



Women's Memory



GEORGIAN NARRATIVES:  
A Century and Beyond

SECOND EDITION

*In Memory of Zeynab Philipova*

Tbilisi, 2024

*Women's Memory Series*  
*Logotype of the Series by Nana Churgulia*

**GEORGIAN NARRATIVES: A CENTURY AND BEYOND**

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## FOREWORD

Within the heart of each armed conflict lies a tapestry of silent stories waiting to be told – stories that epitomize strength and the resilient soul of those who encounter war and its consequence. The primary version of this publication was issued in Georgian in 2011 and was later published in English (2013). The preface to the first English language edition was authored by Philip L. Kohl (1946-2022), Professor of Anthropology and Slavic Studies at Wellesley College (USA). The book brought to light the life stories of Georgian women, which remained unheard in the midst of the clamor of historical narratives dominated by military and political discourse.

As we present the second edition of our oral history compilation - *Georgian Narratives: A Century and Beyond*, we emphasize the idea that the echoes of war and the yearnings for peace stay as pertinent nowadays as they were in 2013. Whereas the stories themselves stay unaltered, the context in which we engage with them has evolved – in recent years the world has seen new waves of conflicts and a resurgence of talks about the role of women in the context of war and peacebuilding. These stories, recorded over several years, provide not only a historical account from the past century but also a poignant reflection of ongoing struggles for justice and reconciliation.

The narratives in this compilation are a confirmation to human strength and perseverance. They serve as powerful reminders of the individual costs of war. In revisiting these stories, we hope to inspire readers to reflect on the timeless themes of human suffering, courage, survival, power of love and friendship, which are universal, yet each narrative is steeped in the unique cultural and historical context of Georgia.

Taso Foundation extends gratitude to all who contributed to the project, to those who continue to share their stories with us, and to those who read oral history publications with engagement. We hope that this edition will reach new audiences and spark conversations that honor the past while advocating for a more just and peaceful future.





## **PREFACE**

### to the Georgian Language Publication

Century in Interior is dedicated to Zeynab Philipova, our colleague and friend, who was among the nine people to start conducting research using the oral history method together with us in 2001. The very first publication of the Women's Memory series, *Multiethnic Georgia in the Past Century* (2004), featured eleven biographies prepared by her. Seven years later, along with selected materials from our archive, we included two more narratives in the *Century in Interior* narratives recorded by Zeynab in 2003. Zeynab Philipova, a Georgian Catholic, distinguished journalist and oral history researcher, passed away in Batumi, on June 16, 2011.

The book covers over one hundred years of our history, depicting events as experienced and remembered by people, who willingly related them to us. As it turns out, what people tend to remember from these hundred years, that is, from the beginning of the past century to the present, are stories of revenge, enmity, treachery, retaliation, bloody conflicts and wars. These are mainly tiny details of these stories that are never found in history books. These details are not studied in order to prevent reasons for envy, animosity, treachery, and human suffering, from surfacing later or in the future, which is essentially every successive moment of our lives.

We know that everyone has his/her truth, while the ultimate truth is inscrutable, similar to all types of goodness, even the supreme goodness, peace, peace within oneself, in the family, in society, in the country, and among countries. And yet, what lies beyond us, though being inscrutable, still dwells in us to a certain degree of fullness, insofar as we long and strive for it.

This book is sincerely and highly valued by the people who narrated these stories. We, whom these people trusted and to whom they related their stories, shared their love and concerns and testify that we have conveyed their narratives precisely (albeit in some cases shortening them). Accordingly, these narratives represent a source of contemporary history. How reliable this source is and how convincing are the depictions in this book – will be for historians to judge. As usual, they will have different answers

depending on their working theories, demands dictated by time, and other circumstances.

The distinguishing feature of oral history lies in the intrinsic nature of subjectivity being academically foundational in the field of social studies, the same subjectivity, the deliverance from which is credited as a merit and achievement in science and elsewhere. In addition to the subjectivity of the narrative, it also implies that of the listener and the researcher. Thus, while science strives for objectivity as for the truth, here we see subjectivity, as the determinant, approximating objectivity as the goal and value of research. We believe that this circumstance, which is noteworthy in many respects, will strengthen the reader of this book in his/her yearning for the truth through emphasizing human life as the sacred value.

Similar to other publications by the Taso Foundation, the present book is intended for the public at large as its audience, including researchers working in various social sciences and civil society organizations. We hope that the *Century in Interior* will contribute to the success of works aimed to ensure a peaceful, safe, and just future.

The book was published through the support of the Open Society – Georgia Foundation. Our work in the field of oral history has been made possible solely through the support of the Open Society – Georgia Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. We would like to express our immense gratitude for this opportunity.

*Marina Tabukashvili*  
*Taso Foundation, 2011*

## **MZIA SIDAMON-ERISTAVI**

Born in 1921

Interviewed by

NESTAN CHKHIKVADZE in Tbilisi, 2003

My mother was a direct descendant of Solomon Leonidze, King Erekle's [King of Georgia in 1744-1798] advisor, a famous judge and orator. He was her great grandfather. Mariam, my mother, herself was famous for a wide range of intellectual abilities, immense philanthropic disposition, eloquence, and multilingualism. He lost his father, Gabriel Leonidze, at a very young age. He died while taming horses in his estate. His stud farm was located in Ganja, where they raised, bred, and tamed purebred horses. One time, the tamers couldn't handle a horse, so Gabriel mounted it himself, and eventually fell victim to it. My mother was two-years-old at that time. My grandmother, Martha Jorjadze-Leonidze, raised her three fatherless grandchildren all by herself. Out of the two elder children (Soliko, or Solomon, and Tamar Leonidze), one attended a cadet corps, while the other, that is, my mother, attended a gymnasium. My grandfather had been brought up in Moscow. When his friend, the son of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin [(1799-1837) a great Russian poet] and future General Alexander Alexandrovich Pushkin, learned about his friend's death, he sent a message to grandmother, offering to raise her grandchildren, "Choose one of you liking and send him/her to me. I will send my adjutant for him/her." Both elder children refused, while Mariam was too young at that time, and her case was not even discussed, of course. The Pushkins repeated this type of interference in the upbringing of the children when Mariam had already turned eight. The elder siblings turned down the offer once again. Mariam, however, wouldn't refuse, "I will go. I will study in Moscow." Not that year but the following year, the adjutant arrived indeed and took my mother to Moscow to be raised there.

In the meantime, the horse breeding business continued, and revenues kept coming. A certain man had worked on the farm since grandfather's time. He honorably fulfilled his duties out of respect for grandfather's memory, while supporting his own family

as well. The Leonidze's home was on Elbakidze Slope [Tbilisi]. This house is still there, and its residents, especially the Gabrichidzes, remember whose house it was and who built it.

Rooms were rented out in that home, the Leonidze's home. It was a three-story building, serving the family as an additional source of income. In addition, my grandmother also worked. She was an extraordinary embroiderer. It seems to run in our blood, in our family, the Sidamon-Eristavi family, the Bagrationi family. My cousin, Eter Bagrationi, also had golden hands! She made such wonderful embroidery and knitted works! This ability of our women to adapt to hardship and their selfless commitment to raise their children is amazing. Yes, they had special teachers who taught them all kinds of handicraft. Those were handicraft classes of that time.

My mother was educated in the Moscow Finishing School. It was dedicated to Queen Catherine. It offered higher education as well as post-graduate education. Since Alexander Alexandrovich Pushkin assumed the responsibility of my mother's education, Mariam wouldn't come to Tbilisi in summer for a number of years. She spent summers in their estate, the Pushkin estate, together with her classmates, Alexander Alexandrovich Pushkin's granddaughter, Tatyana Pushkin or Pushkina (I don't even know how to refer to her in Georgian) [last names in the Georgian language do not reveal the gender]. It seems that she got so used to that family, becoming inseparable from it, that, judging by her letters to mother, she didn't feel nostalgic for her homeland, that is, you can tell how much attention was being paid to her there. Mother always remembered it.

Mother often related about her schooling in finishing school, how her tutors and teachers took care of her, treated, and cherished my mother, a girl with a lung disease (it seems that Russia's frosty climate had affected her). Some of them worked there only as teaching assistants, while others were teachers. They also had a female supervisor who was in charge of overlooking my mother personally. Every sick student was assigned a supervisor. My mother used to say, "They wouldn't let anyone die. They would put everyone to work." A Georgian girl, Ms. Vera Abazadze, a future French language professor at the Institute of Foreign Languages, also attended this school. She too was often down with a



Mariam Leonidze

cold, and she was often put under a cold shower to develop cold resistance in her. "After they healed me, they made me stand under a cold shower too," remembered my mother. Since then, she had been taking a cold shower early in the morning, before commencing to work on her book.

My mother returned at the age of nineteen, being a fully developed foreign language teacher. Her major in particular was the French language, but she was also fluent in German and could even teach it. By the way, she received twelve out of twelve points upon the completion of a middle school course, that is,

the gymnasium part of her education, while completing the higher education part of the school with honors and being referred to by all the teachers in the school as the eighth wonder of the world. A girl who had arrived there with no decent knowledge of the Russian language, thanks to her open mind, learned everything without any difficulty whatsoever. Her friends used to say, "It's in her blood, Leonidze blood, and the genes of eloquent Solomon the Judge." I tend to believe it is so. Apparently, genes are of great importance. You know why I think it is so? I never cared about being a Sidamon-Eristavi and a Leonidze descendant, but now I see that my kin would never let themselves do things youth nowadays do. How can I say that today's youth have regressed? Back in those days, things we see today did not happen, nothing of the kind. Nowadays, however, the only thing everyone has on mind is how to take away something from others and how to deceive others. This is nothing but the misery of people today. Many cannot even imagine doing something like this. Many never got used to it and are deceived right and left! And this goes for me too. One time, I entrusted one woman with selling my tableware. She took it and disappeared. Then she did the same to someone else who traced her, got a hold of me too, and we went to court. No. The

court didn't help us either, being unable or not wanting to handle our case. There must be something going on that pushes courts to lose interest in serving justice. I never had any hopes anyway. And if I ever hear the news of something improving in our country, it will be a miracle. That's how badly our life has regressed, that's how badly human nature has regressed.

My mother worked as a French language teacher in two schools, the Theological Seminary and the Commercial School for Young Men. By the way, Sergo Parajanov's father attended the Commercial School [Sergo Parajanov (1924-1990), a famous Georgian-born Armenian film director and artist]. My mother used to tell me, "I knew Sergo Parajanov's father. He was my student, though only in his final year, after which I lost track of him. Yes, Sergo was an artist and creative man in whose house you mother [Eter Bagrationi] lived later on." Sergo Parajanov's father was a very noble man. He carried out charity works for these schools too.

After having returned from Moscow, my mother gathered a circle of relatives and friends around her, meeting with her relatives and establishing contacts. She was so strongly detached from Georgia that she had nearly forgotten the Georgian language by the time she returned. One time, when, in company of horsemen, she traveled to her grandmother's (the Gremi Jorjadzes) estates to see local relatives (by the way, my mother had been a good horse rider since childhood, since the Ganja time), and she found herself having a hard time speaking Georgian, so she vowed to master the Georgian language as it befitted a Georgian lady. She became interested in everything Georgian, even folk tales. I remember her reciting Georgian tales for me. As I remember, she had already purchased an incredible edition of Georgian folk tales, similar to the Vakhtang's edition of *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* by Rustaveli [The Knight in the Tiger's Skin, a twelfth century poem by Shota Rustaveli, printed for the first time by King Vakhtang VI (1675-1737) in 1712]. I might as well mention that I loaned this Georgian folk tales book to Vakhtang Kotetishvili [(1893-1937), a Georgian art and literature critic], through the mediation of a classmate. Then he happened to give it to someone else. I kept looking for it and haven't succeeded in finding it yet. Vakhushiti told me that his family had lost many other books. King Vakhtang's version of *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* is preserved in our family to this day. Yes, yes, that very version indeed.

Yes. So I was saying that my mother paid a visit to the Machabelis, paid a visit the Zurabishvilis, saw Nato Vachnadze's parents [Nato Vachnadze (1904-1953) was a great Georgian film actress], and the Leonidzes. There were two Leonidze families, and the third was my mother's family. She was on her way to Kondoli [a village in the Alazani Valley, Eastern Georgia] together with Soliko when she came up with the idea of making friends with Kakutsa Cholokashvili. Kakutsa Cholokashvili's parents happened to be good friends with my Grandma Martha (mother's mother). Solomon Leonidze's descendants, Leonidzes, were still alive. I remember them as [in Russian] Grandpa Evsey and Grandma Olya who would give my mother Solomon Leonidze's things as they believed her to be an immediate descendant of Solomon Leonidze. I remember the rings on my mother's fingers, one, two, three rings. Some of this jewelry was eventually submitted to Torgsin [a Soviet system introduced in the thirties of the twentieth century that aimed at substituting the country's deficit with the internal resources of its citizens]. I remember seeing belongings of Solomon Leonidze's wife submitted to Torgsin by my grandmother, Matiko Jorjadze. Submitting those rings to Torgsin enabled her to buy flour, sugar, butter, a red beret for me and an orange and peach color beret for my cousin. I remember how I got upset because she bought a red beret for me and not the same type as for Tamriko, my cousin. Many things were taken from our family. Mother, however, took it all lightly. "So what?" she used to say, "We'll buy it again." It was a time when mother had already started a quite responsible job working in then the Council of Ministers, that is, the Council of People's Commissars.

We have retained an ermine tippet presented to us by the Leonidzes, [in Russian] a stoat tippet, usually worn by Solomon's wife when she arrived in Saint Petersburg. By the way, frequent attempts to sell it too were made. I remember how my husband asked me once to put it on. There was a meeting with visitors, visiting actors, at the Opera House. He kept begging me, "Please put it on just once." I reasoned, "The hell with it. I'll put it on." So I did. We weren't wearing coats at that time. We were on our way to the amphitheater. He was talking to me, I was talking back, and I could no longer hear my husband's voice. I looked. Where's my husband? I looked around and what do I see? I saw people on

the amphitheater staircase and my husband a bit lower, while I stood there all by myself. As it turned out, they were viewing my stoat tippet. One slide happened to have come off, writing a trail behind me. I pulled myself together and darted toward my seat. My husband caught up with me. I met him with a long face.

I returned to the circle my mother had gathered around her, Ilia Zurabishvili, Vakhtang Tsitsishvili (the head of a cognac distillery), then Ms. Elene Machabeli and her brother, Niko Machabeli whom they called Nika, Ms. Mariam Sidamon-Eristavi-Gersamia, her husband, Clement Gersamia, Natasha Sidamon-Eristavi (the wife of Vanichka, the brother of Siko Sidamon-Eristavi), Natasha Cholokashvili-Chilakaeva, Tiko Tumanishvili (I believe she was the sister of the grandmother of our great film director [meaning Mikheil Tumanishvili (1921-1996)]). I've forgotten many of them. Oh yes, Kolya Kakhidze, Tamunia Tzereteli's future husband. The families of these people gathered at my mother's home, or Marusya Gersamia's home, or the Machabelis. Young women often gathered at the Machabeli's residence, mainly on holidays and the days following holidays.

From my mother's narrative: On the following day, these girls swarmed, made noise, told stories, chatted in Elichka's room. The door opened at that time and the butler said, "Girls, please be quiet. Akaki is coming." Wow! Ilia is coming. They were exceptional friends [Akaki Tzereteli (1940-1915) and Ilia Chavchavadze (1937-1907), great Georgian authors, poets, and public figures]. It was an extraordinary event. From that moment on, we froze, observing everyone around. We noticed some papers, magazines, and books on the table where these chivalrous men gathered. They held debates. We couldn't hear their discussion as they were too far away from us, but I remember one thing. When the discussion cooled off, Taso Bagration-Machabeli, Elichka's aunt and Nika's mother, burst in with a humongous plate, offering everyone, "Would you like some? Would you like some? Would you like some?" Everyone refused, so she put the content in her mouth. We saw that Aunt Taso had been offering everyone but one chicken thigh. Of course, it was a joke, though a joke from the years of hardship because it was Elichka's birthday the day before and everything had been eaten by then.

Of course, the noblemen faced hardship even before sovietization. Things were getting out of hands, they were losing everything,



yet they never even tried to do something about it. Inertness is a characteristic of our nobility, and it has followed us to this day.

I remember there was one vacant room. Grandmother's sister lived in the second room, while grandmother occupied the third. That was the room where people gathered. At their meetings, I remember, they discussed Ilia's article in the Iveria newspaper, which they had to spread among people. Yes, it happened in my childhood. They wanted to spread this article from an old newspaper among people because no one was acquainted with Ilia's opinion journalism. That's what I remember. Somehow it got stuck in my memory. I inquired later, "Mother, what were you doing?" Mother was surprised, "How do you remember? We tried to get people to read Ilia's appeals, Ilia's teaching, Ilia's doctrine."

My parents' marriage was made possible through the mediation of Kakutsa Cholokashvili [(1888-1930), a Georgian nobleman and military commander, regarded as a national hero of Georgia] and Ms. Elene. My father happened to have become interested in my mother back when she traveled on horseback to Kakheti, in Soliko's company. Father recognized Soliko, and it was then that my mother saw him for the first time.

Father took a fancy to mother at first glance, very frequently visiting with her family in Tbilisi afterward. Some time passed and he proposed to her. Mother somehow changed the topic, saying that she had never considered it. On the other hand, she was past the average marriageable age of that time. After she once again turned down his proposal, father felt terribly insulted. Father himself told me, "I wouldn't get near her for a long time. Frankly, it didn't seem to bother her much. One time, I accidentally met her at Ms. Mariam Sidamon-Eristavi's birthday reception. I greeted her. She greeted me back very warmly, and we continued our conversation although no unspoken tiff had taken place between us. Nonetheless, I secretly, inconspicuously kept an eye on her. I was curious if she indeed was not interested in me at all. Then he approached me herself and asked, 'Are you available?' I never left her side thereafter. I saw that she somewhat interested in me. Although she was only interested in dancing, I saw what I needed to see. I never left her side, and much later moved into a house across the street from her home, together with my sister," father used to tell me. "My sister and I often visited with her. Since she was tutoring

my sister in Russian and mathematics, she was forced to receive me too. Her mother, Matiko [diminutive for Martha], was very fond of me. We had a great time. One beautiful day, however, I saw her sitting at one side of her desk and some I couldn't make out on the other. I did hear a man's voice coming room her window into mine though. When it happened again, I wouldn't waist time and threw rotten eggs (I don't know where I got them) in their direction. Your mother, Marusya (he called her Marusya), quickly rose to feet and shut the windows. I was no longer interested what happened inside. Your mother probably apologized and even helped him clean up. One way or another, I never saw that man again. Mother told father and me afterward, "I kept apologizing to him, while he apologized back, saying that he had no idea."

That's how Mikheil Eristavi gradually won over his prey, Mariam Leonidze. After that, my father once again proposed to her. In the heat of the moment, mother categorically turned him down. My father left. A few hours later, my mother heard my aunt (my future aunt) scream, "Marusya, help me!"

As it turned out, my father bathed, made his bed, lay down, and attempted to shoot himself in the heart. Fortunately, the bullet missed his heart and flew through the floor. After this incident, mother watched him like a hawk throughout his recovery. All his friends stood by his bedside, reprimanding Mariam for torturing him so long. She pondered on this issue for a long time and then told Kakutsa (as she herself told me), "I really like that man. He has such a bad temper though. I was afraid of his temper."

Some time passed. My mother kept hesitating and hesitating. One time, as she was leaving the Theological School building, a carriage stood nearby, while Kakutsa kept pacing back and forth. He pretended to have bumped into her and inquired, "What are you doing here?" Mother replied, "This is my school. I work here." Kakutsa knew very well where she worked. "Hold on a second. I'll give you a ride home. I had an errand to run, but... Well, come on. I'll take you home." Kakutsa played his role very well. As mother recalled, "He duped me into a charming conversation, so I didn't even notice where we were headed. Only after we left town did I realize what it was all about. 'Yes, I'm kidnapping you,' told me Kakutsa, 'and now you're on your way to meet your husband-to-be.' I found myself in Borjomi [a city and resort in Eastern Georgia].

There were Elene Machabeli, Nika Machabeli, Ilia Zurabishvili, Vakhtang Tsitsishvili, and a Russian woman artist (I forgot her name; she too was a sponsor) standing in the churchyard. 'Who are the sponsors?' inquired the priest. 'Here, Mister Kakutsa Cholokashvili, Ma'am Elene Machabeli, (the woman artist), and Mister Ilia Zurabishvili,' was the reply. The situation, the time was such that, imagine, they wouldn't include Kakutsa on the list.

Kakutsa and my uncle, Soliko, emigrated. We knew that they both went to France. Neither had written any letters for a long time. Believe it or not, mother was even apprehended for a while to extract from information about their whereabouts. Yet, as she held a responsible public office, and probably her background had been scrutinized, they wouldn't touch her, so she was sent back home. It was an amazing story. We never found out where exactly Soliko was. Even Kakutsa left here without knowing it. They arrived in Paris. Kakutsa was actually my father's friend, and he knew Soliko through my father. I believe my uncle did it all, so that the family of his sister wouldn't be harmed.

I was born in 1921. Of course, if I know anything about that time, I know from narratives. I remember from narratives that in 1921, before my birth, my father had his platoon (a hundred men) board a ship, waiting for my mother to arrive in the port, so that they could flee the country as emigrants [In February 1921, Georgia was attacked by the Red Army. The Georgian army was defeated and the Social-Democrat government fled the country. On February 25, 1921 the Red Army entered the capital Tbilisi and installed a Moscow directed communist government].

My father, Mikheil Sidamon-Eristavi, was a young officer. After having graduated from the Cadet Corps, he served in an army detachment as an officer, and apparently liked his job. He was apparently very chivalrous, presentable, lively, and sometime hot-tempered. This too I know from narratives, especially those by my aunts [father's sisters]. I know that mother had already reached the seacoast, was ready to embark, when father stopped her. I know that they were about to go where Siko Sidamon-Eristavi, a representative of Sidamon-Eristavis, had already gone a little earlier. By the way, I'm not mistaken as it became evident later that Sidamon-Eristavis had been a branch of the great princes of Kakheti, the Aragvi Princes [Kakheti, a region in Eastern Georgia,

became a separate kingdom in the sixties of the fifteenth century]. My father was born in Telavi [a city in Kakheti]. According to my grandmother's narrative, he was very restless, famous for his chivalrous nature since childhood. My grandmother was Ms. Tamar Vachnadze-Sidamon-Eristavi. She was the most beautiful woman. She was much loved where they lived, that is, Telavi. She was not famous only for her outward appearance. She also was a beautiful person in soul and body. She was a widow who raised four siblings, two boys and two girls, sending only Mikheil to take a course in military school.

He refused to flee abroad, having his platoon come back, and himself siding with the Bolsheviks, which was considered a great merit, and his contribution was soon awarded. I believe that a part of the public sympathized with the revolution because people anticipated something new. The country and the world in general were in need of something new, and they apparently came to believe that this something, new and good, was on its way. I never noticed any discontent on their part. I cannot recall anything of this kind. They worked as the surrounding circumstances demanded and as it had to be done in general. They seemed to have adapted, doing their job painlessly and honestly. Both my mother and father were democrats at heart. The death of Data Bagrationi, the husband of my aunt, was most painful for us. He was executed by a firing squad in 1924 by people whom Bulgakov described in his *Heart of a Dog* [(1891–1940), a Soviet Russian writer and playwright]. Those were the same narrow-minded people who executed him. You know why they executed people? They believed that all noblemen had to be executed. People like my aunt's husband, a nobleman and democrat, a saint, were one in a million. Unfortunately, people like him were the ones to fall victim to this foolishness, the foolishness of that time.

Kakutsa and my father were friends. They may have had disagreements in terms of ideology, but they never actually argued or quarreled over these issues. Look at the hubbub in our parliament! They would never imagine anything of this kind. They would never stoop to anything like that. Friendship always remained friendship. No one in my family has ever bad-mouthed him, and my baptismal certificate lists him as my sponsor. I was baptized very late, when I was already twenty-one [baptism of infants is a

customary practice in the Orthodox Church], after I had become a member of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League [the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. Yes, it was prohibited and dangerous at that. Total ungodliness reigned in the country. Since childhood, however, I had been going to church with mother or grandmother on a regular basis. We attended services in that Russian [in Russian] Bogoslovsky Church, near the Blue Monastery. The Blue Monastery was shut down for a long time. They were planning to open a museum there, but it never happened. I have never swayed from the church.

I remember only one thing from my childhood. Starting from 1937, a fear of being arrested was in the air. However, I also remember that life before that time was very difficult, it was very difficult to support one's family, and that mother helped father tremendously in supporting our family and taking care of my aunt's orphaned children. My mother was already a stenographer for the Council of Ministers at that time.

Very soon after the revolution, the French and German language courses were removed from the curriculum of public schools. English was not in vogue at all at that time. My mother forced to work as a stenographer. She was forced to become involved in shorthand because it enabled her to support her family. She took a course in Tbilisi. She turned to a certain Zhyvastovsky, the author of a Russian-language shorthand textbook, who had arrived here, teaching shorthand. There were special schools in Tbilisi that seemed to have been created to enable my mother to survive. She used to say [in Russian], "Shorthand for the pocket and languages for the soul."

My mother became a seasoned stenographer, and there was a shortage of stenographers. My mother had been considering (and she was soon made an offer by the Ministry of Education) to compile a stenography textbook in Georgian. There was something but nothing effective. There were authors who had tried to create a Georgian-language shorthand textbook. And exactly when my mother realized that the Georgian language required Georgian stenographers, when people in the government, in the system of education, saw the necessity of Georgian stenographers, my mother was summoned to the Ministry of Education and was made an offer, "You are a Russian-language stenographer, but you are also

familiar with the capabilities of Georgian shorthand. Would you like to create a textbook?” Mother commenced to work that very day. For this purpose she, of course, studied not only the basics of Russian shorthand but of Czech, English, and German shorthand as well. She subscribed to special literature (and I still have it) with her notes on the fields. There were two shorthand systems at that time, geometric and graphic. She had to decide which would serve the Georgian language better. Mother adapted the peculiarities of the Georgian language to the Russian system. Mr. Akaki Shanidze [(1887-1987) a Georgian linguist and philologist] personally witnessed how great a job she did. Although he was very busy, he agreed to participate in this undertaking and looked through the Georgian-language shorthand textbook material developed by my mother. He pointed out to her right away, “You know, Mariam, Georgian is a very unique language and requires caution when working with it. I did notice, however, something I liked. It’s just that adaptation will not work here.” Mother replied, “I wasn’t planning to carry out adaptation. I’m planning to create Georgian shorthand. I will study everything, and even if I will adapt anything, it will be in compliance with the rules of graphics systems. Russian shorthand is based on a graphics system and maybe Georgian stenographers will learn the Russian system as well, becoming able to carry out both Russian and Georgian shorthand.” This was the goal of my mother, and I believe she fulfilled her plan honorably. There is a voluminous review on this topic written by Nikolai Nikolaevich Sokolov, the founder of Russian shorthand, that is, graphics shorthand, as well as a long review by Mister Akaki that reads, “Ms Mariam handled the study of Georgian shorthand exceptionally well.” According to both reviewers, my mother deserved a doctoral degree in linguistics without having to defend her thesis.

First of all, such an approach was beneficial for stenographers themselves in terms of intellectual development. Secondly, a stenographer was necessary because he/she recorded words by great people, reports, speeches, and these speeches were the results of the work of such people, which were subsequently published and disseminated. However, this is not the most important thing here. I will bring my mother’s example. Your mother, my mother’s student, was a Georgian shorthand expert just like my mother was a Russian shorthand expert. One day, she attended a trial against the murder-

ers of Ilia [Chavchavadze]. When it was announced that one of the murderers was about to take the stand, the stenographers, including your mother, were prohibited from carrying out stenography. After having left, your mother went straight to my mother and told her, "They prohibited us to shorthand." My mother got up, picked a notebook from her desk, and said, "Sit down and write down everything you remember. It will prove to be useful eventually." Indeed, the document written by our mother in our home eventually served as a very useful and interesting document. If I'm not mistaken, the cover of that notebook features Stalin's portrait. I saw it in Eteri's home, in an already dilapidated condition. Then this document was preserved in Ilia Museum. Eteri fully restored the speech by Berbichashvili. It is presently preserved in the museum. She frequently told me, "It's very difficult to shorthand our famous literary critic, Besarion Zhghenti, but I'm doing my best to shorthand him."

Mariam served worked at session and meeting at the Council of Ministers, carrying out shorthand in Russian. Later on, Eteri joined her to shorthand in the Georgian language. In addition, my mother was soon appointed the deputy of the head of the general Department of the Council of People's Commissars, Zhulunkevich. It was a high position now. There was a well-organized office where many great future lawyers worked, Ms. Tinatin Tzereteli and Ms. Xenia Grebenshchikova who graduated from the University Department of Law with the help of my mother. My mother let them attend classes and pass exams during work hours. She used to say, "While I was carried away by shorthand, I could have worked in any field during this time and defend my thesis. Since I have not done it, let my coworkers, these children raised by me, do it."

This status was necessary, practically essential to my mother. Mother has accomplished many good deeds while working there. I remember an elderly lady whom my mother helped out. The lady met her at the entrance to the Council of Ministers building, knelt before her and said, "You are my Philippe Makharadze" [laughs]. She has worked many good deeds. Mister Evgeni Kharadze never forgot it and frequently pointed out that the construction of the Kanobili Observatory had been financed thanks to my mother. My mother also received appreciation for contributing to the acquisition of financing for the Sokhumi Government Building and the Sokhumi Theater. Mr. Leo Gvatua, a famous civil engineer,



Mzia Sidamon-Eristavi with parents

supervised the process of construction. Here in Tbilisi, mother contributed to the acquisition of financing for the construction of a new building of School Eighteen (presently Tbilisi School Fifty-One). People remember it to this day. An anniversary of the school was celebrated recently and those who contributed to its construction were remembered. These pictures are preserved in the school museum to this day. We were the third graduating class, while in the classes before us were such great figures as Mr. Malkhaz Zaalishvili, an academician and mathematician, the physicist Levan Gedevanishvili, the famous movie director Jemal Gokieli, and our cherished poet Ioseb Noneshvili. There were so many. Then there were (subsequent generations) Ketevan Tsertsvadze-Chalashvili, a children's literature author, Parnaoz Kotetishvili, a very interesting person and a descendant of the Kotetishvili lineage, who was highly reputed as a Georgian language expert and Varo Vardiashvili's disciple, and who read lectures in our Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University. Of course, we shouldn't forget Sulkhan-Saba's name, yet why would they remove Alexander Pushkin's name from the title of our university [Tbilisi Alexander Pushkin State Pedagogical Institute was renamed Sulkhan-Saba Pedagogical University which, in turn, merged with Ilia University in 2006]?



My mother spent nights transcribing her shorthand records. At that time, she carried out shorthand at the conventions, sessions, and meetings of the Council of People's Commissariat, transcribing everything at night, so that she could dictate the text to the typist in the morning to have it printed and submitted on time. On the other hand, my mother always had time for me. She always checked my homework. She never missed a day without inquiring about me and having a conversation with me. Mother trusted me. I, by the way, was a very committed student. After coming home from school, while grandma was cooking dinner, I was already doing my mathematics homework. I solved mathematical equations at my mother's desk. No one ever helped me. Only after I received a B in Georgian, mother became involved in my studies and pointed out to me, "It would be good if you fathomed the meaning of what you had read on your own." She was talking about Kazbegi's *Khevisberi Gocha* [*Alexander Kazbegi (1848-1893), a famous Georgian writer*]. That's when she told me, "Think about it. Think about the ideas behind it." That's how my mother became involved in my education. Otherwise I never required any help. I first did my homework, and then I rushed outside, playing and having fun just like any other normal child, and climbing up the tree and even playing *chilika jokhi* and leapfrog games like boys [*chilika jokhi, a traditional Georgian game, similar to cricket and baseball*]. Back in those days, these Italian courtyards were unbelievable. I had great friends. We never differentiated by nationality; we were all together with Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Since my mother and grandmother had estates in Azerbaijan, they spoke fluent Armenian and Azerbaijani. There were Armenians too on our block, and I communicated with them in their language perfectly well. I spoke with Grandpa Sergo and Grandma Asmat (who used to remodel [in Russian] second-hand clothing) in Armenian. They spoke with in Armenian intentionally, so I could learn the language. Mother taught me French, while I also learned the Armenian language. I loved spending time with them. They taught me how to use a meat grinder. I hadn't seen anything like that in my life as I really disliked eating, really disliked the kitchen, and really disliked my grandmother's whining, "What shall I feed you today?" I disliked it so much that while still a schoolchild, a fifth-grader (I started to attend school in the fifth grade. Tutors educated me at home before that), I told her one time,

“Grandma, I will invent pills, so that you will never have to make soups and borsch, so that you will never have to work hard. I will take these pills and will never go hungry.”

I have a very oppressing recollection of the day when Ms. Nutsa Tsintsadze-Karalashvili was arrested and my mother sat at our doorsteps, burning her interesting works, translations from Russian into French, which she had been anticipating to be published any day. These works were in the French language, so mother was afraid they would suspect any connections with foreign countries. Her brother had after all fled abroad. She burned her essays that she used to read for her nephew and me at night. My cousin was already an adolescent, so he often asked her to read. By the way, he was very talented, becoming a good engineer eventually and moving to Moscow. My worst recollections of those days are related to my mother constantly waiting to be arrested. One in a thousand had a telephone set at that time. Our telephone was removed. As we learned later, our neighbor made sure it was removed and installed at his apartment. I don't want to remember what was going on. I have a troublesome recollection of being after that my mother could be taken away. She survived. Do you know who saved her? Beria's driver, the driver of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, and a gardener who reported to whom they were supposed to report and what they were supposed to report. That's the kind of drivers and gardeners they were. Germane Mgaloblishvili was the Chairman of the Council of Ministers at that time, while Lavrenti Pavles-dze Beria was in charge of the KGB.

Soliko Leonidze's family fled from Ukraine and moved in with us, as well as my aunt. These bandits who came together with the Bolsheviks and were absolutely clueless, foolishly murdered her husband, Professor Mikheil Ponerko, a psychologist, while working on coal transportation. My aunt also worked on coal transportation. There in the [in Russian] camps [meaning forced labor camps], women and men carried coal separately. We kept their family album at home. They were all covered I coal, and then they cleaned themselves. I've strayed from my point now. I'm about to get to the point. My mother lived not only for me but for my cousins, her nephews and nieces as well. She found time and kind words for everyone. She carried out her charity for everyone. She helped everyone as much as she could.

There's one more thing I would like to say about my aunt. When Tamar arrived, she started to work as the head of a kindergarten right here on Petriashvili Street. It was in the years after 1937. It was a miracle that my mother, who worked in the Council of People's Commissars, survived 1937. In 1937, they arrested Nutsa Tsintsadze-Karalashvili, the daughter of His Holiness, indeed Divinely Catholicos-Patriarch Kalistrate (Tsintsadze) and mother of Nika Karalashvili. My mother had been waiting to be arrested from that day on. She never quit working in the Council of People's Commissars though. It's a different story how she did it. One way or another, she accomplished many good deeds while working there. When my mother worked as the head of the garden, she often sent the gardener and an attendant, a certain Hassan (I don't remember his last name), to our home, to grandmother. This Hassan would come over and call up my grandmother from downstairs, from the street, "Grandma Martha, [in Russian] the directory say send kerosene!" "What?" "Firewood. That is all, grandma," as though saying, "What else would I need? Are you kidding me?"

Grandma would throw down the keys to him. He would enter the shed and grabbed a barrel of gasoline (which was stashed for the needs of our family). He would take a whole barrel and enough firewood to fill up his cart. And then again [in Russian], "Send some flour. Send some sugar. Send some butter." It was after 1937. Since my mother was an employee of the Council of People's Commissars, the deputy head of the General Department, she was entitled for a corporate vehicle and a driver. We shopped nearby, in a closed store of the Council of People's Commissars. Bread coupons had already been introduced, and civil servants were served in closed-type of stores where my aunt managed to obtain goods for children. Moreover, my aunt took kindergarten children to the Borjomi Gorge (to the village of Tba) and then Bichvinta (which wasn't in vogue yet) every year [*Bichvinta, a resort in Abkhazia*]. I was already an adolescent when she got me a job as a night guard, making me used to work and earning my living through labor. Believe it or not, when taking children on trips, she always had Mirakov with her, the father of that otolaryngology doctor and an incredible pediatrician himself. As a result of treatment, the air and sea climate healed many children. They are elderly people now. They have children and grandchildren of their own. One of them

is Lily Azmaiparashvili. My aunt spent her salary on those trips. Everything in her world existed only for the children. Of course, there was state financing. Nonetheless, it was the old generation intelligentsia occupying public offices that raised these children. That's why I'm good as a teacher today. That's why people of our generation try to contribute to the upbringing of youth and share their experience with younger generations.

I remember my childhood, days spent in my home together with my classmates, better than anything, of course. We held literature evenings, ad-libbing our own poems, short stories, and drawing in the sketchbook. This sketchbook is preserved in one of the corners of my desk. That's how we entertained ourselves at that time. We the schoolmates gathered in our home even after enrolling in college. Ioseb Noneshvili dedicated a poem to me, and so did Malkhaz Zaalishvili. My schoolmates and I were featured in Givi Karbelashvili's short stories. Thus, we managed to live a full life in the toughest years of the war.

I was already a higher education student during the war. By the way, I was nominated for a Stalin Scholarship in my sophomore year, yet somehow it was all cancelled. My family never really felt the hardship of those years. As I already mentioned, mother spent many years working for the Council of Ministers, so we were not in need. Mother also helped the head of the kindergarten. She may have been taking away some from us, but she was doing a good deed. Grandmother never complained about mother taking things away from home.

My mother and father were separated. However, they retained such relations that father often stayed with us overnight, especially when his brother-in-law moved in with his family. They had a lot in common. Even before [the separation], mother was very attentive to his family and my aunts. My mother and my aunts lived for one another and had exceptionally noble and warm relations. Father would cheat when they played cards in their leisure time, and mother would scold him jokingly, "You're cheating!" It was no big deal.

And now about my father; he was wounded in the Civil War and subsequently lost his hearing. There was a hospital in the university at that time, and that's where he underwent his medical treatment. He came down with meningitis. They saved him life, but he suffered from hearing loss. He worried about it terribly and didn't

even want to live. My mother's conversations and words, "You are the one who has to take care of your children, family, nephews, and nieces," however, strengthened him. Then father himself realized that he has no right to leave this world and accomplished a truly heroic feat to start working despite his illness. The Society for Persons with Hearing Disabilities had already been established, so he addressed it right away. He was soon appointed the society's chairman and eventually accomplished many good deeds. He expanded the existing workshops, created new ones, produced new workplaces, and employed many persons with hearing disabilities. They produced their own beautiful production. I remember that they produced watches; they also had an eyeglass workshop, and they processed timber as well. Then a school equipment workshop was opened. He had a one-room apartment, [in Russian] a true box room, on Dzneldze Street. He never even considered enlarging his residence. Both my aunts and their children lived with him.

Many years later, he built the House of the Society for Persons with Hearing Disabilities, which has survived and the residents of which still remember that it's Misha Eristavi's house. Needless to say, Misha Eristavi could not build it with his own money! Yet, it was the result of his care and philanthropy. His democratic nature revealed itself in care for people, which we do not see today. Not a single member of this government... Our president may be good at conducting foreign affairs, yet it is a fact that people are being annihilated, people are being oppressed, and humanity is vanishing!

Here's what I would like to add. You should have seen persons with hearing disabilities crying when my father passed away in 1963. I froze. My tears seemed to have dried up on my cheeks. They kept mourning and wailing though. One of them said, "He brought my child back to live. He had such a doctor treat my child. He made everyone take care of my child." I remember how another person said, "My husband was about to fall victim to alcoholism. He found (I don't remember what this institution is called) doctors, experts in this field." Back in those days, drug addiction was not even up for discussion and there were no rehabs. Nevertheless, he found a doctor who would handle such patients, so he entrusted that lady's husband and a few other alcoholics to the care of this doctor, paying their treatment fee from his own pocket. That's what that lady told us that time.

## **MARIAM GELASHVILI**

1914 – 2010

Interviewed by

TSISANA GODERDZISHVILI in Tbilisi, 2004

I probably followed in my mother's footsteps in terms of height, because my father was a tall man. Grandfather Pepo, my mother's father, was also a tall man. His wife, Sophiko, was a beauty. Grandfather owned twelve pairs of oxen with a plow and vast lands; he owned the whole Kvishkheti Lowland, all the way to the village of Tskhramura [Shida Kartli Region; Eastern Georgia]. In addition, he was a village elder. He was a very rich man, yet no one held a grudge against him. His crops were so plentiful that he was forced to turn to local farmers to help him in harvesting crops. He then let them take as much wheat and corn as they pleased, in accordance with the sizes of their households, saying, "Take it, man. You've six children to feed. Take wheat too. Don't be shy!" He gave out barley, beans, everything, in one word. Local farmers adored him. There were thirty-eight villagers, and he kept them all happy. He owned a Russian-style bakery stove. He let everyone use it to bake bread free of charge. There were, however, those willing to spare a loaf in return. [Making a circle with both hands] That's how big those loaves were. He also had a separate room for vodka distillation. Again, farmers would come over, distill vodka, and leave a couple of pints in return.

To make it short, my grandfather was well-to-do, and so was my grandmother. They had seven children: four daughters and three sons. Grandmother had her daughters grow up with the Samareli family. The Samarelis had little children, and my grandmother told her daughters, "Go and help them raise their kids", and so they did. My mother also grew up with the Samarelis. Baking, sewing, different types of embroidery, knitting: she learned it all from them... Everything, starting from prayers, even medical skills.

The Samareli's son, who was named Rezo, was a doctor who had received his education in Germany. Poor soul, he never married and died of tuberculosis. My mother mourned him as she would her blood brother. He taught my mother a great deal about herbal medicine.

The Samarelis lived in the village of Beghleti, past Kvishkhети, Gori District (the country had not been divided into regions yet). The Samarelis refused to bake cornbread and constantly asked my mother, “Luba, we prefer your cornbread. Please bake it for us.” As soon as my mother started knitting dough, the housewife walked up to her and put sugar and sunflower oil in the bowl, saying that cornbread tasted better this way. My mother asked, “Why did you do that, Aunt Pelo?” “You just wait and see. This cornbread will be a full meal in itself,” was the reply. Corn flour inherently contains natural oil, yet she added sunflower oil; it is also sweet as it is, yet she put sugar in it. In the process of baking, these additives enriched cornbread... “That’s why they loved my cornbread,” my mother used to say.

The Samarelis had a maid, a very young maid. They didn’t want to tarnish her reputation, so they pretended she was their goddaughter and treated her as such. They picked her from a large needy family. She was one of the four daughters of a certain farmer. The duties of this maid included mopping and dusting. The Samarelis didn’t want her to bake cornbread. After she finished mopping and dusting, they had her wash her hands. Then she milked the Samareli’s cow, boiled milk and made yogurt.

As for my mother, her duty consisted of sewing (using a sewing machine). She was good at it; her mother taught her. She sewed for the Samareli ladies. The then most popular dress, khabarda, was easy to make. All she had to do after having sewn the front was to knit around it. A full set consisted of one blue and two burgundy dresses. The dress was belted right here [pointing to her waist] and then flowed down freely, one end dropping this way and the other in this manner (crosswise). The belt was fastened with its two ends at the front. The dress had a very thin wire frame inside, this way making it impossible to tell how slim or chubby the lady was. Oh, khabarda! Have you noticed how broad women in khabarda are on pictures? I read a magazine article on a certain colonel. There was a picture of him with his wife next to him. You should’ve seen it! I said right away, this khabarda dress was tailored by my mother. How pretty and slim that lady was standing by her husband!

My grandfather introduced my mother to my father and even arranged their marriage. My father had just started working at the railroad, still in training. He must have been just a kid, like

seven or so, when the Surami Tunnel construction began. Our walnut tree was planted by him. It's one hundred and seventeen years old now. So he watched workers build the tunnel and remove rocks and stones from the site. Then he grew up. He was sixteen when the construction was completed. He loved the tunnel so much. He always pastured grandfather's cattle past the tunnel. He herded cattle in his spare time. His full-time job consisted of walking through the tunnel and making sure no one had fallen off the train, or been killed, or run over. The tunnel was short, with a very narrow walkway. It took special skills not to end up on the rail track. After all, they built two rail tracks where one had been before. After they built two rail tracks, they barely left this much space from the tunnel walls [measuring about twenty inches with her index fingers]. Back when my father was on duty, inspecting the tunnel all the way through, he was forced to press himself against the wall every time he heard a train nearby.

There were old-fashioned hand-crank magneto phones in the tunnel. My father would crank the magneto and get in touch directly with the Khashuri Department of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs [the public and secret police organization of the Soviet Union that directly executed the rule of power of the Soviet government]. He would request "a draisine" [emergency rail vehicle] to this or that kilometer. Then a doctor would arrive with a gurney and transport the injured to Khashuri. Train traffic would be halted for the time being.

That's how he worked. In his spare time, he herded cattle. At the age of eighteen or nineteen, while still a bachelor, he appeared at a regular wrestling contest organized by Prince Zumbatov. He was extremely good at traditional Georgian wrestling. He was a big and strong man. Prince Amilakhvari often visited Zumbatov with his two wrestlers and challenged my father. Grandfather gladly took over the cattle, knowing that my father would bring gold from the wrestling contest, knowing that he was undefeated. As a rule, wrestling matches didn't last long. He had mastered a very peculiar backheel: a grappling hold and he had an Amilakhvari wrestler on his back. "Take a break", Zumbatov told him. "No need. Next!" answered my father. Then he quickly defeated the other wrestler, rushing back home to herd cattle.



The prince's house was built on a raised foundation, and his family observed the wrestling ring from above. The prince's daughter, Katyusha, watched wrestling matches in company with Amilakhvari's daughter and young ladies visiting from Leningrad [Petrograd in 1914-1924; Sankt-Peterburg prior to 1914]. My father always wore a shabby akhalukhi [traditional Georgian shirt] and a chokha [traditional Georgian long tight-waist color jacket] over it. The young ladies threw gold coins in his directions, saying, "Gabo [diminutive for Gabriel], take it! This is from Katyusha! This is from Valya from Leningrad! I'm Nana from Mtskheta!" He never returned from the competition without three, four, or even five coins. Those were five-ruble gold coins, very valuable. He gave them all to his father. He never dressed well.

That was exactly when my grandfather (my mother's father) saw him. Neither my mother nor my grandmother had ever met him. So my grandfather clothed him, bought him a red shirt (similar to those worn by karachogheli townfolk), a long jacket, a large handkerchief, fastened his own silver belt around my father's waist, tucking the handkerchief in it, put a townfolk-style hat on his head, and gave him gold coins and a large napkin full of candy. My grandfather told my father, "That's my house over there. Let me go first. Let's pretend you came here on your own. Stop at the end of the vineyard. Make sure I get into the house and then come. I'll greet you and pretend I haven't seen you recently. Here, take these rings." He had my father present my mother with a pure gold turquoise gemstone ring since she was born in December, on St. Barbara's feast-day [December 17, according to the Julian calendar; the veneration of Saint Barbara the Great-Martyr holds a special place in the Georgian Orthodox Church and folklore; turquoise is the December birthstone], while grandmother received a flat ring. Back in those days, they usually made rings about three inches in width with small tablets attached to them for gift inscriptions; grandmother's ring read "From Gabo to Mother-in-Law Sophiko".

Thus, my father arrived with great pomp. He was a well-cultured man, having served on the German border. Lack of good clothes was his only vice. My grandfather greeted him, "Well, hello Gabo, hello!" My grandmother stepped outside, acting reservedly; she grew up in a princely family and was extremely well-cultured. They lived near the Samarelis who, in addition, were her godparents.

My father was not overly captivated by my mother at first, but what could he do! Then grandfather invited him over for the feast day of the Prophet Elijah. My father didn't know at the time that my mother was very good at playing the accordion and daira tambourine and singing. Both father and mother showed up neatly dressed at the reception. My father was a very handsome man. He listened to my mother play the accordion and sing. Among other songs, she sang Dark Eyes, she had learned from visitors from Leningrad. Mother was a good singer with a good voice; as a result, my father was enchanted. He regretted disliking this dark-haired woman at first. Then he married her. She carried her accordion to every reception they attended.

My parents married at the end of 1912 or the beginning of 1913. My grandfather [from mother's side] grabbed five gold coins, bought them a wooden house, cattle, pigs, a pigsty, built a hen coop for them, and allotted a land parcel, while grandmother spared hens with chicken. Then grandfather approached my father's uncle, "This man [Mariam's father] does not belong in your house. He's an orphan. Thank you, of course, for raising him. Naturally, you can keep that gold he has brought you, but you should allot land to him." Back then there was a rule: my father was to be allotted as much lowland as his uncle had and as many hills as his uncle had; in one word, the land was to be split in half. At first, the uncle wanted to divide his lands into four as he had three sons of his own. My grandfather [mother's father], however, told him that the land belonged to him [uncle] and his brother [Mariam's father's father]. Accordingly, the land had to be divided between him and his dead brother [that is, dead brother's son: Mariam's father], and only then could the uncle split his share between his sons. My father ended up receiving many lands; he was considered a well-to-do farmer.

I was born in November 1914 and baptized the same year. War [WW I] broke out that year, 1914. My father was drafted, and my mother and I wound up on our own. She loved my father so much that she turned down grandfather's offer to move in with him, "I have to keep the home fires burning. I cannot leave, and I shall continue breeding cows, hens and chicken." She didn't have any oxen because grandfather [father's uncle] took them over after father went to war, thinking that he wouldn't come back, which

my father nonetheless did. As it turned out, he was a commanding officer in Grodno [a city in Belarus] and never participated in actual battle. As one fluent in Russian and Georgian, he was appointed a commanding officer on the border; in one word, he was put in charge of the border. Grodno was a sort of gateway between Russia and Poland.

My father returned from war, and they lived happily ever after. The year 1914 ended, and my brother was born in April of the following year. I remember my mother saying she had given birth to a boy and giving out an order to feed me cow's milk. She breast-fed my brother for three years, so he caught up with me in stature. By the way, my mother had not experienced a menstrual period since she got married (in addition to suffering from migraines that started right after her marriage), thus being unable to tell whether she was pregnant or not. She felt all right only when she was with child; otherwise, she suffered from horrible headaches.

My parents had six children in all. My mother had already had three children, two boys and me, when she visited her father at home for the feast day of the Prophet Elijah. Why wouldn't she! He had a house of his own and a separate room referred to as "a barn" in the village, with a balcony, covering its southern and eastern sides. This is the barn and this is the bedroom [using her fingers to show that these two rooms were located next door to each other]. Whoever got married moved into this secluded room, the barn. The balcony was very wide, approximately ten feet, with permanently fastened tables stretching from the near end on the eastern side all the way to the far end on the southern side. Guests sat at that table to celebrate the feast.

Revolutionary Committees had already been established, and Zumbadze, Chairman of the Local Committee, was also invited. Grandfather was the village elder and, naturally, had bigwigs invited to the reception. Princes were present at the reception. A farmer could also join the celebration and have a drink provided that he was a decent man, especially if he had a good wife and was a newlywed. Grandfather invited his guests in advance; he was careful in selecting them.

That year, one of my mother's brothers was present in grandfather's house, helping him pour wine. The youngest brother, Giorgi, supervised cowboys whom grandfather had hired; Giorgi's job was

to make sure the hirelings fed and watered grandfather's livestock properly, pastured them on decent territories, and had them rest in the shade. One time Giorgi herded the cattle into the barn. There was one bull in grandfather's herd, an aggressive type, though strong and hardworking. That's why grandfather didn't get rid of it. In addition, it didn't harm family members, while strangers couldn't come near it. Giorgi grabbed the bull by the horns, tied it up and turned around. A rifle fired all of a sudden, and Giorgi collapsed into the water tank. As it turned out, a drunken Zumbadze fired a revolver, and the stray bullet hit Giorgi. Bad luck! The celebration of the feast of the Prophet Elijah started in the evening and had turned into mourning and wailing by 10 pm. The guests left. That's how that celebration ended. The whole village gathered. The boy's body was placed in the house for viewing. My mother lost a brother; grief took hold of her. My father prohibited her from crying, "That won't bring him back. Go on with your life." What a tragedy!

My mother had another brother who studied in Borjomi and had a girlfriend. That girl was not good enough for him to marry. It was more of a no-strings-attached type of relationship. That girl learned from someone that grandmother had found a young woman for my uncle to marry. She asked him to visit her for a farewell dinner. After they had two glasses, she put soap in his third glass of wine, clinked glasses with him and had him drink it up. The young man barely made it to his bedroom and died right away. That's how my mother lost her second brother. His name was Niko, Nicholas; my brother, who went missing in action, was named after him.

My mother's oldest brother never went to school. His name was Jason. He was a railroader. He had three sisters: Sonya, Marusya and Nata. Then his youngest sister, Nata, got married. She was gorgeous; she was often compared to Nata Vachnadze [Georgian movie star in the first half of the twentieth century]. She was unbelievably beautiful, blonde and tall. She looked nothing like my mother. My mother's grandmother was dark-haired and tiny. My mother probably followed in her footsteps. Nata died in childbirth, leaving her child motherless. The child was raised by grandmother. Then the other sisters also married: one to a Menshevik, the other to a man bearing the same last name as she, Datiko Gelashvili. My father went berserk. However, there were no close blood ties

between us. Our common ancestors, brothers Kimote and Giorga, migrated from the village of Nadaburi. We were the descendants of Giorga, while his family line could be traced back to Kimote. He proved that there were no close blood ties between us and kidnapped Marusya.

My other aunt was kidnapped by a man from Samegrelo [a region in Western Georgia] and took her to his estate in Abkhazia, without the woman's parents even knowing anything about her fate for a long time. His last name was Pirtskhalava and he spoke both Abkhazian and Megrelian. He used to be a Menshevik assassin. Those Mensheviks uprooted socialists wherever they found them, including Abkhazia. Then he worked as a railroad security officer together with my father. He used to visit us, saying that he loved our chanchuri apples. Our apples were good indeed, yet, in reality, he was keeping his eye on my aunt. He warned my father, "Don't mess with me! I have ninety-nine tokens in my pocket, just as many as the number of men I've killed!" To make it short, he was a crafty and sly man, and very strong with that. He said he had stolen more horses than there were plums on our plum tree. My father told him, "I have nothing against you. If the woman wants to marry you, so be it." My aunt, guileless as she was, bought into his boasting, sneaked out and married him. She was beautiful, resembling the other aunt, Nato, in a way; she had dark eyebrows, black curly hair; she was a wholesome woman, popular in an old-fashioned way. So he disappeared with her. My grandfather and grandmother broke into tears, knowing that he was a killer and fearing that he had killed her. My father tried to comfort them, "Don't you worry! He loves her." Indeed, one day he appeared in grandfather's front yard with my aunt and their child.

Here I am, my father-in-law! Will you let me in, or should I go back to Samegrelo?

My son, you've made it here. That's what matters!

My aunt and her family were received with arms wide open. It happened two years after their disappearance. Their daughter, my cousin, is still alive. Her name is Rusudan. Her father was later imprisoned because of my grandfather. Grandfather was subjected to dekulakization [Soviet campaign of political repressions, including arrests, deportations, and executions of millions of well-to-do farmers. More or less well-off farmers were labeled kulaks and

considered class enemies] and her father tried to convince the authorities, “Your revolutionary underground meetings were held in his basement! How dare you arrest him!” “He owns too much land,” was the reply.

Local farmers stood up for grandfather, but he said, “Give it up. These are not good people. They will shoot you and kill you. Let them take me wherever they please.” Then my uncle [Mariam’s aunt’s husband] Pirtskhalava stood up to protect him, “Come and claim him if you dare. I won’t hesitate to shoot.” He shot one of them. There were six of them however. There was no overcoming them. They caught him and tied his hands. Thus, they got both grandfather and Pirtskhalava, the latter being charged with murder. My father went to the District Committee [of the Communist Party], pleading and interceding for Pirtskhalava, “He’s a valuable asset. He’s the head of the railroad security.”

As for my grandfather, he was sent to Baku [the capital of Azerbaijan]. We have never heard from him since, save one letter. In this letter, he addressed grandmother, Sopo, saying that he asked someone else to write the letter for him since he had gone blind. Oh how they loved each other! He cried his eyes out and went blind. Then we received a note from his cellmate. The note read that grandfather had reposed; he was buried in Krasnodar [a city in Russia]. The cellmate also informed us that five or six people died of hunger there every day and that they were all buried in a common grave in Krasnodar. That’s why he didn’t know exactly where grandfather was buried. It happened in 1928. Grandmother grieved over his death so intensely that she came down with tuberculosis and died three years later.

Pirtskhalava was eventually released. I visited him a couple of times. He was a good tailor. He was especially good at designing men’s clothing. My aunt adored him. Whatever money he made he handed over to his wife to put in an iron box they had, “Here, Sonya, take it.” That box was overflowing. It was stolen after my aunt reposed. I don’t know who stole it. Anyway, my uncle [Pirtskhalava] was released. Later he took pictures with my father: how they danced on Saint George’s feast day. He was very grateful to my father.

My father became a member of the party in 1920. He joined the Bolshevik Party [In 1918, the Bolshevik Party took the name

Communist Party] even before the Bolsheviks entered the country [the Bolsheviks took over Georgia in 1921]. Everyone at the Khashuri Motive Power Depot considered him equal to Stalin's comrades-in-arms. His party membership card number was short, seventeen or eighteen. He died at the age of ninety-two. He went to the local District Committee [of the Communist Party] and turned in his party membership card, saying that he had grown too old and couldn't trust anyone. Then he died. He felt his days were drawing to a close. He died of heart failure. The new chairman of the Party Committee felt sorry for my father and would visit him at home to collect father's monthly party membership fee. My father became unable to walk and deliver his fees on his own; his knees wouldn't let him...

After getting married and leaving grandfather's home, my father found a job as a tunnel worker. Then a certain "road supervisor" appeared; he was sent from Russia. Of course, they didn't trust us much. So this man arrived with his wife and little daughter. She was seven when I was born. That man, whose last name was Sereda, was a Ukrainian. My mother always wondered what kind of name Sereda was. It didn't seem odd to my father, however, since he had served in the army.

There were workers in charge of the rails in our tunnel, yet there was no supervisor. No one had the slightest idea what he was supposed to do. My father replaced railroad ties and spoke with that man in Russian. "Gabriel, you speak Russian?" the man asked. "Yes," replied my father. Sereda then told my father he was renting a house from Chkoidze. That Chkoidze was supposed to be a road supervisor. In reality, however, he was just an ordinary worker, a good one though. So a decision was made in Russia to lay him off and appoint Sereda. He was put in charge of the railroad from the tunnel almost all the way to Khashuri. That's how he became our road supervisor. No one referred to him as an engineer, though he had an engineering background.

Sereda vacated Chkoidze's house. He said that the Chkoidzes didn't speak any Russian and asked my father if there was any way he and his family could move in with us, sharing expenses and dining together. In addition, he felt sorry for his wife for not being able to speak Russian with anyone. Thus, they moved in. I had already been baptized by Kolya, yet he yielded godparent's honor



Maro Gelashvili with parents (left) and the Seredas

in favor of Sereda's wife. Marusya was her name, if I'm not mistaken. Sereda and his family spent quite some time with us.

Then, while the Bolsheviks took over there [in Russia], the Mensheviks happened to come to power here [in Georgia], driving out Armenians and telling them to move to Yerevan. We have Armenians with an altered Georgian last name, Khutsishvili. Many of them live in Kareli.

There are also Mghebrishvilis, saying they used to be Mghebriants [Armenian family name suffix] and that father got scared and immediately changed his last name to Mhgebrishvili at the local council [After Georgia became part of the Russian Empire in 1801, it became customary to change Georgian family name suffixes into Russian ones, which provided better opportunities for advancement]. The Mensheviks believed that Georgia was to be pure, free of Russians, Tatars, Armenians. They all vacated their homes and fled. The Gorki-bound train delivered them to Batumi, from where the ship took them to Ukraine. This was the easiest route. Some were sent to Baku. Not a single Russian, Ukrainian, or Belorussian was left in Georgia. They [the Mensheviks] purged Georgia. They simply grabbed this Russian godmother of mine and kicked her out and straight to Russia. My father and mother felt so sorry. They wept, and so did we all, when this family got deported. We kept in touch, however, writing letters. A year later, after the Communists came to power, they [deportees] all returned. That's what happened in Georgia. They all returned, but my godmother never did. Then Vera [Sereda's daughter] informed us that her father had died. Our



correspondence stopped soon afterward. I don't know why. It was around 1937, and I suspect that letters sent by the Seredas were prevented from reaching us. We were completely isolated.

The Mensheviks' lawlessness proved to be a mere foray. The whole thing started in February. They established their Menshevik Guard. It was not called an army but rather a guard. They loaded their rifles and raided village by village. Unlike today, when a multitude of guns are around, the Berdan rifle was in use back then. It fired five bullets at a time. So they [the Mensheviks] prowled around, looking if anyone had a Russian wife. They made sure no one had a Russian wife.

At the end of that year, they started to pillage and party all night. They printed their own currency, bons. My father used to carry his salary in a big sack. It equaled forty rubles, yet we hardly counted the bills. We had so many of those bills that my mother stuck them up on the wall after the sovietization of the country. Mensheviks confiscated hogs from pig farmers in Akhaltsikhe, transported swine and sold them to farmers for ten bons, which equaled five rubles, not even that. Those hogs were so fat. Their owners were in distress however. They [Mensheviks] used the money they made after selling hogs to party, fool around with women and have fun.

At the beginning of the following year, my father told us, "Budyonny [Soviet cavalryman, military commander, politician and a close ally of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin] approaches. He'll pass through Baku by train and subject it to the Soviet rule, followed by Armenia, and then he'll enter our country." He said that Dashnaks, which means Mensheviks in Armenian, were in power in Armenia. Indeed, Baku was subjected to the Soviet rule, and so was Armenia. The next stop was Georgia. The Mensheviks spread rumors about the Bolsheviks, saying that they were approaching, starved to death, seizing infants and eating them. Locals were frightened. My father said there was no way a Russian would eat an infant and told them to stay put, not to migrate.

He did send us away however. He reasoned that we lived above the tunnel, and they may start bombing or shooting. We lived ten minutes from the tunnel, a kilometer away. There was a hill, and our house stood just over that hill. We had a big hazelnut tree and a lot of nuts. He brought those nuts inside and left them there along

with flour and oven-baked bread. He also placed firewood next to the fireplace and left the door open, reasoning that the guys would come in and rest. They had to cover mountain passes to Tzipi, pass through villages and reach Batumi. My father intended to leave beds as well, yet my mother argued that she would have no use for beds after they had used them. Our backyard was covered in thirteen feet of snow. My father spent three days carving a room in that snow, a couple of feet above the ground, where we stored all our beds, wheat flour, corn flour, everything we could get a hold of: pots, dishes. He covered up the entrance to that storage room, and it became indiscernible from the house after it had snowed for two or three days. Imagine how hard it snowed in our parts.

He made us travel by sleigh through thirteen feet of snow. A wagon wouldn't work under the circumstances. I was little at that time, not even a schoolchild yet. My brother, Niko, was still a suckling infant. Father had Sasha and me sit in the back, wrapping ourselves around poles fastened at the back of the sleigh with a net stretched from one pole to another to keep us from falling off. I sat there without even noticing how Sasha fell off. The wind scattered snowdrifts, hiding my brother from our sight. The oxen moved very slowly, poor things, sinking into the snow up to their bellies. Although the snow had frozen, it gave way under the weight of the oxen. The oxen moved on, while the sleigh fell into the holes made by their hooves. Then the oxen moved again and the sleigh sunk again. We travelled with such difficulties. My father returned and found my brother ten-fifteen steps behind us, lying face-up in the snow and not even crying or anything. He has always been a tough kid. Father picked him up and placed him next to mother. My mother had a shawl over her shoulders; coats were not in use back then. She held Niko to her chest and hugged that silly one [Sasha] as well.

Father told me, "Why don't you lie down on that wide board in the back. This way the wind won't blow in your face. Just cover your face with a scarf." So I lay down, grabbed the board with both hands and cuddled on the sleigh.

We were brought to a big house. It was the house of Aunt Irine. She had five sons and five daughters-in-law. They all lived in one house. It was an old-fashioned house. All the village women with

children gathered in the hall, fifty feet by fifty feet. This was the Monastery village.

We went over one hill, leaving the tunnel far behind. We passed the Lomidze residence on the right. They were not afraid of bombing. My father told them that no one would eat their children and advised them to stay at home. He had brothers there. He said, "I have to leave because I live right above the tunnel. It wouldn't be right to stay." Local residents brought their own food to Aunt Irine's and boiled beans in a big pot. They fed us, children, first and then ate themselves if there was anything left. We didn't stay there long. Father told us, "You've got just three days to wait. They're already in Armenia and they're coming here soon." Then he went back home to check on the guys, that is, soldiers, staying at our place, and told them, "This is my house and I left you with everything I had. I don't have any bread. I cannot go to Khashuri to buy some because there is no road. I took all the bread I had to where I'm staying now." He couldn't say he had stashed bread in a bag in such and such place! The granary was locked; there was some flour. He told them that some wheat flour was stored there. "Take it if you open it and eat it if you can." He also said that there were whole ears of corn.

They answered, "No. We don't need anything. Hazelnut will do." They ended up staying for two days only. After they finished one sack of hazelnuts, two were still left, the second sack missing some of its contents. They must have filled up their bags. They had no bombs to start bombing; just the ammo and rifles. There were Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars: all kinds. I don't know. My father rightly relied on educated guesswork.

Indeed, after Yerevan, they [Bolsheviks] entered Tbilisi. There was hardly any resistance here. Underground Bolsheviks were all over the place, preparing people. When the Mensheviks saw that the Bolsheviks were approaching, they fled in advance. They simply walked over the pass. The whole division fled to Western Georgia, and not one soldier was captured. Who would resist them [the Bolsheviks] in that knee-high snow! Not a single Menshevik fought against them at the tunnel either. They stopped at the other end of the tunnel. At one point, they stopped the train, planning to fire at the Bolsheviks as they entered the tunnel. But the motor power depot workers drove a steam locomotive, rained a shower

of bullets, and they [the Mensheviks] dispersed. Khashuri Depot underground workers were prepared in advance.

Now this is how the Bolsheviks entered the Monastery village where we were staying since they were to pass through this place in order to reach the pass. That's exactly where the Mensheviks fled, saying that they [the Bolsheviks] cut up and ate children. My father said, "Be wise! They will come and, whatever their field ration is (there were given four pieces of sugar), they will give it to the kids." Indeed, a Red Army soldier came and said hello in Russian, "Don't be afraid. Don't worry. I'm a Russian, a communist. I'm here to help you." My father translated his words. "My friends are about to arrive. May they warm up their hands here, please?" An elderly man, Aunt Irine's father, old army soldier, rose up and answered, "Of course, they may. We have beans and we have cornbread here." Grownups were left hungry. Poor souls, they ate beans and cornbread; they brewed tea, and then my father had them divide their sugar in two, so they ended up drinking unsweetened tea. They gave us, children, pieces of sugar. They gave us sugar! Some of them had families; they picked up some of the children present. One young man lifted up my brother, Niko, kissed him, and told my father, "I have a son like him." They were mostly young men. We fed them everything we had. This particular group came to us. They went to the farmers in groups of five, asking to let them warm up. Those elderly farmers who had served in the army conversed with them. Others only said, "Hello! Please come in." That's all they knew. They let them warm up their hands and treated them to whatever they had. You know how we, the Georgians, are. Those who possessed nothing gave them at least vodka and wine to drink, broke cornbread with them, and then they left. As my father found out later, they spread all over the village, going to some houses in groups of four, or even three. At least six or seven came to our house. My father went outside and welcomed them, saying that the house was big enough.

That village is called Monastery because it contains the site of a ruined church. That's where the commander of the division gathered his soldiers in that snow. They asked for grease to polish their boots, saying that they had to walk through snow. They all [farmers] spared grease. They bid us farewell and headed toward the pass. They were unable to catch up with the Mensheviks,

however, because, according to the Tzipi [the tunnel uniting the railroad systems of Eastern and Western Georgia] night guard, they, including those who initially left on foot, fled by train. They hopped on a freight train and fled toward Batumi. In Zestaphoni [a city in Western Georgia], people dismantled rails, thus forcing them to walk on foot. While these [the Bolsheviks] were chasing them, the Mensheviks made it to Batumi [a city port in Western Georgia], where some sneaked on ships, while others changed their clothes and concealed their Menshevik identity. My uncle, the husband of my aunt, Marusya, one with the last name Gelashvili, stayed there in Monastery. Where else could he go! My father continued to serve as a tunnel guard.

I was about nine when I first went to school. Younger children were not accepted. In addition, I had to walk about two miles to get to the station and then take a train to Khashuri, where I attended a school for railroaders' children. It was very far from us. Only my brother and I went to school from the village. We didn't have friends either. Father used to see us off. He dug through thirteen feet of snow and led the way for us. What a crybaby my brother was! I was tougher. My feet froze, yet I never told my father about it, feeling sorry for him. We held petroleum-soaked kernelless ears of corn. We lighted them, and they lasted us almost to the station. When my brother's hand started to ache, I took over. We wore warm gloves. They were given to my father to hold the signal lantern. At the end of each year, he received a new pair, while we wore the old ones. They were so heavy he carried them on his way back from the station. He packed two pairs in his bag and left. Before leaving, he unlocked luxurious sleeping cars for us (he had the key), saying, "Hop in! Hop in!" He pushed us inside and locked the door. He instructed us, "Tell the conductor when you reach the Khashuri junction that you need to get off, that you go to school there." Then he headed back to the village. We weren't allowed on that train. It was not a special train. We were supposed to get on it in Sakhalkho. The conductor came to know us. He told us, "Oh you little rascals! Your father let you in again?!" and let us off at the station. We got on the train at three in the morning. At three-thirty we were at the Khashuri station. We did our homework in that stale air. It got dark again at 8:30 pm. We went over to the school to wake up the night guard so that he would start up the

coal stove. It was freezing in the school building; we were shivering. He lit it up, and we sat at the door.

Zakro Zazikashvili, a former priest, was our teacher up to the fourth grade. In the past, a teacher usually led a given class from the first grade up to the fourth grade. Oh how I loved my teacher! I cried my eyes out when he left us and took over another class. All the children cried.

I was an all A student. My brother was also an A student. We encountered difficulties, yet we did better than others. Niko Manjavidze, a teacher of Georgian, was our head teacher. “These kids get up at three in the morning, cover ten miles to get here, and they are all A students, boy,” he told Bibileishvili from Khashuri [a classmate]. “You’re a big guy and you have no clue what the Georgian language is about. I only feel embarrassed before these kids every time I look at them.” He called me Little Maro. I was the smallest kid [in the class]. “Well, Little Maro, please tell us,” he used to address me. We had an exercise. We staged mock trials for literary characters. We had small trials within our group. We selected defense attorneys, prosecutors and judges, and we tried characters of various stories, for example, Bakhva Pulava by Egnate Ninoshvili [(1859-1894) a famous Georgian writer of the nineteenth century]. Some we acquitted and some we convicted. We had an Armenian woman, Davidova, who taught us Russian. Davidovs can be either Russians or Armenians. She may have been Russian, I don’t know. My brother had such neat Russian handwriting; the teacher was crazy about him.

I did my homework by lamplight. We had one lamp standing on a low table with notebooks placed in the corners, and we children, the three of us, did our homework at this table. It was our father’s merit that we all graduated from school. He supported us while we were in school, acquiring textbooks for us; he would sell his last shirt just to buy books for us. Back in those days, textbooks were not renewed, so my brother used the books I had previously studied, while he, in turn, passed books down to our youngest brother. All we had at that time was Deda Ena [Georgian language primer, authored and compiled by Iakob Gogebashvili (1840-1912), a great Georgian author and educator, the founder of scientific pedagogy in Georgia] and arithmetic textbooks.

He [father], however, prohibited me from reading other types of books. I went to the Khashuri Library to get books. I read them in secret from my father. As soon as I came home, I swiftly shoved them under the table linens. He had a habit of saying whenever he noticed a book, "Leave that thing alone. There is nothing worthwhile in it." I was fourteen when I started reading books. There was a library at my mother's house. I read Tristan and Isolde after borrowing it from grandfather's house. My mother brought books from there on the sly. She put fruits on top of everything in her purse. My father looked at it and asked, "What is this?" "Nothing. I just went apple picking for Saint Elijah's Day," answered my mother. Then she sent me to fetch Budeshuri wine grapes [one of the oldest grape varieties in Georgia]. This variety of grapes did not grow in our parts. We did grow grapes, though they were the Alikarti type only. We grew both red and white grapes. One touch on those grapes (provided that grapes were really ripe) could cause seeds to pop out. Ripe grapes fell on the ground and one had to pick them up. On the other hand, grandmother grew Kharistvala and Budeshuri variety grapes, all kinds of them. So [in reality] my mother sent me there to return books.

My mother taught us a lot. She was respected by all in the village. My mother was considered a poor man's savior in the village. And she had saved many. She washed strips of old bed sheets with toilet soap in order to make bandages, covering them with a layer of soap three times, then rinsing and drying them outdoors. No ironing whatsoever. She washed her hands thoroughly, rubbed her fingers with alcohol, cut bed sheets this way [into four-inch-wide strips] and rolled up strips like this [into inch-wide rolls]. She rolled them up and stored them in a special sack she had sewn. Whenever fat cattle were slaughtered, farmers came over saying, "Luba, we brought you some tallow here." It absolutely had to be cow fat; she never used old bull fat. She melted that fat in a special frying pan and then poured it on plates. If she had any leftovers, she poured a double layer to work on it later. While the tallow was still hot, mother dipped a cotton string from both ends. Then she left enough room for hanging here (in the middle) and hung it up in a dark cupboard. It gets chilly in the village, and she kept a cupboard with tableware for guests in the attic. One needed a lot of tableware in the past. There were nails fastened inside the

cupboard to store tallow and those strips. The whole village used to come to us. Whenever someone had a cut, he came to my mother, “Luba, please help me!” She dressed and bandaged the wounds and said, “Don’t remove it and don’t touch it!”

My mother was a village medicine woman. She treated everything: pneumonia, brain inflammation... She had goatskins for brain inflammation, small goatskins. She had a caregiver fill it up with cold water and placed it on a patient’s head every thirty minutes. Patients with brain inflammation had their temperature normalized and opened their eyes by the following morning. Doctors usually sent patients with brain inflammation to the hospital right away. And how were people supposed to transport patients? There were no automobiles back in those days! Doctors arrived in “draisines”, visiting railroaders exclusively. My father invited them, paid them money, bringing them from Khashuri, just out of pity for farmers. They told my father, “Gabo, if he’s not a railroader, don’t waste our time. Don’t make us go there.” “What? Leave him for dead because he’s not a railroader? I don’t want him to die! He’s my fellow collective farmer. It’s all on me. Let’s go home now; nice meal’s on me. Here is your ‘draisine’.” They pulled it off the rails and left it standing at the booth. There usually were driver and a doctor in the back, all puffed up like a general. My mother treated them to fried chicken, had them drink wine and get really wasted, and then joked with them, “Now tell me, I shouldn’t call you anymore?” “Of course, you should, of course. I too feel sorry for them. It’s just that the railroaders’ [outpatient] clinic strictly demanded we make house calls to treat our tradesmen only.”

That’s who my parents were.

My mother taught us how to read and write. My father only knew how to sign his name in Russian. He spoke well though. He wrote “report” on accountancy documents and signed them. He knew Georgian well, though he was self-taught. I remember his beautifully curved letters.

A general’s daughter, who had a Georgian father and a Russian mother, happened to have fallen in love with my father when he served in the army. She told her father she wanted to learn Georgian. She suggested he [Mariam’s father] teach her colloquial Georgian, while she offered to teach him how to read and write. She knew the basics but couldn’t speak any Georgian. She started



teaching my father and managed to teach him literacy skills in full, while she herself learned colloquial Georgian. Then she made a statement to her father, whether you like it or not, I'm going with him to Georgia. There was no way a general would let his daughter come here! Especially since he knew that my father was a hireling and arrived in the army dressed in shabby clothes. She kept writing him letters in Georgian for a long time. Letters were sent to his friend's address, and he picked them up there.

My father had gone through many tribulations, and that's why I respected him. He used to instruct us, "Work hard to make a living. Never accept easy money, it'll eventually cost you twice as much. As soon as the sky grows dark, a decent woman and a decent man should stay at home. Never idle your time away and keep busy day and night." My brother constantly complained about stomachaches and refused to go work in the field or elsewhere, "Mother, daddy has a sickle for me, but I have a stomachache." "Leave him alone, man. Cannot you see the child is sick!" "It's called laziness, he's not sick. Had he been born to a German family, he would have his head cut off," my father replied. "His stomachache started right when I handed him the sickle."

Father himself was a very hard-working man. He had to be first to sow, first to harvest, first to shuck corn. He was a special man. After harvesting corn, he unloaded it from the cart (he had a worker to help him). Being a very meticulous man, he picked up ears of corn from the cart and stacked them oh so neatly instead of dumping them in a pile in an unorganized manner. He stacked them so cozily that all one had to do was pick and shuck corn one by one. He stacked ears of corn under the walnut tree, while my mother summoned young boys and girls whom she supplied with rouge and for whom she designed robes. What they did is called mamitadi in Shida Kartli [region in Georgia, its central part], while Imeretians [Imereti: a region in Western Georgia] call it helping while supping. They arrived in the evening, after they had finished their chores. Seven-thirty in the evening is considered early in summer. So they arrived at half past seven and worked until two in the morning. My mother had hens slaughtered, chickens fried, homemade wine ready, and a low table set up under that walnut tree. They sat around the table, some sitting with knees straight, others just squatting. There were quite a number of them, up to

fifty boys and girls; boys on one side and girls on the other. My father wouldn't let them sit together, saying that girls might want to straighten their knees, and it would be uncalled-for to place their legs in guys' laps. He sat at the head of the table, and they indulged in drinking wine all night. At dawn, when they became sufficiently buzzed, boys lay on the haystack piled for drying outside the walnut tree shade; but not women because they didn't drink as much. They loved visiting with us.

Father was not overly talkative; he was a wise man. When conversing with someone, he let the other party speak, he listened, said a couple of sentences, and convinced the other party. For example, when a young man wanted to marry, he came to my father and asked, "Uncle, I'm about to marry Liza, Bluashvili's daughter." "Don't do that, son, don't. Her grandmother was ugly, and she may give birth to ugly children. I know you've taken a fancy to the Chitiashvili girl in Tezvevi [a village]. She's a wholesome girl, and I would suggest you marry her." They listened to my father, and everything turned out well. My mother was the same way. She made rouge, and all dark-skinned girls glowed after applying it. She bought a chalk-like substance and brewed it with white threads, then added some butter, and this was her rouge. She always had beet juice ready for coloring; she poured it in a separate bottle and gave it away with rouge. The girls placed a few drops of it on cotton, applied it, and turned into beauties. Thus, my mother also helped young girls in their quests for their future husbands.

I was helping my father plow fields one time. I'm short now, and I was even shorter back in those days, barely matching the height of a plow at the age of eleven.

Oxen understood my father. He yelled, "Baghdana, come this way!" and Baghdana immediately complied. "Nisha, come here!" Nisha was hesitant, however, being afraid of father. "Oh, you'll make me break your nose!" Then he punched the approaching ox in the nose like this, causing it to bleed. Mother came over and said, "Have you no fear of God at all?" "It should obey me when I tell it to come." "It's not a child. It's an ox." "I don't know about an ox, but its ears are bigger than a child's." Nisha stared at my father as though promising not to act up again. Hmm, hmm, it exhaled deeply and shed tears. My mother walked up to it and wiped away the tears with her apron. "Alright, Nisha, he won't hurt

you anymore. Just listen to him when he calls you, you fool you!” my mother said. Then Nisha learned her lesson and approached every time it heard my father’s command. “There you go! It’s getting dark. Move!” yelled my father and the ox pulled the plow. I lead the plow. One has to lead the ox on the edge of the tracks in order to plow properly. After all, the ox does not know where it’s supposed to step.

I grabbed the ox by the rope in the middle of what they call the yoke and walked on the edge of the tracks. I walked on the plowed tracks, while the chisel passed through the unplowed tracks. Suddenly I noticed the chisel pass by my feet and I found myself standing next to my father. “Girl, what are you doing here?” “Dad,” I answered, “I couldn’t keep pace. Why are you yelling at me?” In addition, the field was so rocky that my feet kept slipping. Thus, the ox, all sweaty, ran away. There was no way my father could catch up with it on that slope. There was a strip of land running downhill to the river. The ox drank water. My father walked up to the ox, herded it back up. As soon as the ox came uphill, it died of heart failure because it had drunk water while heavily perspiring.

The Lomidzes immediately learned about it. We lived on the slope of the pass, while they resided above us. They noticed us swarming busily on the threshing floor.

The threshing floor was located on an elevation. It ran uphill on the slope and downhill below, being part of our property; it was quite sizeable, half a mile in width and almost two miles from top to bottom. We worked on that land, and it yielded good corn and good wheat. There’s a rule: corn must be sown one year, while wheat must be sown on the same land the following year, so that stems left after harvesting may undergo fermentation until the following year.

Thus, the Lomidzes noticed what was going on and ran down the slope with baskets in their hands. The ox was still breathing and bleeding from the mouth. My father’s brother brought a knife. “What is it?” asked my father. “Slaughter it while it’s still alive! You cannot let so much meat go wasted!” It was a very large ox. “Get out of here with that knife! I’m not going to feed you my ox! Dream on!”

He sent everyone away, waited for the ox to die, wept, walked down to the riverbank, and hewed a tomb in rock, so that no one

would dig it up. He dragged this huge ox with a rope, down to the riverbank, placed it in the tomb, and covered it with rocks and dirt. Can you believe it! We mourned; no laughter was allowed at our home for two months. We were left with but one ox. We ended up borrowing a second ox once in a while. We still had two strips of land to plow, and we had to pay money for the extra ox. That ox was impossible! Our oxen, on the contrary, were like human beings. It went off to the right, and then to the left, while my father couldn't afford getting angry with it, or beat it, for the reason that it was somebody else's ox. He also remembered how our ox had died on him. We, his children, have been fond of cattle since childhood. We petted our cow so tenderly! My mother also loved cattle; our cow understood her.

My mother was feeling under the weather one time, and my aunt came over to milk the cow. My mother went outside with a cane and told the cow, "Irema, I cannot milk you today as I'm ill. Someone else is milking you today. So, don't you dare kick, or else you'll get it from me!" My mother stood by, while my aunt milked the cow. It didn't produce much milk, however, while usually producing about a gallon when my mother milked it.

My mother was not a sturdy woman. She was constantly ill, having been raised in a prince's family and presently living in a working man's family. Milking cows was a maid's duty at the princely family. My mother didn't milk cows or distill vodka; she only worked with a sewing machine and baked cornbread. She knew how to cook all kinds of dishes, pastry, and nazuki [traditional Georgian sweet bread]. They made nazuki back in those days, no other pastry was customary. They baked nazuki in the oven. When she came to this place, she found hens, chickens, pigs. We had a spring past a small ravine, and carrying water in a jug from there was the only thing my father wouldn't let her do. He sent us with jugs after I turned sixteen. Those were four-gallon jugs. He told me, "You're a young woman now. Swing this jug over your shoulder. You're a village girl. Act like one! Don't be like your mother!" The jug was made of clay. It had a handle to carry it on one's shoulder. You place a rag here (on the shoulder) to prevent your shoulder from wetting. I carried the jug back, yet I couldn't quite make it all the way back. The path to the spring passed over a bridge. Then I had to cross the small ravine and ascend dirt stairs.

Imagine ascending them in wet weather! It was very hard for me. I took off the jug and put it down once in a while, then mounted it back on my shoulder and ascended a bit higher. There were big basswoods. I sat there and took rest every so often.

I've been through a lot. That's why I never grew taller. Both my brothers were tall. My eldest brother was of medium height, chubby and broad-shouldered.

It got so hot in summer that we nearly overheated in stockings. When my father was on duty, I pulled down my stockings, then my mother gave a shout, "You're father's coming. Pull them up!" One day I pulled down my stockings and covered myself with mother's apron. That day father was not supposed to come home, but for some reason he did. "Pilnaty is back at work, so my schedule has changed." He left to work the nightshift but ended up coming home. It was half past eight and he was already home.

We had a custom. After having worked all day, a man was supposed to wash his feet. Father worked in dirt, and my mother would never let him go to bed with dirty feet. She was a very clean woman. She was reared in a princely family. You've seen her in the picture. Look at her in 1914! You couldn't find a woman like her in the village in 1914 (with a long bib and a medallion)! I covered my front with an apron. My father realized why I had it in front of me. I poured water and started washing his feet. He waved off the apron, "Take care of your feet first and then wash mine." I replied, "Dad, you were gone, plus I was about to go to bed. Forgive me." "Don't do it again! You're supposed to take them off right before going to bed. Wash them and go to sleep!" I told him I had already washed my feet, never putting the stockings back on.

You think I really washed them? I only took the stockings off and wandered aimlessly. Then I became unable to wash my feet or do anything. My mother dared not saying anything either. He [father] was a very tough man. No wonder! He served in Germany. Not a single shred of paper would be tolerated in our yard. If I'm not mistaken, our yard was over 300 yards by 200 yards. He walked along the fence once in a while, holding a stick with a nail attached to it and cleaning up leaves or pieces of paper blown in by the wind. My mother swept the whole front yard in advance. She swept it clean of everything there was to sweep. Only oat-grass remained in the yard. The house had to be spotless inside

as well, of course. I remember father picking up a mirror, a simple mirror, and making sure [picks up a magazine and looks at it askance] it wasn't dusty. "Leave me alone!" my mother told him. "I have so many small kids, and now you're checking mirrors on me!" "Woman, if you cannot handle it, let me know, and I'll help you. I'm not telling you to polish the mirrors. Just say they need polishing, and I'll polish them." And he meant it.

They treated each other with great respect, especially father. He lit the fireplace first, then brewed tea for her and, only after it got warm enough in the house, turned to her, "Get up, man!" They called each other "man". Yep!

He was a party member [Communist Party], yet he respected her so much he let her go to church. "I cannot give up going to church," my mother told him. He replied, "Don't tell anyone I know about it." So my mother asked women, collective farmers, who attended church, "Don't tell Gabo, please. I have to leave now. Otherwise, he won't let me come here again."

My father had a habit of making the sign of the cross. I've seen him cross himself, commit the coming day into Christ's hands, drink half a shot of vodka, break off a piece of cornbread, and go outside. He looked around and made sure no one had seen him. We all ducked under the blankets, knowing that he was about to look back. He didn't hold it back from mother but only from us.

In 1928, I was a fourteen-year-old girl, a member of Komsomol [The Communist Union of Youth, the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. Soviet Councils [Local governmental bodies in the Soviet Union] had not been elected yet. Chairmen of the Revolutionary Committees [Bolshevik-led organizations in Soviet Russia and in areas of its activities established to serve as provisional governments and temporary Soviet administrations on territories under the control of the Red Army] were still in power. Poor farmers were in great need but they [revolutionary committees] couldn't help them. The houses of some collapsed, while others lost their oxen. The Communists had to help them!

We were summoned and given two sewn sacks full of ribbons, this wide (three inches). We spent all night driving 300-400 pins through these ribbons. Then we cut them into small pieces of paper (square and approximately an inch and a half in length) with round seals that read Khashuri Revolutionary Committee.

We worked in pairs. We arrived in Tbilisi by the Moscow-Bound People's Train with the wealthiest passengers. One of us carried a box with a security seal. We would never steal the box, but it was sealed nonetheless. We approached the passengers and pinned our small pieces of paper to their collars, or ties, or suits if they wore them. All I had to do was say "help!" and pin that paper. We said [in Russian] "help!" and pinned a piece of paper, that's all we did. Neither men nor women were able to utter a word. They only reached for their pockets, some pulling out a ruble, some larger coins and some smaller. We went through the whole train in this manner. Everyone we pinned donated money. There were eight in each railroad car. No one had ever refused to donate for as long as we continued walking through trains. Those in upper bunks asked us to pin them and dropped money down. They had no use for those paper ribbons. They could throw them away, yet they were proud of having helped the authorities. In addition, those who had ribbons previously pinned were not asked to donate again. They all sat there with those ribbons pinned.

Then we returned by the Batumi-bound train. It arrived in Khashuri at seven-thirty in the evening. The following morning we went to the Revolutionary Committee. Then the deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Committee, the secretary, a worker and a farmer opened the sack. There had to be a worker present: a railroader, or a porter, or someone who replaces railroad ties, and a more or less literate farmer. They were in charge of counting the money. The chairman sat separately. Coins prevailed in the sack. Whenever they counted a hundred rubles, they put the money in front of the chairman. Then they took the money to the savings bank in Khashuri and exchanged it for bills. They brought the bills back and bought shingles, or oxen for those who didn't have them. They helped the needy.

Then, in 1929-1930, when I was already in the eighth grade, we, members of the Communist Union of Youth, organized charity dinners. We baked cheese bread at home, brought homemade wine, everyone contributed as much as he or she could, so that we could avoid spending money. That Zumbatov's front yard in Kvishkheta, in front of the Revolutionary Committee building, one located on the plateau, still had its blue tables. We served meals on these tables. Two union members stood at the gate and sold

tickets for an abaz-uzaltuni each, which equals thirty tetri. Some gave us a ruble, some two-fifths of a ruble, and some five uzultuns. An uzultun equals ten tetri. It was a widespread term among us, farmers, as well as merchants. When a Jew would come and sell calico, he would say it cost a ruble and an uzultun, that is, one ruble and 10 tetri. Thus, we also handed this money to the Revolutionary Committee. Those who paid were seated at the table, eating and drinking wine. Couples came as well.

This is what happened at one of the charity dinners. Kolya Ghonghadze, who was an only child, was in love with the daughter of the Siradzes. The father of this Ghonghadze was a wealthy beekeeper. Siradze's daughter was an orphan. She was fatherless, and the Ghonghadzes didn't want an orphan woman. You know how they used to give dowries on behalf of soon-to-be-married young women. This young man found out that the girl's mother was about to give her in marriage [to someone else] and asked her if it was true. "What can I do, Valiko? You won't marry me. Your folks don't want me. If you move in with us, how's my mother supposed to feed you? And your folks won't let you go to begin with as you're their only child. It's not my fault." "Let's go for a walk," suggested the young man. There was an alley below the Zumbatov residence leading to the Ghonghadze's house. He led the girl into this alley and killed her with a knife. There was a river nearby, they called it Beghletula. He secretly dumped her in that river. Then the girl's body was discovered. The young man, however, got away with it. His parents said, "He came home and said that the young woman walked him home. Then he wanted to walk her home but she said, I'm betrothed and I don't want anybody to see us." Now that's politics! They couldn't convict Valiko. He grew old and never married. His parents were miserable. He grew old and died, miserable alone.

Do you know what happened to the Zumbatovs I mentioned earlier? In 1921, before the coming of the Bolsheviks, the prince summoned the farmers to the threshing floor for threshing. He supervised them from above, "Faster! Faster!" They were forced to run the oxen fast; he wouldn't let them do it slowly. He was a mean man, God forgive me, and he deserved to die. One ox died on the threshing floor. He made the leading farmer bring his wife and yoke her. This woman made two circles with a threshing board,



collapsed and gave up the ghost. The husband buried her, never saying a word. He couldn't sue the prince! What was he supposed to do? He was dealing with a nobleman.

Zumbatov had two sons living with him, one was seventeen and the other was seven. His daughter, Ekaterine, was a student in Leningrad. He had sent his eldest son to serve in the army. His last name was Zumbatov, although in reality they were Sumbatashvilis. However, since his boy was registered with the army as Zumbatov, the father also assumed this last name. We were no longer allowed to call them the Sumbatashvilis.

Back in those days, before they [the Bolsheviks] entered, Socialists were hiding in the forest. Some of those Bolsheviks were depot workers and some were farmers. There were the brothers Nemsadze. They attacked the Zumbatovs at night and slaughtered the whole family: Zumbatov, his wife, their son and maid, even their page. Because they stood up for them [the Zumbatovs], that's why. The seven-year-old son hid under the bed. He later became a military commander. He was admitted into the Communist Party.

Katyusha [diminutive for Ekaterine] graduated from a monastery school. She knew Russian and also studied culture or something. Prince Mukhran-Batoni conveyed a telegram to her (farmers didn't know the address) that read, "Your father mistreated the farmers. They slaughtered his whole family. Make necessary arrangements."

Katyusha was associated with the Socialists in Leningrad. She arrived in Tbilisi, found a small parcel of wild land at the bank of the Mtkvari River [Starting in northeastern Turkey, Mtkvari flows through Turkey to Georgia, then to Azerbaijan, and into the Caspian Sea], on a plateau. She buried her mother, father and brother there, and on the same day laid a foundation and built the Church of Saint Barbara because the church in Kvishkheti [ a village in Eastern Georgia] was dedicated to Saint Barbara as well. That's why. She was unable to bury them there [in Kvishkheti] because she was told, "They've done such things that if you bury them here, their bodies will be snatched." So she buried them in secrecy. No one knew about it. The asphalt laid by her is still visible in the church. If one enters Saint Barbara's and looks attentively, he'll notice the prince's grave right where the icon of Christ is placed for veneration. His wife is buried on one side and his son on the other. She built it and encircled it with a three-foot-thick wall.

When the church was expanded, the entrance part was blown up, yet the foundation remained unharmed. The church had a fence from the Mtkvari River side as well, and its gates were secured by iron chains. She hired a sacristan as she was afraid the church would be blown up. At first, noblemen and princes were buried in those premises. Later Katyusha ordered the opening of the gate and let everyone be buried there. The place grew large, and the three-foot-thick wall was dismantled. The bricks belonged to the church, so no one could take them. They were piled in front of the church and were used by people for graves.

There was a wild plateau at a distance of approximately a mile from my village, Beghleti. It was surrounded by oaks. Its slopes were so steep that cattle couldn't ascend them. Since cattle couldn't ascend such steep heights, the locals started to carry and bury their dead there.

Then Kola Mtiulishvili said, "Don't touch the plain," and built a church with his own savings. Locals didn't have a church before. They had to go to Kvishkheti. The church was very small, only fitting four or five people in width. It was pretty long, though, because it had to have an altar where the priest comes from. The priest hung a bell, a very big bell; its ringing could be heard in Kvishkheti.

Kola only served services for the departed. This church built by him has survived to this day. He said, "Why should I build a church in Kvishkheti? It's a large village. They don't need it." Then our local farmers volunteered to carry materials uphill. They carried such big stones on their backs! He built the church in 1916-1917. We were baptized two years earlier. The Communists entered and right away put a lock on it. It happened in 1927-1928. Priest Kola turned to the Revolutionary Committee, "Open my church. I'll take my sacred items elsewhere. Icons won't stand in your way, let them hang. Have the farmers bring chairs and open a school for illiterate adults. If you don't have a teacher, I can teach." Kola taught for a while, but later he started having a hard time walking from Kvishkheti. He was an elderly man. He completed a course in the Theological Seminary together with Stalin [Stalin took a course in the Tbilisi Theological Seminary in 1894-1899. In 1899, he was expelled for missing his final exams]. Then he told the Communists, "If you don't leave, I'll write a letter to Soso [diminutive for Joseph, that is, Stalin] himself." He was Stalin's classmate.

The second [teacher] was Kapanadze. He was a comrade-in-arms of the Socialists in Baku. He was dispatched to the Khashuri Depot for political agitation purposes. That's where he admitted my father into the party.

That Mtiulishvili [Priest Kola] was straight from the Gori Theological Seminary where Stalin also studied and from where he was expelled because a big book of the Socialists was found in his home. They reasoned he wouldn't make a good priest, confiscated all his books and gave him a warning. He filed a written request, asking to return his books and promising to drop out of the seminary. In 1917, when Kola was building the church, he knew that they would come. We were his godchildren, and my father knew all his secrets. He came to us and told us about them. When a mother brings her child to receive Holy Communion, the child should do so on an empty stomach, yet Priest Kola told my mother, "Stephanovna [patronymic, daughter of Stephen], feed your children. The Beghleti children get hungry and eat licorice, and this licorice gets stuck between their teeth every time I serve them communion. Feed your children. They will be forgiven."

My father secretly made the sign of the cross at home. He never let us see him do it though. Nevertheless, I've seen him on a numerous occasions. "Jesus Christ, our Savior," he made the sign of the cross three times, "be my supporter in all my deeds." Then he downed vodka, broke off a piece of cornbread and left for work. My mother used to say, "He crosses himself on the sly, alright!" I asked her not to tell, lest he be fired and die from sorrow.

My brother and I were baptized by Priest Kola. He also christened us. He used to bring candy to hang on the Christmas tree on New Year's Eve. The Christmas tree was decorated with snacks only. There were no decorations back in those days.

By the way, he also served the liturgy in the Kvishkhети Church. Today Kvishkhети no longer has Saint Barbara's Church. It collapsed after an earthquake in Communist times, and it hasn't been restored to this day. Our church was also extremely run-down until my brother built the stairs. When the brother of my father's father died, his sons, both artists, restored the church. They embellished it with wall paintings and made an inscription, "This church was restored in the summer of 2003 by me, Varlam

Gelashvili, 'Beard' (he inscribed his nickname because he had a beard), and Vera Ananiashvili.”

I remember Stalin's visit in 1930 or 1931. We, members of the Communist Union of Youth, as well as pioneers, were summoned to stand there and sing Blossoming Rosebud [a poem by Stalin]. No one listened! The train stopped, Stalin disembarked, looked around, and gestured to the guard to go back into the car. Then his full-time bodyguard, a Russian, I don't remember his last name, Federenko or something, he told the other guards, "Better be safe. We'll walk down one street and you follow us on another." He [Stalin] first approached his comrade-in-arms from Baku, because Mtiulishvili lived near the church, uphill and far away.

He [Stalin] kept up correspondence with Petre [Peter] in the past. "How are you?" he asked. "Well, I live in a hut. I couldn't get a hold of enough money to build a second floor and relax." He didn't complain because he hoped to get him to send money. "Man, let me get my salary and I'll send you the money. Go ahead and build a second floor." When he arrived, he called him "Petrushka" [diminutive for Peter] just as he used to in Baku. Poor soul, he came outside, opened his front yard door, and only uttered "Soselo" [diminutive for Joseph] and collapsed right there, on the ground. "I'm on vacation and was on my way to Borjomi. I'm only checking whether you've built a second floor with my money." Then he went to Mtiulishvili and visited with him as well.

We were not allowed to leave the railroad station until he returned and boarded the train. We stood there from ten in the morning until five in the evening, hungry and standing at ease. We weren't even allowed to drink water.

Finally, when he was on his way back, the guards followed him up another street, at a distance, so he couldn't see them. He walked up Chala Street, while they followed on Gamarjveba Street so that they all had already boarded the train by the time he covered Chala Street. Thus, he approached with his three personal bodyguards. He was also accompanied by a translator. They [bodyguards] had to know what the conversation was about. He said, "A bodyguard should know what I'm talking about." That's the kind of man he was.

The train started off and so did we. We were nearly starved to death. He spent two weeks in Borjomi. He made friends with

everyone who was on vacation there in those two weeks. "I was so pleased. I spoke with local farmers. People are in great need in Georgia, and it has been held back from me, no one has told me." There was one vacationer, a forester, who told him [Stalin] that his salary was twenty rubles and that he covered thirty-five miles around the forest every day. He [Stalin] called the District Committee and ordered them to pay that man eighty rubles and give him special clothing made of latex rubber, because he had to walk through shrubs in his shabby outfit. He was given clothing to wear indoors and outdoors, and he was given eighty rubles. Then that man spoke on the radio and expressed his gratitude.

Then he [Stalin] met with a mineral water bottler. "How much is your salary?" "Seventeen-eighteen rubles, depending on how many bottles I fill up." "How much do you get paid per bottle?" "Five kopeks." "Five kopeks? You operate the machine manually and they pay you five kopeks?"

My sister worked there when she lost her husband. They all got a raise. The bottlers were paid seventy-five rubles and they were allowed to take five bottles of Borjomi [Georgian mineral water] with them. My brother-in-law brought five bottles of Borjomi every day. Then he got a job for his wife; they worked together. She was a teacher and she had told Stalin that the Georgian language was about to vanish. We were gradually allowed to hold our meetings in Georgian, while before they proceeded in Russian. A Russian person used to give a speech in plants, sewing factories, the motor depot, explaining what the meeting was about. Then a Georgian, Chairman of the Party Committee, would say the same thing in Georgian. The chairman was not a Russian, he was a Georgian. Thus, meetings used to be held in two languages. Later, however, meetings were held in Georgian everywhere save the railroad. They were no longer in Russian.

As a young woman, I spoke Russian. Instead of asking "Are you getting off at the next stop?" in Georgian, I asked in Russian. What was wrong with me? I was speaking to a Georgian woman and I could have told her in Georgian! "Yes," she replied in Russian. Shame on both of us!

I graduated from middle school in 1930. In 1934, I graduated from vocational school at the Gymnasium (School) for Young Men. The gymnasium was located past the department store, one that

was recently renovated on the hill. I cried my eyes out when it burned down. In the past, in order to enroll in vocational school, you didn't have to pass any exams but only submit a paper to verify that you were a worker's or a farmer's child. After that, it was up to them to select a branch for you.

For some reason, all the girls wanted to study sewing, and the Vocational School for Mechanical Sewing was opened by decree from Moscow. Such branches as mechanical sewing, ceramics, and leather art were introduced. Someone had to take care of the skins of slaughtered cattle! The skins were sent to Moscow. Then we purchased salted leather made from the skins of our oxen back from Moscow. Our people wished to keep those skins locally and decided to open a slaughterhouse.

There had been no slaughterhouse before. The meat processing factory opened in my time. They started slaughtering [cattle]. When the boys were in their fourth year in school, the slaughterhouse opened and they underwent practical training there. This was before the war [WW II]. I enrolled in the vocational school in 1932, and in 1934 I was already undergoing practical training in Moscow. I didn't make it into the mechanical sewing department women's group and five of us women enrolled in the boys' group.

My father wanted me to become a railroad engineer. He said it was a manly job. He said that Sasha was a weak boy and Niko was too small. He told me I was a macho woman and advised me to become a railroad engineer. And I wanted to enroll in the Industrial Vocational School where future locomotive engineers, civil engineers, and planners were educated. I became unable to enroll as the maximum number of entrants was filled, so we women were left out. To make up for it, I enrolled in the mechanical sewing vocational school. After all, I was an all A student. Where were we supposed to undergo practical training? Our factory construction was still underway, so they sent us to Moscow. There were ten young men, all distinguished young men: Gontsadze from Zestaphoni, Kako Kanteladze from Chiatura, Giga Eristavi from Khoni, Amashukeli from Shorapani... and five women: Tamara Amashukeli, Bella Shukrishvili, I, Tamara Kajaia, and Keto. Fifteen of us traveled.

We were met [by a welcoming party]. Otherwise, we were not familiar with Moscow; we were hillbillies. I brought a huge basket full of all my toys with me. The boys could hardly carry it and kept

asking me, "What's in it, Maro?" A car was waiting for us, a truck, of course, and delivered us to the Red Town of Engineers. There were one-story barracks with double-glazed windows. The lights were to be on all night. The guards patrolled in circles all night, watching the guys, lest they play cards or sneak in girls. They continually counted us and made sure we were in place.

Thus, we were brought into the factory for practical training. We spent two weeks there, though we were supposed to stay for three weeks. None of us spoke Russian, so they couldn't make us understand a thing. The workshop manager kept saying [in Russian], "Nobody understands a word in Russian. How am I supposed to teach them? I don't speak Georgian." Then those of us who spoke at least some [Russian] were forced to follow our illiterate guys around and translate for them. A telegram was sent, "Practical training impossible as the majority do not speak Russian."

Similarly to our trip there, we traveled back free of charge. We had a lot of fun on our way back. We passed through what presently is Chechnya, and watermelons seemed to be all over the place. The train would stop, and the guys would jump off and fetch them. No one prohibited them from doing it. Quite the opposite, they said, "Pick that long one. It's tastier." Georgians were highly esteemed there.

Then we passed through Ingushetia [the Republic of Ingushetia, Russian Federation, in North Caucasus]. That's where I first saw boiled and fried milk. They shouted [in Russian], "Fried milk! Boiled milk!" It was fried in the oven. It was mouthwatering. It was kept in the oven until it went crispy. Two pints of milk made this much [measuring about an inch in height with her fingers]. I bought it and my, what a delight! It wasn't practiced in our parts. Our milk won't fry!

While we were staying in Moscow, Yasha, Stalin's son, came to visit us. I remember the pleasant impression he made, a tall, slim young man with a sallow complexion. Someone had told him that some Georgians were staying in the Engineers' Town. Some bigwig happened to mention in a conversation that Georgia had sent people to undergo practical training, that they were staying in the Town of Engineers and that none of them spoke a word in Russian. He showed up, introduced himself as a Georgian and asked us to host him. He didn't tell us he was Stalin's son. We

asked him what his name was. “Yasha,” he answered. “What’s your last name?” “Jughashvili” [Stalin’s real last name]. “Boy, are you Stalin’s son?” “Yeah, sort of! I haven’t seen my father in three months. I live on my own. I have a maid. She feeds me, she does my laundry, she knows where I am and when.”

He spoke perfect Georgian. He wept over his mother, “My father loves me but since he remarried, his selfishness has been killing me.” His mother was also a revolutionary. She died young. She worked with Stalin and he married her. We treated him to wine. He was a young man from Racha [region in Western Georgia], his mother was from Racha, and he was reared by his grandparents from Racha. After Stalin remarried, he told him, “It’s not right. I’m a big man, while my son is neglected in Georgia. Come, you need to study!” He put him in the aviation school. It never worked out as he couldn’t figure out how piloting worked. He told his father he was going to study electricity. He completed a course in electromechanics and worked at the airport. He was Stalin’s son. Who would refuse to let him pilot an airplane! He was only a signalman, yet he piloted aircrafts. He eventually became a squadron leader. The war [WW II] broke out and Stalin told him, “Your piloting won’t do us any good in battle. They let you fly only because of my name. They should all be fired. Grab a rifle, enlist today, and serve in the ranks.” Poor young man, he went to the war.

He brought us a big jug of honey. “What should I bring them?” he asked his stepmother. She was a very kind woman. Beria got her killed, along many others. He did, that lowlife, and they say she killed herself! Beria couldn’t talk her into having an affair. He treated her badly; she wouldn’t consent and he shot her, he killed her and placed the revolver next to her. Then a rumor leaked from the Kremlin as though she hadn’t committed a suicide. They said her husband addressed her with disrespect at a reception, “Hey, you!” and that’s why she left and killed herself. What are you talking about? “Hey, you!” You know what it means to a Georgian man’s wife! “Hey, you!” She supposedly said, “I do have a name,” then left and killed herself. It’s a lie!

He would bring us honey and white bread, as much as we wanted. He would fill up his rucksack with loaves and pay a visit to us. Our guys would buy chickens, pluck them and fry them. He



visited us often. He covered about eight miles to come to us from the Kremlin. Then he saw us off.

When he joined the ranks, I had a premonition he was not going to come back. Poor soul, he died such a miserable death. I cried so much when he died. There was a lead story published in the newspaper during the war, describing how he wouldn't betray his father, how he was tortured, how they offered him everything in the world. He knew, however, what the Germans would do. They would have him talk and then they would shoot him. Name one minister today who could compare with Stalin! He didn't care if it was his son or an average citizen. He wasn't like those who sent their children to school in America nowadays.

Those of us who spoke Russian received good practical training. A sewing factory was built. We were not awarded our diplomas however. Neither were we allowed to enroll in schools of higher education. Since we had scholarships (we had salaries, each student receiving seventy rubles), we were told that we had to pay off our scholarships through labor; they would subtract certain amounts from our paychecks. We were paid well and we had free meals at the cafeteria. We, the graduates of the sewing vocational school, wore insignias, stating that we were operators. We had a separate table and we were served whatever we ordered. The sewing factory had four workshops. A total of eight hundred workers were employed. Each workshop had two hundred workers. We served two hundred machines. You try running up and down the stairs!

