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## FIRST GIRLS FROM BOGA TO ATTEND HIGH SCHOOL

This year we are pleased to announce that two girls from Boga who are recipients of AAI scholarships are attending high school in the city of Shkoder. They are the first girls from Boga to stay away from home to go to high school. Traditionally, girls stayed home after the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade until they entered into an arranged marriage. AAI is paying for their dorm room in a convent near the high school. The following are excerpts from interviews with these girls conducted by Angjelin Olaj, one of our university scholarship recipients:



### **DAFINA RAKAJ**

Dafina is the second oldest child of Fran and Vera Rakaj. She has an older sister, a younger sister and two younger brothers.

Angjelini: How do you like living in the convent?

Dafina: Well, let's say everything is different from what we have expected before, it's great to be a student in Shkodra, we have many friends there and everything is going perfect.

Angjelini: Can you use a computer?

Dafina: Well, at the convent there is no computer for us to use, maybe we could use if we would have one.

Angjelini: Is the library good?

Dafina: Somehow, the environment is good enough to study, it's quiet, but I do not think that there are enough books.



### **REGJINA RAKAJ**

Regjina is the youngest daughter of Gjok and Gjyste Rakaj. She has two older brothers who reside in Italy.

Angjelini: Do you help keep the convent clean? Are the nuns mean or nice?

Regjina: We need to wash the dishes and to clean our sleeping room. The nuns are very polite, we have good relations with them.

Angjelini: Is it working ok traveling back and forth to Boga?

Regjina: Yes, Marash guides us every Monday and Friday from the bus to school and vice versa.

Angjelini: Have you made friends with the other students?

Regjina: Yes we feel very good in the class, we have good friends.

Both girls are adjusting to the new experience of living away from their families as well as the difficulty of their classes. The village schools are not good and have not prepared them very well academically; however they are very grateful for the opportunity and are working very hard.

Of the other 26 AAI scholarship students, six more are in high school in Shkoder, two are attending the University of Shkoder, eleven are receiving help with bus fare to high school and seven young girls are receiving a small stipend with which to purchase books at the bookstore in town.

*Our Mission:  
Supporting improved quality of  
educational opportunities for  
the children and youth of the  
isolated Malsia e Madhe  
region of Northern Albania.*

## PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT PROJECT

AAI is raising money to put playground equipment in three of the village schools. While the older students play soccer or volleyball, there is nothing for the younger students. Areas surrounding the schools are just dirt. Donations are welcome; designate "Playground Equipment" on your check or online gift.



## 2011 SUMMER TREK – 10 days



Lonely Planet has anointed Albania as *the* destination for 2011. Join our trek in summer 2011. We've been taking travelers into the Albanian Alps since 1993. We hike trails that are virtually untraveled these days, and most have never seen a foreign footprint. We stay in mountaineer homes and eat the feasts that they set out. We bask in their hospitality. Albanian mountaineers are some of the coolest people in the world. Simple, yet knowing, unadorned but with huge personalities. We'll slide along ridges, top out on mountains, wander along streams. We are not in a hurry, but will provide you with a series of experiences that you will never forget. We're looking for a half dozen intrepid travelers who want to experience the real Albania and will tailor our trek to the interests of the participants.

Who are "we?" Dr. Steve Cook, AAI President, led his first trek in the Albanian Alps in 1993 and has been involved ever since. Professor Marash Rakaj, AAI's Albanian Manager and Alpine Ecologist at the University of Shkoder grew up in the mountains and knows the people *and* the ecology. We'll hire horses and donkeys to carry our stuff. We can accommodate serious hikers or provide an occasional van for those less inclined. Email for more details. All proceeds go toward our programs.



*We deeply regret to report the passing of Jean Sedlar, one of AAI's most generous donors. Jean funded our English program for the past six years, as well as supported several village students each year to attend high school or university. Jean lived in Johnstown, PA and was a history professor at the University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown campus. She believed in the value of education and that a helping hand at a crucial moment can change the course of a human life. Certainly the lives of the Albanian village students that she helped were changed in many positive ways. It was indeed an honor to have known Jean. She will be missed.*

*Steve and Terri Cook*

Learn more about AAI at [www.albanianalps.org](http://www.albanianalps.org)

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