



Washington, DC Chapter Newsletter

Winter 2010

DC Assist: Who are we?



Once again, in the 2009-2010 school year, we are pleased to have an outstanding group of ASSIST scholars at Washington, D.C., suburban Maryland, and Virginia independent schools. The 11 ASSIST students enrolled in nine Washington area schools represent five countries. Four students are from Germany and four are from China, reflecting the ASSIST organization's historic relationship with Germany, and its renewed emphasis on recruiting scholars from China. In addition, we are pleased that ASSIST continues its

commitment to draw students from eastern and central European countries, which has brought us a student from Bulgaria and a student from Hungary. The newest scholar to arrive in Washington is a student from Palestine. These scholars do so much to enrich our local school communities, and we believe they will go home enriched as well. To put our data in the context of the national ASSIST Class of 2009-10, look at "current students" at <http://tinyurl.com/ylij42fi>.

The Washington area students are:

Melina Kammerer (Germany)
Theresa Schafer (Germany)
Fangyue (Diana) Bao (China)
Teodora (Teddy) Rousseva (Bulgaria)
Ji Yu (Jerry) Zhao (China)
Yifan Liu (China)
Miriam Mahmoud (Germany)
Chen Wang (China)
Julia Reszel (Germany)
Luca Bartek (Hungary)

National Cathedral School, DC
Episcopal High School, VA
Maret School, DC
Holton-Arms School, MD
Landon School, MD
Washington Int'l School, DC
Washington Int'l School, DC
St. Alban's School, DC
St. Timothy's School, MD
St. Timothy's School, MD

AND, our newest arrival!...

Zaid Malhees (Palestine)

Sidwell Friends School, DC

Student Roundup: How are they doing so far?

We were able to reach six of our 11 scholars to get a report on their year in the U.S....so far. We'll track down the other five for our next issue, but the following will provide a glimpse into the life of an ASSIST scholar in an American school in or very near the national capital city.

Fangyue (Diana) Bao comes to Maret School (DC) from Shanghai. Diana is an enthusiast, and with her abundant energy, she is sharing her many talents with the school community. Soon after school started, Diana performed a traditional Chinese dance for a talent show, and she joined the Maret School choir to sing at the National Cathedral. She has also played piano for children at a hospital, as a part of her community service activities this year. The biggest cultural surprise so far: for her 18th birthday, Diana's new friends gave a big party, with presents, locker decorations, and a cake. That was all in addition to the dinner with friends given by her host family. "At home, according to Chinese tradition, I would eat noodles for longevity," Diana says. "My birthday would just be a celebration with family."

Ji Yu (Jerry) Zhao, a student at Landon School (MD) attends the same high school as Diana in Shanghai. He experienced what could only be called total immersion upon his arrival at Landon. On the morning after he arrived at his family's house, Jerry was up at 7 am, in the pool at 8 am, and swimming for water polo practice until noon. Noting that there were even midnight practices, Jerry says, "On the flip side of all this insane training, I got to know a lot of friends who then became pretty close with me after the school year started." Jerry has joined a jazz band at Landon and, because he is classically trained at the piano, Jerry is finding jazz style an interesting challenge. Biggest cultural surprise: the style of learning in American classrooms. Jerry notes that while classes are quiet and reserved in China, American classes are more "verbally active. It takes time for me to get used to the aggressiveness of the class."

Julia Reszel has always been interested in international friendships. Her home school in Dusseldorf, Germany, Gorres Gymnasium, has sent a number of ASSIST scholars over the years, so it was not difficult for Julia to find ASSIST and the opportunity to spend a year at school in the U.S. St. Timothy's School (MD) provides her with a satisfyingly rich international community, with an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, roommates from Hungary, Korea, and Delaware, and teachers from outside the U.S. Julia has found it easy to make friends at St. Tim's, but the 24-7 exposure at a boarding school is sometimes challenging. "So staying open minded every day and being curious to meet new characters and challenges ...are also things I have learned." Biggest cultural surprise: getting excited about sports! Julia has been to a college lacrosse game and she went with friends to an NBA basketball game. Finally, Julia says, "I want to give more students a motivation to take this chance and opportunity of going abroad."

Miriam Mahmoud comes to Washington International School (WIS) from Heidelberg, Germany. She loves the international environment at WIS and says it is in some ways easier to "fit in" here than in Germany, where her Palestinian father's name makes her somewhat different. Miriam reports that at WIS, where international backgrounds are the norm, students compare cultures and languages all the time. There are, for example, five students in her class who speak Arabic (Miriam understands her father's dialect, though she says that Arabic dialects are so different that the language is really many languages). Miriam has a full sports schedule this year. After soccer in the fall and basketball in the winter, she is especially looking forward to joining the tennis team in the spring. She played trombone in the orchestra for the school musical in December.

Yifan Liu, from Beijing, China, is also a student at WIS. Her home high school has 2,700 students and 300 teachers. She is in one of 11 classes in her grade, and she doesn't know other students in her grade. At WIS, she feels that she's getting to know everyone, and that's a bonus (though in the beginning it was a challenge to remember names!) Yifan likes the small classes and the close communication with, and helpful attention from, teachers. Yifan loved the way her American friends celebrate Halloween and New Year's, noting that in China, the most important holiday is the Spring Festival. Yifan will emcee a spring festival performance at WIS in February. Biggest surprise: biology! Though she has always thought of a future in business and math, after attending a "life changing" biology conference with her class, Yifan is now considering studying medicine. Biggest cultural surprise: the relationship of siblings. Following China's single child policy, Yifan is an only child. Yifan's host family has three children, and she enjoys watching the relationship between the siblings.

