

AH ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

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ANNIVERSARY NOTE:

This is the AH's 15th year of operation. We are planning a substantial celebration on the 4th of July. If you are considering attending this gala event—or would just like to be kept informed of the plans for the celebration—please notify Oxana. She will put you on the Anniversary Celebration mailing list. We especially need to know well in advance if you will need assistance with getting a visa.

Oxana: ah@amhome.elcom.ru

INTRODUCTION –Ron

This issue of the newsletter is obviously late. A lot has been going on, both personal and regarding the AH. For example, our son Bryan has relocated to California where he is working on a Masters in Buddhist Studies at the University of the West. (Bryan taught at the AH in the 1996 summer session. And he recently taught English for a year in Japan. We've also added a grandson: Danny; born May 19, 2006.)

Russian Staff

On the AH side, two staff members, Lena Belova and Olya Solovkina, are out on maternity leave. Lena is expecting her second child the beginning of January. Olya's daughter, Viktoria, was born October 23. I'm assured that all are doing well.

The two young women ably replacing Lena and Olya are introduced below. We are most fortunate to have Jenya and Natasha join the AH team.

English Program

A substantial amount of time and effort is being put into organizing and revamping the English program. Materials have been carefully indexed and stored on the computer. Lena and Kelli Gladeny, co-Lead Teacher last year, devoted a good deal of time to this project this past summer.

Lena, with help from Jenya and Joanna Greenlee, this year's Lead Teacher, put considerable effort into "upgrading" the new teacher orientation program. This included trying to take maximum advantage of the online TESOL course all the new teachers were supposed to take. From now on out, we have to provide evidence of "certification" of our teachers—so completion of the online course will be mandatory.

It is clear that the online course contributes to preparing the new teachers for what is to come, but there is no substitute for actual "in-class" experience—even if it is mock teaching practice. In light of this, we are going to add several days to the orientation schedule to make room for more "teaching" practice—and more work on lesson planning.

Video clips of actual classes have proven very useful—and more are being prepared. (One of these days we'll get set up for digital video editing.)

Jenya and the current teachers are working on improving the exams. This includes putting more stress on testing "communicative" skills. Also, they are continuing work on sorting out what grammar should be included at each level. We hope it will be possible for several people to work on this project this next summer.

Thanks to Roman Ryabinkin, former AH student and our first "intern," the American law firm where he has been working for a number of years donated two-year-old laptop computers which are now in use at the AH. Oxana is working on setting them up so that they can be used with the TV sets in each of the classrooms to access the Internet, show PowerPoint presentations, etc. Roman is going to try to arrange for us to get additional donations each year, so that we'll be able to keep the computers reasonably up-to-date

Other efforts to upgrade the program are being seriously discussed. One of our top priorities is to find ways to make improvements each year. (See Youngmee Hahn's comments below.)

Other Projects

It is my pleasure to note that one of our former students, Masha Yumatova, completed her Masters in Criminal Justice at Illinois State University. (See below.) Another former student, Yelena Bychkovskikh, is enrolled in the tourism graduate program at the University of Florida Gainesville—where she will be a graduate assistant next semester. And Marianna Strzelecka is enrolled in the tourism PhD program at the University of Illinois. (With the assistance of the AH, Marianna, who is from Poland, collected information in Vladimir for her Masters thesis on comparative tourism development in Poland and Russia.) Finally, the odds appear to be good that Layla Meshkova will have a summer job in Illinois. (See Layla's essay below on her "tourism internship" this last summer in Vladimir.)

We have prepared a very well received map of Vladimir's historic center in both English and Russian. Alexei has invested a lot of time and effort in this project. He and designer Masha Tarasova are putting the final touches on the next edition of both maps. We are continuing to work on the tourist website. The direct address for that site is now: www.vladimir-russia.info. (Comments, including suggestions for improving the site, will be appreciated.)

Dr. Bruce Wicks, the U of I tourism specialist who is heading up our tourism project, gave a presentation last May at the American Home on identifying and meeting guest expectations for hotel and restaurant staff. All the participants indicated that the presentation was very helpful, and that they wanted more seminars on related topics. He is continuing to collect information, assign students to work on specific projects, and develop concrete suggestions.

Clearly, the tourism development project is making a contribution.

