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Janet Hauck
Whitworth University, jhauck@whitworth.edu

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First Impressions of America
Tacoma: 1905

BY JANET HAUCK

Perspective. When you are in the middle of it all, there's nothing like a word from someone on the outside. It's been almost one hundred years since the following perspective was penned by a collegiate football player and artist, but it is just as enriching today as it was then.

The Tacoma campus of Whitworth College had been open for just one year, when in the fall of 1901, a young man from Bulgaria found his way to its halls. Although it appears he spent only five

Ivan Doseff came from Bulgaria in 1901. He joined his brother at Whitworth College in Tacoma, playing football and studying visual arts. It appears that Ivan remained in America, where "the people are the greatest wonder to me," for the rest of his life. During the years 1910-1922, he held positions at four different midwestern colleges, where he coached an assortment of football and basketball teams. The football star who also played on Whitworth College's first basketball team in 1906, was putting his athletic skills to good use.

Presumably, he also kept up with his artistic talent, since the last we hear of Ivan Doseff, he is a professor at the University of Minnesota. It is the year 1948, and he has been asked to sculpt six stone medallions for the façade of the Minneapolis Star Tribune newspaper building. The medallions depict the principal industries and resources of Minnesota at the time, and still grace the building today.
years of his long life in the Pacific Northwest, lasting memories were made, and his contributions to Whitworth remain in evidence to this day. The young man's name was Ivan Doseff, and this is his story, based on an article he wrote for the March 8, 1905 edition of the college newspaper. He titled his article, "My First Impressions of America, by Ivan Doseff, Whitworth Class of 1907."

The other morning I was quite surprised to find myself confronted by one of the young lady editors, asking me to write on the above subject. I thought the Whitworthian must be hard up for material — otherwise they would not have come to me for such a matter. Thinking it was easy, I said that I would, and now after chewing off the top of my penholder, I think different.

About three years and a half ago, after storms and seasickness, which I will not attempt to describe, for fear that my pen might prove too weak to portray the vividness of it all, I landed. Yes, I landed — but didn't know where. All I knew was that I was in America — in New York — amid strange people, in a strange country — all strange, and worst of all, knowing nothing of English. You will comprehend my distress if you can imagine the feelings of a young pup with some empty tin cans tied to its tail.

It seems that Ivan had followed his brother, Dosu, from Gabrova, Bulgaria, to attend Whitworth College in Tacoma. Dosu, a member of the class of 1905, was a piano student in the School of Music. While Dosu played left guard on the college's football team, Ivan played left tackle on the same team. A tribute to Ivan's athletic ability appears in the same Whitworthian in which his article appears: "To I. Doseff, '07, left end, the pivotal point in the line; as a heavy gate post is necessary to a great gate, so is Doseff to the line." Ivan's story continues:

The first thing that caught my eye as the steamer entered the harbor was the Statue of Liberty, that emblem toward which so many eyes were turned, and fingers pointing. It thrilled me, for I knew what it stood for, and it thrilled many more, who knew nothing of its significance till that very day! The steamer advanced slowly on account of the great flotilla of boats, which at one time I started counting, but had to give it up, they were so numerous! That day also I had to give up trying to see the many things in order that I might observe the few.

The first thing that impressed me so much, and which I will never forget, was the cleanliness that pervaded everything. In every place we passed...
through, this same neatness and order abounded. It impressed me as it will never impress you, unless you have been in countries where people are so busy attending to their individual affairs that they forget, or are indifferent to, the cleanliness of their cities. Another thing that impressed me greatly was the system and order by which so many people were so easily received and sent to their respective destinations.

Even as Ivan was arriving in this country, he still had a heart for those in his homeland. As evidence, the Whitworthian of March 8, 1905, printed these words: "This issue contains a sketch of a few of Mr. Ivan Doseff's numerous impressions received in this country. If he recognizes the greatness of our country and its people, we certainly have been enlightened concerning Bulgaria, for which our respect and regard has been deepened, through the loyalty and patriotism of her sons." Ivan:

My head was never bigger than it is now, but that day - the only day that I ever spent in that great city - it seemed to extend with the thoughts that were crowding in, as bees in a beehive. Oh, what a hard position to be in, with so many beautiful things all around and about which a person might inquired and be satisfied, had he but a knowledge of the native tongue - the much coveted English.

On the evening of the same day on which we landed, we boarded the train bound for Tacoma. Seven days of beautiful weather and scenery - seven days of wonders - and we were on the shore of the Pacific. It was a surprise to me to find that most of the houses in the city were of wood, and I admitted to myself that the architecture and construction made them without a doubt beautiful. No sooner would I begin to get accustomed to some things when others would begin to come up.

It is fitting that Ivan had an eye for beauty, since he would soon become a student in the School of Art at Whitworth. His artwork was highlighted in the very first issue of the school newspaper, dated January 16, 1905. Ivan had been asked to draw the logo for the fledgling paper, and the editor made this note, "The talent of Mr. Ivan Doseff, so generously displayed for the benefits of any and all student enterprises, is not to be undervalued either from the standpoint of its plentifulness to us, or from his merited applause as a coming artist of note. We are looking forward with proud distinction to "Vonnie's" cartoon for the Whitworthian."

Ivan finishes his story:

I began to study the people and their ways and the more I studied them the more I liked them. Soon after I came I started to school, there beginning my association with the boys, and the more I did so, the more I learned of them and their ways, so different from mine, that I could not help re-
Ivan Doseff, who had lettered twice in football while at Whitworth, joined the University of Chicago team for the years 1906 and 1907. And, of course, he studied art as well.

Ivan stayed in touch with his friends in Tacoma. He sent this message to be printed in the May 1908 edition of the Whitworth College Bulletin, "Ivan Doseff, a former Whitworth student, specializing in art in Chicago, led a philanthropic enterprise which saved hundreds of Bulgarians from starvation and want." He was truly carrying out the loyalty and patriotism which had been evident to those who knew him at Whitworth.

Would Ivan Doseff have identified with the motto of the Class of "Naughty Seven" as it appeared in the Whitworthian of January 16, 1905? Definitely not, but he probably would have smiled at it just the same:

Motto of the Class of Naughty Seven
Ours not to give a care,
Ours but to deal hot air,
Ours not to give a thunder,
Ours but to go and blunder.

Janet Hauck is the archivist at Whitworth College in Spokane.

Ticket to a football game between Whitworth and Whitman, played in Tacoma in 1906. No word on which team won.