Melina Kammerer, a student at National Cathedral School (NCS), also loves the comforts of a small school and the availability of so much support from the faculty at NCS. She notes that “everybody knows everybody at NCS and it’s just a big family.” Melina participated in the Voyageur Program this fall, kayaking three times a week. Now she’s happy that swim season has started. Swimming is her favorite sport – at home, in Oberhaching, a suburb of Munich, Germany, she swims five days a week. Melina has three host families this year, each different from the other, but she says “It’s interesting to experience different lifestyles in different families, and so you have a bit of everything.” She and her host sister have a ritual of teaching each other about their languages every night – Melina teaches a German word and her host sister teaches her an English slang word. Biggest cultural surprise: though in many ways, German and American cultures are more similar than she expected, she does find Americans surprisingly wasteful of energy. She says, “I am really thankful that ASSIST and NCS are giving me this opportunity.”

Life after ASSIST: Pia Bungarten '75 tells her story



It almost seems as if **Pia Bungarten** '75 were destined to come to the United States. From the time she was a little girl in Hermeskeil, Germany (a small village near the Luxemburg border), Pia was fascinated by American history. She read as much as she could about America, and she entertained herself drawing maps of the country. So when her sister brought home news of the ASSIST program, Pia jumped at the opportunity.

Pia was a student in the ASSIST Class of 1974-75, attending Suffield Academy (CT). She remembers finding the teachers at Suffield so much more humane, more interested in her as a student at Suffield than at her school at home, that she began to really enjoy her studies. “Adjusting to the language was not easy,” Pia remembers, “and at first I had very little in common with my contemporaries – we didn’t know the same movies, music...” But, she adds, all of that grew better as the year went along. Homestays were provided for Pia at the home of the wonderful Walsh family in West Hartford; she still keeps in close touch with them.

After going home to complete her studies, Pia came back to the U.S. to go to Amherst, followed by a master’s degree in American studies at the University of Munich. She later returned to the U.S. for a master’s in public administration at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. Pia, whose husband Tom Baker is an American, has spent her professional career working for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (<http://www.fesdc.org/>), a German political foundation that promotes international political dialogue and development, with offices around the world. After a few years in New York, Thailand, and Berlin, Pia and her family are now here in Washington, where she is an administrator of the foundation. Their son Anton is a student at Washington International School.

Pia’s experience as an ASSIST scholar has been absolutely central to her life experience to date. “As a person,” she says, “I come from my family. As an adult, I come from Suffield and Amherst.”



Notes from the Home Office: Marty Milne

Washingtonians may have already met Martin (Marty) Milne, ASSIST’s new vice president for school and family relations, who is on the road taking care of a multitude of constituents in his new job. Working with participating schools and their representatives, Marty serves as a liaison between schools, host families, and students, supporting the scholars as they make inevitable cultural adjustments and apply themselves to school work in another language.

Neither of those tasks is easy, and Marty understands the need to support host families, offering best practices in their generous undertaking, as they do their part to support the scholars. In the

beginning of the ASSIST program, 80 percent of the students enrolled at boarding schools. Now about 50 percent are in boarding schools and 50 percent are in day schools which means that more willing families must be identified as a part of the enrollment process, because more of the students are living with families, learning to adjust to each family's individual traditions and values.

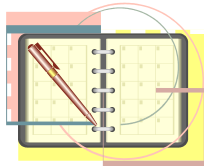
Marty is also traveling the U.S. identifying new schools to host ASSIST scholars. Why do schools choose to participate in ASSIST? First of all, schools believe in the value of diversifying the student community, bringing in students who can introduce the school to different cultural perspectives. They trust ASSIST, because the organization has a proud history of identifying outstanding students from around the world (Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and now Africa) who can handle the rigor of academic programs and bring other talents to the school community. And this fall, Marty has seen the results – ASSIST scholars in their element, proud to show off their schools and friends, happy and appreciative of the opportunity they've been given.

In the six months he has been on the job, Marty has discovered that "There are so many people who give their time and believe in the mission of ASSIST. That's what keeps the program going – the donors, the volunteers, the host families, the ASSIST board, the schools and their representatives – they believe in the value of hosting exchange students in our schools."

Thank you, school reps!

There *are* so many people to thank for the welcome and support given our scholars (host families, for example!), but right now we want to make special note of the school representatives who provide daily ongoing encouragement to our eleven scholars as they negotiate challenging classes in English, not to mention sports, clubs, plays, residential life and the other million joys and hazards present in any school community. Here are the school professionals acting as first responders to our scholars in the Washington area:

Robbie Jefferiss, National Cathedral School
Hart Roper, St. Alban's School
Annie Farquhar, Maret School
Kate Meenan-Waugh, Washington International School
Emily Atkinson, Episcopal High School
Josephine Shiroma, Holton-Arms School
Harry Murphy, Landon School
John Fowler, Sidwell Friends School
Deborah Haskins, St. Timothy's School



Save the Date:

Don't forget about the spring gathering of Washington area ASSIST students and their families on May 2. Be thinking about the poster (on standard white poster board from the drugstore) that you will make representing your school year in the U.S. Share your year's memories with the ASSIST DC

community, using photos and mementos that tell the story of your memorable moments, new friends, and favorite experiences. Here are the details – see you there!

Assist DC Spring Gathering

Sunday, May 2, 1:30 to 3:30 pm

Holton-Arms School (www.holton-arms.edu)

Bethesda, MD

Spring Issue: we will hear from Theresa, Teddy, Chen, Luca, and Zaid with news about their year as ASSIST scholars, and from **Ioana Niculcea '01**, who will tell her story. For more story ideas, contact Selby McPhee, editor, at selby.mcphee@gmail.com.