

AH Alumni Newsletter

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More Changes at the AH Galya

We've started to put the new classroom in the attic to good use. Everyone likes having this new large space. And our students are continuing to enjoy the much larger "waiting area" in the garage. We've decided to move the teachers' office to the other attic room—which has much more room than the basement office and where there is a window with a pleasant view of trees and Traktir, the "log cabin" restaurant next to the AH. We are in the process of getting shelving installed and other work done in the new office. We've already purchased a new copier for this room and a scanner. We'll get at least one more new computer as soon as possible—and some comfortable furniture.

We are going to turn the old office in the basement into a library—and an office for Lena who plans on returning from her maternity leave to work part time beginning in August. She'll be responsible for the library as well as work directly with the teachers. (See "Help for the Teachers" in issue no. 3.)

When the books and magazines are removed from my office, we are going to fix it up and add a desk for Alexei. We may even put carpeting on the floor. It will be nice to have a less cluttered place to bring visitors to for quiet discussions.

Overall, we are continuing to "fix things up," both inside and outside the AH. Hopefully some of you will be able to visit us soon and see for yourselves all the things we are doing to make the AH a more pleasant and productive place to work.

Project Updates Ron

We were notified the end of March that we were awarded a \$66,000 grant for the Fulbright-Hayes Group Programs Abroad project mentioned in the previous newsletter. The "lead organization" in this project is the University of Illinois Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center. They officially applied for the grant and will provide a pre-departure workshop here in Illinois. All the arrangements for the program in Vladimir and Murom are being made by the AH—with Alexei playing the lead role. I'll be the "director" traveling with the group—which will also go to St. Pete and Moscow. This is clearly a major program—which we hope to be able to repeat in the future. (See Alexei's comments below.)

We've also had some success with the "Vladimir Projects" mentioned in the previous issue. The Tourism Development Project received a \$5,000 grant from Sister Cities International, the Summer Recreation Project received a \$4,200 grant from the University of Nebraska (where one of the faculty participants teaches) and \$1,500 in travel funds from Illinois State University. The ISU faculty

member supervising the student group working on the English language Vladimir web site also has travel funds for this summer. We are still looking for travel funds for the Domestic Violence Project. (We will keep looking for ways to move this project forward.)

The social studies teachers will arrive in Vladimir June 22—and depart from Moscow July 19. The Vladimir Projects people will arrive July 19 and stay for about 8 days. It's going to be a VERY busy summer for me—and the AH staff. I'm sure they will be glad to see me leave for home the beginning of August.

We've also had some significant success on some other fronts. For example, one of our students and a June 2003 honors graduate from the Vladimir Juridical Institute, Masha Yumatova, has been accepted by the ISU Criminal Justice Masters program. She's been awarded a full tuition waiver and a graduate assistantship. She'll be arriving in Illinois in August for this two-year program. (I've written a brief essay on the "accomplishments" of the law enforcement exchange program that will be published in The Law Enforcement Executive Forum in July. If you'd like a copy of the essay, send me a note.)

As Alexei discusses below, we've also helped arrange for a young—and very talented—jazz singer from Vladimir, Juliana Rogachova, to attend a summer workshop in California.

We are continuing to work on other project possibilities.

And I've finished hiring next year's teachers. See www.serendipity-russia.com/newteachers.htm for photos and a few words....

PLEASE drop us a note and let us know what you are up to—and please let us know if you are in touch with any AH alumni who are not receiving this newsletter. There are a number of our former teachers—and intensive Russian students—that we've lost touch with.

SPECIAL NOTE: As Alexei mentions below, we need to come up with \$1,275 to help cover the cost of Juliana Rogachova's participation in the Stanford Jazz Workshop. This will cover her room and board and a small part of the tuition for the two-week program in California. She's raising the money for her airfare, U.S. visa, and spending money in Russia. If you'd like to contribute something to help further the very promising career of this exceptionally talented young lady, please contact me, and I'll let you know where the fundraising effort stands. (Any amount will help.)