Tour Groups

Benefiting from the tourism program's efforts will be the regular Illinois State University Criminal Justice tour (May 15-28), hopefully a second group of Fulbright social studies teachers (we should hear about the grant application by the beginning of March), and the third annual Fall Russian Tour. (See "Tours" on the Serendipity-Russia website.) The tour this last September once again received "rave reviews"—thanks I part to the leadership of Karen Hasara. (Karen is a former Illinois State legislator and former mayor of Springfield—and a member of our tourism team.)

Nadya's Great Adventure!

Believe it or not, Nadya Pyanikova, our tour escort since 1993, finally "made it to America"! From October 3 to November 28 Nadya was hosted by more than a dozen families and individuals during a coast-to-coast "trip of a life time." She started in Massachusetts and ended up in California. For quite a few photos of her trip see: www.snapfish.com; e-mail: nadyavamerike@yahoo.com; password: vladimir. During the trip Nadya kept saying that she couldn't believe she was actually here—and seeing so much. (She claims that when she returns, she wants to be either a forest ranger or a cowboy in Montana.)

Everyone who hosted her said that it was a wonderful experience.

Hopefully Nadya will report on her trip in the next issue.

AH Remodeling

Finally, anyone who hasn't been to the AH since last summer should notice on their next visit the new paneling in the visitor corridor. On the left side as you approach the reception office there is an interesting surprise: a shadow box built into the wall. The glass-covered "box" is approximately 10 in. high, 14 in. wide, and 4 in. deep. Using "scrapbook" and craft items sent from the States and other materials, Alexei has so far created attractive Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas displays. We want to collect more appropriate items for these occasions, as well as "back to school," Mardi Gras, Valentine's Day, Easter/spring, summer vacation, and the 4th of July. I know that Alexei will appreciate any and all contributions

NOTES: For information on all the Russian staff, go to: <http://www.serendipity-russia.com/AHStaff.html>

For information on our teachers go to: www.serendipity-russia.com/newteachers.htm

We have an excellent team this year!

NEW RUSSIAN STAFF

Jenya Kislyakova

Note: Jenya is filling in for Lena while she takes her second maternity leave. Jenya graduated from Vladimir State Pedagogical University in June. She was one of Alexei's students. She has "student taught" English and worked with Americans in summer camps. She began working with Lena in August and has been rapidly "learning the ropes" since then.

Jenya is originally from Vyazniki, a small town east of Vladimir. Her parents still live there. Her Mom is an official in the district administration, and her father teaches history. Her younger sister is a university student majoring in the study of culture.

Her special interests include watercolor and pastel painting, reading, and all kinds of music. Recently she has been pursuing two special projects: 1) the study of British idioms which she reported on in her "senior thesis," and 2) a survey of churches in the Vyazniki district. Because these churches aren't being renovated as rapidly as in the larger communities, the evidence of their tragic history hasn't been covered over with layers of new paint. She gave a presentation on this research at the Student Scientific Conference in April, and the paper she presented was subsequently published in the conference proceedings.

Jenya's comments on the "sweet American Home"

At the time I'm writing this I've been working at the American Home for two months. It is already clear that this is a perfect place to work. .

I have been employed before, so I can compare the American Home to my previous jobs. And it's pretty clear to me that any comparisons are impossible because there is no other place like the American Home! The atmosphere is really home-like, cozy, and I feel very comfortable here. Everyone is friendly and helpful, and I try to be the same. As I am the person to replace Lena, I'm getting acquainted with all her duties. I'm not yet an expert on all the teaching materials and other resources, but I mean to become one!

It's difficult to decide how to use all of the available resources most effectively, and that's where my previous teaching experience has proved useful. Lena's and Galina Petrovna's advice is also extremely helpful. Besides, our teachers are quite creative, which makes our cooperation more productive and the process of learning English easier and especially interesting for the students.

There is another important thing to be mentioned. The main teaching materials and supplementary resources are very well organized. This makes it easy to find everything needed for a successful lesson. I realize now what great work has already been done, and I'm ready to contribute to it.

What I also appreciate here is the staff's tradition of spending time together. The picnic at Tatiyana Akimova's dacha was one of the greatest experiences. And tea-time in the kitchen each day is very rewarding. Celebrating birthdays is also something to remember. And even such serious events as the teachers' meetings every Wednesday are not just organized in a haphazard way, One feels quite comfortable having a cup of hot tea with cookies and sharing one's successes and problems in the classroom. I really like it here and I'm looking forward to many new experiences.

