

# HISTORY OF EXCHANGES

Illinois State and Vladimir universities have exchanged around 100 university students, typically in one or two week visits. B/N and Vladimir high school students involved in exchanges total 43. Of these high school students, we have stories of 29. We also have 15 stories and/or photos of their sponsors.

## INDIVIDUAL SPONSORSHIP OF VLADIMIR STUDENTS TO B/N—1990 to 1995

Individuals in B/N hosted and assisted at least 10 Vladimir students. See previous section for 3 examples.

## V/C ASSOCIATION SPONSORSHIP OF VLADIMIR STUDENTS TO B/N—1995 to 2012

26 Vladimir students with sponsors are listed here who attended a B/N high school for one or two semesters. The book has stories and/or photos of 18 students and 15 sponsors.

1996— <b>Victoria Melnikova,</b>	U High	Sponsor, Dean & Joyce Christensen
1998— <b>Olga Mesheryakova,</b>	Normal West	Sponsor, Kay Isenberg
<b>Roman Leikine,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Sue Fancher
2000— <b>Alexander Spiridonov,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Don and Cathy Roberts
2001— <b>Svetlana Zhydovtchitz,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Vicky Tanner
<b>Alexander Gorbach,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Jane & Charlie Vogel
<b>Dmitry Zinoviev,</b>	U High	Sponsor, Cynthia & Alan Langrall
2002— <b>Denis Philippov,</b>	Normal West	Sponsor, Terry Fox
<b>Anya Rogacheva,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Marilyn Snook & Charles Stuckey
2003— <b>Natasha Sablina,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Kevin & Paula Wisniewski
<b>Leyla Meshkova,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Bill & Jill West
2004— <b>Anya Degtyareva,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Steve & Michel Taylor
<b>Tatiana Akhmedova,</b>	U High	Sponsor, Don & Sylvia Cooper
2005— <b>Evgeny Loginov,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Gary & Sharon Finamore
<b>Tamara Pitskaleva,</b>	U High	Sponsor, Rick Glass & Barbara Campbell
2006— <b>Polina Karyakina,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Mike & Mary Walker
<b>Tatiana Smyslova,</b>	U High	Sponsor, Carol and Rebecca Benson
2007— <b>Tatiana Kolevatova,</b>	Normal Community	Sponsor, Bruce & Diane Boeck
<b>Petr Pyorkov,</b>	Normal West	Sponsor, Andrew & Mary Jefferson
2008— <b>Sergey Chubich,</b>	Bloomington	Sponsor, Nancy Sultan
<b>Yulia Ivanova,</b>	Bloomington	Sponsor, Mike & Diane Dennis
2009— <b>Tatyana Derevyanko,</b>	Normal West	Sponsor, Bruce & Diane Boeck
<b>Lilia Iosilevich,</b>	Normal West	Sponsor, Andre & Desiree Quizon-Colquitt
2011— <b>Yaroslav Timantsev,</b>	Bloomington	Sponsor, Karen & Dan Fleming
<b>Elena Isaeva,</b>	Bloomington	Sponsor, Memuna & Craig Lee
2012— <b>Anastasia Pavlova,</b>	U High	Sponsor, Andre & Desiree Quizon-Colquitt

## ASSOCIATION SPONSORSHIP OF B/N STUDENTS TO VLADIMIR—2002 to 2011

A total of 17 high school students went to Vladimir for 2 or 3 weeks in the summer, and were hosted by a Russian family. There are stories and/or photos for 11 students.

2002— <b>Aubrey Taylor &amp; Kyle Roberts</b>	2003— <b>Erin Astroth &amp; Andy Groves</b>
2004— <b>Craig Brauer, Leanna Finamore &amp; Ellen West</b>	2005— <b>Katelyn Arendel</b>
2006— <b>Genevieve Crow &amp; Hari Mani</b>	2007— <b>Steven Gilles &amp; Zoe Myers</b>
2008— <b>Teresa Wenning</b>	2010— <b>Lucas Mays &amp; Anibal Torres</b>
2011— <b>Reid Fleming &amp; Jason Chien</b>	



## 1998 SHOCK AND SMILES

**Olga Mesheryakova**

Sponsor, Kay Isenberg

I fell in love with American people when I was 13 years old. I attended a summer camp in Russia where I met some wonderful American people. I came back home after the camp with strong determination to learn English. I had lots of fun learning the language, but going to America one day was still a huge dream that I honestly never thought would come true.