Fortunately, we have a number of people lined up to assist Masha Yumatova. But if we end up needing extra help for her, I'll send out a note.

Our Special Projects

Alexei

Special visitors

In its 12 years of operation the AH has acquired significant experience in arranging various kinds of visits for Americans interested in Russia. All the travelers who have taken advantage of our help have been special in part due to the wide variety of their profiles and aims. (They have included college professors and students, US Embassy representatives, quilt lovers, a Federal Judge, and a theatre researcher.) But the people we will be hosting this summer may be VERY special. I mean the 14 American social studies teachers who are eager to discover modern Russia and who have chosen us to be their guides. I am thrilled with the need to fully satisfy their appetite. Why? For many reasons. For example, the sphere covered by social studies is amazingly vast and we have to define the most typical and tasteful ingredients for the Russian "solyanka" we'd like to offer our guests. Fourteen "hungry" teachers. (I suppose I know what inquisitive teachers are like, and I assume that the "hungriest" of the applicants to this program have been selected.) Clearly, we are going to be dealing with a challenging group. But it's a true pleasure to try to satisfy curious guests.

Having received the first responses to our short questionnaire, without any hesitation I give our new friends additional points for their curiosity and excitement. Wouldn't you enjoy reading these comments: "I look forward to brushing up on my spoken Russian... I'm so excited! ... I want to really see how Russian people live in a day-to-day situation... I am so looking forward to this experience... I

am very open to new experiences, cultures, foods, adventures... I'm very excited... I can hardly wait.... Thank you for this opportunity!... I am honored to be involved in a program like this..."

Well, I am starting to feel dangerously excited, too!

Our future guests are also proving to be—additional points for this!—outgoing and, apparently, easy to work with: “I like to socialize with new people... No basic preference re my host family as long as they are a typical Russian family... A multi-generational family would be great... I will eat any kind of food... I'll try anything..."

I have not yet met these people, but they have definitely gained my goodwill. We will do our very best to make their Russian experience pleasant and productive.

A special opportunity for a young singer's development

How many very important, but at the time seemingly unremarkable events and occasions make up our lives! It's like a jigsaw puzzle with lots of exact interlocking pieces you need to find and put properly in order to build a harmonic picture. The life picture of an artistic individual should include special pieces. It may take long years for even a very talented person to find a special urgently needed piece and successfully fit it into his or her biographical puzzle. It's great if there's somebody to help them.

Our “puzzle solving” program for the young Vladimir jazz singer Juliana Rogachova is in full operation. Thanks to the efforts of Ron and, especially, Dr. Catherine (Katchie) Cartwright (Chair of Sisters in Jazz and a lecturer at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music), a very special piece of the puzzle for Juliana has been found and hopefully will add a lot to her picture. This is the opportunity to attend two weeks of the Stanford Jazz Workshop this summer. The fact that the Workshop is providing Juliana with a \$1,500 scholarship is turning Ron's idea (which once looked like a mere dream) to enable Juliana to study in the US into a realistic opportunity. We very much hope that the fundraising efforts on both sides of the ocean will be successful, so that Juliana will be able to add a very important piece to her puzzle.

In Search of the Perfect Textbook: Passages vs. American Dimensions David Johnson

NOTE: David is completing his third year at the AH—and second year as Lead Teacher. Probably thanks at least in part to the precedent he has set, two of this year's second year teachers will be returning next year. (See Ted Wall's essay below.)

The search for the perfect textbook continues. Anyone who has taught, or been around someone who has taught, the B or C, i.e., the intermediate levels at the AH knows that the American Dimensions textbook was not universally loved. Everyone agreed that it didn't have very good grammar explanations (actually, it simply didn't have grammar explanations), the readings were outdated, and the exercises sparse and uninteresting. During the two and a half years that I've been here, countless people have gone to the Moscow bookstore "Anglia" hoping to find a good replacement. Last summer, a new textbook was found.

