

# AH ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

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## Some Comments from Ron

This has been a busy period—thus the delay in sending out this issue of the newsletter. The Center for East European and Russian/Eurasian Studies at the University of Chicago received the Fulbright grant—for which we, once again, are the “subcontractor” for the in-country program. We—especially Alexei—are making a substantial effort to make improvements in the program where ever possible. It looks like we have another good group this year. (I’m particularly glad that the CEERES Associate Director, Meredith Clason, is going with us. I’m confident that she will provide valuable assistance during the trip, and that she will be able to provide useful feedback.)

The new teachers for next year have been hired. (See [www.serendipity-russia.com/newteachers.htm](http://www.serendipity-russia.com/newteachers.htm).) There are 8 of them, plus Sara Beach is returning for at least the fall term. In other words, we’ll have 9 full time teachers in the fall.

The new teachers will have the benefit of two “consultants.” Both Lena Belova and Olya Solovkina will be returning from maternity leave—and both will work directly with the teachers. Lena will be returning to the position she was the first to fill in fall 2004—after returning from her first maternity leave. Lena began her second maternity leave in 2006. Jenya Kislyakova has very ably filled in during Lena’s absence. (See newsletters 10 11,12—and this issue.) Jenya has already landed a job teaching English at a private preschool. She is also hoping to be hired by the English Department at the Vladimir State Humanities University (formerly the Pedagogical). I know that she will have a great deal to contribute in both positions.

Joining Lena in working with the teachers will be Olya Solovkina. Olya was the AH secretary-receptionist before beginning her maternity leave in fall 2006. She, like Lena (and Jenya, Oxana, and Natasha, the current secretary), trained to teach English.

Olya is currently working on the ICAL course—see Galya’s comments below—and doing very well. (Lena took the course the first year we required it.)

It’s going to be very nice having both young ladies back—and working together to assist the teachers.

I’m leaving for Chicago for the pre-departure Fulbright program latter today (June 18). I’ll be back in my “home away from home” in Vladimir Sunday evening.

I’m confident this is going to be an excellent Fulbright trip—and I’m looking forward to “debriefing” the current teachers and getting other matters discussed and dealt with.

## **Preparing in Advance**

Galya

We started requiring our teachers to take a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) course when the Russian government informed us that they had to have some sort of “certification.” We decided that an online course offered by a British firm, ICAL, was worth trying. It was reasonably inexpensive (now \$265), flexible (teachers could access the course from anywhere and, within limits, work at their own pace). Most important, it looked like the course would provide the new teachers with a shared introduction to some of the basics involved in teaching English as a foreign language, especially basic lesson planning.

We selected as the initial tutor for our teachers a young man who had worked for a number of years in Russia as an English teacher and teacher trainer—and who had married a Russian. Larry did a very good job of providing the first group of teachers who took the course in 2006 with useful comments and suggestions. (A second—and also very experienced—tutor has since been added.)

Not all the teachers that first year—or this year—thought the course was especially helpful. But I think they underestimate the value of being required to start thinking about at least some of the major issues involved in teaching a “foreign language.”

The result is that they show up in Vladimir with a shared foundation that we can then build on during our intensive orientation program.

For this year, as Ron mentions above, we have been allowed by ICAL to customize the course, so that it more directly matches up with what we actually do in our program.

It will be interesting to see if the new teachers have a positive response to the revised materials. In any case, having everyone take the same course clearly helps us prepare a more effective orientation. We know what we can assume they already know....

For information on ICAL see: <http://www.icalweb.com/page.asp?title=AboutICAL>

## **AH Ambassadors—A Very Rewarding Experience**

Meg White, 2007-08

When I took the job at the American Home last year, I was thrilled by the fact that I would not only be teaching English, but that I would be involved in the community of Vladimir. When the year began, I may have had doubts about my ability to act as an informal “cultural ambassador” for the US, but after one TV interview on the origins of Thanksgiving, two very different radio interviews (one on the role of Andrew Carnegie and the other on Christmas trees) and numerous visits to local schools, I really have come to enjoy the role of an accessible, friendly AH teacher—more or less “knowledgeable on things American.” Because underneath the interviews and school

visits, what the people here really want to know about is your own individual experiences—and that is something that is easily shared.