Natasha Yudina

Natasha is filling in as the secretary-receptionist while Olya is on maternity leave. Natasha was born in Gus Khrustalny (Goose Crystal) where a number of major glass and crystal factories are located. But her family now lives in Vladimir. She has a sister four years younger than her who hopes to be an architect. Her mother works at the post office, and her father works in construction in Moscow. Natasha graduated from Vladimir State University in June 2006 with a double major in Education Theory and German. She has also studied English. She is currently enrolled in an AH C2 (second semester 4th year class). In 2004 she studied in Germany and in 2005 she did her student teaching (German and English) in a local school. She enjoys foreign languages

Natasha's comments:

When I came to the AH for the first time, I was surprised. I saw a REAL home. I hadn't expected that. I saw a small gray building with white trim, and with beautiful flowers around it. But I didn't anticipate that it would be so cozy and comfortable inside. I was shown every room here and introduced to the teachers and to the Russian staff. Everybody was very kind to me, even

Gosha (the Cat-in-Charge). Now I come to the AH almost every day to learn the responsibilities of my new position. Olya is teaching me everything I'll be responsible for. Sometimes she asks me to do something under her guidance. I like my work at the AH. It's also very interesting and useful for me to attend classes here.

Last Saturday I had a good opportunity to learn more about the work collective at the AH. We went on a picnic. It was my first picnic here, and I was deeply impressed. The weather was not very pleasant, but it didn't spoil our fun. It was really great! We played some Russian ball games, and then the teachers taught me to play American football. It's an interesting game. I've heard much about it, but I had never played it before. Though our team lost, I had a lot of fun!

Note: Since the above was written, Natasha has taken over from Olya full time.

SOME COMMENTS FROM THE NEW TEACHERS

Being a teacher is nerve-racking!

Sara Beach

Two weeks into my first teaching job, I was preparing a lesson on comparing different professions. I had a ton of new vocabulary to introduce to my intermediate students. Together, we were debating whether being a programmer was as difficult as working as a businessman, and if being a poet was more fascinating than working as an archaeologist.

Naturally this led into a discussion of why they were learning English. Almost all of them said it would help them in their future profession. Many were thinking about business and management. We were split on being a translator: some said it would be challenging to travel and meet people; others said it was the most boring of all professions because you weren't creating something new. Together we decided that being president was as dangerous as being an astronaut, and I was impressed when one student was able to convince her classmates that being a millionaire would eventually become boring.

I usually try to have the Russian definition on hand in case I'm having trouble explaining a vocabulary word, or in case I hear the students misinterpret my charades. This time, however, I hadn't had time to find a good equivalent of nerve-racking. I stood at the front of the class, watching them stare back at me with furrowed brows.

"Nerve-racking is, umm," I began, "well, it has the word nerve in it, like nervous. If something is nerve-racking, it makes you nervous. There is, umm, lots of stress. It's very bad to make a mistake, and maybe someone is always watching you. So, umm, being a driver is nerve-racking."

"Teaching is nerve-racking!" shouted a voice from the back of the class.

"Yes!" I exclaimed. Exactly!

"Forget about being a driver!" I said. "Being a teacher is nerve-racking. Look at me. I moved all the way to Russia. I have never been a teacher before. Every day I stand up here and teach this very difficult language. Sometimes you look at our grammar and ask why? And I really don't know the answer. Sometimes I think there are no rules in English at all, and that we Americans are just crazy!" My students laughed.

"Every day, you are all looking at me, waiting for me to teach you. I don't want to make any mistakes, but I don't know everything. And it's just me up here, alone!"

It was a great class. I looked up from the textbook and told them something real about English and about myself. And even though by their next quiz some of them had decided that being a doctor was more nerve-racking than being a teacher (something about saving lives versus assigning homework), that sense of openness and humor has continued to be the best part about coming into class every day. I might be the one who speaks English, but we're definitely all learning.

Russian Hospitality 101

Molly Murchison

The other day, Galya, the director of the American Home, ventured up to the teachers' office. As usual, all eight of us were roosting in the warm attic room e-mailing, lesson-planning, and brushing up on our English grammar. Galya stopped in front of my desk and said, "Molly, I have to talk to you. There is a problem with your host family." Galya had the tone of gearing up for a lecture, and needless to say I was a little concerned. "Boris called this morning. He said that you don't eat, and never have breakfast."

