent through initial misunderstandings. Trust is necessary in taking the risk involved in cultural exchange—and remembering that everyone, *everyone*, doesn't know how to dance to The Final Countdown.

And you can't figure that out at a fashion show—you have to actually try on the clothes.

In the mean time, things will seem crazy, awkward, or funny (odd)—but *Vse Taya*. Bulgaria and Bulgarians have taught me to say this phrase which will stick with me forever.

And, really, I love the nickname "Deenya."

Disclaimer The text is published in its original and unedited version.

Out of America

Bulgaria and Back

To teach journalism in Eastern Europe is to step back in time, and to glimpse hope for the future. More than 20 years since the fall of Communism, the former satellite countries continue their transition toward democracy and free markets. At the same time, they struggle to understand and embrace free speech and a free press.

My journey as a Fulbright Scholar took me to the American University in Bulgaria, a university housed in a drab gray building that once served as the headquarters of the local Communist Party. "We still don't know where the microphones were hidden," one professor commented laughingly. Founded in 1991, shortly after the Soviet Union's collapse, the university is located in Blagoevgrad, a city of 80,000 located about a two hours south of the Bulgarian capital city of Sofia. About half of the 1,000 students come from Bulgaria. The rest represent 28 countries in the region. The catalog spells out a mission "to educate students of outstanding potential in a community of academic excellence, diversity, and respect and to prepare them for democratic and ethical leadership in serving the needs of the region and the world."

Teaching journalism in this setting is especially challenging. One of the first things you discover is that students' names can be difficult to decipher. "There's a serious shortage of vowels over here," a friend once remarked. As I struggled with their names, I learned that household names in America, like Pulitzer, Hearst, Murrow and Cronkite, can be equally confounding for many Eastern Europeans. The notion of a free and fair press remains a novel concept. During one class discussion, not one of my students described the press in their country as free. Even where there are laws protecting the press, no one knows what they mean in practical terms since there are no court cases to clarify them. Many laws simply are not enforced by corrupt judges, leaving an uncertain atmosphere. The reality is that journalists are poorly paid and live under physical threat or intimidation. A Romanian journalist, for example, was arrested at the Bulgarian border for carrying a concealed camera. Bulgarian authorities can prosecute journalists under an "insult law" that makes it a crime to criticize public officials. In an extreme case, a Bulgarian reporter had acid thrown in her face after she exposed Mafia dealings and now lives with the disfigurement. Stories of Russian journalists who have been beaten and murdered have become legendary. My students were amazed to learn of the struggles faced by colonial publishers



Edward Alwood outside AUBG

in American history and the American journalists who have gone to jail to protect their sources. They were mesmerized by the history of radio, television and motion pictures, though text books tend to ignore developments outside the United States, Guglielmo Marconi being the most notable exception.

Students from the former Soviet republics particularly don't recognize the journalists' right to public information. When they question public officials, they don't expect to get answers. The notion of challenging authority is especially novel. It is difficult for them to understand that the idea that journalists represent their readers and are entitled to information that can be passed on to the citizens.

Many of their newspapers are little more than propaganda tools for political parties, or sensational tabloids that appeal to the masses. The most popular newspaper in Bulgaria, for example, is a tabloid that publishes lurid photos and concentrates on crime and corruption, of which there is plenty. I canceled a guest speaker after I learned that she was receiving threats from the Mafia. There is a reticence toward the Mafia because the Mafia is too powerful and the governments too weak. Reflecting a pervasive public reti-



Edward Alwood with the Bulgarian student Ivaylo Gyurov



Edward Alwood at Thanksgiving Dinner with all of the American study-abroad students at AUBG

cence, students rattle off the names of Mafia figures as if they were cartoon characters.

It is difficult for journalism students to find role models. Journalists who challenge authority in their country simply disappear. There are also examples of unscrupulous journalists who have used their positions to extort money or favors from political figures. Several students talked of having worked at internships where editors changed certain facts of their stories to please a corrupt publisher. When we discussed the Pentagon Papers, several students volunteered that lying to the people is an everyday practice where they live. Two students returned to Belarus at Christmas to find rioting in the wake of recent elections.

"I want to do investigative journalism but I don't know how this is possible in my country," said a student from Kazakhstan.

The region is isolated and maintains an undercurrent of mystery and silence. Logistical problems can quickly become a nightmare. A shipment of text books for some of my students didn't arrive for nearly two months. The region is plagued by energy problems and power failures are frequent. Governmental tensions are also a problem. Some of my students came from countries that have been ravaged by war. I watched tensions begin to rise in my classroom one day as we discussed minority representation in the media. One student began railing against gypsies as others squirmed in their seats.

A Russian student with visa problems did not arrive until the week before midterm exams. Students from Turkmenistan ran into more

dramatic trouble when they were scheduled to depart for the university. Border police suddenly removed them from the airplane. Turkmenistan authorizes objected to an American university recruiting on their soil and demonstrated this by blocking the students. The university dispatched someone to negotiate a few days later but when the students boarded another flight, they were blocked again. Finally, with State Department assistance, the traumatized students were able to depart but they remained fearful that they would be stopped again if they dared to visit their families at Christmas or during the semester break. Their ordeal was a reminder that Communism may have fallen but intimidation did not entirely go away.

"Most of them won't go into journalism," the department chair told me. "There just aren't jobs and the ones that are available pay so little money." Nevertheless, the students are fascinated and communications remains one of the university's most popular majors. Having a career that a person finds enjoyable and fulfilling is a dream that most of their parents and grandparents never had.

Despite the challenges there comes a sense of fulfillment. It was clear that my students represented the first generation of Eastern Europeans with hopes, dreams, and aspirations though they may not be certain how they will reach them. "I enjoyed your course," said one of my students from Moldova at the end of the semester. "The final grade wasn't very important to me, it is the knowledge that finally counts."

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