

# **Travel Journal**

A collection of e-mails

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**Global Understanding Requirement  
BGSU Higher Education Administration Program  
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American University in Bulgaria**

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*July 2001*

*When I went back to clean out my Hotmail account and compile all the e-mail messages that circled the globe during my Global Understanding trip, I had NO IDEA how many there were. I pasted them into a single document to have a keepsake of my adventure. My first draft was over 100 pages long. This is the edited version, and it is still quite long, but I hope it gives you a sense of my trip.*

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Tue, 9 May 2000 19:08:27 EET

From: Jill Rasmussen

Subject: hi!

Janice,

Hope this arrives on time. The taxi driver will pick you up with a sign that says AUBG in English. We are expecting an 8 pm arrival on Balkan from London on the 19th. Let me know if it changes. I will be in Sofia that night for a 6 pm meeting and may have Plamen pick me up on the way home if I don't drive myself-so you may see me that night, if not, I will leave directions and a key for you when you get to the residence hall. All the halls have guards, but they don't speak English. Safe journey. See you soon.

-Jill

ps...if you are looking for something to bring....red licorice does the trick...especially if it is not twizzler, but the real stuff! If you have room in your suitcase I would pay you for a pack! (we could even use a bag or two of marshmallows, but they take up too much space!)

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Jill M. Rasmussen--C/O AUBG #1  
Blagoevgrad 2700--Bulgaria--Europe

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*My classmate Gretchen did her Global Understanding trip at the same time I did. She was at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and also traveled in Ireland.*

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Sat, 13 May 2000 12:38:19 EDT

Subject: You there OK?

Hi Gretchen,

Are you there OK? I've been thinking of you! I'm packed and anxiously awaiting my flight. My big suitcase is bulging, but I think I'm going to leave it alone and just let it bulge. I'm leaving for the airport in 1.5 hours...

Hope you're enjoying your first days in the UK!

\*J

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Sun, 14 May 2000 16:58:21 EDT

From: Gretchen Lohman

Subject: Re: You there OK?

Janice,

Yes, I am here! I really can't even believe it. Once Koepp is here, I might not want to leave - even though it is COLD!!!! I need more sweaters.

I tried emailing the other day, but it bounced back, not sure what I typed in wrong, but glad you emailed me. Have fun in London and talk to you soon.

Safe journeys,

Gretchen =)

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Tue, 16 May 2000 11:58:03 -0400

From: J. Gerda"

Subject: Did you make it?

Hi Janice,

Since we haven't heard anything, assume you made it to London.

Red misses you. None of the cats seem happy when they are together in the same rooms, so we haven't pushed them. Red gets to roam the house when the other two are outside which is often. He sure is friendly when its breakfast time...

Dad.

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06:21 AM 5/17/00 EDT

Subject: Re: Did you make it?

To: all

Hi There!

I am indeed here! Much to share, but this one will be quick. Chris and Ellis (my hosts) pay local calls by the minute, plus I'm trying to get out of here to hop a train for Cambridge. I saw Oxford yesterday, and wandered all over London the day before. May is an excellent time for gardens in London (formal, cottage and otherwise) as all the trees and bushes are in bloom. Lilacs are just past peak, I saw the biggest rhododendron ever over in Kensington Gardens, columbine, other

flowering trees... and the multi-decade if not multi-century old wisteria at Oxford was breathtaking. It's so wild to wander around 1000-year old things. Gardens and history -- I'm very happy.

When I arrived and called from the airport, Chris was at the hospital. Katie was born Saturday, just before I left Cleveland. She is a cutie. We brought both Chris and Katie home from the hospital on Monday, and it's been a cultural experience all by itself to have 3 kids in the house!

More later...

\*J

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May 21, 2000

I'm here!

Hello folks!

Sorry I didn't e-mail earlier, but I had a little trouble getting into Hotmail from the residence hall. I'm here at my first day of work at the university main building and the connection seems to be better.

I'll try to write more about my experiences and send it to everyone, so please forgive me if I repeat things in those messages. But I wanted to get one message off to you!

London was wonderful, and it was great to spend time with Chris, Ellis and the boys (and new baby Katie!) I saw Oxford and Cambridge (similar, but both spectacular) and saw universities from their beginning. Only the Sorbonne is older than Oxford. On Thursday, I saw the Tower of London, which was very impressive and neat. Did you go there, Mom & Dad? It was a good all-day visit, and it was very easy to picture the medieval kings in their day. I saw where Thomas More was held prisoner, where Elizabeth I spent time before becoming queen, and the ups and downs of two wives of Henry VIII. If you haven't already seen it, rent the movie "Elizabeth" and you'll get a sense. Our tour guide (yeoman warder, or "beefeater") made a special point to show the Americans the "Traitors' Gate" to the Thames, and said he wanted to go to Canada because he had been invited to "Drink Canada Dry." (bdum, dum.) He was great. The crown jewels were breathtaking, and I went through the line past them four times to get a good look. It wasn't crowded at all, so this was easy. The Star of Africa, the diamond in the scepter is over 500 carats and is the largest diamond in the world. It was over 1000 carats before cut (if I'm remembering right). Anyway, the whole thing was moving. They were showing a film of the queen's coronation - she looked so young and nervous - and then engravings and paintings of the same crowns, scepters, orbs with different regents back to Charles II. It was really neat.

I got here OK on Friday, and despite the warnings the flight was great (new Boeing 737) and my transfer here was smooth. The group from Kosovo is here, and I've spent a lot of time with them. We toured Sofia on Saturday. My first three meals in Bulgaria were McDonalds, McDonalds, and Chinese food. Needless to say, the group vote takes me places that are different from where I'd go if alone.

The Kosovar Albanians take very good care of me, and rarely let me pay for my own drinks or food. Everyone wants a picture with me. As one Bulgarian said, "ah, the saved and the savior." As an American, the only way I could be more popular is to have actually met Bill Clinton> I told them that my mother and father don't like him much, and so you all have invitations to come and stay in Prishtina to see what good his policy has done. Many of them have sad and scary stories, but are excited to be building a new country.

Now, I'm learning more about the university, and perhaps more about Bulgarians. Right now, I'm off to watch the Kosovars do values clarification and debate. More later.

Love you all,

\*J

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May 22, 2000

Re: Greetings

Hi Lee!

I am in Europe, and I am checking my e-mail! Today was my first day of my internship. I'm still learning about the university, and I've been staying in the residence hall since Friday. Staying with me is a group of young leaders from Kosovo, and they are going through a leadership program. Many of the exercises are familiar to me as a student affairs person (conflict resolution, values clarification) but the experiences of the participants and the language difference makes it all very, very interesting. I'm enjoying spending time with the Kosovar Albanians, partly because they are just so full of life and fun, and partly because they are so, so welcoming and friendly to me. I know there are parts of the world in which Americans are not popular, but to these Kosovars I am the "bees knees" and I am enjoying the gratitude that they feel for all Americans. I'm being spoiled. I'll try to learn some Albanian, but I think for the most part my job is to help them practice English (which they very much want to do.)

I need to send some other messages - but it was so good to see your name in my inbox...

Take care, and say hello to all for me!

\*J

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May 22, 2000

Testing?

Hi Ellis/Chris!

First, I'm testing this address to see if I remembered it right. Are you there Ellis?

Second, I wanted to let you know that I made it here with no complications (actually, it was a great flight and right on time.) I don't understand most of what I hear each day, but most of the people around me want to practice their English and so want to talk in English anyway. I feel bad for not knowing another language, but English is serving me well.

Hey, the discotheque here is called the "Underground" and is the blue line through the red circle. It all ties together...

Mind the gap!

\*J

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May 22, 2000

Subject: (none)

Hello All!

I am safely here in Bulgaria (since Friday) and I already have lots to share. Blagoevgrad has beautiful mountains and friendly people! However, I need to wait until I have some more time here at the computer to tell stories. Meanwhile, I wanted to say hello, and to try out my distribution list. I hope I'm not being presumptuous about who's on here -- please let me know if you would rather skip the inbox-cloggers and I'll take you off. Also, please let others who might be interested know that I'm on my adventure and thinking of my friends in America (and England, and Scotland, and Benin). I talk about you and "home" a lot!

Hope all is well with you, and I'll write more soon.

\*Janice

P.S. If my English sounds funny, it's because I've been trying to speak in simple, short sentence with basic words for my Kosovar Albanian friends who speak little English. I'm also learning to read signs in Cyrillic, and my spelling might get a bit confused...

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Mon, 22 May 2000 12:42:37 -0400

From: J. Gerda  
Subject: Re: I'm here!

Hi Janice,

...the cats continue to coexist. Red still needs to be separated from the other two by doors to avoid hissing and growling contests.

Yes, your mother, Kersten, and Krallmann and I went through the Tower of London but without a tour guide. The things that stuck in my mind was the absence of any acknowledged British military defeats (ie, the American Revolution) and how evil the Germans were portrayed. Krallmann didn't talk too much during the tour. History is in the eyes of the beholder.

Dad

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Tue, 23 May 2000 05:24:04 EDT  
From: Gretchen Lohman"  
Subject: Re:

Janice,

Hey, how are you? I am fine and finally seeing more of Scotland. Koeppe arrives on Friday and we will be going on a backpacking tour ("bus"packing tour). If you want to see about it go to [www.macpackbackers.com](http://www.macpackbackers.com) and look at the 3 day Highland Romp tour. We leave on Saturday - Monday. I have lots to say too. It has been wonderful. I will tell you all about it when I get back. I leave for Trinity College next Thursday. Take care,

Gretchen =)

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Tuesday, May 23, 2000 1:49 AM  
To: <gerdaj@stratos.net>  
Subject: Re: I'm here!

Hi Dad,

Yes, I know you supported Kosovo action as most Americans did, but these folks are funny. They have nearly deified Bill. I try to explain to them why enthusiasm for him is more... shall we say, tempered, at home, but they become very serious and it's clear that they are more than



willing to acknowledge that he is not perfect but insist that his leadership meant the difference between life and death for them and their children. I think there is just a sense of gratitude, and since Bill Clinton is the most famous American to them (and in many cases I'm the only American they know - at least civilian) we are both benefiting from a focused sense of gratitude. They tell me that if all Americans wanted to come to visit Prishtina, they would be welcome. Some of them have scars (literally and figuratively) from Serbian police and army, and they are hesitant to talk but have opened up more. It has been very, very interesting.

Give Red a snuggle for me. Sorry he growls at your kitties.

If you missed the beefeaters, you missed a good show. He was part comedian. He got in a couple American jabs, but it is true they don't highlight military defeats. He expressed a good deal of national regret for all the imprisonments and beheadings and such, but he knew darn well that they are part of the macabre attraction of the Tower. I didn't get too much about the Germans, but I also didn't see any Germans. The tour was much more about Elizabeth I, Thomas More, and the tragic tales of Anne Bolyn and Jane Grey. Very dramatic.

Gotta run - hope all is well. Love you all!

\*J

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Tue, 23 May 2000 14:48:43 -0400

From: J. Gerda"

Subject: Finances

Hi Janice,

...I don't know if you heard, but the Arkansas Bar is recommending Bill be disbarred for lying under oath. Good thing your Kosovo friends can't vote in the US.

Dad and Red

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May 25, 2000

Subject: Re: Finances

Hi Dad (and Red, and everyone else in Brunswick),

Thanks for being so thorough about my bills - you're great. I can tell that I'm successfully negotiating Blagoevgrad because I read your message and thought, "Gee, I owe BGSU 663 leva."

...I understand why Kosovars are pretty solidly appreciative of Clinton (and Albright and Blair), but I understood less why Bulgarians are. Another American here told me that he was the first US president ever in history to visit Bulgaria. For a small country, struggling for the most basic of its population's needs, emulating the most powerful country in the world, and aware that most of the world can't find it on a map, his visit meant so much to them. The students who met him were aware of the scandal and a bit wary, but by all reports he was very kind, encouraging, and he followed up on some promises he made to them. He is very personable, I've never doubted that. This person told me that it's a little like having a big brother who, although certainly not perfect, you want to grow up to be like, and one day this brother introduces you to all of his older friends (Europe), and proudly says, "this is my little brother." It meant a lot to them, and American politics aside, I understand why.

Last night I stayed up and talked with a Kosovar who is here taking an English course, and he showed me his English workbook. It has a funny story and exercises about Americans traveling abroad. True, but embarrassing. The highlighted quotation was, "If it's Tuesday, it must be Munich," and featured sentences about marveling at the age of everything in sight. But the picture didn't look like either of us :)

We're having a bonfire tonight, and I'm going to put my marshmallows to good use!

\*J

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May 25, 2000

Subject: Chapter 1 - England

Miredita! (Good afternoon, in Albanian... I think.)

I have been so wonderfully busy talking with people that I haven't had much of an opportunity to get to this message, but I have a few minutes now and wanted to let you all know a little of what I've seen and what I've interpreted so far!

Chapter 1

ENGLAND

May 14-19, 2000

My first week away was spent in London. I stayed with Chris and Ellis Butler, in their flat in Notting Hill. It was a great location and I could catch a train or a bus to everything. Chris had

the baby on May 14 (Katie) and we had a houseful of children with her and the two boys. It was my first cultural shock, but I had a lot of fun playing with Jack and Will and cooing at tiny Katie. It was so wonderful to be with them all. What a great family, and what wonderful friends.

In addition to the usual London landmarks, I made a trip to Oxford on one day, and Cambridge the next. My tour book told me that if I confuse them, I'm not alone, and that Londoners sometimes refer to them as "Oxbridge." Both schools were in finals, so I didn't talk to many students. They were in their gowns and mortarboards and zipping around looking stressed. This sort of academic garb is not reserved just for commencement, and some colleges even require it for dinner each evening.

Both universities are arranged in colleges, with each small college almost self-contained (with residence rooms, dining hall, chapel) and the university providing central services. The university arranges lectures, and the students meet one-on-one or in small groups in their colleges with a "tutor". This grew out of the "early days" (er, like, 13th c.) when a teacher would take on a few students and they all would live in a house together. Oxford has 39 colleges, Cambridge 31. The buildings vary, from medieval enclosed quads to very modern complexes, but most are old, and architecturally breathtaking and include in some way a very neatly clipped courtyard and/or spectacular gardens. It was the perfect time of year for a fan of English gardening, as most gardens were fully in bloom. I saw some wisteria with trunks like trees, and both formal and cottage gardens perfumed the air. The weather was sunny and warm almost the whole time. At Cambridge, I went to the Evensong service at King's College Chapel, which is more aptly described as a cathedral. The choir, at first note, filled my eyes to brimming. It was truly a spiritual experience.

Like other prestigious universities we might be familiar with, Oxford and Cambridge only embraced coeducation recently. Oxford began awarding degrees to women in 1972 (imagine that.) However, I was told that this academic year was the first in Oxford's 800-year history that there were more female students than male students.

