

TRAVEL TALK

BY CHASE BINDER



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Bow resident Jeanette Lizotte is now heading into her seventh month of a two-year stint as Head Librarian at the newly-opened Albanian College Tirana in the Albanian capital of Tirana. Her first letter home was published in the September issue of *The Bow Times*, and as promised, here is the second in her occasional series, *Letters from Albania*.



Our youngest daughter, Nicole, flew to Tirana for the Christmas holidays. Here Jeff and I treat her to coffee and pastries at a Tirana sidewalk café on Christmas day.

Letters from Albania — Life in a European City

When I wrote my first letter home back in September, I was just beginning to get settled. Everything was a colorful and fragrant whirlwind of new experiences—flowers, foods, open-air markets, getting to know my colleagues and the wonderful city of Tirana. It was an enchanting time...if a bit dizzying! Since then, my husband Jeff and our two dogs, Basin the Golden Retriever and Scuppy the Yorkshire Terrier, have arrived. The school has now opened. Jeff and I are crafting a routine that celebrates the differences between our old life

and our new life—and there are many! But having Basin and Scuppy with us, and having a wonderful holiday visit from our youngest daughter, Nicole, keeps us grounded and reminds us of life back in Bow.

First, for dog-lovers concerned about Basin and Scuppy making the 14-hour journey by plane, they both survived in fine style. The paper work and documentation needed were a bit challenging, but certainly not impossible. And here in Tirana, they get to be much more integrated into our daily routines. Jeff, who manages the house, shopping and cooking while I am at the library, begin his days with long walks along the large promenade I mentioned in my first letter. Basin and Scuppy are right by his side. But it's not just a walk! As they pass groups of elderly men sipping coffee from tiny



A great pastime for older gentlemen in Tirana...playing spirited games of dominoes for hours on end. Tiny cups of coffee on every table.

cups and playing fierce games of dominoes, Jeff is thinking about what to make for dinner. The open air market along the boulevard carries only the freshest items, and in the European fashion of shopping every day, Jeff and the dogs wander among the displays of fresh fruits and vegetables, looking for inspiration for dinner.



Mediterranean diets include tons of figs, nuts and fruits -- all sold in the open air market in big open bins.

Then it's off to the fish monger or butcher—something I am glad to leave to Jeff. European

butchers often leave the heads attached and on display. Ugh! I am thrilled to come to a new dining adventure each night—with no extra faces looking at me! And always a loaf of crusty bread the only way it should be served—fresh from the baker, each and every day. I will never, ever tire of having a husband



Olives anyone? Tirana's open air market features a startling variety of olives.

who loves this part of life!

As is true in much of Europe, life revolves around food. Unlike in America's fast-food culture, people in Tirana tend to savor each meal, using the rituals of sharing meals, or even just coffee and pastries, as an opportunity to converse about—well, just about anything and everything. Camaraderie from work spills over into the sidewalk cafes and restaurants, which are always bustling. We have two favorite spots. One, a local restaurant owned by an American couple that serves good old-fashioned American cuisine—eggs and bacon (rarely found in markets), pancakes, burgers and fries and such. It's a favorite of my colleagues, and we often gather there at weekends.

Another is a local bar and restaurant, where the owner has become a fast friend and even lets us bring our pooches right

inside. Scuppy sits next to me on the couch, and Basin sits on the floor by Jeff. What a great conversation starter! Of course, people want to practice their English—which is so much better than our Albanian! In all, our life in Tirana is wonderfully active. Aside from long walks, we get together with new friends and colleagues for dinner, games—even sports and bowling. We love the activity and we love the camaraderie! We even introduced the idea of an American Thanksgiving. It's a regular workday in Albania, of course, so we gathered pot-luck style at a colleague's house and celebrated Friendsgiving. It was great.

Lastly, Basin and Scuppy are



Scuppy and Basin love monitoring street activity from the balcony of our Tirana flat.

clearly lucky dogs to have humans who love them so. In Tirana there are many pockets of stray dogs, most of which have been trapped, spayed or neutered and tagged at the ear, and then released back to the streets. They don't seem to bother anyone, including Basin and Scuppy. We do think of Bow often, but are truly enchanted with Tirana! Best to all our friends in Bow!

Jeanette Lizotte

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