



judith nadine

## RUSSELL

### Lessons learned across the world

There is an old saying about Naples, Italy, where I lived with my parents when I was much younger: "See the Balkans and...." the meaning being that the ancient city was so beautiful, that nothing after it was worth seeing. After traveling to Sofia, Bulgaria in July, I realized that this saying could be used to describe other parts of the world.

It was not my first time traveling alone, yet I was surprised by how easy the act of traveling was, and how good it felt to be far away from everything familiar. The world was rich with possibilities. As I got off the plane and met my new family for the next two months, I anticipated all my adventures to come.

Though the sun shone on the faces of the beautiful Bulgarian people, I noticed there was something wrong on the streets

of Sofia, some chill of unhappiness that echoed from face to face. The streets were filled with over a thousand young people yelling out phrases I didn't quite understand. The children of that beautiful country, teenagers just like me, were fighting for a better future. Their passion, so beyond mine, was unattainable to me. A university student explained to me, "We don't want to be just the next generation which tries out the totalitarian way of governing."

Despite the establishment of democracy in Bulgaria in 1989, the ruling Communists perpetuated an ideology left over from the Soviet days. The people had been protesting for 95 days, and though the protests were peaceful, they were not weak. The people were determined not to stop until they got what they wanted, fighting for a true democracy.

During the two months I spent in Sofia I met students from around the world - from Russia to Japan, Austria to Italy. Together we faced the challenges of learning a Slavic language by sharing local stories and international slang with each other.

Every day I went to school and my mind expanded with knowledge not only of another language, but also of other people and cultures. Every day I thought more and more about how similar the people of the world are. We all have similar desires; love, ambition, and hopes for a better future. The Bulgarian

students are correct; they are more than just a generation experimenting with a new type of government.

My roommate, Iana, and I decided to go on a road trip through the Bulgarian mountains, Greece, and Macedonia. We hiked over ten hours in a period of four days and three nights conquering the Alpine beauty of the Pirin Mountain. It was a viciously cold climb filled with extraordinary heights and unbelievable sights.

As soon as we hit normal sea level, we were off to Greece. We lived in Greece like typical tourists, going to the beach every day. With all of our worries were behind us, we were only looking forward at the road ahead.

After four days there we were on the road again, headed to Ohrid, Macedonia. I became an Orthodox Hajj, after visiting all of the sacred chapels and temples.

After discovering so much, I was still not satisfied. I realized how lucky I was to go out into the world alone, and see the world as it really was with my own eyes.

But getting through those weeks was not easy. I faced anxiety, and often I would beg to go home. I was forced to be truly independent, but I am undeniably thankful for that. It was only because I was confident in myself that I was able to experience all that I did.




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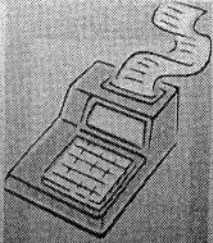
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907-517-3422

caribbeangalscupcakes@gmail.com

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## GUY POWER?

Nathan Richardson and Alexander Bar perform as the only males on the cheer squad and dance team

