

LOLITA NIKOLOVA

Diana
Cholakova

Lady Dee on
Two
Continents

BIOMEMORY

Peter Nikolov - Karlovo

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Diana Cholakova. – Biomemory. – Fashion design.- Immigration.- Bulgaria.- Italy.- USA

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Made in Bulgaria
Made in the USA



This is a story about success, good choices, luck, destiny, friendship, love, family, challenges, ups and downs, and being both included and excluded. It is about being attractive as well as attracted by new words, new ideas, and new environments. Diana Cholakova embodies the tree of life that makes many young people today ask themselves: Am I like her? Can I be like her? Do I want to be like her?

These days, millions of Bulgarian immigrants live all over the world and continue to build the evolving framework of the global Bulgarian nation. They are among the most successful immigrants in the contemporary world, while still remaining attached to their family and friends left behind in Bulgaria. The story of Diana Cholakova, a fashion designer, serves as a model in which readers will see many other destinies intersect. Much like a narrative documentary, it is a biomemory based on detailed interviews with Diana and her family members and friends. The tension is deeply felt in the ocean of questions the story poses, including: Am I worth it? Is my life worthwhile? Readers who compare themselves to Diana while reading this book may find that they wake up to the brighter promise of optimism, realizing that, while life is complex, we can construct it so that it is enjoyable and valuable by following Diana's example of making daily life feel like a garden of beautiful flowers.

LOLITA NIKOLOVA

Diana Cholakova:
Lady Dee on
Two Continents

BIOMEMORY



Peter Nikolov - Karlovo

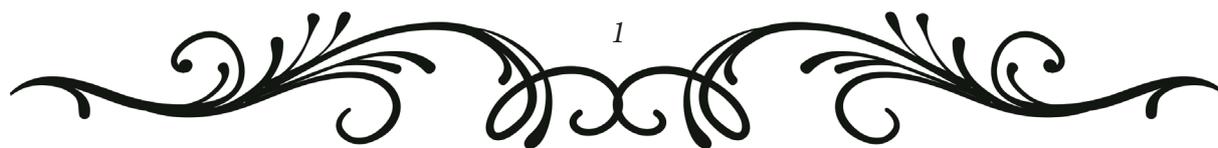


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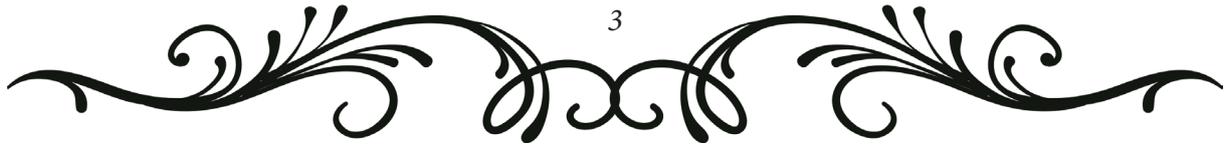
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TIMELINE

- 1943 Born Boyan, the husband of Diana
- 1952 The mother of Diana, Dimitrina, graduated from Pedagogical Institute in Burgas
- 1969 Born Diana in Burgas, Bulgaria
- 1976–1983 Elementary school and middle school, Burgas
- 1983–1988 High school for theater in Plovdiv, Bulgaria
- 1988–1989 Job in Burgas
- 1989–1990 A student at Library Institute in Sofia, Bulgaria
- 1990–1995 A student at Theater and Film Academy, Sofia, Bulgaria
- 1992–1995 A student to be a journalist, Sofia University
- 1995–1999 A journalist in Sofia
- 1999–2000 A journalist in Italy
- 2001 A journalist in the USA
- 2003 Married to Professor Boyan Dimitrov
- 2003 Daria born, the daughter of Boyan and Diana
- 2007 Boyan, Diana and Daria – Bulgarian Family of the Year in the USA
- 2010 Died the second father of Diana
- 2013 Died the first father of Diana
- 2016 Award in Fashion (Avangard dress as art award)
- 2017 Innovation of Tradition Fair Tale Award
- 2015 till now – Theater costumes for children and adults (commission contract)
- 2016 till now – Formal elite presentation for an opera singer, an evening gown for an actress,
etc.
- 2017 Jewelry and accessories – Oscar award
- 2018 International Journalist – Oscar award
- 2018 Bulgarian of the Year in the USA at Open Global Research Academy
- 2019, July – Fashion Show in Plovdiv, Bulgaria – „Bulgaria – Fashion in Art Pictures“
- 2019, July – Costumes for the show „The time, the place and other loves“ – Plovdiv, Bulgaria,
International Festival as part of the program of Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture
- 2015 till now – Embroidery and traditional / fashional ornaments for sell