I really enjoyed learning about all of the odd and serious traditions formed over the centuries, but with a total of 60 colleges to visit I know I barely scratched the surface. I know that I visited more in the role of tourist than colleague, but the history spoke from the stones and it was easy to make the connections that traced out 800 years to modern British and American higher education.

For now,

\*J

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May 29, 2000

Subject: With love from my Kosovar friends

Hello!

I'm going to try to tell you a little about my 10 days here in Bulgaria, but I'm doubtful I can say what I want to in a few paragraphs. I'll have to tell you all more when I get home.

I've spent the first part of my internship working with The Kosovo Project, a program sponsored by the American University in Bulgaria and designed to promote the "human capital" of Kosovo (or Kosova, as the Kosovar Albanians would say) as they rebuild and try to establish their own democracy. There are several groups studying different topics (computers, public administration, etc.) but the group I've become most close to has been working on "Leadership" for three weeks. It is this group of about 35 young (19-35) Kosovar Albanian leaders that I have gotten to know, and I have become so fond of so many of them. They leave Wednesday morning, and I think many of us are going through separation anxiety. Still, they are homesick and most are ready to go even though it's been a great experience. Many have never been out of Kosova, or even out of their area or city.

The leadership program was designed and facilitated by AUBG students, who were themselves trained in crisis response, mental health issues, conflict resolution, prejudice reduction and other topics by the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI.) I attended a NCBI workshop in DC a couple years ago, and so had done many of the activities. The program is much like the UVA Leadership 2000 program, although I must say that the leadership imperative has a different connotation under the circumstances! I am living in the residence hall with the group and Kosovars from the other programs, and we also done fun evening and weekend events like touring, swimming, movies, and just sitting in cafes and trying to discuss heavy issues with limited language commonalities!

As an American (and perhaps somewhat as a woman among a primarily male group) I was instantly very, very popular. I am one of few civilian Americans they've ever met, although they know a LOT of US soldiers. When I first came, everyone wanted to take pictures of and with me. One of the AUBG students from Romania said of me and my usual Kosovar Albanian crowd, "Ah yes, the savior and the saved." I am accepting so much gratitude that is meant for all of you. I tell them I had little to do with it all personally, and they remind me that I pay taxes. They literally credit the United States and other allies with saving their lives.

Their admiration of the USA (and particularly our leadership) is strong to the point of embarrassing. One guy (he's the one who has to be at the center of attention all the time) told me

that in Kosova, first is God, second is Muhammad and Jesus, third is Bill Clinton, and then come Madeline Albright and Tony Blair. Still, I've been able to have good, serious conversations about why American is not perfect, and what I wish we could still change and improve about our country.

The Kosovar Albanians I have met are almost to a person very friendly, open, and trusting of me. Several have told me truly horrific stories from the war, and yet they do so with gentle explanation and amazingly tempered anger. Several have told me about murdered loved ones and friends, and showed me pictures, and yet say they consider themselves lucky because they KNOW the fate of their family members -- as opposed to all those who wonder. One man told me quietly over breakfast about his time in the Kosova Liberation Army. Another showed me photos of his house with bullet holes in the plaster of the ceilings and shells on the stairs. Blerina was interviewed by the BBC during the war, and if you want to learn more about her (her name is incorrectly spelled Larina) you can go to <http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid%5F354000/354893.stm> (let me know if that doesn't work.) It's odd to see her picture of her crying, because she is a vivacious, happy, fun-loving, assertive, beautiful, hopeful 20-year-old woman when I'm with her. After she showed me the site, she said she had nightmares that night, remembering. I have done many student affairs programs when the content of a session made someone upset and they left, and I went to make sure he or she was OK and to give an opportunity to talk. It was a new one to knock on a residence hall door to talk about Mitrovitsa and police and forced marches, and fear for family still, but it was great to be able to at least listen.

One person told me about going to the University of Prishtine. As you may know, the university was closed and the Kosovar Albanian professors in other universities were fired by the Milosevic government. The student told me that teaching continued, in secret and in small houses throughout the city. Education is so important to them, and we probably often take it for granted. I know that education is powerful, but imagine risking your life to attend classes. There is a Kosovar professor here with the program, and the students follow him around like a pied piper. Teachers are very, very much respected.

One of the best parts of this program is that these students have had a chance to be away from Kosovo and just enjoy themselves. We walk and explore a lot, because here they don't worry about the police or hidden bombs that could go off as you walk around. They find Blagoevgrad beautiful and friendly and clean, and even if they learned little from the program (and I know they did) they are healthier people for the three weeks here.

There is a website about the Kosovo Project - I'll send the address once the pictures are loaded on it and you can see for yourself.

Today's exercise included a mock proposal for Kosovar independence, which they had to construct in a way in which it would be acceptable to their bordering countries. The other day, when we talked about prejudice reduction, there were all sorts of Balkan stereotypes that they had to fill me in on, and they asked a lot of questions of me about prejudice in the US. They sure keep me on my toes, and it's a big responsibility to avoid being simplistic about US issues. I use the word "I" a lot.

At first, I was the American and they were all Kosovars, but after a week it has become so much more than that. There are some truly amazing people in this crew who will be (are) wise and very influential leaders in their youth parties and jobs. I hope their fellow citizens recognize the leadership that I see, and that one day I might see them in national roles.

I have more to tell, but I need to go to dinner. More later about some thoughts I have about different definitions of "freedom" (from or of?), and the experience of residence halls and student development in other cultures. We're watching movies tonight, and we need to begin to say our goodbyes. This is going to be really, really hard. I'll write more later.

Let me know if I've not been clear, if you have questions about Bulgaria or what I've learned from the Kosovar Albanians, or just if my language skills have (at least temporarily, I hope) deteriorated!!!

\*J

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May 29, 2000

Subject: (none)

Just a note - I thought about you last night when we had a movie night in Skaptopara residence hall, and watched "Life is Beautiful." It was just as great the second time. Watching it with Kosovar Albanians, some of whom are all too familiar with the concept of ethnic cleansing, was a thought-provoking experience. The language thing was funny too -- Italian, with English subtitles, being read by mostly people who's first language is Albanian, Bulgarian or Romanian. After Albanian for 10 days, Italian sounded familiar to my ears!

Hope all is well with you - take care!

\*J

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May 30, 2000

Subject: Men's Cars

Hey Angela,

The Kosovars I've met here tell me that the Albanian word for "penis" is "car." They've shared all sorts of implications of that. I told them that sometimes, in American, "car" means "penis" as well...

Just thought you might appreciate that...

\*J

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May 30, 2000

Subject: Re: Finances

Hi Dad,

...The leadership Kosovar group leaves tomorrow morning at 7. I'm going to miss them. But I think that things will be less hectic and intense now that the program is over. I can focus on learning about the university.

Love you,

\*J

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May 30, 2000

Subject: Noticing little differences

Hello everyone,

I'm staying in a very nice new residence hall (Skaptopara), probably nicer architecturally than most if not all of the US residence halls I've worked with. It's the first of several planned buildings, so it is kind of in the middle of a field in the middle of the city. My first few nights, I heard a jingling sound most of the night. At first I thought someone had put out chimes, and then I thought it sounded like an ice cream truck or other vendor cart. I finally realized that the "chimes" were the tinkling of the bells around the necks of the goats and ponies grazing around the building, since some gypsies had set up camp behind Skaptopara. This discovery also explained the rooster crowing in the morning. However, this wasn't the oddest thing about the situation. I later discovered that they have a bear. Yes, a bear. The poor thing is led with a nose ring, and an old man walks it into town every day. For a few coins, he plays music and the bear dances. Really. I have pictures.

Each day, we watched for the bear to come lumbering home from work. But today, the gypsies were gone.

FYI, the English "gypsy" comes from the belief that the ethnic group came from Egypt, although Bulgarians call them "Roma" suggesting another origin. It's my understanding that it's more likely they are descended from peoples of Pakistan or northern India.

Later,

\*J

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Tue, 30 May 2000 13:56:10 -0400

From: Dean

Subject: Re: Noticing little differences...

Wow, it sounds so familiar (I bet you don't get that response from anyone else).

People didn't believe me when I got back and told them that Skaptopara was probably the nicest residence hall I had ever seen. If I recall, it is really well designed and would work on any campus in this country. When I was there, they were putting room furniture together, so I'd love to hear more about how it is furnished.

Yes, I woke up each morning to the crowing of Roosters in the middle of the city. It really is a city of discrepancies - every once in a while you see something totally out of place. By the time you leave, you probably won't be surprised by anything.

I am very jealous of your opportunity to work with the Kosovar crowd. That is the one thing I missed by being there in July. I'm sure that you have a life changing experience or interaction on a daily basis.

Some questions:

- What do you think of the food? Do you actually like tarator soup?
- Have you had the chance to travel outside of Blagoevgrad yet?
- What are your impressions of Blagoevgrad?
- What do you miss the most from the USA?

Thanks for the updates, I really enjoy the news from Bulgaria. I'm sure you are a fine representative of the USA, feel free to speak for all of us in the defense of freedom. I guess your training from Mr. Jefferson will serve you well during this trip.



Dean

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June 1, 2000

Subject: Scholarship

Hi Dad, (and whomever else gets to read this!)

...Things are going well, although I've developed a cold. I've had a scratchy throat since I got here, but now it's a stuffy nose and a hoarse voice too. I'm not really suffering, but it would be nice to be totally healthy. I guess they have new and different bugs here. Probably didn't help that I got little sleep last weekend because I was going out dancing with my friends before they went home. But yesterday I got lots of sleep.

Later, love you!

\*J

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June 1, 2000

Subject: Re: Noticing little differences

No, Dean, no one else has said, "sounds familiar!"

BTW, Jason and Jill say a big hi :)

Skaptopara did turn out really nice. The only reasons it wouldn't work at home have to do with the fact that Bulgarian students haven't yet seen Animal House :) I agree with Jill that all those balconies, and the indoor balcony over the guard desk, would probably cause more troubles at home. There are little things Jill wishes she'd know to change - tint the upper windows in the lobby to reduce heat, specify semi-gloss paint instead of this easily-dirtied flat paint, some weird things about the fire and electrical systems. But the common spaces are truly beautiful. We had a karaoke (sp?) night up on the balcony on the 3rd floor, and the cafe in the lobby, are really great. Although I understand that Bulgarian students still "don't get it" when it comes to socializing in all those wonderful common spaces, the Kosovars naturally "got it" and it was so, so fun. The furniture seems like regular US residence hall furniture, although a student told me that one bed spontaneously fell apart in the middle of the night. Apparently the local supplier was working under a "rush order" and used cheap glue and green wood. Oh well.

Where did you stay? We were so busy with the Kosovo Project that I just got the tour of the other residence halls yesterday.

I like the food, yes even Tarator soup. I love cucumbers and tomatoes, so I'm pretty content. I've eaten a lot of shopska.

My first day here, I went to Sofia with the Kosovars, and the second weekend I went to Sandansky. I liked Sofia, and it was odd to see the big statue to the Russian Liberators. I LOVED the Alexander Nevski cathedral, and was totally entranced by it. I hadn't yet seen Blagoevgrad then, and was taken back a little by how much everything is in need of sprucing up. My fellow travelers were the Kosovars, and they wanted to shop and eat at McDonalds, so I might not have seen as much of the historical sites as I otherwise might have. Sandansky was a swim trip - did you go there? It was just to give the Kosovars a day to swim. They seemed like they needed a good 'ol day of vacation.

I'm liking Blagoevgrad more every day. I love all the parks and squares and plazas, and they've been spruced up more even since I've gotten here. I'm amazed that you can buy almost anything, even though you have to look far, wide, and in every little shop and stand to find it.

What do I miss most? Hmm. Probably washing machines and dryers. And clear tap water, and my familiar shower. But not too much else. So far, I'm still finding it an adventure...

Jill wants to go up to dinner - more later.

\*J

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June 1, 2000

Subject: Re:

Hi Shamim!

I've thought of you and Leadership 2000 so many times these last two weeks. The Kosovo Project session were so much like L2K, even down to the common living arrangements. Imagine all the neat stuff that happens when student groups don't get along so well and then learn to get to know each other as friends, and then transfer that to whole nationalities. One of the facilitators is a Serb AUBG student, and it was neat to watch the Kosovar Albanians at first be wary of her, then really move to trusting her. There was a big romantic kiss from her for one of them when they left, so even more must have been going on behind the scenes!

Hope your L2K is going well - about now, yes?

\*J

---

June 2, 2000

Subject: Re: Mail

Hi Dad,

...Yes, my cold or allergies or whatever it is, is really annoying. I've gone through all of the Kleenex I brought. I'm sure that it's available here - most things seem to be - but every little shop and stand sells a mismatched group of things and it's hard to guess where to look for things. With that and the great exchange rate, you'd probably really love it.

Sorry to hear your computer is so frustrating. My best option here is this one at work, and I can only get to it M-F, 8-5, when I'm not busy. But I'm glad to have access.

Yes, I got your photos! They are wonderful. It's so nice to be able to see them from here. I have shot 8 or 9 rolls so far and I need to get them developed soon. I know the shop will do what size, if I want doubles, if I want them in one hour... I have to figure out how to say all that in Bulgarian...

I'm just about halfway done with this trip. To be honest, it seems like it's been longer than 3 weeks and I wouldn't be all that upset if it were less than three weeks til I was home. But I'm still learning good things and enjoying this beautiful place.

Please tell everyone I say hello, and send my love!

\*J

---

June 2, 2000

Subject: Skaptopara and its namesake

Hello!

I wanted to get one more message off before the weekend comes...

On Wednesday, I got up early to see off the bus that took the group back to Kosovo. Some of them were very homesick and ready to go home, and others were maximizing every last minute here. Getting up early was a chore, since they easily talked me into going out to the local watering hole to celebrate their last night. Ironically, the bar we frequented is called the Underground, after the same tube system in London that I was zipping around in only two short weeks ago.

After the bus left, my supervisor Jill and an AUBG student, Ramona, and I all went up to the university's archeological dig. It is on the very top of a hill (a very big hill) and it was some skillful driving on Jill's part that got us there. The dig is uncovering only one building, and it has been going on for 5 or 6 years. Before the dig, it appeared as a mound, and since then they have uncovered a good size building that was two stories (the steps are clearly identifiable) and was damaged by an earthquake before being rebuilt. The original structure was built by the Thracians in the Bronze Age, and then the Romans apparently used it as a burial mound. It has been plundered, and reused by all sorts of local armies as recently as the first world war. Very, very interesting. They hope to finish up this dig soon and then begin a larger dig - a small town - south of here near Sandansky. This is apparently a very rich archeological area.

The professor up at the dig also told me the origin of the name of the residence hall in which I'm staying. It is called Skaptopara, which is named after the nearby Roman settlement. Serious history.