I had nice braids. The workshop manager summoned me and said, "Maro, tie up your braids. Your braids may get caught in the engine and drag you in and then you're screwed. It'll scalp you and you'll never get married."

Thus, I, Little Maro, who had finished school with perfect grades, was shoved into the overcoats workshop. The ironing staff consisted exclusively of Armenians who cracked up themselves, "Who sent you here? What kind of operator are you?" We had one ironing girl, Arevata, an Armenian, a very fidgety one. A certain ironing boy was wooing her. One time, Arevata brought up hot tea and poured it right into his pocket without anyone noticing it. You should've heard him scream! As for Arevata, she continued ironing as though she hadn't done anything. She was summoned and

scolded. The penis of that boy was not burned. He never spoke a word to Arevata ever since.

I worked in the overcoats department for two years. I was one year short of undergoing full manufacturing practice and I wasn't awarded a diploma.

I concealed having graduated from middle school, and enrolled in the department of economics of the university, on Vachnadze Street. We were taught very well how to handle money. Abacus, typing, I learned it all. That's where my husband started wooing me. I retrieved my diploma from there and kept it at home. When we moved into this house, my husband burned it along with some other papers. There were no plastic bags in those days, so I had it wrapped in a newspaper. He put it into the fire and burned it. His answer to my complaints was "Why do you need it? You really fancy yourself as a great economist?" Technically, I was supposed to be a financier. I took a [finance] course and so did my husband.

My husband lived on Sheremetev Street. Poti Street, where I lived, started with Sheremetev and followed all the way up to where the tram passes today. His brother's and his houses were located in the corner. The streets were very short, twenty-thirty houses on each, all private residences. Some owned two-story houses. My landlady, for example, had a hut behind the large two-story houses. People from Samegrelo arrived here and found shelter in those hutments they built. There were seven small hutments with two huts in each, and seven Megrelians [local population of Samegrelo] lived in one hut. Can you imagine? Maria rented out one hut, while living with her husband and children in the other.

Later, when they built the subway, they carried out excavations, and the subway stairs led right to the place where I used to live. You passed through Didube Park (now you'll end up going down Batumi and Gori Streets) and then you reached the Didube Subway Station. Almost a half of Poti Street has been demolished, only the eight-story building on the side of the subway is left intact. One time, back when I could walk, I went to see where I used to live. I wanted to have a look at my brother-in-law's house, but it had been demolished as well. They built a bridge over the Mtkvari River, it's called the New Bridge, all the way from Mushtaid [Mushtaid Garden, built in Tbilisi in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century] to the other side. There were no low buildings left, only

Mushtaid. There is a dance school on this side of Mushtaid. Then brown low buildings used to follow. They're no longer there but they were in my time. That's where I lived.

My landlady's children taught me the Megrelian language. So, just in case I need it, I can speak Megrelian. If you call a Megrelian or Abkhazian "swine", you won't survive; you'll never make it alive, this is how much they hate it. The Megrelians got it from the Abkhazians, from their Abkhazian mothers. They don't tolerate swine, considering them the filthiest creatures. I had an acquaintance, a girl named Getia. Her mother was Abkhazian. She lived not far away from us, in a place called Kheoba [ravine]. She told me, "If you call me 'swine', or my brother, he'll kill you. The swine is a very filthy thing!" I inquired, "Then why do you breed them?" "We raise and sell them." She said they didn't eat swine, her mother didn't eat swine and neither did her husband. They sell them while they're still pigs. They never let them grow old enough to become swine.

My landlady taught me all kinds of things. She taught me awesome profanities in Megrelian! I argued I would have no use for them. She answered, "Whenever a Megrelian boy starts badgering you, you just turn around and..." I don't know about a Megrelian, but around that time I met an Ossetian young man from Gori, Niko Chochishcili. He had completed a course in the department of physics and mathematics. He was seeing one widow. Every young man is seeing somebody. A New Year's Eve party was held at this widow's home. Tamara from Gldani appeared there; she lived on Niko's block and always hung out with young men. She introduced me to him, saying he was a tall young man. Unfortunately for me, all the young men at the party were tall. As it turned out, he sent ten rubles and paid for my pass as it was a paid-for party.

At midnight, Tamara came over and woke up [my landlady], "Aunt Maria, wake up! I'm taking your Maro to a party. I'll bring her back in the morning, in one piece." "My girls?" "Their passes haven't been paid, only hers." I asked her who paid, and she answered that Niko did. I immediately turned pale. I knew from Tamara that Niko was seeing that widow.

The hostess welcomed me with open arms and told me, "Come with me. I'm making khachapuri [traditional Georgian cheese bread] and I could use your help." There were quite a number of people, all coupled up. I helped her. While we were making khacha-

puri, Niko came in and started pestering me, endlessly flipping khachapuri, “Now, girl, don’t you dare sit next to anyone else!” I told him, “I haven’t brought anyone here and I don’t know whom I should sit next to.”

We sat in couples, or girls on one side and boys on the other. I knew how to play the guitar and sing. That woman kept bugging me to play and sing. I sang “My Poor Soul”. Then some other song, and then I told her, “I’m tired. Let someone else sing now.” Niko happened to know how to play the guitar. He was sitting next to me. After starting to play, he told me to sing along.

I found out later that he had six brothers. I inquired with my father and mother. Mother told me, “Child, you’ll be miserable. As a sister-in-law, you’ll end up ironing all their pants and shirts. He’ll take you to a gomi [a miserable hut, shed]. He’ll leave you there for a whole week, and you’ll have to take care of these boys. They’re still in school. I don’t know.” “No,” I replied, “I won’t give him up even if he has more than six brothers.”

Only if you knew what a tremendous way of showing affection Ossetians have! There’s no touching whatsoever; maybe touching on the braids if you have any. I used to have beautiful hair. He used to wrap the tips of my hair around his fingers and say, “Watch and see, you’ll end up betraying me.” I loved him and I swore it wouldn’t happen.

It’s all about fate! Then this young man from Racha who studied at the vocational school of finances started wooing me persistently. Before it became known that he was after me, I was allocated a barrack by my employer organization. Zviadadze was Head of the local Party Committee at that time. I worked as the secretary of the Party Committee. I executed documentation, served as an office manager and typist. Thus, I was the typist for the fire brigade and the party committee at the same time. I did two jobs and I was paid double pay.

There was a big barber shop [near my barrack], and Zviadadze told me, “I’ll have the barber shop vacated for you and move it into the building for the brigade of twenty. How much longer are you planning to live alone? Why should you live in somebody else’s home and pay twenty rubles for it?” My father used to send me that money but now I had a good salary, eight hundred rubles. [Zviadadze] “I’ll give a small apartment. When you get married to

that young man from Racha, or somebody else, you can attach a small balcony to the apartment. I know how much you love flowers.” Zviadadze was a very good man.

Before leaving for work in the morning, I applied sunburn prevention lotion (it cost ten kopeks) on my neck and face. I had a light complexion. One time I showed up at work with some lotion left right here (near my ear). Zviadadze, Head of the Local Party Committee, pulled out a pocket mirror, “You have lotion right here. Clean it up.” I remember it so well, so well...

A certain woman from Racha lived next door to me near that barrack. She was involved in some big story and she laid it all out on me. She happened to have fallen in love with her [future] brother-in-law. They were secondary schoolmates. Her name was Vera, last name Mikiashvili.

When her mother-in-law presented her with a betrothal token, Vera thought it was from Nestor whose elder brother was unattractive and short. He was a military commander. I don't know how he became military commander, but he was an infantry division commander. He was freckle-faced and bad-looking. He looked awful in his hat. As it turned out, Vera's future mother-in-law had her betrothed to Victor, while Nestor was a very handsome young man. “When they came over to take me,” Vera told me, “I looked and saw a dwarfish man! I knew his brother, yet I happened not to be betrothed to him!” Thus, they took her, had a matrimony service in church, and that was it. Yes! She could not refuse as she was in Racha! You know how it worked there between farmers? She could change her mind before she was presented with a betrothal ring. Once betrothed, however, she was considered married. She was surprised, not even once did her husband-to-be come to see her! He only appeared during the wedding and took her home.

They only had one child. Then their daughter went to the war, following in her father's footsteps. As I learned later, her father was also drafted in 1941. Thus, this young man, her brother-in-law, lived with them. Can you imagine how miserable their coexistence must have been! That young man never entered her room, never sat at the dinner table with his sister-in-law. They dined together and only after that he ate alone. Looking at her proved to be too much for him. Apparently, he loved her very much.

That woman was tall, her husband barely reaching her waist. She never went out with him to the movies or something. She went to the movies with Nestor. How could he refuse her!

Later her mother-in-law admitted to her wanting me for Nestor. One time I had a brick-red dress designed for me. You know what was in vogue back in those days? The collar absolutely had to be woven, two wide plaits had to be here (from the waist down), two on the front and two on the back as it was unacceptable to have a dress flow tightly from the knees down. I put on this dress. I had a nice bust then, it was all right. I buttoned it on the back and left for work. Hanging purses over the shoulder was not practiced back then, so I held it in my hand. Vera's mother-in-law noticed me and turned to Vera, "I like this woman very much. I wish Nestor listened to me and married her!" She said it on several occasions. Vera never told me anything, yet she held a grudge against me. So that woman [mother-in-law] approached me saying, "Child, why don't you marry Nestor. If this home isn't good enough for you, I'll buy Nestor a separate house, so you could live in both places alternately. I've already taken a fancy to a house in Avchala [district in Tbilisi]." That's where Nestor worked as a teacher. "That's where we plan to buy a house for him. It's just that we won't let him go until he gets married, lest he end up with the wrong kind. It's hard for him to live here." Thus, she came as a middleman. "No, auntie," I told her, "I have a man from Racha wooing me. He won't let Nestor live." ["Auntie": a customary way of addressing elder females].

That man [from Racha] was stalking me. He always followed me past the railroad tracks. I lived past the railroad tracks. I had to reach the tracks and go over the depot. You know what the depot was? There were connector tracks and there was a freight station in a distance. The tracks, however, didn't lead all the way [to the station]. Cars were hauled up to where we lived. That's where delivered cargo was sorted out. For example, they hooked cars intended for Baku to a Baku-bound locomotive.

To make it short, I had to cross four tracks, two on that side and two on this side. I also had to cross the raised platform Khashuri tracks called "battle" tracks. They were called "battle" because they served non-stop trains, leading directly to Batumi or Poti, for example. There were single-track railroads in those days, not

double-tracks. Then I had to walk over gravel. There was gravel piled and the place was called the gravel. It consisted of some hard rocks and it was there to protect railway ties from accumulating water after rain. I ascended the gravel with difficulty, crossed the tracks, descended from the gravel, then crossed yet another couple of tracks, and then finally made it to our doorstep. We lived nearly at the edge of the railroad tracks. Thus, this man followed me over all those tracks.

Since we lived by ourselves, I was advised to have my father come and keep me company, "Enough of that stalking!" I was told. They were forced to have me stay at the building of the Party Committee overnight. I lived on my own, that's why! I was told, "He'll kidnap you at night! He'll break into the hut and kidnap you!" There was a soft bed in the building of the Party Committee, which gave me a hard time getting up in the morning.

There was a railroad school in the building where I worked. Some very handsome young men attended the school. I had a crush on one of them. He was Megrelian. My father wouldn't let me marry him, "You want to marry a guard, and a Megrelian at that? He'll make you work the hoe in Samegrelo. He, on the other hand, will come here and keep watch over the station." I eventually grew out of love with him. He got laid off soon, transferring to the station in his parts. He served as a first lieutenant here. He entered and graduated from a detective school [police academy], after which he knew better than to keep working as the leader of a fire brigade of twenty! I was about to fly to Moscow one time, I was still a bachelorette, and I saw him in his uniform. He waved at me, called me by name. He had already graduated from the railroad school at that time. I wasn't married at that time. My bad luck! He later sent me greetings from afar through travelers to Moscow. Then he worked as a detective at the Senaki Station. You know they arrested people on trains in those days. They arrested thieves, so he caught them and sent them to jail in Tbilisi. He sent greetings, sometimes corn flour. He sent a full sack, a white sack, once through my fire brigade's political instructor [in the Soviet Union, supervisory political officer responsible for the political education (ideology) and organization, and loyalty to the government], poor man, may God remember him in His Kingdom. "Girl, look what Silagava has sent you!" "What did his wife say?" "It's none of her

business. He probably told her. He keeps your picture on the wall.” I couldn’t believe it. How could I? He had a wife and I had been married for three years at that time.

Then I met his son. I was undergoing bath therapy at that time. I was about to go to soak in the tub. We were waiting for a bus to take us there. The Menji Baths were not far away from the station. I was walking down to the station to buy coffee as I noticed this young man, and my heart sank. Oh mother, he looked exactly like his father! I thought it was Platon. As it turned out, his son also graduated from the detective school and wore the same type of uniform with a tight belt.

I called his assistant, a young private, and asked, “What’s this young man’s last name?” “Silagava, grandma.” “Whose son is he?” “Platon’s.” That young man overheard it, inquired why I was asking and approached me, “Hello, auntie! How did you know my father?” “Son, I worked for a militarized security organization, I was an office manager and typist. There was a railroad school on the first floor. I was a bachelorette and I liked your father. He liked me too. Yet, as they say, what must be, must be. It never worked out.” He said, “Auntie, you must come and visit with us right away.” “Child, I’m not dressed appropriately. I cannot come now.” “My father reposed three years ago. My mother will take you to his grave. It’ll be good for you.” I didn’t have a good dress. “You have to come. Well, I can ask my mother and she’ll come to pick you up at the station tomorrow. Your picture is still hanging on the wall.” “What picture, child?” I asked. “Where you have fox fur over your shoulder.” I wouldn’t believe it had he not mentioned this detail. That picture depicting me with fur. His wife kept the picture on the wall in her bedroom to her death. They slept in that bedroom and kept my picture in a round frame, just like one he had made for me.

I didn’t go, girl, I couldn’t take a chance of looking into that woman’s eyes. I still regret it though. I really do. He said his mother would cook grits for us and take us to the grave. He said, “She’ll be very happy. She’ll imagine my father has come back to life and she’ll mourn him all over. My mother knew that he had you and that later, somehow, someone took you away from him. Then my father got married.”



I was a junior in college when my brother-in-law kidnapped me. He lured me out of my home. He came to me saying that Ambrosi had been wounded and that I had been summoned by the militia. He made me leave home dressed in a calico dress and slippers. He was supposed to take me down Gori Street, yet he led me in the opposite direction. "Shalva, where are you going?" I asked him. I had already been acquainted with him. He led me through the gates to a yard. It was evening, already getting dark. He swung the gate open, led me in, and what do I see! A table is set in the middle of the yard. I had met my sister-in-law, Shaliko's wife, before. All eyes were on me and I, on my part, attentively looked around.

I asked, "How can you sit at the table dressed like this? Have you no shame?" "Girl, go into that room and get dressed!"

I lost respect for the Megrelians since that. A Megrelian, my landlady's elder daughter, betrayed me; she gave my dress to Ambrosi and had a flesh-colored dress of the same size tailored. It was a flared dress with a woven collar. It wasn't allowed to show the breast. They commissioned a shoemaker to make shoes, flesh-colored shoes, just like my shoes, exactly, and you know what else was in vogue? Glossy paper, you know, foil; they got it abroad, inserted it in the toes or heels of shoes. Then they cut it up and make holes in their shoes, and this glossy paper was visible from the inside. There were flesh-colored stockings too. I put on the dress. It fit me perfectly. I put on the stocking. Perfect match, #21! The shoes also fit me. They led me out and had me sit at the bride's place. This husband of mine was seated next to me. He was nicknamed "Midnight". He was dark-skinned. They dressed him well, made him wear a tie, and sat him next to me. The table was set. Back in those days, wedding gifts customarily consisted of dress fabrics, coat fabrics, good perfumes, and stuff like that. All the Gurians [inhabitants of Guria, a region in Western Georgia] presented me with gifts and piled them up in front of me. No one bothered to move them aside! The wedding reception finished at four in the morning. I hadn't had a bite, nothing. The guests found out that I had been kidnapped without my parents' consent. My bridegroom's niece said, "You shouldn't have done it. You should have met with her parents and asked them. She's been mistreated." "Get outta here!" the answer was. The other room was vacated for

me. “No way!” I said, “I’m not lying next to him until my father arrives here. You lied to bring me here!”

He had two girls. I went to their room, and, still dressed, lay next to one of them, Talina, a twelve-year-old girl. I checked the entrance door at night; it was locked. I knew that the entrance door was also locked. Where could I go? The table had not been cleared away. My sister-in-law was sleeping on the couch and my brother-in-law next to her, on the floor. I crossed the hall, opened the kitchen window, looked out the window, and noticed a leaning linden next to the building. I crawled out the window and into the tree. My dress was all torn into pieces. I went into the street. It was five in the morning. I left Sheremetev. I walked up Poti Street and waited for the tram. The first tram leaves at six in the morning. A bell rang whenever it started off. I got to the stop, sat down and... “Look at you, woman!” an Armenian woman turned to me. I told her, “Auntie, I’m a runaway. I have no money, nothing. I have to get to the substation.” The tram fare was five kopeks. I had already been given a small room but I never went there, I was still living at my landlady’s. I always wore the key on my neck. There was neither chair nor bed [in the room she had been allocated by the employer]. I went inside, closed the door, spread old newspapers and lay down. It was half past eleven the following morning when somebody knocked on the door. As it turned out, my sister-in-law sent them a telegram on my behalf, saying that I was getting married and wanted my parents to be there with me. My father never made it in time for the wedding. My mother and father stood with sacks and bags at my doorstep. I opened the door. They said, “Child, you look awful!” I asked them why they had come. “Here’s your telegram!” they said, “Why have you run away? What is he like?”

Mikashvili, the leader of a fire brigade of twenty (he too was from Racha), had the cleaning lady tidy up the place, bring chairs and one small cupboard. “Where were you staying, child?” they asked me. “At my landlady’s house,” I replied. “I was afraid they could find me there, so I came over here. They don’t know about this apartment.” “Oh, I wouldn’t bet on that. Watch and see. They’ll come.”

It was half past noon when my brother-in-law and his wife, the wedding reception hosts, showed up at my doorstep with my husband standing next to them. They left him outside and entered the apartment. “Greetings; so you’ve arrived?” “Yes, we have.

What you did wasn't right. You should've asked me if I wanted to marry off my daughter." "She doesn't want my brother-in-law. She would've told you and would never marry him." "Who lured you away, my daughter? What did he say?" I pointed at my brother-in-law, "He did. He told me that Niko (whom I love) [and Ambrosi] had wounded each other. I rushed to make sure he hadn't been seriously injured."

My father had served in Russia and Germany. He was a cultured man. He spoke fluent Georgian and Russian. He said, "My daughter is an adult. She has a right to choose a husband on her own. If she wants, she can marry him. If she doesn't want to marry him, she doesn't have to. My daughter is not for sale. I cannot accept your brother or your wedding. And this meal I'll give to the leader of twenty [fire brigade of twenty]."

According to custom, treating somebody to a meal meant giving consent. So my father gave the sack and bags he had brought to the man who supplied us with chairs. A serious feasting ensued. They brought empty vessels and went back home. We saw them off.

Nine days later, Ambrosi showed up at my doorstep again, stayed overnight and then left. I had been sending telegrams to Niko in Gori all this time. He happened to have caught salmonellosis. He used to have beautiful curly hair. Now he was bedridden with his head shaved and a fever over a hundred degrees. I received no reply from him, not a line. His sister received a telegram. It made her wish she had never received it! It read that he was about to depart this life. I wish he had written that he was ill, so I could go visit him in Gori. Going there was no big deal for me. His head looked like an egg when he was discharged from the hospital. He was taken straight home. He said, "I cannot let Maro see me until I start looking like a human being again." In the meantime, however, this Maro of ours was kidnapped and forcedly married to a man from Racha.

He was an extraordinary man. I've always respected him, yet, frankly, deep inside my heart, I've never felt being in love with him. Seeing that one [Niko] in my dream was more precious to me than seeing this one [husband] in reality. He took good care of me in every way. When I came home after completing my shift, he served me hot dinner; he did the dishes, vacuumed or did the laundry, whatever there was to be done. He looked after me and stood by

me. He never came home empty-handed after picking up his salary. I had beautiful children, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, they all respected me, but I kept silent, never revealing my secret. At the age of thirty, my hair started turning gray.

Thus, this Ambrosi kept coming in and out. He brought meat every day. It was cheap in those days. He cooked chakhokhbili [a traditional Georgian dish] and all kinds of dishes. He was good at everything. After it became known at work that he snatched me away, I was given four days off. There was a rule back then, either seven or four days off. Zviadadze called me on the phone, "It's no big deal. Partsvania, leader of the crew, halted delivery acceptance." Thus, I stayed at home Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I usually worked on Saturdays, Sunday being my only day-off. Thus, I stayed in.

I wasn't sleeping with my husband at that time, but he kept coming over during those nine days, so everyone got to know him. He spent nine days lying on the couch, and then he told me, "I have spent nine days here. The whole fire brigade of twenty knows that you're my wife. How much longer are you planning to sleep in that bed all by yourself? There are your neighbors and there is your fire brigade. I mean you might as well stick a label on your forehead: 'I am a virgin'."

I waited for Niko for one month. Then I reasoned, "He probably found out that I was taken away and gave up on me." That's why I gave in. Then my father formally married me off [betrothal], "It won't be right not to do so! He's not a bad kid. Why won't you marry him?" So I did marry him. Yet, I don't know how to say it, but I have to admit that I never kissed him; it was always he kissing me. I had a habit of covering my face. I don't remember kissing him even once. I couldn't get myself to do it. I respected him tremendously and I felt very sorry for him but I did not love him. You cannot let go of your first love, and Niko was my first love, Silagava... While here there was a slight attraction, we sort of liked each other.

My husband moved in with me, in that hut near the Didube Subway Station, because his family had no room for us. He lived with his brother. They had two rooms. The smaller room was occupied by his little nieces, while his brother and sister-in-law were in the larger room. We didn't fit in this picture! Earlier, when my



Mariam Gelashvili (third from right) at a Party Bureau meeting

father and mother arrived, my brother-in-law assured them he had a room arranged for us. However, I refused to go mainly because I was angry with my brother-in-law; it was he who kidnapped me. Why would I want to move in with them?

It was 1939. I was a newlywed. I didn't have any kids yet. I joined the [Communist] Party at that time. Future party membership candidates [there were two test in accordance with two stages: party membership candidate and party member] were asked questions at special meetings. If they failed, they were told to try next time. At first, I was accepted as a candidate. One month later, they asked different types of questions. Why was Moscow burned down? Where did Bonaparte go? When was serfdom abolished in Ukraine? Who led the Resistance? Who were the Tatars? Who was the Tatars' commander? The Reds? The Greens? [laughing] They asked all kinds of questions. Have no answer? Try next time! The discipline was harsh. It was 1939-1940.

By the way, I didn't pay [meaning bribery] for my party membership card. People paid two hundred rubles for them.

Then I had to pass an individual interview with the Secretary of the Tbilisi Committee [of the Communist Party]. I had to go face-to-face. I had to wait in line. It was the Tbilisi Committee, the Tbilisi Committee of the Party, and then there was the Central Committee. You had to pass the Tbilisi Committee first. They examined you, checked who your parents were, how well you had

passed your tests, how many questions you had been asked. They investigated stuff like that. Then they told you, “A Bureau meeting will be held. Please get back to us on the ninth.” Now you had to go to the Tbilisi Committee Bureau meeting and answer a new set of questions. How many years have you spent as a member of the Communist Union of Youth? How long have you been a Communist Party membership candidate? And then again, who was Kutuzov? They asked whatever they pleased.

After getting the green light from the Tbilisi Committee, your documentation was transferred to the Central Committee. Charkviani, Kandid Charkviani, was in charge of the Central Committee at that time. Things were handled in such an orderly manner that Charkviani was reelected twelve times as the chairman of the Central Committee. Every branch of the party received instructions from Moscow to vote for Charkviani, then he received the majority of votes in the Tbilisi Committee, then at the meeting of the Central Committee, and that’s how he remained secretary for thirteen or fourteen years.

Beria served as secretary for five years. Beria was secretary in my time; he caused a complete mess here and swiftly flew to Moscow.

However, I joined the party in the time of Charkviani. By the way, he was a very good man. I had to pass an individual interview with him. People were waiting in the reception room. There was a waiting line. After all, I wasn’t the only person there. He didn’t ask too many questions, “Now since you’ve made it so far and since you’ve reached me, you must be a good girl. Why don’t you come to the Central Committee meeting?” I remember well that he said it was to be held on August the fifth. He said, “Don’t be late. Just come in and have a seat. Your name will be called. We’ll ask you questions. We’ll approve you and the Lenin District Committee will issue a party membership card for you.”

Back then it was the Lenin District, and there was the Stalin District; this one, Samgori, was called Construction District. There were more construction material factories there than in any other district. I was from the Construction District because the Fire Department was here, in Navtlughi [district in Tbilisi]. The Molotov District was located below it. Present Plekhanov Avenue used to be the Stalin District. Nadzaladevi [district in Tbilisi] is presently

located where the Lenin District used to be, while Gldani, or Didube, or the Third Housing Estate, didn't exist at all at that time.

The area where the Third Housing Estate is today was covered with poppies. I taught Nugzar how to ride a bicycle at the edge of the highway because poppies and grass past the far-right emergency lane grew so tall that a child would never be able to walk through them. There was a hill further up. People settled on this hill in my time. I'm nearly a hundred-year-old woman.

Oh, I nearly forgot. I was summoned by the Lenin District first, before going to the Tbilisi Committee. I attended a meeting at work, after which I went to the Lenin District Bureau meeting, then to the Tbilisi Committee. Now look, how many of them? I went to the Communist Party meeting of my firefighters group, the Lenin District Committee, the Tbilisi Committee, and the Central Committee. Now there are those who burn party membership cards and did I do the same? I have it right here. It'll be buried with me after I die. It's all written in here, including the date I joined the party, November 1939, just like that!

Charkviani was a very good man. He was nice to be around. He was a very simple man. No unlawful arrests were in practice in his time. It all stopped after Beria [Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia in 1931-1938] left. Beria was the source of all evil. It was Beria who annihilated all talented people. You know what Beria did? He made Professor Javakhishvili [the famous Georgian historian Ivane Javakhishvili] write a book, this thick, called Textbook for the Leaders of Local Party Organizations of Transcaucasia, attributed authorship to himself and had him [Professor Javakhishvili] thrown in the prison hole and killed [in reality, Javakhishvili was released. He passed away shortly afterward, while teaching a class], so that he wouldn't reveal the identity of the book's true author. Beria knew nothing about the Party, while that professor wrote a whole history book. We later used this book, as though authored by Beria, in our school studies. Shortly afterward, this professor and a female opera singer were arrested; the singer was accused of being a mistress of a certain English diplomat.

It was around the time when that train was burned. Rumor had it that it was done on purpose. The Kvirila River runs like crazy near Kharagauli. There is a place a short distance past Kharagauli, where a ravine is on one side and a cliff on the other, with the

river flowing between the two. Somebody was indeed ordered by the authorities to arrange the whole thing on purpose. Petrol was poured in the back of a railroad car and set on fire. Then the railroad switch was changed in such a way that, instead of stopping, the burning train went off the rails and into the water.

What looks suspicious is that, although the railroad car was already on fire, the train never stopped at the Kharagauli Station. They kept running back and forth, as though working hard to put out the fire, while, in reality, they wanted those people to burn alive. After the roof of the car went off, after the walls collapsed, they changed the switch and had the train fly into the water.

It happened in 1937. I believe that good and talented people were on that train. They had worked for the government, and you know what they were told? They were promised that they would be transported to Batumi and then abroad free of charge, so they wouldn't end up being executed. Then they opted against exiling these people; they didn't want any of them coming back alive. I don't remember their names but they were all important figures. That's how they got rid of people in those days.

I remember working as a typist for the Ministry of Internal Affairs for three or four months. I was told to type a list of people to be arrested the following morning. It was a long list. While typing, I noticed the names of Kako Partskvania, the head of my military unit, and his deputy, Shakro Gulua. I also read the name of Chonashvili. At the same time, Gogoshvili, Secretary of the Party Committee, and our political instructor were not on the list. How would anyone lay a finger on them! Everything they made me type I kept confidential. They gestured like this [pressing her index finger against her pursed lips]. I cried all night. I knew they weren't coming to work the next morning. Indeed, as soon as I arrived at work, Vadachkoria, Chairman of the Party Committee, turned to me, "There's no one there." I pretended not to know anything, "What do you mean no one is there? The head of the staff is about to arrive." Yeah, right! Partsvania, Gulua and Choniashvili were apprehended the night before. I don't know what they were accused of. They were honest people. I could not recall them saying a single bad word about the government. They were talented.

One half of the building belonged to the Railroad Security Department and the other was occupied by the Military Staff



Department. We were part of the Transcaucasia [Soviet term for South Caucasus], while the railroad security was under the direct supervision of Moscow. The Railroad Security Department controlled the Batumi, Kutaisi [a city in Western Georgia] lines, half of the Baku line, and the Yerevan line as well. The following evening, Kakauridze, Head of the Railroad Security, and his deputy, Kvachantiradze, were also arrested. No one knows why. I didn't type that particular list. I don't know who did. They had their own typist.

I'm telling you about 1937. People were simply arrested and that was it! You had no right to ask the why question! I would dare you! I was told later that Choniashvili had returned. One of my former coworkers from the village of Kvakhreli told me, "You know Choniashvili has survived and he's back!" "How do you know?" I inquired. As it turned out, his [Choniashvili's] wife was from Kvakhreli. "He spent last summer in our village. He's broken down, walks with a cane; his memory is good. It's just that he's gone deaf."

I wanted to see him so much, so very much... My husband was ill, and I was looking after him. Otherwise, I would gladly hug and welcome him back. They spent twenty-five years in exile. Partskvania never returned, neither did Gulua or Kakauridze. They weren't together. They were in different camps. We read about it afterward. After Malenkov [Soviet politician, Communist Party leader and close collaborator of Joseph Stalin. After Stalin's death, he was briefly considered the most powerful Soviet politician before being overshadowed by Nikita Khrushchev] released people, we started looking for them.

I've also witnessed the following. Cut railroad ties were delivered to us to place them as parts of the railroad tracks. They used to be wooden, now they're made of metal. These ties were cut and sent from Siberia. There are big spruces in Siberia. Raw material was delivered to us and then treated with creosote to protect them from rotting, and laid perpendicular to the rails. Exiles, those who were forced to produce these ties, carved their names on them. That's how we identified those still living. Chairman of the Party Committee of the freight station called us every now and then and complained, "I cannot unload the cars. People are swarming around the ties." Everyone browsed through the cars, checking the sides

of ties. Fearing that the authorities would notice their inscriptions and cover them with creosote, prisoners didn't carve their names on the horizontal sides of ties; they carved on either face of the vertical section of the tie. Thus, people browsed through ties in the cars. Correspondence was prohibited. You couldn't write a letter to a political prisoner! They read names, last names, and rejoiced, knowing that someone was still alive. Security guards were forced to disperse the crowd, "These cars must be sorted out. They must be delivered to Gori. Move out of the way!"

The creosote factory was located in Gori. People kept complaining. The smell was all over the place day and night. There was a mammoth vat where ties were dipped with a crane. Then they were sun-dried and placed under railroad tracks. Metal is used nowadays. Metal never expands. Metal ties are welded to the tracks by means of thin metal strips at both top and bottom. Should the bottom tie fail, there's always the upper one.

I got married in 1938. In 1939, I had a son. He died in November. Forceps were used to deliver him. I breastfed him once, and then I was told he had died. My husband lied to me, carrying the baby's body from the hospital and burying it where his father's grave was. He did it on purpose. I gave him the baby's wristband number. He took the body and buried it. I ended up staying in the hospital for quite a while as I had stitches. I stayed for fifteen days after the baby's death. My external stitches were no big deal but I also had internal stitches. I decided not to drink water, so I wouldn't have to walk to the bathroom. My whole body was burning. My doctor was stitching me when I asked, "You'll discharge me after you pull these stitches, right?" "You want to go, don't you?" Then he poured a whole bottle of iodine in my wound and added, "You can go home once you can walk." I couldn't get up.

Again in November of the following year, that is, in 1940, I gave birth to Izo. My husband started having suspicions after I gave birth to this baby girl. Then he brought Niko, the Ossetian young man I used to be in love with. I looked and behold, he brought Niko with him! I nearly collapsed. He, Niko, looked into the cradle. He had a present for the baby. He had flowers and candy for me. I had Ambrosi bring the cradle in. I went into another room and couldn't leave, so hard for me it was to handle his love and betrayal. They cooked a meal on their own. I set up a table for them though. Then

he told me, “Didn’t I tell you that you would be the one to betray me? I was right, was I not?” Then Ambrosi told him, “Quit hurting her! She never betrayed you!” They engaged in a conversation, drank champagne, and left.

Two years later, Niko went to Kvishkhети and married my neighbor’s, Bliadze’s, daughter. When visiting with my father and mother in the summer, I couldn’t escape looking into their front yard and seeing that woman. I refused to go see my parents in the summer. I only went there after making sure they [Niko and his wife] had left. Only then I arrived.

My husband and Niko had a serious fistfight before that. My husband had a scar from being cut with a glass bottle in that fight. Then they reconciled and accepted fate.

Later, when we took a train to Borjomi [a city in Eastern Georgia], Izo looked out the train window. Niko said, “Ask mommy to peek out the window.” I looked outside and saw him give a bouquet of roses to Izo. They had a nice rose garden. I don’t know how he found out. The guys from the fire brigade of twenty must have informed him. “You didn’t have to do it,” I told him. “I was right, you are the betrayer.”

I worked in the Railroad Security Department at that time. I had a good husband. He was the director of a savings bank branch. Foolish as he was, he lost a cash collector and got arrested. He was in charge of a bank branch. He was a member of the Bureau of the District Committee [of the Communist Party], member of the Communist Party and a good Communist. That’s why my father respected him so much. When I married him, he was just an ordinary man. He became all that afterward.

The cash collector lived in Didube, on the bank of the Mtkvari River. He had recently moved from the village. Mushtaid was not as big as it is now. It was a mere field on the Mtkvari riverbank, and that’s where all newcomers from the village lived. According to law, one had to have lived in Tbilisi for three years in order to be registered. That’s why they hid there, living in huts. Then they received documents proving that they had their landlord, paid their rent and had resided there for three years, after which they were formally registered and given apartments.

That young man [cash collector] lived there. My husband told that young man, “You’re going to Didube anyway.” Then he sent

650 rubles with him. He had a booth in Didube, at the beginning of Poti Street. There were branches, and people kept their money there, some withdrawing and some depositing sums. There was one booth like that at the tram depot. People requested, "I want 100 rubles," "I need 200 rubles." Speculating that people would withdraw money, my husband gave that collector money first thing in the morning. Apparently, the cash case was snatched out of his hands [collector]. The cash case was emptied and thrown into the Mtkvari River, along with the cash collector. The young man disappeared. He disappeared and my husband was arrested.

They couldn't pin murder charges on him because he was a member of the District Committee [of the Communist Party], a seasoned Communist with a good record. He joined the party right after he married me. The detective said, "It's not even up for discussion that Matsaberidze is our murderer. You should be charged, however, with negligence and sentenced to eighteen months." Two weeks later, he appeared before closed court, where he made a statement, "I plead guilty." The judge said, "Had he pleaded not guilty, we would acquit him." He was sentenced to eighteen months, leaving me with a suckling child, Izolda. The war [WW II] had not started yet when he went to prison for [in Russia] negligence while performing duties. He was ordered to pay compensation as well, for the reason of which I was prohibited from leaving town, while my property was levied. My husband was a carpenter. He had a good table with the lion's heads carved on its legs and in the middle. I also had another table and nice beds. It was all levied. All of my husband's woodwork was taken away from me. My neighbor unabashedly purchased everything for pennies. Remember that woman from Racha I told you about? That's how she squared accounts with me.

The war broke out in 1941. Stalin gave a speech, stating that Germany had attacked us. In less than a week, my sister-in-law came to visit me. We bought a chicken and some other stuff to deliver to my husband in prison. We were told by a guard, however, that he had gone to the frontline. The guard said that prisoners sentenced to less than five years, excluding those charged with grave crimes, were given an opportunity to go to the frontline, but the frontline only. Matsaberidze was first to volunteer. We carried that chicken back. There was nobody we could send it to. We took

it home. My sister-in-law went on whining and worrying. I told her, "It's none of our business. He's a young man. They would force him and herd him to the frontline later anyway. It's better to volunteer, which he did."

It was November. The war raged. It started raining hard and snowing. The roof in my hut started to leak. I couldn't afford reroofing. I was between jobs. My father brought me four pounds of beans and twenty-five pounds of corn flour. That's how I sustained my child. I lived in a hut. It was impossible to live there, yet I couldn't part with the stuff I kept at home. That's why I never left the hut.

I felt embarrassed in front of people. My father was a distinguished man, the chairman of a collective farm, and I couldn't say that my husband was a prisoner. Now after he had gone to the war, I felt more comfortable to some extent, and sold the hut. I sold it to one machinist for a pretty high price, by the way. Before selling the hut, however, I wrote a letter, saying that my husband was the manager of a savings bank branch, that he was friends with guys from Racha, that he trusted one man from Racha who was an employee of the Didube branch of the savings bank and issued money in the evening, while he was supposed to do so in the morning; that the poor man from Racha lived on the bank of the Mtkvari River, and that he took the money and disappeared with the money that very night; that my husband pleaded guilty and was sent to prison; that he was presently on the frontline; that he was a party member, a member of the District Committee, a progressive man, who went to the frontline to defend his homeland; that I was left all by myself with an eight-month-old infant; that my roof was leaking and that I had no food, and that I couldn't afford fixing the roof either. I put the letter in an envelope and sent it to the Central Committee.

Charkviani, the father of that young man on television, was Chairman of the Central Committee at that time. He led the Central Committee for sixteen years. Back in those days, you were told to vote for Charkviani, while the names of two token candidates were put on the ballot just for the sake of formality. He was a good man. He telegraphed my request to Moscow. I addressed the letter to Beria as he was my fellow countryman. I would never dare addressing Stalin, "My roof is leaking. Please send me some food." I wrote it to Beria who was one of us, "Please support me."

It was Friday. On Saturday, I dressed up my child and was about to leave to sell a hen and chickens. I was totally broke, not even a penny to buy bread. Then I noticed a pickup truck pull up nearly to my doorstep. I was caught by surprise. I wrote the letter the day before and today... "Is Mariam Matsaberidze in?" I replied, "It's I." "Is your roof leaking?" I said yes. "Which one is your house?" I pointed at my house. Then they set up a folding ladder and waterproofed the roof with two or even three layers of roofing felt, as opposed to one layer, using up all their supply. "There's so much felt it'll survive a fire even if the whole hut burns down."

Then they unloaded a bag from the truck; it was full of potatoes. "Who sent it?" I asked. "Beria's orders. We were told to supply you with as much potato and oil as you'll need to make it through the winter." Those were non-perishable goods, ten pounds of pasta, rice. My neighbors nearly went nuts. The workers kept unloading goods. There were no plastic bags in those days, so everything was packed in sacks. I said, "I don't have sacks large enough to return your sacks." "Who says we need your sacks? We weren't told to bring them back."

Oil was contained in a jug. I still have it. I kept it as memorabilia. It was a blue enamel jug with a lid. They brought everything in, filling up the room. I no longer had to sell my hen and chickens! I had no bread, but I boiled potatoes.

My sisters-in-law learned about it and showed up at once. They were rich, all of them, yet they never supported me. They asked me, "What did they bring you, child?" "Everything I needed," I replied. "You think you can have some of it?"

The husband of one of them was a marble stone craftsman. He charged four thousand rubles for decorating one grave. The husband of the other was a famous carpenter. Yet, none of them had ever supported me with money. They only supplied me with a few pounds of corn flour or pieces of cheese once in a while. Rich people are very stingy, they're penny pinchers. They feel reluctant to help poor people.

Just to mention my wedding gifts will suffice. My sister-in-law kept them all. I received nothing. It was customary in those days to give dresses or coat patterns, or various fabrics, as presents. Rings were expensive, and no one presented me with one. Stockings and perfumes were also given as wedding gifts, whatever one

could afford. The Gurians arrived loaded with gifts. Everything was left there that night, and my sister-in-law never told me to pick up my gifts, to use patterns and fabrics given to me to have dresses tailored. Later her daughter used those fabrics to have dresses designed for her to wear in college. As for me, I couldn't afford buying a dress for my Izo when she graduated from school. We were railroaders. We couldn't afford fancy dresses! We had to feed our children. We had chickens, pigs, and they also required sustenance. I couldn't handle it all!

Then that girl [the daughter of Mariam's sister-in-law] took off her white dress and gave it to Izo, the dress that was initially given to me as a wedding gift. I never said anything to Izo when she told me, "Look! Talina gave me a dress!" Talina gave her a dress! It was my dress presented to me! Shameless woman! That's why I don't really like the Gurians. They're not much better than the Megrelians! Only if you knew how rich they were! That brother-in-law of mine was the director of a lumber plant.

You know how crafty he was? He went to the authorities saying, "I'm handing the factory over to you, just let me be its director. I know how to manage the factory. I'm willing to pay as much as you request." Shaliko was my brother-in-law's name, one who kidnapped me. Indeed, the Communists let him run the factory, and he met all their requirements. He was commissioned to make school desks. He made wonderful desks and painted them in compliance with the request. Money was transferred into his account, and he yielded his dues, that is, a part of his revenues, in favor of the state budget.

There's a field called Skachka in Didube, right before you get to the subway station. His lumber factory occupied the whole territory of that field. Houses were built on that field later. My brother-in-law occupied the territory from the Didube Freight Station and the Didube Railroad Station all the way up to the tramway tracks. He had a cousin in Kakheti [a region in Eastern Georgia] who felled mammoth trees and sent logs to him. He [cousin] was a tough man. My brother-in-law told him, "You take care of the logs and I'll buy you a house, so you can get married." Poor soul, he was killed while river logging; he got caught and crushed between logs. My brother-in-law raised his sister. They were orphans. Thus, Bidzina Matsaberidze died unmarried.

There was another Bidzina Matsaberidze, the son of my father-in-law's third brother. He owned a chemical plant near Isani [a district in Tbilisi]; they made raincoats there, raincoats stiff as a board. He invented a chemical compound for soft raincoat production. He dug up a workspace in the ground. People descended through a hatch into that space. He had three hundred employees working upstairs and two hundred underground. Those working underground were paid good salaries. Raincoats produced in the lower workspace were imported straight to Rostov [a city in Russia]. He didn't sell them here, in Tbilisi, he concealed their very existence.

Later one worker sold it in Tbilisi, and he [Bidzina Matsaberidze] was sentenced to death by a firing squad. The Communists would never let him get away with it! He kept that place running for ten years! He kept his people working there for ten years. My neighbor, Nunu, who died recently, was subpoenaed as a witness. My husband was present at the trial. It was his blood cousin after all. Of course, he would be there! He was charged with embezzlement of state property, embezzlement of Socialist property.

He [Bidzina Matsaberidze] built a two-story house in Vake [a fancy neighborhood in Tbilisi]. After he started that workshop, he married a woman who was on the list of the most beautiful women, Damana Bagrationi, a Rustaveli Theater actress. I've read about it in the newspaper. There was a list of the most beautiful women, thirty of them. This list was later published as a book. Damana was on that list. Her husband was also talented and handsome, tall, blondish and blue-eyed. Of course, he was talented! Otherwise, how could he come up with the idea of softening those stiff raincoats!

The raincoat produced in the upstairs department was so stiff one had to hold it in his hands after undressing; there was no way one could fold it or something. The underground raincoat, on the other hand, was so soft it could be folded, rolled, and placed in a suitcase. He packed those raincoats in plastic bags and sent them to Rostov. Of course, he put all the revenues in his pocket after paying his underground employees four hundred rubles for working in that stale air.

You know what he also did? There was an outhouse in the yard and an air piping system and greenery behind the outhouse, you know, bushes, evergreen bushes. The bushes hid that piping system from outsiders' sight, and there was also the factory fence



made of plastic. What he did was supply people working underground with air from that piping system. Yes! He did it on his own. There were two bushes. He trimmed one of them, the taller one. Then he assembled a capped pipe (to prevent the rain from flowing into the pipe, similar to exhaust pipes with caps) between the bushes. When I asked Nunu if they had any air to breathe, she replied, "Our ventilation system worked better than the one upstairs. We had two big pipes and big vents."

It was 1967 or 1968 when Bidzina was tried. He was apprehended and sentenced to death by a firing squad. The defense attorney said, "This man is a design engineer. That's what he supposedly does, yet he is so good at chemistry that it would be a pity to sentence him to death! Let's exile him someplace north of Leningrad and let him freeze there to death. He may invent something else while in exile. Why do you want him dead? Listen to your heart!" His sentence was eventually changed to life imprisonment. He was exiled north of Leningrad.

He was really good at chemistry. He collected stiff leftover raincoat materials, boiled them, and produced soft raincoats. He didn't need any extra materials. Nunu told me, "He used pieces left after collars or other parts had been cut. He called me Assyrian. I was dark-skinned, that's why. He would turn to me, 'Assyrian, is it boiled yet? Make sure no pieces are left in there.'" She cried her eyes out and pulled her hair when he was sentenced. She cried more than I did when Ambrosi came home and said that Bidzina was sentenced to death by a firing squad. My husband couldn't eat.

Then an appeal was filed, and it was finally announced on television that Bidzina's sentence was changed to life imprisonment. His wife complained in her letter to Moscow, "What has he done to deserve it? He only had a workshop. That's all! He hasn't killed anyone or anything after all!" Charkviani was Chairman at that time. She mentioned in her letter that Beria had given orders to annihilate all talented people, and that was the reason why her husband was driven to death. She insisted that the letter be delivered to Stalin himself. She went to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and submitted the letter. Stalin received her appeal and decreed to change her husband's sentence to ten years in prison. He said they couldn't afford executing talented people. Stalin suggested Bidzina be sent to Leningrad to work.

There was a certain factory on the Finnish border, and he really worked there. Man, he invented something in that factory as well, some kind of clothing, or produced plastic bottles or something, I don't remember what exactly. The director wrote a letter and stated that it would be a pity to execute a man like him and suggested to set him free and let him go home. He served six years. After six years, the Central Committee released him. Stalin was informed from Leningrad that it would be wrong to kill Bidzina; that he had health issues, heart problems; that he had a family in Tbilisi; that he hadn't really done anything; that he invented something everywhere he went; and that it would be a shame to have him killed by a firing squad.

There was a celebration in honor of Bidzina's return. Word has it that he was poisoned. He died that very night. When Damana, his wife, went into the kitchen to wash the dishes, he lay down on the sofa. Some say he had a heart rupture. His wife turned to him, "Why don't you go to bed?" She found out that he had already been dead.

While Bidzina was alive, he gave stacks of money to everyone who turned to him for help. My father never went to him. Bidzina was known in his inner circle as Lasha, while his passport read Bidzina. Nobody referred to him as Bidzina. He was Lasha Matsaberidze, the name given to him by his father. His father had a close friend in Svaneti [a mountainous region in Georgia], Lasha was his name. Thus, his father named him Lasha in honor of his friend. Bidzina was the name given to him by his mother. When I told Nunu that his official passport name was Bidzina, she answered, "I don't care about his passport! He was a good man!" She nearly went crazy after he reposed. She asked me to give her his address. So I did. She went there. She wept so inconsolably that Bidzina's wife, Damana, asked my niece, Dali, "Ask Aunt Maro who that dark-haired lady was, one that cried so bitterly." Dali answered, "I know her. She was an 'underground worker'. She used to work for Lasha." Damana said, "Goodness, who mourns so loudly nowadays?"

Thus, I had rich brothers-in-law. They never helped me during the war, however.

I hardly made it through 1941. My child was with my mother. I returned to Tbilisi and continued working in the railroad guard.

As a member of the Communist Party, I was transferred to the militarized service. I was often on duty at the railroad station. We worked hard day and night during the war. We carried gurneys as military trains arrived one by one. After we were attacked, all those people who had been wounded and injured in Ukraine were transported here, to Georgia. I was a bag of bones.

Rumors started circulating one time that Niko Gelashvili had returned after having been wounded in the war. I couldn't see his face. It was covered with a sheet. I was beside myself with joy, thinking that my brother had come back. I made ready, paid one hundred rubles for a loaf of bread, sixty rubles for a hen (as it was small) and thirty rubles for wine. I used lottery money I had saved to buy it all. I arrived and asked where I could see Niko Gelashvili. I looked at him and... it was not my brother. I asked, "Are you Niko Gelashvili?" The man replied, "Yes." "What's your father's name?" "Mikheil. My brother's father was Gabriel." I asked him, "Where are you from?" He replied, "I'm from Kvareli, my sister, from Kvareli. I'm a teacher."

He was a big, healthy man. I couldn't take the food back with me, it would have been impolite, so I told him, "Have everyone drink a toast to my brother." As it turned out, my brother had already been dead and buried in Poland.

I wasn't on duty in the railroad guard as much as I was at the railroad station. I was on duty twenty-four hours and then off for two full days. But I was a fighter, and I joined the army. We had very good working conditions. I fulfilled my duties as a military servicewoman. I had to salute my superiors. I had to be on guard duty. I was paid well, and my father also supported me from the village, sending flour and groceries.

I lived with my sister-in-law, however. I returned from work only to find out that everything had been consumed, not a crumb left in the bread basket. One sister-in-law of mine lived upstairs with her family of nine, while the other sister-in-law's family of six lived downstairs. I came home, lifted the bread basket lid and... I said, "I'm breastfeeding here! Couldn't you save at least one loaf of bread for me?"

My poor mother, such a skinny woman, could hardly walk. Of course, my father made her carry the basket. It was beneath his dignity to carry it. My mother walked, chaffing the skin on her

shoulder. Wicker baskets were in use in those days. So she carried two batches of bread in those baskets, which nearly killed her the following morning.

Then I approached the railroad section manager, "Please help me. Please find a room for me, so I can keep bread when my parents deliver it to me. As for my daughter, I can bring her with me and keep her here, at work." Later I was given a room in the residential building of railroaders, on the Navtlughi-Kakheti Highway.

I remember how we were inspected by a representative from Moscow (he also found refuge in Tbilisi), the military commandant of the city, and a representative of the Fire Department from Moscow. I was on duty. I made my daughter hide behind the curtain while I was on duty. I had an agreement with the driver. He was supposed to knock on my door as soon as the inspection arrived. Thus, I sat there. My breasts were this large [making a circle with both hands]; I was breastfeeding at that time. I tied the last button on my collar. I had boots on. I was dressed in the uniform, a skirt and a tightly buckled belt. I rose up, saluted them and reported, "I am the guard on duty. No fire has been reported. All is well on the site." "What is it over there? A child?" The Moscow representative rushed to the curtain and moved it only to find a little child. He inquired, "What should we do?" Gorin replied, "You think I should fire the telephone operator? I will not fire the telephone operator! She's an excellent employee!" "Alright. Alright," they replied and left. Gorin stayed, and I stayed, and the child stayed.

This Gorin was Latvian. His fire brigade fled [during the Latvian occupation by Germany]. The heads of fire brigades took turns to be on duty every night. There were six fire brigades scattered all over Tbilisi. We had three brigades from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The main fire brigade was stationed past Varketili [a district in Tbilisi], where the old road, Kakheti Highway, used to be. Then there were brigades on Machabeli Street and Klara Tsetkin Street. The last one was stationed near Vagzali Street, Didube, where the railroad station is. There were only ten fire brigades that had fled from Moscow.

One time, I put my daughter to bed, left the commanding officer on duty, Uncle Vaso, and set off to fulfill my four-hour guard duty assignment. I took over at eight in the evening and I was supposed to be off at midnight. My substitute was scheduled to take over

the post at half past midnight, yet for some reason he was late. It was already half past midnight. I paced back and forth, worried and concerned. Uncle Vaso called me, "I just woke him up. He's on his way. This moron was sleeping like a log."

His last name was Gabinashvili. He went fishing for days on end and slept like a log after having come back. He was supposed to arrive with the commanding officer. I had to report that I was ready to yield the duty, while he was to report his readiness to take over.

A car pulled in at that time. A big man with stars on his shoulder straps opened the gate and entered. I yelled [in Russian], "Halt! Who goes there?" "I am the Head of the Security Services." "Nonetheless, I am not going to let you pass. I am not authorized to. I have to stop you. You will be received by the commanding officer on duty."

I rang the bell. The officer on duty came outside. [The Head of Security Service] was accompanied by two political instructors and a bodyguard. He stopped and waited. I reported to the officer on duty, "Head of the Security Services of the Soviet Union and his deputies have arrived to carry out inspection of the fire brigade. I am Mariam Gelashvili, guard on duty, and I am ready to go off duty."

That man was appointed by Moscow. He thanked me and left to carry out his inspection. In a week, the head of the railroad received a letter of appreciation.

We had phony fires every other day. I raised the alarm, and they [firefighters] all rushed to the newly-built houses in Navtlughi (a chalk factory was later built there) and pretended these houses were on fire. The buildings were tall. Once a firefighter ascended a building, he couldn't descend using the ladder, he had to slide down the rope. They had special rubber gloves for that purpose. One had to wear them properly, lest he chafe off his skin.

We had one young man from Svaneti. Goodness! Was he huge! He wore shoes size twelve! His boots were custom made. He was a very handsome young man, tall, with black curly hair, rosy cheeks and a manly face.

He told us one time how he encountered a poltergeist. He swore it was all true. He caught a ride to Chiatura [a city in Western Georgia] once. There was a narrow path leading to a ravine. This poltergeist had a habit of appearing past that ravine, near the water. He reasoned, "I'm a firefighter. A ghost has nothing on

me!” He heard a woman’s voice from below. Her long blond hair illuminated the surroundings. This beautiful blond woman dressed in a sleeveless dress stood in the freezing cold and summoned him, “Come down here for just a moment. Just for a moment and then I’ll let you go.” She would let him go alright, but he would never escape her; he would end up having to see her every time he passed that place. “The hell with you!” he turned to her, treading the path down into the ravine. “I trembled with fear, but I wouldn’t give in. After I got home, I spent one full day in bed, in a state of delirium. They barely brought me around.”

When he came back, I was on duty. He brought cheese bread. It was nothing but cheese. They [the inhabitants of Svaneti] are generous with cheese. They have cows. The cheese bread crust was very thin. His mother had sent pumpkin leaves and Svanetian tomatoes with him. Tomatoes are usually grown at home first and then transplanted from clay pots into the ground for two months, July and August. We had a meal. They [the Svanetians] don’t make wine. They make sweetened drinks, so we drank them.

All my employees knew that my mother was a medicine woman. One time, Zhora Khizanishvili, Commanding Officer on Duty of the Fire Brigade, was taken into the Infectious Diseases Hospital. He turned to me, “Maro, your mother knows some medicine. Please get it for me! You’ll be given days-off, go to the village.” So I did. Mother brewed the medicine. She gave me two one-quart jugs and told me to give one to him right away and store the other at home, in a cold place. In addition, she warned me, “No other medication when taking my medicine!” Zhora placed the jug in the cupboard and locked it. He spent one week in the hospital. They kept examining him only to determine that his condition hadn’t changed. Every time the nurse came into his room to give him a shot, he made her break the syringe in half. The nurse told him, “We’ll see how that medicine will cure you.”

After a checkup on the fourth day, everyone wondered how quickly he had recovered. The physician begged him, “Please tell me what kind of medicine it was.”

I still remember the names of the plants. One grows on the side of the road, it doesn’t require water or anything; it grows like a shrub, almost two feet in height. It has small flowers on its twigs. Its buds are large and green, yet the flowers themselves are tiny.

This plant is uprooted and dried. The second plant is wild and tall, with buds lined up horizontally in its upper part. It grows ten to fifteen twigs with small, minuscule white bell-shaped flowers. The flowers blossom and make small round buds with two-three seeds. Timing is important; you have to gather those seeds before they pop out. The leaves and the stem of that plant are usable as well. Mother boiled eight to ten seeds in a quart of water. The brew had a yellowish color. It was used to treat diarrhea in little children.

1941 was bearable, but the winter of 1942 was severe. God seemed to have blessed us in 1942 as it didn't snow in Tbilisi. We had electricity. Militiamen patrolled the city. Dark blackout curtains were mandatory to keep the light inside. We were located close to the Caucasus. German bombers could see us from Turkey and rain down bombs on us. They [militiamen] cried out, "You wanna die or what? Hang those curtains! Hang them!"

I purposefully bought a black curtain and hung it. I had an electric heater. In 1942, my wounded husband returned. He had his elbow smashed by a mine while he was reconnoitering... he was crawling and the mine exploded under his elbow... I don't know how he survived! His face was slightly burned here (right side) and his elbow was injured. They had some American iodine. It cured wounds without stitches. He spent some time in the hospital here. His wound healed, then he went for a checkup, came back home and scratched the wound open. I asked him, "Why are you doing this?" He replied, "You really want me to go back to the war and die?"

Nevertheless, he was sent back to the war in a month. He kept writing letters to me until 1945. Then his letters stopped coming. I thought he had been killed. As it turned out, he had a wife in Gorky [a city in Russia; present-day Nizhny Novgorod]. He lived there, pretending to be mute and writing no letters or anything. He told me later, "I couldn't talk. I couldn't come back like that." He spent six months in the hospital. He must have fooled around with one of the nurses. He told her he had no wife, no children. Then he wrote me a letter, telling me to sell the house and move to Gorky. I replied that I was engaged and about to get married, "I've waited for you until 1945 and beyond, like two more years, but now I have a fiancé, a man I love. Why don't you stay there with your wife and let me get married here? Our child is already

eight-years-old. You can come, or you might as well stay there. It won't make any difference now."

He showed up at my doorstep wearing galoshes and dressed in shabby clothes. His wife, a Ukrainian woman, intercepted my letter and hid his clothes. She read the letter and kept it. After having waited for my reply in vain, he dug through his old and dirty clothes that had been dumped for two years. He uncovered his filthy raincoat, combat pants up to here (knees), and galoshes, not even boots. She had thrown his boots away. He showed up dressed in those miserable clothes. He rode without a ticket. He was totally broke, and who would give him any money? He implored the conductor in Gorky, "Please let me get on board. Let me make it to Moscow. I'm going to see my wife and daughter. My woman wouldn't let me go. She stashed away all my clothing." The officer in charge of the train led him into the sleeping car, "No one's gonna find you here. Inspectors don't come here. Take the third bunk and keep your mouth shut." This officer turned out to be such a nice man. After having delivered my husband to Moscow, he found the chief officer of the Tbilisi train and asked him, "Please take him to Tbilisi. I'm a Russian and I have brought him this far. You're from Tbilisi, and I'm sure you can take him home." My husband told me later that he traveled in a regular car, car number seven. Then the conductor told him, "Don't worry. Just tell me where I should let you off in Tbilisi." "You'll have to drop me off early. Everyone knows me at the station."

Locomotives replenished their supply of fuel near where the Railroaders Palace used to be and where the fuel tower was built later. The Baku railroad tracks were located one hill away. That's where he got off on the gravel. I have no clue how he made it home. I wrote him a letter. I've no idea if he read the letter or not, or how he found out where I lived. He left me in misery, and now I lived in a room in the railroaders' residential building, apartment 1, the Railroaders' Residential Building, Navtlughi-Kakheti Highway. He may have asked a conductor on his way here where the railroaders' building was.

Can you imagine? It was an express train; it was prohibited to stop the train. They did, however, slow down for him. The semaphore signaled no slowdown, yet they did slow down for that poor fool to jump off. All the conductors on that train looked outside.



They were concerned, thinking that somebody had been run over, thus forcing the train to move slowly. My husband worked at the railroad station, and he overheard the conductor of that train say, “Man, they were sure they ran over somebody! You should’ve seen them running like a headless chicken.”

The apartment that the Railroad Security Service allocated to me was a Nicholas-style [an architectural style prevalent during the reign of Emperor Nicholas I of Russia (1825-1855)] building on the Navtlughi-Kakheti Highway. You can see that place today if you’re coming from the airport down the Kakheti Highway. It’s located on the highest elevation in those parts. There’s a bridge, and we lived on the left side of the bridge, right next to the edge of the railroad tracks. There was also an administrative office building. Its walls were made from bricks this thick [measuring about a yard with her hands].

I had a neighbor; her last name was Miruashvili. She got married, and then she told me, “Maro, Nadia wants to take over your apartment. I overheard her conversation with Kakutia, the commanding officer of our settlement, in the hallway. She told him, ‘Only kick her out of here and I’ll pay you thirty rubles extra.’ She was talking about you.” She left a window open for me, advising me to throw my bedding through the window because Kakutia had sealed the door from the outside.

That Nadia was from Samegrelo. She lived across the hall from me. I didn’t know her background. She was married to a Pole, so her children (she had two daughters) were half Polish. What good is a child of a Megrelian and a Pole?!

Nadia wanted her daughters to move from Navtlughi and have them both by her side, one on either side. At the same time, she had driven off their husbands! One daughter was married to a Pole, Buznyak was his last name. The other son-in-law was Lynik. At first, she encouraged her daughters to marry Poles, saying they were good people. Her sons-in-law were local Poles, not those who arrived after the war. During the war, mainly Russians and Ukrainians came here. Poles never made it here. Hitler annihilated them. He gave orders to have them slaughtered and have potatoes planted all over Poland.

You know what she did to her son-in-law? She wanted him out. As soon as he became intimate with his wife, she started cough-



Mariam Gelashvili with husband

ing. She stayed up all night, waiting for them to start having intercourse. Then that man told his wife, "Would you like to come with me to Russia because I am going." He left indeed and served in the army. He was given a generous allowance. He was a good man. He

worked as head militiaman here. His name was Edik Lynik.

Thus, I came in through the window. Kakutia removed the seal, came in and told me that the place didn't belong to me. I was the wife of a Red Army soldier. The major of the settlement was Bagrat Zviadadze, the head of the local Party Committee of the Security Service where I had worked as a typist; he was like a brother to me. He was first to congratulate and kiss me when I got married, "You're an honest woman! Keep it up!"

Yet, this Kakutia didn't know about it. He accepted the bribe, thirty rubles plus thirty more later. It was good money in those days. Sixty rubles was the highest monthly salary. He told me, "I've already given this room to Lynik." "You did? Now take those thirty rubles and return them!" He was speechless. Nadia came out of her room and asked [in Megrelian], "What is she talking about?" I spoke Megrelian well. I had lived with Megrelians. I replied [in Megrelian], "I'm telling the truth". "She speaks Megrelian?" "No," answered Kakutia, "Just a couple of words." I turned to him, "Give her the thirty rubles right now, or else... I swear I'll make you rot in jail. I'll have you arrested today. How dare you! I'm a secretary of the Party Committee; I have acquaintances in the District Committee. How dare you!"

I left. I called Zviadadze from work and told him that Kakutia was about to throw me out of my room and give it to Lynik. I also told him that he had already accepted thirty rubles and was supposed to receive thirty more. I said I had overheard their conversation in Megrelian.

Zviadadze arrived, and so did militia officers. They used to be called battalions. There were also different battalions, battalions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They were the best. He [Zviadadze] asked Kakutia, "Show me the room you want for Nadia's daughter. Do you know that this woman [Mariam Gelashvili] is the wife of a Red Army soldier? You bastard, I'll have you imprisoned right now! Bring the money and give it to that woman!" Kakutia went inside. "No. Have her come outside. I want to see him give her the money." Nadia came outside. He pulled out three red ten-ruble bills and gave them to her. "Why did you accept this money? You knew this woman already lived here. Why did you have her room sealed? Aren't you afraid? She's the wife of a Red Army soldier, a Party member; she has the District Committee to back her up. How dare you!"

Kakutia later sent his wife to me. She brought Megrelian flour and a chicken, "Kako has sent me. He told me to ask you to write a letter of forgiveness. Otherwise, he'll get fired." He was the commanding officer of our settlement.

I dropped by Zviadadze's office a little later. "Has he said anything to you?" I replied, "No." "Then enjoy that flour and that chicken! Don't write anything yet. Let him break out in a cold sweat for a while." He really ended up in big trouble. He never returned to our building, while Nadia held a grudge against me.

We had narrow hallways; the way it was customary in old houses. In addition, it wasn't a residential building as such but rather a former administrative office facility. There was the accountancy department office, and there were rooms for accountants, and so on and so forth. To make it short, this hallway was divided and turned into rooms. The Manuchashvilis lived next door to me; they were on my half. Our door led to the airport. We had another door, on the other side, but Nadia forced us to keep it locked, lest we wake her in the morning. Our door was heavy, and it squeaked every time we opened it.

Then she [Nadia] was diagnosed with advanced cancer. She screamed and wailed all the time. I cooked an entree with meat, followed by a potato garnish, and had my daughter take it to her. Nevertheless, she wouldn't stop cursing us. Every time we left for work after my husband's return, she told us, "I hope you'll never come back." My husband, however, felt sorry for her, "They don't

have a man in the family, that's why I feel sorry for them." When Nadia died, her daughter approached us, "We're totally broke. I want to sell my sewing machine. Otherwise, I have no money to bury her." My husband told her, "Don't worry. Let the sewing machine be. I'll go and buy a coffin today. Don't tell anyone you're broke. It's embarrassing. We'll collect some money for the funeral later." Indeed, he bought a coffin with his own money. He even damaged his suit beyond repair. Ice was placed in the coffin [to prevent the body from decaying]. The ice melted while he was carrying the coffin [in the funeral procession], dripped on his suit and ruined it.

One Georgian man lived next door to me before my husband returned. He had to turn on the heater, so I could get warm. I called him, "Archil! Archil!" He replied, "No can do, girl! I'm off to work." "Please turn it on! What do you care?" "Who'll stir and watch the coals then?"

I was freezing while he was on duty. I burned my eyebrows during the war. I used to have beautiful eyebrows. My kerosene lamp blew up on me, burning my eyebrows so they never grew again. It did something very stupid. I didn't want to put it out [it was running low on kerosene]. On the other hand, I didn't have matches. So I, a firefighter, poured kerosene in the lit kerosene lamp.

Then I told Archil, "I'll pay you whatever this room cost you. I'll pay you if you yield this room to me. You're in Kaspi all the time anyway. You can go to your house or stay in the common room here." He was a firefighter. I gave him two hundred rubles and he agreed.

Conjoining or splitting up apartments was prohibited back then. I had Sukhashvili (poor soul, I guess he's still around) cut through a wall overnight. The wall consisted of two layers of plaster with space left between the layers to prevent cold air from penetrating. That's why my conversations could be overheard on the other side of the wall. He cut through the wall, placed covers from both sides and told me to have them painted blue (the color of my room) that night, "Should the commanding officer drop by and inquire, you can say that it was like this when you moved in."

Later, when my husband returned from the war, he dismantled a brick wall under one of the windows. We built a door into the hollow. Then we used the bricks to build a twenty-foot-long wall with windows, thus making a cozy room. My husband built a small

kitchen adjacent to the room. God rest his soul! Then I wished, “Only if we could have a small balcony, so the lilac tree can blossom and reach for my balcony with its branches.” He came home from work one day, welded a frame and built a floor, thus making a balcony expanding right next to the lilac tree. It was small. It could only fit one chair in width. I asked him, “Man, what is this?” “That’s your balcony you’ve been dreaming about. Now you can sit and rest on the balcony.”

Then there was a flood. We survived thanks to the ladder-shaped cement structure placed next to that balcony. Otherwise, water would penetrate from the side and drown us. The screen saved us on yet another occasion. Chitiashvili, my classmate from Khashuri, made it for us. He was a locomotive engineer and good at welding as well. My father sent him, “Leo, please do me a favor. Go, take measurements and make a couple of good screens, so that not even a small flask could squeeze through the mesh.” He built the screens in Khashuri and installed them on both windows. Had it not been for those screens, we would have drowned.

The water had destroyed entire houses and carried whole beams in our direction. They wouldn’t fit through our screens, however, and drifted away and into our neighbor’s front yard (the water flooded our front yard entirely). The flood swept over the neighbor’s front yard. It also swept away my hen and chickens together with the coop. I had brown butter jugs stored in the coop. They too were swept away. We had a small barrel to squeeze grape juice. It was stored in the basement. The flood wiped clean the basement, including the barrel and everything. To make it short, it was a full-blown flood. No wonder! There was a sea nearby [so-called Tbilisi Sea, an artificial lake in the vicinity of Tbilisi]. It happened in 1959, toward the end of June and the beginning of July, when tomatoes ripen and the strawberry season is ending. The flood simply uprooted ripe tomatoes and Khomarduli apple trees [local apple cultivar]. The water bent the apple trees and buried them in the sand so badly that my husband ended up digging them up with a shovel.

The Iori River [a river in Eastern Georgia and Azerbaijan], its course having been previously altered [by river engineers], made its way back to the sea. It had been flowing for weeks, causing the sea to overflow. Otherwise, it was so deep that people were afraid to swim.

My father dug up the land for that sea. Collective farmers were dispatched from all over Georgia, from every region. There were even those from Samegrelo. A sea was about to be formed in Tbilisi! Crews, that is, representatives of each collective farm, took turns and worked for one week each. Who would dare complain under Communist rule! The secretary was present there all the time. My father also arrived. He brought his farmers, sixty people, including women and men. They walked to Khashuri and then traveled to Tbilisi by train. Then they were transported to the site in trucks. When my father worked in the Gori Collective Farm Samtavisi, their truck was on duty 24/7, meeting every train coming in. It wasn't large enough to fit everyone, so the driver had to make several trips a night, driving back and forth. Thus, they kept excavating, while the crane moved and piled the dirt in a distance. That's how these hills originated. The place used to be all flat.

In the north, the sea is bordered by a mountain. The Gldani [a district in Tbilisi] residences were built on its slopes. The basements and first floors of those buildings were flooded when the sea overflowed. People were evacuated and moved to apartments on the other slope, the Gldani Mountain Slope. The Samgori Mountain Slope residential buildings were evacuated as well. Before the evacuation, people would climb through the windows as the entrance halls had been flooded.

I remember watching German captives march down our highway. I felt so sorry for them. They wore clogs bound together with leather strips and tied to their feet with ropes. They built the Ceramics Factory, the Bakery Plant (the same as Plant One). The Pasta Factory was also built by the Germans, as well as the Second Salt Factory in Didube where salt was refined and packaged. The factories built by them never exhibited water leakage and never had their walls collapse during an earthquake. The Germans engineered and built them.

They were stationed in some barracks toward Lilo [a Tbilisi suburb]. They lined up and marched down the Airport Highway to work on the Ceramics Factory. They walked; they weren't transported. Poor guys, they were in misery, walking in shabby and torn clothing. One time my husband grabbed his pants and gave them to one of them, whose pants had holes in the knees. He made the sign of the cross and blessed him in a German manner. This

highway was reconstructed later, presently running less than a mile past where it used to be. It ran downhill into our settlement. Later, when the dirt was dumped in our yard, it covered our persimmon and mulberry trees and roses, and reached our doorstep. Our outhouse was covered too.

Then all our neighbors were moved to the seaside. Ambrosi worked as a conductor. He needed this job for his retirement plan, a good retirement plan, like 110 rubles, which he eventually did receive. I went to the District Committee and said, "My husband is a conductor. He has a lady, whose duty is to wake him up at three in the morning. She travels all the way from Navtlughi. If we move [to the Tbilisi Sea], she won't be able to wake him up! I'm a secretary myself. The District Committee needs to get in touch with me three times a day, while I have no phone as I live near the sea." There were only two families to receive apartments here. There was the family of a young man in charge of the railroad station and there was our family. We received this apartment in 1973. My husband said, "I want an apartment where I can hear trains coming from the other Navtlughi Station and down the Yerevan railroad tracks. I cannot live without the sound of the train."

We went through a lot during this war [WW II]. My brother was eighteen when he was drafted. He was given a wooden rifle and trained. He underwent training in Sevastopol [a city in Crimea, present-day Ukraine]. Germany took over Sevastopol. The boys still had those wooden rifles. "What are these?" asked the Germans after taking them captive. "We're youths from Georgia. These were given to us to practice." "Pick them up," commanded the Germans and broke the rifles over their heads, beating them up mercilessly.

A guerilla group was captured. It was not Zhora's guerilla group but a different, older one. Someone ratted them out. Some of the guerillas managed to escape, leaving the others. Some were cooking, some... They dropped by the old hideout and found their old leaders, Ukrainians, gone. Their leader must have found out about it. These young men followed him and they all escaped, like thirty of them, while these kids, these Georgian young men, about eighteen of them, were captured.

Then our troops took over Sevastopol, then the Germans claimed it back, then our troops took over once again, thus the city kept changing hands! After our troops took over, they drove

the Germans off. Then guerilla warfare resumed in the enemy's rear. Everyone had gone through harsh tribulation. Only after our troops reclaimed Sevastopol for the last time, my brother said [told the Red Army military commander], "I don't know anything. I don't even know how to use a rifle. Give me some kind of paper in case I'm captured." He was given a document.

He put his document verifying his guerilla work in Ukraine in a so-called black box, an iron box attached to the belt. This box is designed to survive even if its owner burns to death. Three hundred men were taken captive. They were taken into a school building where an enemy battalion was supposed to be recruited. Hatred was embedded in their minds day and night, "You're slaves! Stalin is idolized, and it is wrong! We will win and you will all become great military commanders!"

Getzadze, a Nakhalovka resident and an Imeretian by descent [Nakhalovka or Nadzaladevi, a district in Tbilisi; Imereti, a region in Western Georgia], and my brother made a rope from towels, climbed down from the third floor and escaped. In Germany, they cooperated with local Communists against Hitler.

They had a letter from Thalmann [Ernst Thalmann, the leader of the German Communists; executed by the Nazis in 1944]. Thalmann was executed by a firing squad. Actually, he wasn't shot but rather bombed to make it look as though he had been a bombing victim. Well, they shot him first and then dropped the bomb. He was killed by the Germans because he was a Communist leader and gave Hitler a hard time at home. He worked in secret, underground. They worked with him and even had a letter from him. One Communist borrowed two skirts from his wife, two blouses, had them put on these clothes, covered their heads with scarves, made them put on makeup, gave them old purses he had gotten a hold of earlier, and low-heels to wear, and told them, "Now go, be merry and have fun! Tell the boys you're Italians. If they ask you to present your documents, tell them, since when do prostitutes carry IDs?"

They passed over the mountains in order to cross the Italian border. One Jewish watchmaker sheltered them there and even bought clothing for them. As Italy was in cahoots with Germany in those days, he told them, "You can stay here for a while and help me, but eventually you'll have to make it to Switzerland, from where you'll be free to go anywhere." They spent three months



there. Then he helped them to get to Switzerland where they stayed through the war.

Then a POW exchange was announced in Italy. The borders had already been opened. No questions like “How did you leave?” or “How have you made it back?” were asked at the border. They only asked, “Are you a prisoner of war? If so, you may enter.” They exchanged prisoners. They let in just as many people as there were Germans leaving, except that officers were exchanged for officers and soldiers for soldiers. They traveled from Italy and were accepted in liberated Germany, from where they flew to Moscow. Then my brother returned to Georgia and came home. The war had ended for quite a while by then. It was a cold November.

Up until 1943, we were unaware of his whereabouts. Then one prisoner of war appeared (I don't know if he had been imprisoned or discharged), Gongadze was his last name, and said, “Zhora is alive. We were involved in guerilla warfare in Ukraine. We were hiding in the forest, and Zhora was our commander. He saved my life once.” They happened to have a watchword, ‘eagle’. This man was captured by our guerillas who were about to execute him. My brother saw him and identified him as a Georgian. The man said, “Zhora, I've forgotten the watchword. Please get me off the hook.” Zhora said, “He's one of us. He doesn't speak any Russian. What do you expect him to do?” The Russians also backed him up [in Russian], “Yes, he's one of us.” He recalled, “It was a narrow escape. I nearly got executed. Zhora saved me. He's alive. He was a guerilla in Western Ukraine.” We learned about it in 1943. My father nearly exploded, “If this kid who has never seen a rifle in his life made it to 1943, he must be alive somewhere, somehow.”

Later, after he came back home, he found a job as a tunnel electrician. He picked up his monthly salary a couple of times. Our parents were so happy.

There was one of his comrades-in-arms, Getzadze. They escaped together from Germany, they stayed together in Switzerland, they traveled together to Italy, and they returned together to Georgia. Getzadze got drunk one time and started boasting, “We dressed in women's clothes to escape. Otherwise, we would've been killed in the war, so we escaped to Italy. Then we moved to Switzerland. Our life in Switzerland was nice and easy. Then we were exchanged for POWs, and that's how we came back.”

Three months later, Getzadze was arrested. He was forced to name my brother, not only him but everyone who had gone to the war from Western Georgia; they were all arrested. My brother recalled, "It was like twenty of us."

It was wrong! These people were taken from Sevastopol by the Germans. Then they spent time in concentration camps. My brother and Getzadze escaped. This Getzadze named them all. These poor young men, who had been through concentration camps and all kinds of tribulations, who had served their duties, were imprisoned again. Zhora told me, "Innocent people are locked up here with me."

He came home and told my mother, "Mother, I'll be arrested any day now. I don't want you to see it and I don't want you to suffer, so I'll just go ahead and turn myself in. This guy has snitched on me. I've already been informed."

Poor soul, he worked as an electrician at the Khashuri Station. The elder brother was an engineer at the Khashuri Station, and then there were his assistant and the electrician. After he returned, his brother gave him this job.

Secretary of the District Committee, a good man and my father's acquaintance, told Zhora, "Your friend has betrayed you. You might as well turn yourself in. I cannot come to arrest you. I cannot do this to Gabo." So he turned himself in, dressed in worn-out work clothes. He was told he was a traitor because, according to them, he was captured in 1942 and stayed throughout the war abroad, hiding. According to them, he shouldn't have been taken captive, he was supposed to commit a suicide, or... He was booked and thrown into a basement.

The building of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was located on the corner of Vagzali Street and the tram tracks. He used to tell me he could hear the tram pass by. It was a quite large basement full of people. There was no sunlight. There was only a vent system. It was humid and miserable. I used to be a tough woman. Three months had passed, and we hadn't heard anything about him, whether he had been tried or not, whether he had been sentenced or not. We received no answers. My father reasoned that his boy had been executed by a firing squad similar to what was practiced in 1937. He told me, "Child, maybe you'll be able to find out if he's still alive."

I put his documents together from the time when he served in Sevastopol, before going to Germany. By the way, he escaped from

Germany with the status of a spy. He had worked in Ukraine. He had a document proving that he had worked there. He also had a paper from the Central Committee of Germany, verifying that he had worked for local Communists, escaping to Italy only after he was captured and forced to join their [Nazis] school. This school was to supply Vlasov's division [Andrey Vlasov, Commander of the Russian Liberation Army; hanged in Moscow in 1946] in the fight against the Soviet Union. It was all true, yet they later dug up some stuff on him and labeled him a traitor. I submitted these two documents. I filed a request with the detective. He was so stupid though. He couldn't read German or Ukrainian. He just pushed the papers aside and said no. I told him, "Alright. You cannot read here that he has served our people for a long time, but please let his parents see him. My father is a seasoned Communist, who has worked underground. He can come here, so you can check his warrant and have a look at his background. All his brothers are Party members, members of the Communist Union of Youth, our family is an exemplary Communist family. What do you want from our family?"

He granted permission. My father and mother were surprised. I worked as a telephone operator in the Militarized Security Service at that time. I was Secretary of the Party Committee, Bartaya was my deputy. He told me, "Yeah, keep going there. They'll arrest you too and put you in the cell with him. You'll end up in that basement."

I brought my father and mother [from the village] and warned them, "Keep in mind that everything you'll say will be recorded. Try to turn the conversation to our advantage. Tell him, 'Child, we believe you're innocent. You were just a kid when you got nabbed. Well, there's no escaping the law however.'"

As soon as the three of us arrived, the detective excused himself, pretending not wanting to hinder our conversation. He thought I would buy it, I who had worked as a typist in the Ministry of Internal Affairs for three or four months. My brother was brought upstairs. He had a yellowish skin color and seemed to have gained weight, yet in reality he was swollen, with pale arms and puffed up fingers. Father told him, "I am a Party member who has worked underground. How can my child be a traitor? It's unbelievable that the investigation cannot find out the truth! One way or another, son, you'll be out!" Indeed, my father's prediction

proved true, “Son, you had no control over the situation when you got captured. The Germans would do whatever they wanted. They didn’t need your permission. Neither did you control anything when you escaped, being instructed or told to act one way or another. There’s nothing we can do about it. You’ll have to serve whatever sentence they’ll give you.” My mother couldn’t stop sobbing, “My son, once you are charged, I guess that’s it. We’ll be dead by the time you’ll be released. Well, there’s no one to pity us, and there’s nothing we can do about it!”

At this point, the visit ended. Poor souls, they didn’t have the time to eat and left for Khashuri, hungry. Then I exerted pressure on the detective, “Hold a trial fast and transfer him to the prison! Don’t get him killed here! He’s just a kid, and innocent at that!” A week later, a court trial was scheduled. A trial, right! They only brought him up from the basement and transported to the prison. They put a sign on his back that read “traitor”.

I visited him there. I brought him stew, yet the guards ate it all. I asked him what the guards had fed him, and he answered, “Borsch.” Then he was exiled to some small town past Magadan [a city in North-East Russia]. There’s nothing past it. It’s the furthest [northernmost] point in the country, after which is the Chukchi Peninsula only, leading to America.

Then I appealed to Malenkov. I wrote an appeal in my poor Russian, to the best of my ability, saying that he was innocent, that he was from a different type of family; that the detective never read about his serving our side us a spy and then accidentally being captured by the Germans. I wrote to Stalin first and then to Malenkov, “My brother, who later became a guerilla, hadn’t even seen a rifle in his life before he got drafted and sent into the forest; “Go, join the guerillas, you may learn how to use a gun or something,” he was told (it was before he was captured by the Germans). That’s how he became a guerilla fighter in Western Ukraine. He was given a paper by the Secretary of Party Committee of Western Ukraine (the accursed one wrote it in the Ukrainian language), verifying that he had fought as a guerilla, that he was an activist and the leader of a guerilla group. He has evidence of having spent six months as a guerilla in Ukraine, while helping Thalmann’s resistance groups in Germany for three months. What happened to these documents? My brother shouldn’t suffer because you cannot

read!" I also wrote that our father was a Party member who had worked underground; that I had been Party Committee Secretary for twenty years; that my brother was Party Committee Secretary and an engineer; that the younger brother was Communist Union of Youth Committee Secretary, and that this younger brother had been arrested and exiled. I appealed, "How can such a family raise a traitor? Please save him!"

I inserted the letter in an envelope, one that had to be insured. I wrote the address at the bottom of the envelope and sent it to Malenkov. He freed such young men [like her brother]. He was imprisoned for six years while Stalin was alive. As soon as Stalin died in 1953, I wrote the appeal. I knew that he would never be released in Stalin's time. That much I knew. [My brother's] documentation was reviewed and he was released. It was said that he was innocent, having fought as a guerilla for so long. So they released him. He served six years, while being sentenced to twenty-five.

He stayed there, however, working in the mine. He was in Magadan. Can you imagine how hard a labor it was? He was a gold prospector. [Prospectors] wore boots up to their crotches, pardon my French. They penetrated Tundra. There was so much water that they used long poles to probe the depth. If the depth was below the human height, they pushed forward; if it exceeded the human height, they halted. They filled up buckets with dirt and, poor souls, carried those buckets to dump the content into a special vessel called the vat. The content of the vat was then rinsed to separate the gold that was then sent to the government. You know what some of the young men did, those who were present at the rinsing of the vat? They hid [gold] in their hair (those who had good hair) and then concealed it in their socks. My brother said, "Yes, but what good was that gold? They all knew who stole gold and how much. After someone was released, he was followed and killed over gold by his fellow comrades, or by local Chukchi who knew that those released carried gold. Chukchi mugged them, killed them, and took away the gold. There was no way I could make it to Magadan alive. I wasn't crazy. I knew better than to hold back gold."

The conditions were tough. There was no potable water at all. The place was full of swamps. Water was delivered in vats; one cup per prisoner. He who drank two cups risked having his head smashed from behind by a fellow prisoner. They were given one

copper cup per person. You drink it at a single gulp and that's it, that's your daily ratio until 3 pm on the next day.

One time, when there was a shortage of water, he sneaked out to the spring at night, in snow, and froze. His frozen body was taken back, laid on the floor, and the commanding officer said, "If he thaws, he may live. If not, just dig the snow and bury him. This snow won't thaw. Leave him here. Where am I supposed to take him? Why did he leave in the first place?"

"It was like -76 F outside. I sneaked out and reasoned I might as well die here. Then I lay down on my back in the snow. When I was brought back in, I had my arms folded as though I were sleeping. I thawed out and didn't have any fever either. It's just in the evening, after I went to bed, I noticed that one of my toes had turned black."

The camp physician was summoned. He arrived, grabbed large scissors, applied iodine on the big toe and cut it off. He said, "You may rest for three days, then you're going back to work." "He put iodine on the wound and applied some anti-hemorrhagic dressing over it. We had these dressings. Whenever one of us cut himself, this dressing was applied and the wound healed without any bandaging or anything.

"After three days, I got bored with sitting there in the cold, with no food or drink." Prisoners were fed boiled pasta twice a day and given tea with a piece of sugar to drink. "I spent three days in that misery. Then I put boots on my toeless foot and left." As it turned out, he had been told that it was possible to travel from Magadan by train or bus free of charge. However, he ended walking from that town (I don't remember what it was called) all the way to Magadan. He spent one night at some Chukchi's house. He paid from his remuneration. He said, "I'll give you money. Just don't frisk me. I have no gold, not a gram." As he related, the moon was full, it was bright, and he walked day and night. He finally made it to Magadan, where he bought an airline ticket to Novosibirsk [a city in Siberia, Russia]. Once at the Novosibirsk Airport, he started having a high fever. He was transported straight to the Tuberculosis Clinic, examined and diagnosed with consumption. He was hospitalized, and that's where my tall sister-in-law happened to be.

She was taller than my brother. She took notice of a Georgian man registered as Giorgi Gelashvili. He told her, however, that he

was referred to as Zhora by his family member. Thus, she would enter his room and ask, "And how are we today, Zhora? I got some food for you." She fed him fried chickens, boiled eggs, butter, goat milk, and sometimes cheese, every day. She fed him so well that his lungs were clear in three months. That's how well this lady nursed him.

He spent eighteen months in the hospital. We didn't know whether he had been released from prison or not. Then he was hired as an x-ray maintenance guy in the same hospital. He was a talented boy. He knew the clock inside and out. He could have a glance at a clock, take it apart, then put it back together and make it work. Thus, whenever their x-ray machine broke down, he fixed it. He had a good salary. After he recovered, he was told he was to be discharged and sent back to work in the mine. Zhora answered, "I have suffered a lung disease. Although you've healed me, I cannot go back there. Tuberculosis will kill me. Pay me my dues and I'll head back home, to Georgia." He moved into his mother-in-law's house, fixed the fence, covered the roof, built a stone staircase, cleaned the yard spotless, pruned the trees, planted and harvested potatoes.

At last, we received a letter and learned that he had a wife in Novosibirsk and that they even had had a child. I wouldn't stop writing letters to him and asking him to come back to his parents with his wife and children. They couldn't leave my sister-in-law's mother on her own. She passed away, yet my sister-in-law refused to leave. Then Zhora told her, "I'll go, get married there. Keep this child. I'll support you from there." After he told her he was going to remarry, she became forced to follow him. They left the house to the godparent of their child. Somebody, who lived in a shabby house, happened to have baptized Zhora's child. My brother let him into his house and said, "Valery, stay in my house. I may not like it in Georgia and come back. Promise me you'll vacate the house if I come back."

They arrived. He came up with excuses, saying that wanting to bring some money to his parents was the reason why he stayed to work in the mine. My mother looked at my sister-in-law and nearly passed out. She was a head taller than he. She was unattractive, yet a doctor is a doctor. She was a cold-hearted woman. One day she could be warm and be rigid the next day. I asked her one day,

out of curiosity, “What’s your background?” “I’m a Cheldan. That’s what they call us. We’re no longer Russians,” she answered. It read Cheldan in her passport too. Was she a Russian? A Cossack? Who was she? I asked her, “Are you Christian?” She replied, “Of course, I am. We’re outright Orthodox!”

Their child knew good Georgian. Zhora had been speaking to her in Georgian from day one. He probably considered coming back one day. The child would approach my mother, “Granma, is the tea ready?” “Yes, sweetheart, it is. Come have some.” “I’ll have it over there. Mom’s is all by herself.” “Of course, darling. Here’s sugar and bread.”

The lady wouldn’t sit at the table with us. I don’t know, maybe she figured out that my mother didn’t really like her. Not my father, though; he was a well-cultured man. He would say, “Vera, my child, please make good borsch for us. I miss it. You’re a good cook.” A Georgian man yearning for borsch! Can you imagine? She respected father. She truly made excellent borsch. No wonder! That’s all they have in Siberia, cabbage and potato.

My brother found it hard to live here. Potatoes were this big [making a six-inch diameter circle with her hands] and cabbages were this size [approximately twenty inches] in Siberia. A head of cabbage was large enough to cook borsch all week. Two onion bulbs weighed over a pound. My sister-in-law couldn’t get used to living here either. She sowed one container of beans and harvested half a container. She found life here to be too miserable. My brother was about to run back but my father and mother wouldn’t let him go. He complained to me, “You brought me here! I can’t live here!” I feel guilty about it to this day. He said, “Had I stayed there, my daughter wouldn’t have died.”

This girl [the niece] had a Ukrainian boyfriend. This young man came here and they got married. My sister-in-law, however, didn’t like him. He was a corresponding medical college junior. He was an army officer. He had served in the army. He served as a paramedic. He was very talented. He wasn’t hired as a paramedic in Khashuri, however. My niece was a gorgeous girl. Everyone had his eye on her. She was reproached day and night, “Why did you marry a Ukrainian? Couldn’t you find a Georgian husband?” Yet, she loved her husband.



As an army officer, my nephew-in-law moved to Sovietized Germany to work and took his family with him. There were those who fought against the Soviet Union, ambushing and attacking Communists, and demanding them to leave. My niece's family lived in some hutment near the forest. They were not allowed to settle in the city itself. Germans attacked the hutment. The wives and children of Russian army officers were hacked to pieces at the entrance. The inhabitants of twelve units were slaughtered, twelve units! And only they [the niece's family] survived because my Eteri screamed, "I'm not Russian! I'm Georgian! Don't kill me!" They wouldn't touch her. Her son, a little boy, however, cried inconsolably at seeing his mother about to be killed. Her exclamation saved them in the nick of time.

When the Russian officer learned that their wives and children had been slaughtered, they wept bitterly, then loaded machine guns, and raided the village. A group of armed men met them near the village only to say that they had nothing to do with it and that the separatists were to blame, similar to what Kokoity says today, "I have nothing to do with it! It's the separatists' fault!"

That's how their stay in Germany ended. They came back and settled in Khashuri, where Goga lives today. They only spent one year here but my nephew-in-law was already getting restless. One time he sneaked out and arrived at my house. I knew he was a good eater, so I fried a whole pan of potatoes and put it in front of him. Then he told me, "Aunt Maro, I have to leave that place, but my wife won't leave her parents. I'm about to graduate and I need to find a job." And he did leave. After that, my niece worried all the time, developed throat cancer as a result, and passed away.

She probably loved her husband. She never remarried, though she had admirers in Khashuri. She worried about her son as well and... Goga was fourteen when she passed away. He's fifty now. He's a big man, a grownup, but he has progressive dementia. He was five or six when his father left them. His father remarried. I received a letter from Sasha once, asking how they were. I replied that Eteri had died of throat cancer, while the boy remained unattended. I never received any follow-up letters from him...

My brother is presently in bad shape. He lived in the village. They're both alive. He is seventy-nine and my sister-in-law is seventy-eight. They can no longer walk, and they've both gone

deaf. Zhora travels to Khashuri, supplies Goga with food enough to last him a couple of days and immediately returns. Grandson does not let my sister-in-law in the house at all. He remembered his mother's words, "You hated my father and you killed my mother."

My elder brother married this woman with a child of her own. When he told my father about marrying a woman with a child, he replied, "Go ahead and marry her. Just remember that you'll never be allowed to leave her."

This is how my brother fell in love with this woman. When he was drafted, he passed a medical examination, naked. This woman happened to work in the hospital reception. She was a physician, weighing, consulting people, etc. She must have caught a glimpse of him. She told him, "I'll give you my address. Why won't you drop a line?" My brother wrote a bunch of letters to her.

Then he wrote to my father, asking him to supply her with a cart of firewood as she was in need. My father delivered enough firewood, all properly chopped, to last her through that winter. He said, "How can I refuse my son? He wrote from the frontline!" When he arrived, he was welcomed by that woman's mother and daughter. He inquired, "And who's this?" "This is Mary's daughter," was the reply. He was in shock, yet he said, "Come here, darling." He caressed the child anyway, "Tell your mommy that Sasha's father was here to bring you some firewood." Then Mary wrote to my brother, informing him that his father had supplied her with firewood.

My sister-in-law's last name was Drelling. She was daughter of a Georgianized man who had moved to Georgia and married a Georgian woman, my sister-in-law's mother. Had not Mary taken her husband's last name, they would have been kicked out during Stalin's rule. She was a tough woman. When my father sat down, she wouldn't sit down but kept herself busy. My father told her, "Child, why won't you get some rest?" "My Mary," that's how my mother referred to her. She had learned how to bake bread in the brick oven, and my mother only ate bread baked by her, while baking it herself before. My father used to say, "A loaf of bread must be large enough to fit a square meal." On Saint George's Day, wine was placed on such loaves, along with a plateful of meat and a wineglass. Then a toast was pronounced, wine spilled over the bread and consumed. The whole meal was served on a loaf of bread. That's how large my mother's loaves were. She had a large, soft peel.

My father and mother lived a long life together. My father passed away at the age of ninety-four. My mother followed him a year later. In their latest picture, he looks like a sixty-year-old man. He had all his teeth in place. When asked why, he replied, "I crack walnuts with my teeth. That's why! The mouse has all its teeth in place because it cracks hazelnut and walnut all the time. Have your teeth trained to be resilient! If you eat porridge all the time, you'll lose them all."

My third brother, Niko Gelashvili, went missing in action. I've told you about him, one whom I thought to have been wounded and discharged, and whose namesake, the teacher from Kvareli, I encountered. My brother was awarded a Gold Star Order and a Second Class Hero of the Soviet Union Honorary Title, as well as a number of Stalin Prizes, on top of being First Lieutenant and a recipient of an Exceptional Spy Award.

I visited his grave during the Communist rule. At first, we received an MIA notification. Later we received a KIA notification. We held them back from our parents. They never saw them. They received pensions and this is how we explained it, "He's in Germany, and we arranged for you to be able to pick up his pension here. He didn't come back, and we lied to the Military Commissariat [local military administrative agency in the Soviet Union], saying that he has been killed." My father figured it out. They received pensions separately as he didn't have a wife. Father received forty-five rubles and so did mother.

I wrote a letter to Moscow using my poor knowledge of Russian and received an answer, "He was killed in Poland; is missing in action." I wrote directly to one of the top generals of the Soviet Union Army, "What kind of people are you to have lost a Hero of the Soviet Union, First Lieutenant, awardee of two Stalin Prizes and seven orders. Tell me where my brother's grave is. I know where it is, and it will be a shame if you don't show its location to me." I knew where it was because I had received a letter from his political instructor, written the very night he was killed, "He burned in the tank last night. He's buried on the boulevard near the railroad station in the city of Sanok" [town in South-Eastern Poland]. I knew where the grave was, yet I wouldn't reveal it.

Then I received a letter written in a very respectful manner [in Russian], "Dear Maria Gavrilovna, we forwarded your inquiry to

Leningrad, where the personal records of officers are filed. You will receive a comprehensive reply from me personally. Do not expect, however, a prompt reply. It may take about a year.”

A year passed, and I received a letter from the General Staff, “Buried in Sanok. His remains were disinterred and reinterred in Baligrod [village in South-Eastern Poland]; buried in the officers’ cemetery.” There were four people buried there. All four were mentioned by names. The letter also read, “The grave is to the left from the gate, number two.” Just like this. Of course, I would go!

I had so many appointments! I was scrutinized so many times! Whose daughter are you? Why are you going there? He’s dead anyway, why do you need to go? Nevertheless, I remained firm and said, “Don’t talk to me like that, young man! You’re my son’s age! My father was a lieutenant colonel. Do I look like a saboteur to you? What can I do in Poland now? Does it look like I’m a defector? Tell me!”

I explained and conveyed everything clearly. I was good at geography. I used a map to calculate how much time I would spend on train and which trains I was to take. Eventually, I was told to get back to them a month later. I was told to have my siblings come as they were also supposed to be scrutinized. I said, “Here are all the documents. My siblings need no verification. One is a farmer, who was accused of treason, tried and exiled, then acquitted and released because he was no traitor. He was released by Malenkov. He was released in six years after I reported as to who his parents were, though he was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. What? You think you’re smarter than Malenkov? What would be the purpose of his coming here? He can no longer hold his water! He cannot come here!”

I was asked about my second brother. He was in Kutaisi, enlisting soldiers, that is, recruits; he worked for the Military Commissariat. I answered, “He’s in charge of the Kutaisi Military Commissariat. My sister is a housewife. Her only route is to the barn and back to the house. She never leaves home.” I was asked no more questions. Then I said, “I submitted my application in July. Maybe you could let us go in August.”

This argument took place on the first. On the seventh, our travel documents were issued. We were given three sets of travel documents, for my sister, my brother who lived in Kutaisi, and

me. The other brother refused to go, saying that he couldn't travel as he had to use the bathroom every five minutes. I summoned them and they arrived. I remember it so well. I made a lot of burgers. We set up a nice table. We took some soil from the graves of father and mother.

You know why I went? I saw my brother in a dream. He was walking to the barn, where the graves are, with his side pockets full of something heavy. "O Niko! I thought you were dead! Are you alive? Are you back from Poland?" "I am in Poland," he replied. "What's that?" I asked. "I'm taking soil from the graves of mother and father. I need it for my home," which meant that he needed it for his grave. I told my sister, "Let them do whatever they please. I am going and I am taking the soil with me!"

Thus, we were allowed to travel. Nugzar [Mariam's son] piloted our airplane to Lvov and made sure we travelled alright. We spent that night in the hotel. Our train was scheduled to depart on the following morning. I asked my brother to buy train tickets for us. He left, wearing his medals and decorations. The Poles abhorred Soviet medals and decorations. Yet, he pinned them on his chest! I told him, "Take them off and put them in the bag! I ain't Georgia to prance around like this!" He asked why. I replied, "They'll label as an invader. Put them back right now! We are invaders." He took them off and packed them. He asked, "What good am I now?" I answered, "Just keep your mouth shut! You are who you are!"

I gave him twenty-four rubles. He returned and... "I need seventy-two rubles." I told him, "Didn't I give you a railroader's paper, so you could get a 'request'?" "I don't know, Maro. Why don't you come with me and have it all settled?"

I said, "Hello, colleague. I am a railroader. Why do you charge us seventy-two rubles? I am entitled for a 'request', and three persons can be included in one invoice. And I don't want my ticket stamped for as long as I'll stay in Poland."

You know what a "request" is? It's a ticket for three persons. You can travel by train, or whichever way you please; you can travel wherever you want. Only your final destination is marked on the ticket. I wrote down the Central Station as our destination. The Central Station is located past Samara [a city in the southeastern part of Russia]. We arrived, bringing the soil consecrated by a priest, consecrated bread. We would never find a priest in those

parts, so we had cheese bread, sweet bread, and brick oven bread, everything blessed by a priest. We packed everything and left.

But you know what I regret? We took only six bottles of wine. We were told it was usually confiscated en route. As it turned out, no one confiscated wine. You could take a whole barrel. Luggage was inspected by Russian young men whom you could treat to a glass of wine, and they would let you be. I learned about it later, a bit too late!

Poland, where my brother was buried, was divided in two, with two District Committees, one of Workers and Farmers and the other of Communists, the latter occupying the center. I was not going all the way to the center, however. There is the Baligrod District past the Russian border, a few miles away from the border.

We were instructed by that man from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, one who issued travel documents to us. After our arrival, we were instructed to go to the Special Department of the Baligrod Military Cemetery, pay three rubles to have the name identified on the list. Then we were instructed to treat the officer on duty to a glass of wine and have him show us to the grave. I didn't tell him at that time that I knew the grave's location and number.

We arrived. My brother stopped a bus, paid thirty rubles, and the driver took us all the way to the cemetery. There was a direct bus route from Sanok to Baligrod where my brother was buried. We saw that station and that boulevard from where his remains were translated. I came across one old, ancient beggar and asked him, "Where can I find the graves of the soldiers who used to be buried here?" He asked [in Russian], "Who are you?" I answered, "I'm a Georgian visitor. I'm looking for my brother's grave." He replied, "You know, child, everyone who used to be buried here lies in Baligrod now. There are only the flowers here." That's what he said.

There was a boulevard in the city center. That's where they were dumped.

When we got on a bus, it was packed. People looked at us, noticing that we weren't from those parts. Some young men rose and said, "Please have a seat." My brother turned to me, "And you wanna tell me they call us invaders?" I replied, "Try your decorations on. Then you'll see."

Polish mothers bought flowers every Saturday and, together with their children, went to the Baligrod cemetery. The Polish cem-

etery is big. A group of twenty resistance fighters against Germany are buried there, those who had been captured and executed. It was their cemetery. Not a single ordinary Pole was buried there. The cemetery was for anti-German resistance fighters.

The cemetery had a big sign at the wide entrance. It consisted of ten or twelve rows all the way through. Goodness, were they long! It's located on an elevation, making a vast field, with nothing but rows of graves. Ours [Soviet] was the front row. That's where 170 thousand Soviet fighters were buried. Some graves contained ten soldiers and some twenty. These [those buried with Mariam's brothers], as commanding officers, were buried in groups of four per grave. There were a Chechen, a Ukrainian, a Belorussian, and my brother, a Georgian, buried in one grave. I had their last names written down.

I reached the grave. I wanted to cry. There was mud all over the place. Only our grave had violets blossoming over them, those small violets called evening violets in our parts. These lowlifes must have sent a telegram. That's why the first two graves of commanding officers were so beautified. The third grave was all in weeds. A woman approached, and we gave her money. I asked her, "Who planted these flowers?" It was in the summer, in August, it was hot, and flowers were not supposed to blossom. "I did. I was instructed from there." She was a Special Department employee. My brother gave her ten rubles. We gave her oven-baked bread. She prayed, making the sign of the cross. We scattered the consecrated soil over the grave. My sister wept. I couldn't shed a single tear. I don't know why, maybe out of an excessive feeling of gratification.

Then, a miracle, not one tree grew in that cemetery, save one, a spruce, growing on Niko's grave! It was an act of God!

We had one tall spruce in our yard. My father told him once, "Son, go and cut off its top. I loved this spruce, don't fell it." Niko replied, "It's the first thing I see amid these shrubs when I leave home."

It seemed that one of those spruces he loved so much had been transferred to his grave. It was just as tall and dense. It grew in the corner of the grave, providing nice shade. We sat in the shade of the spruce. I have a whole lecture written on that spruce. My brother, a famous photographer, packed his razor, yet he forgot to bring the camera, so we could take pictures. A photographer took pictures of a Polish beggar but my brother said that the pictures

wouldn't develop. The spruce shade moved away, and we wound up directly in the sun. It seemed to have rained until we went to the cemetery, yet it was a sunny day when we went there. It rained when we traveled by train; it rained when we were on the bus. The sun began to shine, however, once we reached the cemetery.

We rode back on a train with cushiony seats and panel compartments. Our seats were unfolded, and we were sleeping. They [ticket controllers] proved to be very nice people. They asked us [in Russian], "Where are you from?" I replied, "From Tbilisi." "Georgians?" I answered yes. "Then you're alright," and asked no further questions. I told them, "Why? You can check. We have a 'request'." "No need. No need. Please forgive us for God's sake."

We got off at the station. We walked around, touring the city, a beautiful big city. I don't remember the name. My sister bought me a purse. I bought a raincoat. My brother also bought a raincoat for his wife. It was his first wife. In one word, we replenished our stock and visited the grave. Our electric train had already left for the center, that is, Warsaw. The next one was scheduled to leave on the following morning.

Where were we to go? We went to the hotel. "No rooms available," we were told. It was a railroaders' hotel. I said [in Russian], "You're a railroader. Please give us one room for my brother and one for us women." She said, "No rooms." I said, "What do you mean 'no rooms'? Rooms are always available. That's what they always say in our parts too. Don't you lie to me!" She fell silent and put my brother and us in separate rooms. Of course, she had rooms. She just wanted to make money.

We stayed there overnight. We got up at seven in the morning. The electric train arrived at the station. It wasn't time to depart yet. We were leaving at eight-thirty. The train was supposed to wait for workers and take them to Sanok where large factories were located.

We boarded the train and took our seats. Our heads were visible. We weren't hiding! One Pole approached us [in Russian], "Where are you headed? Why did you board so early?" I replied, "Go back where you came from! It's none of your business!" My brother was scared, "I hope they don't slaughter us. It's just three of us here." I answered, "You can hide if you want!" They kept coming and inviting us, "Would you like some tea?" or "Would you like to



disembark and visit the cafeteria?” I replied, “We’ve already had our tea.” They approached us three or four times.

The train was full by eight-thirty. A man walked by, making sure everyone had a ticket. He approached us and, as soon as we presented our ‘request’, waved his hands and asked [in Russian], “Visitors?” I replied, “Yes. Visitors.” He immediately apologized. He didn’t even have a look at our paper. Our people are not so well-cultured. An American man was beaten up and his car was taken away just the day before yesterday. He cried out [in Russian], “I am an American!” No one listened! He didn’t have much money, dollars, so they took away his car. His face and body were all covered in blood. I felt embarrassed looking at it on television. And how attentive people were to us over there!

I’ve toured Poland quite thoroughly. My son paid five hundred rubles and bought me an international tour voucher. Not one of those tours where you see big trains packed with shuttle traders with their money stashed in their socks or elsewhere. Such trains are loathed abroad. One woman told me in Czechoslovakia, “You’re all shuttle traders! You’re all Jews!”

There were two District Committees in Poland. One was the Communist Party District Committee and the other People’s District Committee. To make it short, the Polish system was no good. Only a half of its population consists of Party members, they are very poor. Of course, they welcomed us as we were delegated by the Party.

We were twenty young men and fifteen young women. You know who were selected [to join the group]? A civil engineer and a metallurgical engineer. A man from the Rustavi Metallurgical Plant traveled with us, pretending to be a stoker. In reality, he was appointed to spy on our group. I figured him out right away. He had soft work shy hands and general outlook. I was a seasoned seventy-two-year old woman. I could see through him, that KGB guy!

Everyone’s document read “a miner”, not a single “engineer”. We, thirty-five people, were given one loaf of bread. That woman sliced it and gave each of us a small piece. The guys looked at her and grabbed three persons’ share each. “What are you doing?” “We eat a lot of bread?” “Why, you don’t have any other food?” “Only if you knew our dishes, you miserable ones!” answered one of the guys, a miner, in Polish.

Americans sat at the next table. That was the first time I saw Americans. They all had big bellies. They were rich and chubby.

I had a friend, Suzanna, in Czechoslovakia. She came to visit her father's grave once. She stayed at the Tbilisi Hotel. She never made it to my house. She told the driver, "I need to get to Nakaduli Street." The driver took her to the Nakaduli Movie Theater, Saburtalo District. She told me, "I rode and rode in the cab. The driver charged me ten rubles but I never found your house. Finally, I went back to the Tbilisi Hotel."

As soon as I arrived at the hotel and that woman [Suzanna] came downstairs, two young men took a table nearby and started to play backgammon. I pulled out my warrant and said, "Child, I'm an old Party member. I have nothing to hold back from this woman. She's a former Armenian, the wife of a Czechoslovakian young man. She has brought me a pair of sandals and a headscarf. They're right here. If you want, you can have a look at them, but please don't make noise here. Please sit next to someone else. I've been a member of the Party for as long as you've been living on this earth. I am Party Committee Secretary. It's a shame that you should check on me."