Since fall semester B and C level students have been using Passages. The new book is an improvement on the old one in many ways. It has relatively current and interesting readings, listening activities, and makes an attempt at grammar explanations. And it comes with a helpful teacher's manual. It seems like a dramatic improvement, doesn't it? Well, we've discovered, once again, that there is no such thing as the perfect textbook.

It may come as a shocking surprise to some former teachers, but, American Dimensions actually has some obvious strengths, especially when compared to Passages. Despite all of the good things in the new textbook, it lacks something important, diverse and challenging grammar, the one strength that the old text had.

If we learned anything from this long exercise, it is that the perfect textbook is a myth. A textbook can only be a foundation for a class. It is our job to build something on that foundation.

Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn

Sarah Rorimer

NOTE: Sarah will be the Lead Teacher this next year.

Why am I returning for a second year? The short answer is that I want to continue the learning I've done thus far. While my job title is "teacher," my experience is more that of "student:" learning to teach, learning Russian and learning about life in a different culture. From my host family's kitchen table, to the classroom or the post office, this is an environment which offers an endless supply of adventures. And with each adventure comes insight.

Working at the AH can be all-consuming, but it's great! Teaching is stimulating because I get to be creative and energetic. Plus, it's fun to interact with so many different people. Here, my co-workers are also my close friends. The atmosphere in the workplace is youthful and upbeat; with each other we share not only teaching materials, but also the daily challenges of living abroad. In this respect, the American Home sometimes feels like an extension of college life, where friends function as pseudo-family.

Although I have the luxury of being an expert at speaking English simply because I am a native, mastering the art of teaching remains a never-ending pursuit. There is always something to be improved. In the past few months, experience has confirmed that as difficult as challenges may seem at the time, if I can learn from them, they are the very things that bring about new understanding and growth as an individual. Living in Russia, I find myself re-examining my values daily. This unique opportunity for perspective and self-improvement is one of the main reasons I'm heading for a second year.

Another reason is that there's something simply addictive about Russia. In college courses this oh-so-indefinable theme was often referred to as the Mysterious Russian Soul (MRS). Just when I think I've got her figured out, I'm perplexed by some unanticipated event.

Not long ago, I went to the post office to pick up a package. Although the outside doors were open, the service windows were roped off with signs reading "sanitary day." I guess I should have known that the last Wednesday of each month is a sort of organizational and cleaning day. Having just read the "closed" sign, I was amazed to see someone standing beyond the ropes, receiving a package from a postal worker. I asked if the window was open, and the worker replied with a tone that suggested I was the only person on earth who didn't know, "It's a sanitary day!" I decided not to argue and repeated to myself, "Never a dull moment." Sometimes optimism requires more work here.

Alas, the more time I spend in Russia, the more intrigued I become. It's hard to say whether a second year will satisfy my curiosity or increase it. In any case, there's a lot to learn here and I want more!

Why a THIRD Year?

Ted Walls

I am sitting down to write this brief composition on why I have chosen to stay in Vladimir for another year. Well, do you want the short answer or the long? The short answer is that I'm staying here because I can get away with it! The long answer must be a little more philosophical, and set in context. As a matter of fact, let's depend completely on context, and I think from that the answer will be made clear.

Here in Vladimir I do not drive a car, park a car, buy gasoline, pay for car insurance or flip people off in traffic. I live in a town that is small enough for me to walk everywhere I have to go, if need be. I ride a trolleybus to work every morning. My apartment has no telephone. My balcony overlooks a green space where children usually play. I walk to an outdoor market where I buy fresh simple products, most of them made or grown in the region where I live. Oh, and not only me, but everyone recycles their grocery bags. The trash which I and my girlfriend produce every week (that can't be recycled) amounts to one very small bag.

My job is teaching. I can touch my students and slide down snowy hills with them. When I'm out sick, they all write me get-well cards asking me to come back soon. At the end of the semester they bring me gifts. They are respectful, and genuinely glad for what I have to offer them.