On the way back to town, we stopped in a Bulgarian cemetery. The gravesites are very well kept with beautiful flowers, but the most interesting thing is that they have ceramics painted or etched with the pictures of the departed person. So, you can see the person who is buried there. We also noted that communist era graves do not have crosses, but communist stars instead.

I toured the other AUBG residence halls, and they have quite a range of facilities in various states of good and less good condition. One is an old communist retreat facility on a hilltop. It does seem like the communists moved out and the American university moved in!

Yesterday and today I worked with the Career Center to see what they have and make suggestions for programs and services. The coordinator is a Bulgarian AUBG grad, and already has many of the basic placement services in place, but I think I was able to prepare a report with good suggestions. He seemed excited by some ideas and we'll see what he does with them. Next week I work with Admissions while Jill travels in Germany.

I've developed a bit of cold or allergies or something -- not too bad, but enough to make me uncomfortable. It seems that I'm not alone, though, here or at home.

That's enough for today -- more next week when I can get back to the office computer.

Thank you to all of you who wrote or sent short notes -- it's good to hear from you, even if I can't get in enough time to reply to each one. I hope you're all well.

Take care!

\*J

---

June 4, 2000

Subject: Skaptopara and its namesake

Hi Felicia! It's so good to hear from you!

This trip is a part of my doctoral program. In lieu of a language, the program requires a "Global Understanding" piece for completion. It can be fulfilled by examining international education through in-depth research, taking a 3-credit class, or... going abroad to study a university for a month. I chose the latter, as do about 4 or 5 of us each year. I'll need to present on my experience this fall. One of my classmates, Dean, came here two summers ago and told me about it. It is a nice mix of challenge (very different language and system, developing region) and familiar (American ties and a few Americans around, the business of the U. done in English, an intern has already been here.) The contact with the Kosovo program has been an added bonus. This will show up on my transcript as "internship", although this is most unusual way to get 3 credits that I've come across so far...

Please give a big kiss to John for me, and a scratch under the chin for Bailey (or the other way around, if you prefer :)

Take care!

\*J

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June 4, 2000

Subject: Re: Noticing little differences

Hi Dean,

No, I haven't bought much in the way of souvenirs yet. My Sofia trip was my very first day and I had only exchange a small amount of money. I did see all the Soviet trinkets and such, and it looked interesting. There was also at one place a bowl of coins that looked like they might be from all sorts of fallen empires, communist or otherwise. I ate at two different McDonalds' in Sofia, one brand new. It tastes the same everywhere. You should see "Chicken McNuggets" in Cyrillic.

You stayed in Volga, yes? Nice place. Jill's old apartment has been split into two small apartments, and Todor (her assistant for the last 10 months) lives in one. Volga is nice, except

for the scary fire protection system and locked fire escapes, and the wedding reception restaurant downstairs, and the mafia bar underneath :)

I'm in Skaptopara, but not next to Jill. I have a single in the other building on the fourth floor. It's nice, with bathroom all to myself. I overlook the river and face kinda northwest. Jill's apartment did turn out very, very nice indeed. I'll have some pictures from an international dinner we did with the Kosovo students.

I didn't get to Rila Monastery this weekend, but I'm thinking about next weekend. This weekend I just explored Blagoevgrad and this area. I wandered way out into the countryside and wondered if I'd make it back in.

Ah yes, it will be good to talk about all this with you when I get back. That's actually still quite a ways off!

Take care -- later,

\*J

---

*It didn't take long after the Kosovars had left before some of my friends began to e-mail me from Kosovo...*

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Mon, 5 Jun 2000 08:18:39 -0700 (PDT)

From: Blerina Sylva

Subject: normal

Hi my american friend.....

how is life in Bulgaria this days without me. Probably its terrible weather.....no sunshine...no jokes....and no Blerina.... but still Blerina is somewhere and she is thinking about you dont worry I am not going to forget you and your smile....when are you coming in KOSOVO and to see real life here .....talk to you another day.....mfalaaaaaaaaa...

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*As part of my internship with the Career Center, I e-mailed a BGSU faculty member for some career resource ideas...*

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Mon, 05 Jun 2000 11:30:32 -0700

From: Kathryn S. Hoff

Subject: Re: Career office in Bulgaria

Hello, Janice. It's good to hear from you. Isn't it great that you can stay connected, even from Eastern Europe. When I spent time in Moscow a few years ago, e-mail was my lifeline to my daughter, my university friends, etc.

But, in response to your question, I have compiled both a bibliography of print materials and a web list for my class which I'm happy to forward to you. In fact, I'll send it to both you and Ivailo, just to make sure it gets there. Both are formatted in Word, hope this works for you.

Please let me know if you have any difficulty opening these files.

---

Jun 5, 2000

Subject: Re: career office in Bulgaria

THANK YOU! We got them. I think the resources will be very helpful for a new office.

...Thanks again, and all my best wishes to Bowling Green. I hope you're surviving the "big dig." With any luck, it'll be mostly done by the time I get there...

\*Janice

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June 5, 2000

Re: normal

Hi Blerina!

I'm glad to hear that you made it home safely, and are your same energetic self! Indeed, AUBG is a quiet and calm place without you, and I miss you! I have been spending time with other students here but it is not the same... :)

...I am working in Admissions here at AUBG, but there is not a lot to do yet. I'm trying to read and learn.

Take care of yourself, and I'm thinking of you in Kosovo, too!

Mirupafshim,

\*Janice

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June 5, 2000

Subject: Sites to see

Hello,

I thought that you might want to see AUBG. Go here:

<http://www.aubg.bg>

...for the main website for American University in Bulgaria.

Go here:

<http://mm.aubg.bg/web-tour>

...for a virtual tour (or at least some photos of the U.) If this address doesn't work, you can link through the "Student Life" link on the U. main page.

The Kosovo Education Project description is linked from the main page under projects, but the newsletter with pictures should be on-line soon. (Poor Mana, one of the AUBG student who worked with it, is under the deadline from USAID to get it up and running...) I'll send that address with explanation when the time comes.

\*J

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Tue, 6 Jun 2000 10:17:55 +0200

Subject: HI

Hello Janice,

Sorry that I couldn't write you before, but I was too busy. I hope that you've had a good time with us. You are very kindless lady and your smile is very sweet. I can't forget your especially smile wich I couldn't find to somebody else. I promise that I'll write to you again, but if you have time you can write me through e-mail in this address. Please give both address to Vilson Nikolla, he is in public admistration, my friend. I writing from my friend's (Lora, Linda) address and as you know I'm not very good in English but they helped me to write this to you and also they are sending regards to you.

Ferizaj, 06.06.00.

Jacob

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*As part of my internship with the Admissions office, I worked with a prospective student who was in Hawaii...*



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June 6, 2000

Subject: Re: AUBG

Dear Chris,

We are excited about your acceptance to AUBG and are looking forward to meeting you. However, we have not heard from you since replying to your May 15 e-mail requesting information about financial aid. We would like to know how your plans are coming, and if we might save a spot for you in our incoming class.

I would be happy to talk with you by phone, but will need to call you late tonight your time (early tomorrow morning, for us) because of a 13-hour time difference.

In case you didn't receive the May 17 reply, I am copying it below. I am an American student intern, and as another suggestion for funding, you might also search the web for scholarship databases. I have had some luck with [www.embark.com](http://www.embark.com), and I believe I saw some scholarships/grants/loans specifically for study abroad.

Good luck, and I hope to hear from you soon.

\*Janice Gerda

Intern, Admissions

American University in Bulgaria

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Tue, 6 Jun 2000 14:08:44 +0300

From: Jordanka Melniklijska

Subject: Re: AUBG

Janice: Thanks a lot! Iordanka

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Tue, 6 Jun 2000 15:35:33 EET

From: Ivailo Aksharov

Subject: Re: Career office in Bulgaria

Dear Janice and dear Ms. Hoff,

Thank you very much for your engagement and swift response. I am sure that the information forwarded will help us build and promote the diversity of activities and services we are aiming for at the AUBG Career Center.

Sincerely,

Ivailo Aksharov, Coordinator  
Career Center  
American University in Bulgaria  
Blagoevgrad 2700  
BULGARIA

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Jun 6, 2000

Subject: Check fax?

Dad,

...I still have 2.5 weeks, and I think I'm getting a little homesick. It might just be today. I'm now starting to get e-mails from Kosovo from the group that's left. I still have some friends among the group that's still here, although one guy knows just about 10 words in English! He's so funny. He imitates my pronunciation, and after a couple weeks he sounds just like an Ohioan who's been in Virginia. There are also some more Americans around now, with the Kosovo Project. And, of course, I'm really enjoying the people who work here at AUBG. They are almost all Bulgarian. The AUBG students I've met are leaving one by one, off to home and the States and summer jobs.

More later - just wanted to say hi!

\*J

---

Tue, 6 Jun 2000 16:17:05 -0700

Subject: Re: Check fax?

Hi Janice,

Will showed up and took down the deader of the two trees at Jeff's today. I missed it while helping Mother out on the Library Book sale, but Jeff said it was real exciting. Something about tying it to his truck to put tension on it and then cutting it until it started to fall and then running screaming in the other direction. He chickened out on finishing off the other tree when the winds got too high when he was up in it. Again, lots of yelling. Jeff went back to bed when he left and his new fence guy didn't show up.

Any comments over there on Bill's visit to Russia? He didn't appear to get rave reviews from the Russian press, but the US press wasn't too bad on him.

Love ya, Dad

---

Tue, 6 Jun 2000 16:34:36 -0700 (PDT)

From: chris

Subject: Re: What's up in Bulgaria?

Hey Janice, thanks for the e-mail. I am sorry about my lack of correspondence, but I am scrambling on this end to try to get financial aid for school (Also, the surf has been really good). At the present I am not going to be able to attend the fall 2000 semester, because, frankly, I just don't have the money. I was hoping for some sort of help from the school, which doesn't look like its going to happen. Thank-you for your suggestion about the financial aid websites. I would really love to come, and I am going to keep trying to raise the money, even though I know that you might have to give my spot to another student. I wish I could tell you that I am definitely coming, but it looks as if money, or lack of money, is going to be my big problem.. I have just graduated from a 900 hour community service program through AmeriCorps, and am guaranteed a stipend for school, but I am not sure how long it is going to take to process all of the paperwork. And even then, it is only a portion of what I will need. I'll check out the websites you mentioned and see what I can find. I would love to talk to you on the phone tonight. I'll try to stay up until about 1 o'clock tonight waiting for your call. There are many questions that I would love to ask you. Once again, thank-you for the e-mail and Aloha.--- Chris

---

June 6, 2000

Subject: Re: What's up in Bulgaria?

Hi Chris,

I'll call again tomorrow, and I'll work on an answer to the FAFSA question. Meanwhile, do you have any funds currently to contribute to the cost of AUBG? I know the tendency is to want to get as much aid as possible, but if you can contribute some percentage that would be helpful. As you might imagine, most of the targeted students here need financial help, and so the total money available is pretty small. Your e-mail suggests that you're starting from zero, but if you can contribute it might be easier to find funding to make up the difference.

... You said you had the university's website, but just in case it is [www.aubg.bg](http://www.aubg.bg). If you go under "Student Life", there is a virtual tour where you can see photos of the main building, residence halls, and city of Blagoevgrad.

As I said, a dollar goes a long way once you get here. At the canteen with your meal plan, most meals total about 3 or 4 Leva (\$1.50-2.00). If you save your meal plan points and eat out, a large pizza is about 3 leva (\$1.50), a cucumber and tomato salad about 1.80 leva (\$.90) and a small bottle of Coke is about .60 leva (\$.30). Clothes and most other things are similarly inexpensive with the exchange rate. Of course, that's today's rate (it's tied to the Deutchmark) and might change, but as I said, pocket money in dollars should go a long way.

My flight here was fairly expensive at \$1500, but that was with no discounts, roundtrip, and a week layover in London. If you are open to departure dates, only buy a one-way, and shop the internet, you might do considerably better. Yes, you want to fly into Sofia. I took Northwest to London and Balkan Air to Sofia.

In the catalogue, there are courses listed for French, German, and Bulgarian. The introductory Bulgarian is on a pass/fail basis and is 4 credits. There are also courses in Balkan literature and regional history and music. With a small student body, registration and course limits might dictate when you would be able to take certain courses. If you register late this year, they will try to help you to get into the courses you want but you might need to be creative about when you take which class. Do you have a major selected?

Of course, as I said, I'm just visiting here, but these are my observations so far. I'll call to see if you can give me a number on your financial contribution for us to work with. Meanwhile, feel free to ask any questions and I'll do my best to answer them or find the answer.

\*Janice

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June 6, 2000

Subject: Re: HI

Hello, Yacop! (Jakob!)

It is so very good to hear from you! I'm glad to know that you have gotten home safely. It was wonderful to have spent time with you here in Bulgaria and I was sad to see you go. I will give Vilson your addresses.

I am working in the Admissions Office of AUBG and trying to help form their entering class. Jordan is excited that he will be teaching English to teachers from Kosovo. We are still spending time in cafes and watching a lot of movies at night.

Please take care of yourself, and write me again when you have the chance!

\*Janice

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June 6, 2000

Subject: Re: Survey?

Hi John,

Yes, indeed, I am in Bulgaria! So far the weather has been beautiful but it's beginning to really warm up. I'm in the southwest part of Bulgaria, very near the Macedonian border. There are large hills cradling the city of Blagoevgrad, and one can see the snow-capped big mountains off in the distance behind them. It is really beautiful.

...AUBG now has four residences halls in a wide range of conditions. There are only about 800 students (fewer, actually) but almost all of them live in the residence halls. One is a rented former hotel right in the middle of town, one is a former Communist retreat center at up the side of a mountain, one is a former office building for the local waterworks, and one is a brand-new construction beautiful thing that would make you drool. The last, Skaptopara, is in very good condition except for the wear and tear of two years of students, while Hilltop still has some Turkish toilets and the bathrooms and condition of the carpets made me cringe. Volga, the former hotel, has some serious and frightening fire safety concerns. But overall, they work very nicely for the university.

If you want to see them, you can go to:

<http://mm.aubg.bg/web-tour/>

or you can wander around the main site at [www.aubg.bg](http://www.aubg.bg)

Thanks again for the info - I hope that you're having fun with your first-year assignments mailings. Please say a big warm "hello" to Kay and Barbara and Pam and everyone else for me!

\*J

---

June 6, 2000

Subject: QOL survey?

Hi Gerry!

Thanks for the reply...

Yes, this has been an exciting and once-in-a-lifetime experience. When I advised students, I used to encourage them to go abroad even though I hadn't done it myself, as a student. So, this is a part of my "do as I say, and as I did" student plan, trying to take my own advice after all of these years of giving it. And, no, I don't binge drink and yes, study a little bit almost every day, and I'm getting much better at not putting off things until the last minute!

