

**Brenda TOOLEY****Grand Valley State University, Allendale, US**

### **Letter of Appreciation\***

I am writing this letter with great pleasure as I recall many moments with Professor Ludmilla Kostova. I am writing because I want you to know how very grateful I am to know Ludmilla and to have participated in the Fulbright program in Bulgaria as a result of her initial welcome and continued support. I am writing because I want to express how much I admire Ludmilla's academic and administrative acumen and outstanding, rigorous, ground-breaking scholarship.

I have worked with many (many) academic/faculty administrators and (in the context of liberal arts colleges) senior administrative staff and have taught at highly selective liberal arts colleges and large public universities. I have this basis for comparison and reflection. I see Ludmilla as an exceptional, extraordinary leader. Her commitment to scholarship and scholarly integrity in the classroom and in professional contexts (the north star in all that we do), her thoughtful approach to curriculum, her indefatigable energy in collaboration with colleagues, her ethical approach to academic initiatives and practices, her tactical and strategic wisdom, and her candid, dryly humorous, always directly honest presence as department head and teaching partner are, for me, all aspects of an exceptional teacher-scholar and academic leader.

That's the formal statement! Here are snapshots from my memories of our collaboration in Bulgaria and at conferences at Wolverhampton and Vienna, and more.

Arrival at UVT in 2010 – I arrived in February, if I remember correctly, for the spring semester of 2010. The British and American Studies program had very recently hosted a Fulbright Scholar but was ready and willing to welcome another immediately afterward. I still recall sitting in the office of the Department Secretary as Ludmilla sorted out what teaching responsibilities I might have – I was delighted with any sort of opportunity to interact with students and quickly found that handling the small-group seminars following Ludmilla's lectures would work well for all. I can still remember her saying to colleagues in the office, "she is a good sport, willing to do what's needed." It was so good to feel that I was not an imposition as

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\* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the international conference "Re-Inventing Eastern Europe," which took place in Vienna, Austria, from May 17th to May 19th, 2012. Subsequently, the article has been revised and modified.

a new, strange faculty member coming in on a Fulbright grant but someone who might actually be able to contribute to the department. Ludmilla was direct and brisk – and that very honesty was the best possible kind of welcome.

Luncheons at Shtastlivetsa – we lunched several times at Shtastlivetsa (of course!) in 2010 and in 2018 (at the new location with the lovely open terrace). I recall fine and funny conversations about departmental and university doings that helped me better understand the organizational structures and underlying dynamics of my host institution. Ludmilla was always forthright, often VERY funny (with a dry, insightful wit that I came to deeply appreciate), and occasionally indignant (sometimes justifiably angry) about unfairness, bureaucratic ineptitude, lack of resources or petty maneuvering. In 2010 especially, I appreciated this mentoring; I valued (and continue to value) her insightful perspectives.

Fulbright International Summer Institute at Pravets – I learned the expression “Mutrinski baroque!” (smile) and enjoyed walks through the small town of Pravets as well as the marvelous farewell dinner on the patio terrace of the golf club. What good times! And I am so grateful that Ludmilla met the young Americans I brought with me to FISI. She made a fine, striking impression upon them (a bit intimidating and imposing at first – this was so GOOD for them! ha!).

Wolverhampton conference – I met a number of Ludmilla’s closest colleagues here as well as several of her then graduate students (smile). Despite arriving late without luggage (Schiphol to Birmingham with barely time to make the transfer), this was one of the finest experiences of international scholarly exchange of ideas I have ever experienced. Not to mention lovely stops at historic pubs!

Vienna walking tour – again, through Ludmilla’s generosity and astounding organizational skills, a number of us (Ludmilla’s fan club, might I say?) participated in a conference in Vienna – I recall the conference, of course, but what is visit in my mind are the conversations over dinner at a delightful small restaurant and a long walk through Vienna to the large park and then back to our hotel via thoroughfares that took us past the Staatsoper and government building lit dazzlingly at night. I think that a major soccer tournament was taking place that evening (smile – the World Cup, perhaps?) – Germany and some other team... The night was electric with people out enjoying the evening and broadcasts of the sport event.

Visit to Ruse (Thanksgiving, 2010) – this is a highlight of my memories of my friendship with Ludmilla! Over Thanksgiving of 2010 (I believe it was 2010), she invited me to accompany her to Russe. We walked through the central part of the city, along the river, of course through the university... and Ludmilla reminisced about her childhood and early education as this was, in part (if I remember correctly) the city where she completed her secondary education. I still recall the beauty of the city park on a breezy, temperate November day! No single story captures the complexity of Bulgarian history in the years immediately before the fall of the USSR and all that attended it, of course – but I felt privileged to glimpse one vivid snapshot through Ludmilla’s shared memories.

In sum, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with Ludmilla and to witness her deeply informed lectures to students and presentations to colleagues. Because of our friendship, I have grown in my understanding of how best to develop collaborative partnerships across borders and educational systems, and I have a profound appreciation for the depth and breadth of Ludmilla's scholarship as well as her generous support and ability to sustain friendships across borders and many forms of difference.

With respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brande Tooley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the text "With respect,".