This is a peculiar thing for my host to say, since I actually do eat breakfast, but it's usually after he's left for work. I concluded that he must think I don't eat breakfast because I do my dishes after I finish, meaning that there isn't any evidence that I really ate. (It is apparently unheard of for a guest in Russia to do their own dishes.) In addition to the lack of "evidence," we have a history with the issue of how much I eat...

The first day I arrived in Vladimir, Boris greeted me at the door while my host brother and his friend carried my suitcases up the stairs, despite my insistence that I could do it myself. Boris immediately led me to the kitchen, sat me down at the table, and began bringing out the food. An unusually large bowl of soup, a plate piled high with bread, an oversized tomato and cucumber salad, two sausages, a bowl of tea cookies ("sushki"), and a glass of tea, into which he carefully measured several teaspoons of sugar.

I wasn't really hungry, but since I found myself sitting there in front of all that food, I made an effort to eat anyway. Boris sat across from me and watched my progress. If I slowed down for a moment, he would loudly say, "Eat, eat!" So I tried my best to eat as much as possible, but could not convince Boris that I was eating as much as I should. I tried to explain that the food was great, but I really just wasn't that hungry. He looked at me skeptically. "Go on, just go ahead and eat!"

A few minutes later, with a grave expression, he picked up the phone, and called the American Home. "Oxana, it's Boris. I have the American here, and I'm giving her food, but she won't eat! I don't know what to do!" I panicked in response to the fact that he was going to such measures. I grabbed some bread with one hand, and a fork with the other, and made as much of a show of eating as possible.

I courageously sat there until all the food was gone, and I felt sick to my stomach.

Though Boris has only resorted to calling the American Home once, similar kitchen table stand-offs have happened almost every day. I hope to one day be able to convey in good Russian firmly and unequivocally that I am not hungry and won't eat anymore. In the meantime, I will leave all used dishes in the sink, and try to follow my fellow teacher, Joanna's wise advice: "Don't let the food win!"

SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM FORMER TEACHERS

An A+ for the American Home!

Youngmee Hahn (2005-06)

When I decided to come and teach at the American Home, I was expecting my year in Vladimir to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I ended up being right about that, but what I wasn't expecting was to come out of that experience with a clear idea of exactly what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. To my surprise, teaching at the American Home didn't just give me an unforgettable experience in Russia; it also showed me that teaching is where I belong. Based on my experience at the American Home, I decided to return to the US, get the necessary certification, and embark on a career as a teacher.

I am now in the final weeks of student teaching for my certification program, and it has not been an easy ride! As I had expected, teaching high school is very different from teaching at the American Home—the students are less motivated, the curriculum is much more rigid, and there seem to be a million things to keep track of, from homeroom attendance to hall passes for kids who want to go to the bathroom! It has been a challenging time, but once in a while I catch a glimpse of the kind of learning that I saw in my students at the American Home, and it's that kind of connection that keeps me going these days.

One thing that has been fascinating for me this semester is discovering just how well-run the American Home is. In addition to student teaching, I attend a weekly seminar where we discuss curriculum issues and general teaching methods, and I've been amazed over and over as I read various articles about excellent teaching practices and theory. "That sounds exactly like the American Home!" From the American Home practice (strictly and excellently enforced by Lena) of creating tests well in advance and making sure that they actually measure proficiency, not just the ability to fill in blanks, to the very collaborative work environment where teachers can and are in fact encouraged to ask each other for advice or bounce ideas off each other, practices that are so everyday as to be taken for granted at the American Home are being

presented in education journals as solutions to the many problems in the American public school system.

American Home teachers may often come in green and inexperienced, but the support and training they get are excellent. And now that I've had a chance to study teaching methods in a more formal setting, I can confidently say that the quality of instruction at the American Home is really very good. The American Home isn't just for Russophiles or adventurous souls with an urge for something different—it's also for people with a serious interest in developing their teaching skills in an uncommonly supportive and well-run program.