I'm in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, in the southwestern part of the country. We're only a few miles from the border with Macedonia. It is a mountainous area, and the city itself is cradled between two large hills (which I have of course climbed to see the whole valley). In the distance to the northeast, one can see the really big mountains, snow-capped and all.

AUBG now has four residence halls in a wide range of conditions. There are only about 800 students (fewer, actually) but almost all of them live in the residence halls. One residence hall is a rented former hotel right in the middle of town, one is a former Communist retreat center at up the side of a mountain, one is a former office building for the local waterworks, and one is a brand-new construction beautiful thing that would make you drool. The last, Skaptopara, is in very good condition except for the wear and tear of two years of students, while Hilltop still has some Turkish toilets and the bathrooms and condition of the carpets made me cringe. Volga, the former hotel, has some serious and frightening fire safety concerns. But overall, they work very nicely for the university.

If you want to see them, you can go to:

<http://mm.aubg.bg/web-tour/>

or you can wander around the main site at [www.aubg.bg](http://www.aubg.bg)

Thanks, and hope the summer has brought a welcome change of pace for you in Blacksburg!

\*J

---

Wed, 7 Jun 2000 14:48:15 +200

From: Mana Ionescu

To: Leadership group

Subject: Dear Friends you're famous!

Dear friends:

Per verzionin e letres ne shqip shiko me poshte!

The Newsletter is alive and kicking. It contains great pictures, stories.

You can find it at:

[www.aubg.bg/cj/~mni960/](http://www.aubg.bg/cj/~mni960/)

or you can find the link on the Kosovo Project page:

[mm.aubg.bg/kosovo/](http://mm.aubg.bg/kosovo/)

Check out the features page and the picture gallery and write to us.

Regards,

The Newsletter team

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Wed, 07 Jun 2000 09:19:40 EDT

Subject: Kosovo Education Project Newsletter

Hello everyone!

The on-line newsletter for the Kosovo Project's leadership group is up and running! Please visit it and see the wonderful people I spent my first 1.5 weeks here with. I hope you can see what a privilege it was for me to be a part of it.

I know you'll want to read the articles and see the great pictures, but if nothing else visit it to see what a GREAT job Mana did in creating the newsletter. It gives you a taste of the quality of work that AUBG students can do. Mana and some of the other students who worked on it are studying journalism.

To visit the newsletter:

<http://www.aubg.bg/cj/~mni960/>

or you can find the link on the Kosovo Project page:

<http://mm.aubg.bg/kosovo/>

On a sadder but very relevant note, I read today about renewed violence in a town just south of Prishtine. If the US news didn't carry the headline, you can read about it at

<http://www.cnn.com>. If it depresses you, go back and read the newsletter again!

Take care!

\*J

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Wed, 7 Jun 2000 15:05:26 -0400

From: Dean Harwood

Subject: Re: Kosovo Education Project Newsletter

Janice,

I just read the newsletter from the Kosovo Project. It is very well done and very interesting. I was really impressed by what this program was able to accomplish. And you even got your name and picture in there.

Ciao,

Dean

---

Wed, 7 Jun 2000 15:58:44 -0700 (PDT)

From: chris

Subject: My contribution

Hi Janice, thank-you for all of your help in this matter. I've never had a school give me so much personal attention. Right now I am trying to find out if my AmeriCorps award can be used for an institution outside of the U.S.... So that's my story at the present. I wasn't expecting the school to give me more than a very partial scholarship, and I certainly wouldn't want to take money away from kids who need it much more than I do. So any money the school can offer me would be greatly appreciated. And from there either I can afford to come or I can't. In any case, thank-you so much for all your input and help. Aloha, Chris

---

June 7, 2000

Subject: Re: My contribution

Hi again Chris!

I'm going to e-mail instead of call, since I don't have news yet, but I should soon.

Thanks for your e-mail about your contribution. That should help a lot to know that. The director has an admissions committee meeting at 10 am (9 pm your time) and it is to discuss a whole lot of things about the incoming class, but she said she might be able to get some



information about additional aid for you at that time. So, I'll e-mail later today my time or call you tomorrow your time (is that confusing enough?)

Meanwhile, do you have any other questions I could answer or try to find the answer to?

\*Janice

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June 8, 2000

Subject: Re: Hello, and some info?

JB,

Wow, you're a gem. Thanks so much for all of that information! I've put together a small proposal for them to survey their alumni and friends and hopefully find a way to enhance their programs with the very small staffs and limited funds they have. It is exciting but a little scary to be such a young institution and have so little financial footing in a newly-democratic country with very bright but not very wealthy target students.

Thanks for the offer about contacting international NACAC. Danche says that AUBG used to belong, but weren't sure they were getting anything out of it and so discontinued their membership. At the time, they wouldn't have had anyone in the US to attend fairs, and they got info about some fairs from ACCRAO (is that the right acronym?) Danche says she will reconsider rejoining if the network gets running, but... do you have suggestions for what other benefits there would be to belonging? Perhaps its not a good match for AUBG, and perhaps they just haven't yet explored the benefits.

...I was really enjoying being a student (stress and deadlines and ton of reading and all.) I have a great cohort of 9 other (now 8 other) students and we have a nice balance of social and work time. I have to admit, it all seems like another lifetime now that I've been out of the country for four weeks. Bulgaria is a different world, and Bowling Green seems both literally and metaphorically a million miles away. I still have two weeks before I return to the flatness and the heat and summer school. Frankly, I'm starting to get a little homesick and although I will make the most of my remaining two weeks, I'm looking forward to re-entering my old life again. Meanwhile, it's a life of trying to communicate with only three words of Bulgarian, shopska salad, and lots of sipping cheap Cokes in cafes. Not bad.

It's so great to hear from you. I won't let it go that long again. :)

\*J

---

June 8, 2000

Subject: Re: QOL survey?

Thanks, Gerry, for myself and for the hardworking folks here at AUBG! Could you please just send it as an attachment? So far, I've had pretty good luck with attachments across the miles on my Hotmail account.

It sounds like the "residential experience" in Eastern Europe outside of American universities is indeed a dormitory experience. Part of the challenge even here seems to be convincing both students and local professionals that students need common spaces and that residence halls can be classrooms of sorts. And that's not even counting convincing the American professors! Jill seems to have done well with the challenge, and converted a lot of rooms into the sort of common space we all try to have - lounges, study rooms, computer labs, gyms, party spaces, even cafes. She now probably has more common space than most of us. Hilltop, the one that used to be a Communist Party retreat site, even has a large theater. The new building, Skaptopara, not only has great common space on the first floor and each upper floor, but it has balconies and a deck and a first floor atrium. It really is beautiful. I suspect it works here because so far they haven't gotten ahold of the video "Animal House" and apparently it doesn't much occur to students to do what UVa, BGSU, or VT students might automatically do to such things. I thought of you and the litigious nature of our US residence halls ("fall-proof" windows) when I noted that not only does Skaptopara (and the main university building) have lots of balconies, but none of the windows anywhere have screens. They all open wide, with no barrier, and are large windows. But then again, there are a lot of facilities things here that would be illegal, impractical, or intolerable at home.

Well, that's enough for now.

Thanks again,

\*J

---

June 8, 2000

Subject: Traditions and Celebrations

Hello all,

I wanted to tell you a little bit about what I've learned about traditions here.

On my second day at work, it was Maia's birthday. Maia is the Acting Director of Student Services. In Bulgaria, when it is your birthday, you bring a box of chocolates to share with everyone, and they bring you flowers. It's nice, because the birthday person gets to both give and receive.

In celebration of her birthday, Maia invited the Student Services staff to her father's garden plot outside of the city. We went there for lunch. We all piled into the tiny, old cars that are ubiquitous (they all remind me of the 1978 Rabbit I used to own in grad school - the first time) and we drove about ten miles outside of town. The last several miles were on the most uneven, steep, winding dirt road I had ever seen. The sky periodically clouded over, and I was suppressing a bit of terror that it would rain and we'd have to come back over the same road in the mud. Or, as the case may be, NOT come over it and have to stay in the mountains until it dried out!

Maia told me that about fifteen years ago, when city-dwellers were having difficulty making ends meet (perhaps some still are), the government gave each person a small plot of land in the countryside to grow fruits and vegetables to feed the family. I've seen these little family plots in the center of highway cloverleaves, at the edges of cemeteries, and tucked in the most unlikely places. Maia's father's plot is a steep but not large piece of land. He built a small, two-story, three room house on it. Of course, there is no electricity (although Maia joked that the Socialists were just about to run power out that far, so they ALMOST got electricity.) There is a big container to collect rainwater and so there is some "running water" further down the hill.

Maia uses the summer kitchen to pick produce from the garden, carry it only a few feet, and can it on the spot. The produce was beautiful, and although it was a big garden, it was all hand tended. No roto-tillers here. The cherry trees were heavy with sweet cherries and the strawberries were also plentiful. Coming were tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, potatoes, and other vegetables. Jill told me (and Dean mentioned it too before I left) that there are no garden problems with nibbling wildlife because all the game was hunted out a few years ago when life was really lean. I tend to believe that, because when we went to the local zoo, the first three cages had RABBITS. (More on the "zoopark" another time.)

Anyway, it was really beautiful out there, and for Maia's birthday we ate strawberries, cherries, cake, and drank champagne. It was really nice.

I was also fortunate to be here for a big national holiday. May 24 is the day for the celebration of Cyril and Methodius (pronounced Kee-ree and Mah-toh-dee in Bulgarian). They were 9th century Christian missionaries, now saints, who in the process of spreading religion, needed a lettering system to translate Christian literature into the local language. Hence, the Cyrillic

alphabet was formed, and Bulgarian was recorded. This is why I'm still learning to read signs in Bulgarian. To celebrate the day, the university was closed and children were out of school. There were bands and choirs on the main plaza in front of the university, and it was a very festive atmosphere. Although everyone went back to work and school the next day, the concerts continued for over a week. We had amplified children's choirs plenty loud in the offices for quite some time.

OK, that's a pretty long message. I'll let you go now. It's close to quitting time here, and I'm going to show a Kosovar Albanian friend where the zoopark and botanical gardens are, up the hill. The weather has been so mild up 'til now, but it's starting to really get hot...

Hope you are well!

\*J

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Thu, 8 Jun 2000 08:28:42 -0700 (PDT)

From: Blerina Sylva

Subject: m'falaaaaaaaaaaa

dear friend I feel so good when I hear that my friends all around the World are good that is only hope which I have. Because when the people in all the world are good why should I be sad even I am sad that is my personal us that right what you think about it .... I miss you and all the best from me....

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Thu, 8 Jun 2000 13:10:06 -0700 (PDT)

From: chris

Subject: other stuff

Hi Janice.

I have a few more questions for you if you have the time. Do I need a Visa and if so, where do I obtain it and how much does it cost? Do I need to get any required or optional health shots before I come? Is there an entrance fee to the country that I should be aware of? And finally, do I pay for health insurance through the school, or do I need to take care of that on my own? Also, I am leaving for Colorado tomorrow (Friday) to start my summer job, so probably the best way to communicate will be by e-mail. I only have limited access to the web in Colorado, but I should be able to check my e-mail every couple of days. My address for the summer there is: Echo Canyon River Expeditions...

So in case there is any mail correspondence that the school needs to send to me, this address would be the most direct. I would still get mail at the other address, it would just take a little bit

longer. I look forward to hearing from you about any financial aid, and once again, THANK-YOU!

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You wrote:

Sounds like you are having a really great time and learning a lot. Keep enjoying.

Conrad

PS. Did you experience any of the effects of the earthquake in Turkey?

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June 9, 2000

Subject: Re: Sites to see

Hi Conrad,

No, I didn't feel any earthquakes, although I understand that this area is not at all immune to earthquakes. I didn't realize there'd been an earthquake in Turkey until your message. From the Internet reports it looks like it happened pretty far east from where I am (I'm in western Bulgaria, almost all the way in Macedonia.) But it sure sounds like the quake scared them, after their last major one.

...It's late Friday afternoon here and I spent the morning on a trip to the Rila Monastery. The bus ride back made me sleepy, and the heat isn't waking me up. Perhaps I can get in a little nap when I get back to the residence hall...

Take care, and have a great weekend!

\*J

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June 9, 2000

Subject: Re: Check fax?

Hi Dad,

The tree saga at the St. James Gerda House sounds like I'm really missing the show. Your message made me laugh out loud. I am glad I met Will and can picture this whole thing...

No, I really hadn't heard anything about Clinton's trip to Russia. It's at least partly because I'm feeling a little news-deprived. I try to read the CNN website when I can get to it, but I can't understand the Bulgarian or German news programs. We do get CNN in English, but heck if I

can convince my hallmates to watch it. They seem to prefer MTV-Europe and I'm pretty much outvoted. I'm trying to follow the increased tensions in Kosovo and Greece, but mostly on the internet. The Kosovo Project Newsletter I wrote about before has a daily news update section now.

Also, the Kosovo Project Newsletter is now doing daily updates of activities of the groups. I went to the Rila Monastery this morning and some pictures are already on the "TODAY" section of the newsletter. Wow. (<http://www.aubg.bg/cj/~MNI960/index.html>)

It sounds like there is a revolution or coup d'etat going on outside the office window in the square here, but I'm told it's just "football fans" cheering on their team. I think I hear gunshots. From what I know of "football" fans, I might be safer with a coup d'etat. I think I'll stay in here. As a former Communist Headquarters, this building seems to be well-fortified.

I'm not sure what I'll be doing this weekend. I don't much feel like traveling, but we'll see. I stayed up late last night playing Monopoly on this very funny knock-off of the Parker Brothers' game. It was also interesting to try to tell the AUBG students (Kosovar) to think like capitalist pigs. They kept wanting to give Jordan more money when he'd nearly run out when he'd land on my hotels :)

Love you all,  
\*J

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June 9, 2000  
Subject: Re: Survey

Hi John,

...Yes, it is really great to actually get to know people and sit still in one place long enough to begin to FEEL the place. I'm feeling very at home here, although I'm also starting to feel ready to come back. It is an advantage of being single and childless that I can pick up and do this, but international education is so hot now that I suspect that there will be many opportunities for flexible trips. If you are interested, there might be opportunities yet to come.

...Oh, I do miss UVa sometimes!

We're about to have a big summer storm here, so I might have to walk back to Skaptopara in the rain. I went on a trip to the Rila Monastery this morning, up in the mountains, and it was really,

really beautiful. From there, we saw the storm loom up over the mountain peaks. Rila is east of here, so we beat the storm back to Blagoevgrad, and now it's finally caught up with us.

Take care, John!

\*J

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June 9, 2000

Subject: Kosovo Education Project Newsletter

Hi Fiona,

Thanks for your message! It's good to hear from home!