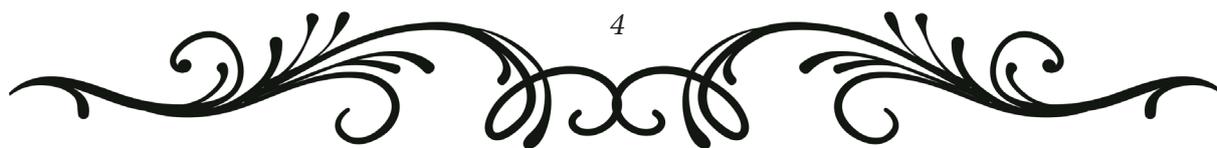


Preface

Diana and I met online in 2007, when the idea of Bulgarians of the Year in the United States arose. Unlike many other categories that focus on events, the Salt Lake City International Institute of Anthropology implemented the idea of the anthropology of everyday life—the search for values that create cultural capital in everyday life. Along with Nikola Charakchiev and Peter Stamatov from Chicago, Diana was relentless in drawing a realistic picture of immigration in the U.S. with her focus on Bulgarians from Detroit, Michigan. Diana, her husband, Boyan, and her daughter Daria, became a Bulgarian family of the year in 2007. Above all, the love in the family and the friendship they shared with other Bulgarians from Detroit was impressive.

After 2007, the pinnacle of everyday life separated us for a long time. Ten years later, Diana's posts started dominating my Facebook feed as she embarked on a series of creative performances. Along with her original creations in fashion, her friends also enjoyed news of well-deserved recognitions that were not unexpected. During this decade, Bulgarian immigration to the United States and Canada changed greatly, creating numerous media e-publications that closely followed the success of Bulgarians—some of the most successful modern immigrants in the world. The idea of a Bulgarian global nation also emerged and transformed the strategy of the International Institute of Anthropology. It has become Open Global Research Academy (OGRA), and the nominations for Bulgarians of the Year have included outstanding Bulgarians who have made a significant impact on the humanistic image of the global Bulgarian nation.

Diana Cholakova's victory in 2018 as the Bulgarian of the Year at OGRA was a confirmation, first of all, of her creative spirit as an independent, authentic artist. Success in fashion and design is measured by the originality of the work. The difficulty in this career is due to the need to invest heavily without knowing the end result, because in today's world of extremely diverse offerings at low prices and reduced aesthetic criteria, artists face a huge wall of competition that they must hurdle in order to find their clients. Although at first glance, it seems easy to succeed because of the many opportunities to offer products for sale on the Internet, success actually depends on investing not only in products, but also in advertising. This context increases the interest in artists like Diana from different perspectives, as they do not give up and continue to create and present the creative side of their personality as a sort of cultural missionary of what can be called authentic or essentialist culture.



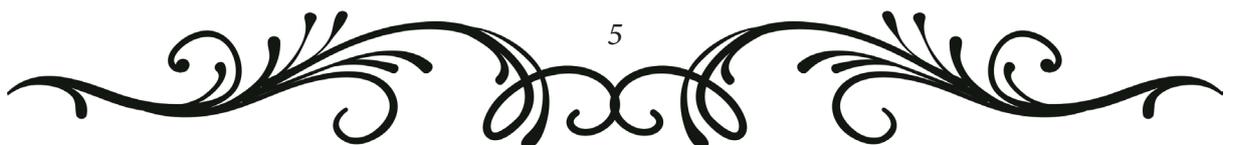
Diana as we are: In search of values

Bulgarians have the fate of people who depend not only on themselves, but sometimes even more on others. I remember taking advanced German courses in Heidelberg in 1998. There, I wrote my monograph, “The Balkans in Later Prehistory,” and conducted a seminar on the Central Balkans in prehistory as a lecturer at the University of Heidelberg with German academic scholarship. During the course, the teacher shared that the young in Germany paid more taxes because of the pensions of the old. The Germans have solved the problem, and today even best Bulgarians live in Germany. The immigrants from Southeast Europe are not only Turks workers like in past, but trained, smart, and ambitious Europeans who do not want to have the financial problems of Bulgarians in our country. Bulgarian immigrants for economic reasons are all over the world. This turned out to be one of the biggest victories for Bulgarians after the Fall of the Berlin Wall—the right to choose where to live. Undoubtedly, it is an exclusive right for which many Bulgarians even sacrificed their lives during the Communist dictatorship from 1944 to 1989.

Diana Cholakova, the main character in this book, follows her fate as an art creator. After working in Bulgaria, her fate was to go to Italy as a Bulgarian journalist, and there she meets her future husband, Professor Boyan Dimitrov, who later in the United States proposed marriage to her after finding out she was pregnant. Thus, her life path evolves and she becomes mainly wife and mother in Detroit, Michigan. But this way of life never kills her social creativity, and she continues to build her professional identity and realize herself as an artist in the United States with eyes always looking to Bulgaria, where her close and distant relatives and friends always greet her with love.