The company I work for doesn't pollute, doesn't make consumer garbage to waste money on then throw into a landfill. They will stop everything and have a birthday party for each of their employees. About once per month we all sit down to some kind of communal feast. My boss takes me on picnics, gets concert tickets for me, is concerned about my personal problems, and if I have any medical issues she personally escorts me to the doctors office and handles everything. I have a direct personal relationship with all of my co-workers, and we all enjoy associating with each other during our free time.

As part of my job, I organize activities and parties for students. I have played Santa Clause for schoolchildren, given speeches, performed in public, been interviewed for the evening news, and been to small towns and villages where I was the first foreigner ever to visit.

The town where I live is filled with interesting architecture, representing a history of almost 900 years—by some accounts—and over 1,000 years according to the City Administration. I go to an 800 year old cathedral for the ancient rites, see people venerating the remains of Alexander Nevsky, and frescoes painted by Andrei Rublyev. I go to galleries, see live performances, and am always invited to the best Russian house parties. Even though I arrived here knowing not a soul, I now have a wide circle of warm friends and acquaintances (which includes some rather colorful characters). I always run into people I know on the street or the trolleybus. I feel like I'm part of a living culture, with depth.

I walk a lot. If I want to walk into nature, there is virtually no urban sprawl standing between me and miles of fields, forest, hills and riverbanks. I get invited to dachas where I swim, pick mushrooms and berries in the forest, work in the garden and hang out with the animals.

I have learned to cross-country ski, play the guitar, and speak a foreign language. I bought my first pair of ice skates! I have had the time to read some classic works of literature I didn't have time for in college. I attend a conversation salon every Friday evening.

If I want some big city action, the train takes me to Moscow, one of the biggest and most exciting cities in the world, in about two and a half hours. I have traveled around Russia, to Finland, and to Egypt. My colleagues have gone to Spain, Hungary, Germany—lots of places.

My time here is providing me with an in-country experience that not a lot of people have, in a country which is emerging in the world—a country with great potential. This will look very good on my resume.

There's more, much more. But if you are coming here, I'll let you find out for yourself. If you've already been here, you probably know what I'm talking about. I'll leave the minuses (they do exist!) for another time. But the answer to the question should be clear. It's very clear to me. In short, I can say that I'm leading the life that I've always dreamed of living. If I can live it another year, well, why not?

NOTE: Moultrie Townsend will also be returning for his third year. Sarah Rorimer and Meghan Gilrein will be returning for their second year.

Reflections from America **Sarah Volkov**

NOTE: For health reasons I had to return to the States at the end of the fall term. Fortunately, one of last year's teachers, Jonathan White, was eager to return to Vladimir where he has been very ably filling in for me! Thank you Jonathan!

My pictures from Russia are in a shoebox under my bed, sitting on top of the box containing my wedding dress. One box from the past and one for the future. I've been meaning to put the pictures into a scrapbook, surrounded by captions, stickers and "scraps," but even after three months of being home, my Vladimir experience has yet to enter into the realm of retrospect. It still seems too fresh to memorialize and too flooded with emotions to cut up and paste.

I am home now, working seven days a week, planning my wedding, applying to masters programs and rarely thinking about the crazy way I spent the last four months of 2003. But when I do have a moment of free mental space, I rarely think about Red Square, Tolstoy's desk, one thousand year old villages or

any of the travel brochure picturesque places where I actually stood. I think about the people. And I cannot think about them without smiling, laughing a little and feeling a twinge of nostalgia.