I graduated from High School in Vladimir in 1997 with almost excellent grades and lots of potential to pass the entrance exams to go to the Pedagogical University to be part of the English Department. My knowledge of English was much higher than that of an average student because I put a lot of effort into studying it beyond the learning in school. I went to a special private school where they offered it every day, I took classes at the American Home in Vladimir, I had a private tutor and I studied a lot on my own. Little did I know, however, how corrupt our university entrance exam system was and that if you weren't "connected" or didn't pay extra money to one of the professors on the admitting committee, you didn't stand a chance to get in.

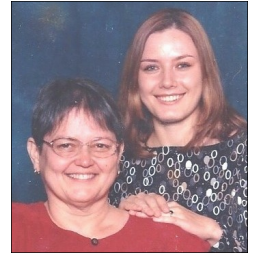
When I saw the list of names of students accepted to the English Department that year I recognized some names of D students that I personally knew who were relatives of some influential people in town. I walked home that day for miles crying non-stop, I have never been so heart broken and let down in my life. The reality hit me hard, I had so many ambitions and dreams that all of a sudden I didn't see happening. I went into a pretty deep depression until a few months later when I got a call that they wanted me to come to the US for one semester of High School. I will never forget that day, I was jumping and skipping on my way home, I couldn't believe it. A little over a month later I was on the plane to America.

I loved every minute of my 6-month stay during the exchange program. Everything was so different, new and fascinating to me. My host mom lived in a mobile home and I thought that was the neatest thing ever. I remember writing letters to my parents describing what a mobile home was (as we didn't have it there) and how cool it was that it had wheels covered up and it could be moved if you wanted to. We ate out every day and I thought that was amazing, I have never seen so much food in my entire life. The portions that were served would feed a family of four for a month back in Russia and here I had it all for myself in one meal. I always made sure to top it off with a large milkshake. I gained close to 40 pounds in three months and I was unbelievably happy about it. I was sending pictures home boasting of my new look. Before, I was a very skinny child and teenager and I could never gain weight no matter how much I ate.



Everything in America was so different and fascinating: school buses, high school building and facilities (I went to then newly built Normal West High School), super nice and fun teachers, abundant supermarkets, malls, dozens of channels on TV, people that I met, learning how to drive with my host mom, the two road trips that we took (to New York City-Philadelphia-Washington D.C. and Colorado-New Mexico). I loved the skyscrapers in Chicago and then later New York. I pinched myself looking at them not believing that I was in America. Even though I studied English before I came here I never spoke it and never had to study other subjects in school in English. Now that I look back I realize how challenging it was. It would take me 7 hours to read one chapter when it would take an American student maybe an hour. And I had 5 classes to study for. I remember reading schoolbooks until 3am every night translating every other word with my dictionary. Now that I think back I wonder how I did it. And the answer is I did well because I loved the experience and because of that I had a great attitude. If I complained and whined about it I would have been miserable.

I was shocked about how nice all the teachers were—very different from Russian teachers. I spent my entire life in Russia being afraid of my teachers. They were strict, dry and evil at times. American teachers were friendly, many with a sense of humor and very helpful to me as a foreign exchange student. I loved American culture of communication and culture in general. I loved how everyone smiled; it was so pleasant to go to stores, doctors' offices, and restaurants, everywhere! People were pleasant to talk to and everyone seemed to express genuine interest towards me being from Russia. I loved my first Christmas Experience in America. I was shocked to see how many gifts each person received; I have never gotten so many gifts in my entire life until then.





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A couple of funny things related to language barrier/cultural difference: Americans would always discuss what they ate in restaurants and what they did over the weekends. I never spent so much time actually making a conversation about what I ordered off of a menu and discuss it in great detail and how I liked it. Neither did I ever have anyone care what I did during my weekends. It was because our lives in Russia were so simple and no one ever did anything special, it was the same pretty much for everyone: schoolwork, housework, going outside with friends. It wasn't a custom to take weekend trips or go to movie theaters or go out to eat, or go to amusement parks (We didn't have any of that.). It also wasn't customary in Russia to be asked, "Did you have fun?" upon return home. I remember Kay asked me a couple of times if I had fun when I came home from the movies or being out with friends. I answered "No" to her. I understood that question as "Did you

laugh a lot?" I didn't quite understand why she cared if my friends and me laughed that night. I was puzzled about that question until she explained it to me.

Another sad but still interesting experience was a funeral. I was always so traumatized by funeral experience in Russia. Unfortunately, Kay's mom passed away during my stay. I was shocked and pleasantly surprised to see that a funeral experience in the US was a true celebration of life.