They listened to me and left. I was later summoned by the KGB because of it. I inquired what it was all about, and the operator told me, "Well, you had this guest from Czechoslovakia and you wouldn't let the guys sit near you." "I will go and read them out. I've done it before." You know how badly I read them out? "You were not even born when my father became a Communist! How dare you check on me! I only presented my warrant and asked them to stop clanging." They asked me, "Do you know where you are?" I replied, "Where? Do you intend to have me arrested? Do you have anything on me? Have I committed treason? Immediately apologize for summoning me and making me come up to the ninth floor, or else I will arrange an interrogation for you!"

He couldn't say a word. He accompanied me on my way out and said, "Please don't tell anyone you were here." Can you imagine? The guards at the elevator saw me off. He made me go up nine floors in that building called Telecommunications House.

They never found out anything anyway. She spent ten rubles in the cab, and I put twenty rubles in a flat and collapsible handbag. It had a plastic bottom plate, so I put the money under that plate.

I opened the bag and showed it to them, "This is the handbag I intend to give her." Suzanna called me later, "I'm amazed at how brave you are!" I saw her off and even gave her sweets and pictures of Tbilisi for her husband. It was prohibited to send views of Tbilisi by mail. The majority featured churches; some were purchased by me and some taken by my brother. I told her, "Put them at the bottom and cover them with the clothes."

I haven't written to her in two years now. She probably thinks I have passed away. Our correspondence has been such a wonderful experience.

I've worked as Secretary of the Party Committee (consisting of one hundred members) of the Tbilisi Junction Station for twenty years. It was called the Navtlughi Junction Station. It was renamed later. I've been awarded certificates and letters of recommendation. I remained Secretary of the Party Committee until I retired. Deputies would be elected, while I would be reelected as Secretary.

I was told I was good at "keeping up" the station. Now this is what "keeping up" meant. I was good at making our employees subscribe to newspapers. They were supposed to subscribe to the Railroader newspaper, the Communist newspaper by all means, and one Russian-language newspaper, either *Izvestia* or *Pravda*. We, the Communists, subscribed to four titles. A Communist was absolutely obligated to be a Communist newspaper subscriber!

One time, after I had all our Georgians subscribe to newspapers, the Kurds refused to do the same. And they were right! They couldn't read Georgian or Russian. I had four shifts of redcaps, four men per shift. I was Secretary of the Party Committee; at the same time, I was in charge of the PA and Information Desk. I was not paid for this Party Secretary. Nevertheless, I sat at the Information Desk every day, announcing train schedules.

I knew their [redcaps'] secret. They were not allowed past Station Square. When a farmer delivered his goods by train, a farmers' market carrier was to come over and carry his stuff.

One time Khalo, redcap shift supervisor, approached me saying, "We cannot read. I have toilet paper. I'm not poor enough to use newspapers. So what if the Armenians subscribed to the *Vrastan* [Armenia in the Armenian language] newspaper? It arrives from Armenia on the next day." I replied, "Alright, Khalo. Rejoice! I'll be relieved from the duties of Party Committee Secretary. My

salary is eighty rubles. Alright, I'll subscribe to three newspapers for each of you. I will pay and you will receive the newspaper. Now give me your list with exact addresses, you miserable ones you!" I pretended to be very angry, as though I no longer wanted the red-caps to subscribe. There were two young men. They approached me, "Aunt Maro, it's embarrassing. We cannot let you pay for us." "Weren't you the ones who sent Khalo to tell me you couldn't read and write in Russian? You know how to count money alright! When the train from Kakheti arrives and you'll carry luggage from the station to the market, I'll let the Party Committee know about it! You'll be prohibited from leaving the square! Watch and see!"

On the following day, I didn't let them go, "Go ahead and cross the tracks! I dare you!" They used to walk over the tram tracks, carry loads to the farmers' market, and charged a lot of money. They were paid five rubles. They were filthy rich. I told them, "You don't want to learn Russian? Alright, remain what you are, Kurds. Go back to your Kurdistan and subscribe to newspapers there. And I'm not apologizing!" I subscribed and paid from my own pocket.

They learned how much my bill was. Khalo gathered his people and came to me, "Only let us go to the farmers' market and we'll repay you, and pay even more every day." I told them, "I am a Communist. I don't need you to bribe me every day. You can bring me some fruits, however. I'm not Bekaia to accept bribes here." They paid him [Bekaia] ten rubles. They told him, "Maro won't let us go [over the tracks]." He replied, "It's none of my business. Pay me my due, and you're free to go."

Bekaia asked me to train young women, "Train them and don't tell anyone. I want to hire them as cashiers. Our cashiers are old and ailing. I'll hire these afterward. Just explain to them in your free time how to sell tickets, how to calculate routes."

Our textbook was in Russian. We hired young women who spoke Russian without delay. I trained cashiers in secret. Later, however, it became known that I had trained them.

In 1974 or 1975, a very bad train wreck occurred, one of the worst in the history of the South Caucasian railroad. In the evening, the Tbilisi-Batumi train departed from Tbilisi. It had a small number of beds and sleeping cars, accommodating mainly traders and workers, inhabitants of Zestaphoni, Guria, and the whole region of Imereti. Thus, the train was crowded. The Mtkvari

River, which flowed on the southern side of the tracks, changed its course right before the train entered Dzegvi and flows on the northern side. The train had to cross the bridge on an elevation. The height was approximately one hundred feet. It happened in the summer. The tracks had expanded by half an inch. Between Dzegvi and Kvakhevi, the electric locomotive went off the tracks at fifty miles per hour and right through the sand. The cars collided with one another, making a heap of thirteen train cars. The train couldn't stop, leaned on its side together with the electric locomotive, and rolled downhill. It only stopped after having reached the bottom. It stopped near a village road. It didn't stop, it actually crashed, smashing the cars and killing the people. There was a pool of blood so big that nothing could be discerned that night.

In the morning, the rescuers arrived. The traffic was halted. It was halted for three days to prevent other passengers from having to look at the scene and to have the railroad tracks fixed. The second wheels cut through the tracks, destroying everything in its way. Farmers lived in a distance, below the scene. They did, however, have vineyards and orchards closer to the tracks. Blood flowed into these orchards, and people refused to harvest grapes or fruits in the fall.

People in Western Georgia, starting from Khashuri and Gori, whose relatives or acquaintances didn't arrive on time, learned about the wreck and traveled to the scene. Militiamen were dispatched to protect people. They surrounded the train cars, yet were unable to see anything. The crane would lift one car and carry it, while repair workers would clear the scene. There was no way to identify the dead! Some found severed heads, while others discovered hands, or even one half of a body with the other half missing.

It was such a horrible wreck! I still get chills up and down my spine. The process of removing body parts from the wreckage took seven days. Many bodies were never found, not in one piece. It was calculated that almost three thousand people were on that train. Lively trade activities were held at that time, and there must have been people who traveled standing. How many more people were stuck in that train? I don't know the exact number, child, but it was the worst train wreck. Yes, train wrecks do happen, all kinds of them. Tanks full of creosote go off the tracks, catch on fire, yet I haven't heard of a train wreck take so many lives.

My distant cousin had two children, a son and a daughter. The girl was a sophomore student. The boy had brought some goods to sell [in Tbilisi]. So the siblings decided to travel together and boarded the last car. Although the cars in the rear of the train were wrecked badly, whole bodies were still removed from them; dead bodies, of course. There were no survivors. Both of my cousin's children were killed. Poor soul, he had two coffins in his home and two children to mourn.

By the way, the watchman who was in charge of the tracks was arrested and executed. Back in those days, the ties had three bolts. His job was to make sure they were tightly fastened and to tighten loose bolts on either side. His office was called railroad track watchman. His duty consisted of making rounds three-four times a day. Actually, he was supposed to do the same at night as well, but watchmen had peculiar shifts. They worked one full day and then took a full day off. That train went off the tracks near Dzegvi because of a loose bolt. Before it went completely off, the second wheel pulled out a track. Had it not been for the loose bolt, it would never happen as the railroad tracks were embedded deep in the ground. It was not done on purpose, however. Things like that didn't usually happen in those days.

Thus, that man was arrested and executed. And he deserved to be executed. Just do your job, man! You're in charge of some three miles, just walk down the tracks and fasten the bolts! By the way, he turned himself in, saying that it was his fault. He probably reasoned he would be sentenced to time in prison; he hoped to get away with it. Yet, he simply vanished. There was no trial, no nothing. People like him were executed by a firing squad near the prison. It was in 1974, 1975, or 1976.

Nugzar graduated in 1972. He piloted planes to and from Azerbaijan. He was not allowed to fly big airplanes. He was an intern. Thus, he was out of town when I went to attend the funeral. I left our keys with neighbors.

After my husband reposed in 1980, my son refused to let me go back to work, "The mother of a pilot, a woman dressed in black [customary black clothing worn as a sign of mourning during and, in many cases, long after funerals], does not belong in the station! I will give you eighty rubles every month. Just stay at home. I don't want to hear about your Party Committee or your shifts anymore!"

He went to the Head of the Junction Station and asked him to have me discharged. In return, he promised that I, as a Party member, would continue paying my membership fee and attend meetings.

By the way, my Party Committee provided my son with a recommendation letter when he was about to be accepted as a member of the Communist Party, in 1973-1974. Then Nugzar gradually distanced himself from the Party, even before people started trampling their membership cards underfoot and burning them. I was also told to submit my Party membership card. I replied, "I have it right here. I never bribed anyone to acquire it or to be given a job. I became a Communist sincerely and wholeheartedly. I'll never give up my Communist Party membership card!"

Later, fifty years after I became a Party member, I was awarded a medal Fifty Years in the Party. It happened during Perestroika. A store was opened for us in Nadzaladevi [a district in Tbilisi], past the bridge, with a sign that read "For Party members of fifty years and over." Oh my goodness! Everything was free of charge. I only paid for fresh meat. Everything we were entitled to receive was free of charge. If we wanted to have something extra, we had to pay. We were entitled to half a pound of lamb or beef, instant coffee, Borjomi [Georgian sparkling mineral water] and a bottle of champagne, two eggs, and half a pound of butter. We went there once every three days. We maintained order when there was a waiting line. Many of us, Party members, met there. I met one colleague from the time when I worked for the Railroad Security Guard. I also met my professor of economics. It's amazing how we, decrepit old people, recognized one another. I've always been tough. I had no problem standing in line. I've let so many poor males cut in front of me.

This Nadia (the neighbor) forced her way into our group but it was revealed later that she hadn't been a Party member for fifty years, and she was eventually expelled. A representative of the District Committee stopped her at the entrance and said, "You're stolen our Party membership. You've never been a Party member. We know everything. If you don't behave, you'll wind up in jail." She had been exiled for treason. Her husband burned his own and her documents after they returned from exile. I asked my husband, "Why would he burn their passports?" He replied, "Passports issued to ex-convicts have different numbers."

Nadia lived in Stalingrad with her niece. That's where she sheltered that spy (her future husband). She lived in German quarters. He wooed her. She sheltered him and let him stay at night. Our people went to their home and arrested them both. They said, "We were helping the Reds [that is, Communists]." Nonsense! They were both exiled to Uzbekistan for ten years. She had been recently released when she made her way to Tbilikhelsatzko, a factory (I think it's still functioning), finding a job and even receiving a corporate apartment. I asked her husband, "Where did you find that crazy woman? Why did you, a Megrelian, marry that Russian woman? He said shortly before his death, "I've nothing to hide. I was a captive in Stalingrad, helping the Germans here and there." Helping in what way? He informed them about the whereabouts of the Red Army soldiers. She [Nadia] let him stay at her apartment overnight and was arrested along with him.

She appeared before the Lilo soldiers recently [in Russian], "I was a nurse in the Red Army. Here's my document." Her document read "Lucia Arisova", while in reality she was Nadia Golovanova. She worked where army personnel records were issued. Someone died. She stole the departed person's records and used her number. Now she claims to be Nadia Sharukhia, pretending to be Megrelian. She's a very deceitful woman. That's why I dislike her. Otherwise... We have another neighbor... I don't have much myself, alright... I had two pounds of pasta. Nugzar gave it to me yesterday. I gave half of the pasta to the neighbor. I asked, "You have anything to eat?" "Nothing. I bought powdered milk and some rice." I told her, "Here's some pasta you can boil and eat." Whenever she comes to visit with us, I give her some coffee, if I have any left. She's in need. I gave her three or four of Nugzari's pants that were too narrow for him.

She promised me today, "I'll accompany you to take a passport picture and submit a passport application for you. You don't need this Russian daughter-in-law of yours to go with you. I'm much obliged to you."

This Russian daughter-in-law of mine is Nugzar's wife. She used to be a flight attendant. They had a child over there, and I didn't know anything about it. Nugzar brought the child's picture. My husband was gravely ill. Ambrosi entered the room and covered something with a newspaper. When I left to cook food in



a little while, he flipped it over. It read in Russian, "To grandpa and grandma. It's me, Nana. I'm six-months-old in this picture. A keepsake to remind you of me."

He was afraid to let me see it. He was gravely ill. He passed away in the same year. God rest his soul, my husband was such a good man. He was good to me; he was good to everyone. He only spent seven years here, but everyone said, "My goodness, Ambrosi was such a wonderful man."

He knew he was about to die, yet he was always neatly dressed when going out. He shaved, put on a white collar and a black suit, thoroughly ironed his pants (if I wasn't around to do it, he ironed them himself) and polished his shoes. There was a chair outside, under the cottonwood. He went outside and sat in that chair. He knew he was dying, yet he kept his chin up. He didn't want me to see that he was dying.

You see, I am quite old. I got married in 1938. I have never changed a shirt or a skirt in front of my husband. You know how some people say, "Scrub my back for me please!" I would never let my husband into the shower with me! Woman, you must be kidding me! I would never let him see me naked! Never!

## **ZINA DADIANI**

Born in 1918

Interviewed by

ZEYNAB PHILIPOVA in Batumi, 2003

I was born in the village of Nokalakevi, Senaki District [Samegrelo, Western Georgia]. I was born one year after the Communists took over. I remember it vaguely. You know what noblemen used to do? They rode horses around the festive table. They entered the room on horses. I still hear the sound. We had a marble staircase. We had a very large mansion. Noblemen, dressed in chokhas [a traditional Georgian long tight-waist color jacket], armed with daggers, ascended [the staircase]... and clickety-click. You know what kind of noise horse hooves make when clicking against marble. Thus, they entered. Not all of them could enter. Five or six had to enter at a time. They rode around the set festive table and left. That's how large the room was. They made a circle and left. They trotted on horses in circles and left. They were greeted by the boys [servants] who took over the horses, and feasting ensued.

Feasting took place at least once a month. My cousin got married? Feasting! New Year's Eve, Easter, baptism? Feasting! Baptism was widespread in Samegrelo [a region in Western Georgia]. I was baptized. I always wore a cross. I remember how my elementary school teacher told me once, "Next time I see you with that on, I won't let you into the school." I conveyed these words to my family. My mother took off my cross right away and stashed it. Sovietization had just begun.

I know one tradition about Dadianis [the princely dynasty of the historic Samegrelo Principality, Western Georgia]. The uncle of Rostom Tzereteli married Mariam Dadiani. I don't know whether this Dadiani woman was my grandfather's sister or aunt. The Dadianis invited the Tzeretelis over. Now this is a tale. Preparations were underway, and the place was a total mess. This was related to me by my relatives. My grandfather had a servant, Zachariah from Racha [a region in Western Georgia]. You know noblemen used to have servants who recited poems and sang songs. This man was very quick and sharp. Zachariah was told, "Boil this heifer over the fire in the middle of the hut." Zachariah obeyed, while people

kept running back and forth in preparation. The heifer was probably cooked, so Zachariah removed the meat, intending to taste it. In the meantime, my grandfather opened the door and entered. Zachariah hid the piece of meat in his bosom. My grandfather noticed it and said in verse, “Zachariah, check outside – See what the weather’s like!” Zachariah rushed outside, probably removed the meat from his bosom, went back into the hut, and announced, “No rain outside, no sleet – Serving my master is so sweet!”

I don’t recall my family having servants. It was practiced before me. My brother’s were old enough, however, to have witnessed it. My family had an Armenian maiden, Aykanush. My family frequently remembered her. As far back as I can remember, my mother looked after the household herself, while my aunt did not do as much. My aunt claimed to belong to princely lineage, yet she was only a noblewoman. Her last name was Mikeladze. She got used to luxury however. She had servants.

My brothers were raised by my uncles. They weren’t brought up by mother. It was customary for uncles to raise their nephews back in those days. Both my brothers were given to wet nurses. We, my sisters and I, however, were not. It was not practiced in the Soviet period. My father allocated a piece of land to the family where Shalva was raised, and built a house. It was a Megrelian type of two-room dirt-floor house. Dirt floors were customary in those days; no [wooden] floor, just dirt. We loved that woman so much. We called her Nana. The last name of the nanny who raised my elder brother was Papaskiri, while the younger brother was brought up by Beselia. They never swore on the lives of their children. They swore on the lives of their foster children. Poor soul, she would say, “I swear on the life of my Shaliko...” She had boys. She never swore on their lives. The wet nurse breastfed her foster children as they had to be equal to her own children. They lived nearby. My brothers would come over and play games. Then they would say it was time for them to go home and head for their nanny’s home. They would come over in the evening, and eat and drink. Shalva would then rush back, “Mom Eka will yell at me.” Masha was the name of Shota’s nanny. My brothers became accustomed to labor as well. My brother and his nanny’s children went up a nearby mountain and carried firewood on their backs. They went and carried firewood. It was obligatory for a nanny to

be a farmer. I don't know how my mother handled her sons being raised by someone else. It was customary, however, for children to be raised by nannies. You know why it was beneficial? A child must be acquainted with everything, need, ailment, poverty, and honor. Honor was present among farmers to a greater degree.

These... I will say something. I know I'll be reprimanded for saying it. The noblemen feasted by themselves. My elder brother's nanny passed away after he went missing in action. When she learned he went missing, she sat near the house, waiting for him. A passerby asked her, "What are you doing here?" She replied, "Shaliko's about to come this way." She had her own children drafted, yet she never said a word about them, only repeating that Shaliko was about to return. They [the nannies] loved their foster children so much, even more [than their own children]. She was told that he [Zina's brother] had been killed. She wouldn't believe it however. Neither did Eka's son come back from the war, one who had been raised together with my brother, and nor did his elder brother. The elder brother had children of his own. They're looking for my nephew now. My nephew told me last summer (he was visiting with me here in Batumi), "You know, Kondrate's son came over and stayed with me for three days. 'I won't lose you,' he told me." Kondrate was Eka's son. Eka herself passed away at the age of a hundred and ten.

My elder brother was born in 1909. Shota was born in 1911. We still stay in touch with the descendants of the nannies of Shalva and Shota. Every time we travel to Samegrelo, we go visiting with the grandchildren of the nannies of Shaliko and Shota.

I was born in 1918. I remember everything from 1924 on. We, the Dadianis, were deprived of our home and lands. We spent three days outdoors. We slept under a fig tree. It was fall. It was time to harvest corn. It must have been October. The Village Council and elementary school moved into our home. I remember we were little and excited about being under a fig tree. Later, however, three days later (I still have no clue what happened; I'm an old woman, yet I still have no idea), we were told to move back into our house. They grabbed their desks, tables, all their stuff, and left. Thus, we were home once again. Then everything, cattle, and other items, was given back to us.

We even had a piano at home. My mother's sisters were pretty picky but my father's sisters were even worse. One of my father's sisters never married as she knew she couldn't marry a Dadiani, while fancying it beneath her dignity to marry someone else. Their grandmother's last name was Chikovani. Dadiani is our title, while Chikovani is our last name. My father's other sister got secretly married in Ochamchire. Who would give her in marriage to a Turkia [a Georgian last name]? He was a merchant, however, a very wealthy man, and very kind and handsome at that. My other grandfather, my mother's father, also paid special attention to lineage. He was alive when I got married. He nearly went crazy after learning that my sister married a Chikhladze [a Georgian last name]. He said [in Russian], "She married a merchant Kazakh." When he was told that Zina married a Chkheidze [a Georgian last name], he said [in Russian], "It's alright. She married a decent man. Chkheidzes used to be noblemen in Imereti [a region in Western Georgia]."

My grandfather passed away at the age of a hundred and five. As it turned out, he used to own ships, traveling and trading in Turkey. He was extremely wealthy. The Bolsheviks burned down his house. While the house was burning, my aunt got stuck upstairs, on the second floor; she jumped down and survived. My grandfather and uncle were downstairs, while Varvara was reading upstairs. A neighbor noticed that the house was burning and told grandfather, "Help her, Alexander!" Everyone in the village gathered to help, yet what could they do? Houses were made of wood back then. There were no brick houses in those days. It was a huge wooden house, a two-story house. Varvara looked around and saw that the staircase had already caught fire. She had no choice but to jump, which she did. She only damaged her eyes. Ever since, she had to bring the book close to her eyes in order to read. Aunt Varvara eventually married Vladimir Chanturia. They were both professors at Batumi University.

What else do I remember? There were informers in the village. They conveyed conversations, for example. Noblemen were still considered a bit suspicious. There was one Kiri, Gagua was his last name. He was despised by people. I was at my uncle's. My aunt was reading something in Russian. My uncle told her in Russian, "Stop! Stop! Someone's spying on us from below." I took his words into account. There was a teapot placed on the stove. I took it off

and poured hot water all over the floor. The spy had hidden under the house [Due to high humidity, houses were customarily placed on more or less high pillars in Western Georgia, thus preventing humidity from entering, while the floors were made of quite thin layers of wood]. The water dropped on him (the crack was not too wide) and we heard him cry out, "Ouch!" My uncle turned on me, "What have you done?"

There was also a commune in Nokalakevi. The commune, however, proved to be a failure. All families went there. They ate and drank there. They only went home to sleep. Somehow, the authorities failed to put it all together. As a result, the commune only lasted three months and then broke up. My family never joined the commune. When the collective farm was established, however, then my father and uncle were first to join. They contributed everything they possessed, cattle and lands (the whole village of Nokalakevi belonged to the Dadianis), thus welcoming Communist rule. It could be heard all over the district, "Alexander and Evgeni were first to submit their cattle to the collective farm."

My father and uncle never labored manually. Father was Chairman of the Village Council. Father and uncle were very well educated. They knew foreign languages. They had graduated from gymnasiums. They had traveled abroad. My father had been to France, just as a tourist, sightseeing. Uncle never worked. By the way, he had lived in Moscow for a year before I was born, and he returned on the very day I was born. I don't know what he was doing there. When he was told that Evgeni had a baby girl, he said, "Name her Zina." I think he had a mistress named Zina in Russia [laughs]. He had three daughters of his own. My mother's last name was Chichua. Her name was Eprosine. She was from Senaki [a district in Western Georgia], a village called Nosiri. My father's name was Evgeni. Mother was from a noble family. As a Dadiani, my father wouldn't marry a farmer's daughter. There were six of us siblings. We all lived as one household, uncle, cousins, aunt, and my immediate family. The house, however, was so big that it would fit one more family. My grandmother's name was Katuysha. Chikovani was her last name. Karamani was the name of my father's father. Emkhvari was the family name of my grandmother from my mother's side. Her name was Nino. She was from Sokhumi.

My mother had graduated from the then Senaki Gymnasium; she even taught for a while before we were born. My mother was a very well educated woman. She taught us everything at home, including prayers and handicraft. She was a very active woman. She embroidered, sewed, she did everything. She never stopped even for a second. She had to read a book, or sit down with us and tell us stories. My father also graduated from a gymnasium. He never worked however. He and his brother spent time feasting. Uncle's name was Alexander.

My mother passed away in 1934. She wasn't even forty at that time. My father mourned and worried about his six motherless children. My younger sister was still a suckling infant. Nine months later, my father passed away at the age of forty-three.

I was a middle child. My brothers were older than I. The eldest brother's name was Shalva. He was followed by Shota and Alexander who was named after my uncle and grandfather, my mother's father. My sister's name was Nanuli. I was next, followed by Tsitsino and Angelina, the smallest child, the one who was still a suckling infant. My eldest brother graduated from an automotive vocational school. He became unable to receive higher education after our parents passed away. He worked in Senaki, ten miles away from our village. My second brother graduated from the Agricultural Institute in Tbilisi. He first worked as Deputy Provost of the Senaki Agricultural Vocational School, eventually becoming Provost. He passed away recently. He was highly respected in our district. "Look! This is Mister Shota!" people would say every time he went for a walk. He was of noble stature. He had refined manners. He was only addressed as "mister". His wife was a medical doctor. They had two girls and a boy. When his son became a senior in school, the sophomores and seniors of his school held a soccer match. My cousin, a boy of seventeen, had his heart vessels collapse and died. My poor brother was left with two daughters. One of them graduated from a music school in Batumi and continued her education in Tbilisi. The other sister graduated from a medical school in Russia. They both live in Tbilisi now. My poor brother, Shalva, was killed in Stalingrad. I used to go visit his grave while Vakhtang was alive. My sister-in-law, Shota's wife, was Chairperson of the Senaki Military Commissariat [a local military administrative agency in the former Soviet Union], so my brother could get off the

hook when it came to being drafted. He, however, believed it to be beneath his dignity. He looked around the collective farm and all he saw was women, women, women... All men had left. "I'm not a lady!" he said and went [to the war] in secret, without even telling his brother or sister-in-law. He left and got killed. He never married.

Twelve years later, a certain lady, professor at the Tbilisi Medical Institute, discovered his grave and wrote about it in the Communist newspaper. The article read that Shalva Evgenis dze Dadiani, a medical doctor (yet, my brother was no medical doctor), was buried on Stalingrad Liberation Square, thus appealing and informing his relatives and acquaintances about the location of his grave in Stalingrad. I worked in Kakhaberi at that time. We all traveled to Stalingrad. There was far more than a cemetery to visit in Stalingrad. There was an archive containing personal files of all soldiers. My brother found the right file that read born in the village of Nokalakevi, Senaki District. We would travel to Stalingrad every year to celebrate Victory Day [May 9, marks the capitulation of Nazi Germany to the Soviet Union in the Second World War]. I haven't been there since Vakhtang passed away.

My two sisters were nurses. The elder sister, Nanuli, graduated from an industrial vocational school. She served twenty-five years as Head of the Poti Station. The last names of my brothers-in-law were Chikhladze, Kuprava, and Kutsia. Nanuli was married to Chikhladze, Tsitsino to Kuprava, and Angelina to Kutsia. The latter, Kutsia, was from Abasha [a settlement in Western Georgia]. His name was Victor. He was an engineering geologist. He was assigned to a job in Donbas [a region in Eastern Ukraine]. My sister was a nurse. She worked in a hospital. She was only a kid when someone arranged her marriage. They left for Donbas. She still lives there. Her husband passed away and was buried there. She has two boys. Her daughters-in-law are Russians. My nephews speak no Georgian, and even my sister has gradually lost her grip on her native language.

My father's home... As brothers, my father and uncle refused to live separately. After the Communists entered, we multiplied; there were six of us children. My father reasoned that he should build a separate house for his sons as they would eventually need it when they got married. He built a nice two-story house near the house he shared with his brother. When my brother was drafted,



the house was locked. My two sisters had already been married, while the youngest sister, one who was still a suckling infant when my mother passed away, lived with the eldest sister. My brother, Shota, and his wife built a house in Senaki and settled there. Our ancestral home was locked. How much longer could they keep the house locked? They sold the house and donated the lands to the collective farm. After the Communist rule was over, we were told, “Dadianis, come and reclaim your lands!” My sister called me, “What are we to do?” My sister and I went there. My brother had recently passed away. We told [the authorities] to allocated a parcel of land exactly where our house used to be. Many people had settled on our lands, a whole village settled there. Thus, our request was granted and a parcel of land was given to us. Now who’s taking care of that land? There was a son of the nanny of one of my brothers. The sons of this nanny volunteered to cultivate the land and provide us with the fruits of their labor. I don’t need their support! Nevertheless, I’ve told my nephew in Tbilisi to check on our ancestral land. It’s his grandfather’s property after all. I told him to make sure it’s cultivated and tended properly. He said yes, yet how will I know for sure?

I graduated from the Nokalakevi Seven-Grade School and continued my education in the Senaki Pedagogical Vocational School. I completed a four-year course. In my freshman and sophomore years, I was taught the same stuff as in high school. Then we took special courses in pedagogy, methods of pedagogy, delivery of lessons. We underwent active and passive practical training. The active type of training implied actual classes delivered by us, students. Passive training meant that we attended elementary school classes delivered by others. Tatarashvili [Kontrate Tatarashvili, pen-name Uiaragho, a Georgian author (1872-1929)], the author of the book *Mamluk*, taught us the Russian language. He was an elderly, handsome and tall man. I became a member of Komsomol [The Communist Union of Youth, the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] while still a student of the vocational school. There were certain reservations as I was a Dadiani, yet I was eventually accepted. At the first session, I was told, “Next time, sweetheart.” I was accepted at the second session.

I graduated from the vocational school in 1938. Back in those days, we had those so-called Communist Youth vouchers, which

meant that graduates were to travel to Achara or Svaneti [regions in Georgia], high-mountainous regions. I opted to go to Achara to complete my internship, so I went to Achara. I don't know why I chose Achara as I didn't know anything about it. I knew a thing or two about Svaneti though. I had a Svanetian dance teacher in the vocational school, so I knew what kind of people the Svanetians were. The Megrelians do not like the Svanetians. I don't know why. At any rate, I opted for Achara. I never told my siblings. I simply sneaked out. It was my first time in Batumi [the capital of Achara]. I had a referral and the address of the ministry. I arrived at the address. There were three of us. The minister told us, "There are many like you waiting outside." Nadim Nizharadze served as Minister in those days. A theater was opened in Batumi the year I arrived. There was a two-year institute in Batumi at that time. When I first arrived there, I was afraid I would get lost, so I never left the side of the teachers who had arrived with me. I was assigned to the village of Oghriali, Khulo District [Achara]. There had been no school in that place previously. At first, I had twelve students. They were twelve-thirteen years of age when they first went to school. They were very motivated however. They were excited about going to school. The school had just been opened in the village. I was assigned to that school on September 1, 1938. I taught literacy using Iakob Gogebashvili's textbook as the guide [meaning Deda Ena, a Georgian language primer, authored and compiled by Iakob Gogebashvili (1840-1912), a great Georgian author and educator, the founder of scientific pedagogy in Georgia]. I didn't teach the Russian language. I only taught mathematics, Georgian, and natural history. You know why? Russian lessons were not delivered in the first and second school years. I taught first, second, and third-graders. I stayed with Mohammad Davitadze's family. He was a farmer, a collective farm member.

Collective farms had been recently introduced in Achara, and there were only seventeen households in the village. Islam was fervently practiced by the elderly. They prayed and fasted. Elderly women wore veils, while younger women had already given up wearing veils. They attended meetings and celebrations at the Village Council. Back in those days, November 7 [October 25 according to Julian calendar, the day of the October Revolution when the Bolsheviks took over] and May 1 [International Workers' Day,

especially honored in the Soviet Union] were celebrated. On the eve of these holidays, an announcement was made, urging the villagers to attend the festive celebration held at the Village Council.

The family where I lived was and, at the same time, was not a Muslim family. The wife never fasted, never prayed. The husband, on the other hand, did pray. He prayed in Arabic. He was very devoted to his religion. There were Mohammad, his wife, and his two younger brothers in the household. They had been recently married. Mohammad's parents had passed away. Mohammad must have been like twenty-two or twenty-three. His brothers were fifteen and seventeen years of age. My hostess was very young. She could read and write. She was brought up in Skhetela village, that's why she knew how to read and write. Skhetela is a village near Shuakhevi. There was an elementary school. Very educated people, Communists, lived there. Her name was Syrma. She was a cousin of Mikheil Davitadze (Mikheil Davitadze was Chairman of the Council of Minister of Achara). She was a gorgeous woman, a very beautiful young woman. She customarily wore a white head cover at home. When going out into the village, she covered her head with a black scarf. The household members treated one another with immense respect. The woman greatly respected the man. When her husband entered, she rose. Needless to say, Syrma also rose when her brothers-in-law entered. She was a very good woman. She never spoke much. They had a sweet family. They were young. They worked hard. They worked day and night with a hoe, a shovel, or an ax. In summer, they cut firewood for winter. They stored hay for the cattle as winters were usually very cold in those parts. It was a high mountainous village.

They didn't have a doctor. Whenever they needed medical treatment, they had to travel to the Shuakhevi center. One time, I remember, there was a pregnant woman. Her condition was very bad. They brought a midwife. She, however, was afraid [to treat the pregnant woman]. Thus, men rushed to Shuakhevi, got a hold of a gurney and brought it to the village, and then they put this woman on the gurney and carried her to Shuakhevi. The woman eventually healed. By the way, not a single person had died there in the course of my entire stay. They probably used homemade medicine as well. My hostess didn't have any homemade remedies. She only had lucky charms, saying that they were supposed to pro-

tect her harm from the evil eye. I never witnessed how the veil was declared no longer mandatory in Achara. Avto Diasamidze wrote an article about me in the Achara newspaper, saying that Zina the Teacher had Syrma remove her veil. Syrma had already given up her veil when I arrived there. I did, however, beg her to get rid of that black head cover she had. The veil custom was abolished at the beginning of the thirties, while I arrived there as late as 1938. Only aged women wore veils, younger women did not. They only wore scarves. Scarves were used in Samegrelo as well.

Shuakhevi was still part of the Khulo District when was assigned to a job there. Shuakhevi became a separate unit later. Zabya Davitadze, Chairman of the Village Committee, personally hired me. He had received no higher, or even secondary, education, yet he was a very eloquent and clever man. He could read and write, and he was a Communist. These qualities were the main criteria in those days. He took me straight to this family. We walked. The path led uphill all the way. I never uttered a word while we were walking. We arrived and he exclaimed, "I cannot believe this! We've walked up such a steep hill, yet this kid has not uttered a single moan. She kept up with me just fine." There was no Khoja [erroneously referring to a Muslim religious rank, probably a mullah] in Oghriali. There must have been one someplace else. There were mosques in big villages. People went there to pray on Fridays. They were not overly zealous in their religious practices. The elderly primarily went to the mosque. They baptized boys in secret, so that no one would find out.

I was accepted as a family member by the Davitadzses. By the way, they never let me pay for my share of meals. Mohammad nearly went berserk every time I put cash in front of him after having received my salary. "Whose money is it?" the host would inquire. I would say I had put it there. He would reply, "Put it back in your pocket!" When I arrived, they had recently had a baby, just a week-old infant. Khatije was the baby's name. This village is no longer there. It was too high up in the mountains, and the Achara authorities decided to resettle the population of this village in the Chakvi Citrus Farm. The farm was in need of a work force at that time. The whole population of the village was removed and settled in Chakvi. It happened in 1950-1951. I had already left when it happened. I only spent three years there, not even that. The village

was nested so high up in the mountains that it became inaccessible in heavy snow. Khushutai and Topuzai were the names of Syrma's brothers-in-law. They knew how to read and write. I believe they attended a school in Tsinareti, a neighboring village. When I arrived in Achara, collective farms had been recently introduced. This family [the Davitadzēs] adapted quite well to this change. The young men were so on the ball. They cultivated their lands. Each household had its parcel. Even unmarried young men had parcels. They were all happy; they liked the new government.

I opened a school in the house where I lodged. My host allocated a room to me. He had a huge house. It was a two-story house, with a stone foundation and a wooden structure above it. In winter, cattle were usually kept downstairs in Zemo Achara [Upper Achara]. This family had a separate barn. When Chairman of the Shuakhevi Village Council took me to Oghriali, he gathered locals and told them, "We intend to open a school for your children. We will need your help. What kind of help? You are to supply desks, chairs, everything children will need; you are to buy books for your children." People were so excited that as many as twenty desks appeared by the following evening. During the first year, books were given to students free of charge. Later, however, they had to purchase them. There were twelve students in all, varying in age. There were both boys and girls. Girls were not allowed to go far away to attend school. Female villagers came to me twice, or even three times, a day. They were interested in classes I delivered, what I taught my students, how I taught, what I said, and what we discussed.

Then a literacy school was opened. Local women attended evening classes and studied, studied with joy as they did better than their children. Those were young mothers whom their husbands didn't prohibit from attending school. Local women kept wondering how I was allowed to travel so far away from home. One elderly lady wouldn't stop hugging me, saying she was amazed at my being so far away from home. They picked on me, "What are you going to do if the Acharians refuse to let you leave?" Local teachers were a rarity in Achara in those days. Those who arrived in Achara to teach often got married and settled there. They teased me and called me Giauroghli [a child of a Georgian in Turkish].

They didn't know how to use a clothing iron. I borrowed one from a teacher in a neighboring village. I told Syrma, "I'll tidy up those clothes you have just washed." They wore wrinkled clothes. They washed and wore wrinkled clothes. The woman was so excited. The host also noticed me iron and said, "Hey Giauroghli! What are you doing? Are you going to burn my woman's clothes?" I replied, "No, Muhammad! I'm preparing a new dress for you woman." Syrma was beside herself with joy after I finished ironing. It was a charcoal iron. When I got married in Akutsa, I had a similar charcoal iron. My brothers-in-law would come to me, demanding to iron their pants and shirts. My brothers-in-law were students when I got married.

My hostess Syrma passed away fairly recently. Poor Syrma, she passed away in Chakvi. She was a good woman and had very good children. They were very nice people. They were very warm. Women always brought presents, pumpkins and stuff like that. Syrma always cooked herself. She never let me cook. They [the Davitadzēs] would bring meat and made some kind of stew. They also made bean soup. In summer, I went back home. When I was about to leave, Muhammad asked me, "Zina, do not bring pork [when you come back]." After I got married, I cooked for my family, of course, yet the cheese bread I used to bake with Acharian cheese back in those days, has nothing on the cheese bread I bake nowadays. Back then, people churned butter using mechanical devices and used the leftovers to make cheese. It was a special type of cheese that required additional butter if one wanted to use it to bake cheese bread.

I was in charge of decorating the Christmas tree in Oghriali. It was 1938. One of the parents [of the students] donated a Christmas tree. We instructed the parent in advance concerning the type of tree we wanted. We had no decorations. They were not sold in those days. We had colored paper sheets in the classroom. I gave my host some money and sent him to the store. The store was located a couple of miles away from the village. I sent him and had him fetch us wrapped candies to hang on the Christmas tree. We cut butterflies and bunnies from the colored paper sheets. With the help of my students, I also made a basket during our arts and craft classes. Thus, we set up a cute Christmas tree. Local children had never seen a New Year celebration before. They only knew that

there was a certain holiday called New Year's Eve. Grownups were probably better acquainted with the subject. I grabbed the kids and had them sing and dance. I gave out presents. I made small paper baskets and filled them with candy apples; I also filled up greeting cards and distributed them. The whole village gathered there and watched us.

Then my life took a totally different turn. I met my future husband at a Trade Union conference, in Khulo. He served as Deputy Head of the Department of Agriculture of the Khulo District at that time, which really meant Senior Agrarian. His name was Kediri; Chkheidze was his last name.

His ancestors never changed their last name under the Ottoman rule [1578-1606 and 1723-1735]. They never gave up their Georgian family name. They are, and have always been, Chkheidzes. There were two family branches in Imereti, Chkheidze and Eristavi. Both branches were given lands in Akutsa. Akutsa is my husband's village in Keda District [Achara, Western Georgia]. Eristavis eventually migrated to Turkey. The year before last, an Eristavi from Turkey visited us. He found us. He was taken up to Akutsa to see the village. My husband's name was Kediri. He changed it to Vakhtang later, in 1951. When I first met him, he was called Kediri. His mother's name was Fatimah. I had five brothers-in-law. They all went to school in Tbilisi. Two of them, however, Osman and Mahmud, were arrested in 1937. They both disappeared without a trace. Osman, as his son, Jemal, found out in 1956, was executed by a firing squad on the Chorokhi riverbank. Mahmud was exiled to Siberia. He lived two or three more years. They [the exiled prisoners] were forced to fell trees. They were terribly mistreated. As far as I know, a tree fell on Mahmud and killed him. We learned about it later. Someone wrote about it in a letter to us.

When Osman and Mahmud were arrested in 1937, my three remaining brothers-in-law were expelled from the [Communist] party. However, Stalin's decree came out a week later, stating that one brother was not responsible for the actions of the other brother, that a father bore no responsibility for the misdeeds of his son, etc. As a result, they were all reinstated. My brothers-in-law were slandered as though they were Trotskyite saboteurs. While attending school in Tbilisi, my husband and brothers-in-law lived

on campus. My husband graduated from a seven-grade school here in Batumi. He then graduated from a vocational school in Kvareli [a city in Kakheti Region, Western Georgia], after which he was referred to the Kvareli Forestry Vocational School. He spent four years in Kakheti. He even picked up a Kakhetian accent and dropped his Acharian pronunciation. He graduated with honors. Then he was allowed to enroll in the Agricultural Institute in Tbilisi without having to pass the entrance exams.

One of the brothers-in-law, Hussein, later became Deputy Minister of Finances of Achara. He remained Hussein as he passed away before the fifties, that is, before old names [Georgian names] were reclaimed. Before I got married, my brother-in-law, Abdul, kept pestering me, "What am I to do? Kedir is my older brother, and I have no right to marry before he does. Why don't you guys hurry up and get married!" He loved Tamar Darsalia, a Megrelian who had settled in Guria [Samegrelo and Guria, regions in Western Georgia]. They were schoolmates. They eventually got married. I never told my brothers. Even if I asked their permission, they would refuse. I wrote a letter to them afterward. I wrote a letter to my sister and she visited me. She never told my brothers. I was welcomed with open arms by [my husband's] family. I got married in Khulo. Vakhtang sent a message to his family, promising that we would arrive there in fifteen-twenty days (in the meantime, we would stay in Khulo where he owned an apartment). Davit Mamuladze was Head of the Department of Culture and Second District Committee Chairman. He was also Head of the Department of Agriculture. My husband was his deputy.

My husband and I were accompanied by four men on our way to his family home. My mother-in-law welcomed me with arms wide open. There were no special customs practiced by the Chkheidzes. They simply accepted me. I was greeted by Jemal's mother (Osman's wife) and my mother-in-law.

There were no automobiles at that time. Our village is called Akutsa. Nowadays, cars drive up here. Back in those days, you had walk up here. Thus, we were greeted with such warmth. Our companions were surprised that a Georgian was so warmly welcomed in those parts. My mother-in-law was a good woman. She took a course in a theological school in Turkey. That's where she



lived. Her father-in-law had killed someone and fled to Turkey in fear. His children were born in Turkey.

When my mother-in-law turned fifteen, she was sent to Georgia for a visit; her father sent her to Merisi where he was from. When she arrived in Keda, my father-in-law was a young man who owned a big store and was occupied in trade. He looked at her and inquired, "Who's that girl?" The reply was, "She's Shervashidze's daughter. She has just arrived from Turkey." He made up his mind, "I will marry this girl!" And he did marry her. A message was sent to her father, saying that Suleiman Chkheidze wanted his daughter for a wife and asking for his permission. Her father replied that he had heard about the good reputation of the Chkheidzes. My mother-in-law had aunts here in Georgia. Her father fled all right, yet his family remained here. My mother-in-law had yet to graduate from school, she was a senior. Nevertheless, she got married and settled here.

My mother-in-law read Arabic. She could speak some Georgian, but she never learned how to read and write. She had books written in Arabic. After everyone had gone to sleep, she read. She was a very cultured woman. She also had siblings. Her relatives still live there [in Turkey]. My mother-in-law was a Muslim. After all, she was raised in Turkey. Yet, she never wore a veil. After we arrived with those strangers who travelled with us, my mother-in-law treated the guests to dinner. She was a tall woman. She was gorgeous. Her children didn't look like her. When I arrived, all madrasah schools had already been shut down. The buildings, however, had not been demolished. My husband (Vakhtang) used to say, "When we were little, we were forced to fast through Ramadan. I would snap and steal stuff from my mother. She had jugs of yogurt lined up. One time, I stole a jug and ate the yogurt. I accidentally spilled some on my chest. I didn't notice it, so my mother reproached me, 'What have you done? Tell me! You broke the fast, haven't you?' I replied, 'I swear by God I have not!' She then advised me to look in the mirror instead of swearing by God's name."

Names were changed in the fifties. By decree of the government, all Muslim names had to be replaced with Christian names. People accepted the change with understanding. As for youths, they were quite excited about it. This is how Nodar [Zina's son] gave a name to his father. He was in the fourth grade. As I remember, we lived

in Keda at that time. My husband asked, “What name should I pick?” He was about forty at that time. Nodar had learned a poem, “Catching the enemy’s sight, Vakhtang made ready for fight.” He said, “That’s why I like the name Vakhtang. Daddy, if you’re going to change your name, please change it to Vakhtang. I name you Vakhtang.” My husband said yes and assumed the name without a problem. I, on the other hand, could not get used to this name. I couldn’t make myself call him Vakhtang. I continued to refer to him as Kedir. Esadze, Chairman of the District Committee [of the Communist Party] told me, “Zina, you call him Kedir one more time and you’ll lose me! Your husband has such a nice name. How can you call him Kedir?” My brother-in-law Felulah picked the name Felix, while Abdullah decided to become Archil.

After the collapse of the Communist rule, some reclaimed their original names, mainly in high-mountainous villages. After I got married, I moved to Keda. I was appointed Principal of the Akutsa Elementary School, Keda District. There were about eighty children in the school. I first had twelve students in Oghriali, then fifteen, and then seventeen. Hassan Zanakidze and Davitadze, both locals, were the teachers there. Davitadze had graduated from a pedagogical school in Batumi. There were three of us teachers. Locals were encouraged to study [to become teachers themselves]. They were sent to pedagogical schools. For example, there was a pedagogical school in Keda [Achara, Western Georgia].

I worked in the village for three years. Then I was appointed an elementary school teacher at the Pedagogical School. Then I worked in the Pedagogical School itself for twelve years. This is how things worked in the Pedagogical School. Sophomores were required to undergo internship, hold demonstration lessons, the whole nine yards. A future teacher was expected to have good delivery skills and be thoroughly acquainted with methodology. Gegelia, Inspector of the Department of Education, examined me for a week. Kolya Gegelia was from Tbilisi. He worked in Keda. He reported to the Department of Education and endorsed me for a position in the Pedagogical School. I was assigned my job in 1944. I worked there through 1955.

It was believed that a good teacher had to be a good propagandist, especially during the war [WW II]. We delivered classes with newspapers in our hands. Then we went to visit collective



Zina Dadiani with husband. 1955

farm teams. We were assigned to various groups of farmers. Tobacco and grapes were harvested. We informed these people concerning the war. People were interested. Many had gone to the war. My husband was also drafted. He served in the military for almost two years, yet he never made it to the actual front-

line. He came down with food poisoning, typhoid fever. He was carried all the way from here to Baku lying on a gurney (I've no idea why they did it). There was a doctor in Baku, Avni Diasamidze, who too was drafted. He served in the hospital where my husband was delivered. He sent a telegram to Felulah, my brother-in-law, saying that Kedir was in bad shape and requesting his presence.

Felulah and I traveled to Baku, while the war raged all around us. It took us three days to find the hospital. At last, we found it. By the time we arrived, he had recovered so well that he walked us to the hospital gates. He said, "Now, since I saw you, I'm no longer afraid to die." We stayed there for three days. My brother-in-law got a hold of [my husband's] medical record. Avni also promised to help, and so we left. In 1943, just out of the blue, he showed up at my doorstep. "Goodness! What happened?" we exclaimed. He replied, "They got sick and tired of transferring me on a gurney from one detachment to another, then to the third and fourth detachments. I was told, 'Go home. Get well, and then we'll draft you.' They discharged me." He spent ten days sitting at home. Then he was summoned by Chairman of the District Committee. There was dearth of good professionals in those days, so he was appointed Head of the Department of Agriculture of Keda District. In the meantime, I taught in the Pedagogical School. Then Tsatso was born, my girl.

You know when my brother reconciled with me? It was 1942. Wow! My brothers wouldn't talk to me for so long, "What are you

doing so far away from home?” People were not allowed to travel without special passes in those days. It took my family members five days to get passes, so that they could attend my mother-in-law’s funeral. My first child, Nodar, was born when the war broke out. He was born in 1940. I had already left Shuakhevi, when Vakhtang was drafted. The whole country was agitated. I went home. One witnesses so many funny incidents when on the road. There was a train between Batumi and Poti [Georgian Black Sea port cities]. The whole population of Guria, Samegrelo, and Imereti [regions in Western Georgia] used this route. It was such a mess! There weren’t as many cars in those days as there are today, you know. Felulah, my brother-in-law, saw me off. I barely managed to board. Sacks, boxes, baskets, and people were all over the place. I was holding my child. I boarded all right, yet there were no seats. A certain lady had already occupied a seat, and she helped me by taking over my child.

One Megrelian man with a long mustache boarded at this time. He held a basket over his head. He kept asking to let him through. He managed to make his way to where we were. He asked me to let him through. “Where? There’s no room!” He said, “Please let me through, I’m going to Abasha.” [Abasha, a village in Samegrelo, Western Georgia] I replied, “Big deal! You’re going to Abasha, I’m going to Senaki, fifteen miles further. What’s the big deal?” He stopped for a while. Then started again. I refused to let him through. Then he said in Megrelian, “Look at her, standing proudly like a Dadiani lady!” What was I supposed to tell him? He would tell me, “If you’re a Dadiani lady, what are you doing here?” If I told him that Dadiani ladies were not arrogant, he would ask, “How would you know?” [Laughs]. Funny incidents like this happened a lot.

I arrived in Senaki. It was my first time in Senaki after I got married. I was going through hard times. My husband had been drafted. There were but women left in our family. We needed food to eat, water to drink, clothes to wear. I went to my brother to get some help. My brother was at work, in the vocational school. The other brother had been drafted. I had a nice sister-in-law, poor soul. She told me, “Do not worry about what Shota will say.” Kyra was my sister-in-law’s name. I told her, “Kyra, I’m scared. What if he kicks me out? Where would I go?” Nodar had just learned how

to stand on his two feet. He was a cute child. Kyra told me, "He'll come over for lunch break."

Kyra was the director of a hospital. They had a wicket gate. The wicket gate opened and Shota came in. I was so scared that he would go off on me. He entered, and my sister-in-law let go of the child, "Let Shota guess whose child is this cute boy!" He guessed right away. He looked at the kid and guessed right away. "Aha, you made it!" that's all he said. I walked up to him and hugged him, "Shota, please forgive me." I stayed with them for three or four days. He loaded the vocational school truck with goods like bread, flour, everything, and sent me home in that truck. My sister-in-law had her mother bring corn ears and chickens from the village. They gave it all to me. They saw me off loaded with goods.

As it turned out, Shota and Vakhtang were schoolmates. When they met, they greeted each other and reconciled. In 1955, Vakhtang was appointed Deputy Minister of Agriculture of Achara. I was supposed to follow him [to Achara]. I spent one year in Keda, while he resided here. His brothers were in the process of building the house where we live now. They tidied up the house, and I arrived with my children. I was relieved of my previous duties and assigned to the Ministry of Education, so that my employment history would remain uninterrupted.

Khulo and Shuakhevi became two separate districts. Mamuladze was Chairman of the District Committee. He told Vakhtang in a brotherly way, "You must quit and come help me." They were indeed like brothers. They were together in Khulo. "You have to establish a department of agriculture and staff it." Vakhtang replied, "I have to go to Shuakhevi. My woman is between jobs. I cannot leave her." He was Deputy Minister after all. He had to go to Shuakhevi for a while, to get things going. He was a very good expert. Mamuladze picked up the phone and called the then Minister Vakhtang Akhvlediani, and asked him to find a job for a certain woman, Vakhtang Chkheidze's wife. [Akhvlediani] Replied, "I have no openings here in the city at this point. There is one job but Vakhtang is so stubborn, he won't consent." "Where is this job?" "In Kakhaberi."

In the evening, my husband asked me, "There's a vice-principal's job opening in Kakhaberi. Will you go?" I replied, "I cannot walk there." "No. Buses stop near the village. Why won't you come

with me to the ministry?" I followed him. We entered the office of Vakhtang Akhvlediani. He told me, "There are 120 students. It's a big school. We're looking for a teacher who could work as the school's vice-principal. You are perfect for this job." He sort of encouraged me. I replied I was ready to start. He immediately called a clerk, we executed all the necessary papers, and I started the very next morning.

Buses stopped near the village all right, yet they didn't go all the way to the airport, while the school was located next to the airport. I still had to walk half a mile. I arrived to find four teachers there. They were excited, saying that they didn't want a male vice-principal, "We kept asking the Head of the Department of Education to send a woman." They were excited indeed. They turned out to be very nice people and good teachers. Mezveti Tavgziridze was vice-principal before me. Someone dug up something on Tavgziridze. He was our relative. Something surfaced and he was laid off. One teacher was forced to hold joint classes for two different groups. Thus, I commenced to work in this school. The school had quite a number of students. I had experience working in schools. I knew methodology well; I knew exactly what teachers were supposed to do in the classroom. These schoolteachers, however, were not as good. I attended their classes, so I knew. Their methodology was weak and their delivery was weak. They spoke dialect, and the students followed suit. All three teachers were from Guria. They spoke with a Gurian accent.

Thanks to my efforts, it turned into one of the leading schools within three years. Whenever there was an inspection visiting, it was brought to Zina's school. I worked hard, I changed everything, and I replaced everyone. I didn't make anyone feel insulted. I didn't want anyone to say, "Now you've come here, looking down on us." You know, if you want to work as a team, you have to be polite. I participated in various conferences and pedagogical seminars. I attended pedagogical seminars in Tbilisi. Those were pretty much the same as conferences. We were to report what had been done in our schools, for example, in relation to the Georgian language, or mathematics, or arts and crafts, or physical education. One was free to choose any subject and report on it. At first, I selected arts and crafts. I arranged a flower garden in our schoolyard. You know how I did it? There was an agrarian gardener who worked at

the airport. He arranged the airport flower garden. Our school was located near the airport. I watched him tend the garden, and had my students do the same. We made a huge circle in the schoolyard and fenced it with concrete. I asked one of the parents to do it for us. With the help of yet another parent, we purchased everything we needed, like sand and cement. We filled up the circle with dirt piled in the form of a pyramid. Then I divided this pyramid into five parts, thus shaping them in the form of a five-point star. Inside these stars, I planted low-growing flowers, red, green flowers. Vakhtang got in touch with the director of the Botanical Garden, explained what I had been doing, and asked him to provide the seeds. Sharashidze served as Director of the Botanical Garden at that time. I also planted a palm tree. It was so beautiful.

Thus, I wrote about this garden and read my work locally at first. It proved to be a success, and it was decided to send me to Tbilisi. And read my report in Tbilisi. I did. I revisited Tbilisi on three more occasions, again reporting on arts and crafts, by the way. My second report was on one of my students who became a [factory crew] foreman and was awarded the Order of Red Banner of Labor. My third report was on mathematics, explaining how I taught third-graders to solve math equations.

I never considered continuing my own education. I had received no higher education, yet I was very active in the district. I worked for nearly twenty years as Dean of the Khelvachauri District Elementary Schools. I was delegated to the Fifth Republican Convention of Teachers in 1982.

It was announced in the middle of the convention that Brezhnev had died, so we split [laughs]. We were promised that Shevardnadze would give a speech on the following day of the convention and update us. We were all attention. We were strictly forbidden from visiting our relatives [in Tbilisi] and ordered to stay in the hotel. We were staying at the Achara Hotel. My son-in-law, my niece's husband, was a prosecutor. He told me, "Your niece won't stop crying because you were a no-show. Let's go! The convention can wait." We were on our way to his place when he told me, "You know our boss passed away." "Poor soul," I replied, thinking that he meant his DA. "Did he work with you?" I asked. "Who? Brezhnev?" I nearly went crazy. My brother also arrived from Senaki. We stayed at my son-in-law's, chatting until midnight, and then I returned to

the hotel. In the morning, we, the delegates, gathered. There were twenty-five delegates from Achara. It was the fourth day of the convention. We were invited to a reception at one or another school every evening. We arrived and took our places. As it turned out, everyone heard the news. They all whispered, "Brezhnev is dead." Then the minister showed up, "We are sorry, but our convention must be adjourned without ratifying the final resolution. The delegates will be provided with the resolution later as Brezhnev has passed away." We all rose to our feet, even kind of bowed down our heads. Then we were told, "Now you may leave. Make sure to hold mourning rallies. You are delegates and it is your duty to give a speech. No one is allowed to stay in Tbilisi tonight. You all must leave." And so we left that night. I bought so many things for the school! Loads of stuff! I arrived at home and ran straight to the school. The second scheduled hour had already started when I got there. Six hundred students came outside. They heard I had arrived and they knew a rally was to be held. I led the rally.

During Brezhnev's time, we delivered his works in school, such as *Minor Land*, *Rebirth*, and *Virgin Lands*. I was a propagandist. I even attended special seminars. Teachers were almost expected to know these books (*Minor Land*, *Rebirth*, and *Virgin Lands*) by heart. By the way, these works were well written, whether or not they had been written by him or by someone else. They were presented as Brezhnev's works. I doubt it though. There's no way he could've written them! It was not mentioned in our curriculum. Nevertheless, you were absolutely supposed to say that *Minor Land*, *Rebirth*, and *Virgin Lands* were written by Brezhnev. Little children had no clue about these works, yet you had to mention it. I taught first-, second-, and third-graders. I never told first-graders about these books. I did, however, tell second- and third-graders, while informing fourth-graders in more detail. When Brezhnev died, we were sincerely scared that someone might attack us, or someone might stir up something within the country.

I remember Stalin's death as well. I cried so much. My poor mother-in-law lost two children. She would bad-mouth Stalin, "May you rot in hell, Stalin!" It was not Stalin's fault though. As it turned out, a neighbor had snitched on them (that is, told on them). My nephew, Jemal, learned all about it later. He dug into the case and found out that our neighbors had doomed my brother-in-



law, saying that he was against the collective farms, or something of that kind. It was a widespread occurrence. The informant was Tsintsadze. He is no longer around, but his children and grandchildren are still among the living. He was a neighbor; not exactly a next-door neighbor but still a neighbor. Jemal learned all about this case after his father's rehabilitation. When Stalin died and the whole country went into mourning, my mother-in-law was at Felulah's (who later became Felix). I looked around to find everyone weeping. My mother-in-law was also weeping. Her children wondered, "Why are you crying? Your curses have hit the mark after all!" "He must have been a good man. The whole country is weeping, how can I stay calm?"

It was my fourth year after quitting school. My children were in the eighth grade. My school had turned into a secondary school. When I started, it was an elementary school. I did everything I could. My husband was Deputy Minister of Agriculture, while Tebidze was Minister of Education, and Ananidze was First Secretary of the Khelvachauri District. I knew them all; I was very close with them. I hustled here and there and managed to have an eight-grade secondary school opened. Back in those days, Ziah Mikeladze was Head of the Khelvachauri Department [of Education]. He told me, "Why won't you hold your horses? What's in it for you? No one's gonna appoint you principal anyway. You have a vocational school diploma. Just stay put!" I replied, "No! My students are about to graduate from the elementary school. Then they'll have to go to the middle school two miles away from their homes. The Mejinistz-kali River often overflows; the children cannot cross it and miss classes. That's why we have to have an eight-grade school." I was persistent, and I opened an eight-grade school. It was 1965. The elementary school was demolished and a new facility was built.

When we opened the eight-grade school, Kemal Lortkipanidze was appointed its first principal. He had worked as a Russian language teacher in Akhalsopeli [a village in Western Georgia]. He was the son of Zachariah Lortkipanidze, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Achara. Zachariah Lortkipanidze was executed by a firing squad. Ziah Mikeladze, Head of the Khelvachauri Department of Education, told me, "You could work as Vice-Principal, but Vakhtang is adamant. He says you have a family to take care of." In order to become Vice-Principal, I had to complete a higher

education corresponding course. I wasn't up to it. At any rate, I had enough brains to make it. At first, transportation was a challenge. When traveling to Kakhaberi, I had to walk one third of a mile. Three or four years later, bus routes were introduced, traveling in all directions. The school was near the airport. The airport was expanded. Scheduled flights to various destinations were added. The local population grew as well. There were three middle schools in Kakhaberi at that time. There was the School 1, followed by our school, and there was the third school called Adlia. When I first got there, mine was an elementary school, Adlia was a seven-grade school and so was the Mejinistzkali. All three were middle schools, while the area was densely populated. Imagine nine hundred students in the first school, six hundred in ours, and one hundred in Adlia... Our school became a middle school in 1984. Now it's a big three-story building. When I arrived in Kakhaberi, our school was housed in the home of an exiled family. They were exiled in 1947. They were Azerbaijanis, the Khasanovs. By the way, they returned eventually. It was a two-story school. There were three rooms upstairs and two downstairs. It was enough for a school. There were the first, second, third, and fourth grades plus the teachers' common room.

One beautiful morning, it was 1953, I was first to arrive at school only to find Kakabadze (there are many Kakabadzes living in the Airport Settlement; they are Lazi [an ethnic group native to the Black Sea coastal regions of Georgia] Kakabadzes; they live in Gonio), a macho woman, waiting for me. I asked her, "Asimeh, what are you doing here?" "Zina, I have something to tell you. I'm counting on you." "Go ahead," I said. "The owners of this house have returned. The woman gave birth to a child just yesterday. Besides the two-story house, that family owned a two-room building in the yard, a brick shed. We left after school was over, at three or four. At five, locals gathered, cleaned the shed as there were pieces of broken glass all over the place. They brought a mattress, blankets, everything they could.

Then Asimeh told me that the returnees had moved into the shed and asked me to keep it secret. What was I supposed to do? How could I hold it back from the teachers? Asimeh told me that no one would even notice they had come back, "Not even a single piece of laundry will be strung outside." In the meantime, other

Kakabadzes also arrived, men and women. Asimeh was the only person talking to me though. She was a tough woman. I told the teachers, "Don't enter until I return." I went to see my husband. I told him all about it and asked his opinion. I told him that those exiles had been released, coming back here and giving birth to a child last night. Vakhtang replied, "Go to Chairman of the District Executive Committee. Talk to him, he will tell you what to do." Ananidze was Chairman at that time. "What brings you here, Zina?" Ananidze asked me after noticing me outside his office. "I need to speak with you, Mister Abdul." "Come on in. Come on in. What is it?" I told him the story and asked his advice. He asked me, "Don't you feel sorry for those people?" I replied, "Of course, I do. That's why I'm here." He said, "Then don't kick them out. Take pity on them. I'm going to see Secretary of the District Committee, and then even the Minister himself, and I'll ask for their instructions as well." I went back to the school. The teachers were waiting for me. The students had already heard all about it. They were antsy. No one had come outside the shed. Besides the newborn baby, that woman had two boys and a girl. After three classes, I dismissed the remaining classes. I told the teachers, "I'm going to speak with them [the returnees]. I will call you later." I opened the door. The children inside were trembling. God may recompense me one day for doing what I did. The husband walked up to me and knelt, "Don't kick us out," he said in Tartar [a colloquial reference to the language of any Islamic nation or ethnicity]. He spoke no Georgian. I, on the other hand, spoke no Tatar. In the meantime, I noticed that Asimeh had entered the shed. She spoke Tatar. The husband kept begging us to let them stay. I told them they could stay for a while. I looked around and noticed that there were no beds. That woman lay right on the floor. I told the teachers, "Now you may have something to spare at home. Some may have stuff for the baby. Go ahead and bring everything you can. Bring bedding. I'll go get something too. Get some bread. Let's help these people."

The following day, the teachers indeed arrived loaded with stuff. I too brought a thing or two. Vakhtang sent me to school in a car. The children [returnees] were off the hook, grabbing our feet and hugging us. I told them, "Open your door after classes are over. Hang your laundry." The wife knew some Georgia from before her exile. Poor soul, she lay in bed. Her name was Sura. Asimeh

told me about her, “She’s a very good woman. I feel so sorry for her but I don’t’ know how to help her.” “Bring whatever you can. Of course you should feel sorry for her, lying on bare floors with her infant. We supplied them with food for almost three months. The state totally neglected them, never even settling the issue of their accommodation. Secretary of the District Committee only said, “Hanging laundry in the school is unacceptable. Otherwise, if they can stand it, they may stay as long as they don’t hinder the educational process.” They stayed in that shed for two years. In the meantime, the collective farm grew stronger. It was led by Mahmud Mikeladze. He’s still around. He has been awarded the Hero of Socialist Labor Medal. He had the collective farm crew build a house for the returnee family. There was a parcel of land next to the school. Our students cultivated the land, harvesting tangerines. Then we sold the harvested tangerines and bought Christmas trees and presents with that money. That parcel was taken away from us. Actually it was theirs [the returnees], so they were recompensed. A two-room one-story house was built for them. They were also given some extra land at our expense. The head of the collective farm built a fence, thus separating the school from the family. Poor souls, that’s how they lived. Their children grew up and went to a Russian language school. They didn’t speak Georgian, save the youngest daughter who was born here. They all went to a Russian school. They couldn’t handle the Georgian language. They handled the Russian language more or less. That’s why the parents opted against having their children attend a Georgian language school. The husband, poor soul, has passed away. They used to be Khasan-Oghli, now they are Khasanovs.

I never joined the Communist Party. You know why? We lived in Keda. My husband was a member of the Party Bureau of the District Committee. Chairman of District Committee asked him once, “Why won’t your spouse join the Party? She’s such an active woman. Why won’t she?” Vakhtang came to me saying, “If you want, you can join the Party. You’ll be able to take care of your students and do some work there as well.” I said yes. There was Teimuraz Gorgiladze, Office Manager, who offered to fill up my application for me. There is a “title” line in the application, and he wrote down “a noblewoman” in the box. He brought my application and read it to me. I was like, “A noblewoman! You’ll have me arrested! How

could you do this to me?” “What was I supposed to do? Was your father a peasant? What was I supposed to do? I thought it through and decided to write down a noblewoman.” Thus, I never went for my interview. Had he not written down I was of noble descent, I would have joined the Party.

In 2003, I was awarded the Order of the Badge of Honor. I had already quit teaching in school. I could've worked longer, but they pestered me, “Come on. You shouldn't walk such a distance to teach in school. You need to rest.” So I gave in and quit. Actually, Nana Gugunava, Minister of Georgia, scolded me for quitting every time we met. When I turned seventy-five, a big celebration was organized in my honor. I actually turned seventy-seven at that time, yet it was celebrated as my seventy-fifth birthday. I wound up facing hard times after leaving school. I took it all to heart. I was too emotional. On September 1 [the first day of school in the Soviet Union], I went to school only to find my classroom empty. I was hurt. There used to be three new groups of first-graders every year. That year, however, there were only two groups. That's why my classroom was empty.

My daughter Tsatso decided to follow in my footsteps. She lives in Kobuleti [a city in Western Georgia] and works as a school-teacher. Her husband's last name is Tzulukidze. Nodar is my older child. He's always been so talented. He went to school in Keda up to the sixth grade. Then he transferred to School Four in Batumi. He worked in the Batumi Mechanical Engineering Factory for one year, then another year in the Shipbuilding Plant. The Shipbuilding Plant sent him to the Shipbuilding Institute in Nikolaev, Ukraine. He graduated with honors. Then completed a master's degree program, defended his thesis, and obtained a master's degree. He got married there [in Ukraine]. He married a Ukrainian girl, a very young girl, a tenth-grader. They had two boys, twins. She was her parents' only child. Her father was a general. He offered Nodar to stay [in Ukraine], promising to find a good job for him and a good apartment for his family. Nodar refused, saying that he had parents waiting for him. So they moved here. They spent two years here. Her mother kept writing general delivery letters. They eventually went back [to Ukraine]. Our son's departure nearly killed me and Vakhtang. He still writes letters that make me weep. “Mother, my dear,” he writes in Georgian. His children come to visit us. They're

both married. Their names are Vakhtang and Roma. They're named after their grandfathers. One may say, they were brought up by us [Zina and Vakhtang]. They come to visit with us every summer. Their Georgian is not exactly perfect. Then Nodar remarried and had two more boys. They also have families of their own. Thus, I'm totally surrounded by great-grandchildren, Nikusha, Sesili, Nino; then Tsatso's grandchildren, Natia and Nikusha; and David and Darina in Ukraine. I have thirteen great-grandchildren...

What can I say? I want youth to have a good life. I want them to live a happy, good, and peaceful life. I'm counting on the new government. They're young and, I hope, they'll set things straight and take care of the regions, including our Achara. Achara needs it. Who says there's peace and quiet here? Not a single day passes without beatings and arrests. This is not peace and quiet! This is not a peaceful life! Nodar has always worked. He had worked as Director of the Batumi Scientific Research Institute of Membrane Technology for years. He actually initiated the creation of this institute. It's been seven years since he quit his job. He used to be a member of the Union of Citizens of Georgia [a left-of-center political party established by Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia from 1992 to 2003]. My son has been a member of the opposition for thirteen years now, for which they wouldn't forgive him. The Chamber of Control inspected and investigated his case for a whole year, yet nothing was found on him. They went nearly crazy because they couldn't find a single piece of paper in the whole institute. They found nothing on him.

By the way, Aslan Abashidze [the leader of the Autonomous Republic of Achara from 1991 to May 5, 2004. He resigned under the pressure of the central Georgian government and mass opposition rallies during the 2004 Achara crisis] told him, "You're young. I have two openings. One is the position of Mayor, the other is First Deputy of the Council of Ministers. It's your call. I can appoint you right away." Nodar declined the offer. I was so worried. He declined because he didn't want to become a puppet. He's like his uncles and father. They were all very rigid. Chkheidzes have always been, and still are, committed to Achara. All Chkheidzes presently oppose Abashidze. My grandchildren, Nodar's sons, are also members of the opposition, and rightly so. Now, was it right that they sent people from Achara to Tbilisi during the revolution? I don't approve

of it. How can you approve sending armed people when dozens of thousands of people were unarmed and stood in the rain for a whole week? My son, Nodar, stood by their side after classes.

Nodar presently spends most of his time in Tbilisi. He teaches at the Technical University. He runs a lab. Last year, he defended his PhD thesis. He is one of the founders of Our Achara Movement. And I support him. He is right. Enough is enough! He has reigned for thirteen years. It's time for him to go and yield to youth. It's youth's time. The whole government in Tbilisi consists of young people. This is how it used to work. The Communists appointed someone to a certain position. Then this someone had to progress up the career ladder and it took years and years. By the time he reached the top, he was an elderly person. That's why secretaries of the District Committee or chairmen of the Executive Committees were so old. Today, however, you look around and take pleasure at seeing young people. The question is whether they'll live up to expectations. They have all been educated in America. Some have studied in England, others in Russia. Of course, there used to be people holding high positions in the past, back when the Communists had just taken over. My husband was twenty-seven when he was appointed to a high position. Back in those days, there was an acute lack of human resources in Achara. As soon as a person graduated from a school of higher education, provided that he was an Acharian, he would be immediately appointed to an important position. He [Zina's husband] was an Acharian. He graduated from college. Then he enrolled in a master's degree program. And then Achara refused to let him go anywhere. He was eventually awarded as a Hero of Socialist Labor and Honorary Agrarian of Georgia. I too started my career at a very young age. I have worked for sixty-two years, becoming Honorary Professor of Georgia. I've seen a lot of things in my life. By the way, the downfall of Communism had a severe impact on me. I even said at the meeting of Dadianis (it was broadcasted by the Imedi television station) that I had been raised by the Communist regime and it hurt me to see the Communists leave. Eventually I got used to it though. As it turned out, the Communists were not implementing the right policy.

A lot has changed in Achara. Many people have turned violent probably because of the situation in the country. They [Acharians] are very peaceful people. I have worked in Khulo, Shuakhevi, Khel-

vachauri. They are very nice people. I have worked in the regions and I know that they are humble and decent people. You know what happens today? They move people from these places to persecute locals in Batumi. They are given homes. No one asked questions like “Are you a Georgian or a stranger?” in the past, especially in 1938. In 1939, veils were still in use in Upper Achara. Collective farms were just picking up.

Economic conditions must have had an impact on people. People are in need in the village. What can they do? They are in real need. They are in need because lands were allocated to farmers, yet they are unable to cultivate them as they have no oxen, no tractors, nothing to sow seeds. Then you need fertilizers, right? They have no fertilizers. That’s why our lands are neglected and barren, waiting for their master. This factor too has contributed to people’s anguish. The Acharian people would never raise their hand against their neighbors. Yet, a brother wars against his brother nowadays. One brother is a member of the opposition, while the other brother is part of Revival [The Democratic Union for Revival, a political party in Georgia founded by Aslan Abashidze]. They have become blood enemies. Nothing of this kind happened when the Communists took over in Achara. Oneness of mind reigned in those days. It wasn’t as it is today when people say we have democratic Achara, or our Achara, or some other kind of Achara, or Revival Achara. This Revival has embedded so much hatred in people.



## **TAMAR KHUTSISHVILI**

Born in 1912

Interviewed by

TSISANA GODERDZISHVILI in the village of Akhalsopeli,  
Kakheti Region, 2006

I'm an elderly woman, nearly one hundred years old, yet I still miss my mother. I yearn for my mother's tenderness and warmth like a child. I contemplate these pictures and talk to them all day. They're my only way of quenching the nostalgia. [She walks up to the wall and points in the direction of pictures. The wallpaper has turned yellow as a result of leaking water. It is patched with pieces of relatively new wallpaper of a different type, yet even they are unable to cover the shabbiness of the walls. The main place on the wall, its upper part, is dedicated to her mother's enlarged and framed picture, while the rows below are occupied by relatively small portraits of her brother. The bottom row is shared by smaller pictures of her brother, father, and sister, as well as her own embroidery.]

I'm often told, "You have your walls full of dead people's pictures. How can you sleep here?" Well, I take pleasure in contemplating them as though they were alive. I love coming back to this house because I get to touch things their hands have touched and walk where their feet have walked.

Look what a mother I had! [She looks at her mother's picture. Her eyes are full of tears. Her voice chokes with emotion.]. Only if I had a little more time to snuggle in her lap! Only if I could sate myself with the pleasure of caressing her!

By the way, when I was young, I felt really embarrassed to admit that my mother's last name was Nabichvrishvili [literally "son/daughter of a bastard" in the Georgian language]. Quite the opposite, as it turns out, it was a last name to be proud of.

There was the most beautiful girl, a daughter of a certain farmer. A nobleman's son happened to have fallen in love with her. According to tradition, however, a nobleman's son was not allowed to marry a farmer's daughter. There were noblemen in those days, right? Like Ilia Chavchavadze [(1837-1907) a great Georgian writer, poet, journalist, and political and public figure]... Kevlishvi-

lis, Bakradzes, Kipianis, they were all noblemen both here and in Kvareli [a town in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. I emphasize Kvareli because I was born here, I grew up here, and I know everything about it. So this is what happened. This young woman bore a child. The nobleman's son was not allowed to marry her, and she ended up raising that child alone.

The child grew up to be a handsome, tall, good, and well-cultured young man. He exuded his noble ancestry rather than following in his farmer forefathers' footsteps. Thus, he grew up. He danced and sang at the Feast of Saint John the Forerunner on May 7. He eventually grew up to be such a handsome man that he became a prominent figure in the community, "What a boy! Whose son is he? Who are his parents?" He had no last name, no nothing, he was a bastard. Then people said about his children, "They're the bastard's children." This is how he and his descendants acquired the last name Nabichvrishvili.

Nabichvrishvilis could be only found in Kvareli [a city and municipality in the Kakheti Region, Eastern Georgia]. Later this family grew and its representatives spread beyond [Kvareli]. My grandfather, Mikha Nabichvrishvili, for example, lived in Kvareli. He was a neighbor of Ilia [Chavchavadze]. Ilia's cousins and Ilia himself resided in Kvareli. Ilia didn't have a mother. He was raised by his aunt. His mother had died. Ilia's mother confessed the Gregorian Faith [that is, the Armenian Apostolic Church]. She must have been of Armenian origin. Similar to the Velistsikhe Armenians, she must have been a Georgianized Armenian. His father never remarried. Thus, he never had to deal with a stepmother. He was raised by his aunt.

Ilia treated my grandfather with great respect. Grandfather was good at chatting, he was a sweet talker. His speech was smooth, and he sang so well. He had a remarkable voice, so clear, beautiful and sweet. Thus, Ilia loved him very much as a singer and a good person. He always had Mikha by his side even if he had only one person visiting with him, this way entertaining the guest and delighting in socializing with grandfather.

Word has it that Paliashvili [Zachariah Paliashvili (1871-1933) a great Georgian composer] wanted to record my grandpa Mikho. And he did come from Tbilisi though the trip wasn't all that easy in those days. Grandfather was not at home, however, so he turned

around and left. Thus, they never met and grandfather's songs were never recorded. It makes me sad. He was gone hunting in the woods. Yeah [pause]...

Yes, he, Ilia, had cousins, Keto, Tamar, and Nino. I remember them. Niko Chavchavadze was the son of Nino or Keto, I forget who exactly. I do know, however, that he was a descendant of the Chavchavadzes. Zurab Chavchavadze, who was tragically killed, was Niko's son and their [Keto, Tamar or Nino] grandson.

I remember Niko. I remember him well. He was a very talented young man. He later held a high position in the university. I remember his mother too. They lived near Marjanishvili Theater. I've visited them in their apartment. That's how I know. Niko's mother and my mother were of the same age. Neither had been married yet. My mother mingled with these young ladies. She was friends with Ilia's cousins. It was a special circle, and that's why my mother was so distinguished in the village, in Kvareli. First of all, she was good-looking, attractive, with refined manners, exceedingly kindhearted, forgiving. In one word, this woman was the embodiment of all virtues. She was very much in demand and many a man wooed her...

There was a descendant of noblemen (his last name was Kevlishvili) who fell in love with my mother. Yes, the Kevlishvilis were Ilia Chavchavadze's relatives, cousins. He was madly in love with my mother, and my mother also liked him very much. Who wouldn't like this only child of his parents of noble origin, a true noble type of man, tall and handsome? My mother was also beautiful. I wouldn't call her gorgeous but rather good-looking.

To make it short, everyone in Kvareli, elderly residents, know their love story. I regret not inquiring and learning more about this story from the elderly. Yeah, I was a bit too late. I would never learn



Tamar Khutsishvili. 2006

anything at all had I not dropped by the Kvareli [local newspaper] editorial office.

Some of the employees were gathered in the administrative office. One elderly lady, whom I didn't know and who didn't know me, kept looking at me inquiringly. She scrutinized my background, asking me where I was from, what my parents' last names were, and then asked how old I was when my mother passed away. I replied, "Seven." "I knew it was you! Have you heard any stories about your mother?" she asked me. I replied I hadn't. "You must have been too little. Let me tell you one episode from this story." We became all attention. She related the story and left us all dumbfounded. Then she told me, "Now go to the Zautashvili. Nazo's aunt, Martha Kevlishvili, is a teacher in Telavi [a city in the Kakheti Region, Eastern Georgia] School #1. She will tell you the details [of the love story]."

Some time passed. Yet, I never managed to visit Martha. We were in such need that I hadn't been able to see her. I did keep in mind, however, that I had to find a way to meet with Martha, find her, as I only knew her last name, Kevlishvili, and nothing else, no address or anything.

When my brother-in-law reposed, I arrived here, in Akhalsopeli. I don't remember why I was in Lagodekhi [a town in Western Georgia]. Oh yes, I attended another funeral there, my brother-in-law's acquaintance had reposed, and I was coming back from there. Family members of the departed had their friends give me a ride, "They'll drop you off in Akhalsopeli. They're bound to pass through the village anyway." While on the road, they introduced themselves as residents of Telavi. I told them I was interested in finding a certain individual in Telavi and that I only knew her name and last name, no address or anything, "Her name is Martha. All I know is that she's a schoolteacher." This woman [one of the passengers] said, "Oh yes, she's my teacher and neighbor." She was very pleased and so was I. They wouldn't let me out by the roadside. They took me home. They gave me their address and invited me, promising to arrange a meeting with Martha.

Thus, after a while, I went to Telavi with the intention of meeting with Martha. I visited her family. Martha was named after her grandmother. She was just like her, tall, with a knobbed forehead, very aggressive and pompous. She was proud of looking like her

grandmother. I told her who my parents were and introduced myself as a daughter of a woman her father once loved. She replied, "Oh, I've always wanted to meet with you. I've been dreaming about it." I still remember how warm our meeting was. I still get goosebumps. We spent all day in her house, conversing. She told me the story of this wedding. The story about horses was related to me by Zautashvili. To make it short, everything I know was related by those two.

As it turned out, these Kevlishvilis were also Ilia's relatives. They lived in a two-story limestone building in Kvareli. The house had an open balcony with balusters and an orchard. The yard had agricultural facilities, a barn, a hencoop, and a stable. It also had a huge ornamented iron gate. Sir Giorgi Kevlishvili died at a young age. Lady Martha was his widow. She used to be a tall and nicely built woman, always wearing a head cover and dressed in black. She had an only-begotten son, Iliko, who was on a lookout for a wife, and a childless brother-in-law. The latter's name was Levan. Levan willed all his wealth to his nephew.

One time, it was May 7, Iliko ordered Alexi to harness the phaeton horses. Alexi, a boy of sixteen or seventeen, was his servant. Martha saw Iliko to the gate, "My son, please don't be late." Iliko rode down the main street of Kvareli and toward my grandfather's, Mikho Nabichvrishvili's, home. This house still exists in Kvareli, where Alikha Avazashvili, Secretary of the District Party Committee, used to live, right past Natlismtsemeli Street.

I wish you knew how much I love this house! It has a rich history. It was built in the time of Lekianoba [the name given to sporadic forays and incursions by Dagestan clansmen into Georgia from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries]. It resembles a castle. It has a staircase inside and a cellar below. The entrance leads through the cellar and up the staircase. The upper windows nearly reach the height of a standard third floor, overlooking the whole territory of Kvareli.

When a Leki [a North Caucasian people] raid approached, bells were rung, warning people that a Leki army was about to invade the town and urging them to find shelter. That's exactly why this house was built in such a manner, with the staircase inside the building, so that people could lock the door and hide inside. Lekis couldn't climb the building.

Thus, my mother lived in this house. Iliko asked my mother out. She heard the sounds of Iliko's phaeton from afar and flew down the straits to greet him. Iliko tied his horses to a tree and they both went to the Saint John the Baptist Churchyard. They were deeply in love with each other. The power of their love showed, and that's why everyone in Kvareli knew about it. Everyone felt so happy for them, "God has united them."

My mother had a neighbor, Sonya Shavkalashvili. I still remember where her house was located and how it looked. Sonya happened to have guests over from Telavi that day. One of them was her goddaughter, Nino Japaridze, a beautiful young woman and a fashion designer. She was good at tailoring too. It was in vogue to make dresses by hand back in those days. Thus, Nino saw the lovebirds and said about my mother, "She must be so happy!" Something kept her awake at night and she asked Sonya to flip playing cards and tell her fortune. Nino had Iliko in mind, and she was told that the jack of hearts was destined for her. She was surprised yet excited. Soon Sonya learned about her secret feelings and said, "Just give me some time. Mark my words, I'll have him break up with that Nabichvrishvili woman."

A couple of days later, Sonya paid a visit to Lady Martha and said, "It's a pity that your boy is chasing that peasant's daughter. He's with her every evening! Your son doesn't even know that she has a heart ailment. I came here to warn you, lest your son ruin his life. Separate them!" Lady Martha nearly went crazy. She was categorically against her son marrying a farmer's daughter to begin with, "We have nothing in common and now this news about ailment..." In the meantime, Sonya suggested to her, "There's a young woman, my relative. She lives in Telavi. She's a fashion designer. She's of noble lineage and beautiful and healthy at that."

When Iliko returned home, Lady Martha slammed her fists on the table and ordered him to break up [with Tamar's mother], "It's beneath my dignity to be associated with some peasants. In addition, their relative informed me that she has a heart disease!" Iliko implored with her, "Mom, I know her. She's not sick. Mariam is very healthy and sweet. It's all in your head. Something is pushing you to have me break up with her. You know what you're doing to me? You're throwing me off the cliff and into the chasm! You're making me miserable! I beg of you! I implore you! Don't do this to

me!” “No!” Martha was stubborn and adamant. “No! No way!” What could such a shy boy do? He was so well-cultured and loved his mother so much. Thus, he obeyed his mother and called it quits.

On the following day, Martha summoned her brother-in-law, “Levan, my son hangs out with the daughter of a peasant, and I don’t want him to marry her. We must find a bride for him right away. Please help me. I was told kind words about one beautiful girl in Telavi. She’s supposed to be a very good young lady, a fashion designer, and she’s of noble lineage too. I must have them married as soon as possible, and you must speak with Iliko.” He agreed because he was also very fond of the young man, being childless himself.

So, they went to visit their acquaintance in Telavi and [Lady Martha] told her, “Elene, my son is chasing a peasant’s daughter. I’ll never let him marry her. If you know a certain Nino, Japaridze’s daughter, maybe you could arrange a meeting with her.” “Of course, I know her. She can turn her hand to anything! She’s good enough to join your family.” To make it short, [Elene] pretended to have clothing material to cut and invited [Nino] to her home. They looked at Nino and took a liking to her.

Then they managed to take Iliko with them on their following trip [to Telavi]. He did go with them alright, yet he was so downhearted. He couldn’t think about anyone else. He said, “Love only happened once, not fifty times.” Nevertheless, he gave in to his mother’s and uncle’s persistent nagging because of his immense gentleness, and accompanied them to see that young woman in Telavi.

Iliko hid behind a walnut tree in Elene’s yard. Elene called Nino, “Come over. Let’s take measurements.” Nino arrived. She was indeed such a beautiful young woman. “Iliko, my son, do you like her?” Iliko answered, “Very much.” “You like her, you take her!” Lady Martha sent Elene to Nino’s parents, “Eva, happiness has come knocking on your door! Lady Martha from Kvareli and her son, Iliko, are asking for your Nino’s hand in marriage!”

Then, when negotiation was underway, Martha asked [the young woman’s] parents if they consented to their daughter’s and her son’s marriage. The mother replied, “We’re poor noblemen, while you’re rich, yet we will not consent since, as we have heard, your son is in love with someone else, while you’re standing in their way.” [Martha] “How can I support my son in ruining his life?” [The

young woman's] mother turned down the proposal, "My daughter will not be happy." Then the young woman herself was asked, "Nino, what do you say?" "If God wills, I'll be more than happy. I won't refuse. I will marry him." To make it short, she married him. It was not Iliko but his mother who took her [from her parental home]. The mother brought this girl to her son.

My mother learned about it. Then Iliko approached her and said, "Mari, our love is in danger." My mother knew all about it. They both sat there and wept, "What are we to do?" Then Iliko made a suggestion, "Let's go to my father's in Tzinandali [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia] for a couple of weeks. My mother will simmer down and accept us." My mother refused, "Your mother won't ease up on me. I'll never be your concubine." "Alright, since you insist on the mumbling of a priest and won't marry me otherwise..." Iliko went to see Priest Zachariah the next day. He gave him a lot of money and asked him to marry them in secret from his mother. Zachariah agreed.

It was Sunday. A rumor spread throughout Kvareli about Iliko and Mariam being married that day. Everyone, even little children and aged villagers, swarmed in my grandfather's front yard. Lady Martha had maidens, Keto and Salome, who had also learned about it. They wouldn't dare telling her about it. She did, however, look outside and inquired, "Where are these people going?" The maidens could no longer hold it back from her and snapped, "Iliko is about to be wedded." A furious Lady Martha ordered Alexi to harness the horses and joined the stream of people.

The matrimonial rite had already started when Lady Martha got off the phaeton, elbowed her way through the crowd, without even having looked at anyone, and faced Priest Zachariah, "By what power do you marry them? I'll have you shaved tomorrow if you don't stop immediately!" [Orthodox clergymen traditionally grow beard and hair. When excommunicated, however, they used to be forced to shave their beard and cut their hair.]. Priest Zachariah got scared. He knew Lady Martha's uncle was a bishop in Tbilisi and obeyed. The wedding was ruined. Thus, Iliko's and Mari's love ended so abruptly. Iliko stayed at Mari's home. When his mother learned that her son refused to go back home, she became even more furious and went to my mother's house. Iliko and Mari noticed her approach through the window. Iliko knew his mother's temper,



so he jumped out of the second floor window. His whereabouts was unknown for quite some time.

Three months later, Iliko returned home, broken down. He was greeted by Nino whom his mother had selected for him and whom she had brought for him as a wife. Nino wanted Mari out of his heart. She wanted him to obey his mother. Alas! He became unable to forget Mari! He struggled, yet he never succeeded.

He was warm with Nino but his attitude took its source in his good manners as opposed to love, which didn't escape Nino. She couldn't help noticing her husband's binges on the side.

One or two months later, Iliko left home once again. He first stayed with his aunt, Zautashvili, for some time. Then he traveled to Tbilisi. People noticed him where the Ortachala Garden used to be and delivered the news to Lady Martha, "He was listening to music and weeping." He returned home three or four times a year. He spent the remaining time drinking wine in pubs, seeking sympathy and mourning over his fate. Everyone in Kvareli felt so sorry for him. Weeping and mourning ate him up. He lost weight. He was pale as a ghost. He had become a different man.

In the meantime, they had a baby whom they named Giorgi, Giorgi Kevlishvili. He grew up to be an excellent young man. He became a historian and led the Department of Education in Kvareli for a while. Some time later, they had a second child, Martha, who was a teacher in Telavi.

His [Iliko's] mother later regretted her deed bitterly, "What have I done! How could I make my son so miserable?" This proud woman kept beating up herself. She roamed through the village weeping, "Where are you, my son? Please come back to me!" The villagers did not sympathize with her. She begged him, "Please forgive me." He didn't however. He couldn't find it in his heart to forgive her.

In the meantime, Niko, my father, grew up in Akhalsopeli. He told me, "I turned twenty, my child, and I had enough money of my own to get married. People used to marry at an early age back in those days. Thus, we, my mother and I, started looking for a bride.

"I had a great-uncle who lived in the last house down the street. He was my grandfather's brother, Datia Khutsishvili was his name. He was a village elder. Back in those days, the village elder had the same authority in the village as the Secretary of the District Committee has today. He had a beard like Akaki Tzereteli

[a prominent Georgian writer and poet (1849-1915)] [trying to mock an imposing and wise man's posture]. He owned a phaeton and horses, white horses. To make it short, he owned a phaeton.

"Thus, this uncle of my father's, my father and mother went bride-hunting and collected information about good bachelorettes in one village or another. That's how we looked for a bride. We inquired about who were the girl's ancestors and parents... The word 'genes' was not in use in those days, so we simply asked who her parents were. That's what we inquired, child.

"We were advised to go to Velistsikhe one time. We were told about a beautiful young woman with the most splendid dowry, so we went there. Back in those days, a woman had to have a dowry. If she had it, she surely got married even if she was as ugly as a monkey. We saw that young woman and turned her down."

He also told me that they were given a whole dowry list as long as this [measuring about three feet with her arms stretched], including a wardrobe, a cupboard, a vat, a samovar, an iron [laughs], and forty gold coins, ten-rubles each, on top of it all. He told me, "I looked at the woman. She was all right but she was red haired. That's why I turned her down. We left.

"There was a pub owner in Kvareli, Levana. He told us, 'You don't need to go far. I know one woman here in Kvareli. No unmarried, or married, woman compares to her. She's most precious. She was betrothed to a nobleman, however, and his mother ruined their wedding as she didn't want a farmer's daughter [to be her daughter-in-law]. Yeah, that's what happened. She really is a very good girl. You will surely like her.' We asked, 'Where can we see her?' He replied, 'The day after tomorrow, May 7 will be celebrated in the yard of the Church of [Saint John] the Baptist.' May 7 was celebrated in the Chavchavadze's ancestral church. He said, 'You can see her there. I'll show her to you.'"

Thus, they went to the May 7 celebration. They found my mother there, downhearted as such a great tribulation had befallen her. The whole population of the village raved, yet there was not much they could do. In the meantime, my father was told, "That's she, the one in the blue dress."

My mother was dressed in a blue voile dress with a jabot neckwear. Voiles and dresses of this type were in vogue back then. She was so pretty, so beautiful, standing there all by herself. My father

and his uncle and mother saw her. My father thought, I don't care if she has been betrothed or whatever, I am marrying her! Then he asked his uncle and mother what they thought of her. As it turned out, they liked her, both uncle and mother.

Then they told that man, Levan, "We like her. Will you be our middleman?" They went straight to Mikha Nabichvrishvili's house. This house is still located on the street straight across from the Church of [Saint John] the Baptist. Thus, they went to that house.

Levan revealed the purpose of their visit. My mother replied that she had no intention to get married. She was hurt. It was no joke! She was betrothed, and everyone knew about it. They were madly in love, and then this incident took place! She was in such profound distress, and that's exactly when they showed up asking for her hand in marriage. My mother coldly refused, "No!" and my father left.

Father told me, "I kept pestering her until she agreed. In addition, as it turned out, her parents also pushed her. They told her she couldn't remain [unmarried] all her life, she had to get married."

Grandpa Mikha had heard about the Khutsishvilis from Akhalsopeli. My father had a good reputation. Niko was known as a hardworking and lively man. You know what kind of man my father was? Back in those days, uncultured peasants abounded, while my father was different. He was one of those distinguished farmers who were in good terms with noblemen. For example, the noblemen Bakradzes were my father's godparents because they liked him. He was hardworking and lively. They liked him and were friends with him.

Gio Khutsishvili, my grandfather, was a judge. My grandmother was a teacher's daughter. This uncle of mine was a village elder. They were all highly esteemed. Their good name is still remembered in their village.

To make it short, they talked my mother into it. Now Mikha, Grandpa Mikha, said, "You may marry my daughter but remember that she will not have any dowry. Duruji [a river in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia] overflowed once and devastated my lands. That's why I'm impoverished and that's why there'll be no dowry." My father replied, "I don't need your dowry! You can strip her bare! I'll supply her with a dowry and then marry her, so that my parents won't complain! Let me handle it!"

My father has told me, "I had so much money! I sent people to Tbilisi and had them buy everything that was necessary to make up a dowry, including a wedding dress, a wardrobe, a cupboard, a samovar, kitchenware, everything! I bought it all!" That samovar was eventually stolen. I felt so bad about it since it was my mother's dowry. That's what my father did, and many still think that he married a woman with a dowry.

To make it short, he married her. They had a nice wedding reception, an incredible reception. My father was as happy as a clam. He covered my mother's head with a hat, clothed her in a fine dress, and adorned her with gold jewelry. My father's reputation was strengthened. It was said, "What a wonderful woman Niko has married!" The villagers gossiped, "This village has never seen such a bride."

They proved to be a good family. They became the most demanded guests. They became the godparents of every child in the village. When my mother dressed in a Georgian outfit, put on a head cover and a veil, and walked down the street, people flocked outside to see Mariam. She was not only beautiful but well-educated for her time. She was humble and compassionate toward the needy. She had good manners. There was nothing in her that would show that she was a farmer's daughter. Of course! She was around noblemen's daughters all the time.

Hearing about my mother marrying Niko Khutsishvili added insult to Iliko's injury. He used to show up at home three or four times a year. Now he disappeared altogether. In a little while after the wedding, my mother gave birth to me.

One time, when Iliko realized he had one foot in the grave, he reasoned he had to see Mariam before he died. He harnessed his horses in the phaeton and traveled to Akhalsopeli. It was my mother's birthday. Iliko's godfather lived on the edge of the village. The godfather welcomed him with open arms. Iliko's horses were tied to a nearby tree. The host and guest sat at the table for dinner. Iliko informed his godfather concerning the purpose of his visit. Some time later, he was about to harness his horses but... the horses were gone! They got loose! They were gone! They asked people walking up and down the street [if they had seen the horses]. The reply was, "No. We haven't seen them." Finally one man walking down the street said, "I saw two saddled horses on the main road."

We lived on the other end of the village, two or three kilometers from there. Those horses galloped all the way to our doorstep. We used to have a wagon gate right there [points in the direction of the back yard]. The horses came in through that gate. It was amazing how the horses made it here! This hall used to be an open porch. The horses put their muzzles on the porch floor, staring dumbly and snorting as though waiting for their master to look outside.

My mother and her mother-in-law, Grandma Masho, heard the noise and looked outside. My mother recognized them, "Man, these are Iliko's horses!" She made the sign of the cross, "Oh my God, what brings them here?" As for Iliko, he chased the horses and waltzed into the yard shortly afterward. After having learned whose property he was about to enter, he rushed into the nearby Saporov's Tavern and bought sweets, wrapping them in a red handkerchief and showing up at our doorstep.

My mother looked through this window [the front of the house has a door and two windows. She points in the direction of one of the windows] and behold! She saw Iliko, not the same Iliko though, but skinny and totally different! My mother's heart sank. At the same time, she felt sorry for him. She was lost, not quite understanding what she was supposed to do, "Mother-in-law, please look outside. A man is at the door."

Grandma Masho looked outside. Iliko said, "Mother [a customary way of addressing elderly women], these horses in your yard must be mine. May I?" "Of course, son. Come in. I don't know whose they are, but they pranced in as though they had been invited. They're in the yard. Come in and take them." Iliko handed the handkerchief with the sweets to Grandma Masho. Masho thanked him, "You didn't have to." Then she asked, "Whose son are you? I don't recognize you. Are you from around here?" "No, mother, I'm a captive from Kvareli," that was all he said as he entered the yard, looking around. He must have been looking for my mother.

My mother hid inside and never peeked outside. She still felt mistreated. Why would a grownup man listen to his mother? How could he hurt her so badly? He had ruined his own life and my mother's life.

Then Iliko took away his horses, harnessed them in the phaeton and set out for Kvareli. After having reached the edge of the

village, he dismounted and set the horses loose, while entering some nearby vineyard himself.

The horses drew the phaeton all they way home. Martha and Nino slapped their foreheads, "We must be in trouble." Ten days later, a rumor spread in the village. Poor Iliko's unattended body was eventually found in the Kindzmarauli vineyard. Then his mother passed away. Grief and sorrow, as well as the wrath of people, killed her. She broke down, angry and furious, becoming gravely ill and eventually dying. Apparently, Nino could no longer endure it all either. She was driven to exhaustion, constantly having to wait for her husband. She died of a heart failure shortly afterward. Two little children were left orphaned, three-year-old Giorgi and one-year-old Martha. The siblings were raised by Nazo Zautashvili, their aunt.

My mother had had three children and was pregnant with her fourth child when a rumor spread about Nicholas [Emperor Nicholas of Russia] being overthrown and the Bolsheviks having advanced, "They're about to come here, people, bearing death and starvation."

People were scared. They gathered at our doorstep one time. Many women were among them. They said that the Bolsheviks were murderers and mourned over their uncertain future. That was the reputation the Bolsheviks had among people. My mother said, "I'm going to have an abortion." She was expecting her fourth child. "How am I supposed to raise children at such a time as this?" Others also joined her, "So will I! So will I!" There must have been more pregnant women present.

They were in the middle of this conversation when the cannon thundered here in Lagodekhi. "They're here, people!" I buried my head in her lap, "Mommy, I'm so scared!" "Don't you worry, child! They, the Bolsheviks, won't come here."

We the children pictured the Bolsheviks as monsters. Then the cannon fired again. "You hear? They are advancing! What shall we do, people?" They were all sorely troubled. Those women (they must have been young), all of them, indeed had an abortion, doubting whether they would be able to raise their children.

As early as the following day, Bolshevik soldiers entered with their wagons and ammo. I remember how one of the soldiers came to my father's house, picked me up and wept. I was little and I didn't know why he wept. I asked mother, "Why was that man crying?"

“My child, he said, ‘I’ve spent so many years in the army; I have a son of her age. She reminded me of him.’ That’s why he broke out into tears.” I remember him so vividly precisely because he wept.

I remember well the wagons loaded with [Russian-style] loaves of bread and passing through [the village]. Those were Russian horse-drawn wagons. They were different from our carts. They were loaded with loaves of bread. I remember how they broke the bread and distributed it among the locals. They visited every family in the village. I can still remember the taste of that bread. It was delicious. I haven’t tasted better bread or canned food ever since. I don’t know where the bread came from. Soldiers had to be provided for and fed.

I remember them shout, “We represent a new country! We’re about to build a new country! It will be a collective country where poverty will no longer exist and where life will be joyful!” That’s how they comforted the villagers. Fear dispersed when the people sensed this warmth. “Don’t be afraid! We will live in unity! There will no longer be the rich and the poor! We will dine at the common table! A joyful life awaits you!” To make it short, the people were very pleased.

Nevertheless, my mother had an abortion and passed away. I don’t know what exactly she did but she didn’t die right away. Apparently, her condition worsened gradually. My father summoned physicians from all over the place, yet to no avail. There was also one thing that determined my mother’s death. Otherwise, she might have survived.

My father invited a famous physician who had graduated with honors from school in Poland. This man, Giorgi Giunashvili, was well known throughout Kakheti. He was rumored to have the ability to raise the dead [a figure of speech]. That’s the kind of physician he was! My father brought him from Velistsikhe [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. He rented a car, drove to Velistsikhe and brought the physician to our home, then took him back to Velistsikhe and drove the car back home.

His [the physician’s] father was a priest. He lived in that house [points in the direction of the house across the street]. He had very talented children, three boys and three girls. They all grew up to become brilliant professors [a doctoral degree holder, as opposed to the pedagogical and academic title], including Giorgi.

My father invited one of the three brothers, one who lived in Velistsikhe. He examined my mother, first her wrist and then her heart. He liked her very much and asked, "Who would give you in marriage to Niko?" My father was unattractive. My mother got upset, so upset that she refused to be examined any further when time came to have her checked from the waist down, "No! I don't want it!" "As you wish," said the physician and left.

My Mother couldn't tell my father what had happened. Her condition worsened. Nothing could help her.

There was another physician, Khariton. He was the Japaridze's son-in-law. He said, "I'll heal her if I'm invited." Yet, she refused to be examined at all. She ruined her life, and that's what I hold against her. How could she do this to us! We were but little children! Then she willed to my father, "You take care of these children. Educate them, teach them how to read and write. Now you're both their mother and their father."

My father never left her deathbed. She was already gravely ill. She would doze off for a second and then wake up immediately. "Niko, I'm a goner. My life is over." "Why are you giving up? What happened?" inquired my father. She replied, "I just had a dream. Iliko came to me and called me, 'Come with me. I must take you with me.' He put his arms around me, led me to his phaeton and took me away." She passed away shortly afterward. My mother was dying, my father was about to end up with three children to provide for, yet he was not overly mournful because she would never love father as much [as she loved Iliko]. Love only happens once. She fell in love once, with all her heart and soul.

It was 1922, Easter Eve. At noon, we the children and our father were all agitated. The news of my mother's repose and her dream spread throughout the village as quickly as lightning. Later, when Iliko's children grew up, they asked questions about their parents, what happened and how. Everyone in the village knew this story! One time, Otar Samkharauli, a good friend of mine, had a reception. Giorgi [Iliko's son] was among the guests, and he related parts of this story. Some of the guests also remembered the story. They wondered if that woman [Tamar's mother] ever had any children. Otar said, "I know their family very well. Tamar is their first child. Niko Khutsishvili was her husband. They live in Akhalsopeli." Giorgi said, "Please arrange a meeting with Tamar for





Tamar and Gogi Khutsishvili with mother on Gavazi Saint George feast day

me. I want to embrace her as my sister.”

After a while, Otar was in Kvareli, while I was in Tbilisi. He told me when we met one time that he had met such a person and so on... I told him I was very interested in meeting that man and asked Otar to arrange a meeting. Shortly after this conversation, Giorgi passed away! I never managed to meet with him. I felt so sorry. Then this editorial office opened my eyes. The secret I had always been interested to learn was finally revealed to me. It was all made clear to me. That

woman told me that Giorgi had passed away and advised me to see Martha, “They were raised by my aunt. Our parents were siblings. They grew up in our family, and they know your story by heart. You’ll learn many interesting things from them.” Martha passed away recently. It has not been long. I managed to have it my way to some extent as I had met with her and fulfilled my dream. That’s how my mother’s story ended. My father did his best to raise and educate us. He was always so attentive to us. A year later [after the repose of Tamar’s mother], he remarried. This is how it happened.

My stepmother was my mother’s friend. They were neighbors. She was divorced. Her ex-husband was “German”. He used to be a physician. He had graduated from school in Germany, and that’s why he was nicknamed “German”. My stepmother was his ex-wife. They didn’t have any children, and that’s exactly why relatives advised my father... My father knew that this woman and my mother

were good friends. I don't remember this story as I was very little, but I was told about it.

Thus, he married her. She died, however, never learning what a child's love is. [She used to say,] "I don't know what this feeling is like. I hope I'll learn what it is like to have a child before I die. I have yet to taste of this feeling that moves so many people." It was 1932. The Bolsheviks had already entered the country. My step-mother's ex-husband was apprehended, arrested, for the reason of his alleged Trotskyite views. He was executed by a firing squad.

By the way, Giunashvili, my mother's physician, was also arrested in 1937. You know why he was arrested? He supposedly healed Cholokashvili [Kakutsa Cholokashvili (1888-1930), a Georgian military commander, leader of the national guerilla resistance against the Bolshevik rule; regarded as Georgia's National Hero. After the unsuccessful 1924 August Uprising against the Soviet Union, in which Cholokashvili commanded the largest single unit of the insurgent forces, he fled to France, where he died of tuberculosis. His remains were moved to the Mtatzminda Pantheon, Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2005.]. At that time, Cholokashvili (Kakutsa) was on the run, hiding from the authorities in the woods. He had been wounded and hid in one of the cellars in Mukuzani [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. Giunashvili was invited as a physician, to treat him. That's what ruined him. He was arrested for having treated Kakutsa's wounds. He was arrested and sentenced to death by a firing squad.

Executions usually took place in one of the squares on the territory of Gurjaani [a town in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. The man who was supposed to execute him, fire at him, recognized Giorgi and asked, "What are you doing here? Why were you arrested?" "The Cholokashvili case." [The executioner said,] "Find a way to sneak out of here, crawl if you need. I won't kill you." Thus, this man helped him escape. He [Giunashvili] reached a certain village after many tribulations. He approached a house and said, "I'm a runaway. Please shelter me." They [residents of the house] got scared, reasoning that they themselves would eventually be executed, and turned in the man who had just escaped! He was sent back and executed. Such a sad story of that poor man! The Communists executed valuable people; they gave no quarter when it came to killing ordinary people either. I have a list of all our fellow

villagers who have been executed. Some of them were shepherds and some of other vocations. There was one man. He had been herding sheep all his life. He was exiled to Central Asia, along with his whole household. They still live there. A certain Giorgi Khutsishvili lives in Gavazi [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. He's a returnee. He was little when he was exiled. He was freed later, returning as a grownup man.

To make it short, arrests were carried out on a regular basis. My father was dumbfounded, "Why would anyone arrest Vano Khutsishvili or Saba Khutsishvili? Or Tzkalobashvili?" And he would go on and on. He said, "Something's wrong here." He later found out that the Communists had arrest and execution quotas to meet. My father was appalled and scared at the same time. [He said,] "I know the village like the back of my hand." That's the way he was. He was always involved in the life of the village. He was at a loss, "Why do they keep arresting people?" One morning, perplexed with such thoughts, he went to the village gathering place. Every day, in their free time, people gathered at the crossroads, at the square, where our church and the Village Council are located today. Even today villagers gather at crossroads, sharing news about the country, as well as their own concerns, and lending one another a helping hand.

Thus, my father went down to the gathering place only to find the place desolate. He was surprised, wondering what could have happened. Suddenly a young man ran up to him and said, "Uncle Niko, I heard you were arrested last night. Why are you here? Leave right now! Hide somewhere!" He even told me that young man's name. I just forgot it. He said, "I lowered my head and trotted back home. I told my wife, 'Pack my stuff. I'm leaving.' She asked me, 'Where are you going?' [I answered,] 'I must run away. They're arresting everyone. Since it was said about me that I was arrested last night, they will probably come after me.'" He cut the door that presently leads to the cellar and hewed a window in the cellar. It took him one day. That was his escape route. He intended to escape through the vineyard. He made ready. [He told his wife,] "Put my shoes, warm underwear, money, and other stuff in a separate sack." So she did. My father and Giga Ioramashvili escaped. He [Giga] also ran away. As for his father who used to live right across the street, he was exiled to Central Asia, along with

his family. It's good that his son lived separately. Indeed, two days later, Cossacks came after my father, "Niko! Niko!" My stepmother looked outside. My stepmother was a tough woman. Even they [the Cossacks] admitted, "We've never met such a tough woman." "What do you want from Niko?" she inquired harshly [imitates a deep voice and a harsh tone]. She wasn't scared at all. "Tell him to come outside!" "He's not at home and I won't call him! Tell me what you need and I'll convey your message to him." "Tell him to come outside!" "I told you he's not at home!"