But when we were reminded that we would be hosting a seminar for English teachers in the Vladimir region, I was a little worried. Truth be told, I was scared. Present a workshop for people who have been teaching ten or more years? What could we, as new English teachers, possibly teach them?

Those doubts were soon assuaged after the first day of the “seminar”—as the Russians call them. These teachers were eager to speak with native English teachers, eager to debate with us, demonstrate their sense of humor and reveal their personalities. And they wanted to learn about the games we had adapted and developed in order to teach specific aspects of our grammar. They, in turn, demonstrated their most effective “tricks” for teaching Russians difficult English grammar points.

The Russian teachers were also curious to hear about our individual experiences and interested in getting to know us as people.

We played games with them, we sang songs and taught them country-western line dances—which, to our surprise, the very much enjoyed. In short, we had fun and we learned a lot about teachers here in Vladimir.

It was extremely helpful to participate in the exchange of teaching techniques and a pleasure to get to know some of our Russian colleagues. The teachers we worked with are clearly dedicated and talented people. Spending time with them was an especially rewarding experience.

## **Divide and Conquer**

Sara Beach, Co-Lead Teacher

**NOTE:** As mentioned above, Sara will be returning for at least the fall semester.

At the end of last year, we decided to divide the A2 level into two semesters, A2 and A3. I've taught both of these new classes, and I can say that they are a great improvement over the old A2—and a lot of fun to teach.

Our main goal in dividing A2 was to provide more opportunities for practicing the basics. In the old A2, we taught five verb tenses, past modals, the passive voice, and more in just 15 weeks, i.e., 45 hours of class time. It was a full plate. It was stressful for students and teachers alike to try to cover so much so quickly.

In the new classes, we have plenty of time to drill with formal exercises; to review difficult grammar from previous levels (especially conditionals: *“If it's sunny tomorrow, we'll go to the park”*); and to address common mistakes (some / any; other / another).

Most important, we can—finally!—go beyond the "write three sentences using the new grammar" approach and spend some time on creative practice.

In A2, we watch a clip from *Ten Things I Hate about You* and write some love / hate poetry of our own using "it-when" phrases: *"I love it when you talk to me, but I can't stand it when you sing."*

To practice describing problems with the passive voice, we have students sit back-to-back and describe the leaking, broken, cracked, and stained items in a picture of an apartment ransacked by burglars. Then they retrace the steps of the thieves. Next, given a fixer-upper dacha or a boat full of holes, students explain to their partners how to *have these problems fixed*, negotiate a selling price, and make a sale.

We also watch the lead-up to the murder scene in *Clue* and ask the students to be detectives. They recreate the scene using past continuous – who was standing where, holding which weapon, and who was acting suspiciously. Afterwards, each student plays the part of one character and has to defend his or her own innocence while accusing others. Not bad for a low-intermediate level!

The current A3 has a definite theme – describing and changing the world around us, which is underscored by the course movie, *Pay It Forward*.

We take the point of view of workers, environmentalists, tourists, and even animals and debate the closing of a factory near Lake Baikal. We write about the workforce of the future and about the social problems most visible in Vladimir. I was thrilled to read that some of my students teach kids about environmental problems and others serve food to the homeless. A3 is a really interesting level to teach, as the students' vocabulary and confidence is just getting to the point where they can really begin to express concern, optimism, or doubt about the changes they see—and the ones they want to see—around them.

I'm writing this right after our midterm oral exams. It was nothing short of awesome to listen as my students talked for the entire 90 minutes, almost without my input, telling their stories about scuba diving, witnessing traffic accidents, getting lost at Borodino, and playing pranks at school. And they were full of questions for each other. (Okay, it's possible that this was because I require them to ask questions.)

Understandably, American Home students often don't look forward to days 14 and 28 of the semester – the oral exams. But I think they can be the most fun, the most beneficial, and the most "Lazy Teacher, Active Students" days of the year. With this in mind, as we continue to develop the new A2 and A3 levels, we will constantly be looking for student input as we target challenging grammar points and expand their opportunities for conversation.