I'm sure that my experience must be so much easier than yours was. I am spared the need to feed myself by the convenience of having a board plan. I eat in the university main building's canteen, although I have to admit that at times I get bored with it and groups of us go out to a restaurant or cafe either in place of or to supplement what is essentially "dorm food." But I have no real complaints. It is very tempting to try to cook for myself when I walk through the open air markets, with all that beautiful fresh home-grown produce, but I'd need to buy all the cooking utensils. And I have no problem with my washing machine - my two hands and a bucket work just fine!

Good for you that you still have your Russian (Lithuanian tinged as it may be) with you. I spend a lot of time here just listening to others speak to hear the cadences of different languages. Most of the students in the residence hall with me speak Albanian, which sounds to me a little Italian (the Rs) and a little German (the sh, ch, sht's). I understand that it is very different from Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian, etc which have some very basic pieces in common such that you can converse in one to the other. I am indeed learning to read simple words in Cyrillic. It's just about remembering how to sound out the letters. The problem comes when the word is not just spelled differently, but is actually a Bulgarian word! My favorites are PECTOPAHT (restaurant) and (gamma)APA(dzh) (garage.) I'm getting along. They are much,much,much easier letters to learn than anything Chinese!!!

I hope things are going well with you. More messages to come from the heart of the Balkans!

\*J

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Sat, 10 Jun 2000 14:25:21 GMT

From: Jakup

Hello Janice,

I'm writing to thank you for your e-mail. I've received and I'm very happy. I hope that you are very fine, but I'm so sorry because I haven't time now for more write. I must go out with one Italian man.

\*This is first e-mail that I write Just me. I don't know English well and you can forgive me for mine mistakes.

Thank you very much and I waiting your e-mail.

And please if you can send me e-mail of Jordan and say hello to him from me.

Jakob

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Fri, 09 Jun 2000 15:50:58 EDT

From: Gretchen Lohman

Subject: Re: Traditions and Celebrations

Janice,

Thank you for your emails. I leave on Sunday to return - bitter sweet. Well, I hope you are well. I will try to write more once I return. I am finishing a project for them and am a bit crunched for time.

G =)

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June 11, 2000

Subject: Re: Traditions and Celebrations

Hi Gretchen,

You must be home by now, as I type this, or very close to being home! I understand about "bittersweet" - I am still enjoying myself but I'm starting to think more about home and restarting life there. I'm looking so much forward to hearing about your travels and discoveries, and I'll have so much to tell you too. Perhaps I can plan a road trip to come visit you so we won't have to wait until August!

Hope your travels were/are safe, congratulations on completing a wonderful life adventure, and good luck with staring up your Kentucky adventure!



\*J

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June 11, 2000  
Subject: Home OK?

Hi Ramona,

Did you get home OK? It was great to meet your dad!

If you have any questions about moving in at Hope College that you think I might be able to answer, please let me know. I was in charge of residence halls for so long that I might be able to speak for most American residence halls. I think, mostly, you'll be amazed by the sheer volume of what other students will bring. They will literally bring truckloads. Don't feel any obligation to match their ability to bring "stuff" - no college student needs the amount of stuff most bring, and many of them would do much better at school without the TV sets, VCR, video games and stereo systems.

Keep in touch!

\*Janice

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June 12, 2000  
Subject: Question

Hey Dean,

What did you do in the offices when you were here? I'm doing a potpourri of projects, but I'm just curious as to what you worked on. I think you said you worked on the handbook - I just proofread the Student Handbook. I'll work with RA training and orientation next week. Anything more specific that you did? Did you do things it might be interesting to follow up on?

\*J

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June 12, 2000  
Subject: FOOD!  
Hello all,

This message is about FOOD! My exposure to food has been mostly through the university's canteen (dining room). As part of my compensation, I have an amount of leva I can spend in the

canteen. The prices are very cheap and I will not come close to using up my leva allowance. Anyway, it's a pretty basic canteen, and I've sampled their different dishes. I still need to remember that it is a dining hall and they are cooking for large numbers of people.

The food here has been pretty good, although I'm beginning to yearn for variety. There appears to be one kind of cheese available, and although the many creative uses for it are appreciated, I do miss the diversity. The cheese available is much like feta, although I understand that feta is goat cheese and this stuff is sheep cheese. Now, I love feta cheese (mmm, good and salty) but it's everywhere! The other day, one of the dishes in the canteen was translated on the card as "Potatoes Ogretin." I thought, "hm, I wonder what ogretin means?" After a full ten seconds it hit me -- au gratin! It was a square of a potato & cheese casserole, with the feta-like cheese!

The primary ingredients for almost all foods are cucumbers, tomatoes, cheese, peppers, and potatoes (and "that cheese", and yogurt). Sometimes add shredded cabbage as a salad and sometimes zucchini. One of the ubiquitous dishes at restaurants is called shopska salad. It's one of the few things I can recognize in Cyrillic in a restaurant, and it's one of the few things of which I have not tired yet. Shopska salad is usually a big bowl of diced tomatoes and cucumbers (sometimes peppers) with shredded feta-like cheese on top. It tastes pretty good just like that, but often I'll put oil and vinegar on it too. Yum.

This is not to be confused with shopska cheese. This is baked in a ceramic bowl (like a French onion soup bowl) and is a tomato and pepper soup/stew with cheese and a big egg on top. It is the saltiest thing I've ever tasted, but good.

Another popular dish is Tarator, a cold soup with cucumbers, yogurt, and various herbs. Bean soup (bop) is also served pretty often. I like the soups.

Most any time of day you can buy banitsa from a vendor or from a special bakery in the center of town. Banitsa is fried bread with cheese in the middle and is very, very yummy. (My bread this morning cost 30 stotinki - about 15 cents). Are you detecting a theme here? NOT low fat. There are fried potato cakes, fried peppers with tomato sauce, and fried zucchini with yogurt sauce. Desserts aren't that sweet (except the excellent ice cream) but the version of baklava here is soaked in honey sauce, over a huge flaky pastry.

You'd think everyone here would be enormous. This is not the case at all. I don't get it.

I believe this is the first time in decades, if not my life, that I have lived this far away from a fast food restaurant for this long. The nearest fast food is in Sofia (McDonalds and Pizza Hut). Even Grinnell, Iowa had a Hardees, and Beijing even had Subway. I scoffed when my first two meals

in Bulgaria were McDonalds (in Sofia) but now it's starting to sound pretty good. My fellow Americans here are dreaming of McD french fries, although I think the canteen does OK with french fries. Their "macaroni and tomatoes" (spaghetti) leaves a lot to be desired, however.

The fruit has been yummy. As I mentioned before, it is cherry season and the strawberries are in too. The canteen also has bananas, and apples and street vendors add peaches, kiwi, and some green plums that I'm not brave enough to try but a Romanian student here said they are very tart. Old women and men set up little stands selling sunflower seeds. Small stores sell all sorts of things, but most notably frozen ice cream treats.

The most obvious tension here is the cola wars, and Pepsi is not faring well. Coke has managed to provide yards and yards of fabric for umbrellas, awnings, and anything else it can get to cafes. A student from Missouri suggested that maybe the Coca Cola banner was the new Bulgarian flag. There must be a hundred cafes in town, some only a small shack with a Coke umbrella and four plastic patio chairs. People sit out all day and night sipping Coke, and Fanta, and coffee in the cafes. It's a nice pace.

We've found the two pizza places in town. However, they are just big Bulgarian cafes with a local twist on the idea of pizza. Good crusts, little or no tomato sauce, unusual toppings. Eggs are a new one for me. And yes, they even get cucumbers on there. A loaded, large pizza costs about 3 or 4 leva (1.50-2.00).

As soon as I send this I'll think of something else, but I think that's it for now. Later.

\*J

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Mon, 12 Jun 2000 11:39:05 -0400

From : Dean Harwood

Subject Re: FOOD!

Janice,

My impression was that there are two kinds of cheese - white and yellow (although I think both are white). The feta-like stuff is the white cheese, and the yellow cheese is what's used in banitsa and on pizza. It all tasted the same to me. I think the only difference is that the feta-like stuff doesn't melt and the yellow cheese does. I ate quite often at both pizza places, and I spent plenty of time at the cafes.

I don't know that there is anything I did that you can follow up with. I really didn't do a whole lot while I was there.

Have you met any Mormon "elders?" When I was there, they were trying to get permission to start building their church. I found the young men to be very interesting and enthusiastic. It must be quite a learning adventure for them. Also, have you run into any Peace Corps folks? You know you're off the beaten path when Peace Corp volunteers show up. I would also be interested in hearing your thoughts on what it means to be an expatriate in Blagoevgrad.

One thing that happened to me about this time in the trip was cravings for American food. I couldn't stop thinking about what I wanted to eat when I got home. The cravings stopped after a quarter-pounder at a McDonald's a block from the Thames in London.

Seen any good movies lately?

Enjoy your time, you'll be home sooner than you think.

Dean

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Mon, 12 Jun 2000 20:27:45 -0400 (EDT)

From : Sarah

Subject : Re: FOOD!

hi janice!

it was so fun to read your email about food!!! as a big food person (i subscribe to a bunch of food magazines and just love experimenting with new ethnic foods), it was so interesting to read all about the food there. although I have to say that i don't know if i could live without green veggies - broccoli and spinach...i remember when i was traveling in poland and hungry the food was very heavy, very high in fat, and very meat oriented. but a lot of it was tasty too! i think that one of the greatest pleasures of traveling is sampling the cuisine, and it sounds like you have been doing just that! speaking of all of this food, i need to go home and make some dinner!

glad you are still having a fun time -

:], sarah

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Date: June 12, 2000

Subject: Re:

Hello Jakob!

You did a great job with your English in the e-mail to me!

Things here are going well. The whole city is without water for three days while they flush out the water pipes, so we are all looking forward to a shower.

There was a nice event last nigh for the first anniversary of the NATO troops' entrance into Kosova. The professor from Kosova spoke, and students played the piano and did dramatic performances of poems. It was followed by a party in Skaptopara. It was very nice!

Jordan's e-mail is .... I said hello to him for you!

Have a great day!

\*Janice

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June 12, 2000

From: Theresa

Subject: Re: FOOD!

Good morning!!

Well, I've been trying SO hard not to respond to your WONDERFUL emails, but the food one just left me cracking up!!! I feel so incredibly fortunate to be on your email list. As you began sending your news, I began my new job and boy are we living different lives! I have loved reading about your experiences and I am dying to know how you found out about this and how I can sign up for next year! Wow. Incredible. Thanks so much for all the details and for taking the time to fill us in.

Keep 'em coming!!

TC

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Date: June 12, 2000

Subject: Re: FOOD!

Hi Theresa!

Well, I'm glad you couldn't resist anymore! It's so good to hear from you! How is your new job? Being in the nursing school must combine the good things of being in a big university with the good things of working with a small student population. What sort of projects will you work on? Are you preparing for the incoming class?

...This internship is a part of my doctoral program. We have a "Global Understanding" requirement, and it can be filled by taking a comparative education class, doing independent study on a non-American educational system, or... going abroad for a month and working/studying at a university. It didn't seem like much of a choice for me! We were pretty much on our own to find the internship, but because this has been going on for a few years, there was some precedent. My classmate, Dean, came to AUBG two summers ago and sold me on it. He found out about it when Don Gehring met someone from AUBG at a conference and talked her into agreeing to take an intern. It's been very much worth it.

AUBG ([www.aubg.bg](http://www.aubg.bg)) is tiny, only about 700 students, and is only 10 years old. But it is exciting in its mission to bring American-style liberal arts education to very bright Eastern European students. The majors are those most relevant to building new democracies - journalism, political science, economics - and the students are motivated and very, very smart. One of the biggest challenges is keeping them here - they all want to transfer to the US or, when they graduate, work outside Eastern Europe. The administrative and faculty systems are so young, so new. A lot has been built in 10 years, but it is fascinating to see them starting from "scratch."

I hope you and all of your wonderful family are doing well - kisses all around from me. Drop me another note when you get a chance.

\*J

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Mon, 12 Jun 2000 10:17:14 -0700

Subject: Re: FOOD!

Janice, All of us enjoy your travelogues so much that we mentioned them at the very successful CISS Workshop. Lee Meserve told the whole group (82 including the President) not only about your great work in making CISS a success; but equally important, he raved about your e-travel notes! Thank you so much for thinking about us.

All is well here. We miss you. I hear from Bob almost everyday. He is having a ball at OSU. Keep those great notes coming. This is the closest I will ever get to this campus:) Take care

---

Hello Dr. McKee!

I'm glad to hear that the CISS workshop went well. What a great project. It's funny to hear that my random reflections are spreading. But I'm glad to hear that more people are learning about AUBG, as it is sure to benefit from the increased public awareness. It sure is a neat place, with an amazing amount of growth in just 10 years but also a lot to do. I've been thinking of Milt Hakel a lot today, because I'm reading about the AUBG Outcomes Committee and their toying with establishing learning outcomes and e-portfolios!

That's so great that Bob is happy at OSU and keeping in touch. I have seen why he said rose oil is a popular souvenir, because these people love roses. Even in the parks and roadsides that have been left to go to weeds without the public funds to keep them up, the roses still bloom on. They love this climate and soil!

Please say hello to 3rd floor McFall for me. I hope that your projects are going well (CISS, Enrollment Network, Admissions #s!) and that you are getting a little bit of time to work at a reasonable pace for a change...

\*J

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June 12, 2000

Subject: Re: FOOD!

Hi Dean,

No, I haven't met any Mormon elders. The night I flew into Sofia, Plamen took me to the new church there and Jill drove me back. I met a few people and saw some cars with "Brigham Young" window decals, but I was only there for a few minutes. Spending time with Jill, I thought I might have more LDS contacts, but no. Actually, she's been in Germany on vacation for a week, and just got back on Sunday.

I haven't met any Peace Corps volunteers either. Where did you meet these folks? Perhaps I'm not frequenting the same places.

Most of my experiences around being an American here are set in the backdrop of the Kosovo Education Project. Skaptopara is full of Kosovar students, the professors are there as well, the university and canteen are mostly catering to their classes, and the other short-term Americans here are all teaching in the Project. Actually, I'm trying to make sure this trip is at least SOMEWHAT about Bulgaria, since I'm getting such a big dose of Kosovo. As you might imagine, people from the US are pretty popular with Kosovars, and I've had some good discussions about why America isn't perfect. I more often find myself in the position of trying to

de-deify America rather than defend it. That's not what I imagined before I came. It has also been interesting to monitor my reactions as other Americans come. For instance, two Americans are teaching in the journalism program, and they strike me as VERY American (they are journalists - assertive, loud, quick to opinion about these foreign ways.) I like them both very much, but I find myself cringing a little as the Kosovars and Bulgarians occasionally slyly chuckle or frown at them.

Yes, yes, yes, I've hit the food variety craving point. I was just proud that I hit it at the same time as the student from Amherst College, and he's been here a week less than I have.