They started yelling even louder. They could hardly hold their horses that seemed to have trampled the whole front yard. Two well-armed men hardly managed to hold them. When people noticed the agitated horses, they reasoned, "They must be after Niko." Our neighbors passed by our house. They [the Cossacks] asked them, "Who is this woman? What's her name?" The reply was, "I don't know. I've never been here before." They never revealed my stepmother's identity. It's interesting that Marusya's identity wasn't revealed either. In the meantime, my father sneaked out. He grabbed his sack and vanished in the vineyard. They went to the mountains, staying with the shepherds whom they later followed down to Shuamta [a monastery complex in Kakheti, eastern Georgia]. "That's where we were hiding. They [the monks] sheltered us." They hid there for six months. Finally, my father went to Tbilisi (where I lived at that time) and checked into the hospital. His veins required surgical interference, and he reasoned he might as well get it over with. Thank goodness he checked in and had that surgery done. In the meantime, the notorious events of 1937 ended.

In the midst of the events of 1937, as incredible as it may sound, people believed that these events were not plotted by Stalin. They believed that they were his [Stalin's] minions' tricks. They told on one another, they had one another arrested, yet they loved Stalin. When encountering some difficulty, people threatened to put on the iron boots, grab the iron staff, go to Moscow, and complain to Stalin [a Georgian expression, meaning "I'll walk as long as it will take me to achieve my goal"]. That was the attitude people had in those days. I don't know if the stories about 1937 are true, but 1937 remained as an unhealed scar in my father's life. In one word, the fear of the Bolsheviks bearing death and starvation came true.

Then, collective farms were finally established. The Communists entered in 1921, while collectivization started in 1932, not immediately. People didn't even know what it was called. My grandmother used to say, "Child, the collective has come, and we have to dine at the common table from now on." People had the following definition of it, "We must submit our goods. Then we will be allocated goods in accordance with the amount of our labor." [Grandmother asked,] "What if I don't work? I will not be given anything?" I replied, "No. You won't have anything until you start working." Nobody liked collective life, "Man, I have one horse and one ox. Why should I give them to you? How do I know there's something in it for me?" No, they were told, this country must live as one; we must work together and equally distribute the fruits of our labor!

You know how hard it was for the country to create collective farms at first? It was very hard. Nobody wanted to join the collective farm. People became unable to cultivate their lands. Those who refused to contribute their wagons or horses had their lands confiscated. People were pressured and threatened in order to make them donate their properties. Collection points, or booths, were created with difficulties. Finally, things got so bad that a famine ensued. To make it short, people were impoverished. They no longer had their ancestral lands to cultivate. What were they supposed to do? My father used to tell me, "You have to work, child. Unless you work hard and dedicate yourself to labor, no one will support you." It was during that period that we cleaned a place for kopali [a Georgian name for an apiary]. It used to be nothing but pebbles and weeds. My father cleaned the place, planting honey plants favored by bees. These trees grow there to this day. I overheard a conversation this morning, "These trees were planted by Uncle Niko." There was a stream. My father changed its course and made it flow into this bee yard as bees like water. He even built a stone shed. After having organized his bee yard, he assumed the responsibility over the Sakhtambako (a trust) bees transported from Tbilisi, thus building one big apiary.

He collected loads of honey, tons of it. He fairly distributed it among those whose bees he kept. My husband told him once, "You work so hard maybe you should keep some of the honey." My father, however, replied, "These are their bees and the honey belongs

to them. I have enough of my own.” Then he turned to trading in honey. He didn’t know how to trade, however, unlike those who sell honey by pound nowadays. He transported it in canisters and traded it at a wholesale price at a special store called Tsekavshiri. This store used to purchase wholesale goods. While honey cost two or three rubles per pound in the market, my father sold it for one ruble. He would take the whole amount at once and used it better than he would by trading in honey in the marketplace year after year. That’s how smart my father was and that’s how he made a fortune in the midst of hard times. Then he was appointed Chief Beekeeper of the region. He owned a horse and a cart. He would ride in the cart to Kvareli and nearby villages.

He was industrious and kind at the same time. He has loaned so much money! It seems to me that a half of our village was built using his money. “Uncle Niko, can I borrow some money from you?” “Uncle Niko, we’re in need!” “My son fell ill last night, Uncle Niko!” One time, in the middle of a night, before dawn, somebody knocked on our door. He [father] looked outside and inquired, “What happened, Mikha?” “Man, my son came down with something last night. He’s very sick. I need to take him to the doctor in Telavi.” Back in those days, we had no physicians [in the village], while a trip to Telavi was no joke. Thus, he asked my father if he could spare ten rubles, “I have a sealed twenty-gallon vessel full of wine. I’ll repay you as soon as I unseal it. Only help me now!” “Alright, Mikha., I’ll give you the money. Wait just a second. How are you planning to take your son to Telavi” “I don’t know. I’ll have to borrow a wagon from somebody else.” Father told him, “Take this money! Now this is my horse and this is my wagon. Put your son in the wagon, take him to Telavi and take care of him.” That man blessed my father and left.

Then, after a while, he repaid his debt. My father asked him, “How’s your son?” He replied, “He recovered. Thank you so much for your help. I have your money here” My father said, “I don’t need it right now. Thank you. I’ll let you keep it as you’re the one in need at this point. I, on the other hand, don’t have a bedridden son.”

That’s why everyone in Akhalsopeli was so grateful to him. Everyone who had a difficulty, be it a family problem or any other need, turned to my father.

There was a woman, Nutsa, who had a very beautiful daughter. She approached my father, "Uncle Niko, I have to tell you something. I need your advice. Please help me." My father invited her in. Nutsa continued, "You know the young man who's wooing my daughter. You know our family. My daughter is a decent girl. As for the young man who's wooing her, I don't know how decent he is. You should know whether he's worthy of her or not." My father replied, "I know his family very well. His parents are hardworking people. I don't know, however, how good a son he has grown up to be. I've never had a chance to travel with him, or feast with him, so I would get to know him. On the other hand, he has good parents, and I believe he's a good son."

Thus, it was always up to my father to judge. That's why everyone loved him, be they elderly or young. They all raved, "Uncle Niko! Uncle Niko!" And I'm proud that my father was so loved by his children and people. We were orphans. We eventually grew a bit older. I did not have a mother, however, to instruct me; I didn't have a mother to share my concerns and ask for her advice. My stepmother was strict. She only said, do this, or do that, or why haven't you swept well?

I hurt my leg once while climbing over our fence, and screamed. I was hurting so badly when my stepmother told me early the next morning, "Start the samovar." I started it, but I forgot to pour water in it. She never told me fill it up. I started it, while continuously bringing hot coals from the neighbors and dumping them into the empty samovar. The samovar burned up. My stepmother guessed what had happened and told me, "Why didn't you fill it up with water?" I replied, "You never told me!" She punished me. She punished me indeed! She enjoyed her meals while keeping me hungry. She wouldn't talk to me either. I cried and cried. And the injured leg nearly drove me crazy. What's her samovar got to do with me! To make it short, I wanted to die.

There was a trunk in our house. That woman [stepmother] watched it like a hawk. The trunk was sealed. She died without letting us know what was in it. I had no one to reveal her secret in the first place! I was in the sixth or seventh grade. Everyone in the school knew that I had a stepmother. They knew I had a very good mother and that I was from a very good family, and they all felt very sorry for me.

Then I blossomed into adolescence, learning a thing or two about life. I was told one time, “You have to look into a wedding ring. You’ll see your destiny on in it.” I didn’t know where I could get that wedding ring. Young women who were older than me told fortunes once and they let me peek into a wedding ring. I looked and saw a young man leap over this stream of ours. I said that such and such just leapt over the stream. In reality, it was someone who had already seen me and whose fancy I had caught. I had yet to learn, however, what love was about. I had no idea what color it was, green? Blue? At the same time, something was awakening inside me, yet I hadn’t figured out what exactly it was.

There was a young man, Lado Varazashvili, who used to live where nice houses are in Varazi. Lado’s cousin was my classmate. He [Lado] knew my father and he knew I was my father’s daughter.

He started writing letters to me (he found out my last name). He told his relative to give him the names of his classmates. My name, Tamar Khutsishvili, was also on that list. Lado found my last name and wrote me a letter. What a letter it was! I don’t remember it well now, but I can recall one passage. He wrote, Tamar my dear... No. No “my dear”, simply Tamar. He wrote, I (I don’t remember where) listened to a song featuring the piano, and it reminded me of a woman weeping over the ruins of... [Struggles to remember] Rome, Italy. These are the only words I can recall. I’ve forgotten the rest. I remembered Lado’s letter whenever I listened to that song. The [upright] piano and the grand piano were very popular in those days. We didn’t have radios and these music shows and stuff like that. Thus, he sent me this letter. He sent it through someone, and it was delivered to me in secret. I hid it in the drawer of my cupboard at first. This boy had fallen in love with me. I, on the other hand, had no clue what love or marriage was about. I didn’t even realize that I would eventually get married and have children. I didn’t know any of that. To make it short, I started acquiring admirers.

Then (it happened after Lado) there was a local young man, Davit Kipiani, my former teacher’s brother. I was his first true love. He happened to have fallen madly in love with me. I was in the seventh grade. Our school had seven grades. In order to get to school, I had to walk to where the Local Council is located today. I would stop by my friend’s house on the corner and we walked to school



together. One time, when I reached the corner, I noticed a young man run. He turned out to be Dato Kipiani. He was older than me. Yes, he was a very good young man. If I only had a brain, I would have married him because of his last name only, not to mention everything else. I still regret being so silly. This young man kept running and running. I approached the gate and was about to call Tamar, "Come on! It's school time!" He ran up to me and handed me over a small letter. I unfolded this small piece of paper that read, "I love you." When I was about to graduate from our seven-grade school, this young man attended classes in Ilia Vocational School, in Saguramo. His uncle, Davit Kipiani, a nobleman I guess, financed his tuition. The Kipianis had prominent ancestors. He came back for holidays and wrote me letters from there. I started making fun of his letters. His letters were so interesting though. I eventually kept two letters only. I stashed them in a drawer for a long time. They were still there even after I got married. My brother also read these beautifully written love letters. Only one letter has survived to this day. I still have it; it's old and shabby. I've kept it folded for so many years. Oh how much he loved me...

After having finished the seventh grade, I arrived in Tbilisi. I turned fourteen, then fifteen, then sixteen... I grew up to be a more or less beautiful adolescent. This picture was taken in that period [looks at a picture of a young woman on the wall]. It was a small picture, I had it enlarged. Data [Dato Kipiani] stole this picture and put it in his pocket. I don't know how he did it. Then he graduated from the agricultural vocational school and was given a job in Western Georgia. I met him once. He told me, "I've already graduated. Let's go to Western Georgia. I was appointed as an agrarian on one of the collective farms." I thought, "Should I go? This young man is an orphan. I'm an orphan too. I'm not even ready to get married. I'm not old enough. I haven't matured yet." I couldn't say a word to him. I still didn't know what love was about. I did feel drawn to him apparently. I told him no. I didn't marry him. I hadn't even graduated from high school yet. Had I had a brain or someone to make a decision for me, I would have [married him]. Yet, I didn't know what to do. I wasn't ready to have a family of my own. I made no promises to him. He kept my picture in his chest pocket. Before leaving, he told Tamar, my best friend, and his cousins, young men from Velistsikhe, "I'm leaving and I entrust

her to your care.” Tamar Japaridze was my classmate. One time she arrived in Tbilisi where she had aunts. There was also Giorgi Kapanadze from Tbilisi. He may be still alive. They used to live in Ikalto where the academy is [Ikalto, a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia; famous for its monastery complex and the Ikalto Academy]. His father held high office there. Giorgi was a very talented man and I liked him very much. Had he asked me to marry him, I would have considered his proposal. He was also older than me. Yet, Davit entrusted me to his care as well, “I’m leaving. I entrust Tamar to your care. Make sure she doesn’t get married.”

They patronized me indeed. I couldn’t make a step without noticing Data Tushishvili, a young man from Velistsikhe, hiding behind a tree or watching me from a distance. His cousins were nice though. Yeah, that’s what happened... My aunt, Paata Burchuladze’s [b. 1955, a prominent Georgian opera singer] grandmother, took me to Tbilisi for the first time after I had graduated from our seven-grade school. I mentioned Paata because he has made a name for himself worldwide. He is my blood relative. We are descendants of siblings. He’s the descendant of a sister and I of a brother. We are fourth or fifth generation relatives. My aunt took me [to Tbilisi] for the first time. I stayed at her home for a year. I spent my second and third year without a permanent residence. I spent a year or so with my relatives. Thus, I was taken there. I was not familiar with Tbilisi at all. I had no home; I knew no local lingo, nothing. I wasn’t too well educated. I had finished ten grades only. I was silly and inexperienced. Nevertheless, I arrived, and my aunt had me enroll in a school at the clothing factory. This school still functions at 60 Kalinin Street.

My freshman year wasn’t eventful. In my sophomore year, however, I distinguished myself. I was the editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. I knew nothing about newspapers, yet I managed to publish one somehow. I created school posters. My handwriting was unrivaled in our class. I was given a pair of overshoes when I was a sophomore. One time, the school director entered the classroom and told the students, “We have a pair of shoes here for your class. You decide who deserves to keep them.” The boys prevailed in our class, and they nearly raised the roof as they knew they weren’t getting the shoes. Then the teacher said, “Alright. Let’s cast lots.” We wrote our names on pieces of paper and put them in one of

our classmate's hat. The teacher drew a piece of paper and read my name. Now the boys raised hell. They thought it was all staged because I was a good student. The teacher got upset and called on the student who behaved most boisterously. We wrote our names on papers and placed them in the hat all over again. She had this boisterous boy draw a piece of paper. He unfolded it and voila! It read Tamar Khutsishvili again. What could the boys say? They fell silent. The teacher laughed, "Must be your luck!" I was so excited, so excited, as though I had won something valuable. Can you imagine how hard life was? There was one pair of shoes for forty-five students. I'm talking about the time after the Communists entered, back when the country was already impoverished.

I had a good reputation. I graduated from school with honors and was given a job as a technical staff member. I, such a little girl, made sixty rubles [a month]. I wasn't married yet. I was even elected as a deputy. I knew nothing about politics. I don't know why I was elected. I was elected as an activist, not as a deputy as such, as an activist of the Supreme Council [Soviet] as I was underage, I wasn't old enough. It wasn't called the parliament then. It was called the Council of the Executive Committee. I still remember how its meetings were held where the big City Hall building is today at Lenin Square [presently Liberty Square]. I remember exactly which entrances led to the meeting halls. I attended work sessions of the legislative [spells out the word legislative] bodies of the country twice a week. I sat in the corner minding my own business. I was the youngest girl there. I sat in the back row. I remember well how deputies argued with one another. Yes, they did have arguments in those days as well. They argued over things like the poor condition of Railroad Station Square, people sleeping in the streets, and stuff like that. I still remember them bumping heads. I wanted to say something. I, such a little girl, did not have the nerve to stand up and talk about the starvation and need that I witnessed around me. I didn't have the guts. I didn't have anyone to mentor me either.

It was before 1937. In 1937, I was no longer there. I got married in 1933... or 1935 [struggles to remember]. My Tsitsino was born in 1936, which means that I got married in 1935. Yes, and I gave birth to Tsitsino on November 8, 1936. She's still around, bless her heart. To make it short, I had a good public reputation.

I had a good circle of friends too. My friends were talented and held doctoral degrees: Gogla Korsaveli who passed away recently, Giorgi Karanadze, Davit Kipiani, poor soul, who loved me dearly, Sandrik Javakhishvili... In one word, I had a very good circle of friends. Everyone had high expectations for me, hoping that I would achieve success in life. Then I got married. Then what? I didn't know my husband. I didn't know who he was; I knew nothing about his background. I didn't have an apartment of my own at that time. I had a childless godmother, Magdana, who sheltered me. She was my godmother and she felt so sorry for me, knowing that I didn't have a mother and that I was an orphan. I reasoned later that she helped me to get married because she wanted to get rid of me as she only had one room that we shared.

In one word, my godmother told the parents of my husband, "Mariam (Mariam was my mother-in-law's name), one Kakhetian girl is staying with me. She comes from a good family. She had a good mother and her father is wealthy. On the other hand, you have sons. Why won't you take her? She'll prove to be useful." She invited my in-laws over to her apartment. They paid us a visit. I had no clue what was going on. Three of them arrived. My mother-in-law wore a head cover. She was a very beautiful woman. My father-in-law wore a neat silver belt that was so in vogue back in those days. And they brought their son, Giga, a handsome young man, so handsome that it was impossible to take one's eyes off of him. He was tall and handsome. He had this haircut, nothing but the forelock. Thus, I was sitting in the corner doing my homework. I didn't know what they were talking about. They didn't look familiar to me. As it turned out, they were there because of me! They left and held a family meeting at home. They had taken a liking to me. My mother-in-law had four more children, three boys and a girl. My husband was the eldest child, followed by Giga, the young men who had accompanied his parents, and the third son, Vakhtang, who's still alive. They were in the middle of a conversation when my husband, as insolent as he was, said, "She's my destiny! Not Giga's!" I happened to have a liking for his brother. He had never met or seen me, yet he kept yelling, "She's my destiny!" He was such a pert! [Tamar is angry.]. Now they had to get to know me better, yet they didn't have a daughter of my age. They had a niece or someone in Tabakhmela, near Kojori [villages near Tbilisi]. They

had this girl, Nina, visit with my godmother at whose apartment I was staying. This girl accompanied me to their home and back. That's how they got to know me and became close to me.

One time they invited me to their home. My mother-in-law was a well-to-do woman back then. They had a good family. She baked bread at home. It was yellow, as though the dough had been kneaded with ghee. It was yellow because of the type of wheat that is harvested in those parts, near Bolnisi [a town in Southeast Georgia]. To make it short, they hosted me. Giga and Nina took me to the movie theater from there. There was a big movie theater on Plekhanov Avenue [present Aghmashenebeli Avenue in Tbilisi] called Amirani or something. Soso was already there. Soso was my husband's name. We sat in the back row, exactly where he sat. He had a good look at me. Then, when the movie was over, I was introduced to him. He told his brother and Nina, "You go home. I'll take her home." What a pert he was!

Thus, we walked all the way from the theater, from Plekhanov Avenue, while my home... You know where my home was? You had to go past Vorontzov [Vorontsov Square in Tbilisi]. It was in the place called Arsenal. He walked me home and entertained me, telling me where he worked, what he did. As soon as I got home, I told my godmother, "I'm so tired of him." My godmother was waiting for me, knowing that I had gone out with them. She asked me, "Who walked you home?" I replied, "Soso." He overheard me say I was tired of him. He got upset and disappeared for almost a year. I was walking down Rike Street one time, all dressed up and cozy [points in the direction of pictures on the wall featuring her as a young woman]. The street was desolate. It must have been like five in the evening. I noticed three boys walking in a distance, students of the gymnasium, holding briefcases and dressed in similar shirts. They noticed me, a girl walking alone down the street. These young men argued, unable to decide who would approach me with a pickup line. In the meantime, I walked closer to one another. When I was close enough, he [Soso] recognized me! [Laughs] I was dressed in a new dress with a pleated skirt. I was so finely dressed, and they liked me even better.

The following day, I found him [Soso] waiting for me in the same place! He chased me for four years, while my Data was sent to Western Georgia, with my picture in his pocket. The next thing

I knew I was married. They [Soso's family] took me and they took me slam-bang. I didn't have an apartment, I had nothing. They told me, "There's an apartment for sale in our neighborhood." They kept dragging this Nina back and forth, knowing that I wouldn't go anywhere without her... [Pronounces in an appalled manner] and they took me! A girl with a spotless reputation! I looked around and I was married! We didn't have a formal wedding reception or anything. I was taken by my in-laws. I didn't want to be his destiny. I hid from him for almost four years. He chased me and stalked me all over the place. One time, I noticed him chase me. I instantaneously ran into a yard. The door was open and I hid behind it. I saw how he passed by me and stopped, wondering where I could've disappeared. He looked for me but never succeeded. That's how I hid from him. Apparently, I didn't hide well enough. My husband said I was his destiny. Indeed, I became his destiny.

Then I found out I was going to have a baby. I got married without even having fully realized I would eventually have a child. I was in distress, "Mother! What have I done?" Although I had graduated from school with honors, I lost my job; I lost everything. I worried a great deal, making everyone around me concerned. While my depression continued, I gave birth to my Tsitsino. After a while, I came here to the village with my little baby. Data also had had a child, a boy. He found out that I had gotten married and even had had a child, and paid us a visit here, holding a whip in his hand, "I'm going to whip you with it!" I asked, "Why?" "You were not planning to get married. What was your rush?" I replied, "What was your rush? You just went and married the first woman to come your way!" He got so upset, so upset, that he left his wife, took their child away from her, and came for me. He hid this child with his cousins in Velistsikhe. His wife went chasing him. The hell with the husband! She wanted her son back! I had no idea what had happened. Data came back and told me, "Leave your husband! You must come with me!" I replied, "I cannot! I have a child and a husband. I cannot leave him!" "Had he been a good husband, you wouldn't have wound up being as skinny as a rake." I had gone through so much, I had had so much to worry about that I looked like this [opens her mouth, puts her hands on her cheeks and squeezes them]. I had changed completely. I said, "Good or bad, he was destined for me."

Data's wife later found that small picture of mine in his pocket. She asked what it was and he replied, "My first love." Had it not been for the war and Data's death in the frontline, something could have happened. I didn't love my husband. You know why? I didn't love him because I was deceived and because he acted like a pert. I was in love with his brother, Giga. Yet, since it so happened, I got used to him. I've been facing hard times ever since. My husband graduated from the Veterinary Institute. He was a veterinarian. My bother-in-law was also a veterinarian. They owned a private house and they were well off; they were never in need, and I had a roof over my head. Then my child breathed life into me to some extent. At first, I wanted to die, saying that it was not the right time to have a child. Yet, after becoming a mother, I totally changed, I went through a transformation, my worldview was completely different. I worried about it so much but now, as an elderly woman looking back into her past, I believe it was a joy that I gave birth to a child. I'd rather have children than become an academician. It's such a wonderful feeling. Happiness had come knocking on my door and I didn't even appreciate it. Then we grew up. My brother, Gogi, was already a student, a senior about to graduate, while I had a family of my own and a daughter, Tsitsino, four or five years of age. We reasoned we were grownups and we had to move on regardless of what we had been through. My father was so excited to see us orphans grow up to be fine, healthy, hardworking and decent people.

An announcement was made on the radio at this time, "People, we are in war with Germany!" The news thundered throughout the country. Young boys, draftees, were all killed that very evening. All young men and women were drafted. Full mobilization was announced. All young men and women were sent to the frontline! It happened in June. My brother was a college student and a distinguished athlete at that, a participant of the Moscow Olympic Games. He was one of the banner bearers. To make it short, he was a very smart and exceptional young man. Students made a statement, our country is in need. We all must support it and go [to the war]. The entire department of physical culture, these handsome young men, went to the war at once. They didn't wait to be summoned by the Military Commissariat [a local military administrative agency in the former Soviet Union], saying, we

won't wait while the country is in need. We must go! Goga came to me, "Tamar, a war broke out, and I'm leaving with my fellow classmates." I told him, "Why are you going? You think they shoot walnuts there? They shoot bullets! Just hold your horses! Let them draft you, and then you can go." "No," he replied. "Everyone is going, I cannot stay! I cannot!" The war was declared on July 21. On August 10, these young men went to the war. When the troop train started, he told me, "Tamar, take Tsitsino and leave! Move in with my father. Don't you dare come back to Tbilisi until I come back! Don't worry! This war won't last long. Four-five months at most." How could our country, our impoverished country, defeat Germany? [He continued,] "While I'm undergoing these courses (He was to undergo a training course in Kuibishev, after the completion of which he would be sent to the frontline), this war will be over. I won't have to go to the frontline."

Thus, he went to Kuibishev. I received letters from him, saying that his trip was alright, he was alright, and asking me not to worry about him. The war, however, lasted four more years. Then my sister got married, and her husband was also drafted five months later. She was pregnant. Then she gave birth to a son, Tamaz. This child fell ill at the age of eighteen months and died amid misery and starvation. We were already starving. My father, however, never stopped working. People, on the other hand, gave up on labor. They didn't sow; they didn't plow, reasoning that it was wartime anyway. Everyone was drafted, so there was no one to sow or plow in the first place. Only women were left. They couldn't do it! They had their families and children to take care of! My father, however, continued plowing and sowing as much as he could. The war didn't have any impact on father (he wasn't drafted) since he had sent his son to the frontline. He wouldn't be drafted in any case, I guess. I don't know. Two years before the end of the war, when the Germans advanced on our territory and the country was in terror... There was one [radio] announcer. We later saw him on television. His voice was so good that the Germans said, let us buy him from you [meaning Yuri Levitan (1914-1983), a famous Soviet radio announcer during WW II]. His voice was something else. He announced news from the frontline.

The situation was grave, and Stalin made an announcement, brothers and sisters, my fellow compatriots, the war will be long,



it will not be over soon. Your husbands and your children fight in the war. Support your country. It is in great need. The words were so touching. I don't remember everything that Stalin conveyed that time. The whole population of the country was touched. My father said, "My son is fighting in the war. I have to work hard here, do something, so I can support my country and my son." Then he was summoned by the Secretary of the District Committee [of the Communist Party], "Niko, here's the deal. What do you think about Stalin's speech? We need your feedback." My father replied, "I will be happy to provide my feedback. I will sell my home, the fruits of my labor, everything I have harvested in this year and last year, I will sell it all and support my country. Only help me sell my products." Tsikhistavi served as Secretary of the District Committee at that time. He promised to send a truck to pick up my father's products. Ladiko Mgeladze from Chikaani [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia], Chairman of the Collective Farm and an old friend of my father, also donated goods to fill up the truck. He also contributed tremendously and supported Georgia. It wasn't counted as much as his merit as he was Chairman of the Collective Farm, while my father was praised as he contributed fruits of his own labor.

To make it short, after Stalin's speech, my father collected money. He sold this watch-necklace my mother has in this picture [points in the direction her mother's picture on the wall]. My father divided my mother's jewelry between us, and this watch fell to Gogi's lot. Elo and I received a bracelet and safety pins respectively. My father then sold this watch, added to the amount he had already collected, so that my mother would also participate in supporting her son [cries; her voice changes]. My father deposited seventy-five thousand [rubles]. Stalin learned about it. The whole population of Georgia learned that there was a man who had sent his son to the war and supported the country with so much money. They nicknamed him "Father of the Soldier" and "Patriot". I still have newspapers. In one word, it was a big deal. Stalin was excited and happy to have such a person. He sent a telegram, personally greeting and thanking my father. Thus, my father deposited the money. The District Committee supported him in bringing his goods to Tbilisi. He sold everything and deposited seventy-five thousand [rubles] in the bank. It was quite an amount in those days. This

money was designated for production of a tank since his son was a tank crewman. He bought a tank for his son. That's how it was interpreted.

My father himself was a kind of person who cared about his country. There are people who only care about their wallets. That's why I always say that people like him must be appreciated. He deprived us of that money! He could have spent that money on us, couldn't he? My sister went through so many trials during the war! Hunger and need! He deprived us, did he not? No matter what, his country came first. He was asked later if he had a wish. He was offered a retirement plan. He said, "No. I don't need a retirement plan. The country is in need. There's not enough money to pay my pension. And, in all fairness, I'm not in need. I don't need it. I only have one request. Please let me see my son for at least a week. I want to see my only son." All right, the Military Commissariat and the District Committee promised to have his requested granted. He was then informed by the commissariat, "Uncle Niko, please check with us at the Military Commissariat this coming Sunday at noon (it might have been some other day)." My father arrived right on time. The Commissariat had my father check into the hospital and undergo a thorough examination. A letter was executed and sent to my brother's detachment, requesting leave for him in order to see his gravely ill father. That's the kind of documentation he was given from the authorities.

This letter arrived on the tenth. On the eighth, however, my brother was killed when his detachment was bombed. My brother and I maintained mail correspondence. I attached Tsitsino's picture to the last letter I sent to him. I held her in my arms when we took that picture. She was three at that time. She looked so beautiful, wearing an apron embroidered by me. Gogi was very happy that at least I had a child. He had that picture in his pocket when he was killed at the frontline. Then his detachment comrades learned (I found out later) that the father of one of their soldiers made him such a present, that is, bought a tank for him. A documentary was eventually produced about this story and my father. The script was written by Eter Japaridze. It was produced by Shalva Chagunava, a documentary filmmaker. They spent one week with us. They filmed my father. These pictures are from that documentary [points in the direction of two pictures of an elderly man].

My father must have been eighty at that time. My father's fatty tumor grew this big [pressing her fist against the throat]. He had had four surgeries, and the doctors said that it was a central nervous system disorder. When I gathered top physicians and asked them to help him because he was such a prominent man, they said it was sarco-lymphoma, a non-lethal but very uncomfortable tumor. He had it removed every year. My father traveled to Leningrad. The doctors couldn't take the risk of removing it in the fifth year of his treatment. That's why he is featured in profile in these pictures. It [the tumor] had grown quite large by then. The documentary shooting took place here. The whole population of the village helped us host the crew. They brought fried chickens, wine, and other provisions from the collective farm. The film was about my father but it also featured me, as well as and my mother's pictures. My stepmother was upset as she was left out. The director told her, "The mother of his children is considered his wife, ma'am."

Then I got a hold of a copy of the film to keep it in our region, just in case. It was sent to me. It was kept in Kvareli. Then [the town of] Kvareli lent it to some outlanders. I complained to them, "No one has a right to cut and destroy scenes in this film!" Why? Someone had a grudge on my father's cousin and he wanted to get even with him. Alright, but I had nothing to with it! Then God cursed this man. He broke his leg or something, had gangrene developed and died. That film disappeared along with him. Now my daughter tells me that her grandfather's pictures from that documentary are featured on television at eight in the morning when the national anthem is broadcast. He was a good man. That's why everyone loved my father, Dibiraant Niko. Now this is why we are nicknamed Dibiraant ["of Dibir" in Georgian]. In the eighteenth century, when Lekianoba raged, that is, when the Lekis raided these parts, every village and every household had a sworn Leki brother, a konak [a term used among Caucasian peoples]. Our family also had a konak. His name was Dibir. That's why they referred to us as Dibiraant. Ilia Chavchavadze also had one such Leki. A family that had a konak was protected from the Lekis. My father was friends with the Lekis. I remember a certain Shepia, my father's good friend, a very good, well-cultured, Georgianized Leki. Everyone loved him. Shepia was eventually killed. One time, he and my father were on their way to Tivi (an Avar (Leki) village

nearby in Kakheti). An assassin was waiting in ambush. He only fired once, hitting this man, Shepia, and killing him right away. A murder investigation was launched and my father was subpoenaed to testify. They asked my father questions like “What happened?” and “Did you kill him?” How could my father kill him? They were walking together, conversing on their way, and that’s when the bullet hit him! A few years later, it became known that a mercenary Leki was the assassin. They [the detectives] knew who he was. The identity of him who had hired that assassin, however, became known to me recently. This part of the case went cold back then. This is what happened. My aunt was married to an officer of a Polish army detachment stationed in Satskheno (a village neighboring Akhalsopeli, located on the other side of the river) [Tamar’s great uncle was the woman’s second husband]. This man was a Polish officer and my aunt was his family’s daughter-in-law. An army detachment is still dislocated there, in Galavani. But I’m telling a story about Nicholas’ time [Emperor Nicholas II of Russia (1868-1918)]. My aunt’s husband had a mistress. This aunt of mine was beside herself, furious about her husband’s affair, so she started an affair of her own with their [family] konak.

Years flew by. Kriminsky passed away. Kriminsky was his last name [aunt’s husband]. That woman remarried. To make it short, their family broke up. Relatives only remain here and there.

When my aunt got married, her Leki lover reproached her, “Why have you betrayed me? I will kill you!” My aunt trembled with fear, “It’s the Lekis’ way. He’ll surely kill me.” The Leki man kept his eye on her, waiting for an opportunity to kill her. She decided to kill him first, so that she would survive. She told her husband, Saba, “One Leki man is after me. He threatened to kill me. Please help me out.” Saba agreed and invited that Leki man to his house. My aunt told the Leki man, “I haven’t cheated on you. Although things have turned out this way, I still love you no matter what.” In one word, she lured him this way and put poison in his wine. The potion kicked in so fast, I don’t know what she gave him. After she walked him to this crossroads [pointing at a crossroads near the house], he suddenly staggered and passed out. He figured out that my aunt had poisoned him.

He barely made it home. His house has survived to this day. I know where it is. He got home and told Shepia, his uncle, that he

had been poisoned and that he was about to die. He told his uncle who had poisoned him. Shepia became enraged and threatened my aunt with revenge, “I won’t let you get away with it. I will avenge him.” My aunt hired one Leki and paid him one liter of wheat. That’s how little he requested for killing a man. Thus, this aunt of mine hired this lowlife Leki and had him kill Shepia. What a crafty woman! It took place a couple of blocks from here. By the way, she was a descendant of clergymen. That’s how that man was killed. We were all saddened by his death.

Shepia was a good man. I remember him. He had a Tushi [Georgian highlanders, inhabitants of Tusheti, Northeastern Georgia] woman for a wife. He was Georgianized. My father and his friends went to his grave and celebrated the anniversary of his repose every year. Here, I even have a picture [browses through the family album, finds the picture and looks at it], prominent Akhalsopeli residents at the grave of Shepia. This is my father. This is Ioska and this is Ladiko, Chairman of the Collective Farm. This is Jemal Tzkalobashvili, a good speaker and poet. This is wine in wineskins... Pots... Look, they had a chicken with its legs upward. This picture [picks up another picture] was taken at Shepia’s grave. I have other pictures of Shepia. Then this woman (my aunt, so to speak, as she was the second wife of my great uncle, my father’s uncle) she sort of confessed to somebody, wanting to let it all out a bit, to take the load off her shoulders. It turned into a confession indeed. She had to tell somebody about it in order to be at peace with her conscience. We learned about it after she passed away, much later. My father had already died. It all became known much later. That’s how old the roots of this story are.

My father was friends with other Dagestan Lekis too, Akhala Magamedov, Haibula Zagirkhanov, and many others. You should have seen the love and warm hospitality with which the Lekis welcomed Georgians who traveled to their parts, trading wine and vodka for cheese and other goods, wool, for example, and mentioned Niko’s name, stating that they were his relatives or fellow villagers. The Lekis would say, “Niko is our brother, and his relatives and fellow villagers are our brothers. Akhala [one of Niko’s Leki friends] was the then Chairman of the District Executive Committee, a high-ranking official. He was highly respected by the Lekis. He knew Georgian, and he was a very amiable man.

Another man [Niko's Leki friend] moved his family to Kakheti. He settled in the village of Tivi like many others [Lekis] did. We have a village here called Tivi. He moved to this village. He and my father, Gogia Iashvili, Ioseb Demetrashvili, and Sasha Shiukashvili were sworn brothers. Akhala's Georgian friends helped him arrange a vineyard in the Georgian quarters. They even taught him how to tend it. In one word, they proved to be true friends.

It was 1989. Akhala and his wife paid me a visit. We greeted one another. They thanked me, "My niece Tamar, thank you for keeping your father's fireplace burning." We remembered a lot of stories, how my father went hunting in Dagestan, for example. We were in the middle of this conversation when Akhala's sons, Khajimurad and Khajial, his nephew, Zagir Magamedov, and second wife, Jamarat Amashukeli, Kotya Amashukeli's daughter-in-law, entered my front yard. I wondered, "Jamarat, you have a Georgian last name?" She replied, "My husband is Kotya Amashukeli's son." Kotya was from Kharagauli [a city in Western Georgia]. He was Elguja Amashukeli's cousin. He fled Kharagauli a long time ago and was sheltered by the Lekis. He even married a Leki woman, Phatima, a beautiful woman. She passed away, however, shortly afterward. He didn't have any children with her. Then he remarried. His second wife's name was Nutsa. Her mother was a Georgian woman. He had a boy and a girl with her. This Jamarat turned out to be that boy's wife. Kotya passed away in 1962, while his descendants continue the Amashukeli bloodline in the land of the Lekis.

I wanted so much to call the Amashukelis and ask them if they had ever heard this story. I never managed to get in touch with them though. Then I asked those youths [the Leki guests] if they got along with the Georgians well. They replied, "Yes. Our father lived in Beshta [a village in Dagestan]. He didn't come here to make war. Love for Georgians impelled him. We'll do anything for Georgia as long as there is peace. We agreed today to have our houses built next to the Acharians [inhabitants of Achara, a region in Western Georgia], and we youths volunteered to work free of charge. One Leki from Saruso [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia] failed and embarrassed us, however, tarnishing our good name." Here's why they mentioned the Saruso incident. Under Communist rule, I remember well, the Germans, Kurds, Lekis, and others were deported from the territory of Georgia. Georgians

settled in Mtisdziri [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. They still live there. Other villages, such as Tivi, Chantliskure, Saruso, became desolate. Years later, I don't remember exactly when, it must have been 1957 or 1955, in Alikha Avazashvili's time (he was Secretary of the Kvareli District Committee), Lekis from Chechnya were moved to Tivi. They are polygamists, and the idea was to have them multiply fast. The district authorities seized the moment and sold Georgian lands to the Lekis. The Leki women boasted, "We have sacks full of cheese and sheep. We have homes and we have lands." They would appropriate whole territories on this side of the Alazani Valley [Eastern Georgia], and they intended to do so.

One time, however, a rumor was spread about a certain Leki killing a Georgian man, removing his intestines and roasting them on a skewer, while boasting, "Kakheti belongs to the Lekis, all the way to Alazani. I'm going to slaughter Georgians every week." This story stirred ethnic animosity, creating a gap [between the two peoples]. The issue of having the Lekis leave the land of Kakheti and go back to their Dagestan was raised. The villages of Tivi, Tkhilistzkaro, and Chantliskure were vacated. The Tivi Lekis were slightly more amiable, they held different values. They were different from other Lekis. They built a bridge (it's still there) between our villages over the Avani Gorge, so that our people could mingle. Those Lekis from Tivi were very friendly with the Georgians, with every Georgian family, especially with my father.

Thus, he [one of the visiting Leki youths] was talking about the Lekis from Saruso, "On behalf of the Avar people, we filed a request with the District Committee and militia; we even wrote a letter to the editorial office of the *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* newspaper, demanding the right to try the murderer on our own. We were told that, unfortunately, once a man was arrested by the militia, it was a done deal." Then he told me, "Tamar, I'll tell you one old story. Your father, Niko, and others also knew that friendship between Georgians and Lekis goes back centuries. Yes, there has been both enmity and friendship. The story I'm about to tell was recently published in the *Krasnoe Znamya* newspaper.

"There is a lowland valley below Parati and above Artzukhi, on the territory of Dagestan... Alyah went down to the valley to drink some water. Nearby, King Tamar and her retinue were camped in the same valley. The retinue included Tamar's ladies-in-waiting,

cooks, singers, musicians, who made merry, danced and minded their own business [Queen Tamar of Georgia (1160-1213), one of the most prominent rulers in Georgian history, glorified by the Orthodox Church as a saint. The Golden Age of medieval Georgia is closely tied to her name. Her position as the first woman to rule Georgia in her own right was emphasized by the title King commonly used in medieval Georgian sources in relation to Tamar]. Alyah drew closer to the tents. One of the ladies-in-waiting took a fancy to Alyah, 'King of Kings Tamar, a certain young man has come to our tents, as handsome as the cannon.' Tall young men were compared to the cannon in those days. Alyah approached Tamar and inquired, 'Who are you? What is going on here? Where do you come from?' King Tamar replied, 'We have come here to ask for help and to save ourselves. The whole land of my Georgia and Kakheti is bleeding to death, so I have come to my neighbors to request aid.'

"This story took place in the twelfth century. That's how old it is.

"Alyah wondered, 'Well, if you are in such distress, then why are you singing? For it is a sign of joy.' Tamar replied, 'These are my servants, some are my slaves. Why should they care about the country?' Alyah asked, 'What do you need from my people now?' Tamar replied, 'Help me save my Georgia and my Kakheti. The Shah has made war against us.' Alyah replied, 'These sheep are not mine. Let me herd them back to their owner, and then I shall help my neighbors, Georgia and Kakheti, as much as I can.'

"Apparently, Georgia had not been unified yet.

"Alyah mastered the Leki army and led it to Kakheti. A fierce battle ensued against the Shah in the Alazani Valley. Alyah defeated the Shah's army. The enraged Shah sent his mighty son to slay Alyah. A spear pierced Alyah's chest, yet he would not bow down, but collected himself, rushed to the Shah's son and beheaded him, taking his head and presenting it to Tamar.

"The remnants of the Shah's army fled, leaving the young man's body behind. Tamar took a wounded Alyah to Kakheti, surrounded him with physicians from all over Georgia, and healed him. She thanked the army, while asking Alyah to stay in Georgia. Alyah replied, 'My mother and my father, as well as my beloved betrothed, are waiting for me in my land. I cannot stay here.' Tamar asked, 'Do you love your betrothed very much?' 'She is my heart and soul.' Tamar then said, 'If so, you must leave.' She took a gold bracelet



off her wrist and handed it to Alyah, 'Give it to your betrothed as a present and tell your future wife to keep Tamar's present safe. I also have another request. Name the field where we met Tamar's Field.' Tamar's Field is presently located in the gorge. Many people know about this place, including Niko. That is the kind of neighborly relations the Georgians and the Lekis had."

Then he drew an imaginary circle with his finger and said, "This is Georgia and look how many enemies encircle you. Appreciate your neighbors."

When my father had had a surgery, he and his wife came to see him every day, in the morning and in the evening. There's a shortcut over the bridge. They crossed the bridge and brought milk for my father. They truly respected him. When Zviadi (Gamsakhurdia) came into power and said, Georgia for the Georgians, that's exactly when they all left [Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1993), first President of Georgia]. The house built by him in Tivi has survived to this day. Someone bought it and moved in. Many have left and moved to Beshta. We were saddened by their departure. Some drove them out, telling them to pack and leave. They [the Lekis] have said about such people, "We would never imagine it would please them so much to see us leave." They were so downhearted, yet they weren't upset with us, quite the opposite. They continued coming to visit with us and wrote letters from Beshta. His [Akhala's] son paid us a visit two years ago. He inquired if I needed anything. I wonder if he's still alive. He's my age. I'm happy today. Had I not been forced to marry, I would've learned about the things that accompanied marriage, and possibly wouldn't have gotten married. I was such a wimp. I wouldn't get married, no way. I'm happy today because I have two children. My boy was a late child. After Gogi, my brother, passed away, I gave birth to a boy and named him Gogi. I have two children who mean the world to me. Having a child is the greatest joy ever.

My husband passed away in 1988. He was seventy-six. My husband loved us, his wife and children. I have to give it to him. It's just that he loved women. Poor soul, he had a mistress. I knew about her, yet I couldn't care less. I would say, "Let him love her. What do I care?" [Laughs] Apparently, things like that shouldn't be tolerated. What do you mean he loves her? You have a wife, don't you? So sit on your behind and be merry. [Pauses]

Then that woman, his mistress, wished to take over my home. My father bought this house and another one in Tbilisi and registered them in my name. It was considered a good house in those days. It still is. It's a two-story building with high ceilings. I have a yard, a garage, a basement, and six rooms on the second floor, an open balcony on one side that would make a good sunroom if roofed (yet, why would I need a sunroom?). Everyone had his own room. My father registered the house in my name. Now my husband also contributed. He too worked hard. Nevertheless, I would never be able to afford it. It was so expensive, almost a million. The monetary reform had recently been implemented, and we ended up paying 14 000 000. It almost equaled a million pre-reform [rubles]. I was frequently asked while registering the house, "Why are you registering it in your name?" They thought my husband had stolen the money somewhere. I replied, "My father is buying it for me. Would you register your daughter's present in your son-in-law's name?" The person said no more. That house is still registered in my name.

Later, after the repose of my husband, I found out that they wanted to kick me out of that house. My husband was still alive when that woman, my husband's mistress, showed up. She got scared because she had learned that I knew everything. She feared that the news would spread by word of mouth, so she rushed to my place saying, "It's either you or me!" I was so agitated by what she said that my temperature rose to over a hundred degrees. I had told my husband earlier that I knew about it and I wanted him to take care of it, "I don't want to see you go there or her to come here!"

And guess who came to my house? That woman walked up the stairs and rang the bell. I was lying in bed as she walked in and said, "It's either you or me!" "Why should it be you in the first place?" I jumped up and grabbed her by the neck. Agitated as I was, I was filled with strength through God's grace, ripping her clothes off and handing the rags to her. She was stunned. I gave her a good beating, and then my husband kicked her out. She had no business coming to my place. I told my husband, "I don't want to see you either. I trusted you and this is what you've done." He replied, "Had you loved your husband, you would've held on to him. You raised hell today but why haven't you done anything earlier?" He tried to make me look guilty. He was right though. I suspected something was wrong, yet I never did anything about it. I told him,

“Just stay away from me for a while.” He stayed at his mother’s. They lived way up in Kukia [a district in Tbilisi].

Then my cousins, good young men, became involved. He apologized to me saying, “You too are to blame. You don’t love me. You neglected me. Why did you let me be on my own for so long?” I was told so many times that this woman was seen trying to sit in my husband’s lap, while he was trying to get rid of her, kicking her and saying, “Get outta here! Why won’t you leave me alone?” Apparently, he couldn’t get rid of her. Shortly after this incident, that woman passed away, she must have died in anguish. My husband did not live much longer either. He also died soon. I’m still alive only to spite them [laughs]. At the same time, I feel sorry for him. Although he had a mistress, he never mistreated me in any way. I don’t remember him making me miserable or unhappy.

My husband is buried next to his father and mother. Giga, my handsome brother-in-law, has also passed away. He’s buried there too. They’re all buried together. Both my sisters-in-law have reposed. I only have one brother-in-law. It’s only Vakhtang and I left. Everyone else has departed. I’m often asked where I would like to be buried. Why should I be buried in Kukia [a large cemetery in the Tbilisi district bearing the same name]? I was born here. My father and mother are buried here. I belong next to them. I need to write a will to make it clear. I used to say, “Wherever you can find a place.” Now, however, I insist on being buried here. Now, when they learn that I must be buried here, they may tidy up the place. Gogi has said, “Mom, I’m going to be buried next to you.” I have good children. Everyone loves his child. The way I see it, however, not every child is good. I am glad that, as a daughter, I have made my father’s life complete through my being a good and hardworking woman.

I started to embroider in my old age. Different people come to me, and I always emphasize the good name of my father. I’m often asked about this embroidery. It’s Stalin’s telegram. [She points in the direction of Stalin’s portrait hanging next to Niko Khutsishvili’s picture. Stalin’s portrait and the words of his telegram embroidered with gold threads against a white cloth background. The telegram itself is inserted in the corner of the white cloth.]. They ask and I tell them its story.

Now this is how I started embroidering. It was my birthday, February 2, and we had guests over, including that physician [struggles

to remember]... Just a second... There was an announcer and there were people from my daughter-in-law's office. My daughter-in-law is the engineering manager of the Second Cold Store. There were Gogi's (my son's) coworkers as well. Gogi graduated from the Woodworking Vocational School. All this time since his graduation, he has worked as the director of a plant. There must have been like forty people at the table. Zhora (Gogi's friend) told me, "Granma Tamar, I remember you were looking for one particular type of fabric. Have you made anything from it?" I brought King Tamar, "I made this!" They all jumped from their seats, dazed and amazed... Yes, Davit Sokolov was his name... Davit told me, "This artwork has to be exhibited."

On the following day, I received a call from my daughter-in-law's coworkers, "Mrs. Tamar, We've been talking about you, and nobody but you, all day today." One of them asked me to embroider Saint Nino [Saint Nino, Enlightener of the Georgians and Equal of the Apostles, converted Eastern Georgia to Christianity in the early fourth century]. I agreed. Thus, I've embroidered so many images of Nino without even knowing who had commissioned them. I didn't know much back then. I didn't even know the gold thread existed and was used in embroidery.

One time I had a dream. People were gathered in the church in Kukia, including me. Incredible, divine chants could be heard. People were swarming, King Tamar among them, dressed in such [points in the direction of her embroidery] and a thousand times more lavish clothes. I liked her... I liked her, and I decided to depict the image I was contemplating at that moment. But how? I had no materials, so I went to the marketplace. We lived near the marketplace. We lived on Vorontsov Street. There was a store nearby where I noticed a gold thread. It seemed to be used for packed souvenirs, perfumes, cognac bottles, and stuff like that. Someone must have unwrapped his present and left the thread on the counter. I was overjoyed. Things were working out for me. I asked the salesperson if I could have it. "Of course. It'll be recycled anyway." Thus, I left and started to work with it [the thread]. Then it turned out I needed different types of thread as well.

When my Tsitsino was little, I made all her clothing. I've loved sewing dolls since childhood. I sewed pretty dresses for my, and later Tsitsino's, dolls. I found a red thread in the pile of the dolls

and used it for Tamar's image, one that I have here. That's how my first work was created. It doesn't feature any beads because it was my first work. Now I have to embed the eyes and beads. I have expanded my knowledge and polished my skills. I didn't know what colors to use, how to select them and how to embed beads, and it took me quite an amount of time. Now, however, I've become skilled that I know it all by heart. It only takes me a month to do what used to take me two months. If I had better work conditions, if I didn't have constantly to get up and down, I would do it even faster. Getting up and down isn't good for this kind of job. I have to be relaxed, and the weather conditions must be good as I need light.

I donated one of my first works to the church. That's how people, everyone in the village, got to know me. When something interesting takes place in the village, people travel here from Tbilisi. Once here, they notice my work in the church, inquire about the artist, and then come to see me. I have loved sewing dolls since early childhood. Later, during the war when everyone was impoverished, a certain type of dress was in vogue. I learned how to design it and even taught everyone in Akhalsopeli and Kvareli. They've all learned from me. Then I noticed my mother's blouse. I liked it very much. I made a copy of it too. It was a long time ago, yet I remember well sewing blouses for everyone in Akhalsopeli, clerks, teachers, everyone.

I was given a liter of wheat for a blouse. Can you imagine how expensive wheat was since I had to go through so much work for one liter of it? Wheat was measured by liter back in those days. Then someone told me, "Granma Tamar, I think I have my aunt's blouse stashed somewhere. I'm going to give it to you." I said, "Let me have a look at it." I embroidered additional ornaments, and everyone liked it very much. To make it short, I embroidered for everyone in Akhalsopeli.

Then the country sank into the abyss of disorder. Then Shevardnadze totally messed us up [Eduard Shevardnadze (b. 1927), a former Soviet, and later, Georgian statesman from the height to the end of the Cold War. He served as President of Georgia from 1995 to 2003, and as First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party from 1972 to 1985. Shevardnadze was responsible for many top decisions on Soviet foreign policy in the Gorbachev Era. He was forced to retire in 2003 as a consequence of the bloodless Rose

Revolution.]. Then what did this Saakashvili do? That phony revolution, I believe, was all staged. People like me, who really labor to build the country, are always oppressed. It has always been this way, and it remains the same. I had such great expectations for Saakashvili, and here I am, still struggling to survive on twenty-eight lari [Georgian currency; one lari or one hundred tetri roughly equals 0.6 USD]. You increase my pension by three or five lari and you think it's enough to carry me through?

Now my fellow villagers plan to celebrate my birthday. We have one young man, a lawyer. He dropped by recently and told me, "Granma Tamar, your birthday is near. Shouldn't we have a feast?" I'm almost a century old. Frankly, I really want to live long enough to celebrate my hundredth birthday. I sometimes pray to God to let me live long enough. I have seen and been through much. It's no joke to have lived for a hundred years. My body fails me once in a while but I'm still capable of doing a thing or two. Now since all my fellow villagers wait in great anticipation of my anniversary, I would hate to let them down. I told my children, "I want to gather them all in my father's house, have them have a feast, let them rejoice and be merry. And I too will take pleasure in watching them."

I don't know. Being appreciated makes me happy. [Her voice chokes with sadness for some reason. She rises, saying that her dog must be hungry, breaks a piece off a stale loaf of Georgian bread, and opens the door leading into the porch. A dog with a half of its body covered with bold spots due to its age is sleeping nearby. It opens its eyes unenthusiastically, without even feeling like standing up. "I don't even know where it came from. It just found a shelter here. I wouldn't bring it in on my own. I had let it loose in another village, yet it kept walking until it found its way here. I felt sorry for it", says Tamar without even looking at me.].

## **ETER BAGRATIONI**

1920 – 2003

Memoirs provided by Eter Bagrationi's daughter,  
NESTAN CHKHIKVADZE, in 2004

### **Looking Back At My Life**

I was born on January 17, 1920, to a family of well-educated civil servants. I graduated from the First Tbilisi Pedagogical School in 1937 and from the Tbilisi State Medical Institute in 1951.

That's how short and precise my biography could be written, which I actually did all my life until Perestroika. It was a time when you were not allowed to write what your social background was. But is it really a story only about my personal adventures, or that of my family and relatives, or even the whole social strata to which my parents belonged only?

How much time is enclosed between these dates, 1920, 1937, and 1951? How was this life lived in this period of time?

My mother, Elene (Elo) Sidamon-Eristavi, was the youngest among her siblings. Grandmother, Tamar Zurabis-asuli [asuli, the Georgian female patronymic] Vachnadze, and grandfather, Giorgi Valerianis-dze [dze, the Georgian male patronymic] Sidamon-Eristavi, lived in Telavi [a city in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia] and owned estates in Kardenakhi. They had four children, Mikheil, Ketevan, Levan, and Elene. Grandma Tamro [diminutive for Tamar] was widowed early. Nevertheless, she managed to educate her children. Mikheil graduated from the Summ [a city in Ukraine] Cadet Corps, Levan from the Tzinamdzhvriantkari Agricultural School, and the girls from the Telavi Gymnasium.

My father, Davit Bagrationi, was a son of Solomon Edisherisdze Bagrationi and Ekaterine Nikolozis-asuli Mamatsashvili, the latter's dowry consisted of estates and woodland [the Bagrationi royal dynasty ruled Georgia from the early Middle Ages until the early nineteenth century]. They had many children, twelve in all (five daughters and seven sons). They encountered difficulties providing for such a large family and giving all sons proper education, so the children compensated for the lack of resources with their commitment and assiduity. They were from the village of Abano, Gori District and belonged to the Bagration-Davitashvili (Tvaldam-

tzvarianni) lineage. Grandpa Lido (that's how they referred to him at home) was a singer and dancer. His children inherited his talent for singing and dancing, and although grandpa spent all his life feasting and being merry, he taught his children to be willing to work hard from the very beginning. My uncles and aunts from my father's side were tireless and hardworking people. After the abolition of serfdom, they did not find it hard to live on as they could take care of their estate on their own. Mother recalled that after having come back from work, her brothers washed their hands and faces, changed clothes, dressed up nicely and started dancing and singing with so much vigor that one would think a great celebration was on. They all played various musical instruments (the drums, the *daira*, a number of types of pipe, and even the hair comb). Thus, they made a whole orchestra. My aunts sang and danced very well. They were good at singing sad *bayats*, adding a touch of their sadness. Commitment, hard work, humbleness and patience were the qualities that came in handy at the later stages in life (throughout the years after the October Revolution, followed by the annihilation of nobility as a social class and the Soviet period), after those of them who had survived ended up having to struggle in life and keep on living. This especially concerns my aunts since not my all uncles survived these tumultuous changes of eras.

My father was very close with the family of his uncle, Mikheil Bagrationi, and was brought up there. His uncle's wife was Daro Andronikashvili, an extremely virtuous and kind woman who was always ready to help others. They only had one daughter, Margo, and my father was like a brother to her when they were growing up. Grandma Daro was our relative from two sides. She was my mother's cousin and the wife of my father's uncle. Grandma Daro took care of my education. Later, when my father ended up having his leg operated, it was Grandma Daro again who assumed the responsibility of organizing a charity event and sending the proceeds to Tbilisi. That's how attentive she was and that's how she helped father to get back on his two feet. She was also involved in my mother and father getting married.

Grandpa Misha [diminutive for Mihkeil] and his brother-in-law, Dimitry (Tito) served in the army in Kars. Tito once had a verbal argument with a Russian officer who intended to shoot him but accidentally hit Misha Bagrationi in the back and killed him. Uncle



Tito proved to be unable to get over this incident and died shortly thereafter. That's how not only Grandma Daro's only daughter, Margo, was left fatherless, but also her nephews, Zurab, Keto, and Babulya. From that day on, Grandma Daro wound up having to bring up four children. She adored her nephews, especially Zurab. She did her best to take care of them and help them find a place in the sun. Her blessings have been bestowed on me too.

I would like to recall one incident to illustrate in what conditions the surviving noblemen ended up living after the revolution, when they found themselves with no place to lay their head. Margo had a cotton coat. She used it for a while and, after she outgrew it, she handed it down to Keto at first, then Babulya, and then my cousin, Ziziko, and me. Imagine the durability of that coat to start with and then the need that was to blame for such a great number of the coat's users.

While living in the village, Grandma Daro (who had been left without a man in the family) needed support and protection. That's when my father emerged as the one to stand by her. I still have documents through the power of which Grandma Daro entrusted my father with her estates.

At some point, the revenues from the village became insufficient to support my grandfather's large family, giving pretty much nothing to so many heirs who had grown up, gotten married and multiplied. Not all young women in the family were married either. The brothers split up and assumed the responsibility of taking care of their sisters and giving them out in marriage. That's why all of them turned to additional sources of income, finding employment in different places. My father went to work for his uncle, Vaso Bagrationi, who was married to Manya Amirejibi. They had four children, Tamar, Nino, Elene (subsequently a music school professor), and Adam. Grandpa Vaso was a smart and thrifty man who had built a better life for himself than any of his siblings. After Ivane Machabeli [(1854-1898) a Georgian writer, journalist and public figure], he established the syndicate (later partnership) Borbali in Kartli [a region in Eastern Georgian]. The warehouse of this partnership was in Gomi, from where fruits were exported to Russia.

Father was an energetic, lively, joyful kind of man. He knew what being tired meant. He would survive in a desert. That's what my mother and aunts used to say about him. Having such an

energetic and loyal man by one's side was very useful. Grandpa Vaso lived in Tbilisi and occasionally traveled to Gomi. It was useful for him to have someone to act on his behalf if necessary (when he away).

The year 1924 came. Arrests and executions of noblemen by a firing squad started. Our family lived in Khashuri at that time. There were three children in the family, I was four then, Rusudan was two, Elisabed was still a suckling infant, and my mother was pregnant with her fourth child. One day, when Grandpa Vaso arrived from Tbilisi, he accidentally bumped into Nina Khozberova at the station who told him that he was wanted by the authorities. Grandpa hopped on the Borjomi train and arrived in Abastumani where his daughter was vacationing.

My father had just come back from work. He was about to take his shoes off when someone arrived. Giorgi Mgaloblishvili, who was married to my father's cousin and was his coworker, answered upon hearing that someone was looking for Vaso Bagrationi, "Vaso isn't in, but his nephew is. He can answer all your questions." "This dog is of the same breed," was the reply. My father was taken away never to return. Back in those days, for what were people executed? The main crime was one's ancestry, background.

I am frequently asked if I'm of direct royal descent. How many descendants can one royal family have? In addition, they all have been swallowed by Russia. I'm not a direct descendant of the royal family, but I am a representative of royal lineage. That's what my father's crime was.

As soon as father was arrested, Grandma Daro and Margo showed up in our home, stood by my mother and cheered her up as much as they could. Grandma Daro came to the village to take Rusudan and me to Khashuri, to our mother. Margo and my mother carried meals to my father [in jail]. Mother took us the children to see father one time. I'm not sure if I really remember it or it got stuck in my memory from what elderly people told me. Mother took us someplace to see father. It was not a prison. It was a room in the building where the commander's office was located, the person who gave mother permission to visit father. The commander was an Abkhazian. According to mother, he was very well mannered, polite and correct, unlike his subordinates who mocked my mother, "Make way! Here comes the king's descendant!"

Father reached out of the window, picked us up, hugging and kissing us. This scene has stuck in my memory. That's why it seems to me that I myself remembered it all.

In August 1924, Davit Solomonis-dze Bagrationi of thirty was executed by a firing squad in Khashuri, as well as his brother, Ilo Solomonis-dze Bagrationi of twenty-three, in Gomi. His brother-in-law, Soliko Palavandishvili, was also executed along with two brothers of his own, Iliko and Sasha Palavandishvili, and many others. In Kartli, the Ossetians were turned against the nobility, annihilating the latter and committing atrocities. Vezirishvili's wife was tied down and made to watch how her child was thrown on the tips of ox horns; Kliamashvili's pregnant wife had her two children killed right before her eyes and then she too was killed subsequently. Lawlessness was all over the place. Constantine Bagrationi and his wife, Olga Amirejibi, miraculously survived. During one of the raids by the Ossetians, when their village was set on fire, Ossetians burst into their estate, tied Princess Olga to a pole, while leading handcuffed Grandpa Kote [diminutive for Constantine] into the yard to have him executed. Despite the raging fire, the villagers managed to rescue them.

The Kartli and Kakheti nobilities, in general, were raided and annihilated in an extremely brutal manner. In Kakheti, people were killed with sticks and stoned. The survivors, children and women, were herded away, and their homes were confiscated.

My mother was left homeless. To whom could she turn? All her relatives were in the same condition, no home, and no job. Whole families were driven out of villages, out of their homes, and forced to seek a place to lay their head in the city. They were willing to live in the basement and do any job only to feed their children and maintain their families. Because of all this, many of the surviving nobilities changed their last names. They were no longer Bagrationi but Davitashvili, Mukhraneli, Gruzinski. Instead of Sidamon-Eristavi, they became Sidamonidze, Sidamonishvili, Makashvili and Andronikashvili turned into Gadarchenashvili and Kvrivishvili respectively, and so on.

Shortly after my father's execution, mother was given permission to leave Khashuri. She arrived in Tbilisi where she had no one to shelter her as everyone was in great need. A helpless woman with three children and pregnant with her fourth child had no one

to turn to! She was twenty-four at that time. She decided to stop her pregnancy. Doctors wouldn't recommend it since the fetus had already grown too large. It would endanger my mother's life. Nevertheless, mother took that risk too. Mother used to say, "I wish my husband's mother miscarried, so that his family wouldn't wind up in this misery."

Mother found temporary refuge in the home of her sister-in-law, Tekla. Then she was sheltered for much longer by her great aunt, Keto (Ketevan Bagration-Palavandishvili), an incredibly kindhearted woman. She felt very sorry for mother and tried to comfort and help her in every way. We stayed there until mother found a job and a tiny place to live. Mother had to find a job, but what would she do with her children? There was no one to look after us when she would be gone to work. Grandma Tamro couldn't come from Telavi to help mother because she had Aunt Keto and her underage child and sister-in-law to take care of who had been kicked out of Kolagi [a village in the Gurjaani District]. Grandpa had already passed away. He didn't live long enough to witness his son's execution. His other children could no longer stay in the village, so they split. How they built their own lives is a different story. Grandma Kato alternately stayed with her children. Everyone had problems of his own, so my mother found herself with no helper.

My younger sister, Zuziko (Elisabed), was adopted by our distant relatives, Taso and Apolon Baghashvili. I was taken to kindergarten. It proved to be difficult, however, because children of noble descent were not accepted in schools all that easily. My last name proved to be an obstacle. Adam Bagrationi's wife, the artist Mary Mikeladze-Bagrationi, who was the daughter of General Alexander Mikeladze, the brother of the then Commissar of Education, helped us that time. She had studied art in Paris. With Mary's help, I was accepted in the orphanage where only a handful of children of noble descent could be found. Rusudan was sent to Telavi, to our grandmother first. Later, however, mother reclaimed her after getting married to Bardghu (Vladimir) Chikovani and moving to Samegrelo [a region in Western Georgia]. Rusudan's last name, Bagrationi, posed an obstacle to her acceptance in school, so she assumed the last name Chikovani.

Thus, out of my father's three children, Rusudan Davitis-asuli Bagrationi became Rusudan Vladimiris-asuli Chikovani, while Elis-

abed Davitis-asuli Bagrationi turned into Elisabed Apolonis-asuli Baghashvili. I was the only one to retain the last name Bagrationi.

After going through many a tribulation, mother found a job with the help of father's cousin, Katyusha Gizhimkreli. There was a two-story building with two rooms in Dzneladze Cul-De-Sac (former Sapyornaya). One room was occupied by a laundry with a built-in shower. The other room was smaller and served as a facility for ironing. My mother lived in the latter room, working as a janitor, also being in charge of ironing. Linens from the restaurants and cafes located on Rustaveli Avenue (former Golovin Avenue) were brought to this laundry. Mother took us with her on weekends, and we saw how she spent the night embroidering. Mother was good at embroidery, which enabled her to make some extra money. My mother used to sing for me and teach me how to dance, especially Enzely, which is the same as Uzundara [traditional South Caucasian dances].

Back then, my mother wore a thin black translucent scarf wrapped around her hat with its long ends flowing down. The scarf was neatly attached to the hat with agate pins. I didn't know then that it was a type of mourning dress, that widows wore such head-dresses. I liked it very much. I always dreamed of growing up and wearing one. I couldn't foresee that this exact fate awaited me too.

That's when mother met Bardghu Chikovani, her second husband, who arranged a job for her next to him in a café where authors and artists gathered. Then they got married and moved to Samegrelo. Bardghu Chikovani was a gentle, loving, caring, very simple kind of man, handsome and attractive. He used to walk loosely. His body never became curved, even in his old age. He drew attention on the streets. He was the eldest son in his family. After the repose of his father, he assumed the responsibility over his family. My mother had two children with him, Makvala and Zurab Chikovani. Thus, mother had five children in all, and there was no differentiating who was whose child. During summer vacations, cousins from the Chikovani, Bagrationi, and Sidamon-Eristavi sides gathered and visited with us.

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I was in the orphanage, the First Orphanage, as they referred to it. It was a beautiful two-story building that had been confis-

cated from some rich person. It had big halls, mirrored ceilings, a grand piano, stuffed birds and animals on its walls, and decorative rugs. This house has survived to this day. It's on the corner of Shio Chitadze and Daniel Chonkadze Streets, overlooking the former building of Young Women's Gymnasium. It presently serves as a residential building where education field workers were moved at some point.

There were two orphanages in Tbilisi at that time, one of them being ours, a home for orphans and neglected children. I would like to remember some of these children, brothers Sergo and Goga Vashakidze. Sergo had a musical talent. As I remember, he later worked as a conductor. Goga was killed in action, as well as sisters Nino and Liza Guramishvili, Alexi Meskhi (the artist), Vasiko Labadze, Liza Iliauri (the doctor), Tamar Tzulukidze. There was also one child straight from the streets who had no last name. She was named Mariam Oktombrishvili at the orphanage. I also remember siblings Zhora and Liza Abuev, sisters Rukhadze. I beg forgiveness of those whom I failed to remember.

And there was also the Highlanders Orphanage. It was housed in the building where Iakob Gogebashvili Library is today, in Zemel [a district in Tbilisi]. Those were the first years after the sovietization when schools had not been established in all villages yet, especially in the high-mountainous regions (Svaneti, Khevsureti, Kisteti, etc.). That's why this particular orphanage did not accommodate orphans as much as children brought from the mountainous areas to receive education.

I cannot but mention with special love, reverence and gratitude the faculty and personnel of our orphanage, the principal Xenia Ioseliani, the teachers Talya Ioseliani, Eliko Tsagareishvili, Nadia Nishnianidze, Tsutsa Chachkhiani, the artist Korneli Sanadze, the composer Valerian Tsagareishvili, the pediatrician Kasumov and his assistant, Keto Gachechiladze, the nurse Sasha Mekhuzla, the cook Tyotyia (aunt in Russian) Pasha. It was a warm and virtuous team impelled by love and compassion for children and dedicated to taking care of each and every child's health and life. I would like to recall one incident to back up my point. A measles outbreak occurred in our orphanage one time. All the children in the orphanage overcame the infection in a due manner. I was the only one whose condition became complicated. I also developed lung and

ear inflammation with meningitis symptoms at that. My life was at stake. Our principal, Xenia Ioseliani, was supposed to go on a business trip to Moscow. She would not, however, sending Eliko Tsagareishvili in her place. She invited Professor I. Lortkipanidze, a quite famed physician of that time to come to the orphanage. He let fluids out of my backbone marrow and saved my life. Can a child ever forget such great care?

It was funny that the principals of both orphanages bore the same name, Xenia Ioseliani. Ours was a blue-eyed, blonde and gorgeous woman, the wife of Solovan Tskhakaia. The principal of the Highlanders Orphanage, also Xenia Ioseliani (the wife of Abesalom Iobidze), also was virtuous, caring and attentive who kept on taking care and paying attention to her students even after classes. She too was beautiful, though she was dark-haired, with black brows, and attractive. That's why the children referred to them White Xenia and Black Xenia in order to tell them apart.

Both orphanages cooperated closely, even carrying out joint events. I would like to recall one New Year's Eve party organized at our orphanage because I have never felt the same joy celebrating the coming of a New Year's Eve ever since. Our lit event hall was adorned with a variety of garlands, color balloons, while the big New Year tree was embellished with toys and decorations. The children were neatly and cozily dressed. There was a ladder leaning against the wall at the top of which was an elderly man, symbolizing the old year and gradually descending the ladder, while a beautifully dressed little girl, that is, the New Year, ascended it. There was joy and celebration.

A fall celebration was held one time at the Highlanders Orphanage. We were invited. They had a nice yard. This yard was decorated with fruits, clusters of grape, stringed fruits, pelamushi [thickened grape juice] was being boiled and churchkheldas [stringed nuts dipped in pelamushi] were being made. Joyful hubbub filled the air.

Can one forget experiencing such joy?

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It was discovered that the climate in Kojori [a village near Tbilisi] was very healthy and good for children's health. Kojori was declared a children's town and the government decreed that all orphanages, be they located in Tbilisi or elsewhere, be moved

to Kojori. And so they were. I believe it was 1929. All orphanages, including the Highlanders Orphanage and ours, ended up in Kojori. They were all collectively named Akhalshenis. There were seven Akhalshenis in all in Kojori. All orphanages merged and then the children were grouped in classes.

At first, we wound up in Akhalsheni Five located in a beautiful two-dome building on a hill with a fur grove next to it. It was a confiscated house that used to belong to the Sumbatovs. Our beautiful furniture, rugs, and other items followed us to Kojori. Later on, however, they gradually disappeared. Unfortunately, we no longer had our old professors either. Equally beautiful was Akhalsheni One with a flower garden in front of it. In the subsequent years, when students were grouped in classes, we moved into Akhalsheni Seven.

We didn't have the same conditions in Kojori as we did in Tbilisi. We did at first, but later things went downhill, which is understandable because life in general was getting worse. Bread rationing was introduced. At first, we who were physically weak, were given extra milk. Later on however, it became impossible. I was a skinny and weak child with fragile bones, and I was nicknamed Beanpole Princess. There wasn't enough food for everyone, so the children were all over the fields, plucking salsify, chervil, sorrel, and other plants in the spring, while in the fall looking for and eating greens in the abandoned vegetable patch, especially young cilantro. We also went to the forest, gathered thorn apples, blackberries, green apples, wild pears, and dog rose berries, and carried them in our aprons. That's how our systems were nurtured with "live vitamins" in a natural way, which protected us from many a disease. I would like to recall some of my classmates and roommates in Kojori, such as Tina Bukia, Tamar Taralashvili, Zina Rukhadze, a Kisti girl named Sobura Duishvili, Mikheil Mekvevrishvili who played the drums so well, Svanetian Nutsa Gigani and Tamar Kvitsiani. Generally speaking, there were many Svanetians, such as the brothers Japaridze, Charkseliani, Gulbani, and others. I haven't met them since Kojori. I don't know anything about them. The only exception is Tinatin Ochiauri with whom I was, and still am, friends. We were in the same grade yet in different classes. We were roommates however. When the Kojori Middle School was shut down, Tina was transferred by her parents to a school in Tbilisi



in the eighth grade. Six months later, I also transferred to Tbilisi. From that time on, our friendship has continued to this day.

The director of the Kojori Akhalshenis for Children was Alyosha Jibuti, a hot-tempered and tough man, whom the children dreaded. He was replaced by Dimitri Duduchava. Individual Akhalshenis had their own principal and teachers. Misha Gobronidze was the principal of Akhalsheni Seven. Our mathematics teacher was Parmen Sturua, a man with handsome and distinctively rough facial features, an aquiline nose, and a scar on his cheek that made his face look even rougher. Our physics teacher was Namicheishvili, a stocky man with wide facial features who had measured and dignified manners and whom the children nicknamed Measured Elephant. Eva Sul Khanishvili, our chemistry teacher, made us fall in love with chemistry and taught us well. Babulya Sul Khanishvili was in charge of the library. Eva and Babulya were cousins. Babulya Sul Khanishvili was the sister of the Sasha Sul Khanishvili who immigrated to Europe together with Kakutsa Cholokashvili and whose remnants were translated to his homeland not too long ago. I loved to read, and Aunt Babulya selected books for me. Babulya had her nieces with her, Soniko and Makvala Garakanidze. Soniko was good at singing and dancing. My grandmother, Tamro, and Babulya's mother were friends. They lived near our home, on Samkhedro Street. Aunt Babulya took good care of me.

I have to mention Darsalia, our history teacher, and his history classes separately. He later served as the Commissar of Education of Abkhazia. It was a teacher of a totally different breed and spirit whose classes represented the propaganda of hatred toward the old rule to a greater degree than history lessons. I would like to present an example of his classes, and I have to apologize on his behalf in advance. "Nobilities would sate themselves first, then stick their fingers in their mouths and vomited, so that they could eat once again." Or this one, "Chonguri [a traditional Georgian string instrument] players would sing them lullabies, while scratching their toes, and this way put them to sleep."

And so I, a child saturated with this propaganda, arrived in Tbilisi and told my aunt, "Now I know who you are and what you did!" and repeated the teacher's words. My Aunt looked at me for a while and shed tears.

In Kojori, we also had a very kindhearted and attentive physician, Giorgi Kachakhidze, who served for the benefit of the health of Kojori Orphanage children for many years.

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Passports were introduced in the country. They were obligatory even for children sixteen years of age. When passports were issued in the ten-grade school, two young men had an argument, ending with a murder. A Svanetian young man was killed. This incident itself was alarming, especially Svanetians were many and they could avenge their dead. The ten-grade school was shut down and the seniors were transferred to various orphanages. I studied in the Kojori Orphanage up to the seventh grade and then transferred to the Manglisi Orphanage. There were horrible conditions in the Manglisi Orphanage. After the first semester, my family brought me to Tbilisi and had me enroll in the Pedagogical School where I received a scholarship, which was extremely important to me. It was the 1934-1935 academic year. I had remarkable professors there too. Ivliane Kvachadze was our provost who, at the same time, taught us mathematics. He fell victim to the 1937 repressions. Alexander Gvakharia was our head teacher, while the faculty consisted of Anton Mujiri, Atanase Kharabadze, Onopre Shushania, Mikheil Abramishvili, Iakob Kostava, Valerian Kobakhidze, Abesalom Mikadze, Anna Leister (a victim of the 1937 repressions), Platon Kvirkvelia, Megi Mikeladze, Gulnara Paghava, Xenia Jugheli, Davit Kuchaidze, and Tedo Zhordania.

Why have I specifically listed all my professors by name? Because it was a generation of professors to whom the student came first, that is, the student's skills, talent and personality, as opposed to his/her background or protector. Our parents were never summoned to the school. I graduated from school without my parents being asked to come to my school or doing it of their own accord. Such things were not practiced. It didn't matter whose child you were. My professor's child was my classmate, yet it didn't mean that this person had any privileges. We the children never felt any special attitude toward one or another student on the part of the professors. They loved and cherished every student no matter whose child he/she was. I had transferred from some village school.

Although the school already had its distinguished students, I never had any problems keeping up with the standards.

I would like to mention my classmates in this school, such as Keto Meparishvili (a medical doctor), Lena Saakashvili (a biologist), Guguli Giorgaia (a geographer), Taso Razmadze, Eter Khotivari, Nino Tabatadze (a teacher), Soso Machavariani (a full professor of medical sciences), Kokona Shushania (killed in the frontline during World War II), Suliko Kvachadze (an associate professor of history), Dato Sepiashvili (a linguist), and Achiko Shavianidze (an artist).

Among those who have contributed to my upbringing and ensuring my future, I would especially point out the merit of my uncle, Mikheil Sidamon-Eristavi, my mother's brother. He didn't have much, yet he was willing to share all he had with others. Many a deaf-mute person received help and attention from him. After he returned from Batumi (where he was the chairman of the Society for Deaf-Mute Persons), he brought with him one deaf-mute person whom he accommodated in his own place first, eventually finding a job and a place to live for that person. Many turned to him for advice and help. He was a remarkable army officer, a kind, guileless yet very hot-tempered man.

He had recently married Mariam Leonidze, expecting a child, when he came down with meningitis. There were no medications to treat this disease in those days, so there were many fatal cases. Uncle Misha survived. He lost his hearing however. It was the beginning of the tragedy of his life. Deafness made him jealous. His family fell apart, so he moved in with my mother. It was all very hard on him until he got out of his depression and came to his senses. It wasn't hard for him in financial terms as much as it was from the moral point of view. He loved his wife dearly, spending his whole life waiting for her. Their relationship was something else. They no longer lived together. They did, however, stay in touch, maintaining rapport and care for each other. Aunt Maruysia was arrested and put in the Metekhi Prison for an alleged affair with the Persian Counsel (she spoke Persian). Uncle Misha used to bring her meals in prison. On the other hand, whenever Uncle Misha encountered difficulties, Aunt Maruysia was always by his side. After having lost his hearing, Uncle Misha found it difficult to establish his place in the public. After the Society for Deaf-Mute Persons was established, however, at different times he served as

the Deputy Chairman of the Society, the Chairman of the Achara Branch, and other offices.

After my mother moved to Samegrelo, Uncle Misha lived in this so-called apartment where Grandma Tamro, Aunt Keto with her daughter, Ziziko, and sister-in-law, Nadia, had already moved. I also joined them, and we all mainly lay as a heavy burden on my uncle's shoulders, although Aunt Keto and Aunt Nadia worked as hard as they could (Aunt Keto worked as a mail carrier, while Aunt Nadia was a worker in a cognac distillery).

While I was in school, my scholarship was enough to buy some clothes. I shopped at the so-called Khushusha Supermarket, buying only necessary stuff for myself, such as shoes, a dress, a coat, etc. Khushusha was our landlord's wife. They had recently moved from Armenia together with their two sons. They lived in the former laundry that had been remodeled and turned into an apartment and subsequently sold. They became the owners of this apartment and we their tenants. This couple purchased clothing and other goods in supermarkets and sold them for a bigger price, of course. It was convenient, however, for me, and probably others too, to shop with them because they gave us time to pay, that is, they provided financing.

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I graduated from school in 1937. It was the time when I had to choose a vocation. I considered the Department of Linguistics, but what scared us was that we were constantly on the move. I decided to choose a vocation that would be useful for me everywhere, in my homeland and elsewhere. It was a medical doctor's profession. My graduation certificate (the so-called five-percent graduation) allowed me to enroll in the department of Pedagogical Institute corresponding to my major in school and having to pass the entrance exams. If I decided to enroll in a different department, I would be exempt from mandatory internship, yet I would have to pass the entrance exams. In those days, one had to pass exams in all subjects taught in middle school. That year (1937), the Medical Institute entrance exams were held in the building of School Fourteen (Makharadze Street). Eziashvili was the provost of the Medical Institute. I don't even know what academic degree he held. I don't know if he held any. His term as provost was short-lived,



(From left) Mzia Sidamon-Eristavi, Eter Bagrationi and Elisabed Vachnadze

only lasting through the entrance exams. The exams proceeded in a not overly objective manner. It wasn't as much about money as it was about connections in high places, though one famous surgeon did get punished for accepting a bribe. I intentionally refuse to mention the surgeon's name. This is my policy I stick to when it comes to those who have transgressed against my family. May God forgive them... At that time, bribery and favoritism were not as large-scale as nowadays. They would require three thousand. In subsequent years, however, the scope expanded. Back in those days, it was still possible to enroll relying on one's knowledge if, of course, this knowledge was assessed objectively and adequate grades were awarded. Needless to say, I failed to enroll as I had "no connections", I didn't receive enough points, so I used these points to enroll as a corresponding student in the Department of Biology of the University Pedagogical Sector, hoping eventually to transfer into the Medical Institute. I completed four full courses and passed the relevant exams, which proved to be useful in the future, counting as courses passed after I enrolled in the Medical Institute (1945).

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In the first year of my graduation from school, I met with the first author in my life, and what an author! Mister Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. This is how it happened. Aunt Margo was a stu-

dent of the Railroad Transport Engineering Institute at that time. She was sent as an intern to Gori in the summer. She took me with her, saying that I could use some rest after the exams. Margo Bagrationi was the wife of G. Mushishvili (Khoperia). Soon, however, shortly after their marriage, she divorced him who by 1937 had already been married to another woman. That's exactly what saved Margo from the 1937 repressions when wives shared the fate of their husbands. Thus, she dealt with authors and was even acquainted with them personally.

After she came home one time, she told us, "I met with Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, and he promised to come visit with us for dinner today." I was excited to see such a great author. I was restless and antsy all day, waiting. I rushed to the gate upon hearing the slightest noise. In the evening, after I lost all hope, a carriage appeared and pulled up by our gate. Mister Konstantine stepped out of the carriage.

I remember well his attire, reddish-brownish leggings and jodhpurs, though it was summer and very hot. He entered the house, greeted grandmother. He didn't stay too long, however, and we all took the same carriage to the Gori hotel where his friend (I don't remember his name) who worked on the restoration of the Gori Castle was staying. We walked back home from the hotel, conversing. Of course, the adults spoke, mainly Mister Konstantine. I was all ears.

In those days, the main avenue in Gori was called Lenin Street, streams flowing between the pavement and the sidewalks all along its both sides. It was a pretty sight. Our conversation revolved around this sight and Konstantine mentioned cities of the world where he and his friend had been and seen streets of this type. He awaited confirmation from his friend who was reluctant to join the conversation out of humility and seemed very humble in general. Then Mister Konstantine spoke about the vanishing of the aristocratic class, "For example, I was in Moscow, Russia, and I saw women dancing at International Hotel who seemed to be unable to put on their stockings properly (meaning the "striped stockings" that were in vogue at that time). I went to the Bolshoi Theater and wound up with a hunchback on one side and a soldier with stinky feet on the other and disgust written all over his face. I was scandalized."

That was my first impression of this great author after having met with him.

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The year 1937 raged with its merciless and endless arrests. No one knew where he/she would end up the following day and why people were being arrested. In addition, these arrests acquired a large-scale form. Mother always warned me, “Don’t forget that your father was executed. You are a Bagrationi.” This last name did not serve even Jano (Irakli) Bagrationi [(1909-1979) a prominent Georgian dancer and choreographer] well either throughout his whole life. He died without being allowed to tour abroad even once. In 1937, they annihilated his brother-in-law, Niko Mitzishvili, the husband of Tamar Bagrationi, and exiled Tamar too. Tamar was a beautiful woman. Gigo Gabashvili [(1862-1936), a famous Georgian artist and educator] painted her portrait. She is dressed in Queen Tamar’s attire on this portrait. Vakhtang Kotetishvili [(1893-1937) a Georgian sculptor and art critic] created Tamar’s sculpture, while card featuring her dressed in traditional Georgian women’s clothes was disseminated publicly. When representatives of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs arrived at her home in order to confiscate her property, they wanted to take the portrait by Gabashvili with them but Tamar’s father, Kote Bagrationi, wouldn’t let them.

As soon as Aunt Margo learned about Tamar’s arrest, she showed up at Grandpa Kote’s the very next morning. In his old age, Grandpa Kote had two underage grandchildren to take care of, Ilamazi and Marine. Grandma Daro and Margo stood by Grandpa Kote, doing their best to support him financially and spiritually. Nato Bagrationi, Tamar’s younger sister, dropped out of the university and became a member of Jano Bagrationi’s dance troupe in order to have the time to take care of the children. Thus, these children were brought up without parents, through the labors of Jano, Nato, and Grandpa Kote.

Preparations for the entrance exams were underway. I studied together with my friend, Keto Meparishvili, whose father, Gideon Meparishvili, was the assistant principle of a vocational school. One day, when the Meparishvili’s had one of the authors visiting with them, I overheard the following phrase, “It was either Niko or I. Someone had to do it before the other did. I beat him.”

It was unclear to me back then what this phrase meant, what he meant by it, yet it was clear that this author had contributed to the arrest of Niko Mitzishvili. Only later did it all make sense, much later, many years later, when the process of the rehabilitation of the victims of these repressions started and many mysteries were unveiled. During one of the sessions of the Supreme Council [of the Soviet Union], I met with P. Berdzenishvili who used to be the Prosecutor General of Georgia and who had been involved in the rehabilitation of many victims of the repressions. He worked in the administration of the Chairman of the Supreme Council at that time. I found out as a result of our conversation that a toast to Lavrenti Beria was raised at a table in that author's home and Niko refused to drink to Lavrenti Beria. He poured his wine into the fireplace.

The wave of arrests intensified, and so did fear and anticipation of something sinister, "They're after me! They're on their way!" That's how people felt, destroying, burning, shredding everything, be it a book, letters, or other things that could tie them in any way to the victims of the repressions. Aunt Tamar had a picture of Tamar in a traditional Georgian dress hanging on the wall. I didn't want to see that photo destroyed, so I took it home. My mother got scared and rebuked me. I didn't want to tear it up, so my friend, Tinatin Ochiauri, took it with her.

In 1959, the Tsiskari magazine published Tinatin Ochiauri's "Remembering Mirza" (the poet Mirza Gelovani [(1917-1944) a Georgian poet]). This essay is very interesting on the whole, yet I would like to quote one passage about Tamar's picture.

"My friend, E. Bagrationi, presented me with a portrait of N. Mitzishvili's wife, Tamar Bagrationi, featuring her dressed in traditional Georgian attire (Tamar herself was not in Georgia at that time). This picture is presently hanging on my wall. Mirza used to contemplate Tamar's beautiful face. I have saved one poem written by him right there, in front of the picture.

Though time goes by,  
My love persists;  
Recall I do  
Your whitest veil,  
Your eyebrows black,  
Near Kashveti,



Every dawn.  
I chase shadows,  
Lament and wail –  
Mother of God  
You seem to be –  
I stand and pray.  
Woe is my fate,  
My wings have dropped.  
Tamar, your hair  
Do I miss,  
Drunk on my grief.’

“The Tsiskari magazine, 1959, issue 5.”

\* \* \*

In spite of the harshness of that time, there were researchers who had the guts to carry out studies on scholarly representatives of the Bagrationi family tree. The merit of Mister Vakhtang Parkadze deserves special mention in this regard. Mister Vakhtang started to study the academic merits of Petre, Anton and Davit Bagrationi and to promote them as scholars back when the mention of these people was tabooed. It was prohibited to mention not only this last name but to speak about prominent representatives of Georgian classical literature.

I in particular, as well as my generation in general, are well acquainted with that period in history which they experienced first-hand the fatal events of that tumultuous era. It was a time when Georgian history was not taught in schools, when only a limited amount of Georgian classics was taught. It was a time when the teaching of Ilia Chavchavadze himself was prohibited. It was a time when Philippe Makharadze compared Ilia Chavchavadze to Daniel Chonkadze [(1830-1860) a Georgian novelist] and gave preference to the latter. It was a time when Gigla Bochorishvili was impelled by the existing trends and attitude to come out during the meetings of students’ parents and the faculty and openly and unabashedly declare with pride, “I killed Ilia!” It was a time when the authors Konstantine Gamsakhurdia and Akaki Beliasvili were harshly criticized at sessions and conventions of the Union of Writers, accusing them of idolizing our history. Under these circumstances,

it took a lot of love for one's homeland, self-sacrifice and, most importantly, courage to do what Mister Vakhtang did.

Alter (1969), when the situation seemed to have improved, he initiated a conference dedicated to the 150th anniversary of Petre Romanis-dze Bagrationi and invited all Bagrationis living in Tbilisi to the event. In his works *Distinguished Physicists* (1967) and *Physicists of the World* (1973), Mister Vakhtang Parkadze ranked prominent Georgian physicists (Petre, Anton and Davit Bagrationi, Alexander Didebulidze, Razhden Khutsishvili, Dimitri Ghoghoberidze) among the world's distinguished physicists. For these works, Mister Vakhtang was elected a corresponding member of the International Academy of France in 1971 and a full member in 1983. Vakhtang Parkadze gave a speech at the 1977 International Convention of Physicists held in London. Mister Vakhtang Parkadze was among the eighteen scholars to receive a Queen Elizabeth II Anniversary Award.

I would like to recall another story involving Mister Vakhtang. Two ladies bearing the last name Bagrationi reposed in Crimea. I believe they were sisters. As it turned out, they had been involved in large-scale philanthropy. They had no heirs. The grateful Crimea residents decided to establish their house as a museum and turned in writing to the Academy of Sciences of Georgia for help, requesting official documents and so on. Mister Niko Muskhelishvili [(1891-1976) a Soviet Georgian mathematician, one of the founders and the first president of the Georgian Academy of Sciences] put Vakhtang Parkadze in charge of this undertaking too.

\* \* \*

As soon as I graduated from middle school, parallel to my studies, I started to work. In 1938-1940, I worked as a secretary in the Library Administration, a statistician for Souzspechat [the Soviet governmental agency in charge of the production and distribution of all print literature in the USSR], a secretary at the Department of Finances of the State Bank. At the same time, I attended a shorthand course, after the completion of which, in 1940, I started to work as a session stenographer of the Bureau of Stenographers.

Speaking of stenography, I would like to mention my professor, Mariam Leonidze, the author of the Georgian stenography textbook. She was a very well educated woman. She had graduated from the

Moscow School for Noble Maidens. Besides Georgian and Russian, she spoke the French, German and Persian languages. When life became especially hard and this hardship hit the intelligentsia harder than anyone else, she learned Georgian-Russian shorthand. She was a bilingual stenographer. Need led Aneta Zhghenti, Kotzya Vepkhvadze, the lawyer Ketevan Tzulukidze, the mathematician Terenti Tkemaladze, and many others to learn shorthand. It was a time when full professors were paid seven rubles per hour, while stenographers (whose job was considered equal to that of airplane pilots in terms of intensity) made eighteen rubles.

Thanks to her work carried out through many years, Mariam Leonidze developed a Georgian shorthand system and compiled the first academic Georgian shorthand textbook. She was the one to impel me to fall in love with shorthand, which proved to be very useful in life and contributed to my advancement. At that time, eight-hour workdays were in use and strictly observed. No coming late to work was tolerated, not to mention no-shows. Stenography gave me free time because I wasn't tied to one place to work for the mandatory eight hours, and it didn't interfere with my education.

I've been working in the field of shorthand since 1940. Shorthand has benefited me tremendously in terms of education. Thanks to stenography, I have participated, witnessed and recorded so many interesting historic events and processes. It would suffice only to mention that, at the age of twenty-one, I was one of the stenographers at the trial of Gigla Berbichashvili, the murderer of Ilia Chavchavadze. I recorded the final words of Ilia Chavchavadze's murderer. This is how it happened.

Judge Isidore Dodishvili directed the court proceedings toward proving the involvement of the Okhranka [the secret police force of the Russian Empire], while ignoring and hushing up testimonies that pointed in the direction of the Social Democrats. He tried on several occasions to force the defendant, who proved to be a very stubborn and stern man, to admit that he had been instructed by the Okhranka to commit this crime. He never succeeded though. This should probably explain why we were not allowed to shorthand Berbichashvili's final speech as they didn't know what to expect from this stubborn man, what he would say in his final speech.

As a rule, after having completed another job, I went to Mariam Leonidze's to share my impressions. So it happened this time too.

I related to her that we were told to stop recording before G. Berbi-chashvili's final speech, conveying to her what he had said and how. She grabbed a notebook and told me to write down everything I had just related to her, "In due time, it will be a very interesting material."

So I wrote the following.

"Honorable Judges, please let me speak for as long as I will need to complete my speech. I may not be able to speak as the honorable prosecutor did, yet what can I do? I'm an illiterate man. When the honorable prosecutor was born, education awaited him at the cradle, while the forest and bears were my school.

"Honorable Judges and honorable public, the Communist Law, the Socialist Law reads, 'Those liable to punishment must be punished.' Everyone must be punished for his/her deeds. However, why should anyone be subjected to additional punishment on top of his/her own share of punishment? The honorable prosecutor, however, has already subjected me to nine punishments here when he accused me of theft and robbery. Go to my village where people of my age live, ask around, inquire, and see if anyone mentions theft and robbery committed by me.

"Witnesses called to stand here, these false informers, come up here and say that I was a thief and robber, devastating and robbing people. These false informers say all this all right, yet they cannot back up their stories with hard facts.

"You insist that I haven't spent the last twelve or thirteen years in Persia but here in Georgia, destroying not just my village but all Georgia. If I'm such a robber, why won't you prove it with evidence? Name at least one family, or even one person, whom I've robbed and killed. These false informers go against their own conscience and sell it here. They are people who put their conscience up for sale. If I'm such a thief and robber, how could I hold such responsible jobs as I did after 1921? I've been dealing with millions. Why have I not stolen any? I spent twelve years working in the Department of Agriculture, serving as the warehouse assistant director and even the head of a plant. So much wealth has passed through my hands, yet I haven't held back even a penny. Late Philipe Makharadze himself inspected my performance once and said, 'It's amazing! He's illiterate, yet nothing is missing.' And I've changed like ten directors who eventually proved to be public enemies and who had built houses with people's money. Yet, Gigla

Berbichashvili dreams of a room with four corners, living in a room with three corners. Come and see for yourselves!

“If I were such a thief and robber as you have presented me, why have not I stolen? I dealt with such a wealth, did I not? Why would you need so many unnecessary false charges? I’m a grown up man, and the party has never reprimanded me. Here is my personal file. It’s spotless as snow. There is not a single warning or reprimand in it.

“They say I boasted having killed Ilia, the great Ilia whose greatness I have come to understand thanks to you. I now know who Ilia was for Georgia, the Georgian people, his merit before the Georgian people. Had it been fit to boast something like this, I knew where I could have done it to be promoted. I have worked with Valerian Bakradze, the People’s Commissar. You think I wouldn’t have mentioned it when breaking bread and drinking wine with him?

“I learned today who Ilia was and how treacherous and disgusting a deed his murder is. Is it not enough to rid me of unnecessary punishment because of false charges?

“I asked to rid me of these additional charges. Unfortunately, none of the participants of that incident is around today, so that the truthfulness of my words could be proved. I’m an incidental casualty. Had they been here, the honorable prosecutor would have told me, ‘Go. You are innocent.’

“I would like to ask the honorable prosecutor to punish me in place of those five and rid me of their charges.

“Karaman Paghava, this remnant of the dark reaction, comes here and says that Gigla Berbichashvili was a dangerous man. What hurts me is that no one here asks, dangerous for whom?

“Yes, I was dangerous for Karaman Paghava and his beloved government of that time from which Karaman Paghava had received a myriad of awards and honors; the government that persecuted me. The same Paghava asserts that I was a thief and robber. Nevertheless, he, the head of the district administration, cannot bring any evidence to prove his point. He cannot name a single family.

“That’s where the honorable prosecutor and Karaman Paghava collided and contradicted each other. Karaman Paghava pointed out that the Okhranka paid him one hundred rubles to arrest me. At the same time, the honorable prosecutor says that I am an Okhranka agent who has killed Ilia Chavchavadze following the Okhranka’s

directives. If I was an Okhranka agent, why would the Okhranka pay Paghava for my arrest, and why would the Okhranka arrest me in the first place?

“Those liable to punishment must be punished. Everyone must be punished for his/her deeds, yet there are different types of punishment. I don’t believe that you, or the honorable public, or Ilia himself whom the people have crowned with a laurel wreath would want the green leaves of this wreath to be stained with drops of blood.

“(Judge I. Odishvili, ‘What would you like to request of the court?’)

“What can I request? I would like to ask you to take into consideration my old age, the fact that my son is on the frontline courageously defending his homeland. I could have kept my son from going to the frontline. I could have done it legally. Nevertheless, I let him go and told him to defend his homeland adamantly and courageously. Don’t let my wife and children see my misery. I don’t care what happens to me after I part with them. Don’t let my wife and children end up begging and panhandling after I die (January 5, 1942).”

That’s how Gigla Berbichashvili’s final speech was recorded by me, not during the court proceedings but immediately after the conclusion of the final session.

\* \* \*

I would like to recall one meeting held at the Union of Writers. A prominent generation of decent authors honored this meeting with their presence, including Niko Lortkipanidze, Leo Kiacheli, Geronti Kikodze, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, Galaktion, Razhden Gvetadze, and others. Mister Shalva Dadiani presided over the meeting. Product literature was on the agenda. Sandro Shanshiashvili reported. He had his report written down, so he read it. After the introduction, he announced, “Now let us ascend Golgotha.”

This Golgotha consisted of the criticism of Galaktion and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. He leveled them both to the ground. The audience froze. Galaktion showed no reaction. He did not even object. Konstantine Gamsakhurdia was about to give a speech. Everyone expected him to reply to the report. The audience listened attentively. He, however, spoke about totally different things, as

though nothing had happened, and right before completing his speech and stepping down the platform, cited one parable.

“The Caliph sent his servants someplace to complete a certain mission. On their way to their destination, they saw a marvelous creature in an open field, a white ass that they had never seen before. They came to appreciate it and brought it to the Caliph who came to adore the creature, creating an excellent environment for it. The ass, however, eventually became obnoxious enough to tell the Caliph, ‘Step down off your throne. I have to rule now,’” said Mister Konstantine and stepped down from the platform.

The audience became silent as the dead. No one uttered a word. The chairman, Mister Shalva Dadiani, had not even reacted to what had had happened when Sandro Shanshiashvili jumped up and yelled, “Say something, people! This ass made me look like an ass!”

When I was deciphering the shorthanded material, I asked Ms. Nino Kldiashvili if I had to decipher the exact words. She told me yes.

\* \* \*

During one of the general meetings of the Academy of Sciences, Mister Konstantine Gamsakhurdia mercilessly criticized King Erekle II, discarding all his courage and self-sacrifice because of the very policy enacted, the inevitability of which our present day has already confirmed.

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The stenographer is obliged to keep the original shorthand material for at least six months, so that in case if the deciphered material becomes lost (destruction, fire, etc.), it can be restored. During my carried as a stenographer, however, I have had to decipher stenographic – materials much later than six months, more like 34-37 years later, and here is why.

From the day the Theatrical Society was created, its first chairman, Mister Shalva Dadiani, had been recording every important event (be it a society meeting or a convention, a commemoration or anniversary event dedicated to one or another famous theater worker), thus laying the foundation of a remarkable database. One time, however, when Ms. Tamar Ghviniashvili and I were in the middle of the process of deciphering the shorthanded materials of

a commemorative evening dedicated to Ushangi Chkheidze, a National Artist of the Republic (the evening was chaired by Sh. Dadiani in 1953), the accountant of the society, V. Kiknadze, showed up saying, “No transcript necessary, we’re out of money,” and made us quit deciphering. I saved this and a number of other shorthand materials, deciphering them in 1988-1990 and sending copies to Ushangi Chkheidze Museum (N. Chkheidze), E. Gugushvili, and Eldar Shengelaia (other materials included the evening dedicated to the eightieth anniversary of Shalva Dadiani, People’s Artist, and the sixtieth anniversary of his work in the fields of literature and theater; A. Khorava presided over the event in 1954; Shalva Dadiani’s anniversary evening; chaired by I. Abashidze in 1954; an evening in memory of Nato Vachnadze; chaired by K. Gogodze in 1954).

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There have always been many people who wished to give a speech or engage in fierce discussions at every event held at the Union of Writers. However, everything was different at the session of the Presidium of the Council of the Union of Writers (chaired by G. Abashidze on April 1, 1977) when the issue of Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s expulsion from the union was being discussed. This session was postponed several times due to the absence of Zviad. He wouldn’t show up and word has it that it was thanks to his wife, Manana, that he eventually showed up.

Before the opening of the session, pale and frightened Zviad sat in the chair in front of the office of the chairman, in the hall of the second floor of the Union of Writers. He sat leaning against Manana who stood over him. He looked miserable. Where was the wrathful and self-confident Zviad, the president who would turn Tbilisi into a city of tents? All this had yet to happen later, in the nineties, during the emergence of the national liberation movement, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence by its constituent republics.

No one requested the right to give a speech at that session. The chairman turned to the attendees one by one and invited to speak up. It was hard for the authors to speak. They were being timid. Reverence was felt in the air, reverence for Konstantine. Everyone remembered whose son Zviad was.



\* \* \*

I have taken shorthand at so many lectures, meetings, disputes, conferences and conventions held by authors, scientists, representatives of the field of arts, as well as sessions of the Communist Party meetings, plenums and sessions of the Supreme Council. I was in the midst of exciting events, mingling with interesting people and growing up and learning a lot myself.

It is a pity no one pays attention to the study of shorthand anymore. There are almost no stenographers left. The old well-educated generation has been long gone. It's our generation's time. We're breathing our last, and there are but a handful of young [stenographers]. This subject used to be taught in middle schools. There was even a special school in the system of education where convention session stenographers were educated. Come to think of it, the publishing house Ganatleba dragged the publication of part one of the shorthand textbook for twenty years. Part two has been hopelessly waiting its turn for just as long.

In the meantime, the state of political affairs and politics in general were changing in the country. There was the Soviet Union with its leaders and idols, and the texts of their speeches absolutely had to be included in textbooks. There was Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev with his Perestroika. Then the Soviet Union collapsed. The republics declared independence. National movement emerged with its twists and turns. As these changes were taking place, the publishing house continued to demand from the authors of the textbook to revise it all over again, change exercises and, as you can imagine, the text was rewritten several times. Can you imagine how much effort and paper were wasted? After we were once again (who can count how many times we had done it?) required to revise the text, I reminded the publishing house, "It is our duty to teach how to shorthand every word and phrase regardless of when and at what point in history they were pronounced (because it's history, and one cannot erase history). You cannot change the alphabet in accordance with people who write and speak this language, or who is in power at a given time."

Some may think that there's no time for stenography while the country is in the middle of a war and schools barely function. It's understandable. Nevertheless, this kind of attitude did not surface today. The twenty-year wait for the publication of the stenography

textbook is the reason why shorthand is being ignored nowadays. Some may think that shorthand is no longer needed in this age of modern technology. They may think that “mechanical shorthand” can replace “manual shorthand”. It is not so. First of all, you cannot carry your equipment everywhere, while the same stenographer must transcribe taped materials. Second, when it comes to modern technology, we cannot compete with European countries where shorthand is in high demand, widely promoted and taught in school. Every intelligent person knows how to shorthand to a certain degree (sixty words per minute), using it in everyday life (I must bring the example of Hugo Huppert who translated the Knight in the Panther’s Skin into German. In the process of translation, he maintained correspondence and consultations with Academician Shalva Nutsubidze, which he recorded by means of shorthand). Those who wish to become professional stenographers continue their education in special shorthand schools, learning to shorthand 120 and more words per minute and becoming so-called convention session stenographers. Shorthand competitions are held in Europe and their winners are awarded.

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Time went by and my cousin, Zizo, got married. Her husband was a student. Soon their children joined Uncle Misha’s shelter. There wasn’t enough room for us all. My friend, Mary Dadiani, studied for our Medical Institute midterm exams in the waiting room of the telecommunication station, while preparing for our final exams in the Riverbank Garden.

I decided to save some money and buy a place for me to stay. So I did and bought an 86 sq. ft. room with a bed, a small round table and three chairs for ten thousand rubles from Ioseb Parajanov. Ioseb Parajanov was the father of the movie director Sergo (Serzhik) Parajanov. The Parajanov residence has two entrances and addresses. One of them is from Meskhi Street. Two stairs lead straight into the apartment, which makes it the first floor. Coming from Kipiani Way, however, this building appears as a three-story building, my landlord’s apartment being located on the third floor. Now imagine how deep in the ground the second and especially first floors are. The room I had bought was actually a hole hewn in rock, bordered by small huts on either side. The landlord’s apartment

was on the left and two other rooms were rented out to be used as a kitchen. The landlord installed a cupboard in the wall, as well as a window and a wall shelf, also building a narrow balcony where a put a small chest with kerosene lamp atop. This was my kitchen. Everything was miniature size. I bought a wooden bed and a round table from the landlord, and that's how I arranged my "apartment".

The yard was small. The landlord had built a pool and painted it neatly. My neighbor, Nina Todadze (there were two households living on the first floor), put flowers in pots around this pool. We cleaned the pool and filled it with clean water. There was a cherry tree at the yard entrance. In spring, it bloomed beautiful white flowers. The Kipiani Street side of this house with its yard, its design resembling steps, and a cozy staircase made up a beautiful sight. Why do I say, "Made"? It's still there.

The house was registered to Sirana Bezhanov, Serzhik's mother. She was considered the owner of the house because the landlord (Ioseb) had served time a number of times for illegal trade and other activities. He was even formally divorced from his wife, though they continued to live together. Ioseb had graduated from a school of commerce where Mariam Leonidze taught the English language. She used to say that Parajanov was a very talented man, "Had he lived in a different time and under different circumstances, he would have made a great businessman. This man was good at every type of handiwork. He was good at furniture restoration. At some point, antique furniture went out of fashion, especially after people moved into so-called Khrushchev design apartment buildings. Antique furniture was thrown away or sold for pennies. He had style. He knew the value of everything, especially jewelry and antiques.

The relationship between Parajanov and his wife was pretty tense. Serzhik's mother was a cantankerous woman. She constantly argued with the tenants. Not a day passed without an argument. She would stand on her balcony and address one of her tenants, "Maro said that you..." or "Aniko said..." etc., intending this way to set neighbors against one another and also putting her own words into other people's mouth. Generally speaking, they live a very isolated way of life. In terms of character, Serzhik was nothing like his parents. When he came to Tbilisi, the whole house became lively and noisy. This woman [Serzhik's mother] completely changed after Serzhik arrived. He had just married a gorgeous

young Ukrainian woman, eighteen years of age. This woman was all over her daughter-in-law, exuding attentiveness and adoration.

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In 1945, I once again passed the exams of the Pediatric Department of the Tbilisi State Medical Institute from which I graduated in 1951. When I enrolled in the institute, Academician Konstantine Eristavi was the provost.

Although I was awarded the Academician Mukhadze scholarship and even graduated with honors, I encountered difficulties finding a job as a physician. My father's story prevented me from enrolling in a postgraduate program, while my age proved to be an obstacle on my way to internship. I graduated when I was thirty-one. According to the rules, however, only those under thirty-one were allowed to undergo internship. It would be funny if it weren't so tragic! Professor M. Saakashvili was the provost of the institute at that time. As a physician, I remained unemployed for a long time, finding a job as a biochemist intern at the Biochemistry Lab of the Institute of Blood Transfusion as late as 1953-1955.

While serving as stenographer of one of the general meeting sessions of the Academy of Sciences, I came across Mister Konstantine Eristavi, the then director of the Institute of Experimental and Clinical Surgery at the Academy of Sciences of Georgia. Upon learning that I didn't (couldn't) find a job as a physician, he called me up a little later and appointed me a junior research fellow at the Department of Biochemistry. It was 1960.

Had it not been for Mister Konstantine Eristavi, I would have never become a physician in practice, only theoretically remaining one on paper.

Overcoming life's hardships took a lot of effort. Yet, time wouldn't wait, so I achieved everything a bit later than someone with skills like mine could have under normal circumstances. I graduated from the Medical Institute late (1951), got married late (1957), and started to work as a physician late (1960). I had already been widowed by that time. My getting married resembled a dream. Everything was over in ten months. I got married, gave birth to a child, became a widow, and ended up with a six-week-old infant on my hands, all within ten months.

Mister Konstantine warned Tengiz Goderdzishvili (the head of our department), “She has a child to raise. You have to let her do her job whenever she’s offered a job as a stenographer.”