The Legacy of Vladimir: Musings, Delights, and a Question

Meghan Lynch (2003-04)

It was 2 o'clock early on a Tuesday morning at the Kinston, North Carolina Hampton Inn. Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible and his Oprichnina had just made their Technicolor debut in my hotel room, and I was fighting the weight of my eyelids and the urge to continue my aimless boyar-laden marathon. I wondered who else in this small town and among the rural fields surrounding it could have the motivation to so tediously read subtitles at such an hour. It felt almost as if the executives at that obscure cable channel, having foretold my lonely situation, filled that time slot just for me. All the while, an eight hour day laboring for the UNC School of Public Health rushed toward me.

It has been a little more than two years since I disembarked in Chicago at the end of my one year hiatus in Vladimir. I was no less willing now to devote hours to that old Russian classic than I was in college, feeling victorious when I comprehended a few lines of Ivan's Russian. Of course, much more often, the feeling tended towards self-flagellation when the jumbled dialogue of a foreign language forced me to read subtitles. Now, though, there is no impending trip overseas, no Russian history class to prepare for, no unfamiliar vocabulary to decipher and file away; just an eight hour day at Lenoir Community College in Kinston, interviewing study participants to collect research data on exercise, eating habits, and weight loss. And, I think everyone involved would agree that Ivan's early morning course in Muscovite etiquette and diplomacy did little to promote the alertness and interpersonal interviewing skills necessary to successfully make it through the day. Still, I found myself watching.

So, at least for the time being, I delight in small things, waiting for the opportunity for a serious re-entry into Russian culture. Salat Raiskii, the heavenly combination of tomato slices, shredded cheese, mayo, and garlic, made a big splash at the family reunion in July. I still attempt, when I have a free moment, to decode articles in the Russian version of *Rolling Stones* that make demoralizing piles on my desk. And we still pump up the ipod every time "Beryozi" refreshingly finds its way to the top of the playlist.

Just this weekend as I thought about how to approach this brief article, Jonathan* and I began to wonder not so much about the random surfacing of Vladimir in our own lives (now two years down the road), but about the lives of all of you we worked with and taught slipping farther and

farther into our past. Our conclusion... a simple question: Do you also feel the influence of that experience in strange ways?

*Jonathan White, AH teacher 2002-04

There Is No Place Like Home

Ted Walls (2002-05)

Note: Ted is currently teaching at a private English school in Debicja, a city of about 50,000 in southeastern Poland—about 90 km east of Krakow. Ted's colleagues include 30 Polish teachers and 4 "native speakers," including his wife, Yulia. The school is busy trying to keep up with the demand for English in the wake of Poland's joining the European Union last year. Ted writes that he teaches 14 one-and-a-half hour classes a week, and that he has six preparations—plus two individual students. Despite all this, he writes that he is working "a lot less than I worked in Vladimir." (He claims that many lessons can be taken right "off the shelf" and used as is. He especially recommends "English Files" from Oxford.)

As you'll see below, Ted would prefer to be back in Vladimir....

Ted's comments:

Having worked at the AH for three years, I can say it obviously must have suited me. Or maybe it was just too comfortable—maybe like the Russian literary character Oblomov, I simply went with the flow and took it easy.

Naw, I don't think so. Because in retrospect working at the AH was a very demanding job, more so than I realized at the time.

Teaching English is an art, a skill, a profession. It's not something you just pick up and do arbitrarily. And speaking English as your native tongue gives you only a slight advantage. To come to a new country and learn to do a new job all at once is a daunting task, one which can stretch you to new limits.

The good folks at the AH know all about this. This is why I think they take such pains to make working there more than just a job, but strive to make it a meaningful life experience. And that is the key to understanding the American Home—its value to those who go there to teach is measured in terms of "quality life experience."

I've "moved up the food chain" to a job with many more material rewards than I had in Vladimir, and I'm happy about this, but in terms of "life experience"—it just doesn't measure up.

I know that no matter how long I stay here in my current job, I will not forge the connections or gather the memories I did in Vladimir. The school where I work is good, the people are professional and polite, but they are nobody to me. I know that the director here wouldn't take the time to accompany me to a doctor's appointment. I never sit and have tea with the staff. I can't go to the school any time of the day or night, and have someone I know open the door and

let me in. There are no group excursions or adventures. There are no songs, no birthday cakes, no cultural events. I have no memories of good conversation or shared laughter.