I've seen so many videos since I've been here, since we seem to get several every night for the VCR (except this week - it's the soccer playoffs, of some sort.) The theater here at AUBG closed down, I'm afraid, so I've missed that experience. There is still the other theater, but they haven't had any movies I've recognized. Renting is cheap, nearby, and easy.

I know this last 1.5 week will speed by. I need to leave the country this weekend, so I think I'll talk my American colleague from Amherst College into just doing a run over the Macedonian border. We could try to figure out how to go to Greece for the weekend (one of the visiting professors is going to Thessaloniki) but I think I'm kind of adventured out. I'd like to have a Blagoevgrad weekend, maybe explore the valley as far as I can walk, and then have a quiet last week for work and wrap up and goodbyes.

More messages to come - thanks for your replies!

\*J

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June 13, 2000

Subject: Re: FOOD!

Hi Angela,

I'm not sure, but in the cafes almost everyone is drinking Coke and Fanta (no diet anything here.) I know that there are national favorites of beer and wine (red wine from Melnik) so perhaps that's drunk more at home. I think part of the lack of a weight problem is just the economy. I understand that even a couple years ago, people were really, really struggling for food, and even now the average income is less than \$200/month. Even with inexpensive prices to me, that's a pretty small amount of money. With a struggling economy, graft is rampant, and although the cafes are full of people in the middle of the workday, there are also a good share of Mercedes and Land Rovers going around. I'm told Blagoevgrad is a bit of a mafia center.



I kind of doubt there is much organized exercising going on (in the American sense), other than a LOT of necessity walking (and goat herding, depending on who we're talking about.) The vast majority of the young women (and many of the middle aged women) have these unbelievable bodies - slim legs, small hips and waist, very large breasts. So some of it MUST be genetics.

But I think you're right about quantity of food, combinations, and regular exercise in particular. Americans have more choice, more affordability of quantity, and a lot of cars to drive everywhere. People comment a lot about my stereotype-busting when I walk a lot.

Did L2K go well? How are your new co-chairs adjusting to their summer schedule? I heard your new Woody House (ha ha ha!) won't be open for August move-in... sorry.

\*J

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June 13, 2000

Water and An Anniversary

Hello everyone,

My cultural experience for the day is NO WATER. Not just in my residence hall, but in the whole city. Apparently, once each year the city of Blagoevgrad turns off the water and then flushes the entire pipe system with chlorine. This takes 2-3 days (hopefully 2!) People pretty much take it in stride, and just buy a whole lot more bottled water (maybe it's actually planned by Gorna Banya, the water bottlers!) Of course, today was the first day it got really hot, too. So far it's manageable. The water is back on here at the university and smells a lot like chlorine, so perhaps the system will be back up and running tomorrow!

My Cyrillic has improved enough that I read the name of a big imposing statue near the center of town. He is Dimiter Blagoev, clearly the namesake of the city. Another American here told me that he heard that Blagoev was a communist, and that the city considered a name change, but the only other modern name of the city was Turkish and the Turkish history here is even less popular than the communist history. I've found that very interesting. There is a heavy emphasis on the National Revival Period in the late nineteenth century, when the Russians helped liberate Bulgaria from 500 years of Ottoman rule. I've found an English translation of a Bulgarian history book and am about halfway through it, so I'll know more soon.

This last weekend was a big anniversary for the Kosovars. I don't know if it made the US national news, but it was one year ago that NATO troops took over in Kosovo. Some students planned a big organized party at the favorite bar Friday night, and I went and danced for a while.

I've been with this crew for 3.5 weeks now and lots of songs in Albanian now sound familiar. I was pulled into a big , swaying, arm-in-arm crowd bellowing the lyrics to an Albanian love ballad, and was conspicuously not singing along. It was OK, because the next song was Madonna's remake of "American Pie" and I knew almost all of those lyrics :)

Last night was a more formal commemoration. Yesterday I was stopped by a woman I didn't know and was specifically invited and asked to be their guest. The flyer read, "We invite you to participate in our academy-cocktail for the first anniversary of NATO troops entrance in Kosova. Your presence will honor us!" It was held in the university auditorium (a large classroom.) I went with Jordan, who just finished his first year at Amherst College in Massachusetts. We entered a few minutes late, and the room was full of Kosovars. A professor from the University of Prishtine (who we have just been calling "The Professor" and who always has a cluster of eager students) was giving a speech. Of course, I didn't understand a word. I have gotten used to just listening and enjoying the rhythm and cadences of the language, and had just fallen into a bit of a trance when I heard the only English words of the program. "Thank you USA. Thank you NATO." My friend Alban later told me that at least part of the speech asked the crowd to imagine Kosova without intervention - how many refugees? how many beaten? how many family and friends dead and missing? It was clear that many had their own personal guesses as to the answers and felt them clearly.

The rest of the program included a dramatic performance of an Albanian patriotic poem, a short play, and several piano concertos. There was no need for a translator for these. The program ended with another party back at the residence hall. I should note that these parties are mostly or entirely without alcohol. These particular Kosovar Albanians will dance and sing with very little provocation, and can do so all night long. I've danced more here than in years.

Last weekend I went to the Rila Monestery and to Melnik. I'll write more about them another time. I also realize that I haven't written much about the university itself. That will come too.

Thanks for your patience with my long notes, and I look forward to seeing you all again. For now, I need to earn my keep at my internship!

\*J

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June 13, 2000

Flowers

Hi Mom (and everyone in Brunswick and Bedford Hts),

I wanted to tell you about the flowers I've seen. Of course, the roses are everywhere - mostly deep red, but my favorite is a beautiful orange/yellow/red multicolor rose that really stands out.

But the wildflowers are what I wanted to tell you about. The climate here is pretty dry, and it's even been referred to as "desert." Although there are a lot of trees, the soil is sandy and crumbly. The fields have a lot of wildflowers, some of which I don't recognize. I'll show you in pictures. But the main thing in the hills is the Yarrow. There are gold Yarrow and white Yarrow, and they are (mostly) not as big of flower heads as in the store, but they sure do grow wild. The other color in the fields is purple, from these Thistles the size of peaches. In patches, there are bright red-orange poppies that are so pretty. I even saw some wild Hollyhocks growing on the side of the highway.

Both vegetable and flower, people really tend to their gardens. I know that the beautiful little gardens tucked between buildings in the city are partly about sustenance, but the flowers around and in them are not explained that way. Most balconies and window boxes are also full to overflowing with all sorts of plants. My favorite is a corner building in the center of town that has a second floor flower box full of geraniums of hues of red, hot pink, and purple-pink.

There are flower stores around town, and a lot of people seem to buy cut flowers daily. The variety of both cut flowers and potted plants is larger than I thought it would be.

How does your garden grow? :) I look forward to seeing it in a little over a week.

\*J

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June 13, 2000

From: Ramona

Re: Home OK?

Hi there!!! Thank you so much for the message! Yes home ok:):) very much ok, but I miss AUBG and all the people there. Anyway, I will be fine, being home and being treated like a queen makes up for that!):) Wouldn't you say so?! Anyway, that you so much for the connection with your colleague, I am going to contact her if something comes up.. I have to admit, I laughed when I heard about the "truckloads" of stuff, but not to worry, I will NOT bring so much stuff. I actually am trying to come up with a way to stuff everything in a huge suitcase and my backpack I'll see. In any case, do you happen to know what is the maximum weight I can get on a plane? i never had to actually live there, so I never worried about it. Besides the stuff that I have difficulty finding a plane reservation and the fact t hat I still have to take some

vaccines, all is ok. I'll keep you posted once in a while:) How's life theirs now? Lot's of work? How are the new Kosovars? As cool as "ours"?:):) Tell me more. Take care and keep in touch!  
R.:)

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June 14, 2000

Re: Water and An Anniversary

Hi Lee,

I have water! General hygiene among my hallmates didn't seem to be too much worse than usual. :)

Sounds like you enjoyed your time in (the now former) Yugoslavia. I have more invitations to come to Kosovo than I can count, and I hope to someday follow up on them. One of my fellow expatriates here is considering taking a trip there now (it's so close) but I'm just not that adventurous, even with plenty of friendly troops around. I'd like to hope that the situation gets much more stable in the next couple years and I could return... but I don't know how much to expect. I suspect there are more Americans in Prishtina now than in Bulgaria, with the UN, KFOR, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, Red Cross...

Yes, isn't Sindarella a great name? It has nothing to do with the fairy tale. She is engaged to one of the other participants (Kreshnik) and someone referred to him as "the guy who is engaged to Sindarella." I hadn't met her or seen her name yet then, and I thought it was some sort of literary allusion to describe his personality! She is quiet and sweet, and the picture I took of her with her certificate and flower (the one on the web page) is probably one of the best I've taken here.

I head back stateside a week from tomorrow. I will miss the people and the city here, but I have to admit that I'm ready. I might have had a chance to spend the weekend in Thessaloniki (or anywhere else, if I'd planned it) but I'm just not feeling like I have the energy to set out. I need to leave the country to renew my visa for the last week, so I'll probably just cross over the nearby border with Macedonia and come back. I still have projects to wrap up here at the university, then I think I'm ready...

I'm so glad to hear that CISS is going well! (Dr. McKee wrote too.) I didn't finish a web page before I left and transferred my assistantship to About Campus, but I'd like to work on it some this summer anyway. It's such a neat project, and I've told people here about it and the enrollment initiatives.

Take care, and I'll be back soon!

\*J

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June 15, 2000  
Happy Father's Day

Hello Dads and others,

I hope you both got my e-cards - I don't know if they got through or not. I've also sent a present by mail, so we'll see if that gets there.

I have an opportunity to go to Thessaloniki, Greece until Saturday, so after a very quick packing job, I'm off. I'll be back in Blagoevgrad on Saturday. Another adventure!

Love you all, and I'll see you in about 8 days...

\*J

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Thu, 15 Jun 2000 10:26:36 -0700 (PDT)  
From : chris  
Subject : any new news on financial aid?

Hi Janice! I am in Colorado right now at my summer job, and I am just wondering if you have heard anything new on my financial situation. It turns out that I will be able to use my AmeriCorps award for AUBG... So if you have a chance, maybe you could e-mail me and let me know if anything new has turned up. Thank-you, and have a great day.--- chris

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Thu, 15 Jun 2000 19:02:14 -0400  
Subject : Re: Happy Father's Day

Hi Janice,

Yes, I got my ecards. I read where American Greetings is about to overtake Blue Mountain as the most visited card site. Thanks for the thought. I printed out both mine and Jeff's in case he didn't get around to changing the cartridge in his printer.

Got your book from Amazon.com this afternoon and read it already. I'll take it over to Jeff's tomorrow. The history lesson on the Balkans up to the breakup of the Soviet Union was very informative. The Authors weren't shy about letting you know what their politics were for the

subsequent period. We did agree on Billy, though for different reasons. While on politics, the papers here have been relating the problems the UN is having with newspapers in Kosova. Apparently they have been publishing names of suspected Serb war criminals who wind up dead without a trial shortly after. One was a UN employed translator and the UN shut down the newspapers when they wouldn't cease and desist. Today's paper said they started publishing again rerunning the story that got the translator killed. Sounds like a shortage of responsibility to go with the freedom we provided.

...I guess I'll close for now. Hope you enjoyed Greece. Dad.

---

June 17, 2000

Subject: To eagle

Hello Janice,

today I'm more free then other's days, and now I want to write to you and to ask you for your health and for your feel those times. I hope and I believe that your family and your boy-friend are very well, and you too.

I have received your e-mail (before four day's) and I want to thank to you very very much for your information what you did in Scaptopara. I have begining to learn English with my friend, who is Italian, but and he don't know well (but more better than me). I hope that you didn't forget that's word (wich you did learned) in albanian language.

If I have more time free I'll can send you every time any lesson for learn (of course if you want).

Njëjës - Singu.

Unë - I

Ti - You

Ai (Ajo) - He (She)

Shumës - Plural

Ne - We

Ju - You

Ata (Ato) - They

Forgive me for mine mistakes, because that's my english. You are very polite woman.

If you have chance send me e-mail, because I waiting every time.

Thank you.

With regard

Jacob

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Monday, June 19, 2000 9:49 AM

Subject: Quick question

Hey Dad-

Quick question - how much does it cost to develop a roll of film (24), and how much for doubles? I'm trying to decide if I should develop some rolls here or wait to get home. To develop a roll of 24 is about \$3.60 here, but I don't know what for doubles. Also, one roll I got done here came back with funny colors that I don't think were my camera settings, so... (and I don't know how to complain in Bulgarian...)

Anyway, how much for, say, K-Mart to develop?

I can't remember!!!

Thanks,

\*J

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Hi Janice,

K-Mart's regular price for doubles is \$5.99 US plus tax now. Rite Aid is currently running a special this week for \$1.99 for single 3 inch prints. Walgreens normally charges \$.23 a 4 inch reprint from negatives. The mail order Photoworks varies from \$5 to \$10 for singles depending on coupon offers available but includes high resolution CD and internet posting. Doubles are usually \$2 more. With coupons currently on hand (they may have an even better deal on their web site [www.photoworks.com](http://www.photoworks.com)), I calculate they'll cost \$11.25 for doubles per roll.. Last time I used them, they threw in two rolls of film for the heck of it.

I know what you mean about colors in processing done outside of the US. While it could be a quality problem, they do adjust the color differently in other parts of the world to account for local tastes (per my contacts at Kodak when I worked on that account). Sounds like their prices are comparable.

Father Day was interesting this year. Jeff and I spent a good part of it putting up a 150 ft of 6 ft fence around his back yard. It went pretty fast using his buddy's nail gun. Close for now. See you Friday. Dad.

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June 19, 2000

Subject: Greek Life

6/19/00

First, allow me to acknowledge that Dean has correctly pointed out that there is indeed a second kind of cheese here called "yellow cheese." The main difference between it and the other cheese seems to be that yellow cheese melts. However, as Dean noted, the two cheeses taste suspiciously similar.

Well, I'm telling all of these stories completely out of order, but so be it. My latest story is an exciting one, so I have to get it off to you. Last week, I was sitting here thinking about my internship, and decided that a good university internship should include a thorough study of Greek Life. So, I headed south.

Seriously though...

A few weeks back, I met a visiting professor (for summer school) here who teaches Eastern Asian Literature. He's on the faculty at Southern Utah State University, but spent a semester here as a Fulbright scholar a couple years back and knows AUBG well. Sathyam is a short, older man, with golden brown skin, and a bald head except for a ring of white hair from ear to ear around the back of his head. He is animated and full of quotations from Indian and Shakespearean literature, unfailing delivered with a smile and a chuckle and a thick Indian accent. He was born and grew up in India, but got his doctorate in the US and has been a US citizen since 1985. I asked to sit in on his class, and got a small dose of Indian literature. He had been talking about joining another administrator here and taking a long weekend to Greece. I considered asking to go along, but I was feeling less adventurous as I came within sight (almost a week) of the end of my trip. So I decided to not ask.