I remember sitting with Meghan Gilrein in a NY hotel bar the night before we left, drinking 8-dollar beers, terrified and trying to act normal. I remember the hugs that Galina and Alexei gave me at the airport. I remember my students, their individual styles, their looks of confusion, triumph and frustration. I remember the way Ted Walls filled every doorway and scared Japanese tourists. I remember Sarah Rorimer's laugh and optimism. I remember Meg Lynch's stuffing at Thanksgiving and her work ethic. I remember moving in with Jenne Pross and Moultrie Townsend and being excited when we found ancient cheese powder in our cupboard and being even more excited when we managed to light the stove without singeing our arm hair. I remember holding hilarious mock therapy sessions after staff meetings, during which we pretended our problems were worse than culture shock and homesickness. I remember taking five or six walks a day, just to calm ourselves down. I remember the last time I saw David Johnson. I watched him crunch through the snow, and I could not stop crying, knowing I might not find as true a friend as him again. It's funny what happens when you are stuck with the same people for 12 hours a day, for four months. You are friends strictly because of circumstances. But once those circumstances are removed, you realize that they are still your friends. Russia was, above anything else, the reason I met people who I will never forget

Reflections from an Intensive Russian Student Peter York

It has been nearly three years since I studied at the American Home, which is more than enough time to assess the impact of my experience. I went to the American Home to learn the language, but I gained much more than a skill.

Growing up in West Virginia, I was fascinated by Russia. I often dreamed that I would travel there and learn the language. However, for someone living in a small town in Appalachia, going to Russia was like going to the moon. After some time I lost interest.

While attending Illinois State University, I decided to feed my earlier fascination with Russia by taking a post-Soviet government and politics class. My professor was Dr. Ron Pope. The rest you could say is history, as this "small" decision changed my life forever. After the class, I went on a two-week trip to Russia. I couldn't stop there. I spent the next three summers in Vladimir at the American Home studying Russian and meeting many interesting people. I studied with both Nelli Mukhammadieva and Tanya Akimova. I grew very fond of the American Home staff as well as several groups of American teachers.

It's amazing how small decisions can change your life forever. My first job after completing my studies at the American Home—and an MA in International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh—was with IREX in Washington, DC where I administered educational exchanges with the former Soviet Union. I now work for the Pharmaceutical Security Institute, specializing in pharmaceutical counterfeiting investigations with a focus on Russia, and I frequently use my language skills. To top it off, my wife is from Vladimir! Now, the time and place where I grew up seem as far away as Russia used to. My experience at the American Home has made many things possible and fulfilled the outlandish long ago dream of a kid from southern West Virginia.

Russian Foreign Language Classes vs. the AH Program Olya Solovkina, secretary-receptionist

NOTE: All of our secretaries have studied to be English teachers.

In our schools here in Russia foreign language programs usually are for 6 years. As a rule, students can choose between French, English or German. It goes without saying that English is the most popular. German and French are second and third, respectively. I should say that almost all Russian schools give preference to classical British English. Several years ago students were not even allowed to pronounce and spell words in an American way. Most teachers were quite intolerant of it; though, I believe, there was certain logic in this prohibition. (Speaking English according to British grammar rules and with American pronunciation is somewhat weird.) Nowadays most teachers give their students freedom to choose between British and American accents and spelling. Realizing that American English is getting

more and more widespread all over the world, some teachers give American grammar vs British grammar for the sake of comparison. Most often they give an American variant of grammar as additional info for advanced students. But it is British English that is taught in class as an “official” foreign language.

Since studying a foreign language is more effective in small groups, students are divided into groups of 10-15. Each group has its own teacher. Usually they have 2 or 3 classes of English per week; each class lasts for 45 minutes – an “academic hour.”

Traditionally, an English class includes not only grammar and vocabulary, but also lots of cultural, geographical, and historical material, e.g., texts on the history of the American Flag, British tea drinking traditions, Native American culture, etc.

In order for students to progress systematically from one grade to the next, schools use sets of step-by-step textbooks specially written by Russian authors. The system used in Russian English textbooks is quite logical, and grammar is explained pretty well. But frankly speaking, the materials they use are out-of-date and assignments are not always challenging or practical. Teachers are in constant search for modern supplemental materials to arouse student interest.