I am not preparing a Thanksgiving dish for 25 people this year. I don't dance with my students at parties, and there's no karaoke machine in the basement. I won't be singing Christmas carols with the other native speakers. Local TV and radio stations will never stop by to find out what the Yankees think about a particular issue.

I'm not going to roll naked in the snow here, or be pulled up on stage to dance at Razgulyai. There will be no sledding, no shashlik, no concerts. Halloween came and went with a yawn.

My co-workers here are nice enough, but we pass each other briefly a few times per week in the teachers' room. I've gone out for beers with them once or twice, but they are also nobody to me, and I won't be keeping in touch. Yet after six months of being in Vladimir, I forged connections which are still strong four years later, and look as if they will last.

I miss Vladimir all the time. I plan on returning as soon as I can, at least for a visit. Yulia (my wife) and I will probably travel to Moscow for the summer, where I'll take the Cambridge DELTA course. I'm proud to say that Yulia took the CELTA with me in Krakow in July of this year, and passed it with a "B"—which is difficult even for native speakers with experience to do. She works here at the same school as I, teaching English and also Business Russian at the Goodyear Tire Company (they have a factory here, with administrative control over all of Poland and Ukraine). She also teaches Business English at Goodyear, using materials she herself was studying not long ago at the AH with Moultrie* (Market Leader). Forgive me for bragging, but I'm very proud of her.

I think that no matter what else I do, no matter where I go, I will always cherish my time working at the American Home as something special, something unique in my life. This is because of the people who work there, because of the town, and because of the open-heartedness of the Russian people. I had a real relationship with the people there, warts and all, just like you do with all the real people in your life. So what is that worth? It was definitely worth three years of my life, and I'd do it over in a heartbeat.

*Moultrie Townsend, another three year teacher.

OTHER PROJECTS

The Law Enforcement Exchange Project—Finishing a Masters Degree

Masha Yumatova

NOTE: After completing her Masters Masha lined up an internship at ADM in Decatur, Illinois. This was recently converted to a permanent position as a “global security analyst.” Also, Masha married ISU Finance graduate, Keith Stone in September. They are now looking for a home half way between their places of employment.

Masha's comments:

I graduated from Illinois State University (ISU) this past August with a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice. The two years I spent in this graduate program were a very exciting and important time in my life. I took a variety of courses ranging from "criminological theory" to "research methods," to "criminal law," all of which helped me better understand the American criminal justice system and helped me develop my English writing and analytical skills.

During my program I was able to visit police departments in Chicago, Decatur, Mahomet and Normal. This gave me the opportunity to ride along on patrols and to observe crime scene investigations and other police work. With other ISU students I visited several local prisons and juvenile detention centers.

With the help of Federal Judge Michael Mihm in Peoria, I was able to observe the American judicial system in operation. All of these trips and visits contributed to my criminal justice education and experience.

Beginning with the summer between my first and second years, I had a chance to do an internship at the Police Training Institute, in Champaign, Illinois. I participated as a role-player in integrated scenario-based training for police cadets, conducted a review of law enforcement training curricula nationwide, analyzed crash-investigation and injury reports, and observed training of American police cadets.

Much of what I learned both inside and outside the classroom helped prepare me to write my Masters thesis on "The Problem of Domestic Violence: A Comparison of Russia and the United States." I hope that my thesis will be of interest to specialists in domestic violence here in the States and elsewhere, and that it will be of special interest to Russian law enforcement professionals, social workers, and others as they try to overcome the unfortunate lack of attention to this topic in my home country.

I also plan on working with Dr. Pope on the preparation of a presentation on "domestic violence" intended for inclusion in the training of cadets at the Vladimir Juridical Institute and patrol officers at the Militia School in Yurevets.

My wonderful "grand adventure" in America would not have been possible without the help of the American Home (AH). I was a student at the AH for two-and-a-half years prior to coming to ISU. When I began to study at the AH, my English was very poor, and I had a hard time communicating with native speakers. But, with the help of the American teachers, I was able to improve my English significantly. In addition, I learned about American culture and traditions. In other words, the AH prepared me for my life in the United States and helped reduce the effects of the "culture shock" which almost every Russian experiences during the first few months in America.