On Thursday at lunch, I saw Sathyam and told him I wanted to hear all about the trip when he got back. I mentioned to my Student Services officemates, Maia and Todor, that I had considered asking to go but decided not to. They both were on that like a dog on a T-bone. They wouldn't let me go until I agreed to take the opportunity. "Don't think, just go!" said Maia. Todor explained that for him to go to Greece it would take a month of arrangements and



paperwork and hassle, and that I needed to take advantage of the magic of my American passport. So I went back upstairs to ask Sathyam if I could tag along. It turned out that his travelmate had cancelled due to work on the Bulgarian accreditation report, so my company was much welcomed. I packed in an hour, and we departed on Thursday afternoon.

There is much more to tell about my 4-day trip than I'm sure you have time to read, so I'll just give an outline and I'll just have to tell you more about it when I get home!

It was really hot when we left, and I thought it might be crazy to be going south in that weather. We caught a bus from Blagoevgrad and went straight south for a little over an hour. The border crossing went without too much trouble, and it took about half an hour for the stops and luggage checks at both the Bulgarian and Greek checkpoints. We got back on the road again, continuing south.

The difference once we passed the border was immediate and shocking. I realized that I'd been in Bulgaria long enough that I'd become accustomed to its shabbiness and anachronistic practices. It's kind of like meeting someone and at first being embarrassed by their threadbare clothes, but then getting to know the person and not seeing the patches and tatters anymore. But being in Greece was a jolt. When we entered, there were big signs proclaiming Greece as a member of the EU, and it was clear to me then why Bulgarians had difficulty visiting Greece.

The Greek landscape was covered with neatly tended, well-watered, lush fields of crops. The roads were paved and smooth, with multiple lanes. Even the cars looked newer. I realize that they didn't look all that more prosperous than, say, Ohio or Iowa or Virginia, but next to Bulgaria... In Bulgaria, the fields are haphazardly shaped by hand-tilling and people are constantly out in the sun bent over a hoe. Irrigation is done by digging small trenches from the nearest stream. The roads are best left to professional drivers. On a bus racing through Greece, Sathyam and I must have been a comical sight. Two Americans, pointing and chattering in wonder at tractors, agricultural sprinklers, and supermarkets with shopping carts.

We entered the Greek prefecture of Macedonia, which you probably know as the home region of Alexander the Great, Phillipi, and Mt. Olympus (just over into Thessaly.) You can see the region on a map here <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/dest/eur/graphics/map-gre.htm>.

It only took a couple more hours to get to Thessaloniki. It is a large city, second only to Athens as Greece's second. It was also the second city in Byzantium (I still can't get used to the depth and span of historical notes here.) Thessaloniki was named in 316 BC by the Macedonian general Kassandros. After the Roman conquest in 168 BC, it was the capital of the province of Macedonia. It was sacked by the Normans in 1185, made a feudal kingdom under the Marquis

Boniface of Montferrat in 1204, and reincorporated into the Byzantine Empire in 1246. It fell to Ottoman rule in 1430. Greece became Greece as such in 1913, so that all rounds out a very short history of the city. It experienced a huge fire in 1917 and a severe earthquake in 1978, but there was enough history around from each period to keep me happy. Mostly, the Byzantine churches were amazing, and the old city wall is remarkably intact. The water in the Gulf of Thessaloniki is an incredible shade of blue. I made poor Sathyam walk a circuit of most of the city (including almost all the way up to the fortress on the hill) once on Saturday and once on Sunday.

On Friday we continued on from Thessaloniki by bus to Kavala. We didn't stay long in Kavala, but it is a city of 57,000 that clings to the sides of mountains before they plunge into the shoreline. According to the guidebook, Kavala is built over ancient Neopolis, which was the port of Philippi. It was the European port of entry from the Orient, as so was the port of entry for St. Paul in 49 AD when he came to Europe to convert the pagan Europeans. In addition to more city walls and a fortress, it has an impressive aqueduct built 1520-1566.

From Kavala, we took another bus to Kerimoti, a small town with a ferry to Thasos. Thasos is the northernmost of the Greek Islands. It is truly beautiful. It is mountainous, very green and forested, and very peaceful. It is admittedly pretty well expecting tourists (in Bulgaria, even the most touristy tourist spots don't feel touristy) but Thasos was beautiful enough to be forgiven that. I got to see a small percentage of the Roman ruins. There are apparently all sorts of references to Thasos by the Gods themselves. I'll have to read up more on that. More recently, Thasos was occupied by Bulgaria in WWII. We stayed in a little mountaintop village called Panagia.

One of the many differences I noted in Greece was a clearly different opinion about American political actions than I had become accustomed to, spending so much time with Kosovars. No one said anything to us personally (except a fruit vendor who enthusiastically said Greeks love Americans) and people were very friendly, but there was ubiquitous graffiti. It was almost always in red spray paint and appeared on highway underpasses and buildings in Thessaloniki. Some of it was all Greek to me (ba dum dum) but years on college campuses allowed me to sound out most of the words. I caught a version of American, "Klinton", NATO, a version of the word Balkan, and a lot of exclamation points. They usually were accompanied by a communist symbol or swastika. The authors seemed to have some uniformity in the messages and I wondered if the paintings were coordinated. They were kind enough to translate some of them to English, simply shouting in writing from the concrete, "America get out!" We noted it all, said "OK", and I practiced speaking with an Australian accent in case I needed to.

It was a short but very packed trip. I don't think I nearly did it justice. But it was my vacation while on vacation, I suppose. I feels good to be back in Bulgaria with so much familiar. On

Thasos, I realized that my belongings were at that moment in 1.) Panagia, Greece, 2) Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, 3) Brunswick, Ohio, and 4) Bowling Green, Ohio. I'm feeling a little scattered and perhaps ready to head home. The second group of Kosovar Albanians headed home on Sunday, and it is much quieter here. There are a few new programs, but they are smaller and I've not yet met anyone from there. My friend Alban is still here studying English, and I will have some difficulty saying goodbye to the folks in Student Services. I leave very, very early on Friday morning.

I'll try to write again about more Bulgarian things! We had a small fire in the AUBG restaurant over the weekend, and so the server was down, so you're getting this on Tuesday...

\*J

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June 19, 2000

Subject: Re: any news on financial aid?

Hi Chris,

That's great news, and I've forwarded your message on to Yordanka Melnikliiska, the Director of Admissions. I haven't heard back anything yet, but I hope something will come through for you.

I got a chance last weekend to take a bus down to Greece. I visited Thessaloniki and Kavala, and took a ferry to the Greek island of Thasos. With an American passport, there doesn't seem to be too much trouble getting around. If you come here, I recommend those places. If you find yourself planning the trip, e-mail me and I'll give you some recommendations for hotels and such.

I leave Bulgaria very early on Friday to return to Ohio and my US graduate student life. It has been a fantastic experience here, and I do hope you are able to attend AUBG and spend time in this country. It is a special place.

My e-mail will travel with me, so feel free to ask me any more questions about my trip, but from here on in it would be better for you to contact the Admissions Office or Financial Aid directly for information about your coming to AUBG.

It sounds like you have a fun summer job in Colorado - enjoy yourself, and let me know if you become and AUBG student!

Sincerely,

Janice Gerda

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June 20, 2000

Subject: Chris Butler's Excellent Adventure

Hello from Bulgaria (still!)

I know that not everyone I'm sending this to knows my friend Chris Butler well, but I thought I'd send her note for several reasons. One, to update those who know her; two, it's just funny; three, to show you what a wonderfully fun and creative hostess I had when I was in London for the first week of my trip. I arrived the day after Katie was born, and despite the tone of the e-mail, when I was there they were all (Chris, Ellis, Jack, Will and baby Katie) healthy and cheerful and remarkably gracious in the midst of their excellent adventure!

Here is Chris' mass e-mail to friends about the birth of their beautiful little girl!

\*Janice

From Chris:

OK, so Ellis has set the bar so high for himself with his witty press releases regarding the birth of our first two children that the pressure was too great and we've put off our e announcement to ludicrous lengths. Our sweet Kate is five weeks old now, and since it has been at least that long since I've even checked my e-mail, I thought I'd get on with the business of filling you all in on my version of the story.

Chapter One: Apologies and Disclaimers (otherwise known as lame excuses and why I've been out of touch) Jack comes home from school Friday with wicked sore throat. Mom goes into labor three hours later in posh London restaurant. Mom and Dad go to hospital. Katie comes out twenty four hours later. Boys visit Mom and "x-ray" (see longer version of story below) in hospital spewing germs left and right. Mom and Dad get cold three days later. Katie gets cold ten days later. Jack gets strep ten days after that. Dad gets strep two days later. Mom thinks she has strep two days after that, but only wicked virus that dries up all breast milk. Katie underweight until forced formula supplements drive her well into the safety zone of child development charts. Jack comes home from school feeling lethargic. After vomiting and diarrhea for 12 hours, Jack (vaccinated in 1998 against chicken pox) gets chicken pox. Will, Mom (who never had it) and Kate currently puking, pooping and awaiting the arrival of the itchies.

Now that I've properly cultivated your sympathies and hopefully staved off any lingering resentment over the piss-poor way we've disseminated information about our wonderful arrival, here's the rest of the story. (Oh, and anyone wishing to take issue with my spelling of diahhrea must take into account that the English spellings of medical terms has completely thrown me off my usually excellent spelling instincts.)

## Chapter Two: Where Proper English Ladies DON'T Go Into Labor (Subtitled: Why Confinement Was Actually a Good Idea)

It was a dark and stormy night. Just kidding. Actually it was a sunny evening, as most British evenings are in the summertime. I went to my OB's office for a checkup with a little less than two weeks to go until my due date. He gave me an internal exam (the details of which I shall spare you) and says, "My goodness, it looks like you may go into labor tonight. You're two centimeters dilated, and since your last labor went quickly, don't hesitate to check in when you feel some serious contractions." I skipped out of the office and get in a cab, on my way to meet Ellis at Clarke's, a really superb restaurant where we have scheduled our last date before the arrival of baby. I was delighted that I would be able to break the news over vanilla mousse with raspberry coulis that we'll most likely be parents by weekend's end. The taxi drops me off in front of the restaurant and I wait for Ellis outside.

As I paced I began to feel those familiar cramps that signal a further limitation of my personal freedom. The maitre d' came out of the restaurant and asked me if I'd like to take my table, and I said, "I fear if we sit down to dinner that we will soon require a table for three." He looked at me with a blank expression and began to scan the dining room for an alternative table. I smiled and pointed to my stomach. He said (verbatim),

"Crikey! I'm so bloody daft," and broke into the sweat of a first-time father.

He sat me down at the table closest to the door, fetched me water and proceeded to inform the rest of the staff that I was going into labor. Ellis was late (shocking, but true), so I was attended quite well by tentative and nervous male waiters bearing breadsticks and lots of water. The chef came out of the kitchen with a special dinner to go for the expectant father, on the house. By that time people were staring, so I called Ellis via cell phone. He was stuck in a train tunnel so I told him that dinner was cancelled and that he needed to meet me at home. Our fabulous part-time nanny cleared her weekend schedule and stayed with the boys as we got into a cab and headed for the hospital. Jack cried as we left, not because mommy was going into the hospital but because he couldn't come and see the doctor take the baby out.

## Chapter Two: The First (But Not The Last) Time Katie Made Her Dad Pace

Once the epidural was administered by extremely competent hands (no spinal headaches this time!!), I went to sleep. So did Kate. After no contractions for six hours, they administered the dreaded oxytocin, and we waited some more. My OB delivered two babies whose moms were admitted after me, and came back to check up on me. After watching an entire golf tournament on TV, he came in and told me not to be discouraged, and that he wouldn't even consider a c-section until we'd been trying about 24 hours. (This was at hour 21.) We turned off my epidural, established feeling in my legs again and hit the hallways in slippers. Kate decided at hour 22 to head on out as fast as she could now that all pain relief medications were out of my body. Boy, did it hurt. (!!!!!!!!!!!) She was gorgeous from the first moment, and a great sleeper and eater. The boys fell in love the instant they saw her.

### Chapter Three (This is the last one, I promise): The "X-Ray" Dilemma

When I came home from my sonogram at month five, with the knowledge, improbable as it was, that we were to expect a girl, I approached Jack very carefully with the news. He had been very vocal about his preference for a little brother and his intentions to call him Will as well, since the first one turned out so well. While he was making a visit to the can, where we have many of our most serious chats, I showed him the sonogram pictures, which he loved. When I told him it was a girl, he chastised me for getting the "order wrong," and vowed to call his sister "X-Ray," presumably inspired by the black and white printout he had just seen. Ellis and I, meanwhile, had

taken our time in choosing a name for this child, and selected Kathleen Robinson about two days before delivery. We told Jack this and he said that he would still call her X-Ray. He told all the teachers at school that we named her X-Ray as well as all the nurses at the hospital. I took about a week to chase down all the rumors about the strange, hippie American family over on Ossington Street who named their child X-Ray. He still calls her X-Ray, but will not abide any suggestion that Katie may, as a retaliatory measure, invent a nickname for her oldest brother when she is old enough. I fear that this one may stick, but were doing our best to give everyone else the option of calling her Kate.

Anyway, we miss you all so much, and having a baby so far away from family and friends is not as much fun as it might be, but we are reveling in the joy and civility that Katie has brought into our home. Will is delighted with her and scolds Jack for calling her X-Ray when her real name is "Tatie." We hope that you will all get a chance to meet her when we bring the family to the states sometime this summer. When we know when we're coming (and when we have Katie's passport and when we're pox-free and when I can unclench my toes enough to actually board a plane), we'll let you know.

With much love and gratitude for your love, your good wishes and your good humor despite our poor communication,

Chris

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June 20, 2000

Subject: Re: Fwd: Back to the Land of the Living, Almost...

Chris!

What an absolutely wonderful message. I've read it to my officemates here in Bulgaria and forwarded it on to anyone I didn't see on your "to" list. I see that your creative writing skills are only sharpened by the mommy adventures. I'm so sorry to hear that you all got sick! I did have a cold for a while after getting here, but I've been blaming it on Bulgaria. I'm free and clear on the chicken pox thing, since I had them in the 2nd grade.

I can't believe Katie is already six weeks old, but that makes sense since my trip was scheduled to be six weeks long and I head home on Friday. Wow.

I remembered what you said about the plundering of the British, and thought of you often whenever I went somewhere in Bulgaria or Greece and the travel info said, "The items found in the archaeological excavation of this site can be viewed at the British Museum in London." Sigh.

To both Chris and Ellis - thank you again, and give all of your beautiful children a big kiss for me!

\*J

P.S. I just wanted you to know that I won the middle school spelling bee for Brunswick in 1979 by correctly spelling "diarrhea". It's not really a victory type of word, but it seemed to work for both of us.