Now at age 34 I have spent ALL my adult life here. Who would have ever thought? To make a very long story short, four years post high school I graduated from Illinois State University. A local church in Normal, IL sponsored my tuition. I am forever thankful to them. It was a very unexpected sponsor, as I never thought of asking them for help. (I spent my entire summer after graduating from Normal West High School writing letters to companies and organizations that do business with Russia, such as Caterpillar, John Deere, and Rotary Club. My idea was to do some translation work for them in exchange for tuition sponsorship.) I graduated from ISU shortly after 9/11/2001 when that was a very challenging time in the US for foreign students to get a job.

I sent out my resume to 100s of companies but I got rejected everywhere because no one wanted to deal with sponsoring a foreign worker for a work visa. Then I came across this new

business Insurance Company in Springfield, IL. They hired me instantly and agreed to help me with the work visa. After working very hard for this company for three years, they sent me to Southern California to open an office for them there and train new employees. When I came to California I instantly fell in love with it and didn't want to go back. I finally moved to Southern California but had to change my jobs because I couldn't make a living on that salary.

At my new job I met my now husband. He was from San Francisco and we dated long distance for 2 1/2 years before I moved to San Francisco in the name of love. We got married in 2011 on a beach in Cabo, Mexico. Now we have a beautiful baby boy named Jaxon who was born on Christmas Day of last year.

Even though I faced many challenges and hardships along my journey trying to stay in this country after the Exchange Program, I have been living my dream and I am so thankful for everything I have in life.



**1998**

**Roman Leikine**

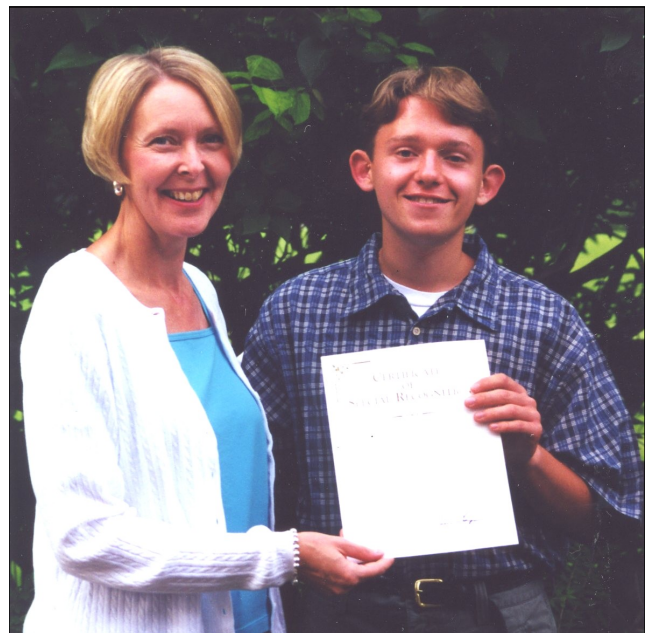
**Sponsor, Sue Fancher**



**2000**

**Alexander Spiridonov**

**Sponsor, Don and Cathy Roberts**



## 2001 COLORFUL DREAMS

Sponsor, Vicky Tanner

Student, Svetlana Zhydovtchitz

I was Svetlana (Sveta) Zhydovtchitz's host mother during her educational exchange at NCHS for the 2000-01 school year. I live in Normal and am a special education teacher in the Roanoke-Benson School District.

Orlyn Edge, chair of the sister city Education Committee and neighbor across the street, asked me to host in the summer even though I had lived alone for years and friends wondered why I said yes. I did so because there was a need and I grew up in a large family.



Svetlana  
(Sveta)

My story emphasizes Sveta's impact on me, our neighbors, and the community at large. It was fun preparing Sveta's room with the help of neighbor Laurie across the street who did the wallpapering. Not long after Sveta arrived, another neighbor hosted a weiner roast to give Sveta a truly American experience. Neighbors Laurie and Linda would host her for dinner when I had late responsibilities at school. You could say that hosting Sveta was a delight for our whole neighborhood.

Meanwhile Sveta and I were becoming very close. She called me her American mother. She would volunteer to help with meal preparation and housekeeping chores. From time to time she would make Russian dishes including Borscht. She went to church with me, sang in the choir (which was a first for her) and went on a church camping trip to Lake Bloomington. Sveta loved my dog "Cinder" and we would walk Constitution trail together with her. She was a very sensitive and loving person. She left notes on my mirror like "Good morning Vicki." Before retiring for bed she might say, "Goodnight, I wish you sweet and colorful dreams."