Having built a picture of Diana’s life, I constantly made analogies to my own life. I wondered that we had a similar childhood and memories. This was the life before 1989 in Bulgaria—a matrix of types of people who had to transform into social groups that served the regime. As a student in the early 1980s, I invited colleagues from my course at Sofia University to celebrate my birthday. At one point, my mind exclaimed, “How we all respond in the same way!” And now, learning about Diana’s childhood, in the same way I repeated:” And I, and I, and I...” There are probably many others like us.

It’s hard to be Bulgarian today. The most difficult thing is to teach your children to be Bulgarians. Thirty years turned out to be very transformative to the powerful new identity of Europeans, but it also remained a continuous struggle to prove the new in the context of the imperious stepmother of everything new and positive that can give birth to the liberated Bulgarian nation. The young claim they are fleeing to the West from their ordinary parents, but they are actually looking for security in their future in the face of the threat that the old regime, with its old and



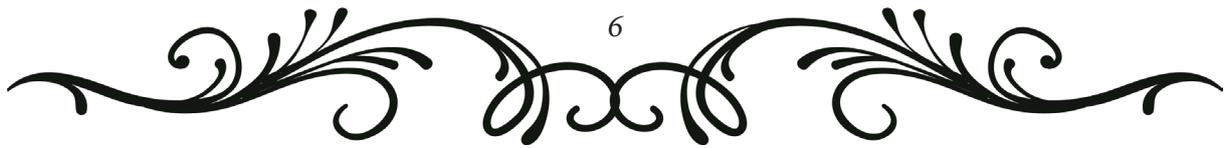
new agents, may bring back the horror of communism. Politicized Bulgaria does not suit them, because personal life usually does not like the politics, left in the West for activists who are usually paid to carry it out. However, the problem is that it is difficult to find a job that is loved all over the world, and in the world's globalizing society, values are being tested. We can ask Diana if she agrees. I know she will respond: "I could get a quiet job for a tolerable salary and live quietly here in Detroit, but it would not be me." Whenever we want to be us, usually the nature of the job is the bait, not money.

In this way, you won't be reading about Diana in major fashion catalogs or the world's other most glamorous fashion magazines. You won't find millions in her bank accounts. To be in top magazines, you either need initial capital or the desire to work for others who make a lot of money from you. And that's what Diana and I are like. We have not learned to be dependent in the West. We are always looking for equal contracts. We find them, but they don't make bring in a lot of money. However, they bring satisfaction from us as people who are not dependent on anyone. Big money can function like a noose.

This is the direction of my thoughts, as I always think about young people in Bulgaria. And Diana is still young. She is only 51 years old (2020), and it turns out that this book is my gift for her birthday. She is actually only two months older than my brother, who lives in Karlovo and who (I believe) is the world's top graphic artist. He has a chance that I have sponsored him and not be thrilled with the problem of subsistence, much like Diana has been supported by her husband. My brother shares my experience that great art and culture do not require noise, but a quiet environment; similarly, Diana lives in her husband's professorial environment, in which every day is a stage for a new discovery. The stress in the business can destroy the greatest talent. It also makes Diana close to my experience—even if sometimes she wants to be in the media business—it is for a short time. This is not a sign of vanity in Diana. She follows healthy values and creates art that is original, and she can communicate it with empathy. And most importantly—Diana is a hard worker, especially when she is inspired by a great creative idea. Of course, this makes us social twins. There is no greater feeling than personal and professional satisfaction when you implement a valuable idea that is good for others.

But I was thinking about the young people in our country, Bulgaria. A few years ago, we opened a Bulgarian-American exhibition in Karlovo. Beautiful smart children from a local high school came with their art teacher, and I asked them, "What do you like about America?" And they all responded, "Everything!" I looked at them and thought, "When am I finally going to come back to make Karlovo a little America?" To this day, when I was in the USA, I enjoyed every success they shared on Facebook, and with all my heart and love, desired to make Karlovo into a little America together in the coming years. Diana, however, thinks differently about Bulgaria. Her family is in Detroit, MI, and for now and possibly forever, she will be Bulgarian Diana in Detroit.

To lie with Diana the young generation in our native country that life in the United States is a rotten capitalism, where people only kill and drink drugs, will not help Bulgaria. This



way we were taught about the capitalist countries during the communism dictatorship. Even now, when I came back to live in Bulgaria with an one-way ticket to Europe, America remains a guiding star in my life, because it not only gave me everything I ever wanted, but also created a worldwide ambiance to live my life, to be myself, and to love my homeland even more. Diana talks less about America, maybe because she's younger and still hasn't gotten everything she wanted. But there is no world disillusioned with America that is not disillusioned with a person-self.

Now I leave you, new readers and friends, who have entered our lives, to learn about Diana from original sources – from Diana, her mother, her sister, her husband, her daughter, and from her friends. And then we will be together again in our shared search for values as Diana helps us be ourselves and build our own values.



Diana's model.