Unfortunately, nowadays few Russian schools can afford to use modern technology in teaching foreign languages. Though many schools have audio equipment, it is far from being enough to improve language skills, and only a few students can say that they have had a chance to communicate with native speakers in their English classes.

It goes without saying that communication with native speakers makes the AH unique – therefore especially interesting. Besides, the teaching system of the AH is totally different from the one used in our schools. For example, in English classes at school they use a traditional system of marks – for participation in class, quizzes, homework, etc. The teachers at the AH have worked out another system of evaluation – and students always have a chance to get extra credit for doing additional assignments. Besides, the AH teachers have scheduled office hours to help students who have problems understanding new language material. Of course Russian teachers of English are also ready to give a hand to their students, but their teaching schedule is so busy that they physically don’t have time for that. I am not going to try to decide which system is better – it doesn’t really matter – but it is important that they are absolutely different. I would say that it is this difference that attracts students to the AH. It is a chance to both study and enjoy yourself at the same time – on the one hand, students are immersed in an atmosphere of novelty and fun, and on the other hand, they are working hard to improve their language skills.

Questionnaire Results

Oxana Ustinova, AH Office Manager

Every semester more than 350 students come to the American Home to learn to speak English. Each of them pursues his/her individual goals. However, our teachers have to find a more or less universal student-oriented approach to teaching group classes since language learning requires a team effort from both the teacher and the students.

In spite of the fact that teachers and students interact in person during classes, it is useful to use questionnaires to get students’ answers to questions concerning our work. We consider this kind of feedback to be a very important part of our interaction with the students. We are interested in their assessment of the structure of the program, our teaching methods, and the teaching materials. And, of course, we are interested in their progress and success.

Besides providing us with useful feedback, the students sometimes say things that sound very flattering and boost our egos—which is always nice.

Here at the American Home we usually administer questionnaires at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester.

I would like to focus upon the results of the mid-semester questionnaire we conducted at the end of February. It is rather detailed and focuses on the students' evaluation of our classes, the amount of material covered, the methods used by the teacher, and the textbook. We also ask them about possible ways to improve the class and for any other suggestions that might benefit the American Home.

First of all it turned out that we have a number of students who have been studying here for a really long period of time. 15 of our students have been with us for 5 semesters, 8 students for 6 semesters, 6 students for 7 semesters, 7 students for 8 semesters, and two girls have been studying with us for 10 semesters, starting from the first level and moving up to the tenth.

The classes are attractive for students because of the cordial, friendly atmosphere, informal relations with the teachers and their classmates, the non-traditional (as compared to classes in regular schools) approach to teaching, the opportunity to study modern conversational language and slang, to communicate with interesting people and discuss various vital topics. They also like it when teachers use various games that help them learn the material and when teachers tell them about American culture and provide a chance to discuss and compare the American and Russian way of life.

We are also interested in what our students would like to change in their class. The answers differ, but the main suggestions are: we want to have more fun in class, to work less, to learn more and to speak English better. (Working less and learning more are of course mutually exclusive most of the time.) There are some serious students who would like to study English grammar more thoroughly and to have more homework and more tests.

In the "Suggestions and Comments" part of the questionnaire many students just write: "Thanks a lot for everything you do" and wish us good health.

We have also conducted a similar, but more detailed questionnaire in our Kraft chocolate factory program. We started working there in February 2002. The program is a business English course. It differs substantially from the classes at the American Home in terms of the objectives and the material covered since the students at the factory have to learn to communicate effectively for business purposes in the shortest time possible. Most of the students are middle and top managers who have a busy schedule, but have to use English in their day-to-day work in dealing with the American company management. So, in this case the main requirements for the classes are efficiency and functionality. Our students (especially in the higher levels) very much appreciate the fact that the teachers are native speakers. As a result, they can develop their listening comprehension skills and have a chance to practice their conversational skills. According to the questionnaire results, the classes help our students to achieve practical results in their work. This includes helping them to communicate more effectively with their English-speaking colleagues both in writing and orally.