Tengiz was an extremely decent man, a pedant when it came to business and a demanding person, which was so vital for biochemical studies. I’m grateful to him for being attentive and supportive of me, and not only me, throughout our work together. I developed my thesis under his guidance.

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I would like to say a few words about my husband, Shalva Chkhikvadze. He was an interesting person thanks to his intelligence, courageous character, broad spectrum of education, and handsome outward looks. He wasted the best years of his life, his whole youth, in the northern steppes. He spent twenty-six years of his life as a victim of political and administrative repressions, having had his civil rights taken away, including the right to choose a residence on his own. He was released in April 1953, yet was not allowed to return to his homeland, so he lived in the Chistopol District of the Kochetkov Region (North Kazan). In 1956, he was permitted to return to Georgia, which he did in July 1956. We got married in 1957. In March 1958, we had a daughter, Nestan. In May 1958, my husband passed away. That’s how fast it all ended. As they say, a bolt from the blue. That’s when I fully understood the meaning of this saying. Liziko Kavtaradze (who was Shalva’s friend and a repression victim like him) pleaded with him to write about what he had been through. As it turned out, he wasn’t given enough time to do it.

His brief biography is interesting in this regard. He wrote it as part of his job application shortly before his repose.

“I was born on March 28, 1904 (old calendar) to the family of the agrarian Kirile Davitis-dze Chkhikvadze, in the village of Mandikori, Tkibuli District (the then Kutaisi Region). I enrolled in the First Kutaisi Vocational School of Humanities (the former Classical Gymnasium) in 1913, graduating from the same school in 1924. From 1924 through 1928, I attended courses of the Financial Branch of the Department of Social and Economic Studies at the Tbilisi State University.

“My work experience dates from 1927. I worked on a number of positions in the field of accountancy and finances from 1927 through January 1930.

“As a member of the illegal organization of young Marxists, I was arrested on January 27, 1930 by the Political Administration of the Georgian State and exiled to faraway Siberia by administrative means. From 1931 to 1933, I worked as an accountant in the fish canning plant Obribtrest (the village of Surgut, the present Ostyakovogulev District). From 1933 to 1936, I lived in the Voronezh District, working as an accountant in the Construction Bureau of the Voronezh District Communication Administration.

“In March 1936, I returned from exile. From April 1936 to August 1937, I worked as the senior accountant of the Tzaghveri Resort Hotel of the Resort Hotel and Sanatoria Administration of Georgia where, on August 28, 1937, I was arrested for the second time by the Borjomi District Administration of the People’s Commissariat of the Internal Affairs of Georgia. The Commission of Three Judges of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs sentenced me to ten years in prison and exiled me to faraway camps.”

In Voronezh, he met with Gr. Lortkipanidze, a prominent public and political figure, and Al. Dgebuadze. It is known that Gr. Lortkipanidze sent Stalin his critical work on the Transcaucasia Federation. Shaliko sent a copy of this work to his brother, Paladi, in Tbilisi. When the merciless repressions broke out in 1937, however, the copy was destroyed. Al. Dgebuadze sent another copy to his family in Samegrelo (the village of Tamakoni if I’m not mistaken). Shaliko planned to travel there, saying that the copy was safe there.

“While in exile, I was tried for the second time during the field session of the Kemerovo District Court on March 21, 1943. I was sentenced to death by a firing squad, this sentence being reduced by the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union to ten years in prison and five years of suspension of all rights in July of the same year.

“I was released from prison in April 1953. I was not allowed to return to my homeland, being exiled to the Kazakhstan Region. While in the Northern Kazakhstan Region, I worked as the deputy senior accountant of the Sheptikul Soviet farm, occasionally serving as the senior accountant of the same farm.

“In 1956, I was allowed to return to my homeland. I returned to Georgia in July 1956.

“During my sixteen years in exile, I worked as an accountant and planning economist, documented proof of which I do not have. They surely are, however, kept in the archive of the Committee of State Security [KGB].”

We were walking down Dzerzhinsky Street one time. We passed the Souzspechat building and Shaliko said, “That’s where those basements are where arrestees were executed by a firing squad in 1937.”

He remembered and expressed his gratitude for Valodya Tskhovrebashvili, the then First Secretary of the Borjomi District Committee of the Communist Party, who later became one of the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia; he also remembered the then head of the Borjomi District Bureau of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs whose last name I cannot recall, unfortunately. He had an Armenian last name. They warned him about his arrest warrant being issued and advised him to flee. He, however, couldn’t leave an ailing woman who was with him, fearing that she would be abused. They were sent straight to Russia from Borjomi. He was not transported to Tbilisi, in which case, as he put it, “I would surely be executed.” It seems that even during those horrible times there were people, including high-ranking officials, who had maintained human dignity and landed a helping hand to those doomed.

“During my stay in Northern Kazakhstan, I appealed to the Soviet Council of Ministers and Prosecutor General of the Soviet Union for mediation, so that my cases, starting from 1930, could be reviewed and reconsidered.

“In January 1956, the Supreme Court of Georgia reviewed my case and deemed my arrest in 1937 unlawful, finding me not guilty and rehabilitating me. I once again appealed to Prosecutor General of the Soviet Union for mediation, so that my 1943 case could be reconsidered, as a result of which it was also deemed unlawful and I was fully rehabilitated.

“Thus, I have been fully rehabilitated by the Supreme Courts of Georgia and the Soviet Union.

“From December 24, 1957 to present, I have been working as the senior accountant of the Reinforced Concrete Plant of the Transcaucasia Metallurgy Construction Authority.

“Sh. Chkhikvadze. 1958.”



Shalva Chkhikvadze in exile

Even this brief bio reveals what he has been through, for what he has suffered, and what kind of attitude he could have had toward the Soviet Government and Stalin. Nevertheless, on his way home from exile, one incident touched his heart.

He was standing in line at the Moscow Railroad Station when a young woman, a tour guide, rushed in and gathered a group of people who wished to go see the Kremlin. The gates of the Kremlin had already been opened for simple mortals (1956). My husband recalled that he too became interested and joined the group. The guide led them through all offices and explained that Lenin had worked in this office for so many years. Kalinin was over there, etc. She mentioned everyone but Stalin. Then Shaliko asked her, "I'm a simple farmer from faraway north. I'm just curious, aren't you forgetting someone?" "No." "No? A man who ruled the country for thirty years used to sit here, and you've forgotten about him?" "It's not in my program." Shaliko was scandalized for obvious reasons.

This very reason lay behind the events of March 9, 1956 about which he had learned before his return from exile to Kazakhstan, from a radio show transmitted from Italy, announcing that the blood of Christian children had been shed in Georgia. Stalin was denounced back then because of his Georgian background. Yet, it was only the beginning of the obliteration of his name. He created a greater empire for the Russian than any other ruler, save Peter the Great. They themselves have been demolishing this empire for so long. It's so solid that they haven't succeeded yet.



One time I reminded Mister Irakli Abashidze of his speech at a Central Committee Convention, this speech having been related to the March 9, 1956 events, “Mister Irakli, in relation to the April 9 events, I remember your speech given at a session of the March 1956 Convention of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia.

“As I remember, it was an intercalated plenary session dedicated to the equally tragic events of March 9, 1956. Similar to April 9, on March 9, 1956, absolutely innocent Georgian youths were gunned down, yes, gunned down! They not only even gunned down, but also annihilated youths who did not come out with anti-Soviet slogans but chanted slogans like ‘Long Live the party of Lenin and Stalin!’ and songs like ‘Fly, Black Swallow, Fly.’

“This plenary session discussed the issue of the relocation of Feduyninsky, the then Commander in Chief of the Transcaucasia Armies, from Georgia and the appointment of Rokosovsky to this position. Rokosovsky’s entry into the conference hall was greeted with applause.

“You gave a speech at the plenary session. It was an ad-lib, not a written text. Texts were customarily written down in advance and in Russian in those days (and have been up until recently). In any case, it has been until this time, until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Your speech was an improvisation. I would like to recall the main essence of your speech because you don’t have its original text.

“You said that the Georgian people had always had a friendly attitude toward other nations, not only now but from the very beginning, throughout the centuries. You said that representatives of diverse nations had always lived as friends and good neighbors on the territory of Georgia; that no pogroms against the Jews had ever taken place in Georgia. To prove your point, you mentioned that the Sioni Cathedral [an Orthodox Christian Church], a mosque and a synagogue coexisted on one tiny square [in Tbilisi], and that the Georgian people mourned Tolbukhin as their own.

‘And you,’ you turned to Feduyninsky, ‘You take the loathing and hatred of the Georgian people as you leave Georgia.’

“This was followed with a long unanimous round of applause.

“These words with which you addressed Feduyninsky then would perfectly fit General Major Rodionov today.

“When I left the hall and went to my office where I was supposed to dictate the text to the typist, an agitated Gurgenidze, the head of the Special Sector of the Communist Party (that’s what it was called in those days), rushed in and asked me, ‘You got everything? You haven’t missed anything, have you?’

“Mister Irakli, I reminded you of the main idea, the main frame of your speech as I remembered it. The record of your speech probably could be found in the Archive of the Communist Party of Georgia when stenographic records of plenary sessions and meetings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia are kept.

“Respectfully, Eter Bagrationi.”

By the way, it should be pointed out that the appointment of Rokosovsky was probably a temporary measure, its primary purpose being to calm down the people. Rokosovsky has never showed up in Georgia since.

I handed this recollection to Mister Irakli during one of the sessions of the governmental committee in charge of investigating the circumstances surrounding Ilia’s murder.

\* \* \*

After my husband returned from exile, he was not allowed to reside in Tbilisi until he was rehabilitated. He found a job in Rustavi where he was allocated a room. Due to the nature of my stenographer’s job, I didn’t have a strictly scheduled workday. I didn’t know when a given session would be over, especially in those years when they, as a rule, were held until late at night. Therefore, it was very difficult for me to move to Rustavi. While I was single, that small room of mine was all right, yet it would be unbearably small for a family, especially with children. My room was so small that it wouldn’t even fit a coffin for viewing, so my husband’s coffin was carried to the cemetery from his brother’s apartment.

As a child, I was deprived of many things, so I was unhappy with my destiny. I grew up without knowing what travelling and vacationing was. Whatever I’ve seen in my life, and even that within the borders of Georgia, I saw after I became a stenographer and started to go on business trips. I was over fifty and my daughter was fourteen when we first visited Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the Baltic countries. That’s why I’ve always tried to provide her with everything, give her adequate education, embed interest and love

for art in her heart, show her places to the best of my abilities, taking her to sea resorts, touring with her, taking her everywhere the team of my institute traveled.

I believe I have raised a child worthy of a worthy man, Shalva Chkhikvadze. Nestan is presently a research fellow at the Institute of Manuscripts.

\* \* \*

The formation of my character and personality was influenced by the environment in which I was growing up and developing, be it my family circle, friends and acquaintances, or social ties. This environment taught me hard work, proper time allocation and use thereof, patience, love of life, hope for a better tomorrow, optimism, and mutual support.

In 1960, I was granted an apartment where it would be possible to live and raise children, for which I would like to thank G. Gegeshidze. In the same year, I was given a job as a physician. At last, I became a medical doctor.

In 1969, I defended my postgraduate scientific degree thesis. I have worked as a senior research fellow since 1970.

I am very thankful to Academician Konstantine Eristavi and the team of the Institute of Surgery where the atmosphere of mutual support and excellent working conditions have been created, Mister Konstantine Eristavi had been behind it all as its driving force.

June, 1944

## **MARIA (RUKIATA) JABATKHANOVA**

1932 – 2011

Interviewed by

TSISANA GODERDZISHVILI in the village of Tivi, Kakheti  
Region, 2008

I remember both my mother and father. My father's last name was Matiashvili, a Georgian surname. There (in the village of Akhalsopeli [Eastern Georgia]) was an outstanding man, Matiashvili, who used to take photographic pictures and whenever he noticed me riding a bus, he used to tell me, "You're my niece" and pay my bus ride fee. My father was a community council member. He also worked in a small lime burning enterprise. All the Georgians knew him. His name was Mahmad Alibegov in the Leki language, but in reality he was Mahmad Matiashvili, a Georgian. I don't know who exactly was a Georgian, his father or mother. If I'm not mistaken, I was in the first grade when he died, so how could I ask these types of questions. He went into the mountains one time and died a month later. My mom followed him ten days later. Typhoid outbreak occurred at that time. Many people died during this war (World War II). As for us, two boys and two girls survived. Besides us, there was my other elder brother. After giving birth to him, mom had one miscarriage. This surviving elder brother of mine must have been an adolescent when I was born. Then he was drafted. During the war, he was dismissed first from Tbilisi, then twice or thrice from Baku, as a primary caregiver of orphaned relatives, so he wound up taking care of us. He nonetheless volunteered and remained in service, so I ended up taking care of a year-and-a-half-old infant, a two-and-a-half-year-old child, and a three-and-a-half-year-old baby. Keep in mind that I was but a first-grader at that time. We owned three or four cows. I sacrificed two of them to commemorate my father and mother, and we ended up with only two cows in our household. Then, when we found ourselves in desperate need, I sold the third cow. I saved the money. I used to milk the last remaining cow, and gather grains once in a while. Because of the famine raging at that time, the guard would not let people go into the fields and gather grains, so my sister and I used to sneak into the field, lie on the ground or hide in the thorny

bushes, whenever we noticed the guards. Sometimes, we managed to gather some grains, but sometimes we ended up with nothing. Similar to some of you bringing money, chickens to the church as a vowed tithe, some people brought us flour and others cheese. In addition, I learned fortune-telling, and for this type of service some people gave me bread or beans. They asked me about those gone to the war. They would say, "She's an orphan, she must know..." I worked. I helped some of your people (Georgians) in the yard; carried firewood in a small sack from the riverside and exchange it sometimes for a bowl of flour or for a bowlful of pickles. Other than that, we would never go door to door begging, no way! Even when the famine was extremely harsh, we still had bran. Oh that bran mixed with mouse poop! I would spread it and separate the bran from the poop, just like I sorted out rice. Then I would wash the bran, pick a lot of nettle, and cook porridge with it. My children and I would eat that unsalted porridge. When I was absolutely on my own, I would never turn to my neighbors for help even when I needed meat or salt. I ate my meals unsalted. That is how tough my life was while I was growing up. That is how "easily" I made it through and brought up those little kids.

Two years later, they took everyone to Chechnya. There were forty-two or forty-three of them, I don't remember exactly. They arrived in our village in your cars, Georgian cars. They took everyone, nobody was left, nobody. When a car arrived to pick up people, my father's niece, my cousin, took us to her place. First, they drove the people by car to Tznori [a town in the Kakheti Region, Western Georgia]. Then they put them on a train. What a mess it was! As it turned out, the Chechens were against the war, so they were transmigrated. We found empty houses when we got there and corn husks all over the place. Some of the houses were burned down, while others packed with the belongings of the local Chechens. They offered some of us rugs, tinware, kitchenware that belonged to the Chechens. We refused to take anything. I said, "It's sinful to appropriate somebody else's things." They killed Chechens, some were shot, others were drowned in the sea, some turned to robbing, and some were forcedly displaced. We were orphans, yet we never touched a single thing belonging to them. We had some of our belongings with us. I had brought some bedding. I could not bring much, though. After all, we were but little children. We put

our bedding down. They gave us three houses to use, but we felt uncomfortable staying there because we kept receiving notes and letters written in Russian and warning us not to touch the fences or damage the houses in any way. The letters read, “We’re armed and hiding in the forest.” Naturally, we were scared. Indeed, one time, when I was going to the mill, I noticed thirty-five men armed with guns, coming out of the forest and disappearing. They wore ox skin caps. The bandits frightened me, and I put a piece of ply-



Rukiata Jabatkhanova

wood that I used to place under my bedding and lie down in hiding. That’s how that winter passed. I would hide as soon as it became dark. The children were so frightened that they would wet themselves and tremble all night. One time, they dug under one of the neighboring

houses. Six or seven Chechens on horses arrived and kicked out the residents. They dug in the center of the house, found rifles, daggers, silver, kitchenware three or four meters deep in the ground, took it all and disappeared in the night.

We spent one winter there. We did not even know where the pharmacy was as we were strangers in a strange village. There was nobody to take care of us. The youngest boy, a very nice kid whom I was raising, had worms in his nose and mouth. Quite large oval boils covered his whole body. Sometimes, when I went to the mill with a bucket over my shoulder (it was very far away and when I would leave there early in the morning, I would return only late at night), I stayed there overnight. One morning after I got home, this ailing brother of mine told me, “I wish I had some lamb, so I could cook it. I want meat.” As it turned out, worms make their victims crave meat and especially fatty food. So I took flour in a large half-a-liter bowl to one of my neighbors, an elderly lady, and asked her to give me some soft cheese and butter. The kid wants

meat, so I'll feed him this instead. She gave me cheese and butter, and I started cooking khinkali [traditional Georgian dumplings with meat]. When the meal was ready, I brought it to the child to eat, "Look! I prepared khinkali and I have butter for you." But I found him dead. The child had died. The worms choked him up. He must have been at least six or seven. His schoolmates dug a grave for him. There was nobody left to do the job. Everyone had gone to the war. No grownups were left, even one fifteen-year-old boy volunteered, "How can I stay here when everyone has gone to the war!" My cousin and I carried the body to the road. Then the local teacher and her students took over and... I didn't even attend my brother's funeral. When he was gravely ill, he told me, "If I die and you end up returning to our home village, use my share of the money we have left after selling our cows to pay the driver. Do not leave me here, transfer my body there. After all, my mother is buried there, too." That little child, that kid asked me, "I beg of you, my sister, do not leave me here. You've been like a mother to me, do not leave me here." I constantly think of those words, those words...

Then I left there and took my other brother with me. As for one of my sisters, I had to leave her there. I just could not do otherwise. I did not know who would shelter me there. We were both young and unmarried. It just would not work out. There was a certain Barata, and I followed him to the mountains near our village. There were so many villages we passed, so many ascents and descents we made, so many rivers we crossed on our way from Chechnya. My brother became unable to walk because of starvation after we ran out of provision, and his mouth began to bleed. There was my elder sister in the mountains, my father's daughter from the first marriage. His first wife died in the mountains and he married my mother. That elder sister of mine was the only child he had had with his first wife. She sent my brother to the boarding school. Because of starvation that he had been put through during our trip, my brother was bedridden for an entire month.

From there I arrived in Akhalsopeli [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. Sometimes, the local police kicked out people all the way to Gurjaani [a town in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia], "Go back where you belong!" The local women hid me in the attic, and I would not leave. I had a felt cloak workshop near the chapel in

Akhalsopeli. That's where I turned to wool-processing and worked there for two or three years. Since I was an orphan, I knew nothing about many things. When I went through my first menstrual period, I thought I had a cut somewhere down there. I applied ovine fat and bandaged the spot. When I got married, I didn't even have breasts. I was only fourteen, just a little kid. Since I was an orphan, elderly women advised me not to give anyone a chance to desecrate my good name. There was one childless lady and she told me, "You're a beautiful girl; you don't want anyone to kidnap you. I will arrange your marriage." I did not want to get married, but even if I refused, they would have forced me to do it anyway. I had not even met my husband before, he was a stranger and they made me marry a stranger. There was one Leki man tending sheep in Akhalsopeli. He had a Georgian woman for a wife, her name was Aniko. He did not let his wife go with him when he took his sheep to the pastures. While he was away, that woman, his first wife, sold the house, everything in it, the vineyard, everything, and left for Leliani [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia] before the husband returned. That was the man who wooed me. His relatives came over to propose to me.

The wedding reception was excellent. My husband took care of it all. I was staying at the gunsmith Simona's place, near the upper chapel, and they brought me down to Pidaan's place. They took me there in a lileinka park drag coach. A Georgian man, Gigutza of the Tzukiaant clan, was my husband's best man. The Leki female inhabitants of the village of Tivi also attended the wedding reception, some of them giving me clothes, others shawls as a wedding gift. That's how I, this orphan girl, was given in marriage. They covered me with something made from silk. I first saw my husband only later, when they left us alone for our wedding night. It was a mandatory custom to be observed. I started screaming and shouting. I never let him come near me and continued crying all night. Because I was so young and would not stop screaming and yelling, the wedding guests would not let my husband see me that night. Then my husband and my brother-in-law went to the village of Tivi to bring sheep and slaughter them for the wedding reception. Their sister, Zina, was there with me. She was a student. I asked her to bring me some water and accompany me so I could use the outhouse. I poured that water in the toilet and asked



her to fetch me some more from the house. I tricked her and ran away toward the cemetery. I hid in the pear tree branches until morning. I was still a virgin. All through the following day, I sat in that tree until midnight. I was hungry and wanted to escape to the mountains so I would not have to go to my husband. A certain woman, Balia, kept looking for me, "Rukia, Rukia!" That was my Leki name. "Come back, my child! He might say you're not a virgin, that's why you have run away. If you're hiding somewhere, please show yourself!" I could not reply to her. I wanted to sneak in and steal some bread after everyone went to sleep. But as it turned out, they kept watch for me. So when I went to get some bread. They blocked my path and one Georgian woman caught me. She took me back home. They kept me locked up for three months and would not let me out. My husband kept guard, and when he was away, his sister and brother took turns watching me. After those events, I spent thirty-three years in Akhalsopeli, renting a place to live. My husband worked as a hireling, looking after his employers' sheep in Kedi. While he was away tending sheep, I gathered leek. I also helped women over a certain bridge. This bridge was way up in the mountains. I would put huge full sacks over the logs used as a bridge and roll those sacks over to the other side of the river. One time, when I was about to give birth to my first son any day, my sisters-in-law arrived from Telavi. They took me, a pregnant woman with a huge belly, to that bridge to help them over the river. They did it just for their own benefit. They were scared to cross the bridge, so I had to help them. I was not scared. But I started having false labor pains right in the middle of the bridge. If I decided to return alone, they would not follow me. I was afraid I would give birth right then and right there! I was scared! So I decided to keep going. I knew those places by heart. When I went there to gather leek, I packed fifteen loaves of bread, two sticks of margarine, and two packs of butter that they used to sell back then. I also put half a kilo of honey. They did not know what I put in their sacks. I also added one meter of felt, a small piece of cloth for the child in case I suddenly went into labor, a bundle made with a headscarf and containing a headband, baby clothes, a tool to cut the umbilical cord, clean rags to cover the navel scar, I brought everything that I could need. The leek gathering endeavor takes three days, and whenever I was in pain, I continued to pluck leek, I filled up a sack

and packed it with my feet. I gave birth to my boy on the third day, when we were supposed to leave for home, when the sun reached its zenith, at about eleven or noon. I was in labor, I could hear the baby cry, and its head was already sticking out, when I noticed one man with a sack over his shoulder, coming down from the mountains. I said, "Look, a man is coming." So I halted the delivery for two hours. I felt embarrassed before that man. The child turned all blue. When that man walked far enough on the other side, only then did I give birth. But it would not utter a cry or open its eyes. I told the women, "It's just that its neck is clogged, the child is not dead. It's alive. It's in need of artificial respiration. Just perform mouth to mouth resuscitation to breathe some life into it!" Nobody even considered breathing life into him, some even left to dig a grave, saying, "The child is dead." I picked it up and breathed life into him. It coughed and then gave a cry: the child was brought back to life. I cut its umbilical cord, tied its navel: one would think it was just out of the hospital, he was taken such a good care of. The women started to dance saying, "She must be a doctor herself! She has learned everything!" They arranged a table and ate everything: that margarine, honey, those breads... Then, when they noticed that bundle, they wrapped the child in swaddling clothes, making it look so cute. Then, in about thirty minutes, they told me, "Let's go!" So I tied this child to my chest with the headscarf, picked up the sack and set on a trip even more vigorously than the others. Some people, namely, twelve women, arrived on the day of our departure. One of them told me, "You came here because of them. Then why won't each of them take some of your leek and put it in her sack, so you won't have to carry that load? You just gave birth and you're not supposed to carry any load, save your infant. Do they really want you to die here?" She would not let me go and I stayed there overnight. As I found out later, there was one newlywed girl from Tivi with her mother. So on that very day when my companions left, the girl drowned in that river, falling off the bridge and sinking along with her sack. She was pushing her wet sack. Then an avalanche from the mountains blocked the river. The stream resumed flowing right when they were crossing the bridge. The river flooded the surroundings. It hailed and rained hard. Those women found themselves trapped under a cliff. The stream carried that girl away. She was four or five months pregnant

with her first child. The flood carried her very far away. The flood was so strong that it carried huge trees and logs. The men kept looking for her, and found her sack. She was stuck in the gap of a split-up tree. When they pulled her out, she was already dead. Her head was split in half and filled with sand. Then, when we set on our trip, the water reached our navels. Nobody could enter that water. There were eighteen women in all, and I helped them over the river one by one. I carried my newborn child to the other side and left it there. I helped all those women one by one, some of them were elderly, others pretty young. When I, a mother who had just given birth stood in the water, it turned all red. I had plucked ninety kilos of leek. I carried both the infant and leek. Later, my landlord rebuked me, "I will kill you! Why did you go with them? Why did you let them trick you into doing it? What would I tell your husband if you had died there?" My husband was tending sheep in Kedi at that time. I answered, "There's nothing we can do about it now. I didn't even get sick."

It was my fifth child. None of the four previous babies had survived.

## **ZEKIE IMAMISHI REIZBA**

Born in 1920

Interviewed by

ZEYNAB PHILIPOVA in Batumi, 2001

My parents were from Hopa, a town in Turkey, and so am I. I was also born there. At the age of four, I was taken to Batumi, and it was my stepmother who brought me up. My mother was still alive. She died much later. But something went wrong between my parents and my father remarried here, while my mother stayed in Hopa. She had many children and never remarried. She would not follow my father to Batumi. There were six of us children in the family, five sisters and a brother. They all stayed there with my mother, I was the only child to follow father. From the second marriage he had two sons. My mother is buried in Istanbul. She passed away quite late, in 1975. My father passed away in Central Asia, in exile, on January 14, 1953. I buried him myself.

Until 1927, the borders [with Turkey] were open. After 1927, however, I do not know what happened, but the borders were closed. No passes were issued. It even worsened after 1932. Nobody so much as dared to look in that direction and this situation persisted until the Soviet Union collapsed. I used to have plenty of relatives in Gudauta, Akhali Athoni, Ochamchire [towns of the then Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, a constituent part of the Georgian Republic]... but all of them moved to Turkey in 1938. Boats were sent from Turkey in 1938 and everyone qualifying as a Turkish subject moved to Turkey.

My father was a Turkish subject, too. I asked him, "There is nothing I can do," as I had already been married, "You take your children and move to Turkey. I have a husband, and I will make it somehow." I wish he had done it, so he could have supported me too. He refused, however, making up an excuse, "They will not let me take the children." Then I turned to my brother Ziah, "Please ask your father to take you to Turkey. What are you going to do here?"

Our elder brother is a high-ranking official Turkey. My stepmother lay dying in the hospital in 1939. My brother wrote a letter from Turkey, "We're meeting boats here. What are you waiting for? Take your children and come. I can support the whole family. I'm

wealthy enough.” Yeah, that’s what he wrote. I once again turned to Ziah, God rest his soul, and asked him to convince our father and leave for Turkey. My father, God rest his soul, went off, “You foolish boy, quit repeating your sister’s words! What shall we do with her? Who will take her of her?” Who would take care of me? I would stay with my husband, for better or worse. I had my elder daughter, I had a husband, and as the Russians say [in Russian], “I have put down roots.” He would not concede and listen to me. It must have been his fate to die in Kazakhstan I was unable to make him change his mind; it was his fate to die in Kazakhstan, leaving his children behind. He was deported to Kazakhstan, and we remained separated for the duration of his deportation. Father was no longer at home. I was deported to Siberia. Later, when he fell ill, I left Siberia [in Russian] via Kazakhstan. I traveled the world and eventually saw my father, God rest his soul, and then left for Batumi. He sent two telegrams, saying he felt unwell and asking us to visit him. One of my brothers went, “You’ve seen him already. Let me see him.” He sent the second telegram the following year (I had sent him a reply-paid telegram, asking why he wanted us to visit him, and I received his reply), [in Russian] “I’m sick. I need care.” Then I told Ziah, “I’ll take a leave and go see him.”

I went and nursed him. My father, may God rest his soul, passed away on the thirty-eighth day. I buried him there in Central Asia, in Jambul, a Kazakhstan district. I had the fortieth day rite served for him [the Muslim right for the departed is served on the third, seventh, and fortieth days after one’s repose]. I returned and never went back. How could I? It took a lot of money and it was so far away. I myself had recently returned from exile. I left and entrusted someone with the grave’s care. He too passed away and his wife and children returned, so I lost the grave.

My mother never remarried. When the border was opened, my mother was first to cross it, God rest her soul. She was seventy-six when she crossed it in 1963. She traveled [in Russian] via Leninkan. We met her here. I had her stay here for three and a half months. We saw her off, and then she invited us in return. She sent five invitations, for all of us. We could not afford traveling together, all five of us. Ziah, my brother, told me, “Never mind the others. Let us go, you and I.” We two traveled in March 1965. We arrived at the end of March and spent April, May, and June there,

returning at the end of June. We traveled throughout Turkey. They took us everywhere, all the way to Hopa. They took us all the way to Kemal Pasha [a settlement in turkey]. We saw our relatives and came back [in Russian] via Leninakan. The trip proved to be quite bothersome. There was no road.

Mother raised her children there, feeling happy. She was quite well. She lived in Istanbul. We ourselves actually originated from Hopa. It is not even Hopa proper. It is a village called Abusla. As soon as you pass Sarpi [a village in Achara, on the border with Turkey] and Kemal Pasha, our village comes first. There is a small mosque at the edge of the road. I spoke with mother in the Lazi language. I know both Turkish and Lazi. I was multilingual. I spoke seven languages. I spoke Megrelian [Samegrelo, a region in Western Georgia]. I spoke Russian, as well as Lazi, Turkish, and Abkhazian. Russian was commonly used in our family. I've been speaking Armenian since childhood. Georgian was the last language I learned. It was after 1935. I learned Georgian after I was kidnapped. Otherwise, I spoke no Georgian.

I know many languages. The main language in Georgia, however, must be its state language. Where there is a Georgian king, the Georgian language must be [the main language]. Where there is a Megrelian king, the Megrelian language, and where the Russian king is, it must be the Russian language. Generally speaking, no language should be banned. Every nation has its own language. Education, however, must be mainly provided in the state language. Was it normal when a sudden frenzy took over our Mister Shevardnadze to have everyone learn Russian and give up Georgian? He betrayed his nation. It was the state, the ruler, to betray the nation. How can one betray and lose his/her own nation? The passport must identify one's nationality. One needs to know who he/she is, who his/her ancestors were. Patronymics should also be included.

I was thirteen when I was kidnapped. I was but a little child playing in the yard. It happened toward evening. A friend of mine betrayed me. Otherwise, I did not even know him. I had not even seen him before. His relatives had been visiting my parents though. I lived in a cantonment. I was playing hide-and-seek in the yard. It happened in the evening. Dusk approached. There were only girls, including my aunt's stepdaughter. We the children were

playing. What else could I, a kid of thirteen, do in the evening? I don't know. Somebody rushed toward me. I saw nobody because somebody grabbed me from behind, covering my face, blindfolding me, picking me up, and rushing me away. I passed out. As they carried me through the whole block, snow dropped on my face, and that was when I came to. They took me to someone's yard, sat me down, and I found people there waiting for me. As I was led to the host, I was greeted in a very orderly and polite manner, welcomed warmly, and so on and so forth. I had never seen the man. I was told who my husband-to-be was. I had never seen the man before though.

On the following day, they put a veil on me and took me to the Kakhaberi [a village in the Khelvachauri District, Achara, Western Georgia] village council. They took me to the doctor first. The doctor examined me and chuckled, and said, "Shouldn't have kidnapped her. She's but a little child." When it came to signing the marriage certificate, I was asked [to voice my consent], yet I uttered not a word. I had the veil on, covering my face. It was early 1935. It was the end of January. On February 1, they took me to the village council. Yet, I still did not know who my husband-to-be was. Thus, they forced me to sign the marriage license without me knowing whom I was about to marry or anything. Then, after I absolutely refused to sign, they dipped my finger (I don't remember which finger it was, a pinky or a thumb) in ink and pressed it on the document, in three places. That's how my business was arranged. Then I spent ten-fifteen days in a family I was entrusted to. Then a wedding reception (a small one) was celebrated and they moved to their place, and only then I saw my husband. What good is seeing your husband afterward?

One night (it was really funny), I overheard [my husband-to-be] beseeching my hostess who helped him arrange the wedding, "Please let me take a look at her. Whom have you brought for me? Is it a woman or a man? Who is it?" He had not seen me either. Everything was arranged through verbal agreement between our relatives. My hostess brought him and told her daughter-in-law, "Dursun-Efendi" [Effendi, lord or master in Turkish] has come to pay us a visit. I'll go open the door for him." Thus, she went from the hall into the kitchen. The woman told me, "Dursun-Efendi is here. Pull yourself together." I was tidying up my broche as she

said it. A certain man entered the room at that time. I had no idea who this Dursun-Efendi was. I was totally clueless. I reached out to shake his hand. He wouldn't let go of me. I thought, "He must be crazy. He won't let go of my hand." When he finally let go of my hand and left, I reasoned, "He must be some kind of nut." I am someone else's wife-to-be and he won't let go of my hand! As it turned out, he was my husband. I didn't like him. Poor soul, he must have worked so hard that day, shoveling and piling up gravel, that he had his hands all covered with blisters. I didn't know yet who he was. I went into another room. He sat in the kitchen where the hostess' daughter-in-law had sat him. There was a door behind me, which I opened and entered. He was telling the host's child, "I'm taking Zekie away." "How so? I sleep with Zekie. Zekie is mine." It was a four-year-old child and she shared a bed with me, "Zekie is mine. No one's taking her away from me." "I kidnapped her from her father. Who are you to keep her?" I couldn't speak Georgian back then. I did understand, however, that something wasn't quite right, so I couldn't sleep that night. I cried my eyes out. My life has been nothing but tears ever since.

My husband was ten years older than I. I moved [into his family]. His was a poor family. Although the man worked and tried to provide, everything was on me. That's how I, a child of thirteen, wound up with a yoke around my neck. As it turned out, when I was kidnapped, my father went looking for me. He went to the police and the civil registry office. He looked for me everywhere. Yet, I was already in Kakhaberi, and they managed to hush up this story. People dared to do things like that under communist rule. Yet, corruption existed even under communist rule.

The husband's word was not questioned in the family. He was the breadwinner providing for the family. He would deliver goods and hand them over to me. I possessed nothing of my own. I entered that family with nothing to my name. He would bring me money and say, "Don't let me go hungry, woman. I'll get paid in a month. If you save any money, go ahead and spend it. If not, we must make ends meet until next month, so don't spend it, lest we go starving. We cannot let that happen."

He always instructed me. Thus, I learned how much our income was, on what and how I was expected to spend money, how to make money last us until the next month, and how to save. I



have been helping my family ever since. I'm still trying to find ways to benefit my family even in my old age.

I have saved my marriage three times. I've always obeyed my husband. It came natural as he was older than I and there was obedience, respect, and mutual understanding. His word was decisive. That's how it worked. It was not up to me. Back in those days, it wasn't like it is today when they say, "Look who's talking?" or, "Who are you?" We had respect for one another in those days. A good mother and wife must be patient. No matter how hard the situation in family, she shouldn't air her dirty laundry in public. There must be chemistry between a husband and a wife. If a wife can understand her husband and vice versa, things will go well. If you pull me in your direction and I do the same, then we will be like [in Russian] the swan, pike, and crawfish [Swan, Pike, and Crawfish, a fable by Ivan Krylov (1769 –1844) is Russia's best known fabulist]. Mutual respect keeps things in order and makes every problem easily solved. You will always overcome need and reach safety. You should believe that though you may be in need today, things will be better tomorrow, God will provide. You should not say, "My neighbor has it. Why shouldn't I?" You should reason thus, "May God grant my neighbor whatever He wills, and may He let me have my due in peace." And now, if my neighbor is hungry, how can I not share my bread with him/her. No way! When you pray and beseech God, you should first say, "God, provide for my neighbor first and then me." You should always say it. If your neighbor has nothing, you'll never have any.

My husband was Abkhazian. I never had any problems with him though since I had been raised in an Abkhazian manner. My stepmother too was Abkhazian. In fact, we have been raised in Lazistan [a region in Turkey, on the South-Eastern coast of the Black Sea, populated by the Lazis]. My great-grandmothers on both sides were Abkhazian. I speak Abkhazian. My husband's family was not fluent in Abkhazian. I was better in this regard since my mother-in-law, God rest her soul, was from Achara (her last name was Gorgadze). Now the clash between the Abkhazians and the Georgians is all about politics. It's none of my business. They all should mind their own business. To tell the truth, the Abkhazians are not to blame because, in their majority, they're highly educated and talented. Georgians took over all high positions, pushing them

aside. That's what caused confrontation. They said, "We're going to join Russia." I don't know. It's all about politics. People were killed on both sides. I used to know people in Abkhazia, yet I have no clue where they are now. There is no way to get there or travel over here. I don't even know if they're dead or alive. We haven't had correspondence in some many years. It was not the Abkhazian's fault. Our Georgia doomed both itself and them. I'll repeat these words wherever you please. I'm an eighty-year-old woman. There was one prince on one hill and another prince on the other hill, constantly quarreling over who was wealthier. They constantly acted selfishly. This selfishness ruined Georgia, and it'll never take a step forward with this kind of mentality and reasoning. It should be known. If they come to their senses and repent, the situation in the country may improve. Everyone should know his/her people and past; should know where he/she comes from and obey the law. One should respect the authorities no matter what his/her creed. It is a state. People of all creeds should respect the state. At the same time, the state must be aware of its people's situation. Ask one of those retirees whose pension is fourteen lari how much it costs to buy a meal? Is this money enough to buy bread, not to mention anything else? The state should take this into account. My pension used to be 147 rubles on top of my salary. I kept working until recently. I have worked twenty-four years in Elektroprybor [electronic manufacturing service]. When I looked and saw that my productivity rate was high, while that of the others was low, I would write over some of my rates to them. We the employees covered one another's backs. I received a pension and a salary. I was feeling just fine, and I was being appreciated.

I have turned eighty. I'm not the kind of woman who would hold a grudge against her neighbors. Unpleasant situations may occur anywhere, but I don't have a single neighbor holding anything against me. I have lived in this neighborhood since 1935 and everyone takes his/her hat off on seeing me and greets me. I'm always in charge of all wakes and weddings in our neighborhood. I was brought here at the age of thirteen. I was fifteen when the aunt of my husband put me in charge of the household, "I have a baptism, so it's all on you. You're in charge now." I've been in charge of our neighborhood since. Now, in my age, I cannot do it all. Still, they ask me to supervise pilaf cooking. Thank God. May

God recompense me in the other world for everything I've done.

That's what my past looked like.

I was nineteen when my husband was taken away from me. He was drafted and taken to the Patriotic War [World War II]. My husband didn't have a picture of himself. When he was about to be drafted, I gave money to his cousin, Rejeb, and asked him, "Please take a picture of Dursun, lest his children be left without a picture of their father." They took a picture. I have but one picture left from my husband. That's how it all ended for me. I was left with two children. One was twenty-one-days-old and the other was three-years-old. That's when my life ended. My husband was taken to the war in August 1941.

I also went through deportation after that. Don't ask me about the deportation. I was all by myself at home with two children. My father, God rest his soul, was no longer around. My younger brother and elder daughter were with me at home. My elder daughter wasn't there. Her uncle had taken her for summer. Thus, at one in the morning, my dear, those with green berets paid me a visit. They made me open the door, which I did. They conducted [in Russian] a search. I don't what they found, or what they didn't, but they drew up a statement and gave me two hours to pack and follow them. "Where?" "You're being deported. We're sending you off." "My child isn't at home. My father isn't here."

My elder brother-in-law had taken my daughter to Akhalsheni. "What do you mean you're deporting me?" It didn't work. I packed everything I could get a hold of. My house was burned down earlier in 1945, so we didn't have much. I grabbed everything we had and went outside. I took this younger daughter of mine with me who felt unwell as it was hot. They herded us into a railroad car together with Greeks, treating us like cattle. There was no room to sit or lie down. We spent one full day packed in that manner. My daughter got worse. I had no water or anything. I was on my own.

The following morning, they read out our names, Azakish's (God rest his soul) and mine. Azakish had a wife and children. "Reizoghli Reizba!" "Present. What do you want?" [In Russian] "Get off the train." I replied [in Russian], "I cannot. I'm all by myself." The commander ordered the soldiers to carry all my belongings in an orderly manner as I had no man to accompany me and a child to take care of. They did so. What did I have? I still had two

bundles. I was transferred into the Turks' railroad car. Azakish was transferred too. When they took me off the car in front of the port and led me into the port, I took advantage of the situation and told the soldiers, "My child is about to die on me. Can I hand her over to someone I know?" They answered [in Russian] no and turned their backs on me. Turning their backs on me was actually a sign of consent. I met some of my acquaintances in the car. I intended to turn my child over to them. I had to toss her through the window. "No! You cannot!" I was told. "What do you mean I cannot? My child is about to die. I'd rather have her die in her forefathers' land than someplace else!" After they turned their backs on me and faced the building, I picked up my daughter and handed her over to my husband's cousin. She shoved her under her arm like a toy. Poor soul, she was one-legged. I kept watching her until she crossed the road. After she crossed it, I passed out, and I don't what happened after that. I was finally brought to the railroad car. When we reached it, the officer in charge started a headcount and found out that my daughter was missing. He said he couldn't admit me. They grabbed me by the hand, "Where is your child?" "She was about to die, so I found some acquaintances and tossed her to them. They picked her up and carried her away."

[In Russian] "Book the boy and the luggage. This woman we will not take without the child," was the command. They put me in a car. Two soldiers with bayonets sat on either side of me and we drove off. We arrived at home. Where else could we go? We did go home, but that woman wouldn't bring my daughter there, would she? I had lodgers at that time. We found one of the lodgers (she was [in Russian] a pilot) at home, but no relatives, only that lodger. She told me [in Russian], "Aunt Zynochka, they're not here. They went looking for you." I winked at her and said, "I met them and gave them my daughter. As soon as they come back, tell them to bring the child to me. I'm not allowed to leave her here." "All right, Zynochka. All right. I'll let them know," she replied. She called me Zynochka.

They put me back in the car and drove me back to the port; we drove to where they placed me in a railroad car in which I spent two days and nights. We stayed in Batumi for two days and nights. They took me out of my house on the thirteenth and we left Batumi on the fifteenth. It was July. It was so very hot; it was unbearable! As we were on our way, I kept crying. I didn't know where my fa-

ther was. I didn't know where my brother was either. I had no idea where my younger daughter was. She was with my brother-in-law, but I didn't know it then. I gave them the address. I wasn't even sure if they would look for her and pick her up at all. I was crying and weeping and wailing when we reached Tikhoretsk [a town in Russia]. We were "rearranged" once in Tikhoretsk, meaning that the Greeks and we who had traveled together were now separated. I looked around and saw my brother catch up with me. I hadn't eaten a bit since we left (must have been so many days). Ziah-Beg Nakashidze's wife was with me in the railroad car [Beg, Bek, or Bey, a title traditionally applied to the leaders of small tribal groups; a polite way of addressing a male]. She told me, "Zekie-Khanum, you must be hungry. Wash your hands. I'll fix something, so we can eat something. Even crying requires strength. You must eat to cry" [Khanum, a customary way of addressing a woman of rank or position in a respectful manner, esp. in Turkey and Iran]. I replied, "Alright." I picked some water. I helped my youngest child, the boy, wash his hands. He told me, "Ziah is here." I told him, "Are you out of your mind? Ziah is here?" "No. Ziah is here." In the meantime, Ziah showed up at the train stairs in company of soldiers. I was washing my son's hands at that time. We were in Tikhoretsk. "What's the matter?" "Our home is locked and sealed. I need a letter of authorization from you, so we can unlock the house. We brought Guliko, she's at home, and so is Bedriko (he was talking about my children). To make it short, the house is sealed and I need a letter of authorization."

I couldn't read or write. I had never seen a school in my life. I was raised without attending one. There was a relative of mine from Ochamchire in the next railroad car. I said, "Ibrahim is here. Let's have him draw it." So he drew a letter of authorization. We sent that document through Ziah. I stayed with my youngest child in the car. The train took off, rumbling for days on end. Who knows how many days? Finally, we ended up in [in Russian] the Novovasuyga Settlement, Novosagansk District, Tomsk Region. That's where we ended up. Not everyone disembarked. They would drop us off in groups [at various locations], so my relative whom I had write that letter, disembarked in that settlement. I reasoned that I'd rather live near my acquaintances than with strangers, so I volunteered to be dropped off at the following station (the first station was Sredni

Vasuygansk Village Council and I got off at the following station, Sidelnikovo Settlement, together with my relatives). That's where I stayed for twenty-eight months.

Thus, one year passed, and the following year I received a notification commanding me to wait for the decision [concerning my deportation]. So I waited. Thank God, twenty-eight months after my arrival, I returned to Batumi. We had [in Russian] a supervising officer, a Russian young man, while in the settlement. I helped his family (they didn't have any children) as a maid. When I was about to leave, he told me [in Russian], "Don't leave yet. Reiz (he called me Reiz), you'd better wait out this winter. This information is classified, but my advice to you is to wait out." "How come?" "What region are you from?" I replied, "I'm from Georgia, the Acharian Autonomous Republic." "They're planning to deport all of Achara's population," the supervising officer told me, "Within 1951. Don't leave this year. Stay here. You never know what might happen. You may return only to be deported back. I replied, "I'll go. If they deport me back, I will at least be with my children." So I left.

I left, hardly making it to Batumi. I arrived. I found everyone well, thank God. I've been working my tail off ever since. Zekie, go ahead work like a mule to pay off debts, clothe your children, feed them, etc. You're a young woman, so you need nice clothing. I carried it all on my back. Thank God, I made it. I made it and survived that deportation. [In Russian] That's it!

I believe in God, and I pray as much as I can. It's not about praying. It's all about the heart. One's heart must be pure. I am never envious of anyone. I would never gossip about others in my life, like he did this and she said that, and so on. It's not my thing. I lay it all out straightforwardly, "Child, you're doing it wrong. Try this way."

I'll tell you what I have to say. If you listen to me, good for you, if not, at least, my conscience will be clean. What happens next is none of my business. I have believed, and I still believe, in God since childhood. Thank God, I'm blameless before God. My path is open.

Women do not go to our houses of prayer. During communist rule, praying was prohibited. Moreover, when we fasted and kept vigil at night, they would check on us, who had the lights on and who didn't. During Ramadan [the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; fasting is prescribed during the month of Ramadan], it

was especially prohibited. Nonetheless, thank God, I managed to keep the fast even in exile. I know one prayer, and I always petition God, and I always mention God's name. I'm illiterate, so all I can recite is a small bismillah [an Arabic phrase meaning "in the name of God"]. That's all I know. What matters is that I believe in God, I believe in the Creator.

I love all feast days. I never refuse to participate in any feast day celebration, be it a celebration according to my creed or a communist celebration, it's all the same, and I equally respect them all. Pascha [Orthodox Christian Easter] was also established by God. I don't make the paschal cake at home but I eat it and respect it. I tell people "happy feast day" on other occasions too. You have your feast days, I have mine, but we ultimately share one God the Creator. Muhammad the Prophet was born in the latter times and there will be no other. He is the ultimate prophet. We the Muslims are guided by this ordinance, and we are not allowed to make any changes to this ordinance. I cannot read, yet I do understand the words read on Mawlid [the observance of the birthday of the Prophet of God]. The words of Mawlid are all Turkish. They're written in Arabic but they're all Turkish words. Muhammad was the last prophet. There have been no prophets after him. He who believes this is a follower of Muslim creed.

Many of my grandchildren were baptized. Was it a worthy deed? You shall not betray your creed. Yes, we used to be Christians one time. Yet, there used to be neither Christianity nor Islam. There was only chaos in this world. Then Jesus came at first, followed by Muhammad. Muhammad bestowed the faith. I've believed in God since childhood. All my dreams, thank God, have been fulfilled sooner or later. I've witnessed so many things and I hope I will witness many more. However, there are many things about contemporary life that I dislike, nakedness, for example. Women are wicked nowadays. They undress and walk around naked. Is this life? Stalin was right when he prohibited bathrobes. Though a communist, he prohibited bathrobes because women's underwear was visible in the wind. That's why. It was prohibited to go outside in bathrobes. Stalin must be resurrected, so he may see what his fellow Georgian people are doing and see how naked women prance around. Now, hearing me say these words, one may object, "Stalin deported you. How can you sympathize with him?" It was not his

decision to deport me. It was the result of other people's gossips. Quite the opposite, Stalin set me free.

I saw Stalin in my dream, and he freed me right after I had this dream. In my dream, I wished Stalin a happy 75th anniversary. A week later, I was informed that my petition had been accepted, reviewed, and redirected to Tbilisi for a final decision. It was Stalin's direct order. Stalin was a man of law but they deceived him. He was honest. And now, what do they make children watch on television? It's none of my business, but it's ugly and sinful. And what about matrimony without a headdress, be it a Christian or a Muslim woman. We couldn't go out without covering our heads. Whatever happened to this custom and this meekness? They allowed both praying and walking around naked.

Well, may God bless our youth. Having ten great-grandchildren, two children and eight grandchildren is what makes me happy. Two out of my eight grandchildren are married, while the others are well taken care of, thank God. May God keep them well. The future is near, so we'll see. Our future depends on us. If we are reasonable and well, everything in the garden will be rosy. Yet, if we gossip against one another and argue what's right and what's wrong, then things won't fly. If you want to progress, there must be obedience and appreciation, as well as respect for the elderly. It's all gone nowadays though.

What else can I tell you? I've worn you out.



## **NELLY (LUBOV) DIDIA**

Born in 1922

Exempts from memoirs (1957) written in the Russian language provided by Nelly Didia's daughter, NAIRA PRICE, 2012

### **Pictures from the Past**

I was a junior in the Tbilisi State University. Professor Dmitry Mgeladze was writing sentences on the blackboard, which told the students stories about the courage of Soviet youths in the fight against German hordes and the black swastika that had treacherously attacked their cherished homeland. They related stories of the Soviet people who had risen to defend their motherland. They inspired the students, feeding their zeal for battle and calling them to “where breathing is hard, where sorrow is loud” (Nekrasov) [Nikolay Nekrasov (1821-1878) was a famous Russian poet, writer, critic and publisher].

That is why, instead of going home after classes, I wound up in the office of the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Young Communist League, requesting to send me to the frontline. After having caressed my head, the secretary told me in a warm and fatherly manner – though himself being quite young – that the homeland had no need of ones like me in the frontline at the moment.

I had already turned nineteen, though I was very short in stature. That was probably why he decided that I was not old enough for great deeds. “Homeland has no need at this point,” this phrase kept echoing dully in my ears. I was pleased to know that my homeland did not require my contribution as it was still strong enough. Yet, it was a bitter feeling to learn that it had no need of me.

No. Of course, there was need. There was need of each and every one of us as every field of our work was a frontline. “Not every soldier meets the foe in person; nonetheless, all must engage in battle” (Nekrasov).

I found my place in the Ministry of Education, which called on junior and senior students to replace schoolteachers who had gone to the war. I was one of the first to volunteer. I worked in three Nadzaladevi District schools [Nadzaladevi, a district in Tbilisi], teaching in the district middle school#19 and the school for young

women in the morning and afternoon respectively, while delivering classes for draftees in the evening at the request of the District Public Education Authority and the Military Commissariat in the school for young men. I taught young men who might be gone to the war tomorrow. In my free time, I read additional lectures in the hospital in an attempt to lift the spirits of wounded soldiers.

The whole home front struggled and labored with one thought: Everything for the frontline! Everything for victory!

One time, the principal of the school #15 for young men Andrew Simonia asked me to help him. As it turned out, the graduating class found itself without a teacher who had gone to the frontline. It was March, so there was not much time left until the completion of the academic year. I had to help those young men, but it was nearly impossible as my schedule was all booked from morning till night.

Yet, Simonia was not a man who would back down in the face of difficulties. A few days later, I was teaching in school when several young, tall and handsome men visited me, with pleading and yet calm self-confident looks on their faces. Their eyes impelled me to take decisive steps in relation to the subject of their interest. These young men turned out to be the graduating class of school #15, Simonia's students.

One of the young men stepped forward saying, "Professor, we have come here with a favor to ask. My name is Tengiz Zakradze." Tengiz eventually became a medical doctor, PhD. He asked me politely to help them complete their education and graduate, so that they could join the ranks of worthy sons of our homeland. "Please do not refuse us," Tengiz insisted. Does a teacher have a right to turn down such a request? Yet, there was no way out as I had absolutely no time.

"We have it all figured out. You won't have to worry about the time," suddenly the heartfelt youthful voice of Givi Tvauri emerged from the midst of the group (Givi Tvauri, subsequently a WW II veteran and military physician). "You'll come to teach us at 8 am, before morning classes, which will give you enough time to make it to school #19 in time for the first class. It's right around the corner from our school. You'll be coming to teach us, and we will arrive early to attend your classes," he asserted with youthful naïveté. "That's right," Otar Gerzmava, the future Deputy Minister of

Healthcare, seconded his proposal. The sparkles in their eyes burned intensely and expressed a great deal of longing for learning. Their eyes exuded a desire to complete education and join the ranks of the brave and selfless defenders of the homeland. I could not refuse. I agreed.



Nelly Didia with daughter Naira

On the very first morning of our course, however, bitter disappointment awaited me. At 7:55 am, I was already in school. Principal Simonia greeted me. The corridors, however, were as silent as the grave. I was shocked. I could not figure out the reason behind the sly devilish sparkles in the principle's eye. Was he indeed happy the boys had not showed up? I walked with him down the corridor with heavy thoughts on my mind.

We approached the classroom, also as silent as the dead. My heart was heavy as I entered. And behold, twenty-eight young men stood at attention like twenty-eight bayonets ready to pierce the enemy, their faces revealing quiet triumph and joy.

Rushing to their classroom was like a celebration every morning. That was exactly where my homeland needed me.

I have raised many students, both young men and women, including composers and poets, such as Giorgi Tsabadze [a famous Georgian composer (1924-1986)], Dodo Gvishiani [a famous Georgian woman poet], Vakhtang Dzneladze [a famous Georgian poet], and many others. There was so much love between us, so much love indeed. Their poems dedicated to me testify to their love.

I would not spare my energy and knowledge not only for the sake of my students but rookie teachers as well since I eventually became Senior Educational Methodology Specialist of the Nadzaladevi District and Vice-Principal of School #11. I dedicated my whole self to them, handing down my experience and expertise.

My work as an educator has been covered in numerous periodicals throughout the years. I was nominated for the Honorary Teacher of the USSR award. I have been waiting for this award ever since [the last comment added in 2010].

I loved my job dearly, yet everything changed when my students showed me an announcement in the newspaper that read, “A Georgian state dance company is being formed under the leadership of Iliko Sukhishvili and Nino Ramishvili. Casting is underway.” [The Georgian National Ballet was the first professional state dance company in Georgia. Founded by Iliko Sukhishvili and Nino Ramishvili, husband and wife and famous Georgian dancers and choreographers, in 1945, it was initially named as the Georgian State Dance Company. Thanks to this company the Georgian national dancing and music has become known in many parts of the world].

That was when my career of a teacher ended. The casting panel consisted of Pavle Kandelaki, the head of the Authority for Culture of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia; the one and only great Vakhtang Chabukiani, a unique ballet phenomenon [Vakhtang Chabukiani (1910-1992), a Georgian ballet dancer, choreographer and teacher highly regarded worldwide as one of the most influential male ballet dancers in history]; Dmitry (Dodo) Aleksidze [(1910-1984) a famous Georgian theater director and professor]; and others.

I was very nervous during the casting. The members of the casting panel sat in the stalls, below the stage level. We the contestants stood behind the curtains, backstage. Scared out of our wits, we waited for our turns, “lying in wait” and peeking through the curtain gaps. We could see the panel browse through our applications and discuss something. As I was told later, they could not decide whom they would examine first. After all, chances of the first candidate failing were quite high. They finally picked one of the applications, and their faces broke into a smile. This application belonged to “Nelly Didia, a Russian language and literature teacher.” At this moment, Vakhtang Chabukiani whispered to Iliko Sukhishvili, “Even if this teacher flunks, no big deal. She’s probably some spinster anyway. I don’t think the art of Georgian dance will suffer any loss.”

I will now quote one of my dancing partners, “A lady walked from behind the curtain, her gait fast and yet self-assured and

composed. She asked what dance in particular the panel wished her to perform, and then she glided gracefully on the stage.” This young woman was I.

The casting panel gave me top scores in all three categories: performance, artistry, and appearance, and decided to admit me as a lead dancer. After all, I had graduated from the choreography school for children under the leadership of Grisha Chivadze [a famous Georgian dancer and choreographer], from which Misha Bakhtadze and I were transferred to the performing dance ensemble as lead dancers. Misha and I participated in a competition held in Moscow in 1938 and even won the first prize for the Kartuli [traditional Georgian] dance [In 1938, Ten Days of Georgian Culture, a nationwide event, were held in Moscow].

I was told later that all candidates had completed their performances, Chabukiani turned to Iliko Sukhishvili asking, “Where’s that girl gliding like a swan?” He was talking about me.

The newly established ensemble under the leadership of Sukhishvili and Ramishvili encountered a great deal of hardship. We worked on a voluntary basis, without being paid a penny or receiving bread coupons, for several months amid the post-war tribulations and need, but our love for dance and enthusiasm kept us alive and strong on our path to success. And finally, a viewing of our performance in concert was scheduled. There was a lot of nervousness and fear. This performance would decide whether our ensemble would be formally established or not. And behold our victory! We were approved! Our ensemble was recognized formally! It was our baptism by fire.

All newspapers covered this news the following morning. Here is an exempt from a story about me [in Georgian], “Chabukiani caressed Nelly’s head and told her, ‘Good job, young lady! Keep on dancing, and you’ll make a tremendous dancer.’”

We went on tour...

We held a concert in Konigsberg [the capital of Prussia until 1701 when the capital was moved to Berlin; conquered by the Soviet Union near the end of World War II]. The audience was small, which was understandable as it was the first year after the end of WW II. The ruins of this city were still smoking. In the middle of my performance, I caught a glimpse of an elderly lady who was all attention with mysterious excitement in her look, caressing us

with her eyes and never missing even the slightest of our moves. This excitement encompassed joy, happiness, love... It was obvious that she was dressed in her favorite attire that night, something she had cherished and something that had nourished and kept her alive far away from her homeland. She was dressed in a traditional Georgian dress with a lechaki [a traditional Georgian veil] covering her head. It was a Georgian lady who, for whatever reason, had left her beloved Georgia and had never given up her dream to reunite with her homeland one day. During the intermission, she flew onto the stage like a bird, and tears of joy and exaltation were shed in abundance. Indeed, there is no place like home...

Let us return to our green tour train #1752. We spent our first year in the cars of this unforgettable train, rushing us along cast iron tracks. Nino [Ramishvili] and I shared our worries about our children, her baby Tengiz and my infant Janna (my second daughter Naira had not been born yet), we had left far away at home [Tengiz Sukhishvili (1938-2007), a prominent Georgian dancer and choreographer, the head of the National Ballet after the repose of his parents]. Motherly anguish choked me, and tears rolled down my cheeks. I went into the train vestibule. Although spring sunlight spread all over the place, it was too weak to comfort human beings, while miserable birch saplings were withering and struggling to survive. I noticed village children, happy to see the approaching train. They rushed to the track and chased our train.

I absolutely have to recall our concerts in Sokhumi. John Priestly, a good friend of the Soviet Union and a great English author and playwright, and his wife came to see our performance. They happened to be travelling through our country at that time. They were late for the first part of our concert, but managed to make it before the beginning of part two. They were so impressed by Georgian dances that they asked us to repeat part one for them. Mister Priestly and his wife cancelled their departure from Sokhumi next day only to attend our concert once again.

A touching episode took place during the intermission after part one of the second performance. Instead of having the curtain lowered, Iliko Sukhishvili gave a speech, expressing his gratitude to the guests, swiftly and elegantly unbelting his favorite silver dagger, and presenting it to Mister Priestly, while letting his wife go before him with a bouquet of flowers in her hands, which she

in turn presented to Mrs. Priestly. Mister Priestly was touched and caught by surprise at the same time. He was at a loss. He rose to feet at first, and even made a step toward the scene, but then stepped back and finally sat down. At last, he composed himself and even gave a speech, "I am enchanted by Georgian dances, and I would like to see you charm the audience in London. This dagger is the most precious present I have ever received. I shall hang it on the wall in my study." The audience thundered endless applause.

One time, after a concert in Sormovo [Russia], I was called to Nino Ramishvili's dressing room where I was met by a number of men, including two Georgians. "This is the young lady whose performance impressed you so much," Nino turned to them. One of the Georgian men addressed me in Georgian, and one of the Russians present objected to him [in Russian], "You won't give up gossiping about me in your language, will you? I bet you told her I'm a base person." The men burst out laughing. I could not fathom their humor and rushed to comfort the Russian man, "You shouldn't be offended. The word 'base person' initially meant someone who stayed in the basement. And by the way, he never referred to you as a base person." Laughter resumed with even greater intensity. The Russian man turned out to be Mikhail Buyny [(1903-1975), a famous Soviet Russian theater and film actor].

We were touring the Baltic republics one time. Our first concert was scheduled to take place in Riga, Latvia. The Freedom Square in Riga features a statue of chained people struggling for freedom and a bronze figure of woman with upraised hands, holding a star and symbolizing freedom. I met with my relatives in Riga who gave me presents... They gave me... No. It is not funny. They gave a notebook. Let the future reader of my notes know how hard living was back in those days. This notebook was an invaluable present at that time. I am actually writing these words in that very notebook. I will keep this notebook in a safe place.

In Riga, our ensemble was welcomed with loud applause and love from people who longed to share in the warmth of Georgia. We were surrounded by amazement and adoration. Our concerts in Riga were attended by Galina Frolova [(b. 1930), a famous Soviet and Russian actress], Schpringfeld [(Pavel Schpringfeld (1912-1971) a famous Soviet theater and film actor), one of the stars of Soviet cinematography Ivan Kuznetsov [(1909-1976)],

and many others. We met with them backstage and became close friends immediately. They were captivated by Georgian modesty and excellent manners. When one of the actors asked us the girls out to the movies, Ivan Kuznetsov told him after having noticed us blush, “No, brother. These are Georgians. They’re pretty strict about these things.”

As I mentioned before, I was madly in love with the art of dance. It was 1949. Our ensemble was making ready to tour Finland. We were rehearsing in the Bolshoy Theater, Moscow. It was precisely at that time when my trials and tribulations started. Thus, we rehearsed and waited to be allowed to travel to Finland. I was very short, so I had commissioned high heels. After having finished rehearsing one dance, I had to rush to the dressing room to change my footwear to something more comfortable for the next dance as it was much faster and more dynamic. The dressing room, however, was located pretty far away. I did not feel like covering such a distance, and I could be late at that, so I decided to dance with my high heels on and be very careful while doing it. Yet, I got carried away and at some point started to dance at full blast. As a result, I sprained my right ankle and fractured my bone. During the walkthrough, I danced with a smile on my face and tears in my eyes. There is nothing else to tell. There was nothing else to tell back then, and there is nothing else to tell now. I had to bid farewell to our ensemble. I forced to quit when all the hardship, all those months of work without a penny to my name and a piece of bread to sustain my family were over. Bad luck, bitterness, sorrow, heartache... The ensemble left for Finland without me. Upon their return, I rushed to meet Iliko Sukhishvili and Nino Ramishvili, driven by the desire to see them once again. Their son, Tengiz, happened to have fallen ill. He was really happy to see me. I sat at his bedside and read some poems for him, including *What Is Good and What Is Bad* by Mayakovski [Vladimir Mayakovski (1893-1930), a great Russian and Soviet poet and playwright]. He seemed to have come to like this poem. Then he told me something in the French language. He had a French language tutor. I – what a shame – could not understand a word he said since I had studied English in high school and German in college. Having noticed a startled look on my face, the kid must have been disappointed because, as we



know, children strongly believe that grownups know everything, I mean, every little thing.

Let me say a few words about myself. As soon as I thought I was standing on my own two feet, fate would come back with vengeance. It was merciless like a mean stepmother, making my life hopelessly miserable sometimes. I gradually shut down, plunging into the depths of my own self. Nonetheless, I made it with my back bent, my knees trembling and my teeth clinched. What mattered most, however, was that I made it, and I made it with clean conscience and a spotless reputation. I was young and yet my life resembled a morning in late fall when the sun appears for but a few minutes, only to be enveloped with lead-like heavy clouds shortly thereafter. And then it gets dark and cold again. Sometimes, however, fate played games with me, removing all the clouds and letting the joyful sun pour down its light and warmth over me in abundance. Then my happiness penetrated the veil of tears and sorrow like grass through a layer of ice. These moments of happiness did not last too long, however. Inspired and happy, I wanted to dedicate my life to what I loved most, dancing. Ominous fate kept grinning in the meantime. I proved to be strong, however, managing to claim and fight for my fair share of happiness, that is, my children and grandchildren. They mean the world to me. They are my life.

## **ZEYNAB TAKTAKISHVILI**

Born in 1923

Interviewed by

MARIAM SEKHNIASHVILI in Tbilisi, 2004

We live in horrible times... I would never imagine I would live like this in my old age. I've always been well provided for, and now...

I was born to a family of civil servants, in the village of Mukhrani, Mtskheta District [Eastern Georgia], on April 15, 1923. My father was an economist and mother was a teacher. Grandmothers are often the ones to assume the responsibility of bringing up their grandchildren. I too spent almost nine months with my grandmother. Nine months later, my parents brought me to Tbilisi. I attended Tbilisi School Twenty-Seven. It was a four-grade school at that time. It was turned into a middle school later. I graduated from School Twenty-Seven in 1940. In 1941, I passed the Technical Institute entrance exams (Department of Inventions and Engineering), but I didn't collect enough points, so I failed to enroll. The following year, I enrolled in the Railroad Institute. It was 1942.

I was a freshman about to become a sophomore when I went to the war. I was the Secretary of the Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League [the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] in my institute. Students went to the war almost as volunteers. We the Young Communist League girls from all higher education schools in Tbilisi gathered and joined Anti-Aircraft Artillery Division 415 as volunteers. The division was stationed at the Arsenal. The Arsenal was, and still is, a military unit on the territory near the Tbilisi Sea [an artificial lake in the vicinity of Tbilisi]. We underwent two-month training courses there. The courses were held in different directions, anti-aircraft warfare, communications, and machine gun warfare. I found myself in the communications unit. It was not intentional. They grouped us at random. For example, ten women were assigned to one direction and ten to another. We completed the courses in two months and were assigned to military units. Our unit was stationed in Tbilisi, near the Lisi Lake, on a high mountain. We stayed there from April through September. It was 1942.

In September, we were sent directly to the frontline. At first, we were stationed in the Ukrainian front, in Donetsk, protecting the coal mines. Then a situation developed when the Germans occupied nearly all Ukraine, so we were sent straight to the frontline.

The first city was Dnepropetrovsk where we were in charge of the defense of a mile-long bridge. This bridge united Western and Eastern Ukraine. I remember it was a winter, freezing cold, and a frozen Dnepr River. The mile-long bridge was totally destroyed. Soviet Union military units couldn't get on the other side of Dnepr. The Germans were already stationed there.

We played a significant role in the defense of the Dnepr Bridge. Division 415 was mainly staffed with young women, while men served as superior officers. There were machine gunmen in our division, as well as those who used radars to measure the height at which aircrafts were approaching. About twenty-five aircrafts were gunned down under our supervision and with our participation. We had many Armenians, Ukrainians, and Azerbaijanis in our division. We never told them apart by nation. We didn't know what a nationality was about. We had such an attitude back then. We loved one another. Sixty years have passed and we're still friends. There are just a handful of us left.

The bridge that we were defending was a pontoon bridge. A pontoon bridge is a wooden bridge rested on the supports made of resin pipes filled with air. Infantry crossed the bridge on wooden planks. We were stationed there for two months. We retained that artificial bridge and managed to cross it, entering and claiming the territory of Dnepropetrovsk.

When we entered Dnepropetrovsk, the German retreated. We spent several months in this city. We defended the city and prevented the Germans from reentering. It was 1943. Fascist Germany was already pulling back at that time.

Dneprodzerzhinsk and Zaporozhie were the next two cities in the defense of which we participated. We spent one month in one location only to be assigned to another location... People had fled to the woods, vacating their homes. We entered apartments whenever it was possible, yet there were situations when we were forced to camp in the open air. Therefore, whenever we entered a town, even if planning to stay there just a couple of days, we made

dugouts. Of course, the guys mainly did the job, not the girls. We lived in dugouts. We would lay down hay and sleep on it.

As to nourishment, it was very good. We never felt hungry. We had a lot of food. After liberating cities, we took over warehouses. We never lacked groceries. There were instances, however, when the Germans poisoned food supplies before leaving. For example, they contaminated a spirit distillery. Russians took over the distillery. You know how much they like alcohol. So they drank spirit and many of them died. Then it was decreed not to touch food supplies.

We didn't have water, so we drank Dnepr River water. We were stationed far away from the city, on the riverbank. We collected ice and thawed it. One day, our cook's assistant told us girls, "I'll go and fetch some ice." He left only to find the ice too thick to break. He reasoned he could take [in Russian] a projectile, physically hit the ice with it and break it. The projectile was stuffed with explosives. He went down to the Dnepr River, hit the ice with the projectile and it exploded. The young man was killed. We were mortified all week after incidents like this. We buried the dead right there on the spot and then informed their families about the whereabouts of their graves. If a person didn't show up in the unit, we started looking for him/her (he/she may have been transferred to another unit). If the person were nowhere to be found, we informed such a person's family that he had gone missing.

Some unseemly persons who didn't care about their homeland sided with the Germans and defected. The enemy probably used them as spies, making them give out all information. I haven't heard about any Georgians among such people. There were many Russians though.

I have a friend. Her last name is Kartvelishvili. She's a Kakhetian girl [Kakheti, a region in Eastern Georgia]. She fought in our unit. Her husband resurfaced ten years ago. He had been missing in action. She received a note about him gone missing. As it turned out, he went to France, found a shelter with a certain rich woman, and stayed there. He wrote a letter to his family ten years ago, "I am alive. If you'll accept me, I'll come back." His wife was against it, but the children wanted him to come back. He did come back. He brought a sizeable wealth to his family. They're still together, living happily.

Another friend stayed with a certain woman in France throughout the war. He came back as though demobilized. He was arrested that very night. You know how our agencies work! A man can stoop to things like that, but a woman would never do anything of this kind! It never happened.

We defended the territory of Ukraine until 1944. Then we were taken to participate in the assault on Berlin. Our army approached Berlin. We camped at the gates of Berlin. It was 1944.

We remained at the gates of Berlin for quite some time. We were told on May 3, 1945 that the following morning we were going to assault Berlin and seize it. We started to make ready. All weapons had to be in place. I was the head of the Communications Department at that time, in charge of twenty young women. The artillery battery consisted of one hundred men and communicated with the division. A division consisted of several artillery batteries. Ours was Battery Four of Division Three. We had communication lines with every military unit. These lines stretched on trees and land. The enemy often damaged them, so we had to repair them frequently.

I would like to recall one incident. We were stationed at the gates of Berlin, and the line with the headquarters was disconnected. We had to repair it as soon as possible. Our communications specialists had gone to the frontline, leaving only two other girls and me. We left everything and went to repair the damaged communications line with the headquarters. We were on our way... Germany consisted of densely wooded territories. We were passing through those woods, knowing that German units were stationed fifty yards ahead of us. Believe it or not, we weren't afraid at all. Quite the opposite, we wanted to accomplish some heroic feat there, so that our names would be remembered. That's how patriotic the youth were then. I don't know where it had its roots, maybe in upbringing, school or family. We deeply believed that we had to sacrifice ourselves for Stalin, the cause and the country. We weren't afraid of anything. We were eighteen-nineteen... I turned nineteen in Kiev.

We were on our way when we heard Germans addressing us through the loudspeakers [in Russian], "Girls, be not afraid! We will not harm you." We followed the telephone cable, convinced that we would be shot any moment. We made it safely though. The line was torn in three places. We fixed it all. We were on our way



Zeynab Taktakishvili (sitting second from right) with comrades-in-arms.  
February 22, 1943

back when we heard the Germans play our song, Suliko [a Georgian love poem written in 1895 by Akaki Tzereteli, which became widely known throughout the Soviet Union as a song performed with music composed by Varenka Tzereteli]. Believe it or not, they had it... They saw us off to music. They felt sorry for us. They too had something human in them. That's how we survived. This was one incident.

I remember another incident too. Right before entering Germany, the guide of our column took the wrong path, and we found ourselves right on the German controlled territory. Our column consisted of forty-fifty vehicles. A bombing ensued. Aircrafts flew over us. It seemed that they flew within a hand's reach, like fifty yards above us. We could even tell everyone in the aircraft, the pilots and everyone else in their seats. A bombing ensued and everyone scattered and hid... The front of our column, several vehicles, was destroyed by bombs, and now they flew toward us, gesturing in our direction from the aircrafts. Everyone hid. I was at a loss, looking at the head of our unit who had crawled under a table. I couldn't do anything. Our vehicle had a driver, an overweight Russian man. When the driver saw my utter confusion, he grabbed my hand, leaned against the wall, and hid me behind his back. I could see how an aircraft flew toward us, dropping shells

on us. This man got hit in the leg and collapsed. I was stunned. I was in horrible shape. I couldn't move. After the raid was over, paramedics came over to help and carried away the driver. That man (I don't remember his name, probably Sasha) saved my life. Many members of our unit were killed that day.

In 1945, we were stationed in the city of Breslau (present Wrocław [Poland]). It was a strongly fortified city and Berlin's lodgment. There were many manufactories and plants in the city. The city had been evacuated.

All German cities had been evacuated and desolate by May. We were prohibited from entering abandoned homes. There was an ordinance prohibiting us from touching anything or entering homes. We the girls sneaked in nonetheless. Homes were abandoned and desolate; all tidied up and cozy, even the clocks worked. These homes, their luxury and wealth, were indescribable... We entered homes when we had time. At the same time, we were afraid of our unit superiors, fearing that they would find out. We were curious, young as we were. We would find the doors open as everyone had fled to the woods. They would come home to spend nights. It was warm. It was May... We entered and opened wardrobes where we found pretty much everything, all kinds of clothing. We missed clothing... We wanted to wear clothing like normal people did.

We wore army uniforms and boots. We went to bathe every Sunday. Wherever we were, the men arranged baths for us. In this regard, we never lacked anything as women. They took good care of us. We opened these wardrobes, trying various dresses and changing them... Almost all households had big mirrors. We twirled in front of the mirror and all that. We would get all dressed up, cozy and tidy, and we liked it. Food... Their fridges were packed with all kinds of food. We never touched anything though. The commander had issued an ordinance, and we were very afraid it would be poisoned.

I remember one time three young women from our unit left, saying that they would be back at night. They left. They never returned because the house where they went turned out to be mined. As soon as they opened the door, the mines exploded. All three were so severely wounded that no one thought at the time that they would survive. After that incident, an even tougher or-

dinance was issued, so we the women wouldn't dare going into town. We were scared.

We were stationed in Breslau for several months. We enjoyed a simply wonderful life there, warm homes abandoned by Germans. We even had heating. We felt at home. We slept there and led a normal life. Our superiors selected territories, had the homes there cleaned up, and we stayed in those homes. We used their beds as well. We the young girls lay in beds with feather down comforters. To make it short, we enjoyed ourselves in Germany. It's just that we were scared, sneaked out and going sightseeing in town. Since you are in Germany, you might as well go sightseeing and see something. We went to stores too. They were all open. People led a regular life there. It wasn't like in Tbilisi when... people lock the doors when they leave... Stores were open all the time, but no one touched anything. No sales were carried out in stores, and manufactories weren't functioning either. There were a radio technology manufactory and a jewelry plant. No one ever touched them. Our people used to carry out goods from the stores. Later on, however, an ordinance was issued, so everyone became afraid. If you brought something to our unit, an unfamiliar piece of clothing, for example, you would be reprimanded and placed under penalty, sent to [in Russian] the hole. Some still managed. You know how human nature is. I myself had so many nice dresses taken from there. I stashed them under my bed though.

We had free time as well. We were off on weekends. Believe it or not, the Germans wouldn't fight on weekends. They wouldn't fire. We always knew when the Germans were about to attack. For example, they had a break at noon, then at four in the evening, and then at suppertime. We were free at this time, sneaking out and into town and fetching goods.

There was one big house in Breslau. Several families must have lived there. It was a luxury residence. Its residents had fled. It took our young fellow fighters a full week to empty this house. They took it all, clothing, shoes, jewelry, silver, gold, everything. You could bring out a small item, something you could conceal, but you had to be careful, lest anyone should see you. It was strictly forbidden to carry extra items. If anyone saw you carry anything extra, you would be surely reprimanded and sent to the hole for a couple of days. You know what "the hole" is? [Laughs]



Offended were placed in “the hole”. It as a special room, and they pout you there if you committed one or another offense. You had to sit there. My friend, Maro Kakhidze, was in and out of “the hole”. She was a very lively woman. She wouldn’t obey the authorities and often talked back and retaliated. There was a bunk in the hole. It was a well-arranged room in every way. Instead, food was served once a day, while we were fed very well. A guard stood at “the hole”. It was well guarded. No one could get near it, save the superior. There were some very stubborn girls and many wound up in “the hole”. Maro Kakhidze recalls, “I’ve been sent to the hole 150 times.” As for me, I was very obedient.

I was on phone duty one time. There were three of us girls, and we took turns on duty every four hours. It was my turn to be on duty that night. Our unit was stationed in a building, a regular apartment building. When we were stationed in Tbilisi, on the Lisi Lake, as well as in Ukraine, we lived in dugouts. In Germany, however, when local residents fled, our unit occupied vacated buildings and camped there. We lived in apartment buildings in Germany, while living in dugouts at home, on our territory.

To make it short, I was on duty one beautiful day. Our superior always checked on us and gave warning, “Girls, don’t doze off.” I happened to have fallen asleep with the phone and radio equipment by my side. Our superior dropped by and took one shoe off my foot. I didn’t feel anything. I was wearing [in Russian] boots with laces at that time. I was punished for not even realizing he took off my shoes, spending one day in “the hole”. That’s the only day I can recall, not more [laughs]. You cannot fall asleep. I was a very harmless, kindhearted girl, raised as an orphan, and everyone felt sorry for me. They too must have felt sorry for me, so they gave me only one day in “the hole”. That was it. I’ve never dozed off on duty since.

I remember yet another incident. We were on duty in Breslau, guarding one site from unauthorized entry. I was holding a rifle in my hand. It was at night and it was windy. I heard a rustle, a noise, not knowing what to do. The patrol was too far away to yell. I noticed a silhouette approaching me. I screamed once and fired. We had rifles and we knew how to fire. The silhouette ran away. The commander of our regiment and the head of staff, as well as their deputies, were in the command and control facility.

They rushed outside after hearing me fire. I told them what had happened. They expressed their gratitude. The next day, we found out that it indeed was a German who had sneaked in. There was our second unit in an apartment nearby, and that's where that German threw a bomb. After I fired, he realized that I was guarding the headquarters. I was officially commended for it and even given a certificate. I have been commended so many times...

After that, we joined the assault on Berlin. It was May 3. We had all weapons ready. The head of our unit approached and warned us, "Don't be afraid. Be vigilant and don't fall asleep. We may be up to a strong assault tonight." Our unit was ready on May 4. We waited... nothing. On May 5, in the morning, the Germans surrendered, they gave up their positions, and agreed to negotiate.

Believe it or not, we were upset because we wanted to fire, to start an assault, and attack. It [the surrender of Germany] was not declared until May 9 though. May 9 was declared Victory Day. You should have seen us rejoice. They would pick us the girls up and toss in the air. Words cannot describe our joy. The sounds of festive gunfire resembled that of an assault. All weapons were fired. Nevertheless, what made us happy most was that we were about to see Berlin and Reichstag. We were not allowed outside the unit for a while. A week later, we started wandering in Berlin and sightseeing. It was all leveled to the ground. Berlin was totally annihilated. In the vicinity of Berlin, however, in the city of Breslau, nothing had been destroyed. That's how wended that war.

We spent the following four months, May, June, July, and August, in the vicinity of Berlin, ensuring defense again.

## **KATO KIKNADZE**

1925 – 2005

Interviewed by

MARIAM SEKHNIASHVILI in the village of Gulgula, Kakheti Region, 2004

I was born in the village of Gulgula, to the Kiknadze family. We had an old house. I am an ancient and long-suffering woman. I've worked all over the place. I built half of this apartment on my own. My brother used to work as the director of a collective farm. He too helped me and attached some of the rooms downstairs to the old structure. One half of the house is my brother's, while two rooms upstairs, the wine cellar and one room downstairs belong to me.

I spent my childhood here, up until the fourth grade. Starting from the fourth grade, I attended the Fourth School in Telavi [the administrative center of the Kakheti Region, Eastern Georgia]. Keto Petriashvili was the school principal at that time. I graduated from a middle school in Telavi. Then I continued my education in a school for paramedics from which I graduated on June 15, 1941. On June 21, the war broke out. I had graduated ten days earlier and I was sixteen, a wild child, as they say, chasing my own shadow, the shadow that follows you everywhere you go. I was so scared of my own shadow. I fled as it chased me.

To make it short, I graduated from the school for paramedics on June 15, 1941. On June 21, the war was declared, and on June 22, I was summoned and registered by the military commissariat. We didn't know what was going on. No one would reveal military secrets. I know it now but I had no idea back then, being a wild child. I had no clue where I was supposed to go. We were given [in Russian] excerpts from our records and sacks, similar to those that soldiers had. The sack was empty. We were supposed to fill it up with provisions to last us three days. We were supposed to take food to our detachment and make it last us as long as we could. I stood among a group of a hundred people, while the commander read out our names, summoning and presenting us with our record excerpts, and also telling us to which military detachments we belonged.

We were drafted on June 22. On June 23, chaos and disorder took over the place. We went to Kharkov [a city in Ukraine] at first. To be honest with you, I met with my cousin in Kharkov. He was the head doctor of the local district hospital. He noticed us, my friend, Tamar Chikvaidze, and me. He loved us both. Tamar and I were good friends; both of us participated in World War II. She lives in Tzinandali [a village in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia] today. My cousin sat us down and asked, "Where do you think you're going? Are you insane? Follow me right away!" He took us back to Telavi, to the military hospital, and told us to stay put, "I'll take you with me wherever I'll go."

When the war broke out, no one was admitted into the hospital at first, though we had everything ready to receive wounded people. We had all beds made and ready. This building is still there, though it no longer serves as a hospital. It housed an institute at first and then a museum.

Our first patients were Germans. Their aircrafts were taken down in the mountains of Caucasus. One German had his right leg severed from the knee down. He was a pilot. He must have been like nineteen-twenty. Another German's leg was severed from below the knee. I cannot say I knew everything, and I was most curious about what the Germans were like.

We thought that the Germans were bad because they fought against us. I entered their room to find four young men that would make anyone's heart sink. They too were human beings born to human parents. They were so well mannered and intelligent. They didn't know our language and we theirs. I don't know what their names were, child, German names are so hard to memorize. Hans is the name of my friend whom I met at the hospital. We're still friends. We speak on the phone. My daughter speaks German, so she translates for me whenever I need to tell him something.

We were interested in the Germans. Those four wounded Germans were put in two hospital rooms, two in each room. These rooms were interconnected. After ten o'clock, people started flocking to see the Germans. Everyone in Telavi, every person holding an office, was curious to see what they looked like. We weren't the only ones. Mainly representatives of national security agencies and militia came to see and interrogate them at night. We were wild enough to come stare at them, but these decent people... The

Germans were so furious... People just waltzed into their rooms... They were like, "Is this a circus or something? Do we look like monkeys to you?" They were proud young men. They would cover themselves with blankets, not even showing their faces.

I was assigned to their rooms as a nurse. I was entitled to enter their rooms and do my business whenever I please. We had [in Russian] interpreters, teachers, who translated from German. That's how we communicated. They wouldn't touch our food. To be honest, we rarely had white bread. We mainly ate rye bread. We did have a lot borsch though. When we served them borsch, they replied [in Russian], "Dogs eat that in our parts." They had chocolate bars in their pockets. I wonder how they managed to keep them after being frisked. German aircraft crews were rumored to sustain themselves on chocolate bars when flying. They still had four chocolate bars each after having been searched. They ate that chocolate for four days. They refused to accept anything else, even water, saying that they would rather die than live like that. They refused to eat because they wanted to die, thinking that nothing good awaited them there. Later, one beautiful day, at two in the afternoon, they were transferred to Tbilisi.

I don't remember what year it was. Trains kept arriving one by one... I cannot even describe how many people like our wounded Georgians we received. They had long beards that they had grown while fighting in the war. They were full of fleas, child, and these fleas followed them everywhere like a chain on a pig's neck. Fleas were so many that they crawled over one another. We had a barbershop at the hospital. There were a hundred people in the barbershop. We led the wounded into the bath, washing them and treating their wounds. Professor Antelava and Professor Bughadze arrived from Tbilisi. I was formally assigned to them to work on organizational issues. Lena from Akhaltsikhe, Keto Chibalashvili and I worked on surgeries. We had a multitude of patients. Then our soldiers were discharged from our hospital three weeks later, and it became a hospital for captives. Trains packed with Germans arrived. Don't even ask me! Legions of captives... They were too many.

We went to the station one time to help patients disembark, and we ended up in a car accident. My thigh was nearly severed, barely hanging on my buttock. I spent three months with my leg in a cast. I was placed in our hospital [shows her wound]. I was pro-

hibited to have children. I'm missing a hipbone and half a buttock. That's what makes me angry. So many people receive support from the state, while I who have been through so much am neglected.

Captives were brought to the hospital one time, all Germans. I remember how two Germans freaked out at the hospital entrance. We had a barbwire, and the captives and we were supposed to be separated by it. The captives called one of the doctors, grabbed him and threatened to strangle him. Nurses rushed to his aid. I don't remember if it was Keto or Tamar. It's been fifty years. Ramishvili, the head of the police, yelled, "Nurse! Hurry up!" This doctor rushed outside and the patient followed him, intending to catch, strangle and kill him. Ramishvili fired from the balcony and killed the German. He may have killed him on purpose, to intimidate other captives, so they wouldn't do the same. After that incident, we never went anywhere without being escorted by police.

One way or another, we treated the wounds of these captives. There was no room left for them. We received thousands of people, all Germans. Our hospital rooms were very small. At first, we put one soldier per bed. Then we put beds together, placed mattresses over them widthwise, sewed the mattress hems together, and put eight people on two mattresses. They were given two pillows, so they used them alternately. We worked like soldiers, not like doctors. We worked day and night, tirelessly. That's how we took care of the Germans before they were transferred to Tbilisi.

I mentioned my German friend. I met with him here in the hospital. This is how it happened, child. There are many good people out there. There are many good people and there are many bad people. There were young men, students in the hospital who spoke more or less good Russian. I didn't know their language and they didn't know mine, yet I was supposed to get their names, measure their temperature, ask them how they felt, and tell them what medication they were to take. We selected leaders in each hospital room, young patients who served as our right-hand people. We didn't care if they were captives as long as they spoke Russian.

That friend of mine whom I mentioned was my captive, my patient, and hospitalized in my room, the room assigned to me. I would grab medications, put them on a cart, roll into a hospital room and have this captive accompany me. I would pick a medication, pronounce the name of a given patient, and he would repeat

the name in German. Then I would have him give medication to the others, and then we would go to the next room, and then another room, and so on. We were assigned to our own particular rooms. That's how it worked.

His name was Hans. He was my age, like seventeen or eighteen, not older than that. Then he was transferred to the recovery department. Those who were about to recover were selected and taken to work at construction sites. The Germans have built so much, both here in Telavi and Tbilisi... I'm tired...

This German came here recently, planning to take me with him. I didn't go. I cannot afford to go there, child, and buy if I came to like something. What was I supposed to do? Tell him I didn't have any money?

I was no longer friends with that German! [Appalled] I was scared of the Germans! I don't know why... The little boys made fun of me, "Kato's boyfriend's here." [Laughs] The boys, my fellow villagers, were unbearable. I was very close with little children. They're big boys now. When they learned that Hans had arrived, they asked me, "Aunt Kato! Aunt Kato! Please invite us over." "Kato's boyfriend is coming."

It's surprising that I retained my friendship with him, and so did he... We severed all ties. I didn't know his name or last name. All I knew was that I had a German, my right-hand man, who helped me in every way whenever I needed him. After he left the hospital, he went to work on construction in Tbilisi where he became friends with Zura Oshkhneli, the head of children's television. Zura is my friend.

When Zura was little, the Germans were building a soccer stadium. You know children love soccer. Zura too happened to play on that field. He had a very good grandmother. This grandmother of his sent food to that German [Hans] through Oshkhneli. She knew he played soccer with her grandson and felt sorry for him because he had no food. This German became friends with Oshkhneli. Children love attention, don't they? He rolled the ball to Oshkhneli and he kicked it back. Oshkhneli was later arrested because of it. He was, of course, interrogated and prohibited from going to the stadium again.

This German man too left Tbilisi when prisoners of war were exchanged. Hans too went back to Germany. He was exchanged.

He did remember, however, that his nurse, Kato, was from Telavi. He probably wrote it down or something...

Zura and I nearly had an argument over this issue. He used to tell me, "Aunt Kato, he loves you so much, doesn't he?" "Son, leave me alone." I would never marry a German. There were enough local young men wooing me. High-ranking people wooed me. I never got married, however, as I was prohibited from having children. I was involved in a car accident and lost my hipbone. My bosom is barren. Why would I get married?

I had enough to hang in there. I had no reason to get married. If I've learned anything, I try to pass it down to my three nieces and nephews. I hope it will be appreciated. One of the nephews is an engineer and the other is an economist. I had them graduate from school in Moscow. My niece has graduated from a medical school. She worked in Russia. Then she fell in love with a young man from Tbilisi. She returned to us with a child. She had been married for two or three days when the war broke out in Zugdidi [the Abkhazian war]. Her husband was drafted. He was captured during a raid. For days later, his body was delivered to Tbilisi. My niece was left a widow.

Hans memorized my name and last name. He went back to Germany and got married to a German woman who passed away in 1961. They had one child. That man has been looking for me ever since. He looked for me throughout Tbilisi and all Georgia, turning to press publications and sending letters everywhere. He wrote, "I was a Telavi Hospital patient. I had a nurse called Kato Kiknadze. As far as I know, she's from Telavi. Please help me find her."

Then he engaged German press publications. German titles got in touch with newspapers and magazines in Tbilisi. Mary Zaalishvili, a Telavi editorial reporter, and I were neighbors. Mary told me one day, "Aunt Kato, a note has arrived to the editorial office. It's written to you. Maybe you should drop by." "What note? Is that my obituary?" She laughed, "No. No." "Who wrote the letter?" I inquired. "A young man, Oshkhneli," she replied. Our editor-in-chief asked me some questions at the editorial office. A letter was sent to Zura who, in turn, sent a letter to Germany. Later (probably when Zura grew up and it became possible to communicate with foreigners) Zura once again made friends with that German man. He matured and found a job. He visited that German man in Germany, staying at his place for a week or so. I don't know. It's his business. That



German was quite a rascal. He got movies from Zura and screened them in Germany. At any rate, they became friends. Zura arrived in Telavi one day and brought the Deputy Minister of Education, a Kvarchakhia, or whatever his name was. I don't know. I was on duty when they paid me a visit.

It was, if I'm not mistaken... It was like fifteen years ago. They pulled up in a foreign car. I was told, "Kato, a car has arrived here, some men sitting in it and asking for you. Girl, is that your boyfriend? Should we go with you? There may be something in it for us too?" They made fun of me. I didn't know Zura at that time. I only knew his last name. I didn't know him in person. "I'm the one who sent a letter to the editorial office," Zura told me, "This is the Deputy Minister of Education." He had a device and he showed me that German man on that device.

I told him, "I don't know who the hell this is." Child, I was sixteen when I met him. Fifty years had passed. How was I supposed to recognize him? I said, "I don't know him." I really didn't recognize him. Then we went into the hospital entrance hall, and he put down his device. I invited my friends, "Girl, come on over here." Zura turned on the device. Then he asked me, "Ma'am, do you mind if I get in touch with this man in Germany and inform him about you, so that he can come here? What do you think? Will you be able to host him?" "Son, a guest is a gift from God. Of course, let him come. When will it happen? I'll need some time to get ready."

Almost two weeks later, I related this story to my family members and one acquaintance in Telavi, a man of like seventy. His son-in-law was a physician too and his sister-in-law was a pediatrician. I gathered them all. I wouldn't do anything without them. I wouldn't make that step on my own. Strangers were about to arrive from Tbilisi and abroad. What would my family say?

My son-in-law told me, "Don't worry. We the men are still around. We won't let anyone near your home. He won't spend a night at your place or come over for any other purpose. We have households of our own. We have available space. We'll feast and have fun."

I delivered a turkey, chickens, vegetables (I wouldn't buy it all at the farmer's market) and about sixty liters of wine. I wanted to make sure we had enough. I took it all to Telavi and stored it in the kitchen. In the meantime, my nephew showed up, "Aunt Kato, Natela Basilashvili is on the phone. She wants to talk to you." Natela Basi-

lashvili was the wife of our neighbor in our village. She lived right off the path to the stream. I asked, "What's the matter?" "People have arrived from Tbilisi. They want to see you. They're in the museum. Please come over here." I told my relatives, "Alright now, it's all on you now. Prepare a meal. I'm not coming back here. It's three or four of you women. Have it all done. I'm on my way to the museum."

Natela looked at me when I got there. I looked very tired. I had baked two batches of bread. "Oh my, Aunt Kato! How will I take you to the Germans looking like this? No way!" She pushed me in the shower and washed me... I kept telling her, "Natela, I'm running late." She put makeup on me, tidied me up, and applied something on my eyelashes. I told her, "Natela my dear, I've never applied anything on my face. Don't make me go meet with strangers looking like this. Girl, I cannot!" She said no. She had a daughter, a good, solid woman. She gave her in marriage recently. Her daughter walked arm in arm with me on one side, Natela did the same on the other side, and so we left.

We arrived to find people, people, and more people! Everyone was waiting for me, curious who this Kato was. They all wanted to see me and how that German captive and I would meet. A multitude of people had gathered, the whole town of Telavi... As I arrived, someone said, "This is Kato." Oshkhneli laughed. They all started staring at me. As I arrived, people yielded for me. I went into the museum. That man [the German] hugged and kissed me. I kissed him back. I asked him how he was. He replied in Russian.

Once in the museum, Telavi residents, bless their heart, organized a whole meeting for us. Four or five hundred people were present. They took pictures of that German man kissing me when we met. We remembered how we met at first.

He had gray hair. I sort of recognized him. He didn't look overly familiar to me though. I vaguely remembered him. He did recognize me. He, my dear, had been through captivity, and his family had passed away, and many other things that have an impact on a person.

Then we went to the museum. I showed him the room where he was placed. He cried so bitterly, so inconsolably. Then he visited all the hospital rooms one by one. He was surprised that Telavi had such a treasure and such a good museum. He took pictures of everything.

We went home and sat at the table. They were very tired and so was I. I invited a few friends. I didn't have any more room.

Otherwise, I would have invited like five more people. We had a good time. These men feasted all night. I, to be honest with you, fell asleep. I was tired. They occupied two rooms. We made beds for them and offered them to pick a room.

We got up the next morning. I took them to Gremi [a sixteenth century architectural monument]. Looking from the outside, Gremi looks like a bare cliff. From the inside, however, it's an open field. It had a big yard too. It was quite a sight. He took pictures. We went to Napareuli from there, passing through Kvemo Alvani and over Zemo Alvani, and arrived in Alaverdi [a sixth century monastery with an eleventh century cathedral]. He took a lot of pictures in Alaverdi, and so did Zura and the other guys. All they did was take pictures. From there we went to Tetri Giorgi [a church dedicated to Saint George], from where we went to Shuamta [an early medieval fortress], and then to Akhali Shuamta [New Shuamta, a sixteenth century monastery], so that he could become acquainted with Georgia. Then we got home after it got dark. We spent the remaining four days and nights feasting. They left on the fifth day.

He gave a tall German book [showing the size with her hands]. I don't read German. My niece does very well. It was about him and had pictures of people close to him.

My niece kept this book. We too took pictures when we went to see churches. We had a good time. He was a visiting foreigner, so I didn't want to...

He came here once again after that. I don't remember when. Letters keep coming and coming... He sends his regards. What else can he write? He cannot write to me that I'm his lover! I send my regards to his wife, Marisha. His wife's name is Marisha. He remarried. He has three children. He recently had a grandchild, a girl.

He, this man, owns a recreation park. I don't know where he is from, what city he lives in. I don't know, child. He mentioned some cape. He has a beautifully arranged and glorious garden in a forested area. He said, "That's where my resort home is." He invited me, but I didn't go. No, child. I didn't have enough money, so how could I go? They offered me to pay for my trips there and back home. I refused though. You can pay for my trip all right, but what if I want to buy something? What if I come to like something? Death is all around me and it's killing me. I have arrhythmia. My whole side is about to burst out. It's no joke. I have been bedridden in Telavi for three months.

## **JULIETTA CHIKOVANI**

Born in 1926

Interviewed by

ZEYNAB PHILIPOVA in Batumi, 2003

I was born on March 8, 1926, in the village of Gonio, Batumi District [Western Georgia]. I am a Lazi [an ethnic group native to the Black Sea coastal regions of Turkey and Georgia. The Lazi language belongs to the Kartvelian family of languages, which also includes the Georgian, Megrelian, and Svanetian languages.] by origin. My father worked in... His name was Rafik. When the first collective farm was established in Gonio, my father became its first chairman. You know what kind of chairman he was? When he led people to the collective farm plantation (my father built the Gonio tea plantation), he had them ride in a cart or the back of a pickup truck, so that they wouldn't waste time walking. He used to tell his people, "I'll fetch everything you need from the store." He delivered everything they needed right where they worked. He didn't want them to remain idle. They even had a cafeteria. He loaded a wagon with pots with food, had them delivered to the plantation, and fed his people. There was another farm in Gonio where Russians worked. Father's merit was appreciated. Father had the first mobile phonograph that had been awarded to him as the chairman of a leading collective farm.

I was eleven when father was arrested in 1937. For a year, it was possible to send him parcels in jail. Then we found out that he had been transferred to Tbilisi and executed by a firing squad. I remember well when father was arrested. He came home on his lunch break. Father usually went to work early in the morning and came home at noon to have lunch. On the day he was arrested, father came home, had his meal, and that's when officers of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs arrived. They led him into a room. He carried a gun, of course. In those days, chairmen of collective farms and the likes were given guns. They confiscated his gun and led him outside. A concrete bridge leads out of our home. At that time, however, it was a wooden, not concrete, bridge. While on that bridge, he turned around and cried to my mother,

“I’m absolutely innocent but... I think I’ll return. If I don’t come back, I have to ask you for one favor. No matter how needy you may be, please don’t leave my children bereft of education.” We all received education.

My mother learned from someone that somebody had told on my father as though he had been a Trotskyite and disliked the authorities [Trotskyites, supporters of Trotsky, the main opponent of Stalin]. My father was not Trotskyite! As it turned out, some Turk had told on him. My mother never said who exactly he was, though she knew. Our neighbor, Osman, was also arrested. He saw father in jail. That neighbor was released unlike my father.

I was thinking recently. If I request my father’s picture from the archive, will they have one? The collective farm had one but the chairman of the collective farm burned it out of fear, probably. The pictures that had been left in Turkey were also destroyed. They probably feared that my father’s being a Trotskyite would hurt them too. Generally speaking, taking picture was rare event here. Our documents read Bataloghli as our last name as we were naturalized Turks. Father had relatives in Turkey. You know there is Sarpi [a border village on the coast of the Black Sea, on the border between Turkey and Georgia], right? His relatives remained on the other side and wound up on the territory of Turkey.

One of my father’s brothers worked here in the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs. His name was Osman. His wife and children were over there, at the other end of Sarpi, that is, Turkey. He was here though. As he worked for the People’s Commissariat, he was frequently sent on business trips and traveled back and forth. He was dispatched here and there. After the borders were closed, however, he became unable to see his family. My Osman’s (it was still possible to cross the border) brother-in-law would come visit with us from over there, that is, Turkey. He was slightly schizophrenic. One beautiful afternoon, Osman left our place after having had diner. His brother-in-law ran after him, shot him with a rifle and killed him at the Gonio Castle. Of course, he was arrested, and probably executed eventually, needless to say. My uncle was buried near the Gonio Castle. I don’t know exactly where. Women didn’t go to the cemetery in those days.

My father was fluent in the German and Tatar languages. He used to socialize with his relatives on the other side. You know

how these relations worked until 1936? A pass was issued to you, and then you went to the border, and met with your relatives at the border. You could exchange a word or two where the guards stood. That's how it worked until 1936. My mother had a pass. My father never went to the other side. We owned a piece of land on the other side. My mother went there and delivered whatever she harvested there. In 1937, when the Trotskyite affairs started, my father had already been executed, so who would let us go over to the other side? Who would give us a pass? Everything was prohibited, no incoming or outgoing mail, nothing was allowed.

I don't remember now what years it was when official visas were introduced. My mother traveled there once with such a visa. She went there for ten days. Almost all her brothers-in-law had already passed away. She went there to see their children and wives. Prior to that and after 1937, there was no mail exchange or anything.

When the borders opened, people were overjoyed because one half of extended families were on this side, while the other half lived over there. Mutual visits were restored, though it was still necessary to have a pass. Now people receive passports and travel back and forth. Maintaining relations has become easier. You know what I mean? When somebody's relative passes away there, someone from here will travel in the morning, mourn the dead, and then come back home. It wasn't possible back in those days. I'll tell you later how it worked then. I'll tell you how we mourned when my aunt passed away.

My mother had nine children. She was seven months pregnant with my youngest brother (he worked as a pharmacist. He has passed away) when father was taken away. My youngest brother had never seen father. My father had been telling me since I was a child that I was to become a medical doctor. Mother did her best to provide us all with education. Three of her children became doctors, including me; one became a pharmacist, one an agrarian, and one an engineer. One of my sisters was a teacher. She was in charge of a kindergarten. The other sister was a nurse. She was the only one without higher education. We the children were very hard-working... Mother remained single (she raised us on her own after father's arrest). In summer, when the school was out, during our summer holidays, we worked in the collective farm for three months, carrying our works equaling 350 workdays and also

helping mother run the household. When I graduated from middle school in 1943, in the middle of the war, I was summoned as a graduate and appointed a mathematics teacher in the Sarpi eight-grade school. I spent two years working there. In the meantime, my sister Hidda (who has passed away) graduated from middle school, and we both enrolled in the Tbilisi State Medical Institute in 1945.

I graduated from the institute in 1951 and started to work as the head physician of the Khelvachauri District Hospital [Western Georgia]. I worked there for thirty months. Then I was transferred to the Makhinjauri Hospital as the head physician [Makhinjauri, a town in Western Georgia]. I worked there for thirty months as well, and then I got married, being no longer to continue to work due to my duties at home, so I transferred to the position of a physician in the Makhinjauri Orphanage. At the same time, I also worked as a physician for tourist facilities. In 1962, I started to work as a phthisiologist at the Tuberculosis Hospital, working concurrently as an emergency physician for ten years. I've also worked as a physician at the Fourth Directorate Resort Facility [Fourth Department, the foreign military intelligence main directorate of the Soviet Army General Staff of the Soviet Union]. I periodically underwent qualification improvement courses. I have undergone phthisiology qualification improvement courses four times [phthisiology, treatment and study of tuberculosis]. The Military Commissariat referred me to Moscow one time, and then the Fourth Directorate sent me to the Institute of Therapy for a month. Thus, I have undergone qualification improvement courses six times. I am presently employed by the Batumi Tuberculosis Hospital.

Now I'll tell you about our family affairs. My two sisters and two brothers have passed away. One of the reposed brothers was a pharmacist and the other an engineer. One of the sisters was a physician and the other a teacher. My cousins and nephews, they all work. They are all married. Four of us nine siblings have passed away. There are only five of us left. My two sisters presently live in Russia. The rest are here.

When my father was arrested, my mother was nonetheless held in high esteem as a mother of many children. She was even awarded the honorary title of Mother Heroine. Everyone on the collective farm was happy when we worked there. When we went to enroll in schools of higher education, the head of the collective

farm provided us with a letter stating that we were members of a large family with a small income. We were required to pay for the first year of our tuition, and this letter exempted us from having to do so. My mother was highly esteemed. Whenever people had guests for dinner (there were no diners at that time), they always came to us despite the fact that we didn't have a father.

Teachers who came to Gonio to work always stayed in our home. Since there was no man in our family, these teachers, all women, wanted to stay with us. Mother was very happy that these teachers felt at home when staying in our home. Mother did both man's and woman's jobs. While she was running errands, these teachers looked after us. Mother never charged them... We were never neglected. These visiting teachers were Kuparadze, Dzidziguri, Ramishvili, Khomeriki, and Khazaradze. Kuparadze was a natural science teacher. Mother considered her a family member. One time, after she returned from summer holidays, she had some of belongings stolen at the railroad station (she dressed very well. Her two brothers went missing in action. She lived in Kachkhi, near Kutaisi [Western Georgia]). When she got home, she had nothing, save the clothes she was wearing. Mother gave her everything and said, "Here, Nadia, pick what you like." That woman was from a well-to-do family, yet she needed things before she would go back home, right? Later, years later, after her brothers had gone missing in action (it was 1944) her mother found out that her sons had died. Nadia's mother said that her daughter was with Tatars [teaching in the district populated by residents of Turkish descent or naturalized Turks] and went to the Ministry of Education. She received a document releasing Nadia from her duties and letting her go back home. When she arrived to take her home and met with our family, she exclaimed, "I went through so much trouble for nothing, saying that my daughter was among Tatars. Look what how wonderful these people are!" One visiting physician wooed Nadia. Mother really wanted Nadia to get married but Nadia wouldn't. She left. We maintained correspondence. Later, since she had no brother and wouldn't get married herself, she adopted her cousin's child. That cousin of hers had already been killed in the war. She adopted her cousin's daughter. We maintained close relations, and she even invited us to that girl's wedding. We, of course, accepted the invitation. My husband, brother, and I went



there. Then her father passed away, and we went for the viewing. Then her mother died, and we went too. When we were studying in the institute, she sent us goods just as mother did. When school was out, we went to her home and, especially in fall, when time came for vintage, helped her harvest wine grapes.

The remaining visiting teachers got married. There was one beautiful teacher, Melkadze. She flirted with everyone. There was a certain Dolidze... To make it short, all visiting teachers got married except for Nadia. They got married in their native parts and left. We kept correspondence with Nadia to the end. When her letters stopped coming, we learned that she had passed away.

Our relative from my mother's side supported us tremendously. They helped mother in every way. Mother had one brother in Turkey. Mother had uncles there too. They wound up on the other side after the borders were closed, so they couldn't come back. None of our relatives from father's side lived here. They were all on the other side. In summer, I often traveled to visit with my grandmother (mother's mother) in Sarpi. It was all populated by Lazis. The Lazis are good swimmers. They learn how to swim in childhood. It is said that the Lazis learn how to swim before they learn how to walk. Swimming and fishing were well developed in Sarpi. My friends went fishing too. One of them, Khorava, has passed away. He was a fisherman. Nodar Dumbadze [(1928-984) a Georgian writer and one of the most popular authors in the late twentieth century Georgia] wrote a book about him called *Don't Worry, Mother*. Ali Khorava was two grades ahead of me. He and I participated in plays in childhood. We danced Georgian dances together. Ali never continued his education after having graduated from middle school. He loved making jokes. Yet, at the same time, he was very intelligent, generally speaking.