## The Library

Jenya Kislyakova, Teachers' Consultant

This year we have gotten a little more room in the library to better arrange the books there. Thank God and Alexei, we don't have the big computer table in it anymore. Instead, we were able to place more shelves on the wall (the table used to cover half the wall), and now the books are not cramped in the corners or piled up in boxes. There is a table, still, a small one, I put the laptop and the books the students return on it.

All the books and other resources are now organized according to the following pattern: Wall 1 is for all kinds of fiction literature: novel, classics, adventure, detective stories, mystery, romance, etc. Here you can also find children's books, low-level ESL literature (right in the middle, so it's easy to

reach it) and juvenile literature. I put all the books donated by Fulbright teachers there, so Z-A students can come up to the shelves and take their time to choose something to their taste. We have wonderful examples of adapted classics there, as well as easy-to-read teenager books. We also have 4 books from the I Wonder Why series that are pretty popular with students. Relatively simple language and plenty of colorful pictures make them an interesting reading for teenager students as well as adults of A-B levels. Higher levels are exposed to the wide range of genres and authors we have.

Wall 2 materials are all about documentary, science and reference. Here you can find diverse materials related to ecology, medicine, economics, social issues, history, etc. There is a section called "All about the USA" containing information about the USA: its history, culture, politics and economics. The collection of Britannica encyclopedias and Oxford Junior Encyclopedias are also there.

Wall 3 is meant for books related to teaching and learning English. Here you can find textbooks, grammar references and dictionaries, as well as materials for TOEFL exams.

The "new order" has had its results already: the number of low-level students borrowing books has increased critically since last summer. And the number of students leaving the library with disappointed faces – because all the books there are beyond their linguistic abilities – has decreased.

Having gone through and organized most materials, I was able to better help our students to find materials related to their occupation or personal interests. For example, two students from the Pedagogical University who are prospective teachers of drawing. They often borrow books and magazines about design, famous artists and painters.

One more change consists in organizing the magazines that used to be piled up on a big lower shelf with no particular structure or logic. Now they will be grouped together:

e.g. all women's magazines, all magazines about economics and business news, all entertainment magazines, etc.

My plans for this summer are: to print out the lists of books from all categories and put them within the reach of students. This idea is not new – teachers from last year suggested that we do it, but it has only become possible now that the library is structured better. These lists will have all the necessary information about the books: the author, the title, the level of proficiency the reader has to have to be able to read this or that book. Potentially, students will be able to look through the lists quickly and choose something even if the librarian is not there. It will also be convenient for the teachers who will bring them to the library – they don't have access to the library database and often don't know what the library contains.

## **FULBRIGHT NOTES**

**Note:** Unless otherwise indicated the following "Fulbrighters" went on last summer's trip.

### **Mike Bailey**

I will be hosting my three (count em..., 3!! ) hosts from Murom this coming summer.

Anton, Edik &

Oksana hope to be arriving in the USA on May 20th. So many details will be worked out at the last minute, but they all have jobs lined up for what is planned to be a 4 month visit. (three working and one touring) They will be staying at our home with myself, my wife and two daughters, (their age), in the small (read: very small ) town of Searsmont, Maine

We live "downtown"—which means all of their jobs are literally just across the street. Anton & Edik will work at the lumber yard, fabricating building trusses, and Oksana will become the town celebrity, making pizza, burgers & fries at our General Store.

If all of this won't generate enough stress for my dear wife, I have been accepted for a three week study tour of China in June and July. (We went to Nice, France over our spring break. This is just the down payment on what I owe her for her help with this summer's undertaking.)

This "Russian connection" will be an ongoing adventure even as the new Fulbright recruits begin their discovery of our former Cold War "enemy."

I remain in regular contact with my hostess in Vladimir. Our students have connected through our "Global Classroom" and we expect to expose our new students next year.

My PowerPoint presentations on my "Russian adventure" have been a huge success at school this year. I've been able to hit a number of classrooms beyond my own. Make sure the new group all get to a Banya...and take pictures...

### **Update—The Russians have arrived!**

Edik, Anton & Oksana have all arrived safely. Edik and Anton are working 10 hour days, 5 days a week at Sprowl Building Components, swinging hammers and welding nailguns and routers. They are learning our somewhat colorful local lumberyard slang, and, probably because of the 10 hour days, are adjusting quite well to our rural "early to bed, early to rise" schedule. Also on their first day of work they discovered that not everything sold in a candy machine is candy...sometimes it's colorful earplugs.