The American Home opened the door to major changes in my life that I could not have imagined possible just a few years ago. I hope that I will be able to at least partially repay my “debt” by contributing to AH law enforcement projects in the years to com

Summer Tourism Development Internship Experiment

Leyla Meshkova

Note: Layla was a participant in the Bloomington-Normal Sister Cities high school exchange program in 2002-03. See her essay in Alumni News No. 4 (November 2003). She currently is a third year student in the German program at Vladimir State Pedagogical University—and an aspiring tourism specialist

This last June Dr. Bruce Wicks,* Asya Amineva,** and I joined forces to collect information for the on-going tourism development project. We set our efforts on gathering direct feedback from tourists. After Dr. Wicks had approved the final draft of our survey, and we got our intern badges from the OTIC (Oblast Tourist Information Center), Asya and I set to work. We spent the month of June primarily on Cathedral Square approaching every tourist in sight and hoping we wouldn't get chased away by tour guides. We spoke with domestic tourists and tourists from Holland, Germany, France, Congo, the South African Republic, Singapore, USA, Australia, and Japan. By the end of the month we were thoroughly tanned and had feedback on the tourists' impressions, complaints and wishes.

Interestingly enough, a good half of the people we interviewed didn't know that Vladimir was a UNESCO World Heritage Destination. Most seemed to have randomly picked the City from a catalogue in a travel office. It's obvious that there is a dramatic lack of information on what Vladimir has to offer visitors, beginning with the World Heritage Sites (the Assumption and St. Demetrius Cathedrals and the Golden Gates), and including the City's museums, world-class performing groups, artists, craftsmen, and warm provincial hospitality. Clearly, much more can be done to entice people to visit our wonderful City.

*Dr. Wicks is a professor of tourism at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. As noted above, he is leading the tourism development team that has been working since 1994 as a part of the AH's efforts to provide "concrete assistance" to Vladimir. The other members of the team are Karen Hasara, a former Illinois State legislator and former mayor of the State capital, Springfield; and Katya Lakshtanova. Katya is originally from Moscow. Here in the States she has become a specialist on website design.

**Asya was born in Vladimir and still has close family there. She now lives in Wisconsin where both of her parents work at UW-Madison. She clearly enjoyed the internship experience. Hopefully she'll write something for the next issue of the newsletter.

ALUMNI NOTES

Liz Bird, 2001-2003

Hello, fellow American Home staff and teachers, past and present! After an initially rough adjustment in the post-Vladimir world, I have some good news to report at last. In April of this year I graduated from a two-year Masters program in Russian and East European Studies at the University of Michigan, and on July 14th, I was married to a certain Vladimir native, Dmitry Malinkin. We had an amazing (skazachnie) two days of Russian wedding traditions with some American ones mixed in as well. The celebrations started with Dima “buying” me (the “vikup”) at 10 AM. The American Home’s own Lena Belova helped to sell me for a high price. Then we were blessed in marriage in “Uspenskii sobor” after quite serious consultations with one of the fathers. Next we went to the museum adjacent to the cathedral for a special re-enactment of old Russian wedding traditions. Then we did the usual wedding tour around town, driving from monument to monument, drinking champagne and taking pictures, and Dima carried me over three bridges. Finally the feast began and it was a merry evening of dancing, singing, eating, drinking, and toast after toast after toast. From my side were 23 American guests and various dear Russian friends including six of my previous American Home students – it was a very special occasion for me. And one which I without a doubt could never have imagined when I arrived in Vladimir in August of 2001. Dima and I met through a mutual friend my second year in Vladimir and we’ve been together ever since. Now we are in the Chicago area, and the only thing missing is a job for me! If any of you alums out there have any connections for me, I will be forever thankful! Hope everyone is well and that we will cross paths in one country or another in the coming years.

Erika Boeckeler, 1997-98

Has completed her PhD in comparative literature at Harvard and accepted a teaching position at Kenyon College in Ohio. Hopefully we'll hear more from Erica in the next issue.

Alison (Kitzman) Silva, 1992-93

The English Program’s first Lead Teacher stopped by. She now has tenure at Kinki University in Japan. (See Alumni Notes in the previous issue.) Teaching English in Japan clearly agrees with her. Hopefully Alison will have the time to write something for the next issue.

Sarah Rorimer, 2003-05

I've just finished an internship at the Metropolitan Opera Guild in the education department. I had the great privilege to write elementary and high school educational materials for The Met's upcoming performance of Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin" in February. I'll be doing the job search starting in January and intend to stay in New York City.