Fishing was prohibited in Sarpi during the war. It was impossible to go asea, probably because it was so close to the sea. The prohibition was gradually lifted. Fishing was highly developed in Sarpi. Fishing had picked up in Gonio too. In the past, however, no one was occupied in fishing. It was mainly developed in Sarpi. Sometimes people sneaked onto this side from Turkey probably because our parts abounded in fish, or something. You know how it worked? In the evening, we would travel to Sarpi to swim in the sea. I didn't know how to swim. I just splashed in the water. I hid behind

the rock called Kvaomkhazi, the one you see on your way to Sarpi. It was already dark when we got started on our path back home, so we lit torches and made our way home. The roads in Sarpi were not as good as they are now. We fetched some food from home and had it in Sarpi (you know how yummy food tastes after swimming).

My siblings were good swimmers. As for me, I don't know, I didn't have the time for swimming. Mother used to leave me in charge of the children. You want to know how I did my homework? I was the eldest child, so mother used to leave me to look after the cradle. I was expected to get up early in the morning. If mother had to leave early, I was supposed to send my siblings to school. I had to milk the cow. We had water buffaloes too, so I had to milk them as well. I had to feed everyone. I was expected to send the children to school first and then go there myself. I remember how I forgot to take off my kitchen apron a couple of times. I went to school with the apron on. We used kerosene lamps for light at that time. We were provided with electricity at night and a blackout was enforced. We would light up one lamp and all the children would gather around it. I never managed to do my homework at home. I only had the time to study during breaks between classes when other children played and had fun. There weren't many textbooks either. By the time the mathematics teacher finished writing exercises on the blackboard, I also had finished solving them. I was good at math. I was interested in natural sciences and history. I hated learning things by heart. I studied my lessons while still in classes. I was an all A student. When my relatives, young boys, came to my home, they took off their school backpacks and asked me to do their homework for them. I answered, "I have to mix cornbread dough, so I'm sieving flour." "We'll sieve it for you. In the meantime, you can do our homework." If I refused to do so, they pulled me by the hair, beat me up and run away.

When I went to school on the morning the war was declared, I couldn't find a single teacher there. Everyone had been drafted the night before. We had one mathematics teacher, Sonya Khomeriki, a very good teacher. She worked as the principal and head teacher. She was later appointed the head of the District Department of Education. When I received my middle school diploma in 1943, representatives of the Local Council [of the Communist Party] approached me and said that I had to report to the Department of Education.

I was delivered there to find out that my teacher was the head of the District Department of Education. She told me, "You'll go teach in the Sarpi eight-grade school." I was surprised, "Teacher, I just graduated. How will I handle teaching?" She replied, "Don't worry. You'll manage. We'll help you." And that was it. I went to work. I had worked for less than six months when she arrived to monitor my performance. She attended my class. I led the class. Of course, I prepared for every class. My uncle, late Ali Tandilava, my mother's blood cousin, was the school principle at that time. He had graduated from the Linguistics Department of the Tbilisi University. Thus, [Sonya Khomeriki] attended my class and was very pleased. She told me I had to enroll in the Batumi Pedagogical Institute, which I did. I finished the first semester. In the meantime, my sister Hidda graduated from school and we both traveled to Tbilisi.

I remember one thing. My mother was a very hardworking woman. Before I graduated from school, in 1943 when the war was on, my cousin had a wedding. My mother took my two sisters with her to buy some fabric to sew clothes to wear to the wedding reception. Somebody snitched on her, saying that she had been trading in goods. My mother always purchased and kept large amounts of fabric, reasoning that her many children were growing up fast and would require a lot of clothing. Mother was arrested. It happened in 1943. At about 7 pm, representatives of the militia arrived. We should have known better and asked them to show us their documents. They turned our home upside down, checking every corner. My mother had a variety of fabrics, about nine hundred yards of it. They confiscated everything, those fabrics, my father's clothes and shoes, everything. They left nothing in the house after the search. My mother's sister, Keto, and Hidda came over and told us that mother had been arrested. We called my uncle, Akhmed Tandilava. He was an engineer.

We called the militia. We were told that mother was under arrest and we shouldn't worry. What could we do? When she was interrogated, mother said, "I am no profiteer." She told them how much fabric he had purchased and from whom, "I have little children. That's why I bought so much fabric and saved it." All fabric traders were summoned and they all verified that she was their customer and paid for the goods. My uncle wouldn't wait for their interrogation to end and turned to one of his classmates who

worked in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (I forgot his name), “Man, Fadime was arrested.” “Why?” My uncle explained. This friend had my uncle write a telegram to Stalin, explaining everything in details, how many children my mother had, and so on. The telegram was sent at ten in the morning. My mother was released at five in the evening. [In Russian], “Release immediately; Return belongings,” that’s what the order read. Mother was released and we reclaimed everything that had been confiscated. In 1943, severe need reigned. Of course, it would be so as it the war had been raging for two years. Mother exchanged all her fabrics into corn and other groceries. That’s how we lived. Later, of course, we too started to work, and our family grew stronger. Mother never gave up working hard even thereafter.

After father was arrested, we wouldn’t eat for a week. We only cried. The cow bellowed, the hen clucked, yet there was no one to look in our direction since, as they put it, we were Trotskyites’ children. Then mother said, “No one will take care of us. We have to sustain our family on our own, through our labor and hard work.” And so we did. Then some of us got married, starting to build our own families, and life went on. Mother was a very active woman. She had cows, poultry, and an orchard. I educated my brother, Kako (who has passed away), taking him to college and sending him money. When father was arrested, our land plot was not confiscated. We had a tiny land plot, less than an acre.

I will tell you about our last name now. Our documents read Bataloghli, a naturalized Turkish last name. We went and reclaimed our family name. Varlam Chikovani, a prison warden, scrutinized all documents, everything. He knew my father. That’s why helped us reclaim our family name. You know when we reclaimed our family name? In 1949. I was already a college student. We had searched for our family name earlier, of course. Search for family names (search for one’s roots and background) was a widespread phenomenon at that time. Here’s what I want to say about our background. Anyone who is more or less familiar with history knows that we the Lazis were the first Georgians. We reclaimed our family name. We arrived in Tbilisi to continue our education as Bataloghli. Everyone said about us, “Tatars! Tatars!” We didn’t look like Tatars at all though. By the way, I would like to say something here. When a school opened in Sarpi, the residents of Sarpi

were the only ones to learn pure Georgian. Now because people from other regions settled in Sarpi (from Khulo and other places), the language of the children in Sarpi has changed a bit. Yet, those children who are pure Lazis have retained their language.

We spoke mainly the Georgian and Lazi languages. Our neighbors, however, those who live in Gonio, spoke Tatar (Turkish) only. Some of them, those elderly, just a handful of them, still speak Tatar. Otherwise, everyone speaks Georgian nowadays. There aren't too many Lazis in Gonio. There were only two Lazi families in Gonio, the Khalvashis and our family. The rest were people with ancient roots, Acharians.

We even had our first names changed. When I went to the civil registry office, Kemkhadze worked there who had a lot of respect for my mother. She told me, "Child, I have to pick a name for you." I asked, "What are you going to name me?" "I will name you Julietta." My name used to be Sultan. It was 1948. She picked names for our whole family. Changing names was mandatory but we too wanted to do so. I was about to change my last name, I might as well have changed my first name too. Since we matured and became acquainted with history, we wanted to have Georgian names. We referred to my brother as Kako (who has passed away) from day one. His formal name was Muhammad. He retained the name Kako to his death. We never called him Muhammad. We always called him Kako. Kerime was the name of one of my sisters. She later changed it to Ketevan. Hidda has always been Hidda. Another sister, Rusiko, used to be Fadime (the same name as my mother's. My mother's mother was also Fadime, so my sister was given the same name). Then there was Nedime who later became Nelly. Kemkhadze picked all these names. Then there were my brothers: Shukri who is Shota now, then Muhammad. Then there was Liana who used to be called Aisha. She was followed by Jevdet who was renamed Vakhtang. Vakhtang was the head of a pharmacy. It was said that Hidda was a foreign name, so she remained Hidda.

One of my sisters, Rusiko, got married in Russia. She and mother exported tangerines for sale to Russia one time and met a police lieutenant in the marketplace. It was my future brother-in-law. This man took our address from my mother and promised to pay us a visit and spend his vacation with us the following summer. My sister was good-looking. He liked her. He paid us a visit one

time and then again. Next time my sister went [to Russia] to trade, he wouldn't let her go. That's how my sister, Rusiko, got married. She lives in Kharkov now. She has a perfect family. That man, my brother-in-law, quit working for the police and became the director of a taxi company. Then my two brothers graduated from college in Kharkov. Two of my nephews and nieces graduated from college in Kharkov too, one of them from the Pharmaceutical Institute. My sister, Rusiko, never received higher education. She learned how to sew and became a tailor. There was Podgorny in Moscow, so my niece, Rusiko's daughter, Ira, was his daughter-in-law. She married Podgorny's grandson [Nikolai Podgorny (1903 –1983) was a Soviet Ukrainian statesman during the Cold War. He served as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine and as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council].

That's how things have worked out. Some of our relatives live in Kharkov, some in Moscow, while others in Turkey, on the other side of Sarpi. My cousins live on the other side of Sarpi. I was there when the new road was opened. I spent like ten days there. I visited with my cousins. Out of my uncles, only my mother's brother was alive at that time. I stayed there for ten days. Let me tell you one story.

My mother's brother who went to school there before the borders were closed engaged in the Communist movement in Turkey and got himself imprisoned. After having been released from prison, he became a lawyer and came here when traveling was once again allowed. His last name was Tandilava, and Bekhri was his name. When he arrived here, he delivered information about Georgian last names, i.e. who descended from one or another family. Then he went to Makharadze [a city in Western Georgia]. He was invited by local Georgians. Bekhri opened Georgian elementary schools in Turkey. These schools were located in Murghuli. You know where Murghuli is located? It's past Hopa [a city in Turkey], it's like a settlement. Our relatives delivered textbooks to him, and he too took some with him. Then he passed away. After we learned about his repose, we went to the other side of Sarpi. He lived in Ancyra. He was buried on the other side of Sarpi, and we attended his funeral.

You know that Sarpi is divided into two parts, Sarpi on this side and Sarpi on the other side. Like I said, Sarpi on the other side is on the territory of Turkey. When my aunt died and we took her body to the Sarpi cemetery (the cemetery can be seen very

well from the other side), everyone on the other side came outside too. We were prohibited from communicating with one another. We couldn't invite one another either. When my mother cried and mourned here, everyone on the other side heard her. The houses on either side were located so close to one another that one could see from which house in particular the coffin was carried [to the cemetery]. Those on the other side didn't know that my aunt had passed away. When my mother cried and mentioned the name of the one she was mourning, our cousins too started to wail on the other side. My aunt had sisters on the other side and her daughter was married there. They all ascended a hill on the other side and cried. We lined up on this side of Sarpi. My mother cried, and we, her nine children (those on the other side knew that mother had nine children), gathered around her. When they saw us gather together, they counted us, and told my mother as though wailing (it was prohibited to talk or communicate in any other way), "One of your children is missing." "That one (she was talking about my sister) got married in Kharkov." That's why they asked about the ninth children from the other side. They only counted eight. My mother let them know that my sister was in Russia.

Residents on the other side of Sarpi mainly speak the Lazi language. Some of them, those who keep in touch with Georgians here and there, still know a word or two. There were no essential differences between the Lazis and the Acharians in terms of customs, except that the Acharians followed Muslim tradition closer and [their women] even wore veils. The Lazi women didn't as much. It all depended on the family however. Since many teachers frequently stayed with us, mother followed Georgian customs. Mother was a progressive woman. She was crazy about education. She would pay her last penny for her children to be educated. She was very eloquent. My husband used to tell her, "Had you lived in our time, you would have made a good lawyer." Mother was not educated. She was intelligent in general. One of mother's brothers was a lawyer, the other, Akhmed, an engineer. Mother's sisters were not well educated, of course, one having graduated from middle school, the other from elementary school. Mother was 19 when I was born. She got married at eighteen.

Here's how my mother's marriage came about. My grandmother in Turkey (mother's mother) bore the same last name as we, that

is, Bataloghli, while mother's last name was Tanduloghli, the same as Tandilava. The father of my grandmother (mother's mother) was killed by my father's brother, that is, my great grandfather from mother's side was killed by my uncle from father's side. In order to prevent bloodshed, my mother was given in marriage to my father, and this way the clans reconciled. Back in those days, marriages between cousins from mother's side (mother's niece or nephew) were prohibited, while between cousins from father's side were allowed. It was customary among the Lazis as they were under Turkish rule. It was a Turkish custom. It doesn't sound surprising to me anymore because, as I heard, worse things happen in America. The Lazis were few on this side of Sarpi. Probably that's why they didn't want to give a woman out in marriage to anyone else. Later, after the border opened, it became easy to travel back and forth, and now girls from the other side get married here and vice versa. They get married to Lazis, of course. They have a different creed though. No one follows the Muslim teaching on this side of Sarpi anymore.

There were teachers in our village who taught the Lazi language. My school was housed in the Japaridze residence (as a result of dekulakization, this house was confiscated and accommodated collective farm office at first) [dekulakization, the Soviet campaign of political repressions, including arrests, deportations, and executions of millions of the better-off farmers and their families in 1929-1932]. Everyone spoke good Russian in Gonio. Russian lived on the collective farm, so everyone picked the Russian language pretty well. As soon as the war broke out, people migrated and settled in Gonio, as well as in Makhinjauri where I wound up living after getting married.

My father-in-law was from Chakvistavi, Khala [Western Georgia]. He had bought land in Makhinjauri earlier. My father-in-law was illiterate, so he made an X mark on the property deed when he bought the land. This document was executed in Tatar. The Litvinovs were the previous landowners. The Posinkovs also owned lands in Makhinjauri. The garden where the Makhinjauri Orphanage is located is called the Posinkovs Garden. I worked in that orphanage. There were Russians in Gonio too, but they mainly settled there after the evacuation. I learned the Russian language from them. Gonio residents spoke Russian better than people in



Sarpi. Mainly the Lazi language was spoken in Sarpi, pure Lazi, and even those who learned Georgian spoke perfect Georgian. They spoke Turkish too, mainly the elderly though. My uncle (the one who was a school principal), Ali Tandilava, my mother's cousin, was fluent in Turkish. He was very [in Russian] tough. He had graduated from the University Department of Linguistics in Tbilisi.

I had never been to Tbilisi before I went there to continue my education. After I graduated from high school, my sister, Hidda, and I left for Tbilisi. My schoolmates too went to Tbilisi to pass the entrance exams. There were Otari Narakidze (a Lazi man, the director of a hospital, who later married my sister, Hidda) and Akaki Dolidze, also a Lazi. Narakidze had graduated before me and had been working in Khulo. These men went to Tbilisi in 1945 to learn the news. They came back and asked my mother to let her daughters go to Tbilisi with them. Mother was reluctant for a moment, "How can I let my girls go?" "Auntie, you have nothing to worry about. They'll be safe with us. They'll just take the exams and come back home." My mother was not their aunt, but they called her so out of respect. Thus, my mother let us go to Tbilisi. You know what our neighbors told my mother when we were about to leave for Tbilisi to pass the exams? "What you think you're doing sending your girls there? They'll become prostitutes!" My mother thirsted after education. She herself had finished only four grades. She spoke Turkish, and, of course, Lazi. She had learned Georgian from the teachers who stayed with us. She spoke some Russian too. She had learned it from the Gonio Russians. Thus, we went to Tbilisi to pass the entrance exams. I had graduated from school two years earlier, while Hidda had just graduated that year. We arrived in Tbilisi, submitted our applications. Competition was severe... A multitude of demobilized people... Fifty-five people competed for one admission.

There were no local human resources in Gonio. Shashikadze was the minister at that time. He was later transferred to Tbilisi. Manelishvili worked as a gynecologist in Kobuleti. Chichinadze was a student when we enrolled. Manelishvili too was a student. They were two grades ahead of us. The medical staff in Achara consisted of Georgians only. Gigineishvili and Takhtadjan worked in our parts; only a handful of local staff. We went to the institute and passed the entrance exams. We received two Bs and two Cs. Competition was enormous. We didn't know if we made it or not.

The chairmen of the admission council assured us, “You who are from the seacoast villages will be admitted by all means, as an exception.” Relying on this promise, we decided to go back home right after the exams, before the final results would be made public, because we spent fifteen nights in iron screen beds, sharing one blanket. We rented a room. Mother didn’t follow us to Tbilisi. The boys, Otar Narakidze and Akaki Dolidze, rented separate rooms for themselves and us.

So we left. We made friends while in Tbilisi, so these friends told us, “As soon as the results will be announced, we’ll send you a telegram and let you know.” We arrived in the village. On August 31, we received a telegram. It read that neither of us had been admitted. Can you imagine? We went to my uncle, Ali Tandilava, the school principal.

University professors, including the late researcher Arnold Chikobava, used to come to Sarpi in summer and study the Lazi language. I turned to my uncle, Ali Tandilava, explained the situation and asked for his advice. He answered, “I’ll give you a letter and you take it to Arnold Chikobava.” We went to Chikobava’s apartment the next day. He read the letter. He was happy to see us. Our story, however, saddened him. He asked us in Lazi, “And what am I supposed to do with you?” He spoke with us in Lazi. He said, “Have a seat.” We sat down. He gave us a pen and a piece of paper. He had us write a statement. He signed a mediation letter for us both. Kandid Charkviani was the Secretary of the Central Committee at that time, while Kvachadze was the head of the Department of Schools of Higher Education. Kvachadze told us, “Now give your address, so we can find you, and stay put.” We lived on Kobuleti Way. At five in the morning, we were picked up, put in a jeep, and delivered to the Central Committee. We went to Kvachadze’s office. He gave us our documentation that read that the two boys were admitted to the Department of Medical Treatment and we the two girls to the Department of Pediatrics. Needless to say, we were beside ourselves with joy. We went back home. Our neighbors couldn’t believe we enrolled so easily and free of charge. Bribery was practiced in those days too, not widely though because competition was high, and when competition is high, it becomes harder to be accepted. It didn’t take as much money as it does today.

Inscription on the back of the picture:  
To the future doctor and Lazi woman Sultane with best wishes  
Arn. Chikobava 26.IV.1949



Arnold Chikobava

Then, of course, after we commenced our study, Chikobava monitored us closely. He frequently inquired how we were and how we were doing. In 1947, it snowed heavily, and on November 7 we went home for two or three days for holidays. We had a lot of tangerines and oranges to harvest, so we reasoned we would help our mother and decided to stay. It snowed heavily, so we couldn't go back. Esadze was the Chairman of the Regional Committee [of

the Communist Party]. He was very pleased that we were in college. He told my mother, "Good for you! You're the first woman to have sent her children to school!" So Esadze called my mother and asked, "Why are these kids here?" "What can I do? I have tangerines to pluck. They may go rotten," answered my mother. "No way! Let them go back to school! I'll send some people from the collective farm to help you." My mother exclaimed, "How can I send them in such weather?" "A motorboat is about to depart tomorrow. Have

them board it and leave." We boarded the motorboat in the morning. We were halfway there when we started vomiting, so we had to turn around and go back to Gonio. We got up early in the morning. After it stopped snowing, we made it on the evening train. In the meantime, we fell behind in our study, right? We had a horrible course, anatomy, and we had a strict professor too. We missed so many classes. Esadze called the anatomy professor and asked him to hold extra classes for us. So we compensated the missed classes, and I didn't have any more problems thereafter. Students from our parts were held in high esteem. Our studentship consisted of home and study. We didn't have the time to have fun and chat, especially since we were from a coastal region and Lazis at that. We were monitored too, how we did and excelled in studying. Strictness was applied in school. There was only one medical school in Georgia at that time. Now schools have multiplied. Some youths came to my hospital recently. They are local Batumi graduates.

And you know what? They attend school in Batumi only in theory, while they know nothing in practice. Back in my days, in-patients were in the hospital, and a rookie physician was expected to examine them and be on duty. Today there are no in-patients in the hospital; they just cannot afford it, so how is a student supposed to see a patient (especially a tuberculosis patient)? There's no way tuberculosis patients can afford in-patient treatment!

These schools that have multiplied lately are low quality. And you know what else? Youths are used to money, that is, they're used to receiving good grades in exchange for money, while we couldn't miss a single class. If we did, we had to make up for it, either be on duty in the hospital or some other way. Money or the likes wouldn't do. No way! We had study hard.

Then my sister got married. She had a child while still a student. We rented an apartment. During the exams, we took the baby to our mother, so we could prepare and pass our exams. As soon as we graduated, we came back here and started to work.

It would be a good idea to stay in Tbilisi. I couldn't, however, because mother had to take care of so many children, and she needed help, right? That's why I didn't stay. Half of my fellow graduates defended their scientific degree theses. My brother-in-law didn't defend his thesis either. I always encouraged him to defend his thesis. Otar was a very good student.

In 1954, I was appointed the head physician of the First Makhinjauri Sanatorium. I worked there for a year and then got married. I worked even after getting married for like eighteen months, and then I had a child. That's why I quit at the end of March 1956.

When my future husband, Hassan Gorgiladze, came to meet with me, he pretended to be someone wishing to receive sulfur bath treatment. His uncle worked in the hospital as the guard, and I became acquainted with Hassan through his uncle's help. Then he proposed to me, of course. He didn't know me until he came to my workplace. He and his uncle entered my office and the latter said, "Ms. Julietta, I'm going to give you in marriage." I didn't pay attention. On the other hand, I liked my future husband. He was a handsome man. They left. A month later, he came with his friend and asked me to give him a promise. He hadn't showed in a month. I told him I had no intention to get married yet. Then he told me, "I'm going to Russia now to trade in tangerines. I want us to

sign a marriage certificate.” I answered, “I’m not ready to get married at this point, and I have a mother whose permission I need to ask.” We went to my mother. I explained the situation to her. Mother told me, “You’re an adult. It’s up to you to decide.” After she told me these words,



Julietta Chikovani with husband

I went to my brother-in-law (my sister’s husband whose name was Jemal). He worked for a newspaper editorial office. He was elderly brother-in-law. I explained everything to him. He told me the same thing, “You’re an adult. It’s your call.” Then, of course, I promised him [future husband].

Betrothing infants in the cradle was not practiced among us the Lazis. A girl was given in marriage after she turned seventeen or eighteen. My sister, Hidda, had a boyfriend in college, Otar, and she got married while still a student. Keto was first to get married. She got married to Jemal. I got married after Hidda. I was wooed in Tbilisi, while studying in college, yet I didn’t consider getting married at that time. To make it short, I promised myself to my future after I asked my mother’s and brother-in-law’s opinion. In less than fifteen days, he came to me again and repeated his proposal. He started like this, “You’re young and you work here. We shouldn’t just start dating. It’s better for us to get married.” It was August 1954 when we signed a marriage certificate. He told me from the very beginning, before we got married, that his wife had reposed and he had a four-year-old child. I wouldn’t back down because of that. I grew up in a large family. I love children. Since Hassan told me about it straightforwardly, it must have been my destiny. The doctor Soselia was with me. She was my maid of honor. We didn’t have a wedding reception. Mother paid us a visit together with our relatives. When I had a child, mother came over and brought me presents. My elder daughter, Zhuzhuna [stepdaughter], became part of my family. She

was brought up by my mother-in-law. Then, of course, I had a child. The child was born on June 11, 1956. There was no differentiating between the children though. The newborn child was so gentle. She didn't know what a mother meant. She had never been breastfed. She was a sickly child and reposed soon thereafter. Zhuzhuna referred to me as mother, of course. Then I educated her. I had her graduate from vocational school. I got her a nurse's job. I gave her in marriage, and she has a very good family. I've never made her feel that I was her stepmother. She knew, however, that her mother had passed away. When I first entered my new family, my mother-in-law introduced her to us and told her, "This is your mother, your new mother." She's been calling me mother ever since. The daughter of Hassan's cousin, a girl of Zhuzhuna's age, paid us a visit one time. She then rushed back home to tell her father, "Zhuzhuna has a new mother. I want a new mother too." "May God hear your words," her father joked. After Mzevinar, I had Merab. He was born in 1956. Then I had Zuriko in 1958, followed by Merab in 1960. My mother had nine children and I had five.

I went to work early in the morning and came back home late at night. My father-in-law was simply perfect. After having risen in the morning, I tidied up the place a little, sweeping here and there. My father-in-law would say, "You cannot be late for work," and would help around the house and add, "If you have guests from Tbilisi, or someone arrives to inspect the school, you have to take them to the restaurant. You probably won't join them in the restaurant, but you have to pay for their meal. Don't embarrass yourself."

Before I got married, I took my bother to school. I made sure he enrolled and always sent him money. Now I was married when my father-in-law called me one time and said, "Don't make him feel that you can no longer support him. You keep sending him money from your salary just like you used to." That's exactly what I did. He never complained about my sending money to my brother. Quite the opposite, he always said, "Send the kid some money by all means." Kako never forgot how I supported him and after my children grew up, he himself always supported me. My in-laws didn't work. My father-in-law passed away two years after I got married. My mother-in-law took such good care my children that I never had to take them to the hospital. They were never sick. There was no baby food or anything at that time. She would tell me,

“You just bring some food for them; I’ll take care of the rest. I know when to feed them and how. You can relax.” I never took maternity leave. My mother-in-law took good care of my children. We helped others too. We had a vast tangerine plantation. I worked. It didn’t interfere with my job, of course. I built a house too. I wanted to be financially independent.

My husband’s family was not overly large. He didn’t have many siblings. I only had an unmarried sister-in-law and a brother-in-law who had been discharged from the army. When my brother-in-law got married, we split. We built a separate home and lived independently.

I left home in the morning, then came back from one to two in the afternoon, and then worked again until eleven or even midnight. My children learned how to be independent so well! When then the elderly children went to school in the morning, the younger fixed tea on their own, drank it, washed the dishes, and themselves went to school. I never sat down with my children to teach them. They would sit down and do their homework on their own. They graduated from high school without me having been summoned to the principal’s office and receiving complaints about my children not studying well or anything else. Only when they graduated and received diplomas, I went to their school. Now my children reprimand their own children, “Mother never helped us do our homework. Why do you need our help?”

None of my children became a physician, yet I wanted it so much... Competition in college was too severe though...

When Ushangi graduated from school, he started to work and then moved to Tbilisi. He enrolled in the Technical Institute and worked at the same time. That’s how he graduated from the institute. Zuriko was a corresponding student and graduated from college in Kharkov. He too is an engineer. Merab graduated from the Railroad Engineering School in Tbilisi. I wanted Mzevinar to become a doctor. I intended for her to enroll in a medical school for physicians after she would have finished school for nurses. She was kidnapped at the age of fifteen, however, and my plans were ruined [kidnapping a woman with the intention of marrying her was widespread in Georgia]. My three daughters-in-law are all doctors.

I have been working here in the Tuberculosis Hospital for forty-two years now. The number of patients has increased in the past

three years. Drug addicts and alcoholics are hopeless. They cannot look after themselves. There are fatal cases as well, not in large numbers but still. Living conditions also contribute to that because patients take medications only, while having no food and being unable to take some rest. A couple, husband and wife, recently checked in. They're both sick. It seems that the woman had been ill earlier. She must have been unable to take care of herself. People don't have enough nourishment, and the medications provided to us by Germany are not enough. We have an agreement with Germany. According to this agreement, Germany provides us with medications free of charge. You know what causes tuberculosis? Tuberculosis mycobacterium. These bacteria penetrate the system. In order to recover, a patient must have adequate living conditions. When I started to work in the hospital, the situation was better. There were patients, of course, and medication was free, but people had better living conditions. In what way better living conditions? We used to send our patients to the sanatorium. Patients who suffered from acute processes were first hospitalized free of charge. They underwent treatment for a couple of months, recovered more or less, and then we sent them to the sanatorium. Two-month stay at the sanatorium was free of charge. Life became harder gradually, and now we no longer have free admissions at the sanatoria. Only in-patient treatment remains free of charge. All the sanatoria in Abastumani have been annexed [Abastumani, a climatic spa in Southern Georgia. Abastumani hyperthermic springs have long been used in the treatment of tuberculosis]. There is only one hospital left, a two-building hospital. A patient must be in very bad shape for us to refer him/her to this hospital. He/she must release bacteria, must suffer from infiltration and have a cavern. Only those patients who are in such shape may be referred to the Abastumani Sanatorium or Hospital. Abastumani is good due to its best air.

I wasn't really into phthisiatry before I came here to work. There were no other openings at that time though. The ministry appointed me as a phthisiatrician. I wasn't interested in becoming the director of the sanatorium either. I only wanted to become a physician. I constantly worked. After the sanatorium, I started to work in the orphanage and then simultaneously worked as a doctor in a resort facility in Cape Green [a resort in Western Georgia]. I worked part-time and needed a specialty, so I went to the Min-



istry of Healthcare and from there I was sent to the tuberculosis hospital. After having come here, I also started to work part-time in the Fourth Directorate Resort Facility. I started to work in the children's department. The children's department was isolated to a certain degree. I worked in the department of four and five-year-old children. Then I improved my qualification and transferred to the department of adults. By the way, I never feared that I would catch tuberculosis. Needless to say, I observed hygiene rules. Imagine that I was working so hard and, in addition, went to Beshumi for two months in summer, working as a physician at the Beshumi resort facility [Beshumi, a resort in Western Georgia]. I was getting paid in both places because there was a lack of doctors at that time. No one wanted to go to high mountainous regions. The minister was the one to appoint me. I served the huge Batumi Resort Facility. I've even delivered children in pastures (where cattle are herded in summer. Highlander Acharians have homes there). There were experienced midwives who assisted me. I also performed simple surgical operations on patients. There were no set work hours. I was constantly working. These pastures were a couple of miles apart. I went there too. I've gone to the pastures even at night, by torchlight. I earned people's respect everywhere I went because... You know how local women are there? They didn't want a male physician. On the other hand, since I was a woman, they lined up early in the morning, and I ended up giving vaccine shots and all kinds of things. By the way, they loved to have shots given to them. They used to tell me, "Shots work on us better than oral medication." In addition, I was in charge of a pharmacy. Whenever I ran out of medications, I traveled from Beshumi to Khulo and replenished my supply. I had to do it at least twice a month. There was an occasion when I was called to treat a patient in Khulo, so I travelled from Beshumi to the village of Kedlebi. The patient was an elderly woman. I traveled there on horseback.

My children too spent all summer in Beshumi. When they grew up a bit (in the fifth or six grade), I sent them to a sanatorium in Tsemi [a resort in Eastern Georgia]. The Tsemi Sanatorium provided both education and leisure. That's why I kept my children there for whole three months. I had my children get used to independence from the very beginning. My husband and I drove to see them once in fifteen or twenty days. My husband too worked constantly. At

first, he was the accountant of the Makhinjauri Collective Farm. Then he worked in a wrapping factory. Then he retired.

My husband never prevented me from working. He wasn't jealous like some. When I was in the sanatorium, I often had to work till late at night, like eleven or even midnight. I wouldn't go home until the vacationers didn't go to sleep and until I didn't have everything tidied up. He never complained, not even once. It's been fourteen years since Hassan passed away.

I've witnessed so much in my life, have I not? I witnessed the revolution now [the Rose Revolution], and I am very pleased. Why? Was I supposed to be happy with Aslan? What good has he done for Achara? Achara is nearly swept away by water. He could've built one hydroelectric station instead of stealing billions, right? What did he do in Batumi? He renovated only the seashore, while the remaining streets are flushed by water when it rains.

My whole family was in opposition to Abashidze [Aslan Abashidze, a Georgian politician and the head of the Achara Autonomous Republic, Western Georgia, in 1991-2004; resigned as a result of pressure from the central government and mass opposition rallies in 2005]. They started messing with my eldest son, Merab. He was on the side of the National Movement, so his director started messing with him and demoted him. He works in the railroad system. He was demoted for a month and then he was reinstated.

My little grandchild saw the president's picture somewhere. I don't know who gave it to him. He asked his father to post it on the wall, so he did. He was in the first grade. Then he drew a picture of Aslan in a cage, saying that he would be arrested. He did it before the revolution. The village kids, first and second-graders had Saakashvili's pictures. What could we do with these little kids? We couldn't prohibit them? First and second-graders walked around with sticks in their hands and posters on those sticks with the inscription "Long Live Misha". They cried out, "Misha! Misha!" I wondered what they were doing. And they yelled "Down With Aslan!" People were overly agitated at that time. The supporters of Aslan invited us to Choloki, but no one went, not one person [The bridge over the Choloki River (the main link between Achara and the rest of Georgia) was blown up on May 2, 2004 by the ousted leadership of Achara. Acharian leader Aslan Abashidze called the decision to blow up the bridges in the Kobuleti border region "a preventive

measure against the possible attempt of military action by the central Georgian authorities.”]! There was one young policeman and he encouraged people in the village to vote for Aghordzineba. No one listened to him! We were told at work to go to the Choloki. We didn’t however. I said, “Yeah, when pugs fly!” There were two young physicians who were pushed to go there, yet they wouldn’t go either. None of our employees went there.

We have hope. He started well. If no one gets in his way, he’ll probably do something... Now if he reclaims Ossetia... [Talking about Mikheil Saakashvili]

I wasn’t scared at all during the revolution. I wouldn’t wait in defense. Whenever I boarded a minibus, the supporters of Aslan [Abashidze] and we constantly argued. And I was not scared at all. I should have gone where they stood, near the university, but it wouldn’t be proper for an elderly woman like me to show up there. I said, “I’m an old lady. I cannot go there!” My whole family, my extended family, however, was there in its entirety.

Now these Georgians living in Turkey must be beside themselves with joy! And locals must be happy too. Look how traveling back and for has been simplified. It’s free now. It wasn’t so in the past though! Especially since Saakashvili went to Turkey, they must be overjoyed!

It is said that Aslan is Albanian. Oh was he vengeful! One look at face was enough to read his hatred for everything. He sent his daughter to the people. Was he expecting them to applaud?

Everything has changed nowadays. It is rumored that the Ministry of Healthcare will start layoffs soon. You know what the deal is? What’s with these layoffs? If pensions don’t increase, how are these people supposed to live? I’ve worked all my life, and how much will my pension be? During the Communists, my salary was 120 rubles plus my pension. Now I receive my father’s pension too because I have been rehabilitated [meaning that her father has been rehabilitated].

All my children have families of their own. Back in those days, it was possible to export tangerines. You delivered it and picked up your money. It’s no longer so. There is no income either. My orchard used to yield seven or eight tons, yet now there’s nothing. No one buys wholesale tangerines anymore. Life has become harder, yet I remain hopeful.

## **ANIKO KHAREBASHVILI**

1921 – 2008

Interviewed by

MARINA TURASHVILI in the village of Almaty, Kakheti  
Region, 2004

I was born in the village of Shilda. I was given in marriage in Almaty at the age of seventeen. I had a husband for four years. After four years, the war broke out, and he went to the war [World War II]. He went to the war never to return.

I worked in the collective farm. I worked so heroically. I worked double shifts, to say the least. I delivered food to the threshing floor. We worked day and night. We were given credit for both day and night. I was awarded a medal for that. Then I was summoned and awarded another medal. I received three in all. When my child grew up a bit, however, he played with these medals as though they were actual money and eventually lost them. I don't know. I didn't pay attention. I didn't take these medals seriously. I even said when I was awarded, "I would rather have some wheat instead of these."

There was starvation and poverty during the war. We the women dried up wheat on the threshing floor at that time. Then we weighed it and sent to Zagotzerno (a wheat production agency). I cooked meals and fed combine harvester operators. If I stayed there until evening, the heads of work units delivered meals. If not, I left and delivered goods to prepare a meal for the following day. We operated three combine harvesters and three tractors. I hosted all our people.

My husband sent me letters from the war. I even have one letter saved. I don't know where my daughters-in-law dumped the rest.

He constantly wrote in his letters, "I know life is hard now. Sell everything you have. We will buy everything back once I return." He never did return however.

I cannot recall when I received a telegram stating that my husband had gone missing in action. The last letter I received from him was sent from Vladivostok (the Far East). Then I received a telegram about him having gone missing. I was twenty-six at that time. I had one child. We were given two pounds of flour a person.

As the son of a soldier fighting in the war, my son was given two extra pounds. Bread was baked in the collective farm and given to us. I received my ratio at work, while my son received his here. He would go to the office in the evening where they ran a bakery. Valya's mother-in-law and her husband worked there as bakers. They had a list that read whose children were eligible for bread, so they did give out bread. And my son would go down there and pick up his share.

I had a mother-in-law who took care of Guram, my son. I stayed at the threshing floor even at night. There was no way I could pay due attention to him.

My son lacked everything, clothing and food, yet he made it somehow. God wouldn't let him die. Back in those days, there was no variety and abundance of food as it is today. Nevertheless, my son didn't grow up to become a thief or a spy. To make it short, he supported himself through hard work. When he was about to be drafted, he asked me, "Mom, do not let me go there without a license [driver's license], so I can serve as a driver."

I took him to Telavi [the capital of the Kakheti Region, Eastern Georgia], had him graduate from a driving school and acquire his license, and that's how he went to serve in the army. I went through trials and tribulations raising my son. I worked in the collective farm. I have even done seasonal work in the wine cellar. Then I started to work in the hospital. I spent twenty-six years working in the hospital [in Russian] kitchen. Then the hospital was shut down, and I was left unemployed. My coworkers kept nagging me, "Let's go to Kvareli to work" [Kvareli, a city in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia]. They did go there. As for me, however, it was hard for me to travel there. In addition, I would end having to work eight hours in the kitchen and cook. It would have been very hard. I spent my entire youth in labor. I haven't spent a single day in idleness. Whatever I earned I gave to those needy.

It's only four of us living who have witnessed the war. Everyone else has passed away. There were Lesto's mother, Emzar's mother, Aniko, Pacho's daughter Tamara, there were many, but I don't remember them. Everyone worked during the war. A man assigned from Kvareli went door-to-door looking for women who didn't work.

Two of us sneaked out of the threshing floor one time. Goodness, we needed to shower, as we were filthy. God as my witness,

I have to tell the truth. We suffered from filthiness and fleas and lice on top of it. I would heat the water and tell the girls, "Come on. Pour it over me." That's how I washed my head. Then we would go down to the Alazani River to wash our bodies.

Thus, two of us sneaked out of the threshing floor one time. I don't remember now who the other person was. Although Mikha's daughter, Makvala, was younger than we, she used to work together with us. We sneaked out, and when that man from Kvareli saw us the next day, he told us, "Had I caught you on the way here, I would've beaten you up."

Alas, I had a strong voice back then. I was strong and I had a say. I was the wife of a Red Army soldier.

I was given a medal of selfless labor. I sometimes worked out the volume of labor equaling three hundred shifts a month. I worked till late at night. We would get some sleep at night and were up as early as sunrise. If I went home after hours, I wouldn't have enough time to get there and then get back to work. Both Shakriaani [a village in the Kvareli District] and Turistsikhe [a place where Almaty residents own land lots] are far away. So we spent day and night there. My mother-in-law raised my child. She was alive at that time.

We all lived together, my mother-in-law, brother-in-law, his wife, my son, and I. We had two rooms. My son and I lived in one room, while the others occupied the other. They look after my soon when I was away. They fed him if he went short on food. They would never let him go hungry.

Whenever I was where food was served, I refused to eat, so I could take some with me and feed it to my son. How could I eat and leave my son unfed?

I logged everyone's meals. I was in charge of food.

My son was very modest. I don't like children nowadays. They are not well brought up. My son, on the other hand, was so modest. Even when I would go visiting with my neighbors and they would serve a meal, he would never come near. He worked as [in Russian] an assistant in the collective farm, with Piruza Shukoshvili. One day he left his to-go meal at home. The [in Russian] told him, "Go ask your mother to give us a couple of pounds of bread and half a pound of cheese, so we can eat."

He obeyed, yet he never came to me. There was an oak tree nearby, so he lay there all day, hungry. He didn't want anyone to say his mother was feeding him. After he went back, Piruza asked him, "What took you so long? Where is the bread?" "You think I would go there? So that the



Aniko Kharebashvili with husband

drivers would then say that my mother fed her son?" He was so modest. He never came to me and spent all day hungry.

If nothing else, I always had bread and cheese at home.

When my boy was drafted, I had health issues, undergoing treatment. You may not believe me now, but I had a weird dream. I saw Tatar women coming to me and saying, "You owe us." Then I saw Leki women coming to me and saying, "You owe us." I answered them in my dream, "Goodness, I have nothing right now. Please forgive me. I will repay you all after my son comes back from the army."

Then I went to my neighbor before my son returned, and I said, "This is the kind of dream I saw. How will I go to the prayer house when I don't have any flour or wine? All I have is two chickens. How will I go there with just two chickens? My sister gave me a hen and I also have a rooster. I but a hen and a rooster."

My neighbor's husband overheard me say that and turned to his wife, "Tamar, fill up a bucket with flour and give it to Aniko." As they say, God provides for the poor.

Tamara gave me a bucket of flour, so I could bake kada [traditional Georgian sweetbread] and bread. Now I had no wine, so I had to get it somehow. I went to Irakli's grandmother. She lived nearby. Houses were not fenced in those days as they are now. Up the road, at the edge of the village, lived the daughter of Buziaant [the nickname of her father]. Nobody lives there now. The children moved to live down the road. So that woman was there, and I told Nina, the wife of my brother-in-law, "Nina, I want to bake some kada. I have no walnuts. Could you give me some?" She replied, "I'm about to go work in the vegetable patch," and nothing else.

Yet, I had already made the dough. I didn't know what to do. Then I mentioned to Irakli's grandmother, "I wonder when Nina will come back from the vegetable patch. My dough will go sour." When Buzia's daughter heard it, she told me, "Child, don't you worry about a thing. I'll give you some walnuts." She left, filled up a bowl with walnuts, and brought it to me. She gave me walnuts alright, and I got flour from someone else. I baked kadas and bread but I had no wine. They carried wine from Irakli's earthenware vessel into theirs. I mentioned that I had no wine and Buzia's daughter's husband told me, "Aniko, don't you worry. I'll give you some wine." He got up and gave me over a gallon of wine in a barrel. I got wine, baked bread and kadas, and I had chickens, so I went over to Gogia and told him, "Gogi, I need to go to White George [a holy place dedicated to Saint George in the Telavi District]. I have to go amid this need, and you've got to take me there. Even if it costs twenty or even twenty-five rubles, I can give you two pounds of corn."

Gogia agreed to take me there. On the other hand, I reasoned, "How will sit on the [in Russian] tachka [a two-wheel cart pulled by horses and used to transport goods and travel]?" There were no automobiles at that time. Of course, I would prefer to ride in a car if there were any! I went and told Irakli's grandmother, "Godmother Keka, you have to go with me." "Of course, I will." She wouldn't refuse me. We made ready, and out of the blue I received a woman who had come to visit me from the city. She lived near the farmers market, so I stayed at her place when I would take goods for sale. Then she became the godmother of my grandson, Shakro.

This woman arrived and I told her, "Oh Nina, perfect timing! I have to take you to a holy place."

We prepared everything. Next day was Friday though, the eve of the Dormition of Mary [August 28 according to the Gregorian calendar and August 14 according to the Julian calendar], a fast day. I couldn't go there in the middle of the fast and slaughter chickens. My neighbors told me, "If you go, you'll have to stay there two nights, so you can slaughter chickens and then come back."

So I stayed. I didn't go. I told my guest, "Come, it's the Dormition of Mary. Let's go to Gremi [a village in the Kvareli District]. Let's light candles at least."

So we went. My guest had so much fun. She even danced to the drums and accordion. We lit candles and left. We left. One of



my sisters lived in Gremi. Her husband caught up with us and said, "Where you think you're going? Come back right now." I told him, "I'm fasting today. Why should I come back?" "I said come back here right now!"

He made us go back. My mother met us there. She boiled potatoes and told me, "Girl, if you're fasting, these potatoes have no grease, so you can eat them" We dined. Then I mentioned I was planning to go to White George. I said I had made a vow in my dream, so I absolutely had to go.

My sister had a big yard with peppers, eggplants, beans, and tomatoes. She had everything in her yard. She asked me, "What are you taking there?" I explained everything to her. She left and picked eggplants, beans, tomatoes, and greens for me. She also gave me some oil, and I left. I brought everything home and cooked it in oil, as it was a fast.

I was about to go to the holy place the following morning. There were four of us, and these two chickens wouldn't do. I told myself, "I have to get add some meat in Telavi by all means." I didn't have any money though. I went to Maria. They used to call her Tzkiria's [her father's nickname] daughter. She's no longer alive. She used to loan money. I borrowed some from her when I was in need. Sometimes she charged interest and sometimes she didn't. She felt sorry for me. I approached her and said, "Maria, you have to loan me sixty rubles. If I survive, I'll return those six rubles (I owed her) too on top of these sixty. If I die, no big deal, you'll have to suffer a loss." That's what I told her.

Her mother told her, "Go, child, and loan her that money. Even if she doesn't give it back, loan it to her still."

She went and brought me sixty rubles, God rest her soul. I was going to buy meat while passing through Telavi. Just two chickens wouldn't be enough for all these people.

We arrived at home, prepared everything, and left. The sun had already risen when we passed through Telavi. I told Gogia, "Stop the cart. I need to get to the farmers market."

I went there and bought four pounds of lamb. We had tomatoes, so I figured I would cook it with tomatoes. We went straight ahead. We arrived, and Keka told me, "Child, let's go around the church and light candles. Gogia will start a fire and that woman will prepare a meal."

So we did. We walked around the church and lit candles. I didn't know how to make the sign of the cross. Keka grabbed my hand, "This is how you do it." That's how I learned to make the sign of the cross. Then we left. We brought a nun [a woman in the church who cut the visitors' kadas and blessed them] and had her bless our meal. There were festive tables on either side, and people kept inviting Gogia, God rest his soul, "Come, have a drink." "No. I'm in a hurry. The night is going to be very dark." He wouldn't go until our table was blessed. He wouldn't partake of other people's meal first. We had our meal blessed. Then we started to dine. We spent that night there, and Keka told me the following morning, "Come. We have to bid White Georgia farewell."

We left, walked around the church again, lit candles, this and that, and then Keka told me, "Ask White George not to come for you. Tell him you'll go yourself when your time comes."

But I didn't say it. She, may God bless her, made me say these words, "White George, keep me well. Give me the strength I used to have. When my son comes back from the army, I will come to you with six men, with musicians."

Keka advised me to say a different thing, yet she, may God bless her, made me say something totally different. That woman laughed at my words. We joined the others, had [in Russian] a snack and went home. I felt so well afterward. I started to work in the hospital after that. I felt so elevated and no fear whatsoever! I would get so scared before, I wouldn't leave home after dark. I would have hallucinations. This is how I got well.

Imedo's sister worked as a nurse in the hospital at that time [the hospital was opened by a certain Stein, a German physician, in the eighteenth century. After his repose, his descendants were in charge of the hospital. After the war, a hospital of infectious diseases was opened there. This building is still there, though it has been remodeled as a home for persons with limited abilities]. There was a big pear tree in the hospital yard, and we helped Tevdorashvili, the head of the hospital, collect pears when he arrived to take them. This man arrived and I too was there. Imedo's father told him, "This is my daughter-in-law. Maybe you have an opening, so she may work for you." "We'll see. Have her come over."

Two days passed, and Tevdorashvili (he still lives in the village of Shilda) summoned me. He had told Imedo's sister, "Have that

woman come over to see me.” I was on my way there, and Ghapoli’s [her father’s nickname] daughter, Valya’s mother-in-law, asked me, “Aniko, how long do you plan to stay there?” I answered, “It depends. If I like it there, I’ll stay. If not, who’s there to keep me from coming back?”

Whenever I started a new job and I didn’t come to like it, I quit immediately even I would end up starving to death. Keka told me, “I’ve known you for quite a long time, and I know you’ll never keep a steady job.” She was teasing me. I replied, “If anyone treats me wrong there, I’ll leave right away. There’s no way I’m staying there.” I was young and married, and I was afraid someone would treat me wrong. If someone did abuse me, I would leave right away even if they offered me a million.

To make it short, I arrived and told the doctor, “Doctor, I cannot work as a cleaning lady even if I face starvation. If you have an opening in the [in Russian] kitchen, I’ll take the job. If you don’t, I’m out.” “No. It’s exactly in the kitchen that I need someone to work. The lady who works there now has gone blind and I have to let her go. What am I supposed to do if she puts something on the food by mistake?”

Thus, I started to work in the kitchen. I had the best coworker ever. She was very cleanly. She wouldn’t cook unless she had rinsed everything three times. She wouldn’t use a pot unless it was clean spotless. Gee, I met such a cleanly woman, and I was the same way. What else could I wish for? Had she been someone untidy, I would’ve never stayed there. Thus, I observed her for a day or two, and made sure she was good. After having arrived at eight in the morning, this woman would dust everything first. She would look up, making sure there were no webs, and then commenced to prepare [in Russian] breakfast. That was exactly the clean type I wanted to have as a coworker. We got along well and I stayed.

We followed all rules very strictly. The kitchen utensils were not allowed outside the kitchen. There were utensils outside and that’s where we poured food. That’s how our meals were delivered to the patients. It was a hospital for infectious diseases, and that was the only way to do it. That’s how that woman and I worked for fifteen years. She high blood pressure though, so donors would arrive from Kvareli to take her blood. She quit due to health issues. Then another woman arrived. She was from Gremi [a village in

Kakheti]. She too was pretty tidy. She too was unhealthy though. I worked for two years with her and then she passed away, poor soul. I changed five women after that. Gee, some of them were untidy, while others were thieves, stealing food from the kitchen. I used to tell them, “Woman, what are you doing?” In addition, it turned out that they didn’t prepare supper and blamed me, “Aunt Aniko didn’t get produce, so we became unable to cook supper.”

Supper should consist of pasta or pilaf, tea, and eggs. She [a coworker], however, wouldn’t cook it, taking pasta and rice home. She only gave out tea and eggs. She did it all in my absence. I would arrive next morning and the patients would tell me that they had no supper the night before, saying that my coworker blamed it on me as though I hadn’t picked up produce for supper.

I would leave and tell that woman, “Woman, have you no shame? I left you pasta and rice, did I not? Why didn’t you cook it?” Then she would admit, “I wanted to take it home.” “What do you mean ‘take it home’? Patients are complaining, and the doctor will blame me, right?” I told her once, twice, and then I went to the doctor, “Doctor, I cannot work with her. It’s either I or she.” The doctor told her that she could switch to cleaning.

He would get rid of her and then bring someone else. I never come to like the new one either. We had kitchen scrubs, four scrubs, and we wore them only in the kitchen. When leaving the kitchen, we were expected to wear different scrubs. We washed them ourselves. I had my scrubs hanging, washed and ironed. I spent one day off at home. After I went back, I took down my scrub, planning to put it on, and what do I see! The pockets are covered in blood. As it turned out, while I was away, she stole meat, wrapping it in paper and putting it in my pocket. After I saw it, I apologize, but I said, “Which one of you lowlifes did this?”

I said, “I don’t need meat, or rice, or pasta. I have no one at home. I have no one to bring it to!” In addition, I had built such a good reputation with the doctor and the hospital in general that I was assigned thirty patients while having twenty-five or thirty-five while having thirty. Whenever an inspection arrived, they added five patients immediately, so we wouldn’t be embarrassed. When we an inspection over, its members were led straight to the kitchen, requesting the menu right away. If there were thirty patients on the menu, I absolutely had to have it all, rice, butter, pasta, eggs

in correct amounts. They made me weigh everything that had been delivered to me. I received stuffed candies one time. They asked me, "How many do you serve?" I answered, "They're light, so I serve six-seven pieces a person. If I have chocolate candies, they go out four pieces a person." Then they told me, "Count these candies here."

That's how rigid they went on me. I've never embarrassed my superiors. I would rather embarrass myself than them. Thus, I counted and counted those candies. In the meantime, our doctor was speaking with the inspector, and whenever the inspector looked away, I piled up uncounted candies, so I would end up counting fewer candies. I counted and counted, and ended up with seven candies left. The inspector asked me, "What are going to do with these seven candies? Whom are you going to give them?" "These seven candies are my ratio," I replied and laughed. He laughed too. He never told me anything.

Sometimes we baked pastry too. I don't remember how to bake them now [laughs], but we used to make ball-like pastries. In general, the doctor used to deliver [in Russian] shortbread or muffins. If he weren't able to deliver them, he warned us, "I cannot bring pastry tomorrow, so you bake it." We would start baking immediately, so that we would have pastry ready by the following day. One time, when we had an inspection, I found out that I was five eggs short, because I had baked pastry. I did tell the warehouse manager, but he forgot to supply me with eggs. I was short on eggs for a reason but I was short nonetheless. The inspector told me I was five eggs short. As if I didn't know. My doctor burst out yelling at me, "Woman, what's the matter with you! What are you going to feed these five patients?"

I explained the reason and apologized at that. He knew I wasn't lying but kept yelling at me. That was no big deal. They forgave me. Oh! I've been through many a story. Twenty-six years are not twenty-six days.

I gave out meals four times a day, serving semolina porridge, tea, butter, and eggs in the morning. If we were out of eggs, we served sliced [in Russian] sausage. At noon, a slice of cake and a glass of milk were served. At 2 pm, we were supposed to serve dinner. The first course was soup, the second was stew, and the third was thickened sweet juice. It had to be a three-course meal. In the evening, if it was summer, we served supper at 7 pm. In

winter, supper was served at 5 pm. Supper had to contain fried pasta or eggplant, one egg, and tea. We served supper and went home. We never left without having washed all pots even if it were midnight. We would never leave a pot with leftovers in. Pots had to be ready for the following morning by all means. I worked there for twenty-six years without spending a single night there. Even if it were pitch dark, I went back home so enthusiastic and energetic I was. I wasn't scared either walking home. I spent nights at home, rose at seven in the morning, and left for work. I had only one day-off a week. There were two of us working, so one of us was off on Sundays and the other on Mondays. By the way, the doctor told us that one of us was free to leave after serving diner, while the other could stay and serve supper. We both had our own families and errands to run. We had to saw in the vegetable patch or something else. There's always something for a woman to do.

I worked there for twenty-six years. Had not the hospital been shut down, I would have worked longer. Then I worked as a surgery nurse in Kvareli for ten years. I traveled to Sabueti [a village in the Kvareli District] in the morning from where buses departed to Kvareli. If there were no buses to Kvareli, I traveled to Eniseli [a village in the Kvareli District] and caught a ride from there. I worked one full day every three days. It wasn't hard for me to travel. Because of transportation, however, I was late for work. Yet, my superior never reprimanded me, being aware that I had to travel from afar. That man, Otar Bakhutashvili, is still alive. My conscience wouldn't let me though, so I gave him a resignation note and said, "My bus runs late, making me late, so you have to let me go." He tore my note in half and said, "You may come in whenever you can."

I was a kind of woman who couldn't let her superiors down. I was up on my feet all [in Russian] day and night. My young women coworkers would lie down and get some sleep. I was always ready to work. That's why the doctor wouldn't let me go. I was a senior citizen at that time and still I worked. I haven't worked anywhere after that job. I'm all by myself. I have one room, and I sweep and clean it once in a while. If I need to shower, I do so, and if I want to go out, I do so. In one word, there's no one to restrict me.

This home where I live now I built together with my son. When I became this family's daughter-in-law, all they had was a mud-hut with only one room. My mother-in-law, brother-in-law, his wife, my

husband, and I all lived in that one room. Then they brought stones and sand. My husband and I were supposed to build a separate home. My mother-in-law wouldn't let us though, "Look! He and his brother don't want to split up. Why would you force them?"

What was I supposed to do? We just built one room adjacent to the hut and installed a door and [in Russian] windows. In the meantime, a war broke out and my husband left. I was left in this mud-hut all alone. My brother-in-law was drafted even before my husband. Then my husband followed him. I was left with two small children; one was eighteen-months-old and the other six-weeks-old. My elder child died, suffering from a toothache and developing measles. It was incurable back then. Measles ate up my child's gums, and that's what killed him. I took my child to kindergarten. As it turned out, the child couldn't eat, and they didn't even tell me. I would go to work in the morning and come back home late at night. Then I started to leave my second child with my mother-in-law and worked nightshifts as well.

When my boy came back from the army, he decided to get married. I told him, "Son, I don't want an Almaty woman. Let's bring someone from elsewhere." Yet, as it was his desire, there was nothing I could do about it. I only told him, "If that family mistreats you in any way, don't be upset with me."

He got married, and then I told him, "Son, I've pledged to go to White George with six men."

I worked in Gremi at that time. I had money and everything. I bought a sheep on my own and brought it home. I spent some money and got my son a job as a driver in Kvareli after his return from the army. He said, "Mother, Sergia asked me to deliver some cement, so I'll charge him some wine instead of money."

He got the win, I brought the sheep, and I also had bread, so we prepared little something and went up to Osia's to get a ride from him in a cart. He owned a good horse. He wouldn't hesitate, "You don't need to ask. Let's go."

Now I need drums and an accordion. I asked Imedo who had an accordion and played it well. He said, "I'll find a drummer," and brought Lesto [laughs], a young boy at the time. We supped, sang a lot at home, then boarded the cart and left. There were six of us on the cart, my son, my daughter-in-law, the cart driver, the accordionist, and the drummer, six in all. We arrived on the feast of

the Dormition of Mary. We arrived, cooking lamb, setting a table, and starting to feast. We had such a good time that everyone who was there overnight joined our table. We had a good horse, and it was nearly stolen that night. A certain man approached, however, and warned us, "Someone's got an eye on this horse. Be careful."

Carts were lined up along the foot of the wall. Then my fellow travelers pulled out our cart, put the horse on the cart, put some corn in front of it (we had some corn with us), and rolled the cart back, and that was it – no one would be able to steal it as it was sandwiched between other carts. We sat down and feasted without any worries. To make it short, I fulfilled my vow. You shouldn't forget to keep your promises. If you do forget, it will not be good. What keeps me alive so long? Gee, eighty-six years are not eighty-six days. I don't know how I've made it this far. God wouldn't let me die. What can I do?

I have a retirement pension. I receive twenty-five lari. It's enough for me. My nourishment doesn't require much. One loaf of shoti [traditional Georgian bread] lasts me a day. I eat half of it in the morning and the other half in the evening. Bread from the market lasts me even two days. At first, while still working in Gremi and having old enough to be eligible for a pension, I registered for a pension, receiving fourteen lari. Then they gave me eighteen lari. It's been two years since I started receiving thirty-five lari. I learned about it by accident. My neighbor, Tsiala, had it arranger for her, and she told me, "You were too on the list I got at the archive. I just didn't know your father's name."

As it turned out, as a hero of labor and the wife of a soldier killed in the war, I was eligible for a thirty-five lari pension, and I didn't know about it. Later I asked my grandchild (who lives in Tbilisi) to go to the archive and get a document. He did when he had time. He was given [in Russian] a pass (they wouldn't let him in without one), and entered. One woman gave him the log and told him to look through it himself.

It is difficult to browse through these logs, right? It was a log this big [measuring dimensions with her hands] with all people in the region registered in it, showing who was a hero of labor and who wasn't. My grandchild kept browsing and browsing. It takes time to browse it all the way, right?



He couldn't find my name, so he thought, "Maybe grandma lied to me." [He also said] "When I reached almost the end, I saw your name written there. Your name was first and then Tsiala's." She registered for her pension a year before me. Had it not been for her, I would've never found out about it. To make it short, my name was recorded there, stating that I was a lady and a hero of labor. My grandchild got this document ready, had it sealed, had the superior sign it, and delivered it to me. I took this document to Kvareli. I was requested to submit a note from the military commissariat, verifying that I had lost a husband in the war. I prepared everything, and that's how I got my pension.

My marriage was arranged. I didn't even know where Almaty was. I'll tell you the story of my marriage.

We had relatives in Sabueti. Berikaoba [a folk festival celebrated on Cheesefare Monday; is related to fertility] was celebrated, so I went to visit with them. There was a nice family. People called them Gughunaant [a nickname]. They were three brothers. They had two sisters-in-law. The third brother was a bachelor. They often visited with us for name days and just so [the name day of the village of Shilda was celebrated on May 20, while the feast Kokhiaoba on May 21]. To make it short, they arranged my marriage. I was with them on Cheesefare Week, and their sister-in-law told me, "Aniko, let's go outside where everyone is. Let's have a look outside."

People used to watch Berikaoba. We looked outside. There was a big walnut tree with a swing on the edge of the ravine. That's where all the people gathered, the aged and the young. That's where my mother-in-law saw me. I had nice hair and thick braids. I wanted to cut my hair, but my mother wouldn't let me. Thus, my mother-in-law came to like me. She inquired who I was. One of my aunt's daughter-in-laws was my mother-in-law's neighbor. They became involved in the arrangement of my marriage. They came to us three times, my mother-in-law and Otar's mother, yet I refused to give my consent. I kept saying, "Gee, I turned them down, so they're not coming back." One time, my mother's cousin and her daughter-in-law came from Sabueti to make sure my fiancé was a good young man. As it turned out, whenever they inquired about him, they heard the same reply from everyone, "She's not all that good to turn him down. Although they're poor and they have no father, and both brothers were growing up without a father, while

their mother is limping, the young man himself is good. He works as the head of a cattle-breeding farm at that.”

When I saw them come, I felt hot and cold all over. I had too much respect for them to turn them down. There was no hiding. When they arrived, I was upstairs, while the staircase descending downstairs led exactly to the room they were about to enter. I didn't know what to do. I went and hid behind the door. They arrived and started calling me, “Where's Aniko? Where's Aniko?”

They kept looking for me and eventually found me. They looked for me here, looked for me there, but I kept silent, not uttering a word. Then they showed at my doorsteps to have me betrothed, and betroth me they did. They couldn't afford gold, so they only brought me wedding dress fabric and candies. That's how I was given in marriage at seventeen. My mother gave me one chest, a sewing machine, one pot, and two sets of bedding as my dowry.

My brother-in-law got married before my husband. His wife, however, died at childbirth when she was pregnant with their second baby. His first child too died shortly thereafter, so he was left a widower. He remarried one year later to Pua's [a nickname] daughter, Nina. He had no children with her, so when my husband went to the war, he spent everything he earned on my son. We all raised that one child. I cannot recall the government supporting us even a bit.

I grow some onions, some garlic, a little bit of everything. I'm just back from the patch. I have greens there. I took a bucked and a knife with, thinking that I would gather greens, so we could have some. Alas, the cattle have uprooted and eaten it all up. A village woman has to grow greens, or onions, or beans; she must have everything. I'm still capable of working, so I harvest enough to sustain myself. If I become bedridden and they throw me out, so be it. No one has ever done laundry for me, or taken care of family, or obliged me. If they cooked something for me, I ate just a bowlful and nothing else. I work to support myself. I pray to God to protect me from becoming bedridden, to let me live as long as I live, and take me instantaneously when He decided it's time for me to go. I'm healthy at this old age of mine. I have a slight hearing problem and sometimes I get dizzy when I'm overworked, or cook dinner, or do the laundry. I sit down for a while and it all goes away by itself.

I have one son, three grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. Two live in the village, two live in the city, and three are

with Mamuka [the eldest grandson]. None of them live with me, so there's no way they can make me angry.

When I fed combiner operators, I had them sign a document verifying who ate what. I fed thirty people. I had such a good memory that I never neglected a single one of them. I listed everything and had them sign the document on breaks. One time, I didn't know the name of one young man. I had to register him, right? They broke out laughing, thinking that I was kidding them. I got angry. In the meantime, a man assigned from Kvareli approached and I told him, "I refuse to feed this young man from now on." "Why?" he inquired. "Because he won't let me know his name. How am I supposed to register his meals?" The guys cracked up again. This young man said, "Of course, she knows me. She has climbed up our plum tree many a time." He happened to be from Shilda [laughs], one of the Khabashvilis. I said, "Man, of course, I've been there, but you were born after me. How was I supposed to recognize you?"

Combiner and tractor operators were all from the village. After the war broke out and my husband was drafted, all men were reserved, that is, no one was drafted anymore. Warehouse and farm managers, heads of work teams, they were all here. They had drafted enough people and needed no more. Tractor and combiner operators, young men of eighteen-nineteen, were too young for war. We served them. I cooked for them and worked on the threshing floor too. When the women were on a break, they helped me sometimes, separating grains from chaff, and so on. If I had chickens or ducks to pluck, they helped me with that too.

The collective farm was in charge of feeding the workers. I would go to the office and pick up bread, cheese, vodka, wine, everything I was entitled to get, to make it short. Shinago's [a nickname] was assigned to me, so I transported everything in it. If I had to stay at work overnight, I would write a note to Shinago, listing everything I needed, everything he was supposed to deliver the next morning, which he did. And then I cooked. While my younger child was alive, I didn't stay there overnight. After the child passed away at the age of eighteen months, however, I left on Monday and came home as late as Saturday. Staying there overnight counted as an overtime shift.

I have also worked as a wheat weight controller at the threshing floor, and then as a [in Russian] sunflower seed weight controller

as well. After they thrashed corn, I weighed it too. I completed ten grades in the Shilda Middle School.

My husband was in charge of the warehouse before going to the war. He left his keys at home and left. He wasn't even drafted as such. He volunteered. I told him, "Maybe the Commissariat will turn you down." He replied, "Even if they do, I'm going regardless."

Fifteen young men from Almaty went to the war in all. Some of them had wives and children and some didn't. Many never returned. Butkhuza's [a nickname] two unmarried brothers perished there, as well as Gogia's two brothers, Tutaans' [a nickname] two brothers, and... I don't know, some returned but many didn't. They wouldn't draft my husband since he worked in the warehouse and yet he insisted on going. He may have felt his fate had been sealed. I don't know. He just went and left. "We'll be back in a couple of months," that's how cheerful they were when they left. They thought they were going on a picnic. Poor soul, he didn't know he would never come back, leaving his flesh and bones there. He adamantly insisted and left. He left the keys and told me, "Don't let them take over the warehouse without you being present."

I handed the warehouse over to Lamazoant [a nickname] Giga. I did hand it over, yet they had claims against me concerning vodka. They claimed that the [in Russian] vodka barrel was not completely full. They claimed my husband had taken some and brought it home. I told them, "I know that my husband hasn't brought any vodka home. Bring a vessel and get whatever you're missing."

There was one agrarian assigned to us. Although he lived in Shilda, he was from someplace else. He warned me, "No matter what they may tell you, don't sign anything."

It is said, "A friend in need is a friend indeed." I absolutely refused to sign anything, though I was forced to. I told them as I was advised, "draw a document that it got spilled, then you sign it, and only after that I'll sign." Indeed, they had no choice, so they did as I told them.

I had one cow when my husband went to the war. Although I was all by myself, "the preparation" [home front preparations during WW II] obligated me to deliver meat, cheese, and eggs. I gave my child whey to drink, while delivering cheese to the store. The store was located at Tornike's house. I was delivering cheese one time, and Soso Chabrashvili happened to be there. He served as

the Chairman of the Gremi Collective Farm. I delivered the cheese and left. Soso caught up with me and asked, "Why did you deliver the cheese?" "It was due. I'm obligated. What can I do?" He said, "You're not obligated. You don't have to deliver it. Don't do it from now on. Should anyone tell you something, tell them I instructed you not to do so."

And so I did. I stopped delivering cheese thereafter. Yet, they demanded we deliver meat and eggs. I don't know what they did with it all. You think they sent it to the war? They ate it themselves. The war was just an excuse.

They even obligated me to pay [in Russian] taxes. When I ran out of money and couldn't pay my taxes, a Department of Finances official came over, put a rope on my cow, and take it away. I would come back home and inquire, "Where's the cow?" "It's in the Sabueti Council," would be the reply. I would go there, put a rope on my cow, and lead it back home. Two days later, they would take it away again. Gee, others had cows too, but no one ever required from them to pay taxes and deliver meat. I was made to deliver eggs too. I was expected to deliver one hundred eggs. I didn't have that many, so I bought and delivered them. What was I supposed to do? I was required to deliver eggs one time. I told my daughter-in-law, Nina, "Let's go to Pshavs and buy some from them" [Pshavs, residents of Pshavi, a mountainous region of Georgia]. Babe, a neighbor woman, accompanied us. Wherever we went, we were turned down, "We're out of eggs. We ate our broody hens on Easter." Then Babe (she was crafty) told them, "Have some fear of God! Her husband [talking about Pua's wife] has returned from the war, wounded, and the doctor prescribed him eggs. Cannot you spare like five or six eggs?" After they heard it, they rushed to give us eggs free of charge. No one wanted to charge us [laughs]. That's how we collected one hundred eggs and delivered them.

That's how miserable life was back then. I was young though, and I could handle it all. I had a cow, and I sold milk sometimes. I milked ten liters in the evening. Tornike's boys grew up on my milk. Tornike's wife worked in school. They had a maiden at home. She would come over, I would fill up a bottle for her, and she took it with her. How would I make a living otherwise? There was no pension or anything at that time. I still keep my unpaid bills from that time.

My husband used to send me letters from the war. When he ran out of paper, he wrote me letters on butter wrapping. I have but one letter left. My daughters-in-law scattered all his letters. Four daughters-in-law joined my family and do whatever they please, the way they please. He mainly sent greetings in his letters, never writing about the war. When our child dies, we didn't let him know, so he wrote to me one time, "I had a dream. I came home and sat down on [in Russian] the sofa. Guram approached me, grabbed me by the knees, and said that Goderdzi was no longer with us. What's the matter? Have they stolen your cow?" People nowadays don't believe in dreams. My husband, however, learned about the death of our child in a dream. He only interpreted it as warning against theft since it was so widespread at that time. I was downhearted, so I never replied to him. Then he wrote to me again, "I'm about to be dispatched someplace else. Don't write to me until I do." That was the last time I heard from him.

Stealing was pretty widespread at that time. I owned a mud-hut. There was a pole in one of the corners where I tied the cow in winter, so it wouldn't get stolen. In summer, I tied it to [in Russian] the windowpane, and I slept nearby. I don't know. I'm the way God created me. It's all about fate. There's no escaping fate. Once given, we live and die in accordance with our fate. Once born, we all bear a sign on our foreheads that reads how we're destined to die, from illness, or be burned, or drown in water, or die in a car accident. It's all written on our foreheads. I have seen a human skull. I was visiting with one family in Tbilisi. The lady was a physician. She had a cupboard standing in the corner, full of bones, pictures, and other stuff. She showed me a skull.

There was a shortage of everything during the war. There were only fish available. I had quit working in the collective farm by then. Before I started to work in the hospital, I took some goods I had harvested to sell in Tbilisi. That's exactly when my neighbor woman and I met one woman who worked for one of the ministries. There was a shortage of cupric sulfate at that time, so she got a hold of some for my neighbor and gave it to her. We became close after that. I invited her to the vintage. We paid visits to each other. I stayed at her place once in a while. She lived near the farmers market. She was a widow. Her husband had died in the war. She took care of her two sons, and her unmarried sister also lived

with her. One time, when I visited her, she asked me, “Aniko, our ministry has received some tableware. If I get a hold of it, will it sell in the village?”

Indeed, we obtained the tableware and took it to Shilda. It sold right away. We profited five hundred rubles each. Then Shilda residents asked me, “Nekresoba is coming [a feast celebrated in Shilda on Orthodox Christmas, January 7]. Could you bring us some [in Russian] sugar?”

I turned to a person who got a hold of sixty pound of sugar for me with the help of an acquaintance who worked in a warehouse. I transported it to Shilda, selling thirty pounds. Somebody told on me, however, so the detective showed up at my uncle’s doorsteps. I had stashed everything there, so they took it all to Kvareli. I was in Almaty at that time. That detective kept looking for me. He came to Almaty, I turned up in Shilda; he came to Shilda, I turned up in Almaty. I was hiding. What could I do? How could I get back home had he arrested me? Wouldn’t people say I was a convict? To make it short, I told my brother, “You have to help me out. If I get arrested, shame will not let me show up in Almaty or Shilda. I’ll just disappear somewhere.”

The husband of one of my acquaintances (she had the same last name as we) worked in the police, so I went to them. She charged me three thousand rubles and not a penny less. I didn’t have that much money. I was at a loss. I went back home to find that woman from Tbilisi in my home. As it turned out, my daughter-in-law had told her about my situation. That woman told me, “What’s with the long face? Take me to Kvareli tomorrow. I don’t know the road. A man, my acquaintance, works there. I’ll see him, and we’ll take care of it all.”

Sure enough, we left the following morning. I stood afar. There was no way I was getting near the place. I only pointed to the staircase and told that woman, “Go over there and ask.”

She left. She found that man easily. He was surprised at seeing her, “What brings you here?” The woman told asked him to arrange a meeting with the detective for her. So they went to see the detective who asked them for the reason behind their visit. She replied, “One of my acquaintances, a very needy woman, needs help. You’ve confiscated her sugar. She’s not a profiteer though. I gave her that sack of sugar. She has an only child who’s starving

to death. I gave her this sugar so she could exchange some for corn and some for wheat, and feed her child. It's a boy, so he may prove to be helpful to you someday when he grows up." That man said, "She has sent other people to us too, yet we never managed to get her come here herself." "There's no way you can get her come near this place. The mere look at people in uniforms scares her to death. Even now she's waiting for me down the road. She couldn't even come close to the building." The detective requested me to see him, "At least, let me have a look at her. I may meet her someplace, so I need to recognize her. She told me, "Don't trick me. Don't make me bring her here to arrest her, or you will end up in a cell along with her."

Then, at last, they made me go there. As soon as I entered through the door, I started crying hysterically. I didn't utter a sound, but I shed tears involuntarily. Then my acquaintance told the detective, "I told you she's no profiteer. Had she been a profiteer, would she have been in such shape?"

To make it short, everything ended well. They wrote down as though I had been working undercover and spying on profiteers, and I was released on bond. This woman told the detective, "We're much obliged. I personally owe you."

This woman went to Tbilisi, while I went home. Some time passed, and I started thinking, "She promised him to repay him. I have no money. What should I do?" God bless Kona. He gave me a couple gallons of red wine, "Aniko, as long as you're alright, I don't anything back from you."

My neighbor, Martiko, caught a turkey for me. I cooked some stuff and thought, "What should I do? There's no way I'm going there all by myself." I went to Tbilisi, to that woman, and told her, "You've been so kind to me. You may as well want to help me take this token of appreciation."

She added [in Russian] sausage, fish, and some other Tbilisi stuff and accompanied me. We arrived in Eniseli, rented a car, and left. We didn't where he lived so we could deliver it to his home. That's why we went to the same police station. He sent a certain detective in a uniform with us. This detective was from Telavi. His wife and children, however, lived in an apartment he was renting in Kvareli. We delivered one [in Russian] lug with food and a jug with wine and left. It was somebody else's vessel, but I couldn't tell them



to empty it. We went home. I told that woman, my friend, "Before you leave for Tbilisi tomorrow, please come with me to fetch that vessel. I cannot go there alone." Indeed, we went there next morning. When we arrived, that man's wife told us, "My husband asked you to see him. He doesn't want you to leave without seeing him."

We had no choice. We went to see him, though I really didn't want to. He instructed us, "They thing I have received three thousand rubles from you to set you free, so lie low for a while, let things calm down, and then come back." Then he took those twenty pounds of sugar from the cabinet and gave it back to me, "Treat your son to some tea." We took the sugar and went home. That's how a stranger treated me kindly. That woman told me, "Come and stay with me. I'll share my meals with you." I didn't want to leave but I had no choice, I had to step aside for a little while. I left my son with my mother-in-law and sister-in-law and went to Tbilisi. My tribulations are greater in number than the hairs of my head.

## **MANANA PAPIASHVILI**

Interviewed by

TSISANA GODERDZISHVILI in Tbilisi, 2001

[The Kistis are an ancient people who belong to the Vainakh tribes. They mainly live in the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia. The word “Vainakh” means “our people” used by the Chechen, Ingush, and Kisti peoples to distinguish themselves from the other mountainous tribes of Caucasus. Close relations between Georgian and Vainakh tribes were established as early as antiquity. The gradual process of settlement of Vainakh tribes in Georgia usually resulted in their assimilation. The last en masse settlement of Vainakhs on the territory of Georgia took place in the 1920s. As a rule, Vainakhs are Muslims. Kisti Vainakh villages can be found in the narrow Alazani Gorge. Constituting a branch of the Chechens, these people came from the northern slopes of the Caucasian Range. They presently occupy three large villages along the Alazani River: Duisi, Jokolo, and Omalo, with 60 to 120 households in each, as well as three projects: Khoroja, Chkatana, and Kartabude, with six to twelve households in each. The remaining part of the Vainakhs on the territory of Georgia lives in the furthestmost northern part of the Tianeti District. According to the 2002 census, 7 110 Kistis live in Georgia.]

I am twenty-seven now, and I believe I’ve been through enough and experienced enough for a woman of my age. On the other hand, as my husband tells me sometimes, “Isn’t it time for you to wise up?” It’s probably because of my nature as I love people and enjoy conversing with them very much. Even in company of nine strangers, I can mingle and socialize so effortlessly as though we had known one another for a hundred years. In addition, it seems to me that they have the same feelings for me, so I’m quick to trust everyone. My mother-in-law preaches to me sometimes, “Only if you had a shred of craftiness.” My mother-in-law herself is my aunt’s sister-in-law. My aunt is married to her brother in our village, Omalo [meaning the Kisti village in the Akhmeta District, Pankisi Gorge].

As a bachelorette, my mother often visited her sister. Thus, she traveled as a guest to Omalo one time and decided to take a

picture with local village girls and boys. My father happened to be there too, so he joined the group for a picture. My mother shoed him away, "Get out of here!" Then my father said, "I swear by my manhood I will not let you leave this place." At the same time, as my mother recalled later, she was so unseemly and skinny that her waist could fit in her hand, while my father was a handsome man. This incident was over. Later on, however, my father went to the brother of my mother-in-law saying, "You may give your consent or you may not, but I'm kidnapping her regardless, so you might as well arrange my marriage with your wife's sister." He agreed. He was feasting with his buddies one time when he turned to his wife, "Go fetch me some vodka." According to our customs, men do not bring vodka to the table. It's women's job. It was late at night, and my aunt couldn't go alone. My mother happened to be sleeping like a baby at that time. My aunt felt very sorry for her. Nevertheless, she woke her up, which took quite an effort, and asked her to keep her company. The vodka seller lived far away, on the other side of the river. That river was exactly where my father and his buddies lay in wait. As soon as they approached, he grabbed my mother. After my aunt realized what was happening, she hit him in the head with the empty vodka bottle. He passed out for like five minutes. His buddies came to his aid. When he came to (you should have seen it), he hit my aunt in the neck and knocked her out, while herding my mother away. She resisted, however, and wouldn't go with him. Yet, what could she do? Two men walked up front and pulled her, while my father followed behind her and gave her punches. The whole village gathered upon hearing the screaming. However, they had already entered the woods by that time. Before they reached the woods, when they herded her over the river, my mother cut her foot against a stone so badly that it scarred her for the rest of her life. She had her mother's dress on, so she was worried she had torn it, "Mother will beat me up if I tear up her dress." She didn't know any better. She was thirteen at that time, going on fourteen. She used to tell me, "My breasts had just formed. And I had no idea what would happen next." My father wouldn't touch her while they were in the woods. When he fell asleep, she seized the opportunity and made an attempt to escape. His buddies noticed her, however, and brought her back. They scolded my father terribly, "What kind of man are you? You

have a woman lying right by your side and you fall asleep!" My father must have felt embarrassed, so whatever was supposed to happen did happen. My mother wouldn't stop whining, "I first tore up my mother's dress, and now I've stained it. What shall I tell her?"

They finally brought her to the village the following morning. People crowded around my mother. The yard was packed with people. My grandmother sat down on a rock outside and said, "Until you show me my child, I'm not going anywhere from here. Let her say that she left with him of her own accord and only then I will move from here." As for my mother, people tried to talk her into telling her mother that she indeed did it on her own accord. There was one man, a relative, so he said, "Who needs this helter-skelter? Let her tell what she knows. Tell her, so she can move from that stone. Let everyone calm down, and then I will personally take you home." My mother listened to him, stood on the balcony, and announced, "Why do you come here? Since when does a married woman return to her home? Leave right now." What could they do? They all went home. My mother wouldn't let go of that man's hand in the meantime. She followed him everywhere. Then he said, "Let go outside for a while. I'll come back and take you home." He left and wouldn't come back. That's how my mother stayed there for good. It is customary in our parts to wrap a shawl around the bride. Back in those days, they had even bigger shawls than today. She used to relate, "I was so silly. They wrapped a shawl around me and sat me down, and I couldn't wait for people to leave when they came for a bride viewing. I heard children's voices coming from outside. I was dying to go outside and play. As soon as they left, I rushed outside, pulled off my stockings, stuffed it with the shawl, and played with it. One time they came over for a bride-viewing. My mother-in-law couldn't find me, so she went looking for me, and eventually found me in the shed, playing blind man's bluff, blindfolded with the shawl. 'Goodness gracious alive!' she exclaimed, 'I wish I never saw it.'" She took off my mother's shawl, wrapped it around her, led her out of the shed, and sat her down in front of the viewers. "When we sat down at the table and my mother-in-law put food on my plate, I ate it from the plate wherever she put it, without even realizing that I could slide it closer to me. Your father would secretly slide it toward me."

There was no great difference in age between my parents, like two or three years. However, my father happened to have become seasoned, experienced, and mature early for his age. He used to sit down at the table with his buddies and tell my mother, “Go fetch me a half gallon of vodka and I’ll let you go play with other children while we finish off this half gallon. When we’re through, I’ll whistle for you. You’ll come over, fetch me some more, and I’ll let you go again.” Though my father would say a half gallon, she fetched a full gallon, so that she could play outside a little longer. And time was going by...

This foolish girl [Manana’s mother] matured. They bought a wooden house and settled there. My father was arrested when they had their first baby. He stole a horse, while also being strapped, so he was jailed. He was released and imprisoned again in less than a month at home. He was frequently arrested thereafter. He would get out, spend a couple of weeks at home, and then go back to prison for two or three years. He calculated one time and discovered that he had spent eighteen years and a half in prison. The police were always after him. He was drunk all the time. My mother was in constant fear and trembling. She recalled, “When he would get drunk in the bushes or elsewhere, I carried his bedding in knee-high snow. At first, I made his bed wherever he was and had him sleep it off. Then I put him on my shoulders, drunk as he was, and carried him home.” We the children had already been born. Now imagine what she was going through! She had little children, on one hand, and this tribulation with her husband, on the other. She hid him from the police for over three years one time. She recalled, “Sometimes they searched our home two-three times a night.” We slept on the floor, so when police officers came looking for him, they walked over us and asked my mother, “When do you manage to have children. He’s in jail all the time.” Indeed, he spent all his youth in jail. Between imprisonments, when he came home for a while, they constantly quarreled over his drunken binges. We spent most of the time outside. We were growing up outside, spending nights in basements. My mother silently endured it all, so that we the children wouldn’t have a bad reputation. She tried to hold it back from the neighbors too. When drunk, my father would sometimes kick us on the street in knee-high snow. To be more precise, he would kick out my mother when he got drunk. Sometimes he

would tell her to sleep with him. She wouldn't, of course! We lived in one room, so there was no way she would sleep with him while we the children were there! That's why she would rush outside, and we would follow her. We didn't want the neighbors to find out, so we hid standing in the outhouse until father fell asleep. We spent so many nights, standing like that in the outhouse. Then, after he fell asleep, we came out. Our window had iron bars. Since I was the smallest, they made me squeeze through the bars, and open the door from the inside, so that the others would come in. I've fallen and gotten hurt so many times, not to mention fear. We walked on our tiptoes, lest my father wake up.

He sent endless letters from prison. We would get tired of reading them. My mother couldn't read or write, so she asked us to read the endless lists of items my father requested from her to deliver to prison. He requested all kinds of things, and my mother was supposed to deliver it all to the Sagarejo Penitentiary, or the Rustavi Prison, or Ksani, and so on and so forth [penitentiaries in Georgia]. Thus, we were like nomads, as they say, working in mandarin plantations in winter, in tea plantations in summer, and vintaging in fall. We all worked, the elder and the younger, together with my mother. She supported us, sent some to my father, and saved some once in a while. She built a house in Omalo with the money she had saved. We had two rooms. We all grew up in those two rooms. My sister and I were both given in marriage from that home. My little brother always stood by mother's side like a mature man.

My father wrote a note from prison one time, "Send me 500 rubles, or else you'll never see me again." Yet, 500 rubles was good money back then. We received three letters a day, all requesting money. Finally, he gave us a deadline. Apparently, he gambled in prison and lost. My mother lay on the bed face up and wept hysterically. Who would give us so much money? We didn't know what fatherly love was. How would we? He was in prison all the time. When mother cried, however, we all cried. Vepkho was already old enough to help mother. I was too little. She would take me with her wherever he went to work. She also took me to kindergarten. She sent the middle children, siblings of five and three, to the orphanage. Vepkho too joined mother and started to cry. Looking at them, I burst out worse than he. I've been looking up to Vepkho since then, though I couldn't even pronounce his name right. I looked

at Vepkho, saw him cry, and started to weep inconsolably myself. Then Vepkho told mother, “Go tell the shepherds to take me as a hireling and pay you my wage in advance.” He was just an eighth-grader, but he also was a big, broad-shouldered, and fully grown adolescent. Mother refused. She must have felt reluctant to let him go. He implored her, “Go ahead, mom. Let them take me. I’ll be all right. We can get money but we will never have another father,” he wouldn’t give up. Indeed, mother went to the shepherd, our fellow villager. As soon as she related her story, he gave her the money and said, “I’m so sorry. Here’s the money. You don’t have to send your boy to me if you don’t want to.” Mother returned, overjoyed, “Son, I got the money, and I don’t have to send you away.” Vepkho, however, disagreed, “We don’t need a handout. I’ll go with him nonetheless, so that no one would remind us that we owe him.”

He has been working ever since, herding sheep for some time, and then going to Russia to work. Then he was drafted. Mother had tried all means to keep him from being drafted, citing as an excuse the fact that his father was in prison and we had been left without a breadwinner. She managed to keep him for two years. After he turned twenty, however, he got drafted and sent to Murmansk [a city in Northwest Russia]. He was about to be discharged, when he had an argument with his sergeant whom he beat up and thus wound up arrested. Mother nearly went crazy after hearing about it. This story made her forget all the sorrow she had seen before. She couldn’t stay here, yet she had no idea how to get there. She finally talked my father’s cousin into going with her [to Murmansk]. They took everything they would need on the trip and arrived there. The Russians, however, wouldn’t let her see him [Vepkho]. She couldn’t wait at least to glance at him, yet to no avail. Then they gave her a choice, they would either let her see him through the window or she had to send him ten more pounds of [in Russian] goods into prison. Mother was dying to see her son. However, she later reasoned, “It will not benefit him a bit if I see him from a distance. He’d rather have something to eat.” Then they asked, “What’s your final answer?” She replied, “It wouldn’t make any sense to ask you to let him go. I’m only asking to have him transferred to Georgia.” She hired a lawyer and he was indeed transferred to Georgia. Here, mother got him out on probation. That’s when he got married for the first time, to a Kisti girl from a neighboring village.

Things turned upside down though. When rallies were being held during Zviad's time, he happened to be at one of such rallies. He was just present there. He had free time, so he was there only to listen. A robbery took place at that time. People didn't display and sell retail gold as they do now. A certain goldsmith carried a sack with gold to have it hallmark-stamped, and that's when the robbery took place. My brother ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time and was apprehended while being absolutely innocent. They saw that he was an ex-convict, a Kisti boy with no connections, so who would release him? He was given consecutive sentences, twelve years in all. Vepkhia went nearly crazy, "I'm not spending twelve years in prison!" Jaba Ioaseliანი, his people, and my brother were digging a tunnel to escape from prison. Later on, however, Jaba was released through the efforts of students, breaking through the prison gates and liberating him. I don't remember if it happened during Zviad's time or before it. These guys nonetheless finished digging the tunnel and escaped.

My brother wouldn't tarry here long and moved to Grozny [the capital of Chechnya]. He settled there. Our police went after him there, but it was a different country, so they were told, "He hasn't committed any offense on the territory of our country, so we can neither arrest him ourselves nor extradite him." He stayed there for many years. My mother would visit with him there, traveling back and forth. My mother loved my brother immensely. He was my mother's firstborn child, and he had stood by her through so many trials and tribulations. She used to tell us, "If he so much as hurts his fingernail, I will grind you and apply you as medicine on his finger." We didn't get upset. Exactly the opposite, since our mother loved him so much, he became even dearer to us, unimaginably close to our hearts... Of course, we all loved one another but we were especially fond of our elder brother. My mother didn't give me as good a dowry as she did him. Wherever he went, she followed him with her bedding and kitchenware. I sometimes told her, "All you need is Vepkho." "You got that right," she wouldn't even hold it back, "My son, he stood by me through all misfortunes."

She soon fell ill. She was diagnosed with uterine cancer six years ago. She was hospitalized, but her days were numbered. The doctor told me, "Child, take her home as soon as possible." I couldn't bear it and rushed to my in-laws, crying my eyes out and



asking them to help me. They came right away. When we entered the hospital room, I tried to restrain my self. Mother kept looking right into my eyes. Nothing could escape her apparently, “They must have told you that I will not survive anyway. Is that why you’re taking me home?” “No, mother. You just need to get some rest. You’ll regain some strength, and then I will bring you back here,” I tried to cheer her up. “Oh child, there’s no helping me.” That’s all she said. We took her home. My brother was in Grozny at that time. My younger brother was here, but you know how hard it is when you’re broke, so he was unable to help in any way. My sister had a family of her own and many things to take care of, so I practically spent all my time with mother. I babysat her. My in-laws helped me tremendously. They would come over, bringing money and produce. I sometimes left both my children (I had two at that time) with my in-laws and sometimes I alternated with them. When my mother saw them arrive, she asked in fear, “Are you here to take her away?” “Don’t worry,” my mother-in-law told her, “We’re here to see you. She’s your daughter and she will stay with you for as long as you need her.” Poor soul, she gave a sigh of relief. She was dying to see my brother, “I hope I’ll see him just once before dying. Why won’t he come and let me take a look at him.” She would stop abruptly and say, “No. Don’t tell him. Don’t make him come. If he gets arrested because of me, it will haunt me even in the afterlife.” She hung Vepkho’s picture in front of her bed and wouldn’t take her eyes off it. She was very difficult to babysit. I wondered where all that blood came from. When pads proved not to be enough, we switched to old clothes, [in Russian] pillowcases, and robes. After I tidied her up, she sighed, “Oh my girl.” She wasn’t concerned about herself. She was worried about me. It was summer, yet she would get so cold that I would turn on the heater. I had a comforter next to the heater, and that’s where I lay once in a while. Otherwise, I was totally deprived of bed and sleep. She refused to take her medication from somebody else’s hands even if there were a multitude of people in the room. Finally, when she got very bad and became delusional, she did nothing but mumble my brother’s name. My aunt came over and told me, “Let’s not torture her like this anymore. Let’s put Vepkho’s picture and shirt on her shirt, so she may give up the ghost easily. It’s said that a loved one’s picture should be put on a dying person’s chest,

so that he/she may give up the ghost easily.” My mother seemed to have shrugged at these words and asked, “Am I dying?” Then she passed out never to regain consciousness.

After that, it became even harder to look after her. I couldn't afford as much as sitting down. I was really exhausted. My sister came over one night and told me, “Go get some rest. You know you'll have to get up early in the morning, so maybe you could get some rest.” I listened to her and had some sleep that night. I'm still beating up myself for sleeping through that night, while having been up every night for so long. My sister didn't go to sleep. She sat by my mother's bedside and later related to me, “She seemed to have come to for a second in the middle of the night. She looked at me and gestured to me not to cry.” She smiled, raised her hand, and caressed my sister's cheek, trying to comfort her. I wish I had been deemed worthy of mother's last caress... I still cannot forgive myself falling asleep. Then she raised her head and looked around, probably searching for me. She couldn't find me though. Then she closed her eyes not to open them ever again. She gave forth a death rattle. This rattle woke me up. I jumped up and asked, “Is mother alright?” My sister calmed me down, “Don't worry. She's all swollen. That's why she's having a hard time breathing.” I did realize what was happening though. The whole village gathered at my wailing. I was advised to go find a mullah for her. It is your practice to summon a priest, while we call on a mullah to read Koran [for the dying]. I rushed outside. There was an elderly man, mullah, in our village. I asked him and he followed me. When Koran is being read, no one is allowed in the room. Nevertheless, I was watching through the window and saw how that man wiped tears from his face while reading. Then he came outside, saying that he had put her to sleep. Indeed, the rattling seemed to have subsided. I burst into the room and looked at her. I wouldn't move. I had a feeling that if I left, she would have died. My aunt had me run all kinds of errands. Standing over the dying is apparently prohibited. They couldn't tell me about it, so they kept coming up with excuses to send me away. I wouldn't leave though. Then I saw her pull her head behind, stretch her legs, and exhaled. When I started wailing, she came back once again. Oh my God, I could see with my own eyes how her soul struggled to leave and how it returned when I cried. It wasn't right, however, for me to do so. Then my aunt told

me, "Leave. Don't torture your mother like that. Let her soul depart in peace." I left the room, and indeed she gave up the ghost. More people had gathered on the street. My father had gone on the other side of the river. When he learned the news, he rushed back on his injured leg, a man of his size, showing no feelings. Your men are prone to crying, while it's a shame for a man to shed a tear. I told my sister at the wake, "Look at the expression on father's face. It seems as though mother's death has not made him sad at all." I even thought I noticed a smile on his face when people shook his hand. My father disappeared that evening. He wouldn't come home, so my sister and I started looking for him. Our neighbors told us, "He took a nap at our place." We noticed a doctor in their yard, so we went there. Poor soul, he had had a heart attack. Then it dawned on us. That was the first time we saw tears in our father's eyes. He lay there and wept.

He couldn't stay at home either after his wife's death. He went with his relatives to work on the farm. He constantly talked about my mother there. He couldn't go to bed without having sated himself with stories about her. The same happened one evening. He recalled many stories and then lay down in the corner without undressing. He was always up earlier than everyone else, so when he didn't show up in the morning, they started looking for him. They found him dead. He passed away on the fortieth day after mother's death. I still don't know whether it was a mere coincidence or the fulfillment of my mother's promise. She had always told him, "I will not leave you here after I die. I will beseech the Lord and take you with me. You will go on drunken binges here and put my family through hell. There'll be no one to babysit you." Indeed, at the end of December, we held a memorial service in honor of the fortieth day after mother's death. On New Year's morning, I received a note about father's death. That's why the New Year has been associated in my mind with fear and sorrow. I don't like New Year. I was late for father's funeral. It is our custom to bury the dead on the same day or the day after. That's how I lost both mother and father and was left an orphan. I missed both funerals. There [at father's funeral] everything was done in accordance with our traditions. Vepkhia's wife told us later, "I was first to learn about his mother's death, yet I couldn't tell him. Then he himself learned about it in the village center. He barely made it home. He

fell down on the bed face down and wouldn't get up for three days and nights, wailing like a woman. He remained like a ghost for a while, regarding everything as pointless.

After the death of my parents, I stopped going to our ancestral home. I couldn't stand so much as see that place. I only went to my sister's and even from there I returned crying and sobbing. Our home was half-ruined due to neglect and the yard became covered with weeds and manure, yet I couldn't find the strength to do something about it. Vepkho, however, took care of it all after his return.

Oh how happy I was when Vepkhia returned! I kept crying until then, saying that I would probably die without seeing my brother. When I learned that he arrived, I was at a loss, not knowing if I had to scream, cry, or laugh. It seemed to me that everyone had to be as happy as I was. I rushed to see him the next day. Vepkhia had secretly come down from the mountains. He was protected and sheltered by our relatives in the village. When I arrived in Telavi, Kistis who were trading there told me that my brother had indeed returned and was hiding in the attic. It seemed that my bus stopped and wouldn't move. I kept repeating, "Come on, move faster." A century seemed to have passed before I arrived in the village. As soon as our home became visible, I saw how neat everything looked, the yard was clean, the roof fixed, and my brother himself was standing in the balcony. Our neighbors heard that he had arrived, so they all came outside. I couldn't restrain myself, so I started crying from afar, and I could tell he too was trembling and holding onto the rails. I couldn't ascend the stairs. I kept stumbling out of excitement. Vepkho rushed downstairs, his eyes all teary and red out of agitation. He picked me up like a little kid, pressed me against his chest, and carried me inside the house. I was crying over seeing my brother and over my mother who longed to see him so badly. He too cried with me. Nevertheless, we were so happy at that moment! It seemed to me that not just he and I but the whole village, and the whole world, cried together with us. "Don't worry," he kept telling me, "We've missed each other so much, and now we'll never part." Indeed, he never left home. We sat, looking at each other, unable to get enough of each other's love.

We started a new life. A whole new world called love appeared before me. He had brought some money of his own. He started

his own business, [in Russian] a workshop, bought goods, built a house, starting from scratch. There was not as much as a spoon left in the house. What did we expect? It had been neglected for so long! He started everything from zero. He gradually grew stronger, standing on his own two feet. He had been through so much need himself that he wouldn't let a day pass without helping someone. The sun never went down without someone coming to our home. He was so committed to his siblings to begin with, yet he was so kindhearted that he would give his heart and soul to anyone who revealed his/her sorrows to my brother. That's why everyone asked him for protection and care. Then after these Chechen refugees migrated, drugs became popular and widespread. Every other person is a dope dealer. My brother wasn't a dealer, but everyone turned to him for help. Some, those who went withdrawing, asked him to get a hold of some stuff for them. He was on the run and he was in need himself, yet everyone turned to him for help. He had more people sheltered than there were family members in the house. Out home was a mercy home. They have dispersed somewhat now, but...

People probably envied him because he was so good. As they say, the better you are, the more enemies you have. Everyone envied him for managing to do everything. Some kept asking why and how he did it. When the Red Cross people were kidnapped, they couldn't find them anywhere [Sofia Prokofieva and Natasha Zulino, German and Italian representatives of Red Cross respectively, and Yuri Darchiev, a Georgian staff member, were kidnapped on August 4, 1999 and returned on August 14, 1999]. They turned to my brother for help. An appeal by Shevardnadze himself was sent to Vepkhia personally. "Alright," my brother said, "If you need help, I'll help. I will do my best, but you'll have to get me off the wanted list." They promised to do so. He summoned all his sworn brothers and found those people indeed, returning them in good health and well in every way. Then he received a note that he was no longer wanted, yet even a child would guess that it was phony. It was a mere printout, a text with no signature, while some words were misspelled, messed up so badly that one couldn't tell what they meant. He couldn't imagine, however, that it would be all that phony, so he went to the Akhmeta Police Precinct to get a passport [Akhmeta Municipality, Kakheti Region, Eastern Georgia].

He still has no passport. They wouldn't issue a passport, yet they wouldn't arrest him either. He already had quite a reputation, and this government covered for him too. Then village elders gathered. They said (and it had been published in the newspaper earlier), "Vepkhia Margoshvili never came to claim his passport. Maybe we should it deliver it to him at home." Vepkho had one of the village elders with him when he went to get a passport, so he believed him to be his witness, yet this man refused to back him up at the meeting, "I never went with you." After the meeting, he asked for forgiveness, "I had no choice." Vepkho waved his hand, "What can I do? I cannot kill him."

When a parliament member was kidnapped recently, they once again turned to Vepkhia for help. He helped them find the person once again. They didn't find him in the Pankisi Gorge [a valley in Georgia bordering Chechnya, Russian Federation] though, similar to that Arab businessman who was found at the Tbilisi Sea [an artificial reservoir in the Tbilisi vicinity]. They blame everything on Pankisi. They ask my brother for help at first, and after he helps them, they ask him how he knew. Yet, he does everything he can to help. Well, he may know something here and there, yet why would he interfere in somebody else's business. Even if he finds out that someone does something, he shouldn't rat him out, right? Then, when it comes to negotiations and deals, he [Vepkho] says, "You have to concede. You have to do it this way or that way." And his name actually surfaces all the time. He is visible. At the same time, the real players are always in the shade. They have nothing on my brother. Since he has a criminal background, however, he is considered an offender to this day. He had this issue nearly solved, yet he messed it up himself.

Luka Ramazashvili used to oppress our people badly. He's big because he's under Mediko Mezvrishvili's wing. Otherwise, I don't know what kind of person he is. I do know, however, that he is a robber and gangster. He has guns and everything. He has annihilated the whole Kokiashvili or Kikiashvili family and appropriated all their wealth. I don't exactly know who this Mediko Mezvrishvili is, to be honest. Word has it that she must be some bigwig. Their people kidnapped our man once. They must have had some grudge against him. Otherwise, why would they kidnap him? He could've mistreated them in some way, similar to how he annihilated the

Kikiashvilis. A whole gang ambushed our people. They wouldn't touch the women and children, but they led the men away, eleven men in all. When my brother heard about it, he went berserk. "What? Someone has taken my people hostage and I should sit here like this? No way!" And he called an open-air television show, "If Luka Ramazashvili doesn't return our people, I declare war, a war between the Georgians and the Kistis." All hell broke loose. That was all they wanted. Everyone was talking about my brother. That's how the almost resolved issue of his criminal liability went down the drain. That's what he did for the sake of his people. Otherwise, he would've been free by now. Everyone became involved in this case afterward. A village assembly was called. The elders blamed Vepkho for kidnapping Luka's people behind his back. My brother learned about it afterward and said, "You shouldn't talk about me behind my back. You must come after me, claim these people if I have them, and then lawfully punish me." Our people will not let the police become involved. The path of Sharia [the moral code and religious law of Islam based on Koran] is the law among our people, which implies death of the offender. "Punish me. What are waiting for? Find these people in my place first and may you shed my blood blamelessly." He went home. A little later, he noticed all village leaders gather in his yard. Yet, had my brother kidnapped them, he would have returned them immediately to avoid getting in trouble, right? He did so much as calling the television station, not knowing what he was saying out of agitation. He threatened everyone with a war. Had he kidnapped those people, would he have done something like that? Thus, he went outside and told the village elders, "If you've come here to accuse me of kidnapping those people, don't make a single step forward." "We've come to ask you to help us," they replied. Then Vepkhia couldn't turn them down, "If you've indeed come to ask me for my help, I will sacrifice myself and shed my blood to help you."

Indeed, he did everything possible to find those people. Firstly, he wanted to ransom his people. Secondly, he made a promise, so he had to keep it. And he found them. Kistis had taken them, yet not for ransom but vengeance. My brother, however, found them [Luka's people, Georgians] unharmed and delivered them to the elders, saying, "Here are the people I promised you to find. Let's take them to the border, have them bring our people, and have

an exchange.” “Oh no,” they replied, took away these people from him, and hastily sent them away. Vepkhia begged them, “Don’t do it. They will never return our people. I will shed blood and won’t let them torture our people to death. Please listen to me.” The elders wouldn’t listen. Indeed, our people were never returned. My brother went crazy. At the same time, it wasn’t only he involved. Why would he fish in troubled waters? They started talking about him all over the place thereafter. Every television station and every newspaper disseminated stories about my brother as a criminal who threatened Georgians. Everyone covered his story, yet no one told the truth. Luka Ramazashvili wouldn’t return our people; it too was covered upside down. Luka’s word was the law and the truth to them, while ours wasn’t. They covered his words in a positive manner, while ours were covered in a negative way. I have one neighbor who arrived from Tbilisi and told me about hearing things concerning Vepkhia. Before she told me what she had heard, I related to her what was going on. The woman went crazy, saying that she had heard it all yet the other way around.

All this made the situation so tense that my brother really made ready for war. A multitude flocked to him, armed. A Chechen refugee was appointed the village elder. He’s a very wise man. Everyone respects him, especially since these people belong to our clan. That’s why he was appointed. He summoned Vepkhia and instructed him, “We’re in the Georgians’ land, so making war will not do here. I don’t intend to let Christians get away with shedding Muslim blood either, I don’t plan to abandon my people, yet let’s try to have everything settled in a peaceful manner.” Then he met with Ramazashvili and said, “I give you an hour and three minutes, one hour to bring our people back and three minutes to think about it and tell me yes or no. As soon as you break the deadline, you might as well make ready for war.” Instead, Ramazashvili demanded my brother. Gilaev laughed, “If I bring you Vepkho’s fingernail, I’ll have to take your head and put it on my fence. Let’s finish our conversation. Now go. The clock is ticking already.” That man left and returned the kidnapped people, all of them unharmed, even before the deadline.

When I remember it sometimes, I get chills up and down my spine, thinking about how a war was prevented before it even started. Who knows what would happen and how many people would



fall victim? Vepkho was advised at that time to leave to let people forget about him and let things quiet down. He refused, however, saying, "What are you talking about? You want me to step aside and let them say I'm a wimp who runs away and abandons his people to someone's mercy? No! I will not rest until I reclaim my people!"

I was present there at that time. I didn't stay long after we went up to the village. In two or three days, we headed for the mountains to get some rest, and that's exactly when this mess started. I heard about it on the radio there and nearly went nuts, crying and pleading to take me home. Vepkho didn't have the time to come up and take me. It would take him but three hours tops and yet he couldn't do it. He had Moambe [public television newscast] reporters over at my place. They later said that he was up all night, worrying about me having a heart attack. He was dealing with such a huge problem, yet he never forgot about me. It rained heavily at that time. The weather was awful. It thundered so heavily one time that it seemed that the sky was about to tumble down. There must have been a lightning landing someplace in the woods. In a little while, it was announced on the radio that someone threw a grenade into Vepkhia Margoshvili's home, killing his whole family. I cannot tell you which was stronger, the real one, the thunder that sounded like warning, or the one that pierced my heart when I heard the news. I made it through that night somehow, amid sorrow and tribulation. I got up in the morning and rushed away.

It's twenty miles to our village. I ran without feeling the grounds under my feet. I showed up at my brother's doorsteps, all red in this weather, gasping, and with a messed up expression on my face. My brother's chin started to tremble out of excitement and joy when he saw me and his eye lit up, "Here's my youngest sister." He turned to the journalists, "Didn't I tell you that my sister would go crazy and walk all the way here if I didn't go up there myself today?" He pressed me against his chest, then picked me up like a little baby and sat me in his lap and caressed me. I cried and caressed him at the same time, "They said you were killed." He laughed his heart out, "And you believed them?" "I don't know. I believed and I did not at the same time." The surprised girls watched us, saying that they had never seen a love like that. And why would they need to spread information of that kind? Probably they didn't want to say something good about him. Then these journalists from Channel

One and Channel Nine said, “When we were about to come here, we were told horrible things about Vepkhia that made us believe he was some kind of monster.” That’s why they were trembling when first meeting him, shooing one another non-stop. My brother noticed it, smiled, and said, “Look at me. Do I look like an ogre to you? Relax. Don’t be so wired.” [The journalists recalled], “Then we realized what kind of person he was. At first, however, we thought he would smash our mikes over our heads. That’s the impression we had of him when we first went to him. We didn’t know what he would do to us, whether he would kill us or take us hostage.” They laughed afterward, “We were convinced that even birds wouldn’t dare flying over your yard. We were told that you had numerous guards. We didn’t even hope to meet with you.” “What are talking about? I don’t even have a wicket gate,” Vepkho laughed.

Indeed, ours was an open yard. Whoever pleased could enter therein and whoever pleased could leave. Since women are not respected among us, they reasoned they would be treated rudely. It’s actually true that respect for women is alien to our men. They count them as nothing. We’re not like the Georgians who truly hold women in high esteem, especially when it comes to family matters. Our men sit with their legs crossed, while women cut firewood, fix the fence, hoe and till the yard. My brother isn’t that way though. He knows the value of a woman and he knows well when and how to pay homage and attention to women. He never fails. He behaved and spoke with those journalists so freely, keeping himself busy and helping set up the table. He was all attentiveness, asking them to partake of our meal. Yet, our women are not even allowed to sit at the table with men. For my sister and me, however, it was all right to sit at the table and converse with our brother. It’s just that it was my brother who did all the talking, while we weren’t allowed to utter a word, never mind talking back. The journalists couldn’t hold back their excitement to have found themselves in such a situation, especially after he took them to the mountain and let them observe what they wanted to see. The Akhmeta regional Courier staff of Rustavi 2 [Courier, the daily newscast of Rustavi 2, one of the main television stations in Georgia] had their cell phones off the hook, asking them to take them too. When Ramazashvili heard about it, he said, “If they’re decent people, why did they spend three days at the home of the criminal Vepkhia Margoshvili?”