As one of the more advanced students put it, thanks to the classes "it is now possible for me to speak English over the telephone with foreign colleagues, to participate in training programs in English, to present my own ideas in English, and to participate in meetings [conducted in English]."

In general, the mid-semester questionnaires focus on technicalities. The results of the end-of-semester questionnaires sound even more encouraging and flattering. Here our students usually express their profound gratitude and admiration for the American Home and its teaching staff. Their main point was very well expressed by one of our former students: "I wish the American Home to be always crowded with students. Keep up your work on promoting and strengthening friendship between Americans and Russians and also people of other nationalities!"

Reflections on Women in Russia **Chris Stroop**

NOTE: In the fall Chris will begin work on a PhD in Russian history at Stanford. The following comments reflect Chris' personal experience and views. In my opinion, reality is generally more complex than our initial impressions suggest. –Ron

"The whole world knows that men are more clever than women," the roughly middle-aged female English teacher said to me as I was preparing to visit her class. She had just been trying to explain to me why the girls in her class, for the most part, outperformed the boys by a considerable margin, and I

had innocently asked, "You find that unusual? That seems to me to be generally the case." Needless to say, I was floored by her response. During my months of life in Russia, the country's foibles had become less and less exotic to me. Nevertheless, the country maintained—and almost certainly still does maintain—the capacity to surprise me from time to time. This was one of those moments. How could an educated woman so nonchalantly, and in all seriousness, state categorically that men are more intelligent than women, as if she were saying that 2 plus 2 equals 4, or that Ankara is the capital of Turkey? Caught in what was a very awkward position for a Western-educated man with feminist sympathies, all I could muster to answer the teacher's statement was an anticlimactic, "Well, I don't know, I think that men and women have equal intellectual capacities."

This she casually dismissed, with, "Girls work harder." At that point, the classroom became available, and our conversation came to an end. I soon learned that the teacher's attitude is the rule here, rather than the exception, even among educated women. Women are often referred to as "the weak sex," (слабый пол) or "the fair sex" (прекрасный пол), in day-to-day conversations and even in the media. If my discussions with Russians inside and outside of my advanced English classes are any indication, only a very small percentage of women take even the slightest offence at this. In addition, a female university student with whom I am acquainted has related to me that a teacher of hers, who is a woman, once said to a class with a vast majority of female students, "I kowtow before masculine intelligence." Why do Russian women have such a demeaning view of themselves and fail to recognize it as such? This question is difficult to answer.

All Russian women with whom I have ever discussed the topic recognize that they often carry heavier loads than men, and that Russian society rests on the women's strong shoulders. However, they refrain from discussing this often, and, as women have told me time and again, many of them wish they could be weak and dependent. The idea that men are smarter and more capable, but women more industrious, is prevalent. Clearly, this enables irresponsible men to continue in destructive patterns of drunkenness and laziness, but what conceivable benefit, perceived or actual, that women might derive from maintaining this belief is beyond me. Yet the majority of them believe it.

This is one of the things about Russia that continues to perplex me. Conjecture on which common gender tendencies have a biological connection and which are pure cultural constructs is far beyond the scope of this article, but, in any case, I was absolutely amazed to discover how sexist Russia is by Western standards. In general, I have found that even educated Russians believe in inherent characteristics to a much greater extent than most educated Westerners, e.g., inherent national, racial, and gender characteristics. In most Russians' minds, the nature/nurture debate is settled in favor of nature, and, I suppose, this coincides naturally with many Russians' fatalistic outlook on life. Discussing these and other issues with my advanced English classes and local contacts has been an eye-opening experience for me. I like to challenge my students to think about things from a different perspective, and I've also had to evaluate the basis of my own beliefs, which is always healthy. Of course, I still strongly believe that men and women are intellectually equal and should have the same rights, and I am disturbed by how little feminism there is in Russia. I hope that I am doing some good in causing other people to think about gender roles in society. In any case, the clash of ideas is a part of life here, and living here is far from boring.