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June 20, 2000

Subject: Re: Home OK?

Hi Ramona,

Since you asked, and since I get on a plane on Friday, I thought I'd look up the international flight luggage restrictions. I went to the Northwest Airlines site ([www.nwa.com](http://www.nwa.com)) and it said that international flyers can check two pieces of luggage, max. 70 pounds each and 62 linear inches (I think that means wrapped around.) I don't have a conversion table handy, but perhaps you can figure it out. In addition to the checked luggage, you can take a carryon of a maximum outside linear dimension of 45 inches (it needs to fit under the seat in front of you or overhead) although I've seen lots of people with BIG carryons. Finally, you can take a purse or briefcase.

So, you can check two big bags, carry on a backpack, and carry a purse/briefcase. That should be a lot of stuff. Remember, you have to lug it all around before and after the flight!

My big news here is that I went to Greece last weekend. Professor Moorty was going and I tagged along. We went to Thessaloniki, and the island of Thasos. I'll tell you all about it and share pictures when we get together.

Yes, it is definitely quieter here. The Kosovars who were studying public administration left on Sunday, and I missed saying good bye because I was in Greece. I miss Vilson and Sead. But nothing was like "our" Kosovars! My dad says the US press is reporting a lot of stories about Kosovar Albanian retaliation. That's really concerning.

I need to leave soon - it's too hard saying goodbyes all the time!

I will leave on Friday morning at (gulp) 4:30 am. I'm shopping furiously for all the souvenirs that I DIDN'T buy for four and a half weeks, and taking pictures a lot. Once that is done, I think I'm ready to head home. I'll miss AUBG, but there's so much waiting for me at home.

I hope your plane arrangements work out! Keep in touch!

\*J

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June 20, 2000

Re: Happy Father's Day

Hi Dad,

Glad you got your cards and book. I have a copy of the book here and, yes, I thought the same thing about the political opinions at the end. But it is good to remain nationally humble here by remembering that we might be just another empire, influencing away.



That's too bad about the Indians game not going so smoothly. Sometimes it works out, sometimes not. I should have a fun picture for all of you when I come back. I saw a "knockoff" in Greece of an Indians hat. It was a very wavy Chief Wahoo on a black and gold "Chicago Indians" hat. The little girl wearing it was an adorable German tourist. I asked to take her picture, and her father asked why. I tried to explain, and he sounded sad when he said, "It is wrong?" I hope I didn't make him feel bad, and I hope the picture comes out.

I can't wait to see Jeff's fence!

Ack! It's dinner time! Only tonight, Wednesday, and Thursday left...

\*J

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June 20, 2000  
Re: Greek Life

Janice,

Very cool story. It kind of makes a couple hundred years of American history seem pretty insignificant. My favorite line is how you were pleased to be back in the familiar surroundings of Bulgaria. I can't wait to hear about your return to the "familiar" surroundings of the USA. Be prepared for a really strange kind of culture shock. Have a safe trip and I'll talk to you when you are back in BG (that's Bowling Green, not Bulgaria)!

Dean

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June 20, 2000  
Re: any new news on financial aid?

Hey Janice, thanks for your e-mail. Your trip to Greece sounded really cool. Did you see any waves over there? If I go to Bulgaria I'm bringing my surfboard so that I can take a few excursions to Portugal and other places (I hope). Listen, I just want to thank-you for all of your time and help. I hope your time in the states is as eventful as your time in Bulgaria. From now on I will write directly to the financial aid office. Safe travels and lots of luck. Aloha, Chris

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June 20, 2000  
Re: Home OK?

Hi Ramona,

Not a trivial question - important for Michiganers!

Don't bother lugging winter clothes, especially if they are hard to find in Romania. You might not find a winter coat right away in the stores (in August) in the US, but you won't have too much trouble in the fall. There is a wonderful range of prices and qualities. The good news is that, if you look hard enough, you can find almost anything at any time of year. The discount stores will soon have fall and winter coats for \$30 on up. There is also my favorite store chain, called "Big Lots", that sells really, really cheap merchandise that has been overstocked in another store or is out of season. There, a coat will be \$20 or less. It might not be the warmest coat, but if need be you can layer with sweaters. There are also "outlet" stores in Michigan, which sell off overstocked merchandise for major stores. Of course, there are always thrift shops (second-hand clothes) which are trendy in some circles. If all else fails, we'll tell my dad to look for a winter coat for a certain price and he will find you one (shopping for really good bargains is his hobby, and he scours the stores almost every day!) One of these options will keep you warm until next spring when the after-season sales will provide an inexpensive but higher quality coat, if you haven't found one by then.

Really, don't worry too much about finding things in the US stores. It's not as cheap as Bulgaria, but there are all sorts of stores that cater to those of us who are living student lifestyles.

Let me know if you have other questions, trivial or not...

\*J

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June 20, 2000

Re: FOOD!

Hi Sarah,

One of my friends here is a vegetarian and he seems to be doing OK here. There are a lot of green leafies (spinach, cabbage, although no broccoli) in the markets here, although I think you'd need to have a kitchen to really take advantage of it. I'm not a cook, but walking through the open market with stands piled high with tomatoes, onions, garlic, cucumbers, spinach, peppers, zucchini... it makes me want to cook! Also, the fruit has been good. So, the raw ingredients are all there even if that's not what they make in the canteen or in restaurants.

I think of you often because I'm traveling with the travel set you gave me for my last Christmas in Virginia. You meant it for China, and I did take it, but it's been great for this trip. The shampoo, conditioner and body wash will last just the right amount of time :)

Hope all is well with you - I'm preparing to leave on Friday, with mixed feelings...

\*J

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June 20, 2000

Re: FOOD!

Theresa,

Thanks for your long note back and the update. I love how your personality comes through in your notes and I can almost hear your laugh...

You asked:

"What will you be doing when you return to the states?"

I start on Monday (yes, after flying home on a very long Friday) as the editorial assistant for About Campus. I got two days of orientation before I left but I'm not really sure now much I remember! Also, I'm taking two classes, beginning July 3. That should keep me busy until mid-August when I'm serving as an Orientation Leader for the new graduate students. Then classes! So I will have to readjust to faster pace pretty quickly!

Hope your new job is going swimmingly - later!

\*J

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June 20, 2000

Shopping Spree!

Hello all,

Now that I'm down to my last couple days I am buying a few last things and wondering if I shouldn't have bought more, with the inexpensive prices. So, let me say a few words about shopping.

My guide book had said that Bulgaria sells just about everything, and it was right. I am amazed and the amount of stuff for sale in this city. I suspect that you could find just about any category

of "thing", so long as you weren't fussy about size or brand. The stores on the streets are small, and specialize in very small ways - appliances, baby clothes, soaps and toiletries.

The Sunday before the first group of Kosovars left, the president had a reception to say goodbye. The last session that day was about etiquette, and after that speech I could hardly show up for the reception in my shorts. So I went shopping for a dress. The good news is that in Bulgaria, I'm a size 3. The bad news is that there are only three dress sizes in most stores, sizes 1, 2 and 3. The taste in fashion for young city women here is based upon the words "skimpy" and "tight" (much noticed by the men around me, be they Bulgarian, Kosovar, or American) and the outfits probably wander into "tacky" on a regular basis. The women (even many of the older women) have the figures to pull it off. Even in this environment, I found a very nice dress for about \$30 and the shopping experience was good.

Then, there are lots of booths that set up every day on the street (I should note - most of the center streets in Blagoevgrad are wide pedestrian streets, so no cars.) The stands also specialize, with snacks, books, tapes and CDs, jewelry, toys, candy, or magazines. The reading materials are almost exclusively in Bulgarian.

A third type of store is that of the booths in the open market, or "pazar" (you can think of "bazaar" in that word.) There are two main market areas, both right next to my residence hall. They have dozens and dozens of metal booths, and their proprietors set up and take down all the merchandise every morning and every night. One area is primarily small consumer goods - running shoes, women's clothes, baby clothes, fabrics on the bolt, perfumes and toiletries, screws and nails and hardware, towels and tablecloths, kitchen appliances, soccer clothes, miscellaneous. This area looks like a giant outdoor "Big Lots" separated into tables with individual vendors. The other area is food, and has beautiful produce piled up and for small prices. There is also, for sale, small starter plants with bare roots for your own garden and goat and cow bells.

I've enjoyed seeing the "knock-offs", merchandise that is sold to people here under the pretext of being American. Scott, from Missouri, saw a t-shirt that said "Kancac State" across the front (in Cyrillic, "c" is pronounced "s"). I saw two "Lee" t-shirts with the familiar font but the "ee" was upside down. In Greece, I snapped a shot of a little girl wearing a "Chicago Indians" baseball cap.

Ironically for me, there are very few places that sell Bulgarian crafts or souvenirs. There were some booths in Sofia and Sandanski, but not much here. Blagoevgrad, and most of Bulgaria, seems infinitely more interested in western (American) merchandise.

Gotta go work on my last two days of projects here in the office - I hope to get off at least one more message before I leave...

\*J

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June 21, 2000

Before you go...

Janice,

I figure you've gotten plenty of requests to bring back souvenirs for friends, so I wanted to go ahead and throw mine in with the rest;) Could you please send me a postcard? I still collect them and would love a scene from Bulgaria signed by my favorite Dean;) No pressure, though. If you don't have a moment, no problem. Just get home safely.

Thanks for sharing news from your travels. I learned, too!

Always,  
Adriane

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June 21, 2000

Re: FOOD!

hi janice - thanks for the email...i know you must be very busy, so i appreciate that you took the time to write to me! i have really enjoyed all of your updates - you should be a travel writer!  
good luck with your trip home!  
take care, sarah

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Thu, 22 Jun 2000 01:49:00 PDT

From : architecture\_f26@hotmail.com

dear Janice Gerda and Moorty

how are you? it is a mail from Frank, do you still remember? it is the one you met in the old town in thessaloniki.?!?! i remembered last time you have told me that you are doing something like research here, so is everything ok? well for me here, i don't have so much workload, but i still can learn many things. that is good to me i think. talking about last time, after we said goodbye, i walked up to the castle at the top of the hill. i can tell u that it is a wonderful view of the whole town and i took many pictures. by the way, talking about picture, i just want to say

that cause i will be back to HK in middle of august, i think it need some time for me to develop it. ... it will be a little bit longer for u to have a look of the pictures, but anyway i will do it and construct my homepage as soon as possible.

regards

Frank @^^@

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June 22, 2000

Re: Before you go...

Hi Adriane!

Your postcard went out of the Blagoevgrad post office today! Let me know when you get it - I'll be really curious to see how long it takes to get there.

Later!

\*J

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June 22, 2000

To: architecture\_f26@hotmail.com

Re:

Hi Frank!

It's great to get your message! I was going to drop you a message when I got home, but you caught me just before I left. I'm flying back to the US all day tomorrow. I know you are still living your adventure, so I don't expect to see your webpage for quite a while. You should focus on the people and the sights, and work on the computer later! I will try to do a webpage myself, and I'll let you know when I get that done too so you can see some of Bulgaria.

Enjoy yourself, and safe travels!

\*Janice

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June 22, 2000

Headed home

Hello folks!

This is my last chance at the computer till I get home, so I thought I'd just say one last hi and "see you soon." You have my itinerary, and so I'll just give you (Mom & Dad) a call when I get in at Hopkins (I think it's about 6:30 pm... check my schedule.) I will stay in Brunswick Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and head back to Bowling Green on Sunday night. I'm afraid I have to be at work on Monday (sigh.) Since classes don't start until Monday, July 3, I'll probably plan to come spend next weekend with you too, if that's OK.

Hard to believe I'll be there soon. I'm off to a goodbye picnic, then final packing, then a small amount of sleep, and then movin' around the globe again...

Love you,

\*J

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June 23, 2000

Hello is the sates there ...hello ...here is Bulgaria ..blagoevgrad

Dear janice -

I know that now you must be flying while I'm writing to you ...but I just want to make sure that you will go safe and sound to your home - " sweet home" ....

So let me know when you get home ... and how whas the trip ?

Thank you once for all

later on

alban

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June 26, 2000

Home OK?

Hi there!

My turn to ask if home is ok . . . I hope you got there well and you can actually sleep at night . . . :) I know how that feels. Just wanted to check on you for now. Not much new stuff here, just that I was out of the town for the weekend--I went to see a friend who is a student in Cluj, a very important University Center in Romania and a beautiful city I have never seen till now:(Imagine, a Romanian and not having been in so many parts of my own country. We do not travel a lot around here . . . Hope you will get back to me when you can.

Take care,

Ramona

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June 26, 2000

Re: Home OK?

Ramona,

Yes, I'm here safe! This morning, I'm even in Bowling Green, my final destination (I spent the weekend at my parents' house, and drove here with my cat about 1 am this morning.) I started work this morning, although my predecessor is still moving out and I seem to mostly be in the way, so I'm trying to read my notes and just get in the right mind frame.

It's so weird to be back. I went in a huge grocery store and felt overwhelmed, the cars/trucks seem huge, the grass seems unnaturally well-tended, and I'm realizing just how little responsibility and work I had to do in Bulgaria -- and how much people are expecting of me now that I'm back! But everyone has been so welcoming and happy to see me, and they haven't yet told me to shut up about my trip.

Hey, in the six weeks I was gone, the price of gas went from \$1.36 per gallon to \$1.92 per gallon. Sheesh! I know that's still low compared to Europe, but Europeans don't have to drive as far as I do to get anywhere!

Glad to hear you're getting in some traveling. I'm going to take a break from traveling, I think, but I hope to get up into Canada, perhaps in August. Meanwhile, I have plenty to do to get back in the swing of things!

Take care, and keep in touch.

\*J

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June 26, 2000

Made it home!

Hello Jill, Maia, Todor and Polly!

Just wanted to let you know that I made it back safely to my parents' house, after 23 hours of travel with flight delays, superb weather, little sleep, and a trip to McDonald's on the way home from the airport. My cat didn't remember me at first, and ran and hid under the bed when he saw me. But he came around, and has been extra affectionate lately so that I don't leave him for 6



weeks again. I drove the both of us to Bowling Green last night and we're back in the routine already. I started work at my new assistantship today.

Thank you all so much for the desk items and the sentiments that went with them. They will grace my new desk in my (tiny with orange shag carpeting) graduate student office. Jill, the dinner at your place was the perfect ending to an Excellent Adventure. Thank you all, again.

Please keep in touch!

\*Janice

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August 8, 2000

Hey janice

Hi Janice. I don't know if you remember me, but you helped me to organize everything to become a student at AUBG. My name is Chris Martelles and you wrote and called me a few times while you were out there. Anyways, I just wanted to thank-you for all your help and I will be leaving for AUBG in about 2 weeks. So I hope your school is going well. Thank-you for the help.

Aloha, Chris