They sent a reply, "We're on our way to your place now." Indeed, they went there after Vepkhia. Luka Ramazashvili was furious, "I don't want to see any of you here! How dare you not coming to me first?" The journalists said, "If you're a man enough, meet with us," and eventually forced him to accept them. Vepkho did everything to make the girls' trip safe. The Kistis, of course, would not hurt them, but the Georgians... They were worried about the Georgians, "We fear these lowlifes may do something nasty." That's why they first sneaked in tapes with a car and then the journalists one by one. Poor souls, they went through so much. Those who left were worried about those who remained and vice versa. They were worried crazy. By the way, we too were very concerned until they all made it over safely. I'm talking about the girls. As for the tapes, my brother said, "Let me speak and let the people speak. However, as soon as these materials leave here, they'll get lost and never air on television. Or some bigwigs will doctor them and air them the way it suits them." Now when Tamuna and other girls came here, they said that the materials really aired on television, though in a limited and fragmented form. I haven't seen it myself since I was here in the village where nearly no signal is received from Tbilisi.

Elene Tevdoradze came here in relation to this case. They wouldn't let her in Pankisi though. It didn't suit their interests. That's why. The last Georgian village is Matani beyond which is Pankisi. They had women meet her there. Generally speaking, they purposefully keep these women in the village. When the authorities want to say something, they use these women for this purpose. Men have no say. These agitated women come out and go straight to screaming and yelling, so that no one can say anything or understand anything even if he/she tries hard. They insulted Elene Tevdoradze badly, nearly abusing her physically. Elene is a smart woman. She realized what was going on and sent a message to our people, "I could come over nonetheless. After what I saw there, however, I now worry more about you, lest the Georgians plot some provocation, using me and accusing you." She turned around and left.

Things finally quieted down. I came over here, while my brother hid the mountains. My cousin provides me with information once in a while. She was over here recently, and I asked her, "I beg of you. Please tell me. How is he?" "Gee, he's three times the size he

used to be.” I’m so excited. I’m beside myself out of joy. I’m dying to see him once again. He cannot come over here. He’s been all over the place, working here and there. I cannot recall a full year we’ve spent together. That’s probably why we always miss each other. We cannot get enough of each other’s love.

Grounds for unrest in relations between the Kistis and the Georgians have existed earlier too. The situation has become even more intense lately. One thing is true though, the Georgians have always had more grudge on the Kistis than the Kistis on the Georgians. Our children are Georgians too. I’m not pointing my finger at anyone, but they are so obnoxious, they say with [in Russian] so much loathing “Oh these Kistis” that one may get really angry. When our women transported goods for sale at the farmers market amid those times of unrest, they knocked over their stalls with feet and called them all kinds of names. Now they fear the Kistis more than they used to. That’s why they’re so aggressive nowadays. Yet, the Georgians are the ones who do it all in Pankisi, taking hostages, exchanges, splitting up money. They kidnap people from Tbilisi too, and then say that they are in Pankisi. At the same time, if you have some brains and influence and live in Pankisi, they force you to become involved in everything deeper and deeper. A kidnapped person’s relative may appeal to you. You cannot turn him/her down. He/she is offering you money. Exchanges are underway all over the place. I don’t know. There are millions of ways. When everything happens right before your eyes, you inadvertently become involved, especially if you are someone who can accomplish things. Then the Georgians disappear. If a Kisti becomes involved, he/she becomes involved all the way. On her recent show, Inga Grigolia [the then host of a political and analytical show of the national television channel] asked Kakha Targamadze [the then Minister of Internal Affairs], “What do you intend to do about Vepkhia Margoshvili?” She asked him three times in a row and yet he kept changing the subject. Yet, you know how Grigolia is. If she starts bugging a person, she won’t stop until she extracts some information. Then Targamadze told her, “Why are so hung up on this Margoshvili? You know how many people stand behind him and what kinds of things are brewing? He’s but a common criminal, while much bigger criminals are involved.” Grigolia asked once again, “What do you plan to do about him?” Targamadze got fed up and retaliated,

“What should we plan? We’re not going to kiss him on the mouth. We’ll arrest and imprison him.” Georgians call my brother a drug tycoon. It was written in a newspaper, *Kviris Palitra*, that he rides in a white jeep, helping the needy stand on their own two feet, giving presents right and left. That’s why he has a good reputation. I don’t want you to think that I’m exaggerating. He’s really a different person. He has such a heart. Even if a little child asks him to listen, he’ll sit down and listen. He never acts unseemly. If he can help someone, he’ll do everything in his power. We’re in need too. Since Vepkho moved from Grozny, he’s supported us financially on a number of occasions, once in a while. Yet, we need so much on a daily basis. Just to mention school. The kids need all kinds of things in school, sometimes two or three lari at a time. My husband works on occasional jobs, so my mother-in-law supports us practically. There are estranged families whose in-laws just say, “Go live on your own.” We are not that way. My mother-in-law bought us a home, gave us kitchenware, and supports us in every way. My in-laws have seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears many things that my brother has gone through. They tell me once in a while, “Had we not seen it ourselves, we would have never taken your word for it.” That’s why they always stand by me and tell me, “We’re so proud you have such a brother.” I haven’t felt anything wrong from my neighbors or relatives either. I don’t know if it’s been Vepkho’s merit or not. Maybe they were afraid and that was it. At any rate, I cannot recall them badmouthing me or making nasty comments. It may be because I’m not boastful. My husband isn’t either. He’s very reserved and serious. That’s probably why my brother likes him. He doesn’t like upstart and obnoxious men. My husband too respects Vepkho immensely. Our respect is not important. What matters is that he respects us in every way and never asks for anything in return. Quite the opposite, if someone offers him something in return, he’ll be very insulted and never deem that person worthy to be called a man.

My husband is Ingilo and a Christian, yet I never had any problem marrying him. For example, my sister-in-law is a Kisti. Her parents never accepted her marriage, mostly due to religious reasons. You know they all want people of their creed in their families, so they cannot stand that someone may not be a Muslim, especially since hers was a love marriage while mine wasn’t. I was

still very little, fifteen years of age, and I had a boyfriend, a Kisti boy. My mother wouldn't let me, however, and constantly followed me around. She was very strict. She constantly spanked me. Then I went to work in Western Georgia, and he too followed me. He took a course in vocational school. He lied to his relatives, saying that he was going to get some documents, tricking them into giving him some money, and traveling to see me there. As soon as my mother learned about it, she took me back home, gave me a sound thrashing, and said, "We'll go back after he returns from there." I was so embittered. All I wanted was to upset her and get married against his will. It didn't matter to me whom I would marry. This young man [future husband] had been recently discharged from the army, visiting with his grandmother and checking on the girls in the village. My cousin is a niece of my mother-in-law, so I had heard from her what the deal was. I pretended to help him, trying to hook him up with my classmate, being a sort of matchmaker. Yet, after he saw me, he wouldn't back up, "If I'm to get married, I will marry her and nobody else." And he did indeed. He saw me, and I married him the very next day without having spoken to him face to face, only through my cousin. My brother was on probation at that time, yet I didn't even remember whether I had to be afraid of him or not. I was only afraid of my mother. I wanted to infuriate her so much, however, that I got up the following morning and, before the car arrived from the village of Paata's grandmother, passed our village, the one next door too, and went to the third village where they met me. I got in the car and we left. My cousin, father-in-law, and my husband were in the car. They were passing by, so they picked me up. They raised me as their own child thereafter. I've been here for thirteen years. I say sometimes, "A couple of years and I'll have been under your wing for just as long as my mother's." When I got married, I had nothing but stubbornness on my mind. I never even considered his being of a different creed. My father's influence may have had something to do with it. He was a kind of man who would never ask anyone else's opinion. His word was uncontested. He would say a word and it had to be done his way. My father liked to drink, so my mother was always worried because we had no wealth of noble background, and no one would want us as his/her in-laws because of father's binges. Thank God, however, no one turned us down probably because, first of all, my

mother was a very decent woman. No one had anything against her, and it was worth a lot back in those days. A woman's decency does not mean much nowadays. Secondly, despite his constant binges, father was such a wise man that people used to say in the village, "Had he not been a drunk, we would have elected him our judge, and he would have made an excellent judge." We have our own judiciary, and not everyone can be a judge. He must be very wise and just. As for my father, even when totally wasted, he could discuss any matter in such a manner that would surprise you. You had to be straightforward with him and get to the point. He would let you speak and then tell you what he thought. He said everything he had to say straightforwardly. To make it short, he never had any problem with people being of a different creed. One had to be a decent human being. That's what mattered to him. That's why I didn't encounter any obstacles in this regard when I got married. My brother got upset only because I got married so young. Otherwise, he has never said, "He's a Georgian, a Christian. He's not welcome in my home." They [in-laws] did everything in an orderly manner, covering all the expenses and bringing sheep and 500 rubles. 500 rubles was the price for a girl at that time. It was a mandatory payment for every girl. Since we switched to lari, the rates have changed a bit. For example, we paid 320 lari for my sister-in-law. The elder child in family means a lot, especially a boy. If one goes to make wedding arrangements into a given family and the eldest son is not present, he/she will have to go through the arrangement process all over again. Therefore, when my in-laws were about to come to my family, my mother brought Vepkhia from Rustavi [a city in Eastern Georgia], so he could be present at the arrangement. He took it all normally. I cannot even imagine my brother disliking my husband because of his creed, probably because he has been cultured, because he has been around and seen things. This kind of issue bothers those who cannot see beyond their creed and lead an isolated way of life.

I wanted to have my children baptized last year. As it turns out, they don't baptize children of mothers who haven't been baptized themselves. I was at a loss. I didn't want to cause such a large family any problems. That's why I went and got baptized a Christian. There was no need for baptizing me anew as women don't get baptized among us anyway. That's why it could be said that I got baptized a

Christian together with my children. I put the baptism pictures in our family album, so when I was about to go to our village and take the album with me, my husband told me, "Let's take those pictures out." I refused and asked why, "I'm not scared at all. Do you take my brother for a fool who wouldn't understand that I would've accepted your faith after having spent so much time with you?" By the way, my brother saw those pictures, and I explained to him, "These are the pictures of the baptism." I did, however, hold back that I was baptized too. No, he wouldn't mind, but I nonetheless decided it would have been inappropriate to let him now. He accepted the children's baptism as something normal. My mother-in-law also has been christened. That's why neither she nor I observe Muslim customs. It wouldn't make any sense, especially if one lives among Christians. We observe Christian holidays, such as the Dormition of Mary, Eliaoba [the feast dedicated to the Prophet Elijah]. We set a festive table and hold celebrations at home. At these moments, I make wishes and say, "Neither quarrels nor drunken binges can surprise me. All I wish is peace and quiet."

P.S. Approximately two months after Manana's narrative:

"The kidnapping of the Azerbaijani Aziz Khalilov proved to be fateful for Margoshvili. Aziz was wounded and subsequently released, while his father was kept hostage in his stead. Margoshvili's name once again surfaced in relation to this crime. Law enforcements held negotiations with Margoshvili, which proved to be futile. This time, unlike the case when Red Cross employees were freed, Margoshvili refused to help, which entailed the disappearance of his wife, Lydia Saltaeva. Lydia Saltaeva was eventually imprisoned for concealing a crime. Margoshvili took his wife's imprisonment as a personal insult, yet he wouldn't threaten anyone with vengeance.

A week later, he was blown up in a car. His stunned family members found this Kisti crime boss all covered in blood and wounds. His left eye had been blown off, chest fractured, and left thigh torn into pieces. Nevertheless, he hadn't lost consciousness yet and cried for help. He was rushed to a hospital built by Chechens in Duisi. While on the way to the hospital, Margoshvili said, "Look what they've done to me," passed out, and died thirty minutes later."

*Kviris Palitra newspaper, October 22-28, 2001*



## **TALIKO ABULADZE**

Born in 1935

Interviewed by

IA MERKVILADZE in Tbilisi, 2003

### **Childhood**

I was born in the village of Birtskha, near Sokhumi [the capital of Abkhazia]. I don't know what year exactly. I was told it was 1935. My grandpa told me I was born when the cherry trees blossomed. Grandma used to say that my mother joined May Day celebration, suffering from stomach ache after coming back home. Father was drunk. Grandma told him that my mother was about to give birth and that he had to take her to the hospital... "Nah, it can wait till tomorrow." Grandma lead out a horse, seated my mother Tsatsa in the cart and took her to the maternity hospital. That's how I was born. A birth certificate was not issued for me at that time. I received my birth certificate when I got married. I wrote down May 2, 1935 as the date of my birth.

My father was not happy about my birth, "I don't need a baby girl." He told grandma that she could have me if she wanted. So grandma and grandpa raised me. My father had a tough childhood himself. He grew up as an orphan. They were eleven brothers and a sister. Their mother died, so my father's father, Gerasime Ambraladze, remarried and bore two more children. In short, my father remembered his stepmother better than his own mother because he had two burned fingers on his right hand because of her. One time my father reached out for grits boiling in the pot. His stepmother slapped him so badly that his hand wound up in the pot.

Father was from Godogani (there were two villages named Godogani: in the Martvili and Terjola Districts) [Western Georgia]. After this incident, he got on a train and left for Sokhumi... That is how he left home for good. He was fifteen back then. My other grandmother, Matryona, outlived her husband, Grigol Khurtsilava, with whom she had four children besides my mother. She got remarried to Isaac Jimshelishvili. Our step-grandfather treated us as his own grandchildren. He and grandmother never had any children of their own.

My fifteen-year-old runaway father met my grandfather (Jim-sheleishvili) while job-hunting, and was eventually hired by him. My mother saw him, came to like him, and asked grandfather to let her marry him. That's how a new family of Sokumi denizens was created. Grandfather gave my father a piece of land and a house. Where else could a hireling get a place to live?

We were growing up in poverty. There were seven of us: four sisters and three brothers. I lived with grandmother and grandfather. I used to call my mother "aunt", while referring to grandmother as "mom". I was told that I was an unhealthy, rickety child. I had a big head and a large belly. Sometimes people would scold grandmother for kissing me... How can you kiss such an ugly kid? Grandmother would take me to church to pray. She would bathe me in nettle broth, telling me not to worry and promising that I would become the most beautiful girl.

Indeed, I recovered. Our house in Sokhumi was located on Chamba Street. There was a Greek church at the end of the street. That's where grandmother used to take me. I remember it well. Grandmother had a Bible at home; she would murmur prayers. She was a busy woman. She knitted, sewed, embroidered, and taught me these trades as well. I used to say loudly that I was raised by true Georgians.

I turned seven, that is, I was old enough to go to school. There was a school next to the brick plant. I became a first-grader. I remember having Abkhazian and Greek kids as classmates. There were no Russians, though. They attended Russian schools. I went to school three times... just three days. ABC is all I remember. Then grandmother pulled me out of school. I cried; I wanted to study, yet someone had to tend to the family, cows, chickens... There was no other way around it. Thus, I have had three days of education.

Grandfather would wake me up early in the morning, at 6 am. I would wash my face and head toward the barn. I would clean up our cows with a brush. Grandmother would go to harvest tobacco leaves. I would clean up the cows, including the udder. By 9 am, I would have two cows milked; then I would pour over two gallons of milk in two large milk cans and head toward the city. I would reach the small farmer's market by bus and get off at the bus stop. I would push one milk can forward, and then return to do the same with the other can. That's how I would go from door

to door, selling two pints of milk for 50 kopeks. Then I would head back home with empty cans and money. I would clean and tidy the house. Then I would go back to the farmer's market, running errands for grandfather and grandmother, that is, buying fruits and vegetables for home. Women felt sorry for me and loudly expressed their feelings: they would ask me if I was in school and utter, "Oh, poor you", after hearing my negative reply.

Grandmother was an illiterate woman. As for grandfather, he had worked as a sailor on a ship and knew how to read and write. None of my siblings have completed middle school. Some of them completed four years, some five, and others seven, while my education consisted of three days in school. I used to cry because I couldn't go to school. Grandfather used to give me money to go to the movies. He also gave me money for thread, and I started knitting. Mother felt sorry for me as I no longer had the ability or time to attend school. I was already sixteen when I started attending evening classes. It was embarrassing; how could a grown-up woman sit next to little girls in the classroom! They just gave me a certificate... as though I had finished school.

We didn't have a clock at home. When it became dark, we would light a wick lamp, knitting, embroidering, and fluffing up wool. When the rooster would crow, grandfather would say, "It's midnight. Let's all go to bed." Early in the morning, grandmother would tell me to clean up the yard and road. A certain Mgeladze was the first secretary in Sokhumi at that time [Akaki Mgeladze, First Secretary of the Sokhumi City Committee and Abkhazia District Committee of the Communist Party of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1943-1945; was subsequently transferred to Kutaisi; it was said that when he left Kutaisi, local Jews were so overjoyed that they kissed the rail tracks under his railroad car]. He had a habit of walking into other people's front yards and observing them. That is why grandmother wanted me to clean the yard every day.

We owned a one-story house (grandfather's house). There were many beds. When children would become ill, they would move to grandfather's room and recover there. Every time grandmother caressed my siblings, I became angry since I was convinced that I was number one in grandma's and grandpa's house.

At the age of eighteen, I suffered a great loss. My thirty-five-year-old mother died from a malignant tumor. My elder sister was

already married. Mother suffered from cervical cancer. Nothing could save her no matter what we tried. My three-year-old younger sister was left without a mother. Father turned to drinking. He would return home drunk, yelling and kicking us out of the house. Then he would sober up, come to his senses, find us and lead us back home. He would come home drunk every day. Totally wasted, he would be dragged in the cart by a horse.

We begged him. We implored him. We asked him to remarry. He said, "No, I know what a stepmother is." We asked him to remarry even after we got married ourselves. He said it was too late for him to marry. My father reposed fifteen years after mother's death.

When I turned fifteen, a female relative arranged a cleaning lady's job for me at a lab. I was making fifteen rubles a month. I was happy to have a job. In a little while, I was offered a job at a sewing parlor. Back then, sewing parlors wouldn't hire you unless you became a member of a dance ensemble or a choir. So I enrolled in both. I learned how to dance and sing. I remember well that Givi Vashakidze and Tengiz Davitaia were the choreographers, while Nazy Chanturia led the singing classes. We discussed everything in our study groups except love and politics. We never told jokes. We spoke about our activities at home and at work. I especially loved theater. Actors Koberidze, Kanchaveli, Laparidze, Kalandadze were close enough to my heart to be treated as my family members. The boys and girls in our groups treated one another as brothers and sisters. There was one rookie, a young man, who danced the Georgian dance with me. He asked me out. Our boys beat him nearly to death. "Don't you dare touch one of our girls!" The boys respected decent girls. Naughty girls were never accepted in our group. They used to call me "Cutie". When I returned from Uzbekistan after I got married, I wore a traditional Uzbek dress, so they nicknamed me "Uzbek Girl". We were very close, we were like one family: Georgians, Abkhazians, Russians.

I vaguely remember being six when war broke out. I used to climb trees a lot, plucking fruits and selling them at the farmer's market. I was in a cherry plum tree when grandmother called me, "Come down, Taliko, war has just begun."

I remember how my city was bombed. Several bombs hit Sokhumi. Many fled the city. We never did. The grownups built a shelter, a bunker, in the forest, and nearly all kids would hide

there. I don't know if it's just my imagination or I've really experienced war.

My father, back when he was in shape, started to build a house on Chamba Street. Bare wall, that's all there was... They used to tell me that partisans hid there. I don't know. I never saw them. That house eventually collapsed. The grownups brought food for us children every day. We sang songs like: "I Am the Banner of the Red Army", or "Belarus my dear, Ukraine my sweet". My father was a deserter. He never joined the army. "If I get killed, what will happen to my children!" he used to exclaim. Actually, the 1937 repressions never had any impact on my family either. We were honest workers, peasants. We harvested tobacco leaves. We were supplied with corn, and our family had a monthly income in the amount of 100 rubles.

We never experienced starvation during Stalin's era, or during World War II. Grandfather kept Stalin's portrait at home. We nourished ourselves with cornbread and never experienced starvation. We used to go to the ape farm [Sokhumi All-Union Research Institute of Pathology and Experimental Therapy; opened in 1927] and the Sokhumi Botanic Garden. Not all front yards were provided with plumbing back then, and I would do my laundry under the water faucet in the ape farm. It was located on Miminoshvili Street, two kilometers from Chamba Street, at the crossroads of Miminoshvili and Baratashvili Streets called trapezoid. That's how we lived...

After mother's repose, we ended up facing hard times. Grandmother fell ill. In addition, grandmother's son (my mother's brother), Iviane Khurtsilava, went missing. My father lost three brothers in the war. My father simply gave away three of us for adoption [crying], two sisters and a brother: fourteen-year-old Tsiala, thirteen-year-old Khuta, and three-year-old Eteri. It wasn't exactly an adoption. No formal adoption procedures were executed. He just gave them up. He could no longer take care of us, and he kept drinking. Later I found out that Tsiala was herding cows. I went to her foster family, helped her sneak out and took her back home to Chamba Street. They "entrusted" her to some stranger in Baghmarani [a village near Sokhumi]. Then I found my brother, Khuta. As it turned out, my father "gave" him to some relatives. He also herded cattle. As for the youngest one, Eteri, I couldn't find her. We used to call her "Curly". She had curly hair just like

my father. We thought we had lost her forever. Khuta found her years later.

My brother, Khuta, turned to pickpocketing in public transport. We had no one to take care of us, so that's what he did... One time he met a young girl on a bus in Sokhumi, and behold, it was Eteri! He got off the bus and followed her. "What do you want from me?" Curly asked in Russian. "Aren't you Curly?" cried Khuta, "Curly, you're my sister!" And they hugged.

As it turned out, father gave Curly for adoption to the Abkhaz Ashkharava. They lived at 207 Maikop Street. They had no children. That man was the director of the bus station. When Eteri grew up, he hired her as his secretary. All those years, Eteri never forgot that he she had siblings. She recalled one phrase in particular. One time Khuta picked her up and joked that he was about to throw her in the water. Eteri cried, "You won't if you're really my brother." Curly remembered this phrase. She remembered that she had a brother. I lived in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Gulistan [there are two places called Gulistan: in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan]. I was a mother of four at that time. So, Khuta called me in Gulistan, "Taliko, I found Curly!" I immediately bought a ticket to Sokhumi. I flew. I bought gold jewelry. From the airport, I went to my brother's place. I got there, lay down to rest, and heard children shouting, "Curly is here! Curly is here!" I ran outside and what did I see! [crying] At the gate... my mother standing at the gate... except that she was Curly... That's all I remember. I passed out; I lost consciousness. That's how we met twenty years later. Curly asked us not to tell her parents. The Abkhaz Ashkharavas sent her to school; she got a job in school and got married. I haven't seen my sister since the fall of Sokhumi. Her husband took her to Leningrad. She feels comfortable there; she's a happy woman.

Had grandfather and grandmother been alive, they would never have given up my siblings for adoption. Grandmother aged tremendously after mother's repose. She had lost a child before, a thirteen-year-old child... She couldn't handle the death of yet another child.

I kept harvesting tobacco leaves. While grandma was alive, we both worked in Tzereteli Collective Farm. Grapes and tea don't grow in Abkhazia, so we make a living harvesting citrus and tobacco. I plucked tobacco leaves in the evening. I remember two types of

tobacco: Trabzon with long leaves and Sampson with round, thick leaves. We plucked the tobacco leaves and tore off the flowers. It was believed that flowers took away the strength of tobacco leaves. Then we strung the leaves. Most importantly, none of the women employees smoked. We led a decent life. Neither were there any harlots among us, unlike today; there were no smokers among female tobacco harvesters.

This was the story of my childhood.

### **Marriage**

After my mother's repose, I worked at the sewing parlor and studied at the same time. The tuition fee was due, and I felt embarrassed to ask my uncle. Hoping that I could find something better, uncle sent me to his married daughter in Gudauta in 1955, when I turned twenty. My cousin's husband, Vasily, was Russian; his last name was Didovsky. He taught in school. My future husband, Giorgi (Zhora) Yakhyas-dze Bakradze was sixteen years older than I. He taught the German language in the same school, in the village of Jikhva. He fought in the war and had a number of awards and titles; he was even wounded several times.

I didn't want to marry. I wanted to study! On the other hand, I was exhausted. I had worked all my life taking care of my siblings, and never having a place of my own. I thought, at least I would have a roof over my head. I never dressed well. It's not that I had nothing to wear, but my outfits were awfully shabby. I felt self-conscious about my condition. Bakradze asked my uncle for my hand in marriage. I didn't know him; I was not in love with him. We had only met twice prior to our marriage. We had never had a normal conversation. He mainly spoke to my relatives. He lied to us, saying that he was an orphan, that he didn't have anyone. So we never asked him. I thought that since he was an orphan, and so was I, we could get along well. When I found out about his father, he replied, "I couldn't bring my elderly dad over from Tashkent just to attend our marriage." We got married on November 7. That's how I became the wife of a Meskhetian Turk [Georgian civil society prefers to use the term Muslim Meskhetians], a Muslim, without even knowing it.

My husband was from Akhaltsikhe, the village of Ude. He was a representative of people who were deported to Central Asia over-

night, by decree of Stalin, in 1944. My husband's family settled in Uzbekistan, on the Akhumbabaev Collective Farm territory in the Syrdaryinsk District. Then they moved to the Pogranorlovsk District. I followed my husband, of course, spending forty-two years in Uzbekistan. I did, however, fly to Sokhumi to see my relatives almost every year.

Before moving to Uzbekistan, we spent one year in Jikhva. I met many Abkhazians, Armenians, and Greeks. We got along very well. We spent one year there and had our first child, Jemali (my father-in-law called him Kemal), in Jikhva. My husband became a school principal. He had two brothers in Central Asia, both servicemen. We were informed from Central Asia that one of the brothers was involved in an accident. My folks collected money for him, and my husband remained with him for two months. For some reason, neighbors kept picking on me, saying that he had left me... when he returned, we moved to Sokhumi and rented an apartment on Chamba Street, the street of my childhood. My husband started to work in the military health center, in Sokhumi. Money was tight, his salary was small. My father used to drop off groceries every time he passed our home. We spent one year in Sokhumi. I never felt any hatred between Georgians and Abkhazians. We, the members of our dance group: Russians, Abkhazians, Greeks, Georgians, children of interracial marriages, performed the "Kartuli", "Perkhuli", "Mokhevuri" dances together... I danced "Gandagana"... My partner was an Abkhazian, Zuri Marghania. I was friends with his wife. We never discriminated between Georgians and Abkhazians. We spent time together, we ate and drank together.

A year later, my husband took me to Central Asia. It was November, 1955. That's how I wound up on the Ilyich Collective Farm of the Pogranorlovsk Village Council, Syrdaryinsk District [Town of Quvasoy].

Since my husband was a Meskhetian Turk, he was prohibited from leaving town during curfew hours; I was restricted from travelling in and out of town as well. These restrictions remained in force until 1965. Then they were removed. My husband, however, violated the curfew; as a military officer, he was entitled to travel to other towns.

We had been married for six months when he took me to Central Asia. After Sokhumi and Chamba Street, this was very



stressful for me. There was no running water. There were small ponds full of frogs here and there. People collected water in those ponds, boiling and consuming it. Many were poisoned and killed this way. Many newcomers perished right before my eyes. I started having nightmares. In my dreams, I drank Sokhumi water. I woke up and wept. I wasn't feeling good; I frequently fell ill. My husband sent me back to Sokhumi. Then I returned to Asia.

My father-in-law, Yakhya Bakradze, was a Meskhetian Muslim, who fancied himself as a Georgian. He spoke to me in Georgian. That's when I learned what Islam was about. I baptized all my children as Christians, however. I lost my first child, a one-year-old boy... He fell ill; we didn't know what was wrong with him, and he died. We had a Christian funeral for him. It was strange: in spite of everything, we celebrated Christian feasts just as we would in Georgia. We celebrated New Year's Eve and Christmas. Our neighbors, both Christians and non-Christians, gathered in our home to celebrate New Year's Eve. We dyed Easter eggs red, and Uzbek women also participated in the process. I taught them how to cook satsivi and khachapuri [Georgian dishes]. They wrote down and kept Georgian recipes. I could freely go to an Orthodox church. Neither the militia [The term "militia" in the former Soviet Union was specifically used to refer to the civilian police force, and should not be confused with the conventional western definition of militia] nor the KGB bothered us. At the same time, our family also observed Kurban Bayram and Aravari Bayram [Muslim holidays]. They abstained from food at daytime, or fasted for a month. My husband and father-in-law never prohibited me from observing Christian customs. The Mullah started prayers at six in the morning, while I commenced taking care of the children and family. I was always curious about what a masjid was like. I knew women were not allowed there, although one time I managed to sneak in with a tour group.

After I got used to the head covering, it was no longer important to me that my husband was of a different creed. My father-in-law explained to me that God is one, and it didn't matter at all how one prayed. My close relatives arrived from Greece and brought me a cross as a present, knowing that I was a non-Muslim. I wouldn't wear it though, because I didn't want to hurt my father-in-law's feelings. I also knew that polygamy was practiced among Muslims.

My brother-in-law had two women, two wives: one was a legal wife, while the other... My husband also “happened” to have a number of wives, yet nobody took into consideration that he was a Muslim. He was tried nonetheless. Isn’t polygamy practiced among Georgians as well, despite being Orthodox?

It was my father-in-law, and not my husband, who instructed me to wear a head covering. He also said that I didn’t have to wear it at home, unless I wanted to, and that it was mandatory in public only. My father-in-law fancied himself as a Georgian, and there were many Georgian families where we lived, that is, in Pogranorlovsk, near Tashkent. They were Meskhetian Turks, Muslim Meskhetians, who retained a Georgian way of life. They cooked beans and cornbread, feasted in a Georgian manner; they were envied by many. Meskhetians are hardworking people and they make good money.

I respected my father-in-law and wore a white veil called a posh. The chairman of the local collective farm, an Armenian man, used to scold me, “You’re a Georgian woman; why are you dressed like a Muslim?” I answered that it was no big deal for me; what really mattered was that I did not want to hurt the elderly man’s feelings. My father-in-law was highly esteemed, while I, Taliko, was not; they used to call me “Yakhy-basha’s daughter-in-law”. My father-in-law had a tough life. When the Meskhetians were deported in 1944, a multitude of people perished in the railroad car into which they were packed. They dumped the dead out of the car one by one.

Father-in-law was held in high esteem. He was nicknamed Michurin for cultivating his garden. He always had fruits. My husband and I could no longer live on our own and moved in with Yakhya, to March the Eighth Street, Pogranorlovsk Council, Syrdaryinsk District. Unfortunately, I don’t remember the house number. Up to five hundred Meskhetian families resided in that district. There was a Meskhetians’ collective farm. Only vast steppes constituted the district. Muslim Meskhetians started to cultivate it, and the place blossomed. At the same time, they strictly observed Muslim customs, and I was subjected to these customs as well. For example, they slaughtered sheep during Kurban Bayram and shared mutton with all their neighbors. So I visited our neighbors and distributed pieces of meat. I knew I wasn’t supposed to slaughter chicken; it was a man’s job. In addition, chicken were

to be isolated for forty days in order for them not to “partake” of anything unclean outside. They [Muslims] didn’t eat pork. Mainly Russians practiced pig farming. Strangely enough, Muslim Uzbeks also raised pigs for sale, while abstaining from using their meat. It was equally strange that a number of our Uzbek acquaintances ate ham: Uzbeks, Tajiks, Muslim Meskhetians stood in line whenever this product was sold in stores. I don’t eat pork anymore. When we were kicked out of Sokhumi, I saw pigs on television; they were nuzzling the dead bodies of Georgians and Abkhazians. I’ve come to hate the pigs since then. My folks also saw that footage. I cannot tolerate the sight of pigs, not to mention eating pork.

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Before I became a mother of many children, I worked in cotton plantations. Nobody warned me, so I went to work with no leggings on and returned with my legs bleeding. Using gloves was uncomfortable; it was impossible to pick cotton, so my hands were all covered in blisters. I had to keep up high standards! I harvested six kilos on the first day, pushing a bit harder on the second day and picking twelve kilos, while harvesting twenty-four kilos on the third day. I worked in the cotton plantations from 11am to 3pm. There were women who harvested one hundred kilos of cotton in the same amount of time. Our supervisor was a male who made sure we were not wasting time. Yet, we managed to “feast” in the plantation anyway. We had days off when the plantations were treated with chemicals from a helicopter, so that plants would shed their leaves, retaining cotton only. Picking cotton was the women’s main job. We were paid ten kopecks per kilo of cotton harvested in the scorching sun. We collected cotton in our aprons and handed it in. However, for some reason, I was never paid. Soon I quit working in the plantation for good. I turned to taking care of the children and supporting the family. As for the income from cotton, it wasn’t much of a help for a woman with many children.

My husband was a communist. He offered me to join the party, but I had no desire to do so, and I had no idea what the Communist Party was about. In Sokhumi, while working in the sewing parlor, I was accepted in the young communist league. Oddly enough, I was accepted without passing the pioneer movement stage. They couldn’t accept me as a pioneer since I never went to school. Yet,

I was happily accepted in the young communist league along with four other young women, who had graduated from high school. I was proud to wear a young communist league pin up until my marriage. I was excited to be a member of the young communist league, uneducated as I was.

When my father-in-law was deported from Ude, my husband and his two brothers were fighting in the war, defending the homeland. In the meantime, their father was deported to Central Asia. The whole population of Ude was deported at that time. Yakhya Bakradze's wife, daughter and sister perished in Central Asia; they were buried in a common grave. Had my husband been in Ude, he would also have been deported. After returning from war, he found his home desolate. He found out where his parents were deported and headed for Uzbekistan.

In the meantime, my father-in-law was allocated a parcel of land in the Ilyich Collective Farm of the Pogradorlovsk Village Council, Syrdaryinsk District, and he even built a house. The state permitted him to settle. When my husband arrived in Uzbekistan after the war, my father-in-law had already built the house. My husband got married. His first wife was his first love. She, too, lived there, that girl; she was a Meskhetian deportee called Shura. I've already told you how horrible the water in Uzbekistan was. So Shura came down with tuberculosis. She was nearly dead when my husband married her. He hoped to spend at least one day with her. She died fifteen days later.

My husband decided to move to Tbilisi and establish himself there. It didn't work out. Then he returned to Ude, but he wasn't allowed in Akhaltsikhe either [Southwestern Georgia]. Meskhetian Turks were declared public enemies, and the Georgians themselves wouldn't let him in Akhaltsikhe. In addition, the status of a deported man made him a dangerous person. We were married when he tried to return to Akhaltsikhe several times in 1956-1958, yet to no avail.

He returned to Uzbekistan and remarried a Russian woman. After a little while, he kicked her out and married a Meskhetian woman only to kick her out as well a bit later. I happened to be his eighth wife! I was pregnant with our second child (a boy) when I learned about it. A certain Russian woman saw me once and asked, "Aren't you the Meskhetians' daughter-in-law?" I replied I

was Grisha's wife. They used to call him Grisha. "Oh poor you," she said, "he had ten wives before you! Couldn't you find somebody else?" and listed my husband's wives by name. I nearly went berserk and started crying; I wanted to kill myself. I ran crying to my father-in-law. His wife "comforted" me, "It's no big deal, Taliko. This is women's destiny. Men have always had women, wives. You need a husband, don't you?" There was no calming me down, however. Back in Sokhumi, a certain Georgian young man from Sokhumi fell in love me; he wanted to marry me. I found out that he had a mistress and I refused to marry him! And now I wound up being the eighth wife of a polygamist! How could this happen to me? I wept. I wanted to divorce him, but I had reached the point of no return. I had no home. My marriage was an escape from a drunken father. And what was I supposed to do? I was pregnant with a second child.

After I reproached my husband, he replied that it was all a lie. He even called his buddies to vouch for his words. I found out later that my husband had had Tatar, Kazakh, Turkmen, and Azeri wives before me. He had children as well, but I never inquired concerning his offspring.

What was I to do? I just got used to it. I've regretted ever since that my relatives never checked his background, that they blindly trusted him and got rid of me as though putting me in good hands. He lied to us, though, saying that he had no passport and claiming to be of the same creed as we were. He simply overwhelmed us with his military awards and decorations. We believed him to be a serious and decent man.

I truly regret letting this man into my life. He paid no attention to me even when I was in the hospital giving birth. As a rule, there were five-six women in labor in the hospital room. Even hospital personnel wondered at Zhora's behavior. When I gave birth to Koba (second child), he brought our elder son, Jemali, to the hospital, saying he had to go on an excursion and left our son with me.

He used to disappear for months, and I would move in with my father-in-law. Then he would reappear. I was told he was fooling around with mistresses, which he really did. He never brought home any groceries or money. We argued about it, I scolded him, and he beat me up badly, giving me black eyes and bruises. He didn't beat me only when I was at my father-in-law's house. One

time he bashed me up so badly (I was pregnant with a third child), our appalled neighbors collected money for me to return to Sokhumi. I did want to go back to Sokhumi but I had nothing in Sokhumi; I also reasoned that, good or bad, he was my children's father, and persevered. My siblings and I grew up as orphans, and I didn't want my children to be orphans in the hands of a living father. He would beat them, and they would scream and cry.

He went to Moscow once. He promised to come back in five days and put fifty kopecks on the table. That was all he left for me. He promised to return soon and disappeared. What was I to do? I was facing a very bad situation. It was winter, and it was cold. There was no food for the children. I had three children to take care of... I cut down all the trees in the yard for firewood. Then I dismantled the pantry and burned it as well. I could sense that my children were nothing short of freezing and starving to death. Luckily for me, I met one woman, a Kazakh Tatar widow, Zoya Galeulina. She offered me a job as an orderly at the tuberculosis hospital. She promised to help babysit my children when I was on duty. I gladly agreed. My father-in-law gave me ten rubles once in a while, but what is ten rubles when you have children to feed? So I accepted the job. Then they opened a penal colony for women between fourteen and eighteen years of age. The head physician of the tuberculosis hospital summoned me and said, "Taliko, it would be a pity if you, a mother of small children, caught tuberculosis," and transferred me to the colony kitchen.

There was a tearoom near my house. People gathered there in the evening and discussed their concerns. As it turned out, they spoke about me most of the time. They used to give me some flour; others brought milk, while some spared cash. That's how I made it through the winter of 1963. My husband sent a telegram five months later, letting me know that he was about to come back and asking me to wire thirty rubles to a certain address. I borrowed ten rubles here and ten there and sent him the money. Neighbors scolded me, "Why do you need a husband like that? He has abandoned you, but you keep supporting him!" Probably I loved him. That's a woman's destiny. My husband arrived, and I welcomed him with open arms. I didn't even inquire what he was doing in Moscow. He, too, found a job at the penal colony. His salary was three hundred rubles a month. At the same time, I worked

my fingers to the bone, yet my salary was only seventy rubles a month. My husband never brought his pay home. He was having fun with women. He was partying in restaurants. Every time I bought goods or tableware for home, I hid them at our neighbors' home. My husband used to reprimand me for buying blankets.

One time he brought two girls over from the colony. They were eighteen years old. As he explained, he was supposed to send them to Moscow. I got up one night and what do I see! My husband lying next to Gulsara! I threw a shoe at him. "You're throwing shoes at me?" he asked and thrashed me soundly. When the director of the penal colony (his last name was Khokhol) saw me the following day, he nearly went crazy. I told him that my husband was fooling around with eighteen-year-old Gulsara. The director fired my husband in compliance with Article 47.

I no longer wanted to live with my husband [crying]. I went to the village council. I met with the director of food services, the hospital head physician, and others. I said I wanted a divorce, I wanted to leave home. They told me it wasn't I but my husband who was about to leave. I was pregnant with our fourth child at that time. I didn't even know to whom to turn for help. Instead of the village council, I should have gone to court and formally divorced. I didn't know it back then. I couldn't go back to Sokhumi either. Where would I live if I did?

We had Greeks living in our neighborhood. They were deported from Sokhumi to Central Asia in 1944. They felt sorry for me and transported my children and me to the Kazakhstani town of Slavyanka. This town was located on the border with Uzbekistan. Then I moved to Tashkent. We were given a room in a dormitory, in Kirov District. I went looking for a job. My brother-in-law and a whole array of my husband's relatives came over, asking me to return. They said they could live without Zhora but not without me. I found a job as a cleaning lady at first and then as the chef at one of the institutions.

In the meantime, my father-in-law reposed. I received a message from my in-laws, promising to let me have my father-in-law's whole house if I would only return. I agreed. My husband went to work in Gulistan. He came home once a week and then left again. I quit my job. I sat at home, taking care of the children. I already had four: Koba, Jemali, Lamara and Lenara. Sometimes I gathered

fruits in my father-in-law's orchard and sold them at the farmer's market. One time my husband visited me with my brother-in-law and suggested we sell the house, move to Gulistan, and then return to Sokhumi.

That made me happy beyond imagination! I made ready for Sokhumi at once! I was foolish and guileless! They made me sell that house because my brother-in-law needed money! We moved into a one-room apartment in Gulistan. We paid rent, and my husband brought his lovers to that one-room apartment. Sometimes he disappeared for a long time. Rent was often due, and the landlord demanded it from me. I never saw a penny from the money received for my father-in-law's house. I was starving to death and the children were crying. Lenara, the youngest, was one year old.

I went to see Sapar Turaevich Turaev, the director of the local branch of the state department of trade. When I entered his office, I broke into tears. I asked him to find a job for me as we were starving to death. It was April 26, 1968. I remember it well. That man gave me ten rubles to buy food for my children. He took me to the Jews who traded in ice-cream and lemonade and asked them to find a decent job for me. On the 27th, they arranged a trade stand for me. On the 28th, I started to work. I was scared because I didn't know how to sell. Step by step, however, I got used to it. On May 1, I was given ten cans of ice-cream. I trembled at seeing so much ice-cream. Nevertheless, I sold 120 rubles worth of ice-cream that day. My boss, Aunt Muse, was a Jew. I walked up to her and handed her the money. She tore up the invoices and some paperwork, congratulated me with my first day at work, and said, "Taliko, this money is all yours!"

It was the dawn of May 2, my birthday. I had earned 160 rubles. "This money is all yours!" Aunt Muse told me. I still can hear her words. I rushed to buy food for my children. For myself, as I remember, I bought a white shirt, a black skirt, and black platform shoes. Then I paid the landlord three months' rent. My husband never surfaced for a month.

I left the apartment I had been renting and found a better, three-room apartment for forty rubles. My financial situation improved significantly. After seven months, I was offered to sell sodas near the building of the village council. I was making three hundred rubles a day. I thought I was born again. I took my chil-





Taliko the lemonade trader

dren to kindergarten, bought furniture, and neatened the apartment, made sure my children were fed, and even supported my husband. In spite of everything, I clothed him and fed him, and what did I get in return? He reproached me even worse. He went to the human resources department at my job, saying that his wife was a drunk and indecent woman and requesting to have me fired [crying]. His words reached the head of the local brand of the state department of trade, who summoned him and said, “I wish we had more drunks like your wife.”

In a few days, when I went to work to hand in my sales revenue, I was told that my husband had been gossiping about me, saying that I was a slut... Everything went dark before my eyes. The distance between my job and home was seven kilometers. I remember running like hell and covering this distance in five minutes. I happened to pass by an acquaintance who called me. I heard nothing, of course. The acquaintance followed me. A neighbor also noticed me running. In the meantime, I managed to tie a rope and... hanged myself [crying]. My neighbor and that acquaintance opened the door. They screamed. They took me down. I remained

unconscious for three hours. I regret terribly what I did. Who would take care of my children? [crying] I wasn't thinking at that time. Something got a hold of me, I don't know what. I spent one month at home [long pause]. My husband came home late that day. Our neighbors came over and beat him; kicked him out of the house.

I still regret what I did. We had a neighbor, a female Meskhetian Turk. She wasn't married. She could hardly make ends meet raising five kids. She died eventually. These kids were left with no one to take care of them; they were left to starve to death. Sometimes, on my way home, I noticed all five of them standing at the fence. Poor souls... Every time I looked at them, I realized that my children would be standing at the fence just like them, neglected and nearly starved to death, had I died that time. I vowed to divorce my husband once and for all, to work as many jobs as necessary to provide for my children! Yet [crying], my husband kept coming... and eating food that I had bought with my money. Sometimes I bought shoes for him. I don't know. Probably I felt sorry for him. He was my children's father.

Then he filed a complaint with the militia, accusing me of illegal, under-the-counter sparkling water sales. The chief of militia summoned me and showed me what my husband had written about me. I sat there, dumbfounded. I said nothing. Then my husband was summoned. As soon as he entered, the chief of militia tore up his complaint in pieces, threw them in my husband's face and yelled at him, "You ought to be grateful to you wife for keeping you and your children from starving to death! And what do you do? You think we don't know that Taliko sells under the counter. We just wink at it for the sake of your children."

That's how my husband was kicked out.

Then he filed a complaint in the municipal council of women. A certain woman came to my workplace. She interviewed my coworkers, asking whether I was a slut or not. My coworkers were stunned. They told her about my husband that "he was a provocateur and indecent man." Then my husband went complaining to the district attorney's office, insisting again that I was a slut. Representatives of the DA came over, interrogated my neighbors and children. The children said that their mother worked and lived as a decent person, never fooling around with men. There was no organization left with which to file a complaint against me.

I had one hundred cases of vodka for sale one time. My neighbor was about to have a wedding reception. So I accompanied this neighbor to my work to discuss the issue of vodka sales. Vodka cost 3.62 rubles back then. Since he wanted to buy a lot of it, I sold it to him for 2.5 rubles. My husband noticed me walking with that neighbor and beat me mercilessly after I got home. I was gravely injured. My neighbors informed the district attorney's office and warned me, "We'll either kill you or your husband." I was summoned by the DA's office where our case was thoroughly investigated. Nevertheless, I forgave him and let him come back home [crying]. I was such a fool! He seemed to have come to his senses for a month. Then he started to beat and curse me again. I was in the kitchen. I grabbed a frying pan and hit him on the head. He started bleeding. The children were frightened; they ran away. He burst out of the apartment and complained to our neighbors, "Look what she's done to me!" They all slammed their doors in his face. I grabbed the kids and moved in with a neighbor. My husband went to the militia and filed a complaint against me. He called the ambulance to have his head injury on the record. I, on the other hand, never thought of doing the same. I borrowed clothes and footwear and went to the militia precinct. We were summoned, that's why. The detective noticed my bruised hand and understood everything. The neighbors also backed me up. He was sentenced to fifteen days in jail. It was a sort of relief.

After his release and return home in fifteen days, my husband became even more bitter and crazier. I accepted him... What could I do? [crying] He had so many military awards and decorations; he was so highly esteemed, that no one would believe this man to be so violent at home. Every time the children noticed him, they would cry, "Dad's coming!" and disperse. Finally I filed a claim in court. I wanted to change my last name, that is, to reclaim my maiden name. I decided to give my children my last name. My neighbors wrote support letters for me, stating that it was impossible to live with my husband. In one word, I decided to divorce. During a court session, my husband accused the judge of being my lover.

I was at work, in the store, one time. I received a call from the district council, summoning me for an interview. I arrived. The judge held a loaf of bread in his hand and told me, "Put your

hand on the bread and swear that we've never been lovers, that I've never touched you."

Swearing on bread was taken very seriously in those parts. So I swore and added a joke, "According to my husband, I've slept with so many men. It's so good to have met so many people."

I was kidding, yet I didn't feel like kidding! He even sent a letter to the editorial office of the local Women's Newspaper, tarnishing and slandering me, which was followed by a number of similar letters to other newspapers.

Our divorce was soon formally executed in court. I reclaimed my maiden name but never changed my children's last names. I reasoned that after I returned to Georgia, to my Sokhumi, my relatives would wonder why my children bore my last name. They would assume I had never had a husband and had these children from lovers.

That's how I reclaimed my maiden name. I was Taliko Abuladze once again. I wish I had done it earlier. What was I waiting for? Why did I torture myself? What for?

My ex-husband was sentenced to three years in accordance with Article 93, that is, for polygamy and constant physical abuse of a spouse. He was tried for fraud. After he went to jail, a multitude of his creditors swarmed around me. They broke my windows and demanded their money.

He started to write complaints against me even from a prison cell! [Long pause] He was released in eighteen months as a decorated veteran. And he came back to me! I ran to the militia and made a statement, "The wolf and the sheep shall not graze together!" I begged them to rid me of that man. I was redirected to the municipal council. As a war veteran, my husband was offered a one-room apartment. He turned down the offer and declared that he wanted to live in his apartment, with his family (?!). Then he was forced to sign a restriction statement, promising never to walk on the street where I lived. He was warned against harassing Taliko Abuladze ever again. That's how that man disappeared from my life. He found a job somewhere. At last, I was free of that man. As I remember, he died in June 1989. His corpse, like that of a dog, was left unattended for three days. It was found by sheer accident. My children didn't attend his funeral. My sons attended the one-year anniversary of his death. In spite of everything, I have to say

that I have always had, and still maintain, a good relationship with my nephews-in-law and nieces-in-law, my husband's relatives in general. They used to support me with groceries, money. They were thoroughly acquainted with my husband's obnoxious nature. Living with my husband was a train wreck. I cannot recall a single happy moment. I weighed forty-five kilos; I was a miserable bag of bones. After I divorced my husband, I got back in shape and put on a pound or two.

### **Without a husband**

I regret three things in life: I did not study, I married my husband, and I did not return to Georgia.

I've been working all my life. With education to back me up, I could be very successful. I learned how to read and write on my own. My uncle was the chairman of a collective farm. He had many books. I would sit there and draw letters. I learned how to count from my grandfather. After selling milk back when I was a six or seven-year-old girl, I would bring cash to grandfather. He would grab the abacus and plunge into calculations. That's how I learned how to count. My brother used to say about me that I could "conquer the whole land of Uzbekistan" if I were well-educated. "She can't tell right from left, but she runs a whole store." My elder brother had the best education among his siblings; he completed ten grades in school. That's why I wouldn't back up. I didn't want my children to be uneducated. I hated being poor, being an orphan and uneducated! I led the school parent council for eighteen years. I also became actively involved in social work. I gave speeches at meetings and solved problems in school. No New Year's Light [festive show with featured guests, similar to the then national television show Little Blue Light] was organized without my input.

I opened the store at 8 in the morning. At lunch break, at 11 am, I ran home to feed my children. I also looked after the yard, chicken... I often had no time to eat. I often had tears rolling down my face... I cried involuntarily... I used to get so exhausted, and everyone felt sorry for me. I worked the evening shift. My coworkers used to fill in for me. I asked them to give me two hours to clean the house, do the laundry. My children were always dressed in clean and new clothes. I was a Georgian woman in Uzbekistan, and I would never let anyone look askance at my children or me!

I took care of my children in every way, even if it meant staying up all night. They were my children... I secretly dreamed of my Sokhumi... I was convinced that one day I would return there. I was excited about providing for my family on my own. I turned into a real businesswoman.

I learned what life is about in Central Asia. I learned how to stand up for myself, how to survive. It would be hard for me to start all over again today, because people no longer support one another. Back then, however, we did support one another. People used to be more attentive to one another. I am here, I am in Georgia, yet people treat me like a dog. I am nobody. My children (girls) went to work in Antalya. Lamara's son, nine-year-old Irakli, and I stayed here... We too will leave here sooner or later. Georgia doesn't need us, that's why... As the wife of a deportee "Meskhetian Turk", I receive a forty-five lari pension and eleven lari as a refugee from Sokhumi. That's all I get to survive.

### **About Meskhetians**

Meskhetians volunteered to be registered as Turks. They never identified themselves with Georgians, and they never wanted to become Georgians in the first place... They were not Uzbeks either. Many retained Georgian last names, yet they did not register as Georgians. For example, my younger brother-in-law, Lado Bakradze, registered his children as Turks (last name: Latifov)... He used to say, "Georgia won't accept us; no one needs us there, so we'll register as Muslims with Muslim last names." Meskhetian families were especially prominent where I lived. They were well-to-do, and they feasted a lot. "Non-Meskhetians" didn't like it, they were envious. They were envious even when Meskhetians accepted a Georgian daughter-in-law. Uzbeks thought that Meskhetians were not Georgians. Meskhetians only registered as Turks, hoping that they would not be deported again like in 1944. There were, however, those who said, "I would die for a sip of Georgian water." Meskhetians registered as Uzbeks, Azeris, Turks. They were not obligated by the state to do so; no one forced them to change their last names, yet they needed to do so. My husband didn't like them; he never made friends with them and didn't mingle with them. At the same time, he registered one of my boys as a Georgian in his birth certificate, while registering our other son as an Azeri. My best

friends were Meskhetians and Azerbaijanis. I too pretended to be a Meskhetian since my husband was a Meskhetian and my children claimed to be Meskhetians leading a Meskhetian way of life.

Meskhetians residing in Uzbekistan hated Stalin's guts. As for me, I loved... Stalin. And Stalin's portraits were all over the place. Uzbeks kept Stalin's large-size portraits in cars and at home. I too had one hanging in my store. Some Meskhetians were upset with me for having Stalin's portrait on the wall. People hated Stalin, especially Meskhetians, but had his portraits in their cars and homes nonetheless. When I first started working in the store, my coworkers gave me Stalin's portrait. When Stalin died and Khrushchev came to power, the monitoring agency carried out an inspection in our store. They couldn't find anything, so they started caviling about Stalin's portrait. "Take this picture down!" In reply, I promised to take it with me when I quit. They said nothing further. Everyone knew what I had gone through, they considered me a strong woman, and I exercised a considerable amount of authority. "You're a second Stalin," my acquaintances used to tell me.

My husband was communist, a war veteran and defender of the homeland. He suffered a contusion in war. Nevertheless, Stalin uprooted the Meskhetians from their lands and deported them in 1944. Yet, I have never heard my husband badmouthing Stalin. We believed Stalin to be our patron. I emulated Stalin in terms of exercising toughness while raising my children. I'm known for my kindheartedness, but I treated my children as blood enemies. I never spoiled them. I didn't let my daughter wear fashionable outfits. It still scandalizes me to see a woman in pants. When my Lamara debated whether she should wear pants, I told her to put on a robe. She left home dressed like that. It was rumored, however, that she shed the robe right after turning around the corner and pranced down the street. That's what my neighbors told me.

No one criticized Stalin's political course. Uzbeks, among others, adored Stalin. I knew there were many jokes about Stalin but no one dared telling them in my presence. They knew I would be angry. I was angry at Georgians as well after I came here (to Tbilisi) as a refugee from Abkhazia. They made fun of me because I was friends with Muslim Meskhetians and mingled with them. "Go have fun with your Muslims!" they laughed at me. "That's why you're doing so well." I replied, "Meskhetians are hardworking people

who love agriculture. Yes, I love Meskhetians. If they all move to Georgia, the country will flourish.” Many couldn’t understand that Meskhetians were Georgians, except that they were non-Orthodox, non-Christians. I wonder where this hatred toward these people comes from. The state, however, has never showed any care for me as a family member of a Meskhetian Turk. Seven years ago, Guram Mamulia [a Georgian historian, advocate of the rights of Muslim Meskhetians; reposed in 2003] took me to Marneuli, showed me a house with forty square meters of land and exclaimed, “This house is yours!” I was so excited. However, we were never given any document proving that we owned the house. “House” is too fancy a word for that two-story frame. It had neither a yard nor an orchard... Then I was asked by local Azerbaijanis to provide documented evidence of property ownership. Yet, Guram Mamulia never gave me any document. In one word, I was kicked out of there.

I truly regret one thing. Fifteen years ago, Avto Margiani, my friend’s cousin, was First Secretary of the Gardabani District. He offered me an apartment in Gardabani. He pretty much gave it to me. My children, however, objected as they wanted to live in Sokhumi, and so did I, of course.

Everyone coming to Tashkent or Gulistan [meaning visitors from Georgia] looked up “the Abkhaz” Taliko Bakradze and paid a visit to her.

One time a certain Abkhaz man called me “homegirl” at the Tashkent Airport. I almost went crazy with joy. One time I was on my way to see my daughter, Lenara (she got married to an Azeri man in Ganja). My flight to Baku was delayed. I bumped into Abkhazians. The Sokhumi tragedy had recently happened. The Abkhazians were about to fly someplace... They recognized me. They too called me “homegirl”. I was happy beyond imagination.

### **Life goes on**

I learned Turkish while living in Uzbekistan. Meskhetians spoke Turkish, and I naturally learned the Turkish language. We, Meskhetians: Beridzes, Kiknadzes, Bakradzes began to speak Turkish. Many Meskhetians forgot the Georgian language. I tried to retain Georgian. My husband didn’t seem to be too fond of his Meskhetian roots. It was impossible to figure him out. On the other hand, people were not differentiated by nationality in Uzbekistan.



I tried all kinds of jobs: worked in a store, sold soda and ice cream outdoors. Then I turned to importing lemonade and food coloring from Sokhumi. I even started my own business. I bought a large gas cylinder for 130 rubles, syrup for 25 rubles, and sold sodas under the counter. I had to support four children after all. My sodas proved to be delicious. I treated Uzbeks with sodas made of ingredients imported from Sokhumi. They were happy, and I could sleep with a clean conscience. They asked me, “Taliko, how come your soda is so yummy?” I replied, “It’s from Sokhumi, that’s why.” Uzbeks especially loved tarragon soda. Back in Soviet times I traveled to Sokhumi twice a month, bought tarragon coloring, and produced soda drinks. My soft drinks were called “Amirani”. Thus, I made money, like 300 rubles a day, and earned respect. Theft and racketeering were not as big back then. I never locked the door when leaving the store, maybe only at night. I walked back home late at night, wearing gold and diamond jewelry, but had never been mugged. I carried 300 rubles in my purse; no one ever robbed me, while they knew I was making good money.

I wanted my girls and boys to build Georgian families. I wanted to go back to Sokhumi. Lamara grew up to be a beautiful girl with a gorgeous body. At the age of sixteen, she looked like a full-grown woman. I reasoned that Uzbeks could take her away from me. I bought a ticket to Sokhumi and sent my girl to my folks. Lamara spoke no Georgian whatsoever. An acquaintance in Sokhumi promised me to make sure my daughter enrolled in college. I wasn’t expecting her to have arrived in Sokhumi when my brother called me, saying that the Maisuradzses had come to like Lamara and one of them, a twenty-six-year-old bachelor, had decided to marry her as soon as possible. I couldn’t bring her back as I didn’t want an Uzbek son-in-law. I didn’t want Lamara to marry a Muslim. I wanted a Georgian Orthodox son-in-law. That [Maisuradze] fiancé-to-be was ten years older than my girl. I arrived in Sokhumi, and Lamara told me, “Mum, I don’t want to get married.” I ordered her to submit at first and then beat her up, and finally gave her away in marriage to that man [crying]. I sacrificed my girl to “being a Georgian”.

My daughter’s life proved to be a nightmare. My son-in-law turned out to be very jealous. He scolded and beat her. Lamara held it all back from me [crying]. She reasoned that her mother had

had a tough life and opted against revealing it to me. She endured it for twenty years [crying]. She followed in my unlucky footsteps. The only thing I didn't like from the very beginning, yet I never paid due attention to it, was that our in-laws-to-be brought a lot of gold and diamond rings, earrings, etc. to her betrothal; by the next day following their marriage, however, it had all evaporated. As it turned out, they only borrowed that jewelry and eventually ended up returning the goods. Before flying back to Tashkent, I gave a significant amount of money to Lamara's mother-in-law and asked her to buy nice furniture for the newlyweds [crying]. She never did. Eventually she admitted paying off her creditors with that money.

Eight years after Lamara's marriage, my niece [daughter of brother-in-law] visited my folks in Sokhumi. She returned, stunned and scandalized. She told me, "Your Lamara and her three kids live in a railroad car!" I was dumbfounded. I rushed to Sokhumi and what do I see! Lamara's brother-in-law kicked her and her husband out. My daughter lived in a railroad car [crying]! Lamara's brother-in-law told her, "I do respect you but I hate my brother, so you guys are out." Why did my girl hold her misery back from me? Every time I went to Sokhumi, she hosted me in their house. Apparently, that brother-in-law "let them have" the place for the time being. I went to Sokhumi for two months to put Lamara's life together somehow. I bought her furniture, linens; got an automobile for my son-in-law. I neatened their "railroad car" and returned to Uzbekistan, hoping to buy an apartment for them. I often reproached my grandchildren [Lamara's children] for not telling me about their mother's misery. They replied, "Grandma, mommy forbade us."

During the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, in the summer of 1991, Lamara and her husband were given an eight-room apartment free of charge. One of our acquaintances informed Gamsakhurdia that a large family was in need. That's how my girl received such an apartment at 9 Komkavshiri Street. Gamsakhurdia helped many a needy person back then. I trusted him. I deliberately flew over from Tashkent to vote for him on behalf of my whole family during the 1991 election.

I arranged a Russian language university department diploma for Lamara without her even being physically present there. But what was that education good for when her husband never let her

beyond the kitchen door. My daughter went to work twice and both times she got beaten by her husband right at her doorstep. She held it back from me as well. Thus, education didn't do her any good! At first, her husband wouldn't let her work; then, after we became refugees, there was no way she could get a job as a teacher in Tbilisi. We traded here and there, washed dishes in wedding reception halls. Now my daughter is in Antalya. She divorced her husband. It happened when I caught him beating her here, after we became refugees.

Lamara's younger son, Irakli, and I – we're here. We will also go to Antalya any day now! [Crying] We lived well in Uzbekistan, Gulistan, while here we wound up trading in secondhand goods. Lamara somehow got a hold of secondhand stuff and sold it near the Samgori subway station. I baked chiburekki [fried turnovers stuffed with ground or minced meat and onions] at a diner on Kavtaradze Street. Then I turned to baking stuffed pastries and catering for school cafeterias. Lamara found a job as a dishwasher at the banquet hall Iavnana. That's how we dealt with the necessities of life.

### **Fergana**

Twenty years after I started selling sodas, I bought a café. To be more correct, I became its director. In Gulistan, where I permanently resided, all local Meskhetians visited me in the evening. They brought a tape player, listening to music together and sharing news. My boys found good jobs in the town of Quvasoy, Uzbekistan, and moved there. Quvasoy is a town located three kilometers from Fergana.

In 1983, after twenty-six years spent in Gulistan, I too moved to Quvasoy. I opened a café there. My sons opened a restaurant. Everything seemed to be working out just fine. There were many Meskhetians living in Quvasoy, and we established a good relationship with them. They respected me. Each and every Georgian in Quvasoy or Fergana came to visit me, especially those from Sokhumi. I didn't know them, still I welcomed them with due hospitality.

I remember how the Abkhazian band "Sharatoni" stayed with me for four months while on tour, as well as the Georgian detectives investigating "The Adlov Case". Everyone knew that Taliko lived in Gulistan, and later in Fergana, whom one could visit and



Taliko with children in Sokhumi

be treated with Georgian hospitality. When I entered restaurants, the band immediately started playing “Suliko” [a famous Georgian tune]. Even the band “Iveria” [a famous Georgian musical ensemble] paid me a visit.

I was in Sokhumi when the tragedy of April 9, 1989 took place. I remember well how the Abkhazians, just like the Georgians, were appalled at what was going on in Tbilisi. I didn’t know much about the background of these events, yet I knew well that my Abkhazian acquaintances

were not happy about April 9 and the death of people. Why would they? Not a single Abkhazian has ever told me, “You got what you deserved.”

On April 12, I returned to Fergana. One Meskhetian nicknamed “Chachi” met me at the airport. Chachi was well known in Quvasoy, known for his hatred for Georgia and Georgians. He wouldn’t stop saying that he was a Turk. But I knew he was a deported Meskhetian. So he met me at the airport and said to my face in Turkish, “I wish all the Georgians were killed on April 9!” I snapped, “How dare you!” and that’s when I cursed a man for the first time in my life. I told him in Russian, “May you rot in hell”. On May 1, a true war broke out.

Many people don’t know that the Fergana disturbances started in my shish-kabob diner located in Victory Park. Some people came to my diner on May 1 and argued with my employees, “Why do you work for some Meskhetian? Why do you take orders from a Meskhetian?” Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens worked for me. My waiters and waitresses were Russians. They approached the cashier and demanded cash. They wanted to rob us. As I mentioned before, locals didn’t like to see Meskhetian Turks live well and conduct successful businesses. I was told there was a brawl in the shish-

kabob diner. I called the militia and the confrontation was resolved that very day. On May 2, the chief of militia came over to my place, wished me a happy birthday and warned me that such incidents might reoccur. Peace and quiet lasted twenty days. Nobody seemed to hold a grudge against anyone. As it turned out, they were making ready for war.

On May 23, a Meskhetian Turk was sitting at a table in a restaurant. A certain Uzbek turned to him, "Pass me that glass." The Meskhetian replied, "I need this glass." The Uzbek approached the Meskhetian's table, broke off a piece of bread and grabbed that glass. A fierce fight ensued. Next day, on May 24, about five hundred Uzbeks gathered and commenced breaking into the houses of Meskhetian Turks. May 1 Street in Fergana was inhabited mainly by Meskhetian Turks. As it turned out, the Uzbeks had planned it all in advance. Uzbeks from various regions of Uzbekistan hopped the train and arrived in Fergana "to settle the score". I wish Georgia had repatriated us earlier. Thousands of Meskhetian Turks perished that time. Meskhetians often told me, "Taliko, go and tell Shevardnadze and Petriashvili to receive us back."

On May 23, the restaurant cleaner ran up, puffing and panting, to tell me that she saw men loading something from the bakery onto a truck the night before. As it turned out, they were replenishing their baton supply. "You, Meskhetians, are obnoxious and insolent people," they used to tell us. They didn't like Meskhetians for having a better life than locals. On May 24, one Meskhetian Turk was killed. Meskhetian Turks and Uzbeks "met" near the brick plant that evening. One Tajik young man was also killed. To be precise, he didn't get killed but rather "trampled underfoot". Then riots broke out in Tashkent. This news was not covered by the press or by television. On June 4, my sons traveled from Quvasoy to Gulistan to run business errands. On June 5, my brother-in-law's daughter called us, saying that Fergana was burning. I caught a cab and rushed there. I reached Kagan. Militia officers wouldn't let us any further, "War has just begun, and soldiers are all over the place." I broke into tears, saying that I had no idea whether my boys were alive or not and imploring them to let me through. They knew me and eventually let me through. I arrived in our old house in Gulistan. I saw their car. They were alive. I wept. We were safe. We locked both homes the following day, loaded our cars, and drove to Kyrgyzstan.

Meskhetian Turks used to occupy high offices in militia forces and municipal councils. Nevertheless, the Fergana riots had an impact on everyone. The Kazakhs were merciless, stoning people and chasing them with cars. Militia forces wouldn't dare getting involved in this lawlessness. Armed forces seemed to be more active, yet even they were unable to stop the crazed Uzbeks. There was no way an Uzbek militiaman would kill an Uzbek, right? On the other hand, an Uzbek would surely kill an Uzbek militiaman if he figured that the militiaman was helping Meskhetian Turks instead of keeping order.

Disturbing news reached us from Fergana. The Uzbeks burned down all Meskhetian Turks' homes.

It so happened, however, that the Uzbeks never raided Quvasoy, the area where we lived, since mainly Turks lived there.

The Uzbeks covered their door frames with head covers called "bulbakhs". Meskhetian Turks didn't have such "bulbakhs". That's how the attackers recognized the homes of Meskhetian Turks. Many people were killed. Exact numbers remain unknown to this day. Women, young females and underage girls were raped. Pregnant women were slaughtered! An acquaintance of mine, a female employee of the municipal council, called me up, "Taliko, come over, I want to show a video about Uzbeks torturing Meskhetian Turks." We entered somebody's apartments and what do I see! Uzbeks dragged out a screaming pregnant girl, cut her up and dashed the baby against the ground! [Crying] I saw it with my own eyes! They snatched a baby from his mother and burned him right before her eyes! I nearly went crazy and asked Ani, "Get me out of here; I cannot take it anymore." Word has it that a certain Russian journalist called Luda taped these events. Uzbeks commissioned her to do the tape; she later disappeared. Many have tried to locate her, yet to no avail. The tape, however, became viral.

After we made it to Kyrgyzstan, we drove to the town of Kokyangark, Osh Province. We rented a hotel room. Then bought a small house nearby and then... war broke out in those parts as well. This time Uzbeks and Kyrgyz engaged in slaughtering each other. ARC tanks were stationed around my house. We couldn't stay there any longer. Then rumors reached us as though natural Meskhetians were safe in Fergana, only Turks were in grave danger. Many people, however, believed that we looked too much like Turks, although we were Georgians and not Turks. No one would stop in the midst

of war to make sure you're a Turk and not a Georgian! It is still unknown how many people perished then. Some say 3 thousand, some 10 thousand, while others point to 500. I don't know.

We waited one month for tensions to subside. We were constantly invited back to Sokhumi. After tarrying for some time in Kokyangark, we returned to Quvasoy, loaded a five-ton trailer with containers and headed for Sokhumi. We sent the containers to my brother's address in Sokhumi. On July 11, we flew to Sokhumi. The next day, that is, on July 12, we bought an apartment on Dzidzaria Street. We moved in, and on July 15 (1989) riots broke out, this time in Sokhumi. Abkhazians and Georgians were opposed and had a clash near the Red Bridge. Immediately upon hearing this news, I reclaimed the money I had paid for the apartment, vacated it, and considered leaving Sokhumi altogether. The frightening memories of the Fergana events were still fresh and vivid. The Sokhumi riots subsided in three days. So we bought an apartment on Komkavshiri Street for 120 thousand rubles. While we were moving, our containers were robbed twice.

By the way, the government provided monetary compensation for Meskhetian Turk refugees from Fergana; not only for Turks and Meskhetians, to be precise, but everyone who lost his home or job in that war. Georgia never supported us. I received 8 thousand rubles as compensation from Moscow. And what do I get as a refugee here, in Tbilisi? Eleven lari! I also have a 45 lari pension as a member of a deportee Meskhetian family. And I end up going through fire and water to get those 11 lari! I stood in line again today. I couldn't get the money though! I'm in despair! [Crying] I'm so sick and tired! Georgia was all I could think about! I had dreams of Sokhumi water! And here I am, starving to death! I have no place to lay my head. My children fled abroad with their children. Only Irakli, Lamara's son, and I remain here. Should I die, there'll be no one to bury me. It hurts to realize that I'm not welcome in the country I've been idolizing and that I've turned into a beggar. Yet, I am a Georgian citizen! It's not my fault I was born a Georgian!

### **Abkhazia**

On August 16 (August 14), 1992 a war broke out in Abkhazia. We decided to fly to Tashkent. A temporary ceasefire was declared on August 28. As soon as we learned about it, we returned to

Sokhumi, flying to Tbilisi first and then riding on a Tbilisi-Sokhumi train. We spent two days on the road. As soon as I arrived, I found myself at a funeral. Abkhazians had killed Soso, my niece's husband. I moved in with my brother the following day.

My nephew's wife came over one Sunday, at 7 in the morning, to tell me, "I had a dream: an array of women dressed in black fleeing Odishi." As she was telling me her dream, machine guns fired. [Crying] The gunfire was coming from Shroma (a village near Sokhumi). I ran outside and rushed from Chamba Street to my apartment on Komkavshiri Street. Lamara told me, "Mother, let's go to 'Sanatoria' [a Black Sea resort facility of nationwide, all-Soviet importance, reserved for the staff of various governmental agencies and their family members; since many Russians stayed there when the conflict broke out, it was believed to be a relatively safe place that supposedly would not be bombed] and find out what's going on." People used to go there to learn news.

We arrived in "Sanatoria" at 5 pm only to find the door locked. No admittance! [Crying] Lamara and her children crawled between fence bars and ran. I couldn't make it through. I tried, I inhaled, but I couldn't squeeze through. I saw Lamara and the children running toward a vacant car. They cried, "Mother! Grandmother! Hurry up!" I don't know where but we kept running. I finally squeezed between the bars and ran toward my children. A greyhound-type vehicle was parked in the yard. They said that the bus was designated for evacuating children. We kept running toward the building. We covered a couple feet, and that's when a bomb hit the bus and exploded! God was our protector! Had we been closer to the bus, we would be dead. Irakli was two-years-old at the time. His mother held him in her arms and ran. The other kids (Eka and Lika) wrapped themselves around my knees. When the bus exploded, we looked back and saw several men running with their heads bleeding. Parts of the bus were flying all over the place. "Grandma, grandma," cried the children, "where are we running?" I didn't reply, just kept pushing forward, while pondering on my bad luck. I had gone through something similar in Fergana and now the same was happening here, in my longed-for Sokhumi. I ran, unable to stop crying. I kept hoping that God would save us. We entered "Sanatoria" and "settled" there, that is, spent that night there. We squatted and listened to bombs exploding here and there. One of



the soldiers told us that 28 bombs had hit Sokhumi and that the city was all in smoke. “Sanatoria” was never bombed as they knew it was a Russian holiday camp. This camp was located on Tbilisi Street, Sokhumi. I don’t know if the street bears this name today, but I saw “Sanatoria” still standing intact in 2003, when I visited Sokhumi [crying].

Gunfire continued through the night. At dawn, Lamara told me, “Let’s go home. Come what may, it’s better to die at home.” So we did, looking for our homes in the ruined city. We noticed that neither Chamba Street nor Komkavshiri Street had been hit. Our extended family and friends gathered on Chamba Street, daughters-in-law, cousins, everyone was there. Our son-in-law drove up in a pick-up truck, “Hop in everyone! We’re going to Tbilisi right away!” I told Lamara, “Child, you and the children should go. I’ll stay and look after the house.” I had money, 30 thousand rubles, as well as jewelry, concealed in mattresses. I only took 10 thousand rubles. I reasoned I wouldn’t need more. I was planning to return to Sokhumi anyway, so I left the money. How foolish of me! It was a mistake. I gave the 10 thousand rubles to Lamara. We rode to the airport. A multitude of people had gathered there. Women stood on the boarding stairs, screaming. Men kept dragging them inside the plane, some even by the hair. As a result, those women stood on the stairs with their clothes half-torn in pieces. I wish I had never seen it! [Crying] I turned to Lamara, “It’s better to die at home than be trampled to death on that plane.”

People turned into a crowd. Lamara, four children and I turned around (the fourth kid was Gocha, my son’s boy). We saw how they loaded luggage on the plane. I offered Lamara, “Maybe we should try to sneak with the children into the baggage holds. She replied, “Mother, you go. I’ll take care of the children.” She promised me to board the next plane. Three men dressed as soldiers were loading luggage. I asked them to let me fly with them. They said all right. The plane took off. We flew. I sat in the baggage holds in semi-darkness, scared to death. When my eyes got used to the dark, I noticed a coffin-like long box next to me. One side of it was well fastened, while the other remained slightly open. One of the servicemen noticed me examining this coffin. He told me, “We lost a friend; we’re transporting his body to Tbilisi.” I seized the moment when he looked aside and thrust my hand into the opening in the

coffin. I suspected that it was not a human corpse in the coffin. I could feel plates and a stew-pan with my hand. I could tell by their accent, that those men were not from Sokhumi, they were from Tbilisi. I kept silence. It would've been inappropriate under the circumstances to make a fuss about kitchenware in the coffin instead of a dead body. We landed in Tbilisi in twenty minutes. We were informed that two more planes were planned to fly to Tbilisi.

Suddenly rumors started circulating that the second plane had crashed into the sea! [Crying] I was sure Lamara, her children and our relatives were on that plane [crying]. I went out of my mind. I swore to drown myself had my children and grandchildren died. A man sitting next to me burst out wailing and crying. He said his twin brother was supposed to be on that plane. This man brought his children to Tbilisi and was about to fly back. Imagine us waiting in anguish for passengers to disembark from the third plane! I started to cry hysterically upon seeing Lamara and the children descending the boarding stairs. I broke down. I went out of my mind!

We went to the "Megobroba" hotel, Gldani District, from the Tbilisi Airport. Lamara had a room reserved there. When the first shots were fired in Sokhumi, she flew to Tbilisi and then back to Sokhumi, and then once again to the hotel.

As soon as we arrived in Tbilisi, winter came with its rain, snow, and absence of electric power. I got stuck in the subway three times. I groped my way through a pitch-black tunnel. I've walked the distance between the Nadzaladevi subway station and the "Megobroba" hotel three times. I used the money we had brought from Sokhumi to buy a stove. I was first to have a stove installed in "Megobroba". No one had it before me. Everyone came to my room. There was a line at my door. They stood in line, holding kettles and cooking pots. They smoked while waiting for water to boil or food to cook. I put up with it one week, then another, and finally I snapped. I couldn't cook food for my own grandchildren; there was no space in the room for the kids! [Crying] Sometimes Tbilisi residents brought second-hand clothes and dumped this stuff in front of the hotel. From those clothes, I picked a white skirt (it was too small for me, but what could I do?) and a sweater that was probably a man's. I also picked a pair of platform shoes, all shabby and dilapidated, letting water in and out in rain. Splish-splash – that was me walking.

I started trading in cigarettes. There was a woman from Gagra. She promised to find jobs for us. Lamara and I stood at different subway stations and sold cigarettes. I sold a diamond ring, and later earrings, I had brought from Sokhumi. I sold cigarettes and all kinds of other stuff, trying to make money for food. We were given cream of wheat free of charge at “Megobroba”. We cooked ghomi [Georgian grits]. We had no salt, no sugar. Sometimes, very rarely though, I boiled beans and bought bread. That’s how we lived. I was sick and tired. I didn’t know which way to go. I turned to V. Vashakidze, Minister of Refugees and Accommodation. He gave me money to return to Tashkent.

I left on December 5. My three o’clock train left at seven. I barely made it to Baku. At first, I visited my daughter who was married to an Azerbaijani in Ganja. I wanted to travel to Tashkent from there. I traveled by ferryboat. Turkmenistan refused to accept us. We spent twelve hours at sea. My bad luck, I couldn’t help thinking, what am I to do if war breaks out here as well!

At last, I arrived in Tashkent five days later. My brother-in-law’s daughter lived in Tashkent. She and her relatives rushed to hug me. I said, “Don’t touch me. I’m full of lice. I haven’t washed since I left Sokhumi, maybe two or three times.” We weren’t treated as human beings. I rushed to the bathhouse and then straight to the beauty parlor. I went to Valya, a hairdresser and my acquaintance. I told her, “Valya, I have ‘guerillas’ in my hair. I’m counting on you.” Then she gave me a perm. I had long hair down to my waist.

She gave me a haircut, a perm, made me look like a human being again, and nearly wept in the meantime, “Why did you go back to Georgia, to Sokhumi! You were just fine here! You’re such a fool, Taliko!”

My brother-in-law’s daughter wept. She burned my shabby dress and shoes. They fed me and clothed me. I constantly pondered my destiny. My Lenara, before she moved to Ganja, lived in Namangan, Azerbaijan with her husband (whom she had met in college), and war broke out in Namangan as well: Meskhetian Turks were kicked out. When Uzbeks came to my daughter’s house and demanded to see the man of the household, her mother-in-law said, “You’ll have to kill me first.” They survived miraculously. That’s why Lenara left Uzbekistan before me and settled in Ganja.

When Gagra fell, I was in Tashkent. That's when my nephew was killed by Abkhazians. His pregnant wife, poor soul, was left a widow. I wanted to travel there to attend the funeral, but my children forbade me from ever returning to Abkhazia. After the death of my nephew, my daughter-in-law, Ilona, had a baby girl. They called her Ia. Ilona was a Kazakh, and she returned to her paternal family in Almaty after becoming a widow.

Thus, I sat in Tashkent, a refugee from Sokhumi with a short haircut. My relatives kept teasing me, "Going back to Sokhumi any time soon? Georgia must deem you unworthy of living there." My sons went back to Tashkent to work. I brought my five cousins (uncle's children) from Sokhumi to Central Asia. They were followed by their own families, thus severing ties with Sokhumi. Life went back to normal step by step. As for Lamara, she remained in Tbilisi, at the "Megobroba" hotel. Then I moved to Kyrgyzstan and bought an apartment. My female friend and I bought a store. I worked for two years, saving some money. I became restless and... returned to Tbilisi only to find Lamara's children naked, barefoot and hungry. I fed them, clothed them, and left. What was I supposed to do? I wanted to take Lamara with me, but her husband wouldn't let her go. They were still together at that time. My son-in-law made a statement, "Who will be left in the country if everyone leaves here."

What could I do? I returned to Central Asia. I worked, supported my folks. Then it became apparent to me that things were falling apart in Central Asia as well. My boss was transferred to Bishkek, while I returned to Fergana. I bought a two-room, and later a four-room, apartment there. Perfect strangers started paying me visits again. Groups of nine or ten, mainly from Georgia (they traded in lumber, onions, and all kinds of things), they all came to me. Once again I acquired a reputation of an exemplary host. Sometimes they stayed for three-four months. Not one of them ever robbed me, while I had been robbed twice in Sokhumi, three times at "Megobroba", even here [pointing to the so-called room where our interview was recorded; the room Ms Taliko had purchased in the former building of Young Naturalists]. Now I'm considering going back to Sokhumi. My second son had a car accident in Russia. He's serving time now, while his wife returned to her father in Sokhumi. I hope, at least, a daughter-in-law will honor and bury me when I die.

I went to Sokhumi two years and a half ago, together with my sister and niece. The niece got married to an Abkhaz, Ruslan Chergezia, in Sokhumi. Ruslan's mother picked a bride for him. She saw my niece and recommended her to him. The bridegroom met us at the Enguri River. Russians, Georgians and Abkhazians were stationed on the bridge. Lamara wanted to come with us but got scared. It is not safe for youths to cross the bridge. The elderly travel more often as it is safer for them.

The wedding went well, except that Gudauta Abkhazians kept looking askance at me. I had a feeling in my gut they didn't like me much. Be that as it may, I reasoned, every bullet has its billet. I found out that those Abkhazians used to live in rural areas but now have moved to the city.

I went home to Komkavshiri Street [crying]. My apartment was turned upside down, mattresses, pillows scattered all over the place. I couldn't recognize the place. I had money and diamonds "sewn" in one of the mattresses. I found everything cut up in pieces. I also had packaged furniture for my youngest daughter. My neighbor told me, "It was all wrapped so neatly, they had no trouble moving it. They pulled up a truck and loaded it all right." I noticed that the fridge was in place and wondered why they hadn't taken it too. Later I found out that it was missing the engine. The apartment door was taken off its hinges, chandeliers pulled down. I had a collection of Russian literature – all gone.

Before leaving Sokhumi, I had told my daughter-in-law where I had hidden "the treasure".

I went outside [crying], sat on the stairs and started crying. My Russian neighbor noticed me and came outside saying, "Taliko, we've never seen a single Abkhazian in your apartment. We only saw your daughter-in-law. She carried out packed boxes every day. Those boxes were full of your stuff she was selling in the marketplace." I thought to myself, if she sold the stuff, she probably spent the money on my grandchildren; she cannot carry it to her grave.

We used to have tangerine trees in our front yard. They devastated them too. Weeds had sprawled all over the place. This was not my home! [Crying] I felt unwell. The place seemed to be desolate; it was a dead house, full of straw. My neighbors told me, "Abkhazians come to your place to stay overnight, ambushing Georgian guerillas." I went to my brothers' homes: not a stone was

left standing. Their neighbors told me that Armenians had stolen their goods and exported them to Russia.

That was the picture I found there.

I went to the cemetery. It was located near Tzereteli Collective Farm. I couldn't find anybody's grave. The cemetery was all covered in trees and bushes. I couldn't find grandma's or grandpa's, father's or mother's, nephews' graves. I had brought roses and wanted to place them on my mother's grave. Yet, how could I find the grave amid ten-year-old weeds. I wandered alone in those shrubs with roses in my hands. I wanted to penetrate even further, but the density of the shrubs wouldn't let me. Abkhazians had "moved" their cemetery a bit lower. Their cemetery was cozy and nice, while our graves were missing even gravestones.

After I returned, I complained to my Abkhazian acquaintance, "What's the deal with stealing gravestones?" You know what I heard in reply? "Your Georgians stole those gravestones. They took "over the border"; then "renovated" them, that is, erased the names of the departed, and sold the stones to us."

The Jewish cemetery was well taken care of. There was a separate cemetery for Georgian soldiers. I placed the roses at somebody's grave and left. The Georgian boys' cemetery was located far away, one kilometer away. I couldn't visit their graves. Then I returned to Gldani, to "Megobroba".

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I have traveled a lot in my life. I loved to meet people, make friends, and learn new languages. I've spent forty-two years in Central Asia, yet I've never forgotten my native language and faith. My husband forbade me from going to church. Nevertheless, I did. I even have godchildren. Lamara took her children to a Russian-language school. She did, however, have them transferred to a Georgian-language school later. No street in Georgia compares to Chamba Street. All Georgia was concentrated here.

All I did in Georgia was stand in at the bank to get my eleven lari or sell small things. As far as I can remember, I've always been running away from war.

I attended the Kashveti Church. They used to give out flour there. After picking my money up at the bank, I went straight to the church.

Lamara entrusted her son Irakli to my care after leaving for Antalya. I sensed (and, naturally, Irakli also sensed it) that refugees were hated in Tbilisi. Irakli's schoolteacher often reproached him, "Your mother should've stayed here to take care of you instead of going to Turkey." Somehow nobody ever thinks about the reasons why she left for Turkey.

I'm not an educated woman. I do know, however, that every child requires an individual approach. One needs to be friends with children instead of reproaching them and judging their mothers for going to Turkey. The child [Irakli] attended School #65. It's true he wasn't a model student, yet it's not reason enough to bad-mouth his mother like that in school.

Now Irakli and I are about to travel to Antalya. Irakli is traveling with a dance ensemble. The school principal asked me, "Does he know how to dance?" I found his words extremely insulting. Dance classes cost fifteen lari a month. After the choreographer saw Irakli, he volunteered to teach him free of charge; and he did accept Irakli free of charge. In order to participate in the Antalya tour, parents were charged 160 dollars. We were granted a concession and ended up paying only 120 dollars. I too am going with them. We'll probably stay there for a long time. I will return to Georgia if I don't die there.

Had I been a man, I probably wouldn't have gone through so much suffering in life. Sometimes I get fed up and snap, "God, why have You punished me?!" [Crying] Why do I have to endure all the misfortunes in the world? I have a lot on my mind. It was in the hands of the Georgians, however, that I've suffered most. They used to call us "wetbacks". I never wanted to live in Tbilisi in the first place. I had a nice home in Sokhumi. I was often told that the refugees lived better than Tbilisi locals. How so? [Crying] They have homes of their own and roofs over their heads, and what about us? They have nothing on us! I had no bed when I first arrived here and I was forced to sleep on boxes. Yet, everyone comes to Taliko to borrow goods. People still take me for the Taliko I used to be.

At first, I stayed with Lamara at "Megobroba". Then I needed a room of my own. We, a group of refugees, submitted 150 lari each at December 5 Street, Ortachala (the building of the Voluntary Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Fleet),

to acquire a place to live. So far, we haven't received anything, and neither have we been refunded.

Three years later, my daughter sent 3 thousand dollars. I bought a room in this building (the former building of Young Naturalists). Now, since I'm going to Antalya, I've sold this room for 1 300 dollars. I trusted the buyers and accepted only a part of the sum. They won't give me the rest however.

A few days ago, Special Forces burst into the building of the Voluntary Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Fleet, evicted all refugees, and appropriated it.

I've been down since I arrived here. My life was buried between Sokhumi and Tashkent. For better or for worse, I want my Georgia... a place of my own [crying]. God only knows where I'll be buried. I lost track of how many times I've been a refugee. In addition, I see how embittered people have become. One Meskhetian has told me, "We, Meskhetians, have waited sixty years to return to Georgia. You will have to wait another hundred years to return to Abkhazia."

He had no idea I was twice a refugee. He probably cursed me. I don't know.

I used to bring my children: Jemali, Koba, Lamara, Lenara from Kazakhstan to Sokhumi for holidays. When Sokhumi locals noticed me at the airport, they shouted, "Look! Georgia has arrived!" When I returned to Kazakhstan, Kazakhs said the same thing, "Look! Georgia has arrived!"

P.S. Taliko sold her furniture and bed. She presently lives in the city of Antalya, Turkey.



## THE IANETI MESKHETIANS

ARCHIL KIKODZE

Between Kutaisi and Samtredia [cities in Western Georgia], near the Kopitnari Airfield, to the right from the main highway, is a settlement called Ianeti Ward Nine. This name is very conventional since the village of Ianeti itself is located a few miles from there, being adjacent to Samtredia directly. There used to be a different inscription on the road sign that read Ianeti Meskhetian Settlement. This sign was taken down by the local authorities at the insistent request by one late “public figure”.

The settlement of the Meskhetians consists of about thirty buildings, twenty-five of them having been built in the eighties of the past century by the then government of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia for the Muslim Meskhetians from Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.

When talking about these people and their fate, we always get confused because of their name. When I was on my way to their settlement to stay there and carry out field work at the request of the European fund EKMI in late fall 2004, I lived for a month and a half in one of their households and recorded interviews. I knew I was about to visit with Meskhetian Turks. Mentioning the name Meskhetian Turks caused a clamor among my future hosts (I retain friendly and very warm relations with the Ibragimov-Chkheidzes to this day), in the village where the appearance of my colleague and me was not welcomed with much enthusiasm. After that, I referred to the residents of Ianeti Ward Nine (whom the word Turks seemed to have insulted) as Muslim Meskhetians, and so I will in the present essay as well.

As I already mentioned, I spent a month and a half in November and December 2004 in Ianeti Ward Nine, and it proved to be difficult for me to build trust with the locals. Everyone looked at me with suspicion as though I had been an informant or at least a national security agent. The most painful part of my job proved to be polling, especially questions involving religious beliefs. The Ianeti Meskhetians were not happy at all because someone kept watching them constantly. Last summer, when I was contacted

by a young Danish female student who worked on the issue of the Meskhetians and wished to spend some time in Ianeti in order to carry out fieldwork, I couldn't find a place for her to stay, though she was willing to pay well. The Meskhetians usually react to such studies in the following manner, "Enough of studying us already! We've been living here for almost thirty years. Either let our people in, or they might as well evict us if that's what they're planning to do!" I encountered the same problem. They looked at Natia Jalabidze, my colleague, and me as necessary evils and put up with our stay there and polling for that very reason. Trust between us developed slowly and surfaced in the last few weeks of my stay. A few months later, however, when the National Television of Georgia broadcasted a documentary on the problems of the deported Meskhetian, featuring me as one of the interviewees, and the after the residents of the Ianeti settlement learned about my views from this documentary, I received phone calls from many excited residents of Ianeti thanking me, which proved to be the beginning of true and unconditional friendship between us.

I will now go back a little in time and relate to you how a Meskhetian settlement appeared in the midst of the lowland plains near Samtredia. In order to fathom this issue, the reader must realize that the attitude toward the people whom we presently call Meskhetian Turks has not always been negative in Georgia. At the end of the seventies, their return to their homeland was considered a matter of national importance by a significant part of the intelligentsia as well as the dissident movement. A letter written to Eduard Shevardnadze has survived, petitioning for the return of the Meskhetians to their homeland and signed by many distinguished and prominent Georgians. The deportees themselves had made attempts to return to Meskheta before (they believe Meskheta to be their homeland, *vatan* in Turkish, and not Georgia). After the death of Stalin, they migrated from Uzbekistan toward Azerbaijan in great numbers, while a part of them made it all the way to Tbilisi and even held a rally in front of the building of the Central Committee [of the Communist Party]. The deportees were not accepted that time and for the most part settled in Azerbaijan for good where they presently live in the Saatli and Sadirabad Districts, while those well-to-do live in Baku, including the descendants of

the leaders (Islamized Meskhetian noblemen) of two pro-Turkish revolts against independent Georgia in 1918-1921.

At the end of the eighties, the Government of the Republic of Georgia allowed a part of the deportees to return to their homeland. Meskheti, however, remained inaccessible to them (there is a quite famous poem written in Turkish the title of which translates as follows, The Gate to the Homeland is Shut. According to tradition, this poem was created near the Atzkuri block post beyond which lay the fabled homeland entering into which was impossible for the deportees with tourist passports).

A number of Muslim Meskhetian settlements appeared in Georgia, including Ianeti Ward Nine, a vast settlement adjacent to a mammoth cattle-breeding complex. It was initially planned for the state to build homes for the Meskhetians in that settlement. The promised Meskhetian village was supposed to number 150 homes, yet the promise was never kept and only twenty-five homes were built. Roughly half of the settlers arrived straight from Uzbekistan, while the rest from Azerbaijan. The Socialist Republic of Georgia covered a half of the cost of the homes and the other half was to be paid by the Meskhetians themselves. This sum was subtracted regularly from their salaries which they earned working in the cattle-breeding complex. That's how the people some of whom were sports teachers in school, or movie theater attendants, or railroaders, turned into cattle-breeders.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the complex was also shut down, burglarized and robbed, while the Meskhetians found themselves all alone in the open lowland with no neighbors within three miles, in the midst of the plain where the lands were scarce and where it usually rained while the wind blew unceasingly. The years of civil wars, vandalism and lawlessness had yet to come. These years devastated whole of Georgia and this handful of locals were no exception. Geographic isolation played a very bad role in the integration of the Ianeti residents into Georgian society. The second Meskhetian settlement in the village of Nasakirali, Guria Region, is integrated much better and the issue of Georgian language literacy is practically absent.

There is another absurd situation related to the Ianeti Meskhetians. One part of the settlement belongs to the Samtredia District and the other part to the Tzkaltubo District, which endlessly creates

problems. As for the pastures around the village, they belong to the faraway villages of Maghlaki and Partskhanakanebi the residents of which charge the Meskhetians for using their pastures.

According to statistics provided by the Statistics Service of the Local Self-Government of the Samtredia District, twenty-nine families, totaling 171 people, permanently resided in Ianeti Ward Nine in 2004 (when my colleague and I arrived there).

The settlement presently leads a very passive social life. Mayaki, the only Meskhetian non-governmental organization, is nearly cataleptic, though it maintains some contact with other non-governmental organizations (Caucasian House, the Young Lawyers' Association, Soros Foundation). As the narratives by representatives of previous generations reveal, it was not so in the past. At the beginning of the eighties, when the return of the Meskhetians was perceived by a significant part of Georgian society as a serious matter of national importance, a certain part of the Ianeti population led a more active way of life. Many of them were personally acquainted with people who played a vital role in deciding the fate of the Meskhetians (Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Yusuf Sarvarov-Didebulidze, and others). President Gamsakhurdia's coming to power and changes in his attitude toward the Meskhetians were followed by changes in the attitude of the main part of society as well. The Meskhetians ceased their activities, while taking care of themselves and their families and salvaging their wealth became their priority.

After the rule of Gamsakhurdia, during the civil wars, these people went through many tribulations. At first, there was persecution on ethnic and religious grounds. Then there was outright banditry, which this isolated small settlement had no means to oppose. Cattle raiding intensified. There was not a single person to escape being burglarized and robbed by well-armed people in masks.

In January 1993, the Ianeti Meskhetian Settlement turned into a battlefield where two opposing sides clashed (Zviad Gamsakhurdia's supporters on one side and Mkhedrioni on the other). A bomb fired from Samtredia killed a sixteen-year-old girl and a three-year-old boy at that time.

The Meskhetians don't feel quite protected today either, especially after the issue of the return of other Meskhetians (an obligation assumed by Georgia before the European Union) became

pressing and stories about them started to abound on television, and even to a greater degree in print media. The Ianeti Meskhetians fear that the negative attitude of society toward their issue will remind the same society of their once forgotten existence, which may entail a new wave of violence.

In 2004, during my stay in the settlement, such stories frequently appeared in titles at the national and local levels. I had an opportunity to keep an eye on these developments as the Meskhetians kept articles related to them, while elderly residents asked me to translate these materials for them. Thus, I not only had an opportunity to follow media publications but could also observe feedback coming from the Meskhetians themselves. In addition, stories published by Kutaisi based and Samtredia newspapers featured their settlement in particular, to be more precise, the “Turkish” issue in general was viewed via the example of the Ianeti Settlement (which was what the Ianeti Meskhetians feared most).

The Meskhetians were appalled at the speculations and insinuations proposed by the journalists, as well as the way their own words had been misinterpreted. Many of them refused to be interviewed on purpose as they believed that their words would be distorted anyway.

One way or another, the Meskhetian Settlement continues its existence. At the beginning of the nineties, it managed to avoid raiding and resettling, unlike the settlements in Khoni, Bandza, and a number of other settlements. In terms of economy, Ianeti is in just as much need as Georgian villages in general. The main source of the locals’ income is agriculture, to be more precise, cattle-breeding. According to my 2004 calculations, Ianeti households owned, on average, six-seven heads of cattle (of course, there were relatively rich and poor households). They sell cheese and milk at the Samtredia farmers’ market where they trade side by side with local residents with whom they have wonderful relations (I once attended a Meskhetian wedding reception, and the majority of guests were women traders from the Samtredia marketplace).

In addition, Ianeti Ward Nine is the only settlement in those parts where nearly all households have sheep, which play a significant role in Georgian living in general (commemoration of the departed, ritual sacrifice). Throughout my stay in the settlement, people from neighboring villages, but mainly from Kutaisi, pulled

up in one or more cars virtually every day to buy a sheep or a lamb. The Meskhetians are pretty stingy when it comes to trading. I personally have never seen them drop their initial price even a bit, as a result of which sheep buyers have often left empty-handed.

At the same time, every Meskhetian household owns four acres of land received as a result of privatization (some households even lease much larger land plots). They harvest all crops that can grow in this district, corn, pumpkin, tomato, potato, etc. The soil in those parts, however, is quite barren and exhausted because of constant use. The profit made from selling these crops is accordingly small and, in case of a bad harvest, the Meskhetians sometimes end up with losses.

There is one crop imported into the region from Uzbekistan by the Meskhetians. It is peanuts harvested by nearly all households. They sell a part of the peanut harvest and use the rest themselves throughout the year. They used to make a good profit on peanuts in the past, yet in the course of time the Imeretians [inhabitants of Imereti, a region in Western Georgia] purchased peanut seeds from them and learned how to harvest this crop on their own. As a result, this crop is no longer a rarity in the region.

A branch of a Tbilisi-based firm is located near the village. Several Ianeti Meskhetian families rented lands and the firm planted hazelnut trees on these lands. These rented lands cause constant quarrels in the settlement as the landowners (and, accordingly, the families constituting the firm) are blood relatives and employ only their kin to work in the hazelnut garden. It is clear that these five families have certain, and probably significant, incomes from this hazel garden.

Several young Ianeti residents work in two gas stations located not far away from the village. Taking into consideration the local environment, it is considered that they have good jobs. By the way, knowing the Turkish language helps them a great deal. Trailer trucks coming from Turkey usually stop overnight at a park near the gas stations, and the Ianeti youths working at the gas stations are the ones Turk truck drivers ask if they have any problems or inquiries. The knowledge of the Turkish language greatly benefits the residents of Ianeti in general. A number of youths from Ianeti have gone to Tbilisi to work as contractors in the past few years. Construction workers employed in Tbilisi mainly consist of Turks

for whom the Ianeti youths serve as interpreters, helping them to solve a myriad of problems. Ianeti residents also travel to work in Turkey (primarily Hopa, Rize, Trabzon, and Black Sea coastal cities) where they are mainly occupied at construction sites.

The Ianeti residents are occupied in retail trade and vending to a lesser degree. There is no convenient store in the village. It is said that before Russia introduced a visa system, the Meskhetians were more actively involved in trade. They traveled to the regions of Russia where their kin lived and delivered car parts and similar small-scale items from there. Even today, if they end up traveling to Azerbaijan, they try to bring back something that would recompense their travel expenses.

I would not say that the Ianeti Meskhetians occupy one or another niche in the economy of the region by any stretch of imagination. They are too few for it, not to mention other circumstances, while the economic poverty suffered by the Meskhetians is common for the whole region and the country in general.

I will say a couple of words about education as well. An elementary school functioned in Ianeti Ward Nine up until recently. Its teachers work hard indeed. The problem is Turkish remains the native language (spoken domestically) of the Ianeti Meskhetians. Elder residents, that is, the heads of household speak this language. Young Ianeti residents had to learn the Georgian language when they went to school at the age of six (and some even later). At first, the school was generously supported through the grants of the Open Society – Georgia Foundation [operating in Georgia since 1994]. The teachers were paid well and worked overtime with the students. Then the grants stopped. The school, however, continued to operate and the teachers never lost their enthusiasm. They knew well that the elementary school of Ianeti Ward Nine was the only place where these isolated Meskhetian children could learn the Georgian language, especially since, after having graduated from the elementary school, Ianeti young men continued their studies in the Didi Jikhaishi College where they had always been considered successful students. Yet, it so happened that the Ministry of Education refused to extend the school's accreditation, so Ianeti Ward Nine remained without a school. I was really saddened by this fact, especially since I had visited the school several times during my stay in the settlement, attending classes and celebrations and,

besides fully realizing the importance of the work carried out by the teachers, I just loved the place.

Ianeti Ward Nine is a society where the family and kin are probably the strongest institution. All other values or feelings (love, friendship, etc.) seem to fade away, diminish and fall prey to debasement against the background of this institution called the Meskhetian patriarchal family (which was the only type of family I found in Ianeti). The strength of this family lies mainly in the axiom that the elderly are always right. They have seen more and they have more experience... Teachers working in the Ianeti School related to me that the only thing that made their hard work easier was the Meskhetians' inherent respect for older people, the ability to listen to them and take their opinion into consideration.

Meskhetians themselves admit that such blind obedience to those elderly has more than once played a negative role in deciding their fate since the elderly spoke on their behalf most of the time, while not being thoroughly acquainted with the state of political or everyday affairs, or sometimes even being simply too old-school. However, it is also true that the code of relations between youths and those elderly remains almost the only mechanism that maintains the welfare, moral standards and unity of the Meskhetian family.

Many things change, and young men often refuse to marry young women selected by their mothers. Nevertheless, I don't think that anyone would dare marry a woman solely of his own accord, without his parents' consent.

People of older generations complain that the standards of relations between youths and those elderly gradually fade away. While in their time it would suffice for a mother or a father to raise eyebrows to settle any issue, it presently takes a great deal of lecturing and arguing to convince children. On the other hand, I believe that such a statement is an exaggeration. The relations between generations in this society often take forms that seem illogical and incomprehensible to me (a thirty-year-old man dares not smoke in front of his brother who is two years older than he, while the latter, in turn, would never dare smoke or drinking in front of his parents or father-in-law).

Family ties are also very strong. A relative is the best ally and partner in any endeavor. "He was such a good man, maybe even



better than some of my relatives,” I believe that these words by one of the elders tell us a lot.

Let’s go back to the family where the roles are allocated in a very simple manner. The head of the family runs the family together with his wife. If the father of the family passes away, the mother takes his place, accordingly becoming the head of the family. While carrying out questioning for our study, I would ask young male interviewees who the heads of their families were, being convinced that they would name themselves. One time, the answer was “my mother”, and “my aunt” another. According to the family hierarchy, parents are followed by the eldest son, the middle son, and so on.

Daughters seem to play no role whatsoever in the family. It appears to me that their living in their parents’ family is nothing but a preparation stage for the role they will assume and play in their own families after getting married. A daughter-in-law is indeed the quietest and most hardworking member of the family who silently fulfills all tasks, commands and orders, serving the table, doing the laundry, etc. At the same time, a good daughter-in-law is the family housewife’s great treasure and true relief who eases the burden of her chores and promises a more or less quite old age. That is why mothers are actively involved in the selection of wives-to-be for their sons and that is why they have the final say in this matter.

The Meskhetians’ social network is grounded in blood ties precisely. By the way, the Meskhetians refer to their cousins as brothers, which caused a great deal of confusion in my study. These networks are very difficult to maintain simply because not only cousins and relatives but brothers and sisters too are scattered all over the country. It hurts the Meskhetians a great deal not to know the current conditions of one another, not being able to learn in a timely manner about the death of their relatives, or sometimes even their own brothers and sisters. And even when they learn about it on time, they cannot afford traveling abroad, or are unable to travel in time for the funeral.

Whenever the issue of the return of the remaining Meskhetians into Georgia was voiced, one of their arguments was to be close to one another here. Though they may not live in Meskhети, they will all be together in one country, being able to learn good or bad news about one another. As they will live a few hours drive from one another, they will not miss any funerals or weddings.

The Meskhetians themselves say that the emergence of cell phones made communication between them easier. Nevertheless, as much as I could observe, the Ianeti Meskhetians mainly communicated with Meskhetians living in Azerbaijan and the Stavropol and Krasnodar Regions of Russia. It was not only because more of their relatives or former neighbors lived in those parts. It seemed to me communication with these regions was easier and traveling back and forth was more frequent. The local Meskhetians were well informed how their relatives lived and what they were doing in those parts, while having a very vague idea what their brothers and sisters did in Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, or even Turkey.

I witnessed one interesting incident while staying there. On November 15, 2004, on the sixtieth anniversary of their deportation from homeland, the show *Droeba* of the Georgian television station Imedi aired a story about Meskhetians who had emigrated to the United States of America from Krasnodar. One day before the show aired, while the promo of the show and, accordingly, the story kept rolling, one woman called her son in Krasnodar on the cell phone right before my eyes and it turned out that he had already known that a story on Meskhetian immigrants to America was expected to air on a Tbilisi television channel the following Sunday...

I am having a hard time saying that their descent from one or another village presently play any role in the social organization of these people. It could be caused by the fact that the Ianeti Settlement is small and former fellow villagers practically do not live together. Instead, there are very lively jokes about the residents of one or another village. Origin (meaning descent from one or another village) seems to be second in line after kinship as the most important factor in terms of personal identification. What I am trying to say is that there is a sequence in place that looks something like this: the individual, the family, the extended family, the village, our people...

The Meskhetians themselves mentioned the difference between the Meskhetians who had arrived in Ianeti straight from Uzbekistan and those who had lived in Azerbaijan first. They pointed out that this difference shows in certain customs that the latter assumed from the Azerbaijanis, which makes these customs alien to the Meskhetians. Unfortunately, I cannot say anything about these customs since, even if they were evident, they seem to have escaped

me, a stranger, throughout my whole stay, that is, six weeks. It happened probably because these differences are infinitesimal in comparison with what brings these people together, which, first of all, is undoubtedly their common fate.

Byzum shennik (our people), byzum sis (one of us), and surgun lmishlar (are you a deportee?) are the names that the Meskhetians call themselves, used by them to identify whether a given person is one of them. All discussions and arguments about a given person identifying himself/herself as a Meskhetian, a Georgian, or a Turk fade away in comparison with the longing for life with one's own people.

The Kuzhmianis are a Kurdish family living in the Ianeti Settlement. When I was visiting in the settlement, Uncle Pavle, the head of this family, was a local celebrity. This man seemed to have come to Samtredia straight from Emir Kusturica's movies. Although everyone knew that Uncle Pavle and his children were Kurds, still they referred to themselves as Meskhetians, being able to become in-laws with any other family in the settlement. His sons were desired guests and prospective sons-in-law because these two peoples share the same history and fate. I also found out that the Khemshils (Muslim Armenians who lived on the territory of Achara; were also deported in 1944) often visited the settlement, maintaining friendship with the locals and also hosting them.

The shared tragic fate and feeling that everyone is against them have turned the Meskhetians into a very isolated society. When it comes to marriages, wedding "one of us" is the foremost criterion. The Ianeti Meskhetians do not have much to choose from in Georgia. Although they sometimes happen to marry women living in Azerbaijan, they primarily wed their fellow villagers or Meskhetians living in Nasakerali. That's why cases of marrying distant relatives, or even double marriages in one family (for example, when two brothers marry two sisters), abound. On the other hand, in their interviews, Meskhetians always pointed out that they would never go against the decision of their children to marry people of different ethnic or religious background. I do not think they were being overly sincere in their statements. It is also noteworthy that the locals (Imeretians) do not have a burning desire to become in-laws with the Meskhetians either.

This isolated village where people of a different creed and customs live and speak mainly a foreign language is referred to as the

Tatar Settlement, which the local Meskhetians take as quite an insult. The Meskhetians themselves are never called Meskhetians or even Meskhetian Turks but exclusively Tatars. The locals have no idea not only about the origin of these people but the social and economic conditions of the residents of the Ianeti Settlement, or even the number of “Tatar” households therein. Upon learning where I stayed, Imeretians gave me a surprised look, and then asked questions similar to “What do they do? How do they make a living? What do they sow?”

Many jokes and trumped-up stories about the Meskhetians circulate in the region, mainly involving polygamy (the Meskhetians do not practice polygamy) and Muslim customs. These jokes upset the Meskhetians a great deal and have nothing to do with reality.

Throughout my stay in the settlement, I identified only one person (Vagner Gvasalia, a Kutaisi resident, an incredible person who has, unfortunately, passed away) who maintained actually warm friendship with these people, knew and cared for their customs, helping their families at a moment’s notice, while his children were friends with Meskhetian children, and so on and so forth.