Oksana has already become a master pizza and hamburger maker at the Fraternity Village General Store. Still the rookie at work she mostly has gotten the 11 - 8 and weekend shifts...but is putting in a 40+ hour week. Both places of employment are across the street from my house so it is very convenient for them.

They seem to be enjoying our food...sweet peas are a clear favorite for vegetables and shepherd's pie was also a real hit, although they can't quite understand the concept of cooking fish with milk (chowder), but we'll work on that.

No lobster yet, but it is scheduled for next weekend, for Father's Day. Today Oksana bravely asked for time off, and we all spent the day at Acadia National Park. It was the perfect place to spend an otherwise hot, muggy day. The beach, the mountain, the rocky coast...

Have a great trip this summer, and pass on my best wishes to all at the American Home.

\* \* \* \* \*

In response to your request for comments from previous participants, interacting with the people in Russia was very memorable. To see them make do with so little was inspiring. Small dwellings, little storage space, few places or things to call their own, etc. are so different from the way we live. The people seem cold and impersonal until you strike up a closer relationship and then you see such a warm and open side to them. I really enjoyed that. Of course, I especially appreciated visiting historical places I have read and heard about for decades. I believe walking into Red Square for the first time was one of the highlights of my life! Seeing Alexander Palace also gave me goose bumps.

I hope you have a safe and marvelous trip. Thanks for including me last year. If you ever need a pack animal to fill a space on a future trip, please let me know.

**Rick Jacobs**

\* \* \* \* \*

Ron,

Some brief comments. I learned more in the month last summer than in all the time spent reading books on Russia. The contacts with the people were so great. I may sound like an odd duck in relating the following, but recently a parent asked me about the best and worst things about the trip. I had to say that the “worst” was the touring we did at the end. I know that is a strange answer—seeing Moscow and St. Petersburg was the “worst” part of the trip! Red Square and Palace Square—how could those two places be mentioned in the same sentence with any form of the word “bad”?

Of course I was focused on talking with the people more than seeing the sights.

I wish I were on my way back again this summer. I want to ask the babushkas selling berries near where I lived in Vladimir about all they have lived through.

Just putting these few lines together has opened a flood of memories in me. What a great trip.

**Terry McIver**

\* \* \* \* \*

Hi Ron,

Three nights ago I was in Palace Square in St. Petersburg listening to Roger Waters of Pink Floyd with thousands of Russians. It was near the end of a fabulous trip to gather data for my dissertation in Educational Policy and Administration at the University of Minnesota. My school district gave me a paid 4.5 month sabbatical to study and travel.

The last month of almost three months traveling was spent in Russia. I was able to get back to Vladimir to stay with my host family from the 2004 Fulbright. I had traveled first to Belgorod, a town in western Russia not far from the Ukraine, that has a thriving economy.

I was intrigued by the contrast with what I had remembered from the 2004 trip and wondered if the difference was due to geography or time. My new friends in Belgorod insisted it was geographic, explaining that even during the 1990's their economy tended to be stronger than most other areas of Russia.

When I arrived in Vladimir I saw evidence that the economy is changing there too. There is a brand new Globus (a larger German-based grocery, merchandise, and restaurant complex) on the outskirts of town. On a rainy Sunday the parking lot was filled with cars. In the center of town there is a new shopping mall that is also very popular. Even the old department store near the American Home has been modernized. Ladies, do you remember our excursion to buy certain necessary items when our luggage did not arrive for three days?

The overlook near the Assumption Cathedral has a newly paved area with a huge bronze statue, and behind the American Home there is a renovated garden especially for children.

My host from Murom joined us for a day at the dacha, and I was also able to chat with a few other people briefly. I wasn't able to stop in Moscow, but I heard from people in St. Petersburg that Moscow has become so expensive that even New Russians go to St. Pete for the weekend for less expensive restaurants and night life.

My Russian language skills had not improved much since the 2004 trip, but I had no difficulties traveling on my own to any of the three cities. Everywhere Russians—bus drivers, the train porter on the night train to St. Pete, students in the metro—were kind and hospitable, even protective of a single woman traveling alone.