Sveta was an excellent student. She worked hard and always did the extra-credit. Although she usually studied independently, sometimes I would help her with homework study sheets. Before leaving for school, I took Sveta to dance class at ISU at 6:30 a.m. She dearly loved dancing.

I want to mention two humorous cultural misunderstandings. One night I said to Sveta, "Goodnight and don't let the bedbugs bite." She was alarmed that real bedbugs were in her bed. A second one involved the Russian tradition of always bringing gifts for the host and those who supply favors. Sveta thought that she needed gifts for all of the holidays listed in the NCHS calendar.

Sveta did some dating, but usually socialized with a group of friends. She did go to the prom attired elegantly in a dress borrowed from my student teacher. Sveta met my student teacher when she visited my school to help out on days NCHS was not in session.

It was sad to see Sveta leave after ten months. We each agreed that we didn't want tears at the airport so both of us wrote goodbye letters to express our love and appreciation for a year that we will never forget. In August 2004 I had a truly wonderful trip to Russia to visit Sveta and stay with her family for two weeks. There I toured beautiful Vladimir and Suzdal and continued to learn about life in Russia.

## 2001 CHRISTMAS CHOIR

Svetlana Zhydovtchitz

Sponsor, Vicky Tanner

It was the evening of September 17, 2014. I was on daily duty in the maternity ward of the perinatal center ... The phone rang ... Unknown number ... I answered and heard speech that was very familiar to me once. Mr. Orlyn Edge called me!!! I was shocked - after 14 years, during which I managed to finish medical academy and 5 years practicing obstetrician-gynecologist, I was listening to the voice of an old friend of the sister cities of Bloomington-Normal. My mind was immediately transferred to the events of 2000-2001 when I spent the school year in the Twin Cities. Well, it was a fantastic, fun, informative, precious, and rich with



Svetlana Zhydovtchitz, Alexander Gorbach, and Dmitry Zinoviev

new acquaintances and experiences, type of year.

I'll start with the host family - my American Mom Vicki Lynn Tanner - gorgeous woman who has become a very close and dear person to me. During the year there was the difficulty of a language barrier, adolescent age, introduction to a foreign culture, everyday life? We overcame it together with dignity. There were some problems: issues of life (I, for example, missed Russian soups, so I once made red borsch), language slang, and long time away from home. But, of course, thanks to the organizers of the program, my year was rich and bright.

Schooling - loved the approach to the education system - the choice of interesting classes and the subsequent possibility of developing talents and applying them in the future. Practice in Classes of Chemistry and Biology, and trips to museums with an Art Class, Geography Class, and Dance Class ... Even as a 15-year-old teenager, I knew that the USA is a country of opportunities. In addition to the school day I had a chance to explore the culture and customs of the country. I remember the trip to Chicago on the tours, the fairs in the towns of Illinois, trips to football games, musicals, theaters and even a judicial hearing.

Special thanks to neighbors, friends in my neighborhood for our warm evenings with barbecue, valuable time with dogs, cats and children ... Those days filled with laughter, goodness and mutual interest in each other. It is impossible not to describe the feeling of participation in the Christmas choir in the church, which I regularly visited with Vicki. We became so close to each other, that Vicki trusted me helping her in a nursing home for the holidays. My life in the United States was so versatile that I had the opportunity to meet people of different professions - doctors, artists, politicians, priests and managers of various organizations.

It's sooo hard to fit the whole year of my life in the United States on one page. Unfortunately, my perfect (at that time) knowledge of English is not useful in full volume in Russia. I chose to become a doctor ... But endless gratitude for the opportunity to spend a year among YOU ALL will live in my heart forever.



2001

## “LIFE” AN ONGOING EDUCATION

Alexander (Sasha) Gorbach

Sponsor, Jane & Charlie Vogel

*Written in 2009*

I can't believe it was 9 years ago that I got on a plane and flew 3000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean.

Before I left I had my doubts. I was worrying about this new unfamiliar place and new people who awaited me. However, now I can say without a doubt in my mind, the trip was the best thing that ever happened to me. I got a second family with Jane and Charlie Vogel and their two sons: Jon and Mike. Then I got a third – the members of the Sister City—Orlyn and Jana

Edge, Helen McKay-Katz. These wonderful people helped me navigate in the new culture, make friends, explore new places, and do so much more.