ALUMNI NOTES

Helen Campbell, Intensive Russian Student the past two summers; she teaches in the Department of Social Sciences, University of Maryland University College Europe, Heidelberg, Germany.

In November, I had the pleasure of hosting Tanya Akimova and her daughter Nina in my home in Germany, as well as traveling with them to Paris. My companions proved indefatigable: in a single day we visited every major Paris monument, with time left over to scour the shops of the Boule Mich and to then eat mussels at Leon de Bruxelles. Back in Germany, Nina—a born public speaker—addressed two of my University of Maryland classes on the Russian education system, leaving what appeared to be a trail of sighs and broken hearts. I also introduced my guests to as much of the Russian community here as I could assemble, which included three Siberian women and my tutor from Astana in Kazakhstan. Needless to say, I look forward to another "Akimova visit," and wish to extend an invitation here to anyone associated with the American Home.

NOTE: Nina Akimova studied at the American Home and then was a Rotary high school exchange student in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois in 2002-03. She is a lovely young lady who “breaks hearts” wherever she goes. (Her American host mother told me that she always got excellent service in the stores from the young male clerks whenever Nina was with her.)

Alan & Anya (Morozova) Moseley

NOTE: Alan taught at the AH for the 1998-99 academic year and then went to work in Moscow for the Eurasia Foundation. Anya was the AH's "first secretary" from 1993 to 1999 when she also moved to Moscow where she worked for a German firm. (See Alumni News No. 3.)

All is going well for us in New York. Alan will graduate from Columbia University in May with a Masters in International Affairs. We will then probably go to the Balkans over the summer where Alan will study Serbo-Croatian for six weeks. We also hope to do some additional traveling, including visiting my parents in Moscow. While Alan has been studying, I've been working, most recently for a French pharmaceutical company in the Business Planning department.

After we complete our travels we will return to New York and begin a job search.

Charity Trelease, 1998-99 (Lead Teacher)

Greetings from Washington, DC! Skol'ko zim, skol'ko let... [“How many winters, how many summers...”] The American Home seems worlds away from here, but if all goes as planned I will be closer to that neck of the woods next year. I am finishing up my final year of law school at Georgetown. After I take the Bar this July, I will be heading over to London to begin a training contract with Baker & McKenzie. One factor that drew me to the London office of the firm was its regular involvement in cross-border transactions with eastern and central European companies. (The other factor was the five weeks of vacation. Gotta love Europe.) As always, I am looking forward to another international adventure and am eager to plan a long-overdue return visit to Russia once I get settled in London. Soskuchalas'! [“I miss... Vladimir!”]

On a less cheerful note, Romka and I decided last year to go our separate ways. It was an amicable split, and the two of us remain good friends. Romka is still in DC and continues to do great things for Hogan & Hartson's IT Department, where he has been working for the past several years. We both have fond memories of our time in Vladimir and hope you think of us with similar affection.

NOTE: Roman assisted the teachers at the AH. He and Charity were married and moved to Washington, DC in 1999. (See the first issue of the newsletter.)

Nils Wessell, Intensive Russian student fall 2000; Professor of Government, U.S. Coast Guard Academy

I continue to teach in New London, Connecticut. I am trying to keep my Russian from getting too rusty (it was never stainless steel) by taking Russian tutoring lessons three times a week from a native speaker in the area. My thoughts turn to Galya and her colleagues all the time. You made me feel right at home, and I feel like a little bit of Vladimir remains with me. I trust everyone is well and hope that you will get back in touch as opportunity arises. It would be a pleasure to put you up in my house in Mystic or in Maine on any visits to the U.S. My email address at home is nhwessell@comcast.net and at the office NWessell@exmail.uscga.edu. My warmest regards to everyone. Only three and a half years to go until my next sabbatical!