I am envious of the new group of teachers, and I wish them an experience they will come to value even more over time as I have mine.

**Candy Schnepf**, 2004 Fulbrighter

### **Exploiting the Fulbright Experience in the Classroom**

Tom Murdoch, 2004 Fulbrighter

Although it has been nearly four years since I “experienced Russia through everyday life,” I find that what I learned from the program continues to influence me personally and inform what I do in the classroom. This school year, I drew more heavily on my 2004 Fulbright experience than in past years, and the outcome was highly successful. In fact, the eighth graders in my Gifted and Talented Post World War II History class became so caught up with what we were studying that many showed up the last day of school wearing home-made “RUSSIA” T-shirts.

This year, rather than using photos and observations from my Fulbright experience to reinforce the points I wanted to make, I used them to drive the curriculum, that is, they provided the central focus. I was able to accomplish this while still staying within the mandated objectives for the class. However, this did require a couple of years of preparation on my part, and was made easier by the fact that I had a group of students this year who were “global thinkers.”

I began by looking at what materials I had from my Fulbright experience that could serve as links to connect my students and myself to a greater body of knowledge, particularly that pertaining to the Cold War Era, as that topic makes up over half the material covered in this course. Ultimately, there were dozens of things I was able to put to use, but I will discuss only four in this essay: (1) Vladimir State Prison, (2) the former military facilities in Murom, (3) conversations with former Red Army officers and their families, and (4) the increasing popularity of some Western music in Russia. I found that

drawing on my firsthand experience related to these made it easier to hold students' interest than when dealing with topics with which I have little personal familiarity. The result was a greatly enhanced learning environment.

In preparation, I found myself reading a wide variety of Russian literature as well as social histories. My reading list included Figes' *Natasha's Dance* and Volkov's *Magical Chorus*. I also took a year of Russian language at the local community college. And I took advantage of conferences offered by the University of Illinois, including one last summer on the work of Solzhenitsyn. The Author's wife and two of his son's were among the presenters. All of this gave me more material to work with and a better overall understanding of Russia, all of which helped to facilitate discussions in my classroom.

Solzhenitsyn provided a good starting point for our discussion, and there also lies our first link: Vladimir State Prison. He was held there briefly while in transit to Siberia. My photos and description of the prison served as a good hook to grab the students' attention before telling them a little about Solzhenitsyn.

Early in the year, the students read *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. This particular assignment serves two purposes. First, it compliments Elle Eiesel's *Night*, which is required reading for our seventh graders.

*One Day* makes it clear that the horrors generated by imprisoning and enslaving innocent people did not end with the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, but were continued by Stalin for nine more years after Hitler's defeat. Among other things, the students learned that there were Russian soldiers who managed to survive both the Nazi concentration camps and Soviet labor camps. Students then compared the experience of Ivan (or Solzhenitsyn) to that of American servicemen returning home after the war to wives, families, girlfriends, and the GI Bill.

Later, as we covered the sixties, we discussed the controversy that surrounded Khrushchev, who as the Soviet leader authorized the publication of *One Day*, and Solzhenitsyn. Finally, the class was provided something special. Last summer I told Solzhenitsyn's wife, Natalya, that my class would be reading *One Day* during the fall semester, and she graciously wrote a personal note to the class in which she expressed the wish that by reading her husband's work, they would develop a better understanding of our cultures and the world in which we live.

We returned to Vladimir State Prison when discussing the U-2 shoot-down over Yekaterinberg in 1960. Frances Gary Powers was held in the Vladimir prison following his trial in Moscow. I have numerous photos from inside the prison museum, including a copy of the widely recognized one of Powers in his "sanitized" flight suit. This led to a discussion of why Powers, as a CIA employee, was treated better than American military aircrews shot down over the Soviet Union during the Cold War. I explained that

Powers was eventually traded for a U.S.-held Soviet spy—something that wasn't normally done with military personnel. Finally I mentioned that while living in southern California I listened to Powers give the morning Los Angeles traffic report from the KNXT helicopter—which obviously was a far cry from the high flying top secret aircraft that he once piloted.