I remember visiting New Salem and learning first hand about the great American story within the first couple of weeks. And it was just the beginning. I appreciated greatly the suggestion of joining the Normal Community High School band and later the speech team as I got to explore more of the United States by traveling on competitions and more importantly made more great friends. I truly enjoyed the classes at NCHS as well. Economics, German, US History, and International Relations are just a few that I will cherish forever.

But I wasn't just getting involved at the school. Speaking to 4-H club and Rotary clubs allowed me to share my culture while enjoying a company of bright open-minded individuals that shared their worldviews back. The dialog brought me to one conclusion: people are truly diverse and yet so similar no matter where you are in the world. They strive to do better for themselves and others. While both bad and good exists everywhere and in everyone, people have a choice which path to take. I am glad I met so many who chose goodness.

My journey continued after the first very eventful year. I spent the next 4 years going to college, moving to Iowa, meeting my sweetheart, whom I married almost a year ago, working in Madison, WI and going back to Iowa for two more years of school. In January of 2009 I started a new job at Pioneer Hi-Bred.

I was ready to relax and settle into routine. But as I learned from my first year in the US (I knew this before, but it got clearer), life doesn't stop and one must be ready for new adventures. While I thought I'd be all schooled out, I am starting my PhD in the fall. None of this would be possible without my wonderful friends and families. And I am really grateful and happy for meeting them.



*Written by Sasha in 2014*

What can a year abroad change? - An entire life.

While the year at Normal Community High School was 13 summers ago, I still enjoy the benefits from the lessons I learned and people I met.

I still call Jane and Charlie to see how they are doing. Now that I have children of my own I understand somewhat the effort it took to keep me out of trouble. I am always grateful for every big and little thing they did for me. From letting me cook some Russian dishes to including me on activities for their children. It's strange to think that without a trip to Cornell College for Mike, which I tagged along on, I might not have ended up attending the school or meeting my wife there.

Orlyn and Jana have been tremendous friends for my family and me. I still remember the chats over tea on the deck of their house in Bloomington. They helped me get the most out of the exchange program by sharing previous students' experiences and introducing me to other Vladimir Sister City members like Helen McKay-Katz. My mom still reminds me to say hello to Jana and Orlyn, every time I call home.

My current job involves architecting software applications for researchers looking to improved crop yields. But it started with a computer science class. While there was a computer class offered at my school in Vladimir, it was only meant to cover typing and basic office programs. At Normal Community I was learning to code. I was interested in writing graphical programs that would show exciting colors and shapes on the screen. Later after college I worked at a company designing interactive exhibits for museums. Now I design programs that display data for researchers in charts that make it easy to find the best plants to grow.





2001

## ALWAYS STOP TO VISIT SASHA

Sponsor, **Jane & Charlie Vogel**

Sasha Gorbach

My husband Charlie Vogel and I and our two sons Jon and Michael were the host family for Sasha Gorbach (Sasha, Jon, and Michael in photo to right) during his educational exchange at NCHS during the 2000-01 school year. We now live in Scottsdale, AZ where Charlie is enjoying retirement after performing legal work at State Farm and I am employed as a physical therapist.



Prior to hosting we had some concerns about taking on another teenager. However, we decided to host Sasha because of our special interest in Russia and our boy's potential positive relationship with Sasha. We had a delightful hosting experience.

Charlie's parents were second-generation immigrants from Rumania and the Ukraine, so there were not fond memories of the home country. My family was US military from the cold war era. For us and also for our extended family, this turned out to be a wonderful opportunity to learn about what had been at



Left, Sasha, Charlie Vogel, Bill White  
Right, Ann White, Bob Sutherland, Jane Vogel

times an "enemy" culture. Charlie particularly had discussions about history and what was Sasha's perception versus our perception of different events. Through conversations with Sasha and indirect conversations with his family we learned about the political and social changes that were happening in Russia at the time. We have had the opportunity to travel to Russia to visit Sasha's family and his family has visited us. We have learned

from this experience that any foreign culture has a human side that can get lost in the media discussion when a crisis arises.

Sasha and our boys "hit it off" very well. He was more oriented towards staying with adults, less oriented towards hanging with a group, although that evolved a little by the end of the year. He was extremely curious about everything American. Where some American teens would have been "cool" and not asked or pretended like they knew, he was not shy about asking. The work ethic was different, he was very motivated to succeed and that did not just involve studying it also involved a very mature approach to establishing relationships with people around him—this was a very good role model for our boys.

In our cross-country travels, we always stop in Minneapolis to see our son Michael, and to visit Sasha, wife Danielle, and their two sons.