The military facilities in Murom probably provided students with more concrete examples of the nature of the Cold War and its aftermath than Vladimir. This was due largely to the fact that the class took a field trip to a museum of Cold War aircraft at the now-closed Chanute Air Base in Rantoul, Illinois. Like Murom, Rantoul owed its survival to the Cold War, and once that was over, the services provided were no longer necessary. Both the huge tank factory in Murom and the USAF training facility at Chanute were closed in 1994, throwing thousands of people out of work in both the US and Russia. Fourteen years later, neither community has fully recovered.

Before traveling to Chanute, I showed the class a series of photos from Murom. Most were of the abandoned tank factory, showing brush growing up in the parking lot and the buildings in a state of disrepair. When we arrived at Chanute, I had the bus driver circle White Hall, once the largest residence facility in the entire U.S. military. Like the tank factory, White Hall sits abandoned, with windows missing and brush growing through the cracks in the parking lot. Afterward some of the kids had a puzzled look as if to ask "Well who won?" I addressed this by explaining that at the end of the Cold War, there was not really a winning country and a losing country, but instead winners and losers in each country.

It seems that in every class I teach there is a student who asks if I have ever met any KGB agents. My answer always is, "Not that I know of." However, I usually seize the opportunity to explain that I have met a number of former Red Army officers and Russian police officers, and that I have enjoyed engaging in discussions with these gentlemen. I show some photos—and I always make sure to emphasize that these men are not much different from the American officers I served with in the early 1970s, or the fellow Cold War vets with whom I am friends today.

One of the Russians in particular puts a very human face on the Soviet side. He is a former missile officer. When the class discusses the missile race, I show a photo of me dining with the retired Russian officer and his family in their home. I assure the students that he is a very nice guy who never had any more intention of blowing us up than we did of blowing him up.

For better or worse, the topic of nuclear missiles does not seem to grab students' attention the way it once did. The students in this year's class expressed more interest in the officer's family than his military career.

Of all the topics we discussed, the one that, not surprisingly, generated the most intense student interest was entertainment in Russia, especially, rock music. I showed a couple of photos of a band led by a young Vladimir TV reporter named Oleg who spoke excellent English, noting how much we enjoyed their performances. I then explained that Rock and Roll was officially discouraged in Russia until the early 1980s, and how even in the late eighties, while traveling there I was often mobbed by Russian youths who were looking for hard to find cassette tapes of Western bands.

This provided a good basis for the discussion of government censorship and regulation of the arts during the Soviet era. One example I gave was how Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, banned in the Soviet Union, was smuggled out in the mid-sixties and published in London. It became popular reading among Western intellectuals and eventually became the inspiration for the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy for the Devil*. Soviet officials were not pleased, and I point out that the "decadent and anti-Soviet Stones" were among the last Western bands to be invited to perform in Russia.

After I finished my presentation this year, the first response was from a young man who proudly shared that *Sympathy for the Devil* was his ring-tone on his cell phone. Once we got beyond ring-tones, a healthy discussion developed of how both *The Master and Margarita* and *Sympathy for the Devil* were viewed by many as threatening the moral fabric of their respective cultures.

The students soon realized that one of the greatest differences between Soviet and Western society during the Cold War was the degree of freedom of expression allowed under the two systems.

Before this year I was very reluctant to add new topics based on my personal experiences. Among other things, I was concerned that I would appear ego-centric, and that the students would quickly lose interest. This had been my experience with that approach when I had used it with high school juniors following my first trips to Soviet Russia. In the end, the opposite was true with these eighth graders. Not only did my approach hold their interest, it allowed me to establish credibility with them at the beginning of each unit.

Two factors were different this time around. One was the demographics of the students. Most of the "gifted" students in this year's class read at the upper college level while my previous high school groups included quite a few students who read below grade level. The second, and I believe far more important difference, was the amazing job done by Ron Pope's American Home staff in organizing and implementing our program in Russia. We were provided with a wide range of activities and experiences that would be of great interest to our students back home. I suspect that Alexei's (the AH's director of

special projects) familiarity with the nature of American students was a great help in this area.

I would like to conclude with some advice for any educator who has the opportunity to participate in an American Home program. Do not let what you learn get away from you. The experience is priceless! Keep notes, both mental and written, and review them often. What may appear irrelevant to your curriculum at one point in time may be of great value at another. Also, build on your experience through continuous reading and reflection. The value of what you learn can grow over time—and not fade into distant memories.

### **Comparing Three Teaching Experiences: Russia, Korea, Kyrgyzstan**

Jane Keeler

I taught at the AH during the 2005-2006 school year. After that, I spent a year teaching in South Korea, and I am currently teaching in Kyrgyzstan. Here's a short comparison of the three locations.

In Korea, nearly all school children go to several *hogwans*, or private academies, following their normal school day. There are *hogwans* for all subjects, including English, and most English language *hogwans* employ both Koreans and native speakers as teachers. Since *hogwans* are so popular with parents (they are seen as giving their children an edge in life), they're big business in Korea; as such, there are a lot of *hogwans* that are much more concerned with making money than with education. Luckily, I have a friend (an American, married to a Korean man) who owns and runs a *hogwan* in Daegu, South Korea with her husband and brother-in-law. The school is an average *hogwan* in many ways, but the owners are definitely concerned with making sure their students learn—which made it a pleasant working environment. My youngest students were in the first grade, and my oldest were in the ninth. My largest class had 14 students, while my smallest class had just one. I worked every day from 2:00 to 9:00 (roughly) with short breaks between classes and a long break for dinner. Classes are scheduled on a month by month basis, although most classes changed very little each month, and I taught most groups for the entire length of my stay. The *hogwan* (Ansim Oedae Language Institute) is part of the Oedae chain of *hogwans*, and as such uses the Oedae curriculum and textbooks (as opposed to something like New Interchange and Passages). Native teachers taught little grammar, mainly conversation. When I was there, the school employed two native speakers – myself and the owner – and four Korean teachers. They've now expanded to three foreign teachers. The school paid \$2000/mo, plus roundtrip airfare, medical insurance, severance bonus of \$2000, and a

free apartment. (They're currently looking to hire someone for September, if anyone is interested.)

In January of this year, I moved to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to work at The London School. TLS is set up a lot more like the AH than the school in Korea was. Our students range in age from approximately 10 years old to retirees, with the average students being in their early 20s. Like the *hogwan*, TLS offers classes on a month by month basis, although unlike the *hogwan*, we don't always keep our same classes from month to month. The longest I ever had a group was five months; others I've only taught for one month. The school doesn't have a set curriculum. Teachers are allowed to select from various textbooks in the library. I am currently teaching out of a series called New Cutting Edge (similar to New Interchange, but with British English). I currently teach five classes a day (the normal load is four; I get paid extra for five), one in the morning and the other four from 2:30 to 8:30 with short breaks in between. Unfortunately, the school isn't set up well for printing/photocopying, so I can't make many supplementary materials as I could at the AH and in Korea. The current salary here is \$500/mo plus a free apartment. They pay \$150/mo extra to those who teach five classes instead of four. (They're also looking to hire some more people, if anyone is interested. We're getting a raise of \$200 (I think) in September.)

**Note:** In response to some questions I asked, Jane provided the following information—  
Ron

At the AH I taught 12 hours a week plus conversation class and Saturday activities.

In Korea I taught about 30 hours a week, Mon-Fri

Here in Kyrgyzstan I currently teach an extra class (for extra pay), so I'm teaching 27 hours a week. Normal teaching load here is 21 hours a week Monday through Friday

At the AH we had Lena [Belova] as our Teachers' Assistant, who helped us with lesson planning, developing supplemental materials, and coming up with ideas for class if we were having trouble. Neither the school in Korea nor the one in Kyrgyzstan have a "Lena."

At the AH we had 5 computers, Internet access, a printer and two copiers all at our disposal. The school in Korea had two computers, Internet access, two printers and a copier for us to use. Sadly, the thing I dislike the most about my current school is that we have only one computer for teachers to use.... But it isn't connected to either the Internet or a printer. We also have one ancient copy machine which we can use, but we are not supposed to make more than 9 copies on it per day. For any large quantities of copies we need made, we must submit a request to the school's copy girl 24 hours in advance.

The AH and the school in Kyrgyzstan both have libraries for students to use, although the school in Korea did not.

## **A Journey**

Ann Mansolino, 2004-05

My path through life has generally not been a linear one, and I'm okay with that, as I value the range of knowledge and experiences that I've been exposed to—much of it apparently "unconnected." However, recent events have helped me recognize some connections between the places I've been and things I've done that hadn't been evident before.

After leaving the AH in 2005, I went to Singapore for a year to teach photography and writing as a Visiting Lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. My experience in Russia teaching EFL helped me in Singapore (where the language of instruction was English). Many students' first language was Chinese or Malay. I was able to break things down simply and logically in English, regardless of the subject being taught, as a result of having taught English to non-native speakers previously.

During my time living in Asia, I also made two trips to Burma (officially Myanmar) where I volunteered at an unofficial school run by monks in Mandalay. I taught English to children, adults, and monks. The first day, I stood up in a bamboo hut full of kids, and was told, "teach anything." I asked, "what level are they?" A monk responded, "all levels." Not sure what that meant, exactly, I asked, "do you have a book?" I was handed one, and told to start on page 12. I started with that, and then made things up from there. Things went fine – in large part because I had taught English before. I improvised, acted things out, made the kids laugh, made them talk and answer questions – an activity that was fun, but also unusual, as children in Burma are used to learning solely by repetition and memorization rather than conversation. I was invited to return the next day, and the next, and spent the rest of that trip and a second visit trying to do what I could. I was inspired by the monks' belief in the value of education for bringing change to people's lives and to the country as a whole.

I returned to America in 2006, and began a new job at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, teaching photography. I've been here two years. I will be leaving at the end of the current academic year to begin a new full time tenure track position at Rio Hondo College in Whittier, California -- also teaching photography. I'm looking forward to leaving small town Michigan and returning to a more diverse and dynamic urban environment.

It is difficult to find full time academic employment in the arts in America. I'm

increasingly convinced that my international teaching experience has played a significant role in helping me find jobs here, even though what I'm teaching now is largely unrelated to what I've taught in foreign countries. The fact that I have worked in foreign countries has been seen as valuable and unusual, especially when applying to schools in urban areas, where there's a lot of emphasis on diversity—specifically the ability to work with students from different backgrounds and cultures. The experience has been good also for demonstrating a solid commitment to teaching as a profession. You clearly have to WANT to teach to have done it around the world and to seek out additional teaching jobs upon your return.

My experience teaching globally has also influenced how and what I photograph, though in more indirect and metaphorical ways. The imagery reflects an expanded sense of what it means to be human in the world as well as a greater visual interest in the relationship (both connected and disconnected) between individuals and a sense of place. For anyone who's interested, you can see examples at <http://www.annmansolino.com>

And so things have come full circle, in some respects, to connect and to form a pattern, though certainly not one I could have planned out in advance.

## **OTHER NOTES**

### **Teaching American Law in Moscow**

Helen Campbell, Collegiate Professor, University of Maryland University College, Heidelberg, Germany

**Note:** Helen has studied Russian at the AH—and visits as often as she can.

I was recently awarded a Fulbright Lecturing Grant for the 2008-09 academic year at Moscow State University. I'll be teaching American commercial law in English at the law school, and spending the balance of my time improving my Russian language skills. My short but invaluable experience at the American Home played an important behind-the-scenes role. Tanya Akimova, my excellent teacher, motivated me to learn this challenging language and ignited my interest in Russian culture. I certainly look forward to spending time in Vladimir when the pace of Moscow wears me down, and I invite all AH students, teachers and staff to visit me there anytime.

See:

[http://english.fulbright.ru/members/senior\\_us/2008\\_09/index.shtml?helen\\_campbell](http://english.fulbright.ru/members/senior_us/2008_09/index.shtml?helen_campbell)

## **Visiting Murom**

The weekend of April 19 current teachers Meg White, Dana Buckman, and Duncan McCreery went to Murom to help judge the presentations (in English) at their annual student conference. According to Duncan, this year's co-Lead Teacher, "the hosts were truly wonderful and showed us one of the better weekends we've had all year. They observed that both the students and the faculty at the Murom Institute really value their relationship with the American Home. Hopefully more AH teachers will be able to go to Murom next year.

## **ALUMNI NOTES**

**Sarah Rorimer, 2003-05**

I'm teaching high school ESL in Queens and I'm also the ESL Coordinator. I'm getting a master's degree in TESOL from Hunter College. Life is busy, but good!