From my interviews and conversations, I found local residents who had a negative, if not hostile, attitude toward the Meskhetians. Nevertheless, the general attitude toward the Ianeti Meskhetians among the local population took the form of ironic curiosity about something alien and unseen.

Young Meskhetians are the ones to take such an attitude close to heart to the greatest extent; young Meskhetians who are more integrated than anyone else, who know the Georgian language and long for becoming Georgians and full members of this country; youths who were born here in Georgia, or came here at a very early age; youths who like many things about this place and do their best to let everyone else see this longing of theirs. I have watched the videos of concerts held at the Ianeti Elementary School, featuring Ianeti youths performing for guests from Tbilisi singing patriotic songs and reciting poems specifically dedicated to the homeland, that is Georgia, dancing traditional Georgian dances. However, no one, save those who had a clearly positive attitude toward the Meskhetian issue (I am talking about supporters of their return to Georgia), attended these concerts. And such people are very few. The rest ignore invitations to these events and refuse to travel to Ianeti.

It is very sad to see the Ianeti youths who are much more lively and open than their predecessors (as they never had to move from place to place in a foreign land) being abused in such a manner and forced to carry so much pain in their hearts. This became evident from the interviews with them (and not only the interviews). They assert that their only hope is that at least their children will become rightful citizens of this country.

The youths understand well that the main determinant of their isolation from society and the ironic attitude toward them is their specific religion, Islam. Religion in general is a very sore spot for the Meskhetians. Nevertheless, they spoke a lot about it, trying to explain to me that there was nothing wrong with Islam itself, that Islam recognized Jesus Christ as a prophet, that these two religions actually preached the same thing, and that Ottoman Turkey forced their ancestors to accept Islam. At the same time, the Meskhetians tried to draw my attention to customs and traditions that, as they believed, had Christian roots (as they explained, placing open scissors in the form of a cross on the chest of the departed in order to prevent the body from swelling had its roots back when the Meskhetians tried to retain their old customs secretly from the Turks; they also spoke about the custom of having a new daughter-in-law dip her finger in honey and draw a sign of the cross on the doors before she entered her new home).

It is difficult to assess how pious the Meskhetians are as Muslims. Just a handful of them, mainly the elderly, observed the fast during Ramadan while I was there. And even the elderly were not too strict about it. As for Novruz Bayram, it resembled more a civil holiday than it did a religious one (on the morning of Bayram, however, Namaz was held in one of the families and all male residents of the village attended it). By the way, the celebration of Bayram that was held in one of the front yards and ended with a youth dance party, which I described in one of my diaries, lasted one day as opposed to the customary three days, which was explained to me in the following manner. Mohammad and his fellow believers were merchants and noblemen, so they had plenty of time for entertainment and leisure. We, on the other hand, have a lot of work to do, so we cannot afford but one day of rest. It should be also pointed out that although the majority of

the locals did not hold a fast during Ramadan, no one, with rare exception, consumed alcohol.

As for the Ianeti religious leaders, two out of the three people who speak Arabic have the status of a mullah (there is no mosque or any type of religious building in Ianeti). The locals honor only one of these two as the other has revealed a type of behavior not suitable for a religious leader (alcohol abuse, hooliganism, indecency, etc.). Nevertheless, the generally recognized mullah (who, at the same time, is a tractor driver, handyman, and a very pleasant person) cannot find it in himself to assume the role of a civil leader who would speak on behalf of his settlement. Moreover, there is no leader of this type in Ianeti Ward Nine.

I have not noticed any spiritual ties between the Ianeti Meskhetians (Sunnis) and other Muslims living in Georgia (Acharians, Azerbaijanis, Dagestanis). On the other hand, several Ianeti Meskhetians did travel to Batumi to attend Namaz before Bayram in the mosque.

According to my observations, religion to these people (I mean the Meskhetians in general) is yet another unifying force that underlines their shared tragic fate. At the same time, Islam, as a counterbalance to the general process of globalization in Georgia (which they observe and follow), is a solid guarantee that they will retain their patriarchal families and kinship.

On several occasions during our conversations, the Meskhetians compared their fate with that of the Jews, and even pointed out jokingly, "We're struggling so much that we too may achieve something." Generally speaking, the Muslim Meskhetians represent a society within which stereotypes are very popular, the foremost of them being the idea that everyone is against the Meskhetians. "We were taken to Uzbekistan to increase the harvest of cotton as we are the most hardworking people." "Now they want to take our people to America to pick cotton. Even the blacks don't want to pluck cotton anymore. There are alligators, hard labor, and who will work there if not the Meskhetians?" It sounds very naive, yet I heard quite a number of remarks of this type while in Ianeti. It is a typical self-stereotype, a hardworking people who will turn any land into paradise ("When we were settled in Central Asia, we found that there was no drinking water there, forget about harvesting something. When it rained, water gathered in horseshoe tracks where horses had trotted, so we drank that water. In a little while,

however, we turned those parts into a blossoming land, and everyone called it Gulistan, that is, the Land of Roses”). That is exactly why they are constantly resettled from one place into another, only to be kicked out of once barren lands enriched by them.

In 2005, I traveled to Azerbaijan and met with Muslim Meskhetians in the Saatli and Sadirabad Districts (the majority of them being pro-Turkish), and not only did I encounter the same stereotypes but heard the same remarks as well.

The second most significant stereotype involves their homeland, that is Meskheta, a fabled, beautiful land. The elderly who were still children during the 1944 deportation related to me that there is no other land like Meskheta in the whole world, fruits do not taste as good, streams are not as clear, and forests do not abound in wildlife anywhere as they do in Meskheta. One elderly person even told me, “A multitude of deer, bears, wild boars, and monkeys lived in our parts.” I showed my surprise at his words, which made him upset, “Why? We did have monkeys in abundance!” Every Meskhetian, even a small child, knows his/her ancestral village from where his/her family was deported sixty years ago. The residents of Ianketi are mainly from the villages of the Adigeni District, and those from Akhaltsikhe are fewer in number, while no one is from the Aspindza District. The ancestral village plays a very important role in their personal identification.

You will hear many stories how Meskhetians living in relatively well-to-do Central Asia used to acquire Borjomi tourist vouchers [Borjomi, a famous health resort in Georgia] to vacation in Georgia, so that they could spend at least few weeks close to their homeland. Before heading back to Central Asia, they traveled to the Atzkuri block post and set a festive table at the shut gates to their homeland, wept and then left.

Through bribery or some other means, some of them still managed to enter Meskheta and see their ancestral villages or the remains thereof. They related that those residents of Meskheta (Catholic Georgians referred to as “the French”), whose amicable attitude they could recall from the past, greeted them with arms wide open and hosted them with generosity. Meskhetians returned to Central Asia or Azerbaijan loaded with valuable presents, apples from Meskheta, cornbread made with Meskhetian flour, soil from the homeland. Such presents must have been in high demand.

One of the Meskhetians who managed to travel to Meskhети during Soviet times was Jemal, the late father of Zachariah Eybov of Ianeti, who was a confederate of Khalil Gozalishvili, which made him a representative of the pro-Georgian wing [of movement of Meskhetians for the return to homeland e.g. Meskhети part of Georgia]. Jemal Eybov visited practically all villages and the remnants thereof in Meskhети and wrote a poem about each and every one of them. Upon his return to Azerbaijan, he presented these poems to Meskhetians who had been deported from various villages in Meskhети. These poems remain extremely popular even today.

Of course, many Meskhetians who were born after the deportation admit that the impression their ancestral villages made on them (they visited these villages after the collapse of the Soviet Union) did not quite match the image of their homeland that had been drawn in their minds by the narratives of the elderly. Many young Meskhetians assert with all sincerity that Meskhети is not a good place for them to live. They prefer to live here, closer to big cities, Kutaisi and Samtredia. Their homeland, Meskhети, remains irreplaceable nonetheless.

The reason behind the last statement does not lie only in the mythologized narratives by their fathers and grandfathers who were deported in 1944. As the narratives by elderly Meskhetians reveal, they were not acquainted well enough, if at all, with the rest of Georgia as they have hardly ever traveled beyond Khashuri [a city in Western Georgia]. That is exactly why they could not tell their children anything about the rest of Georgia. As for their Georgian roots, even the representatives of the so-called Georgian wing learned about them much later. For example, the same Jemal Eybov whom Khalil Gozalishvili had given many historic books to read, enlightening him and turning him into a fighter for the return of the Meskhetians into Georgian society; or the example of yet another Ianeti Meskhetian who does his best to raise his children as Georgians and integrate them into Georgian society. As it turns out, this man has served as a guard at a military prison for eighteen years. One of the Georgian inmates asked him about his background and then exclaimed, "You are a Georgian!" The young Meskhetian did not believe him then; or the story related by the elderly aunt of the same man who lives in Kyrgyzstan. She was told by a visiting Ianeti Meskhetian, "I saw the image of Queen



Tamar in the Kutaisi Museum. She looked so much like you!” The elderly woman became furious, “What was Queen Tamar doing in the Kutaisi Museum? She was our ruler! What? Have the Georgians already taken her away from us?”)

However, as the Meskhetians themselves explain, they did not refer to themselves as Georgians (as the name Georgian, *Gurji* in Turkish, was associated with the name Christian) or Turks prior to 1944. The most widespread name within the society in those days was *Iereli* meaning “a local”, “a child of this land” in Turkish, while “this land” specifically refers to no other region but Meskheta.

In addition, as they themselves admit, there is no Soviet Republic (and subsequently independent country) where the Meskhetians feel at home. They only feel that they were there temporarily. Even in Fergana, during the post WWII period and long before the 1988 events, incidents similar to these events indeed took place here and there, though these events were not as large-scale as those in 1988 (interview with Telman Eristavi). As the narratives by Ianeti Meskhetians reveal, they have never striven to acquire goods they would be unable to carry with them (furniture, for example) in case they would be forced to move (“We kept our belongings packed, ready to move anytime, and we ourselves broke everything we couldn’t carry,” from a private conversation with Alikhan Ibragimov). Against such a general background, knowing that there is a land that has belonged to you from the very beginning, where the bones of your ancestors are buried, and from where helpless old people, women and children (the men fought in the war at that time) have been deported unjustly and treacherously, knowing all this endows this land, that is, your homeland with a completely different meaning.

When it comes to the homeland, that is, Meskheta, however, I most frequently recall the narrative by my host, Alikhan Chkheidze-Ibragimov, about his travel to Meskheta. This narrative has stuck in my memory most vividly. It is a story about the first trip of Uncle Alikhan and his brother, Mustafa (who has passed away, unfortunately), to Meskheta where they visited the village of Kikineti for the first time, from which their parents were deported in 1944. Uncle Alikhan told me, “Our village is way up in the mountains. There’s nothing beyond it. It’s the most beautiful place. (Last year, I visited Kikineti and, of course, it looked different from the fabled place described by my host). The brothers drove their cars to Kikineti,

looked around the place, and when they told the locals who they were, it caused quite a tension and confusion. The locals said, “You can come visit any time you please, but we cannot accept you as neighbors. You seem to be nice people, but we cannot let you move into our village.” I do not know in what actual form and how exactly it was put by the residents of Kikineti (this village is located near the villages of Varkhani and Tzakhani, Adigeni District [Georgia]), but there is another detail to this story that bothers me more. After the brothers turned around and left gnashing their teeth, one of them, the driver, pulled over, and they both rushed without uttering a word toward the roadside orchards to taste the forbidden fruit, Meskhetian apples, apples about which they had heard so much in childhood. I have thought a lot about this scene. It may seem too artistic for an essay of this nature, but it truly moves me to picture two almost elderly men dressed in their best clothes making their way through tall grass and toward trees laden with apples. Meskhetian apples are indeed something else...

The Meskhetians often assert that they are being deceived when they are told that there are no available living quarters and free lands in Meskheti. They have been to this region and they insist that they are familiar with its demographics. Ianeti residents often cite the Russian language edition of *Meskhetians and Meskheti*, a book by Shota Lomsadze, featuring a map of Meskheti with all 220 (everyone knows this number very well) Meskhetian villages. The villages that have become desolate as a result of the 1944 deportation and have never been restored are marked with black dots. These dots (there are quite a few of them) prove that there still are available lands in Meskheti; it is just that the Georgian Government does not have the will to return the deported Muslims to their former place.

The Ianeti Meskhetians fully realize that it is their Muslim creed that the Government and society fear most (“Had we been Armenians or Greeks, our issue would have been solved much easier”). In my opinion, this problem goes deeper than that, mainly lying in the fact that, as a result of political games and disinformation carried out throughout the years, neither side (the Meskhetians and Georgian society) has a clear idea who these people are, and who they themselves are. Thanks to the pro-Turkish propaganda proceeding for years, the Meskhetians have completely lost the

ability to make head or tail of this issue, while Georgian society has practically no knowledge about the origin of this “ethnicity”. The most intelligent (and, accordingly, the most accountable) part of this society has done nothing to inform the public and return the Meskhetians into the bosom of this society (with the exception of certain activities carried out by the intelligentsia at the end of the seventies). Almost no one has told these people that they are children of all Georgia and they should not feel as guests in the land of Georgia as they do in Ukraine or Uzbekistan...

Discussions involving the issue of the 1944 deportee Meskhetians’ return to their homeland have presently halted. Time will pass, however, and this issue will certainly resurface. I am almost convinced that by that time I will not have a definite answer to the question how, in what numbers, and with what frequency the Meskhetians should return to their homeland and where exactly they should settle. I do not think that anything will change in the mentality of the Meskhetians living in Azerbaijan, Central Asia, Russia or Turkey, which would prevent them from making a fatal, in my opinion, mistake and force them to find it in themselves to recognize not only fabled Meskheta but all Georgia too as their homeland (the contemporary generation of the Meskhetians is to blame for this fatal mistake to the smallest degree in comparison with the tumultuous history and geopolitics of Caucasus).

There are many things about which I am concerned and doubtful in relation to not only the Muslim Meskhetians but also to the future of my country, my future and that of my children. However, whenever I travel to Meskheta, I find myself looking at this place from a different perspective as the myths I had been hearing for a month and a half have germinated in my mentality. Every time I recall the issue of the Muslim Meskhetians, or am being reminded of it from the television screen, I infallibly picture my hosts and Ianeti Ward Nine, a handful of people who constantly ponder and contemplate their own future and that of their kin, people who are lost in their own past and future. I managed to have fallen in love with them because I went to them with an open heart and, as the Meskhetians themselves would put it, “with no guile in my heart”. I still love these people and I am still concerned about their fate. I will rejoice at their success and lament their failure, and this is it, and I think it is neither too little nor too much.

## **THE STORY OF ONE VILLAGE<sup>1</sup>**

*This essay is based on numerous interviews with eyewitnesses of the events described therein*

ARCHIL KIKODZE

It's September 16, 1993. At about 5 AM, the residents of one of the Georgian villages woke up to intense gunfire. The gunfire heard was coming from the Abkhazian villages. It can mean one thing only. The adversary has violated the peace treaty reached earlier through the mediation of Russia. On one hand, this treaty enabled the village to catch its breath for a month. On the other hand, it left the village totally unprepared for a surprise attack. All armored vehicles have already been removed from the village, while no one has kept watch with a gun in his hands at the approaches of the village in a month. The locals who have just woken up are unaware of what's happening in reality. The men arm themselves and head toward their positions around the village. Uncertainty takes over the village. The only source of information is the national television which makes optimistic forecasts and predicts a swift victory of the Georgian side in the renewed war.

The adversary is nearing fast. The armament of the male villagers does not suffice to defend the village. It has been decided to start the only broken tank abandoned by the army. So they do, except that the repair of the tank takes the life of one person. The tank repaired for such a price alternately appears at the opposite ends of the village, depending on the intensity of gunfire. The defenders of the village attempt to create an illusion and make the adversary believe that the village is defended by several tanks instead of one.

In the meantime, gunfire is heard at an increasingly closer distance. Although television continues to predict a swift victory, many come to doubt it. Some consider leaving the village, while others laugh their fear to scorn. There is a dissent of opinions. Those who have decided to flee, however, are having a hard time leaving at once their well-ordered households and farms. Many seem indecisive. While it's being debated who's leaving and who's

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<sup>1</sup> From the collection of essays Exploring Torture published by the Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, 2004

staying, the adversary's bombs explode in the village. It has already become too dangerous for people to move around in groups. They may become an easy target for the adversary's artillery. Somebody comes up with the idea of using the obsolete orchard irrigation canal that went dry a long time ago. The canal has gone wild, being fully covered with thorny bushes and shrubs for miles. This wild vegetation is penetrated by a two-mile tunnel, enabling those who wish to escape (who turn out to make up almost half of the village's population) to reach safety place without being noticed by the adversary.

To the remaining half, the tunnel cut through wild vegetation is nothing but a laughing stock and the fellow villagers' obsession. Although gunfire is near alright, they say on television that there's nothing alarming. Things are changing rapidly. Gunfire is heard from all sides. The adversaries manage to cut through one of the defense lines, and although the village defenders quickly ward them off, they nonetheless manage to burn down up to ten homes. It becomes evident that the village is surrounded. The only escape route lies through the sea, and the village elders get in touch with Sokhumi, requesting a ship to evacuate them and promising to provide fuel, yet Sokhumi cannot make any promises. Those who have stayed now wish they were in the shoes of those who have fled.

When the bombing intensifies, those remaining in the village are seized with the desire to stick together and meet the advancing tribulation as one. About five hundred people gather in the biggest house in the village. This house was built to last. There are even safer buildings in the village (for example, the school bunker), but the most important thing is that this house fits everyone. Men leave their positions briefly to see their relatives here. Then they go back, not even knowing yet that for many of them this will be their last meeting. "I saw my husband for the last time in the morning before the village fell. He dropped by and said, 'Things are pretty messy, so I'm on my way to the headquarters.' It was the last time I saw him."

Even under such circumstances, many take a chance and attempt to take footpaths out of the village to escape. Some perish while on their way. Nevertheless, some manage to reach safety.

"A sixteen-year-old girl, her husband (they were both fifteen when they got married), three-month-old son and brother-in-law

were at her uncle's home at the end of the village. It was the uncle who insisted on fleeing the village. The youths, however, refused as they didn't know anything about their parents. The uncle eventually had it his way.

"The escapees managed to take secret footpaths and reached Kindghi where, luckily for them, a rescue ship moored alongside the shore. Many wished to make it on the ship, yet there was but one boat. It had been decided to yield the boat to women and children, while men would try to swim to the ship. At the very last moment, amid mass hysteria and chaos, men also turned up on the boat. The boat couldn't bear all the weight and sank before reaching the ship. The young woman and her child were drowning. They were both rescued by a male stranger. They reached the boat somehow. Similar to everyone else, the infant's clothing was wet. The only piece of cloth the mother could find to wrap her child was a filthy rag used to mop the dock. After they had already reached safety, the infant developed the gravest form of infection because of the dirty swaddling clothes."

In the meantime, people who have gathered in the biggest house in the village listen to gunfire and tremble at what will happen next. They've spent three days together in stale air and unbearable conditions. Toward the end of the third day, the village falls and the people sheltered in the house see the adversary's soldiers and tanks from their refuge. Someone says, "It's better for one of us to go outside and meet them with a white flag." Upon hearing these words, one of the ladies instinctively attaches a swaddling band to a stick without uttering a word and steps outside with no hesitation ("I felt no fear as though nothing really mattered"). She is accompanied by a male fellow villager, the school principal. The enemy soldiers hit the school principal with automatic rifle butts in front of the lady with the white flag, cursing at him, throwing and trampling him down with their feet for a long time. It's only the beginning. People sheltered in the house are led outside, women and children are separated from men, and then they are all herded toward the school building.

There were also those who met the fall of the village separately from their fellow villagers, in their homes.

"Ms. N was in her home together with her bed-ridden and paralyzed mother. When the adversary entered the village, Ms.

N and her mother found shelter in the basement. The adversary searched and then burned down all homes. Their home was next. The adversary couldn't find the mother and her daughter in the basement and set the house on fire. Ms. N somehow managed to get her mother through a burning window and into the yard without the adversary noticing her. She remembered that there was a wide trench at the end of the yard. That's where she hid together with her mother. They spent more than two weeks in that trench. They sustained themselves on whatever Ms. N was able to find in the vegetable patch at night. It was fall, so they made it somehow.

"Ms. N left seeking food or surviving fellow villagers every night. She went as far away as Ochamchire one night, hoping that the adversary had not entered this city. She soon became convinced, however, that Ochamchire too was occupied by the adversary, and went back to her mother.

"In the trench, they accidentally came across a female relative who had survived miraculously and stayed with them.

"The adversary eventually found them hiding in the trench, abusing them verbally and physically. A round of bullets was fired into the ground around Ms. N with an automatic rifle. The young relative was taken away immediately, while Ms. N and her mother were left at the site. However, they were frequently visited, tortured and terribly abused.

"Armenian women who had accidentally bumped into the mother and her daughter became their only tie with the outer world, bringing them food and news from the village several times. During one of such visits, Ms. N asked the Armenian women to send a telegram to her relatives in Tbilisi and let them know that Ms. N and her mother were alive. As it turned out later, the Armenian women indeed sent a telegram that reached the addressees.

"The same women informed Ms. N that the adversary gathered all surviving captives and seemingly intended to send them toward the territories controlled by the Georgians. Ms. N decided somehow to transfer her mother to the house where the captives were gathered. All Ms. N could dream about during the days spent in the trench and then in her burned down house was to be with her people. It seemed to her that it would be easier for her to endure abuse and torture if she were by her fellow villagers. However, after she and her mother eventually made it to the house and learned

what her fellow villagers were forced to endure and see, she admitted, 'I'm so lucky not to have been there.'

The narrative by Ms. T, another resident of the village, reveals why Ms. N felt lucky.

"On the day when the village fell, Ms. T, her daughter and sister-in-law temporarily left the shelter but were forced to seek refuge in the school bunker after hearing severe gunfire. They found several of their fellow villagers there. While in the bunker, they were found by Ms. T's husband who, similar to his wife, knew nothing about their son who had gone to take his position, only realizing that the battle had been lost. Ms. T's husband was accompanied by two young fighters, both wounded. They required immediate medical aid. Ms. T's sister-in-law was courageous enough to crawl out the house in the midst of a rain of bullets, crawling back with bandages and iodine.

"Ms. T's husband was convinced that defeat was inevitable. He put their identifications in his Svanetian cap and stashed in the niche in the wall. Ms. T is convinced that the documents are still in that niche. Her husband was Svanetian and he would be inevitably killed if his origin were to be made known. However, nothing good awaited him anyway, which he understood well.

"He gently bids farewell to his wife, child and sister, assuring them, 'Do not fear the inevitable and meet possible death with dignity.' Then he leaves the bunker to resume fighting but soon returns, opting to spend the last minutes of his life with his family.

"The adversaries have already entered the village. Soon they unlock the bunker and lead the refugees outside. The men are separated from the women and shot to death on the spot. The young wounded fighters and Ms. T's husband, a schoolteacher, are shot to death the latter's former student right before Ms. T's eyes.

"At first, the captives are taken to the biggest house in the village to join their fellow villagers. From there women, children and up to twenty-five men who had escaped being executed by a firing squad are herded through the main village street toward the Abkhazian villages. On their way there, they are placed in the home of one of their fellow villagers, and it seems that the adversaries intend to burn down the house. They pour fuel on all sides of the house, yet, for some reason, opt against fulfilling their initial plan and lead the captives back into the yard only to find the bodies of



their killed fellow villagers, the owner of the house and his wife, while their severed heads are placed on the table.

“The captives spend the first night in abandoned houses in one of the Abkhazian villages. Violence against the women ensues immediately. Ms. T is haunted to this day by the wailing of one elderly woman who spent all night calling her fourteen-year-old granddaughter who had been led outside by enemy soldiers. The godparent of Ms. T’s daughter notices an Abkhaz acquaintance among the fighters and calls his name. This Abkhazian is offered jewelry concealed in the women’s clothing in exchange for which he stands at the door to their room and guards it from entrants.

“On the following day, the captives and their guards continue their path. However, many, including Ms. T’s daughter and several of her friends, manage to avoid the worst, thanks to their acquaintances or a certain amount of ransom. They are transferred into Abkhazian families where they are kept in more or less bearable conditions and no violence is committed against them. For example, a Greek woman, a daughter-in-law in an Abkhazian family, stands up for Ms. T and her friends, for which Ms. T is grateful to the family where the girls were sheltered. The remaining captives (up to three hundred people in all) are led to one of the Abkhazian villages and placed in the school building, in the classrooms, from forty to eighty people in each room. By this time, almost all male captives have been executed by a firing squad right before the women’s eyes.”

And that’s where the worst part starts... The captive women are lying on the floor or desks in crowded rooms, starved and tortured. They are being selected. The adversaries select the youngest and most beautiful women and lead them outside. The women try to hide such girls and cover them with their own bodies. They hide ten to twelve-year-old girls in sacks, pretending them to be full of their belongings, and even sit down on them in an attempt to deceive the guards. A married mother of many children goes outside in place of her unmarried sisters. Everyone knew what happened to those who went outside and in what condition they were led back.

An elderly mother-in-law who covered her young daughter-in-law with her body is killed by a Cossack on the spot...

A mother hears how her eleven-year-old son is being beaten and abused all night...

A fierce struggle and havoc ensues over bread and water distributed by the guards. Some fight for themselves, some for their children, and some for grandchildren...

They are all led to the restroom together, several times a day. It's not enough sometimes, however, and disturbing uncleanness takes over the classrooms...

About forty surviving captive men are kept separately. The women can see them only when in the corridors, when they are led to the restroom, yet the men are so severely beaten that it's impossible to recognize them. It's no longer possible to tell who is who...

Time will pass and many of these people who have gone through this hell will not be able to find it in their hearts to forgive the others for witnessing their humiliation and the violence committed against them. They will never forgive the filth they have been through together. After reaching safety, many will tell on others in front of their husbands, or fiancés, or even total strangers. Ten years have passed since these events, yet the trauma suffered remains heavy. It's still hard to remember and fathom these things even today.

... Days go by as the number of captives gradually decreases in the village school. The adversaries, especially the Abkhazians, avoid killing women and children. Many captives prove to have protectors and defenders. They are removed from the school building in secret and kept in safety, with the families of their Abkhazian acquaintances. Many are exchanged for captives or ransomed. There are incidents when an adversary becomes so touched by the misery of a captive that he helps such a person sneak out of the school building and frees him/her. In many cases, even harsher torture and abuse await those freed in this manner. For example, an eleven-year-old girl accidentally bumps into enemy soldiers who seize her and dash her head against a tree right before her sister's eyes. The suffered injury is so severe that it subsequently causes a mental disorder...

The image of an outlander deliverer, a Kabarday [the Kabardin North Caucasus people mainly live in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic, Russian Federation] fighting on the other side, appears in stories concerning those days as related by various people. The Kabarday saves captive women unconditionally and with self-sacrifice. He leads one of them out of the school building and, in spite of many tribulations, delivers her to Sokhumi where

licentiousness is no as intense. The woman cannot remember her saviors name or outward appearance. She only remembers that he resembled Christ... That's the answer she gives Abkhazians in Sokhumi when they ask, "Who brought you here?" The answer has an enchanting effect on them and from now on no one dares touching or abusing her.

The narratives by others, however, provide the Kabarday's name. We learn that he is small in stature, stocky and gloomy. He allegedly rescues four women, including one six-month pregnant woman, and delivered them out of the village on the very day it falls. He warns them in advance, "I may curse you out and insult you on our way out in order to deceive others. Don't be afraid or surprised at what I may do." So he does. When alone with the women, however, he is politeness incarnate. He digs out barbwire fence poles with his bare hands in order to ease the path for the captives, and carries the pregnant woman through the forest in his arms...

The women know nothing about their deliverer's motivation. They think that the Kabarday fighter is helping them out of avarice. The captives have jewelry taken from home and concealed in their clothing, so they offer it to him in exchange for help. He is insulted by such an offer and adamantly turns it down. Later on, the women draw closer to their guide and learn that he, together with twenty-six of his kinsmen, has come to fight on the Abkhazian side as a mercenary. However, he became disturbed by witnessing the cruelty of the Abkhazians who, among others, killed some of his kinsmen in order to avoid paying them. Appalled at what he has seen, the Kabarday intends to go back home. Before leaving, however, he wants to do a good deed. In his own words [in Russian], "I want to do something good before I leave."

The Kabarday finds accommodation for the women in the house of his acquaintances, in one of the Abkhazian villages. He places all four of them in one room, while having the hosts set up a bed for him at the door to that room. He sleeps with an automatic rifle in his hands. Although he is forced to leave the women the following morning, he frequently checks on them in the course of the following few days to make sure they're safe. Two weeks later, through the mediation of Georgian relatives and Abkhaz acquaintances, the women are freed.

Let's return to the village school where the number of locked-up captives gradually decreases. Finally, only eighty people remain from the initial five hundred. No one has turned up to be the protector of the eighty. They are neither exchanged nor ransomed. Their torture continues. Those who have retained the patriotic spirit are abused with special diligence. The captives are eventually transported to a high-mountainous Abkhazian village where they manage to take a breather as they're guarded there by women and elderly people only.

Finally, all eighty captives are packed in a bus and transported toward the Georgian positions by the Enguri River. The captives themselves have no clue where the bus is headed. It's unbearable for eighty people to be in one bus. They all think that they're being transported to be slaughtered, executed by a firing squad. At last, the bus stops by the Enguri River where, at the other end of the bridge, relatives and acquaintances await the freed captives. For someone this is the last liberation in life. The bus door is opened from the outside, and a woman who has suffocated to death is first to fall out of the bus.

The fate of the surviving male villagers is very dramatic. Many of them stood at their positions with guns in their hands when the village fell. Mr. D is one of them.

"He had never participated in a war. The sight of dead bodies and blood had always disturbed him. He first picked up a gun only a few days before the village fell, after the village was surrounded.

"After three days of fighting, the adversary occupies the village, and Mr. D tries to make his way home in secret where, as he hopes, his wife, two daughters and son await him. On his way home, he notices a number of bodies, 'whom he eventually gets used to seeing...'"

His home is desolate. It's almost time for the dawn. The village is full of adversaries. Mr. D hides in the attic from where he sees his neighbors' homes being set on fire one by one. It's his home's turn now. Mr. D can clearly hear from the attic how the invaders debate. Some feel that it would be a waste to burn a house with "so many valuables", demanding to take some of the items outside. It has been finally decided that "an order is an order", thus deciding the fate of the house as well. The adversaries (about fifteen people) leave the house for a while. They don't go too far away though.

Mr. D can see them standing at the gate of his yard. That's when intense gunfire ensues, which Mr. D believes to be an assault undertaken by his people. Encouraged by the thought that the fight has resumed, he leaves the attic and goes down to the room. He hopes that he can sneak outside. The gunfire, however, ceases shortly thereafter, while two fighters approach the house. All that Mr. D manages is hiding behind the door. The invaders start piling up the furniture in the middle of the room to set it on fire. Gunfire resumes outside, and Mr. D also fires from behind the door. Both adversaries fall down. The next thought of Mr. D is to set the place on fire on his own in order to deceive those outside and try to sneak out without being noticed. When bending over to start a fire, he hears a moan. One of the two is still alive, begging Mr. D to finish him off and this way deliver from being burned alive. Mr. D does not specify whether he killed the wounded man or left him to be burned alive.

“Mr. D manages to sneak out of the house without being noticed. However, he will not make it too far in the village full of adversaries. His tangerine orchard is not the best place to hide either. The trees have sparse and thinly vegetated branches, while only one of them has pumpkin ivy wrapped around it, its beauty being the only reason why Mr. D never trimmed the ivy. He hides in this very tree, in the pumpkin leaves. In the meantime, the adversaries become suspicious. Indeed, the house is burning, yet the two men who have been sent to start a fire are nowhere to be seen. The adversaries start to inspect the tangerine orchard. Resumed gunfire, however, would not let them do it with due diligence.

“Mr. D hides in the tree until it gets dark. It's only after dark that he summons all his courage to descend and look around, hoping to find any of his people. He hides in the village for five more days, looking for his family members for five nights. He never finds anyone alive in these five nights though, instead discovering the dead in abundance, his neighbors and fellow villagers. He is forced to leave them unattended and unburied, in the open air, which breaks his heart even more.

“On the fifth night, Mr. D leaves the village and makes his way toward the sea where, fortunately for him, he bumps into Georgian fighters, accompanying them on their way to the Kodori Gorge, crossing the river and meeting there with his fellow villag-

ers, and most importantly, his son. Upon seeing his son, Mr. D's knees become weak and he kneels. His son cheers him up. They have yet to find his mother and sister.

"The fellow villagers intend to go back to the village in order to rescue their people. So they do, yet to no avail. They wind up amid the adversary's intense gunfire, some of them being killed during the assault, and three of Mr. D's fellow villagers drown in the Kodori River while retreating.

"Finally, unlike the majority of the fugitives who retreated from Abkhazia toward Svaneti via the Kodori Gorge, Mr. D, his son, and several of their fellow villagers make their way toward the sea via Zugdidi. They travel only at night, making it to Zugdidi in three days. That's where Mr. D meets with his wife and daughter in a few days."

Other men too find their female family members, men who, similar to Mr. D, have done their best to rescue them, including crossing the frontline, capturing hostages and trying to exchange them for their family members. This meeting was not an easy one. Many have never spoken with their wives and children about what happened in the village occupied by the enemy. Many a family has been destroyed and many a family has never been created because of this reservation and uncertainty.

Life in new places, far away from the ancestral lands, life in a strange land, amid need, and the status of refugees await the people gathered at the Enguri Bridge [Georgian-Abkhazian administrative border]. There will be new families and children who will be born later and brought up so that they will learn about their homeland only from the narratives of their parents... It will take strength to face a new and even harder life after what these people have been through, strength and probably love too. One of the young women notices her husband at the other end of the Enguri Bridge. He is waiting for her. She covers her face with her hands, passes by him, and says weeping, "I am no longer yours!" The husband catches up with her, turns her around, embraces her and says, "You are a saint..."

## **IA SHEGHVIASHVILI**

Born in 1989

Interviewed by

MARINA TURASHVILI in the village of Sabueti, Kakheti  
Region, 2004

My name is Ia Sheghviashvili. I was born on August 19, 1989, in Yerevan. My father was imprisoned and my mother was in great need, so she became involved in trading goods to support my elder sister and me. While being pregnant with me, despite her huge belly, she traveled to Yerevan to fetch goods for sale. On her way back by bus, she started having stomachaches and screamed, "Please help me! I'm about to give birth!"

A woman neighbor was with my mother at that time. She and those on the bus took my mother to the maternity hospital. That's how I was born. It became known that I was a child of a needy mother and my father had been imprisoned, so my mother was given swaddling clothes, even some money was collected and she was sent to Sabueti village [Kakheti, Eastern Georgia] together with her infant. My grandmother was informed about my birth, yet she couldn't afford going to Yerevan. As for my father, he was in prison, so there was no way to let him know.

My grandmother, uncles, relatives and neighbors helped raise me. I have two uncles, Vano and Zura, the latter often being referred to as Chaghara [Grey-haired in Georgian]. He was given this nickname by his aunt when he was in prison. He happened to have very blond hair with some grey hair just above his forehead, so she said, "Oh my grey-haired sweetheart!" His real name was immediately forgotten and everyone has been calling him by his nickname ever since.

I have Aunt Eteri and Grandma Rusiko. They took care of me when I was growing up. Of course, my mother too participated in my upbringing, yet not with as much attentiveness as my grandmother, uncles and aunt since we were in great need and she went back to trading.

When my mother went to Yerevan to trade in goods, my sister and I stayed all by ourselves. She was fifteen years older than I,

so she looked after me. When I grew up a little, turning about two years and a half, my father was released from prison.

My father and mother had an argument at the swing (we have it on the balcony) one time. I don't know why they argued. I was too little and I vaguely remember it. My father grabbed me by the hair and dragged me to the swing, yelling, and "I didn't ask you to keep the baby!" and pointed at me [about to weep]. "Don't come near me or I'll slit her throat!"

Everyone cried, daring not to get near him. I was too little at that time and I don't remember it well. My uncle told me this story later. My cousin (Nino, Vano's daughter) seized the moment, snatched me from my father and rushed me to her home (my uncle's and our homes were located close to each other). My uncle, Vano, was standing on the balcony at that time, so my cousin handed me to him. He, in turn, rushed me into the rabbit house where we both hid. As I was told later, I turned to my uncle, "Hush, uncle Vano! Hush!" Then my father calmed down a bit. Nevertheless, he was not allowed near me for two days.

My father had a very quick temper. He spent all his life, forty years, in prison. He would be released, then commit a crime and go back to prison. I don't know how many years he spent in prison but he was there pretty much all the time.

Before my father died, my sister, Leah, got married in the village of Gremi [Kakheti, Eastern Georgia], although my father strongly opposed it. He strongly opposed his son-in-law who too was a thief and convict. Father knew what it would be like to marry a thief, so he felt sorry for my sister because of a life that awaited her. Jemal, my ex brother-in-law, was fifteen years older than my sister. He was nearly old enough to be her father, yet love is blind [smiles].

Things went wrong in our family right after my sister got married. My father told my mother, "You gave her in marriage! You got rid of her!" They argued endlessly. There has been no peace at home since then. My father was very angry and refused to reconcile with Leah. He was furious because she had gone against his will and got married. A little later, however, when he felt really unwell, he told my mother, "You see I'm dying. Go get Leah. I want to see her."

My mother left and let Leah know that her father wanted to see her by all means. Leah was seized with fear, reasoning how she was supposed to face father after all this time. She did come



however. When she arrived, they burst into tears and hugged one another. My father passed away shortly thereafter. He died in my grandma's arms. He bled from his mouth, eventually dying from blood loss. In a few months, grandfather too died from grief over him. My grandmother was left all alone. Long-suffering and down-trodden, she was the one who brought me up.

I remember it all very vaguely as I was very little. Now, when I'm told about these things, I don't want to hear how it all happened. I want to leave everything bad behind and remember good things only. On the other hand, what can I do? It is my past. It may be bad but it's still a part of my life.

Several months passed, and my brother-in-law was murdered. His murder is still veiled in mystery. In any case, I don't know why he got killed. You know, my brother-in-law may have been a thief and convict but he loved and respected my sister very much. As for Leah, she was crazy about her husband. She had never had a hard time living with her husband. She had been acquainted with this kind of life since childhood. After my brother-in-law got killed, my sister could no longer stay in his home, especially there was only her aged mother-in-law left, so she moved in with us, my mother and me. She was pregnant at that time. Her husband's relatives knew nothing about it though. Later on, they found out, of course, and rejoiced greatly, saying that God had sent them a child in place of the departed son. My sister gave birth to a boy. She named him Jemal after her husband. At this point, the sister of my brother-in-law is raising him.

After the death of my father, our family went downhill. We were in such great need that my sister joined my mother and they started to trade in goods together. They would buy clothing here, deliver it to the Lekis' land [i.e. the Lezgians, an ethnic group living predominantly in southern Dagestan and northeastern Azerbaijan] and sell the goods to them. If they couldn't get cash for their goods, they exchanged them and sold that stuff here in our villages.

It takes one day to get to the Lekis' land on foot. That's how my mother and sister struggled to make a living one way or another. During their trips to the Lekis' lands, my sister met a Leki young man, Mussa. They came to like each other and she decided to marry him. Her life had already been quite messed up and need also made her make this step. She had three boys with him,

Magamedia (it's a Leki name), Ramaze (she gave him a Georgian name), and the third boy was named Akaki (Leah named him after our father). Mussa, however, renamed him Kurvana, a Leki name. My sister divorced that man.

I'll tell you why she divorced him. My sister told fortune with coffee residue, cards and candle wax because it was ordained by God. Leah was fifteen, when Mary the Mother of God appeared to her in a dream. My sister spoke like Mary the Mother of God in her dream. She didn't remember a thing when she woke up. In her sleep, however, she turned to my mother, "Ms Nana, please come here for a second." My mother approached. "I am Mary the Mother of God," and she spoke with all seriousness. I don't know what she said. My mother figured out that something was wrong with my sister. She had heard that things like that did happen. She didn't show it though. Had she said anything about it, our relatives would've taken care of my sister, like taking her to church or something. My mother reasoned that it would pass on its own. No, the same thing later happened to my sister a few more times.

One time, my sister, in her sleep again, spoke as though she were Saint Georgia (whom we call White George), "Ms Nana, please come here for a second." My mother guessed what was happening. "You," my sister said, "Must come up here on November 23 [one of the feast days dedicated to Saint George]. You will all come up here and keep vigil. You will bring a rooster with you and you will spend the night here." (There is a chapel dedicated to Saint George, Mugudi Saint George, in the Sabue forest which Sabue residents call Mugudi).

Indeed, on November 23, my mother took my sister, relatives and me there. I was three months old at that time. My mother wrapped me abundantly in swaddling clothes, so I wouldn't catch a cold, and they all took turns holding me by the fire.

My sister had yet another strange dream one time. After it had dawned, she told my mother with fear that in her dream she had been chased by a man with a sack on his back. That man pulled a coffee cup from the sack, threw it at my sister and yelled, "May you know how to tell fortune from this day on." Had she thrown the sack at her, she would've become a beggar, one of those who travel from village to village, collecting whatever others can spare. He threw a coffee cup however. My sister didn't look back. She kept running

with all her might. Then the man threw a deck of cards at her. My sister wouldn't look back that time either. Finally, he pulled out a bundle of candles from the sack and threw it at her too. My sister has been telling fortune with coffee residue, candles and cards from then on. She tells fortune for everyone in Makhachkala (the capital of Dagestan). She tells fortune with coffee residue, reads playing cards, and tells fortune with candles too. She has become so famous that people come to see her all the way from Moscow. She even has her regular clientele.

One time, when my sister felt unwell (she had an ulcer), one of her Muscovite customers who had already made friends with my sister asked her to go with her to Moscow to have the ailment treated. She could undergo treatment and tell fortune at the same time and thus make some money. My sister refused. After her ulcer got really bad, however, she visited that woman as she had her address. Her friend covered the cost of my sister's surgery. She turned out to be very rich. Leah didn't have any money, so she promised to reimburse her later. My sister spent one month in Moscow. She needed some time to heal her wound after the surgery, right? She stayed near that friend of hers. There was a man, Putin's (the Russian president) right-hand man, so my sister's friend took her to that man's wife for a cup of coffee. When my sister's friend flipped her cup, the hostess inquired, "Why would you do that? We're not fortune-tellers!" "We're not certainly, but she is," she answered pointing at my sister.

That woman was very excited and asked my sister to tell her fortune. She went totally nuts when my sister told her that her husband loved to drink. Leah promised to make that man come to hate drinking if she could have his picture. I don't know what my sister did but one thing is clear: that man indeed quit drinking. One day his wife threw a party. She hosted guests and put drinks on the table to test her husband. That man asked her to put them away right after he noticed alcohol on the table, saying that it made him puke.

His wife went nearly crazy with joy. She rushed to my sister's, hugging and kissing and thanking her. My sister and her friend were at a loss. They had no clue what had happened. After that woman explained why she was so happy, Leah inquired, "Why? You didn't believe me?"

The wife of Putin's right-hand man (I think her name was Angela) told my sister, "I don't even know how to thank you for what you've done for me." She begged Leah to stay and promised to buy apartments for her and her three sons, yet how could my sister stay and live there? She spent one month with her friend and then returned to the Lekis' land. Then that woman, the wife of Putin's right-hand man, gave my sister five million. She used that money to repay her friend and sent me some because she knew we had no money to buy bread. She spent the rest on her children. Her eldest son was about to go to school, which required a lot of money.

Generally speaking, my sister doesn't put spells on anyone. Quite the opposite, if someone has a spell put on him/her, Leah removes the spell. My sister was given this gift when she was fifteen and has had it ever since. I don't how she does it. When I visited with her, she collected seashells and some plants at the seaside.

She was so good at fortune telling that she quickly made a name for herself. People flocked to her to have their fortune told, and she made good money. One time, after my brother-in-law saw that she was making a lot of money fortune telling, he demanded money from her to buy himself a car. Leah answered, "Why won't you find a job and buy a car yourself?" He, however, was stubborn in his demand. They had a serious argument. Then my brother-in-law grabbed my sister and pressed a knife against her throat. Even now, after all these years, she has a scar on her throat. It is visible. That's how they ended up with discord in their family. My sister could no longer put up with it. She was a young woman after all who had seen nothing but trouble in her life, so they separated. My brother-in-law, however, wouldn't let her be, begging her to reconcile. After much begging, Leah gave him one last chance. No matter what, he was her children's father. She reconciled with him, begging him to find a job, but all he did was lie down on the couch and eat. He did nothing. He made no money. He could work around the house or in the garden, right? He just lay there and ate. My sister had to take care of everything. She took care of the children and family. They had one cow that went uphill to pasture. Leah would go up on the hill too and cut hay. Then she would descend with haystacks on her shoulders. She would fall and roll down once in a while, yet what could she do? My mother was at a loss. She felt sorry for us both, my sister and me. She alternately

stayed with Leah and me. She spent more time with her because Leah was in a foreign land without anyone to support her, so she needed more help. At least, my grandmother and uncles took care of me here and I was sort of all right. I missed them [mother and sister] very much though.

I've been to the Lekis' land twice. They were very boorish, living like cavemen. At least, when I was there, it was so. They mixed fern and clay to build homes. After they finished one floor, a family moved in. Then another family built the second floor and also moved in. They built three-story homes in this manner. Some of them lived in caves. They dug up dirt, tidied up the place to their liking and lived there. They've started to become more civilized lately though. Now they build homes with dirt and bricks. That's what I saw when I went there for the second time.

While I was there, my brother-in-law started an argument with Leah. I don't know why. Mussa grabbed the mop and was about to hit my sister in the head. I jumped between them and cried out to my mother (she wasn't there at that time. She was on the hill, walking a baby), "Mommy! Mommy! Come here fast!"

I jumped at my brother-in-law and forced him to drop the mop. He was much stronger than I, so he pushed me away. There was a kettle with boiling water on the stove. He grabbed the kettle and ran after my sister. He wanted to burn her with boiling water. I pushed my sister out the door and followed her. Amid this commotion, I too had boiling water sprinkle over me. In the meantime, my mother burst in (she's a courageous woman). She grabbed a long stick. My brother-in-law got scared of her and stopped at once. Then they all simmered down a bit. Leah divorced her husband shortly thereafter and moved to Makhachkala. While she was still Mussa's wife, they lived in the village of Khupra (Kyzlar District, Dagestan). That's how my sister's second family broke up. I don't even want to talk about my sister's messed up life anymore.

Two years later, she remarried again to Ruslan, also a Leki. Unlike Mussa, he turned out to be a very good young man. They have two sons, Ruslan and Mustama (my sister has six children, all boys). I don't know them. I've never seen them. They're in need, yet what can they do? They raise their children far away from us. My mother lives with them. I haven't seen her in six years. I hardly ever receive any news from them. They may drop me a line twice

a year and let me know what's new. My mother has given up on me too. She doesn't need me anymore. My father is dead. My aged grandfather and uncles do their best to raise me. What can we do? That's life. I'm growing up in need and misery [cries].



Ia Sheghviashvili in 2004

Something odd happened before my sister married Ruslan, while she was still Mussa's wife. Let me tell you this story. It happened one morning. A female neighbor came to my grandmother and told her, "Rusiko, I don't feel comfortable saying this but I have to tell you nonetheless. Your granddaughter was killed by her husband. Then Nana killed your son-in-law, Mussa, and then the Lekis killed your daughter-in-law, avenging Mussa, as is their custom. They threw the bodies of Nana and Leah off the cliff and that's where these bodies are now. The children are left abandoned and no one pays attention to them."

I was in the back room at that time, and the neighbor didn't know about it. When I heard what she said, I burst into tears and couldn't stop crying. As soon as that woman left, I came out of the room and told my grandmother, "You know how much I love Leah's children. Let me go there on my own. I'll get there one way or another, I know the roads (I can get to the Lekis' land even today if I need to. It only takes one day to get there on foot). Let me go and get my sister's children. I'll feed them onion roots if I have to and raise them." I was little, ten years old, and I didn't know much about life. My grandfather turned down my offer to bring the children, saying that, no matter what, they were someone else's children, so it would be wrong to bring them.

Moreover, we were in need ourselves at that. We would go all day without having anything to eat. One of the neighbors would give us some corn. We would grind it, bake cornbread and eat it. Sometimes I wondered why my uncles wouldn't find a job and help us. They were both between jobs at that time. Although Uncle Vano had a family of his own to take care of, he would share the last piece of bread with me. As for the other, unmarried uncle, Chaghara, we were the ones to support him.

I spent my day and nights crying. I would press the pictures of my mother, sister and her children to my chest and go to sleep. That's how I satisfied my longing for them. I'm not even fifteen yet and I have suffered so much. I'm not even telling everything in details.

One morning, my mother arrived. I went crazy with joy. I hadn't seen her in five years. As for the news of their death, it proved to be a lie. This rumor had been spread in Sabueti.

The story of the marriage of my father and mother is very interesting. I'll tell you about it too. My mother is from Almaty (Kvareli District), a neighboring village. Father had come to like my mother before he went to jail. After he got arrested, he wound up in the same cell as my mother's brother, Gogi. My father was supposed to be released by my uncle, "I'll marry your sister before you get out of here." Indeed, he married my mother after he was released. That's how our not-too-happy family was created.

I'm a Sabueti middle school tenth-grader now. I'm just back from Almaty because I had to borrow a textbook and do my homework. We have but one geography textbook. I cannot afford one. I could barely afford some used textbooks and I borrowed the others. The geography textbook is pretty expensive compared to the others, so I cannot afford it.

It's twenty-seven of us students in the class. My best friends are Marie, Nato, Beka (from whom I borrowed the geography textbook), and Nika who is my relative at the same time. In this regard, I'm happy that I have good friends.

My pension is eighteen lari. I was recently granted support, twenty-four lari, which took a lot of red tape. Now what am I supposed to eat if I pay eighteen lari for a geography textbook [with sadness in her voice]? That's why I borrowed this book. I write down sections from it into a notebook, so I can give it back to its owner on time for him to do his homework. I sit down and study at night. You probably wonder why I waste time copying materials. Well, I need to recap what I've already studied, don't I? That's how I double my studying, copying. On the other hand, life has treated me so harshly that I don't feel like studying anymore. I mostly have D grades. That's because of my life. I've lost interest in studying because of my tormented life. Our family cannot afford my going to college.

My grandmother is seventy-four, a pensioner. I'm surprised she's still so full of life after all she's been through. At first, her whole life consisted of standing at the prison gate to see my father. Then followed his untimely death at the age of forty, and then my grandfather's death, and now she lives amid such need in her old age. I'm surprised she's still alive after so much. She's a tough woman though. She has a sense of being human too. That's probably what keeps her going.

It gave me hope when Mikheil Saakashvili became our president. None of us had any hope in Shevardnadze's time. I'm glad that tuition fees will be introduced while entrance fees will be abolished. I want to become a student, but I'll need money for transportation, food, and clothing, while my poor grandmother won't be able to support me. I really want to become a midwife. It's the greatest joy to watch a new life being born

As I've already told you, I live with my grandmother and unmarried uncle in the village of Sabueti. My uncle is unemployed, so my grandmother and I support him with our pensions. Grandmother is still strong, yet her age is catching up with her. I will no longer receive any pension after I graduate from high school. I have trust in our president and hope that things will get better, yet I cannot help thinking what I'll do after I graduate, when I won't have my pension. I presently receive forty lari, eighteen lari as an orphan and twenty-two is my welfare. In addition, my grandmother also receives a pension, which makes it more or less enough to supply us with flour, oil, sugar, and some clothing once in a while.

Our village self-government allocated some support, one hundred lari, to me one time as an orphan and one left with only a grandmother to take care of her. I was overjoyed that day. It was the end of August, and I was about to resume my study in school. I bought one sack of potatoes with that money. I used the rest to buy notebooks, pens, and clothing. I bought cheap stuff, so I could get more.

My uncle, Chaghara, is very strict with me. My sister came one time, wanting to take me with her to the Lekis' land for a while and saying that she would buy stuff for me, yet my uncle refused. My sister's life has been more or less better lately. She makes money by fortune telling. I haven't heard any news from her in quite a while though. We used to exchange letters via regular mail. It's



been one year, however, since I last heard from her. If I knew her phone number, I would call her, but how am I supposed to know it if she sends me no letters to let me know?

I also miss my mother terribly. I don't know where she is and how she's doing. I do know that she gets in touch with my sister once in a while since she too is in the Lekis' land. I don't know. Maybe she even got married. How would I know?

Whenever I want to visit my neighbors, I have to ask my uncle. He's very strict. Sometimes he won't let me see my aunt either. I have to come up with lies every time I want to see my friends. I think that he's being too tough. I can be good or bad and it's totally up to me. I do, however, want my uncles and grandmother, everyone who raised me, to be proud of me, even my father who was highly esteemed in the village, even though he had been imprisoned. He was a thief, yet he never stole anything in his village. He would go elsewhere, someplace far away, and steal there, which nonetheless doesn't excuse him.

When my uncle isn't home, gone someplace, or helping someone to bring at least some money home, so we can buy something, I go to see my friends, Marie and Nato. I have a third friend too, Tako, who used to be our classmate but left for Tbilisi to study. While she was here, the four of us, Marie, Nato, Tako, and I, were together all the time.

One time, Tako and I went to see Nato to find an infant there who had a pin with a lucky charm (one of those that are worn to ward off evil spells). That pin got lost, and we (not I as much as my friend) were accused of stealing. I was forced to point in the direction of my friend and say that I saw her steal. I would never do that! I would never accuse my friends of stealing falsely! God would have punished and recompense me if I did! I insisted that my friend didn't even pick up the baby and there was no way she could've stolen the pin.

Since I wouldn't lie and accuse Tako of stealing, I was accused too. Everything ended well for me though. I could've told on my friend and avoided all that headache, could I have not? Yet, I was convinced that Tako would never steal. I did not lie, especially since they started looking for that pin three days after it disappeared. Even the child's mother said, "I took my baby to the clinic the other day, so I might have lost it there, or my husband might have ex-

changed it for vodka (her husband was an alcoholic). I don't know exactly what happened." Nevertheless, they pointed at my sister. All hell broke loose because of it. I didn't sleep for a week. I cried day and night, walking around with swollen eyes. Both my friend and I had no one to protect us. That's why they accused us. Had we had strong protection, they would've never dared to accuse us falsely. We were orphans. That's why they bullied us.

Another time, my neighbor, Lena, accused me of stealing her watch, saying, "Her father was a thief, so she must have stolen it." She herself claimed it was a silver watch. I don't know. Of course, I did not steal it, yet I couldn't prove I was right. Some time passed and my grandmother noticed that watch on somebody else's wrist and told the owner about it [refuses to reveal the identity of the thief]. Then Lena approached the real thief, reclaimed her watch and said, "How dare you!" That woman, the owner of watch, came to me with apologies, yet what good could her apologies be? They would never compensate what I had gone through. I'm still happy that, unlike the previous case with theft, everything was cleared here and my innocence was proven. Sometime I think, "Is it really because of my father's having been a thief that they take the liberty of accusing me of theft?"

My classmates decided one time to gather some money and throw a party. I couldn't say that I had no money and I wouldn't make it to the party, so I agreed. After I went home and told my grandmother that I would need two lari to go to a party, she replied that she didn't have any money and referred me to my uncle who didn't have any money either, so I went to my aunt. My cousin, Nino, the one who was married, was there at that time. I felt really embarrassed to ask them to give me two lari. I couldn't ask for a loan either as I had no means to repay it. I summoned all my courage and said, "My class is throwing a party. Could you give me two lari?" My cousin went berserk; "Is this why you felt embarrassed?" she said, pulled out ten lari and gave it to me. After I told my grandmother that Nino gave me money, she rejoiced saying, "She's so precious."

I didn't say that she gave me ten lari though. I contributed two lari from that money to throw a party and kept the rest. I had a lot of fun at the party. Although we the classmates usually spent all day every day together, spending time together in this manner

is totally different. My friend Nato's birthday was approaching. I went to the store and bought a five-lari present for her from the money I had saved. Her birthday is around the corner (it's on December 5) and I have to wish her a happy birthday. I cannot buy her a five-lari present again, yet I believe that being attentive is what matters. My uncles work here and there and give me a lari once in a while, so sometimes I have some money in my pocket.

The most pleasant thing in my life is that I have a boyfriend [laughs]. He's very rich. He has homes in Tbilisi and Telavi. I'm really surprised he fell in love with me, such a poor girl. I am very happy and I won't complain even if it doesn't last long.

I am happy but I would be even happier if my father were around and I lived with my parents like normal families do. I wish my sister too lived not far away from us, in Telavi or Tbilisi, so I could see her at least once a year.

If I were rich, I would probably spend all my life helping the needy, those elderly who cannot afford a loaf of bread and starve to death in our village. I would help my poor friend, Marika, whose mother has left her (just like mine) and who has been abandoned. Although, unlike me, her father is alive, but he's an alcoholic, and Marika stays with us or other members of the family. When my grandmother's relatives give me clothes that are too small on me, or ones I don't really like, I give them away. I would help my poor neighbor, Valiko, who has no family, whose mother has died and who is left all alone.

When I graduate from school, I know I won't enroll because we cannot afford it. My biggest desire, however, is to work in an orphanage, so I can raise and take care of abandoned children like me. I want to give them motherly warmth. At the same time, I realize that no one can replace a child's mother. My grandmother raised me and gave me everything she had, yet a mother's love is something else.

## **ELENE KHADURI**

Born in 1939

Interviewed by

MAYA MADUASHVILI in the Karaleti IDP Settlement,  
Shida Kartli Region, 2010

My maiden name is Elene Khaduri and my husband's last name is Maisuradze. As far as I can remember, my childhood was tough. I was raised as a poor war child. I was raised by my relatives, then I was sent someplace else and so on, until I turned seventeen. When I turned seventeen, my close relative, a cousin, gave me out in marriage. He gave me out in marriage... My father went missing in action during the war [WW II]. He was drafted and we all... Not we only but everyone was in need at that time. We were in constant need of everything in the village of Kurta. My husband proved to be very good, excellent; excellent in terms of character, love for hard work and so on and so forth. His family was also very poor. It was normal for that period. Then through my labors, and his labors, we built a good family. We also built nice and big homes. Then these homes were destroyed by an earthquake, so we built new ones. Thus [sighs], as they say, the chemistry was good between us. I gave birth to two children, a girl and a boy, Giuli and Guram. I educated them both. My son became an engineer. He graduated from a school in Tbilisi. My daughter graduated from a laboratory school. Then, after she started to work, she was forcefully taken in marriage by a Kakhétian young man [Kakhéti, a region in Eastern Georgia]. Things did not go well for them over there [in Kakhéti], so we had them move over here. To be more precise, we bought them a house and they moved here. My daughter's husband was involved in a car accident at that time, so I was forced to have them move over here... And I have a granddaughter, my Niah [laughs]. As for my son, he spent many years in Russia. He was getting way past his marriageable age, which made us all quite concerned. My husband could no longer bear so much worrying and passed away at the age of sixty-nine. It's been ten years now. It'll be eleven years this coming March.

I took over the household thereafter. I did everything. I doubled my workload. And then my son arrived. I had him get married.

We celebrated his wedding, and now we have a two-month-old girl, Sophiko. We named her Sophiko after my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law spent thirty years living under one roof with me. I am very pleased that my granddaughter was named after her. She was an extraordinary person. Although we were poor, we did have love. We had the loveliest neighbors. I cannot complain about anyone living around us. We had the loveliest, extraordinary neighbors [crying]. And now, since they are far away from here, I miss them tremendously.

Now I'll switch to the war period [August 2008 War]. When all youths left, including my son, only we were left, elderly people... handicapped people who could no longer walk on their own... paralyzed people, while some were way over eighty. They started burning down homes from Tamarasheni [In 2008, this village was completely destroyed and depopulated] and reached our village. We had an icon corner arranged in our home. My daughter-in-law is very religious, and so is our whole family. So I took down the icons and put them in my purse and went outside. Ten of us in all gathered in the garage. There was no one else left in our neighborhood that consisted of us and our neighbors. Thus, we gathered and reasoned. We anticipated Red Cross people to arrive, yet they were not allowed into the village. Aircrafts flew so low that I ducked every time I heard them approach. Tanks were accompanied by four armed young men on either side, guarding the machines from any possible attack from the village. Who was there left to fight? People like us?

Then they started to burn down homes. Seeing my neighbor's home burned down hurt me so badly. Eventually, it would be my home's turn, of course. I left my purse with my people and entered the house. About fifteen armed Ossetians burst into the house and rushed upstairs. They looked around, came back downstairs in about fifteen minutes and left. I said, "God has helped us." So they left. In half an hour, they pulled in a van and a trailer. They loaded everything we possessed onto the van and put our pigs in the trailer. Two pigs... I had two. They left... and took everything away. Saddened, I stood in the yard for about fifteen minutes. Then they once again rushed back, intending to burn down my home. I pleaded with them, "Please don't burn down my home!" One of them turned to me, "Who are you?" grabbed his automatic rifle

and hit me in the head with its shoulder stock. My head looked like that hole over there... I started bleeding. I felt unwell. While I was washing the blood off my face, coming to a little and regaining consciousness, the roof of my home had already burned down to ashes. I burst out crying. I opened the driveway gate and left. I grabbed the gate, thinking whether I should close it or not... I opted to leave it open and bid my home farewell for good. In the meantime, in less than ten seconds, they rushed back yet once again, grabbed my purse (where I kept my daughter's clothing and the icons) and shot it to ribbons with automatic rifles right in front of me. I didn't step back even a bit. I don't know if the icons made me adamant, or I only froze, but I stood there like a statue. They left.

Now I told them [relatives and neighbors], "I have to go through the woods. I cannot take it any longer." My three neighbors, husband and wife, eighty years of age, started crying, "You have to take us with you." I asked them, "Can you walk? I cannot carry you through the woods." They said, "Yes. We'll hold canes and walk." So we left. We kept walking. We made it to the woods before dark. We slept on fallen leaves and brushwood. We didn't really sleep but we lay on them. The sun rose. We slowly walked upward. After we reached the top spot in the woods, we heard dogs barking and the voices of Ossetians and Russians. They had a big bonfire lit. It was August. I have no idea why they would need it. Now they [my neighbors] were frightened. They sat on a rock and refused to follow me. I said, "Alright. I'll go ahead and you follow me. I'll let you know if there's any danger ahead." It was too late to go back. I looked through tree boughs and saw two men armed with automatics, coming toward me. I approached them. They were like thirty years of age, Russians. I greeted them [in Russian], "Hello, sons." "Hello." I asked them, "Do you have any water?" "No. But there's a water source, quarter a mile from here. You can have some there." I thanked them and waved at my neighbors, gesturing them not to be afraid. They approached and greeted [the Russians]. They never said a word to us. They left. Then two big dogs passed by us. I got really scared, "Oh, come what may, we've reached the point of no return." The dogs, however, passed by us, without even having barked at us. We continued our journey. We walked. Then we noticed a trailer. I reasoned that Ossetians or Russians were in the trailer... There was no telling. I got closer. My fellow travelers were

too frightened, so they stopped, while I went ahead. I approached the trailer. The door had a big lock on it. I walked around toward the window. It was a metal window. The trailer was packed with dogs. There must have been at least sixty of them, no human beings though. I was no longer afraid as they couldn't get outside. I waved at my neighbors and they followed me. We went downhill toward the water source. We drank some water, washed our faces and sat down on rocks. We figured we had already reached safety.

The worst was yet to come, however, after we went over... There are villages called Erdevis since three villages in that area are called the same name Erdevi. The same thing was happening there as in our village, aircrafts, tanks, fire reaching for the sky. I told my neighbors, "Can you go there?" They answered no. "Alright, then follow me." I noticed a vineyard with some corn ears and cut hay on the ground. I opened the wicket gate. It was tied with a belt, a woman's belt. I opened the gate and we entered. We spread the hay on the ground and lay on it. We lay there, numb and spellbound. We couldn't sleep. We had not eaten in six days. We only had water with us. We drank some water and that was it. When the sun rose, I took a look at the road. It was quiet [brief pause]. In the meantime, my neighbor's blood pressure rose [pause]. We moved him over onto the hay. His spouse browsed through her purse and found his medication. We had him take a pill and waited for him to recover. These houses [in Erdevis] had already burned to ashes. Apparently, nothing survived in our village or there.

We left... We left slowly. My neighbors walked with canes. When we were leaving, there was not a soul around. Everyone had fled. The highway, however, was full of tanks and Ossetians and Cossacks [semi-military communities of Slavic people in Southern Russia], or whoever they were, swarming around the place. I said, "Let's not take the highway to Gori. It would be better if we went toward the orchards." The road went downhill. We went down the road, and, as it turned out, there was a crossroads ahead, and we noticed a red SUV truck driving down the other road. Suddenly it stopped and started to move toward us. The driver turned out to be young man of thirty-five, an Ossetian who spoke good Georgian. He jumped out of the car and pointed his automatic rifle at us, threatening to kill us. My neighbors started shaking. I asked, "Son, would you kill people walking with canes? Won't you, a chivalrous

young man, feel ashamed? These people are half-dead. They left their home, and they have enough life force in them, if any at all, only to walk. Go ahead and kill them. Just remember that it'll be held against you." He then told us to get out of there and that was all. So we left. I sat my neighbors under a tree. My neighbor (the husband) told me, "Only find a way to Gori."

I left. I walked and walked through an open field. It was very hot. There was a large swamp with a hole in the middle of the field. I fell into this hole. I grasped the grass and that's how I got out of the hole. My shoe got stuck in the mud though. I was wearing slippers. That's how I left home, and now I was left completely bare-foot. Nevertheless, I continued my journey. I eventually found the road [to Gori]. There was a stream to cross. I reasoned that I could make it on the other side, yet my neighbors wouldn't, so I walked along the riverbank, hoping to find a crossing. I found a crossing made from cement slabs. I marked a tree, so I could recognize the place later, and headed back to my neighbors. While walking back, I went a bit too far down the riverbank and came across a peach orchard. I went into the orchard and picked twelve peaches. I went back and brought these peaches to my neighbors. The husband, an elderly man, pulled out a pocket knife and peeled the fruit. We sated ourselves. I told them, "Let's get going step by step. I found the road." They were very excited. After we reached the road, I made them sit under a tree, and the man's blood pressure rose again. His wife was looking for the medication when she came across their son's address in Tbilisi. They rejoiced. I too was overjoyed. They asked me to go to a village called Didi, about a mile away.

I reached one house. I found no one there. Then I approached another house, thinking that its residents must have gone to the orchard. As soon as I was about thirty feet away from the house, I noticed people armed with automatic rifles standing around the house and intending to burn it down. They bumped into me and inquired who I was. I didn't say anything. I only told them that I was on my way elsewhere. I turned around and ran barefoot. When I reached my people (I had three fellow travelers, a couple of eighty years of age, and a man of sixty-five), I saw that an armed Ossetian had stripped the third neighbor of all his clothing, including shoes, save underwear only, and made him herd about one hundred cows from the field. As I got closer, I wondered if



my neighbor had gone nuts, “Omar, what’s the matter with you?” He shrugged his shoulders as though saying, “I have no choice.” I approached the Ossetian and now he turned to me, “You must herd the cows on the other side.” I replied, “Son [her voice gets shaky], I am barefoot, I’m all covered in blood, how do you expect me to go on herding?” “It’s not my problem.” Then he said, “If you don’t,” and pointed his rifle at me. What was I supposed to do? I was forced to rush and herd at least eighty cows for him. The Ossetians took our third neighbor with them, so that he would herd their cattle once in Erdevi.

We kept waiting for our neighbor. Then we assumed he had been killed and wouldn’t come back. We waited for about an hour and a half. And then... Poor soul, we saw him run toward us. When he reached us, I told him, “Put on your pants and shoes. We have to go through the vegetable gardens.” He said alright. Thus, we walked through the gardens. Then we stopped to take a breather. I noticed tomatoes. I walked over into the vegetable patch and picked several tomatoes. There was a stream running nearby. I rinsed the tomatoes. We divided them among ourselves and ate them. We were starving. We had not had anything to eat for a week.

We entered a village. All women had left the village. Only men were left. We sat down on a log. I told my neighbors, “You wait for me here. Stay put, while I go into the village and ask for some bread.” I went into the village. I noticed two men walking. I told them, “My brother, please be a Christian and spare a loaf of bread. I have aged people to take care of. We have just made it out of the war zone in the gorge. I have to feed them something.” “Sister, we have no bread. Our women have left. We do have flour alright, but we have no one to bake bread for us.” I had no choice but to go back. I came across a plum tree, so I picked a handful of plums and rushed back. I fed them the plums. We ate them together.

In the meantime, a young man old enough to be my son approached me. He was well educated, having graduated from a school of higher education. He held a rope in his hands. He approached, greeting us and saying, “Where are you from?” We replied, “We just fled the war zone. We’re from the gorge. Son, maybe you could share some bread with us if you have any.” “Oh mother! We surely don’t have any bread. You won’t be able to get out of here. I myself live in Tbilisi. I spend some time here and some there. My parents are

there, and so are my wife and children, while I'm stranded here. I cannot get out of here. I own stores [in Tbilisi], yet I cannot get out of here. See that mansion? Its owners locked it and fled. It has locks upstairs, but I can let you into the garage." We got excited [pause]. We followed him. He then said, "I'll go fetch some oil and pasta, so you can sate yourselves tonight." I thanked him. There was a small table with three chairs, also a small cupboard with a few plates and a pot, and a natural gas cylinder [sighs]. I swept and tidied up the place. It had dirt floors, so we spent the night sitting in chairs. There was no power, so we lit a candle. When the sun rose, we went outside and... He brought pasta. We boiled it and ate it like that, which breathed life into us a little. We went outside in the morning and saw rows of apple crates. I carried like twenty of them inside and assembled something resembling a bed. Now I had nothing to cover it. I went outside and knocked on the door of that mansion. No one answered. Everyone was gone. There was a couch sitting outside along with two blankets and a pillow. I rolled up the blankets [cries], spread them in the sun, and then we lay on them. Then that young man brought us some tomatoes and potatoes. He obliged us. God bless him. He told me, "The owner of this mansion has two cows and four pigs. You can feed them corn ears. Then you can milk the cows, make cheese, and then we'll split the goods." I said alright. Thus, I made cheese, while he took some and left some for us. I milked those cows and took care of them. That lad, our sixty-five-year-old neighbor, helped me tremendously, feeding and tending them.

Then the young man told me, "If you manage baking bread, I can supply you with a cartful of flour. Here's an oven and firewood, and we'll split the goods again." I answered, "Of course, I can bake." He brought a cartful of flour. I made a lot of dough in two bins. The young man himself had many refugees from Yerevan. I baked four batches of bread once every other day. The young man (the other one, our sixty-five-year-old neighbor) helped me gather and carry tree branches and brushwood and stuff like that. The young man would show up and take his share of bread. Sixteen days passed. We stayed there for sixteen days.

Then a kid from the village came to us and helped us make a phone call. The young man had dropped his cell phone into water, so he couldn't make any calls. The kid let us use his phone, so we

called the young man who told us he had been trying hard to do something for us, he even turned to clergymen and others, trying to help us, yet to no avail. He also said that he might try to come for us in a taxicab via the village. I thanked him and the kid. The kid said before leaving, "If you ever need my help, I'll come see you." On the seventeenth day, behold! The young man arrived in a cab, had us get in the car and rushed us to Gori. On our way to town, we were pulled over by the Russians. They had a tank on the highway. They frisked our car. Having found nothing, they let us go, so we left. We arrived [in Gori], and I spent two and a half months in the building of a kindergarten. There were ten of us, living in harmony. We still keep in touch, visiting with one another every so often. They are sweet people. They love me and I love them too. There, this was my adventure [a long pause].

**Q:** Now how did you get used to this place?

This place? What can I say? Well, a prisoner gets used to the prison cell. I have nowhere else to go and I don't have anything left. Whether I liked it or not, I got used to this place. Yet [a brief pause], my mind and my heart are there. I constantly have dreams about being there [a brief pause]... Yes, being there [sighs deeply]. Thus, this is what I've been through. I even dedicated two poems to my homeland. They're not too valuable, but I put my heart and soul into them.

I dreamed of flying like a bird [her voice gets shaky]  
Over these mountains to my land –  
My gorgeous gorge I wish I could  
Traverse and trot and walk on foot [crying].  
So I could tenderly caress  
Our homes, burned down, turned into ash.  
Our roses are withered and dry,  
So is the vineyard, parched and wry.  
Proud son of the Caucasian range,  
This mountain overlooks the plain;  
Its everlasting frosty beard  
Seems to have melted into tears.  
Mighty Liakhvi River has dried up,  
Its waves are sullied and hushed up.  
Roses and violets dispersed,  
Dry, withered leaves reign instead.

I don't know if it's likeable or not. I did, however, weave all my warmth into it.

**Q:** What about the other poem?

The other one goes like this.

When the enemy attacked,  
Burning down ancestral homes,  
Chasing people into woods,  
We were scattered and dispersed;  
Some could never bear the war  
And departed from this world.  
Hope that one day we will return,  
Rebuild our homes, reclaim our lands  
And gardens, orchards tend our hands;  
Clothed in splendor once again,  
Oh our homeland, you will stand.  
Only if our dreams come true  
May we see sun rise too.  
[Pause] That's all. I could do more.

**Q:** Do these poems have titles?

Titles I'm not sure about...

**Q:** When did you compose them? Recently?

Yes, recently. Sometimes I feel like breaking into tears. I can write but tears blur my vision. I used to have glasses there. I left them, however, so I can no longer write well. Our warmth would be greater if I could have my neighbors here. My neighbors from there... [Pause] None of my next door neighbors reside here [in the IDP settlement]. I want to see them. We used to greet one another and converse. It breaks my heart. "Good morning. How are you?" we used to say, "We're having a festive reception today." I was an elderly woman, but there were about twelve young ladies on our block who would eat dinner without me. I've always loved to have fun, dance, sing, and the whole nine yards. I always seemed to have become their age... Sometimes I even felt embarrassed. I was such an elderly woman and they were so young. "No. We won't do anything without you." That's the kind of relationship we had. I love them very much. Wherever they are, I pray to God to keep them healthy and in wellbeing. That woman (the one whom I delivered

from the war zone with her husband) passed away three months later and was buried at the Bazaleti Lake. I went there by bus. I arrived and wept. My heart was broken, really broken [a long pause].

**Q:** You had good relations with everyone, Ossetians and Georgians, did you not?

There was only one Ossetian family on our block, so... They all left in Gamsakhurdia's time [Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1993), first President of Georgia]. There were but Georgians left. We all bore the same last name as we were all cousins [a long pause].

**Q:** What feasts did you celebrate in your village?

Child, we celebrated a feast [a brief pause] we called the Feast of the Mother of God. We had a church, a splendid church; it's still there... unless it was damaged... That's where we used to go. At first, we held big festive receptions at home and hosted a multitude of guests. Then, in a week, we went there and prayed in that church. That was our feast... Churches in our parts were reopened. We used to go there, lighting candles and praying. I called him the Archangel. I went to the church and sang to the icons to please them...

**Q:** What did you sing?

Whatever would please them [smiles].

**Q:** Do you remember them?

[A long pause] No. Sometimes I get so forgetful, but I may remember.

Oh my saints,  
My dear ones,  
Glory to your name!

I used to sing this, or something like

Do thou protect us,  
Do thou support us,  
Cover us with thy protection  
In time of tribulation!

That's what I sang. I conversed with them through singing [pause]. I still pray. There's a large cathedral dedicated to Saint George. We built new churches. We all made donations and built

new churches everywhere and priests were serving in those churches. We used to go to church and attend services, sometimes staying there all day and other times for a few hours. We attended the liturgy [pause] and then went back home. We took great pleasure in doing it [a long pause]. I still say once in a while,

Oh our saints,  
I hope your chapels  
Have not grown mold.

[Crying] They had little boys. You know, those altar servers who help priests, carrying the censor and filling it up with incense, and so on...These altar boys used to ring bells. I can still hear the sound [a brief pause] and it touches my heart greatly. Every time I remember our icons, I burst into tears. It's too much. I cried this morning too. I cried so hard. If you saw me, I don't know what you would think of me. You would think I had suffered some injury or something. It hurts me so badly though. Worrying about these altar servers is killing me just as much, even more than thinking about my home that I have left [crying]. This is all I have, child [a long pause]. What do we have now?

I sit by the window, looking outside and seeing a rocky road. What good is this view? Back home, I would look outside and contemplate the vineyard, a nice alley, and blossoming roses. And I love flowers very much, to this day. My grandchildren took pictures of me in the midst of our flowers. I didn't even remember it. In the picture, I stand with a bunch of flowers in my hands like this [gestures with her hands]... My home, everything I had, the yard, the house, everything was so beautifully and nicely tidied up. Whenever I miss my home, I take out these pictures and spread them. Then I weep and put them away [crying; a long pause]. We have been scarred badly.

**Q:** Do you have anything here?

Oh yes.

**Q:** What do you have?

Well, these vegetable patches around the house. We grow onions, garlic, tomatoes, and stuff like that... so that we can have small things, greens, for example. I take such good care of the

patches. I tidied them up in the fall [smiles]. Our garlic has grown, and we have our onions... Thus, I'm trying to hang in there.

**Q:** You arranged it all by yourself?

Yes. I removed at least one truck full of rocks from this place, so I [a brief pause] wouldn't cover myself with shame. My neighbors, however, know that I've always been a hardworking woman, child. My neighbors know it. We had a nice stream. When I walked to this stream in a hurry, my neighbors told me, "Come have some rest." No, I had other things to do, so I rushed back to my errands. Rain or shine, it didn't matter to me. I even made trips to bring charcoal. I had orphaned grandchildren. I did everything for them. When I encountered need [a brief pause]... I did have a home and a yard alright, yet bare walls won't do you any good, you need money, right? I took care of my grandchildren and provided them with sustenance. I've been through all kinds of tribulation. I took care of my business, of course, but I labored for others as well. I was very hardworking... I used to say, "I wish night turned into day, so I could finish my work." That's how I spent my tumultuous life [pauses]. What do I believe to be happiness? You know what keeps me going? My children, grandchildren, and these [relatives]. My daughter-in-law is a very good, extraordinary young woman. God gave me such a good daughter-in-law. She's a psychologist. She's precious. She's like a daughter to me [a brief pause], and I'm thankful to God [pauses], and it's the greatest gift to have them all alive and giving me so much pleasure. This is my life [a long pause; sighs]. That's all I know.

**Q:** Can you remember something from your childhood?

My childhood (how should I put it?) was very bitter. I cannot recall anything [a brief pause] but bitterness from my childhood, because I practically don't remember my father. He went to the war when I was still an infant in the cradle. While we were growing up, two sisters and a brother, our mother couldn't provide for us all. We were in need. I spent all my childhood barefoot. I didn't know what footwear was. I would go barefoot to the stream to fetch some water. You know how they say that children catch a cold and so on. Nope, we were alright, hungry and naked though... There was one woman from Tbilisi... She worked as a dairymaid on our collective farm... She made cheese. I frequently saw people holding jars and standing in a line for whey. There was not enough whey

for everyone. Some were left without whey. She gave such people some whey the next day. She always remembered who didn't get any. You also had to stand in a line to get rye bread in Tskhinvali. You had to be there very early. My mother would leave early in the morning and get in the line. She would bring us some bread, slice it and portion it for us. One slice had to last us for some time... We sustained ourselves with fruits and somehow made it. What should I recall? One memory is worse than the other.

We had a school in the middle of the village. It was a four-grade school, while there was a middle school a little further from the village. We walked barefoot. We were in need. We walked barefoot even in winter. One time, I stole shoes from my aunt and put them on. When I left the school after classes, I took them off and carried them under my arm. I carried them back home in secret and put them back. That's what I've been through. Then I grew up. As I already mentioned, when I turned seventeen... Life improved little by little. People found jobs. Then my brother grew up. They built a home and everything, yet the war ruined it all. Nothing was left there after the war. Thus, I lost everything in my native land where I spent fifty-three years of my life, where I raised my children and labored, and built a home.

When I got there, I found nothing but a small wooden house. I commenced to work right away and we built houses. Then there was an earthquake, demolishing our homes. We rebuilt them, yet this second time we lost everything. That was it. I haven't seen anything in my life. My children, grandchildren and my great grandchild, my son's grandson, are my pride and joy. My son is a very good, exceptional boy. He had worked for four years in the Regional Committee [of the Communist Party] while there was peace, but everything turned upside down during Gamsakhurdia's time, so he quit and moved to Gori. He started to work in the Reinforced Concrete Plant, spending three years there. Then things went wrong again. We were constantly in war and tribulation. We couldn't freely travel on our roads. Since Gamsakhurdia's time, the roads have been blocked for eighteen years now. Due to the blocked roads, we walked through the woods. He would call me, "Mother, I made it safely." On his way back, he would say, "I've already made it to the lowland." He would rush home...



Land mines were placed on the roads. Some had their arms or legs blown up by those land mines, while others lost their lives altogether. People used to go to the forest to fetch firewood. The forest too, however, was stuffed with mines. One time, a half-dead father and his barely alive son were carried from the forest. They lost their arms, legs. I don't know what else to recall. That's the situation we have had for eighteen years, yet we stood strong to retain our homeland. Tskhinvali had nothing on us. It was Russia that beat us [pauses]. We had such strong boys. Before the aircrafts showed up, they annihilated them in the tunnel. Later on, however, the general informed the Russians that things looked desperate for them, asking to help them with aircrafts. That was when our boys were bombed in the forest. They thought there must have been thousands of them. After having made calculations, however, it turned out that twelve boys had accomplished such a heroic deed. We lost many valuable people in this war, many a dear brave young man. That's what Russia has brought us.

Imagine having worked for fifty-three years, child, building a home, setting up a household, and then being kicked out with nothing but the clothing you have on... It's tough [pauses]. Our departed have been left unattended too. We light candles here. Yet, I don't know. It breaks my heart not being able to tidy up their graves. We use to plant flowers there, clean up the graves, and now... No one will let us there [a long pause]... If I live long enough... I hope I will. Sometimes they show things on television that break my heart. Sometimes I cheer myself up, forcing myself to live long enough to make it back. I ask one thing of my son. If I feel that I'll never make it back and something happens to me here, I want him to carry me there (if peace comes and we are allowed to go back). That will be my will, and then it's up to my son. When I tell him something of this kind, he says, "No, mother! You have to live long." That's what he says, but it's not up to him, is it? I only want to live to watch my children and see us go back. I'm always there in my dreams. You think I've been here all this time (four and a half months in the kindergarten building and then here)? No. I'm there. I'm working around my yard, seeing people and neighbors. I wake up overjoyed, yet when I look around, bitterness takes hold of me. I sometimes say, "At least, I saw you in my dream." This is all I have, child.

## **ANONYMOUS**

Interviewed by  
ARCHIL KIKODZE in Greece, 2010

I would say that migration from Georgia to Greece is a very pressing issue. Migration has increased in the past year. I have been here for a year and, the way I see it, it has grown, the main reason behind it being unemployment in Georgia and the absence of working conditions, and the non-existence of pay. You could find a job, but what they paid you would never suffice to support your family. That was the reason behind my coming here too. Otherwise, I had a job. I'm still on a one-year leave of absence. If I go back before December 12, I will resume the same job. On the other hand, even if I overstay, finding a job is no problem for me. The pay is a problem, not finding a job. Here I make in a week as much as I used to make there in three months.

I deal with more than a half of the newcomers, and the main reason behind their coming here is their financial standing, as well as political reasons. All those who come here (I mean one hundred percent) request political asylum, citing the current situation in Georgia as the reason. You know how it works? You hire a lawyer, and then you are invited for legal status questioning. I too have tried, but local statutes proved no grounds, so that we could take my case to court and subsequent questioning. Whoever makes it there, however, has to substantiate his/her claims. People go there with phony stories more often than true stories. I mean it! Some people who used to support Zviad and now appear as Burjanadze's supporters, or Zhvania's supporters, claim to have been persecuted [Zviad Gamsakhurdia, (1939-1993), first President of Georgia. Nino Burjanadze (b. 1964) is a Georgian politician and lawyer who served as Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia from November 2001 to June 2008; presently an opposition leader. Zurab Zhvania (1963-2005), a prominent Georgian politician, having served as Prime Minister of Georgia and Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia as well as Minister without Portfolio]. Thus, almost all stories are made-up. Such stories used to work. They don't anymore though. The situation has changed. In reality, reasons why these people

came here are totally different from those named by them. What I'm trying to say is that people find themselves in dire straits after having come here. Those who come here have no clue what they are about to face. If you get caught right on the border, you won't know what to say. If you don't get caught right away and have a couple of days, you mingle with people and someone will instruct you. On the other hand, if you're arrested, what are you supposed to say? When people come from there [Georgia], they're rarely instructed as to what to do and say. At the same time, many get nabbed on the border. I came here with five others, for example, and one of us got arrested on our way here. I can tell you this story in details. It's very interesting to hear what I've been through...

I arrived in Istanbul, and I had to find a way to make it here [to Greece]. I knew no directions, no nothing. I knew how to read maps, yet how will you travel when you don't know where exactly you're going? I rented a room at a hotel in Istanbul. It's called saraya here. It's a bus station when Georgian buses arrive. I inquired where a hotel was nearby, so they gave me directions and I went to that hotel. Everyone there knows that you're there either to stay or travel to Greece and stay there. I actually told them I hadn't made up my mind if I would stay or leave. I just said, "I have come here." When I entered the hotel, I said, "Gurj, Gurj" [the Turkish name for Georgians]. I said I was by myself, having arrived all alone. My brother-in-law called me from Greece and advised me, "Once you get to the hotel in Istanbul, you'll find people who know how to make it over the border." After I got to the hotel, I indeed asked around and found some Georgians. I asked them, "How can I make it to Greece?" They referred me to a certain young man who knew the route. I didn't pay him though. I cannot lie to you. I never paid a penny to make it here. Others may have paid for it. I know that some pay three thousand and others fifteen hundred. When I spoke with that young man, however, he told me, "I'll be traveling on foot. If you want, you can come with me. I know the way." So we did. Five of us who were staying at the hotel and who wanted to make it over the border went with that young man. My narrative may be too fragmented, but I'll elaborate on details that are interesting in my opinion.

So we left the place. Leaving Istanbul also poses a slight problem. You travel to Edirne, a city in Turkey, a border town. When

a Georgian arrives in Edirne, local Turks know right away that he/she wants to get over to Greece. There is nothing in Edirne worthwhile for a tourist to go sightseeing. That's why they keep staring at you and guessing what you might need. It used to be different in the past but now they introduced passport checking to record the reason of your visit. When you approach the cash desk to buy a bus ticket, the cashier looks at your Georgian passport and you're up for an interrogation. You do have a Turkish visa all right, but a police officer standing by the cashier asks you, "What are doing in Edirne?" Thus, when we went to buy tickets for the first time, we were turned down. They couldn't tell us anything in particular as we had valid Turkish visas. We weren't given Edirne tickets nonetheless. It was already a problem. They [the authorities] could call Edirne and say that some Georgians were about to arrive. It only took three hours to get to Edirne from Istanbul, and someone would see if we had arrived and start spying on us, which would make it impossible to cross the border.

The young man who knew the route over the border was Georgian, yet he spoke good Turkish. He must have been a local who traveled back and forth over the border and knew these routes. He told us that he would take care of everything. He told us to wait for him and left. It took three days to take care of our situation. He brought some girl who spoke fluent Turkish and had a Turkish passport. She was Georgian but she had lived there for twenty years. This girl went to the cash desk to buy tickets. There aren't any problems when someone presents his/her Turkish passport. Yet, there is a law in Turkey, according to which women sit next to each other on the bus, while men are supposed to take seats next to other men. Unless they are married, a woman and a man will never sit next to each other. Thus, when this girl was about to buy tickets, she was asked, "How many of you are women and men?" She couldn't say that all five were men. Otherwise, they would ask her, "And who are you supposed to be?" So she bought four tickets for men and one for a woman. She brought us five tickets and never explained the situation. We were clueless. We boarded the bus and took our seats. The eldest man in our group (I don't remember his name or last name) wound up in a woman's seat. The young man who accompanied us verified our tickets just to make sure everything was in order. He could read Turkish, "Ouch! It's

a woman's ticket. We'll have a problem because a woman will sit next to him." Our fellow traveler with that ticket was a gray-haired man of 55-60. This young man suggested, "You know what? Why don't you keep quiet and sort of play a fool. People will think that your wife or someone bought a ticket for you."

The bus was full except for two seats, one of them located next to our fellow traveler. The tickets were sold out, and there was no way the driver would leave without everyone onboard. Five minutes were left until the scheduled departure. The driver kept waiting, and what do we see? A quintessential Muslim woman with a veil covering her face, barely showing the eyes. Her eyes betrayed her young age. She rushed straight toward her seat! Your young companion said, "Now she's gonna raise hell! Watch and see!" Indeed, when she approached her seat and saw a man in the seat next to her, she started screaming so vehemently that it seemed she was about to raise the roof. You should have seen her raise hell! Our young companion told the elderly fellow traveler, "Get off the bus! Quickly! If something happens, you'll have to split!" There was no way for a man to travel with a woman's ticket. It was eventually blamed on the cashier. It all happened for the better as we managed to leave and arrive in Edirne, a small city.

Then you have to travel on foot. You have to cross a bridge. We never had to pass through the river or anything. We walked on regular roads. We passed one village. There were normal roads. We walked through plowed and seeded fields, just fields... We walked at night. You know what else? Border markings couldn't be discerned. After having reached a certain point, we heard a tractor. It sounded like an engine, and the young man said, "Something's going on. I've never encountered anything of this kind here before." The young man, that is, our guide, was with the remaining three travelers. He may have taken money from them, and I could have been a token companion. At any rate, he never asked me to pay. You cannot talk while traveling. You walk in silence and totally rely on the guide as he only knows the route. You go in whatever direction he points. You walk in silence. You cannot say a word. Then our young guide said, "Something's up. Let's stop." I looked and saw a tank ten feet away from me. As it turned out, it was a Turkish tank. The engine was running, and a bunch of Turkish border guards sat in the tank. As it turned out, a military detachment

was stationed a couple of miles away from there, and something must have been happening. We passed the tank. It was three or four in the morning and the soldiers in the tank must have been asleep. We entered the neutral zone controlled by both the Greeks and the Turks. Both parties patrol this territory. You just watch out and act carefully. Now when I relate my story, it sounds like no big deal, but in reality you're going through some serious tribulation. In addition, we were followed by dogs in one of the villages. When we were passing through this village, four-legged, normal looking dogs would not leave us alone. We seemed to be unable to get rid of these dogs from a Turkish village. They followed us all the way to Greece. They followed us for like four miles. We gave them whatever food we had, sausages... They wouldn't leave us alone. They followed us to the Greek border, and our young guide said, "There's barbwire here. It's a no-entry zone." A few months earlier, guys from Kutaisi [a city in Western Georgia] got blown up on land mines here. Three or two men (I don't remember exactly) got killed. And the guide said, "We need to cross the bridge here." Some Greeks own land plots on the neutral territory, so they travel back and forth. They built a regular bridge, traveling back and forth by tractor. They would cultivate their lands and go back home. Our young guide knew it all. He was well informed. He said, "This bridge is not monitored, because people cross it every morning, cultivating their land plots and driving their tractors back home." The strip around the bridge, however, had markings and was stuffed with land mines. Our guide knew this route, so he led us. We crossed the bridge at about five in the morning. It was December. Our young guide led us, followed by me and then the others behind me. As soon as we crossed the bridge, we were in Greece. In the moonlight I noticed a tree and the silhouette of a car under the tree. I told the young guide, "I see a car under that tree." It was like a hundred feet away from us. He said, "You must be tripping! There's no car!" As soon as he pronounced his last words, spotlights were lit up. Spotlights were lit up. Imagine a picture of us standing and about fifty border guards waiting for us in like twenty yards. We figured out later that we were spotted thanks to the dogs from the Turkish village. Spotlights were lit, and our guide screamed with a terrible voice, "Don't be afraid! They won't shoot! Let's run!" At first, I didn't understand why they wouldn't shoot at us. Then

the guide explained to me, "If they shoot at you and miss, and kill a Turk, it'll be a big problem. That's why their guns are empty." Neither the Turks nor they [the Greeks] had any bullets. "They will not shoot. They may end up with too big a problem."

We turned around and ran. The border guards chased us and caught our elderly fellow traveler. He couldn't run fast enough. The military men were ten-fifteen feet behind me. Our young guide was in front of me, I was lagging behind. We lost the others. I don't remember who ran in what direction. When you flee, you can only think about your survival and running... The young guide asked me, "How do you feel? Can you run?" I yelled in reply, "I can, but how much longer are we supposed to run? They're after us!" "Can you see me now?" "I can see you," I replied. I could see him run a yard in front of me. He said, "If you can see me, follow me and jump where I jump." "Alright," I said, "Go ahead and jump!" He jumped, and I followed. I couldn't see where I jumped or how. He was apparently familiar with the surface. I trusted him and jumped, and wound up in thorny bushes. I was all covered in scratches and cuts, and then splash! And I ended up in water. I fell into the water and kept silent. We were both quiet. I heard them [border guards] run by. All night they drove vehicles back and forth, looking for us. Then they brought dogs. One of the dogs kept barking over my head, a yard above me. I dove and lay in the water. It happened at about 5:30 AM. We got out of the water around midnight or one in the morning. Somehow I didn't catch a cold. I didn't even feel cold. The human body apparently does something at such moments. I didn't even feel cold. I only lay there motionless. We spent like seventeen hours there. I spent the following day lying down and taking a rest. No one looked for us at daytime. Once they failed to find us at night, they gave up on us as soon as the sun rose.

I forgot to mention something. Before reaching the bridge, a third of a mile short of the bridge, we noticed a car a little over a mile away from us. We were in an open field covered with a web of roads leading in all directions. We noticed that the car was moving. The young guide said, "These are Turks. They won't come over on this side. They must have taken the wrong turn." Finally, it started off in our direction, coming really close to us. We had nothing to hide behind, save small bushes, so we dove into the bushes and lay down. The car pulled over nearby. The people in the car turned

out to be Greeks. They got off the car, lit their flashlights, and commenced a search. One of them stood on the other side of the bush where I hid. He slid the light from his flashlight back and forth over my feet, yet he never noticed me for some reason. To make it short, the land there had been recently plowed, and we were never noticed.

That's what we went through. I nearly went nuts. It was hard for me to digest. When we got up the following evening, we turned on our phones. We turned them off, both our guide and I, when we fell into the water. When it got dark the following evening and it became quiet, I turned my phone back on. I only turned the volume down. I received a phone call. The remaining two from our group called, looking for us. We were sure they had already been apprehended. Then I handed my phone to our guide. He spoke with them and they figured out their whereabouts. As it turned out, they were nearby. As soon as they crossed the bridge, they dove. Apparently the border guards failed to notice them in the dark. Otherwise, they wouldn't have given up on finding them. We teamed up with our two fellow travelers in the morning and crossed the bridge together. We walked over it and never noticed even a single soul.

The first city beyond the border is Orestiada, so we entered Orestiada. There's one bum house in that city (I named it a bum house). It is a facility where everyone who has just arrived from Georgia, or Pakistan, or elsewhere, gathers. Pakistanis cross the border in the same manner as we do. Now I'll tell you what I saw. We walked all day and only reached the bum house after it got dark. It was a ruined building of the former water supply system or something. A horrible place with its floor covered with a heap of clothing a couple of feet in height. When I looked at it, I was in awe, "What is this?" As it turned out, people have been crossing the border in this manner for fifteen years or so. Thus, after they cross the border, their clothing is no longer usable, so they take it off and dump it there. I too had a small sack of spare clothing only. Our young guide told me, "This heap consists of all clothing collected throughout these years." This is why those clothes are piled up in that place.

It was already dark, and we were quite tired, having been up for two days and nights, so we decided to get a couple of hours



of sleep. We set up our cell-phone alarms and took a nap. In my sleep I felt something step over me, then again. I wondered what it could be. I jumped up. I saw a couple of people standing. I thought we were arrested. I jumped up and our young guide followed me saying, "Don't worry!" It turned out to be Pakistanis, or someone, illegal aliens who had crossed the border illegally as we did. "Oh you bastards!" our guide cursed them out. He seemed to know all languages. These guys [Pakistanis] ran like hell. They vanished in a second. "They enter the country illegally just like we did. Now since they ran from here, it is no longer safe to leave this place. We should wait it out. These guys [who had left the building] are stupid." Indeed, they were all eventually arrested. It became known that someone had entered the city. That's why the guide told us not to follow them. They got arrested, while we survived.

Later, toward the evening, we started to leave in pairs. There was a bus station half a mile away. There was a railroad station first and then a bus station a little further. Then our young guide taught me two words. I know them now but back then Greek was alien to me, so he made me memorize how to say the word "ticket" in Greek. I went up to the cash desk and said I needed a ticket. I don't know. Somehow we got lucky, while many got caught. What usually happens next is that after a bus takes off, there is a driver all right, but there is also a controller who accompanies the bus. When the controller starts checking tickets, he speaks to everyone, especially since it's Orestiada and everyone who comes from Georgia arrives in this city first. The controller speaks with everyone onboard in order to identify who's Georgian and who's not. The controller does it so quietly, one will hardly suspect anything. There's a police station near the bus station, so the bus quietly pulls into the police station yard (you won't even notice anything) where they tell you, "Please get off the bus." They know by heart who sits in what seat. Then Gela, or whatever our guide's name was, told me, "If we pass that post [police station], that's it, we're home." "What? Now we have a post to pass?" We got away though. The bus didn't turn into the police station yard. You know why it didn't? There was no controller that day. After the driver took his seat, the guide told me, "Now they're going to check on us." They did not however. In one word, we got lucky. That's how we made it to Thessaloniki.

When I first came here, first few months, I thought that every Greek posed a danger to me as I had no idea who was a policeman and who worked for what agency. There are different agencies here... Then I gradually got used to it. At first, however, it was a problem. You get on a bus, public transport, and you look at everyone with suspicion. Your psyche undergoes changes. That's exactly what I'm afraid of. People change. I don't want this attitude to follow me when I go back to my country. This place damages one's psyche tremendously since you are forced to look at everyone around you with suspicion and avoid people... I do have this situation under control (at least, I think I do), so that I don't get carried away too far, yet that's exactly how the majority of people live. Some have already acquired a legal status, yet they still walk around in fear. That old fear has been embedded in their psyche. It is very hard to overcome, being one of the biggest problems immigrants face. From what I see, it'll be very hard for them to overcome it. I don't know about suicide, but almost eighty percent [of immigrants] suffer from mental disorders.

We have a wide circle here, about thirty people (meaning acquaintances), and my brother-in-law, another young man and I, three of us, are the only people who work at this point. Due to this recession everyone else is between jobs. Those who are legal, however, are supported by the state. My friend is unemployed, receiving 520 euro a month from the state. By the way, the majority of employed persons do not pay taxes. Illegal aliens don't pay any taxes whatsoever. Fifty percent [of immigrants] are illegal and their number is growing since newcomers can no longer become legal. They can find a job but they're unable to get a legal status. Only a few manage to become legal through official channels. It used to be possible to do through bribes. It used to be but it's over now. When the law was ratified, the situation changed. For example, the law on issuing documents to migrants, according to which everyone who entered the country prior to 2006 is entitled to receive official documents. I came here without a visa, but I may pay a lot of money and it's arranged as though I came here legally, that is, with a visa. This forgery costs between three and five thousand euro. Their majority [migrants] has such phony documents, but it's sort of legal forgery. I don't know how to explain this. It's funny. It's done so that you don't even know who your lawyer is. You never

get to meet with him. Then your documents are legalized. You're not entitled to receive them, yet you actually do acquire them, and in time they become legalized. For example, I'm not entitled but I'll give it a try. It depends on sheer luck; it's like fifty-fifty. Some get lucky, while some lose everything.

Being illegal equals having no rights whatsoever, and I'm not talking about the right to vote or some rights at the state or governmental level. I mean basic human rights like the right to free movement. You're left bereft of this right and you constantly try to be inconspicuous and avoid certain agencies in charge of legal stay issues. I try to avoid going out as much as possible. I do end up going outside, yet it's not exactly going out. I cannot go out for walks. I'm as watchful as possible when outdoors. I've reached the point of personally recognizing nearly all employees of these agencies. I never made any effort to investigate anyone. Life forced me to concentrate on certain individuals. It's very bad but there's no other way. Labor rights are infringed more than any other rights. The thing is that when you, as an illegal alien, are expected to work harder than anyone else, you realize that you have a problem, you are illegal, which forces you to do any job your employer tells you to do. I work eight-hour shifts. I have a work schedule. There are people, however, who work for twelve hours and get paid half as much. I get paid fifty euro, but there are people who work for twelve hours and make twenty-five euro. They have no right to defend themselves.

If you have legal documents, your rights will not be violated under any circumstances and you will fully exercise them. If you are illegal, however, your rights are not only violated, but you may end up in the worst possible situation.

The rights of labor migrants are violated very often. My employer knows I'm illegal but it suits him to hire me because the system is different here. If it becomes known that he works illegal aliens, he will not only have problems, but his business may be shut down. Yet, he is willing to take the risk, and here is why. If you have legal paperwork, he is obliged to pay you a salary, which is more than he would pay an illegal alien. For example, I get paid fifty euro a day. Those legalized, however, must be paid seventy-eight euro. That's the first reason. The second reason is that after having paid salaries, he is obliged to pay nearly as much for ensimo,

that is, an insurance policy fee. That's another fifteen to forty-five euro a day, depending on the difficulty level of a given job. My job, for example, is considered difficult. Technically, I should be paid thirty-five euro on top what I'm paid now, that is, my employer should pay me seventy-eighty euro plus thirty-five euro ensimo. Now calculate how much my employer saves by having an illegal employee. He profits like sixty-seventy euro a day.

My job is health hazardous. My vision has worsened significantly. It takes me fifteen minutes to discern objects after I wake up in the morning. You know what kind of job I have? I do spackling. You know after assembling an item, they apply spackling paste to cover up nail heads. Then there is a sanding device with sandpaper. One thing is that it leaves a lot of dust, chemical dust. Then all this dust is right in your face. I cannot wear goggles since they become covered with dust right away. I wipe the goggles clean but they get dusted again, while there is no time to waste on wiping. Then three layers of paint are applied to the item. After having applied the first layer, you polish the surface with special sandpaper. Our products cost between 100 and 500 per item. We even have some that cost 700 euro. Thus, my employer is willing to take the risk, and they [employers] have connections everywhere. If there's an inspection planned, phone calls are going in every direction, warning them about it. The employer sends you home and the inspector finds nothing. The way I see it, it's the most corrupt country in the world. It's everywhere... Here's another way corruption manifests itself. When I wanted to acquire a legal status, while the law on refugee documentation was still in force, I turned to an attorney. When you go visit an attorney, he/she requests money and doesn't even hold it back from you that certain high-ranking people need to be bribed to have your case processed. If you have money, who cares where you're from or who you are? No questions asked. You pay, you do whatever you please. That's your definition of corruption.

The first reason behind your coming to Greece is that you have acquaintances here. Also, Greece was initially targeted because it accepted people more easily in comparison with other European countries. During the first years, Pontic Greeks (Greek repatriates from Georgia) were followed by many. The situation went out of control. Many had their last names changed, others arranged marriages, and no one paid attention to those things. If you had a

Greek last name, it was enough to grant you a legal status. Later, after these [Greeks] realized what was going on, they implemented relevant laws. After they figured out who was coming [to Greece] and how, they created all kinds of obstacles. The majority of people, however, already had acquaintances or relatives in Greece. I too, for example, had relatives. Where would I go after having decided to come here? My sister and brother-in-law are here. They are legal and the whole shebang. Thus, if you go to a foreign country, you go to your acquaintances or relatives living there. You don't just go and stand in the street, not knowing where to go.

After having come here, I intended to go back in a year. Greek is a very easy language to learn, but it was not my intention to learn it. If you don't have the heart for a language, you'll never learn it no matter how easy it may be. I was interested in a totally different thing. I wanted to work for one year, save some money and go back. However, I live from paycheck to paycheck. That's why I decided to stay and learn the language. I mainly learn the language through socializing. I know some basic stuff.

While in Georgia, I had a totally different opinion on migrants. I was overly critical sometimes, yet now I have a completely different attitude. If you have not lived among these people, if you have not lived with them for a long time and have not experienced what these people experience, you'll never understand what's going on here. There are people who have spent all their lives working and all they do after having come here is work. It all looked totally different from there. I constantly judged and criticized them for not coming back. I still have the same feelings for my country. However, after having come and worked here and seen how and why these people live here, I have changed my mind about these people as I see the tribulations and sometimes debasement they go through for the sake of the well-being of their families. I sometimes feel ashamed for my thoughts in the past. From my point of view, that's the positive side to my coming here and seeing the truth, encountering reality. You know what I see as the negative side? Years turn these people cold. I'm not afraid to say it and I've even had conflicts because of it, not real fights though. I look at myself and see that I'm going in the same direction as others, while some have already reached their destination, that is, have become cold toward their families and homeland. They have but one obligation left, to send money.

The way I see it, these people have freed themselves of every other obligation. A somewhat nihilistic attitude toward our country has developed. When in company, they loudly attest their love for Georgia, so that you and I can hear it. I, for example, have no problem admitting that I had financial difficulties and that's why I came here. The majority, however, justify themselves by criticizing the government, one or another person, putting the blame on everyone else but themselves for their current situation. This is bad! That's what it is! That's why the Greeks are not well-disposed toward us. When asked, "Why have you come here?" they start cursing out the government in reply. They do not say that they are in financial need and that's why they have come here. They have turned really cold. People have turned cold tremendously and I'm having a hard time dealing with them. I mainly mingle with my fellow countrymen in my free time (not mainly but all the time). We primarily meet at festive tables, at wedding or birthday receptions, where all kinds of people mingle. And this is how it works. The toastmaster raises a toast to Georgia. Then everyone rises and drinks to Georgia, yet they don't say a single good word after sitting down! There is but one reason to justify their being here. Yet, they are ashamed to admit that they have found themselves in financial need, becoming unable to afford a loaf of bread, so they start cursing out the country and the president. I may not like the president but at least he's not the reason why I'm here. I cannot say that someone forced me. The reason behind my being here may have its roots in the current state of affairs in Georgia to some extent, yet it's not reason enough for me to criticize Georgia, criticize my country, for forcing me to come here and this way justify my being here. The current attitude toward Georgia may have become a widespread phenomenon due to [people's] state of neurosis. They are in bad shape because they work here like slaves, and I have not seen a single person who would be happy with it.

I have studied people very well. I had never dealt with these people [migrants] before coming here, but now I myself have experienced [what migration is about] and also met them personally. If I decide to do something in the future, this experience will be very useful. I don't know. I have a whole life to live... It's just that the state and we all, every Georgian who stayed in Georgia, will have to reconsider our attitude toward these people. Do you

know the worst thing about it? Why do these people have such an attitude toward their country? I have been contemplating and writing down notes since I came here. When the president, or the speaker of the parliament, or whoever it may be, speaks about the return of migrants, if the state doesn't actually do anything, these words "come back" will remain mere words. Okay, I'm going back. If asked this question, everyone will tell you that he/she would love to go back his/her country. Their family members are more eloquent and sincere than the president when it comes to beseeching these people to go back home. However, if you don't offer these people an actual plan, nothing will work. In addition, they created a special agency and appointed minister of migration and immigrants, while there is no program applicable in the case of even a single individual. There must be a plan concerning what the state has to offer a person when he/she goes back in terms of a job in accordance with one's background, or some concessions. Nothing of this kind exists.

First of all, labor rights are infringed, followed by personal rights being harshly violated. As I mentioned before, this especially applies in the case with Georgians. From what I've seen and contemplated since I came here, it's not the fault of the Georgians living here and it's not our state's fault either. It is the fault of the policy that our country presents to Europe, showing off and pretending that our country is flourishing. You know how they look at us as a result? They consider us to be ungrateful. Here, such rebuilding works are underway in your country; you have such a beautiful country, while you keep coming here and sneaking in... That's the situation we're facing. It's difficult to explain, and very often it results in personal insults. If you wind up under their thumb, they'll give no quarter. They have the worst possible attitude toward us. In comparison with Albanians, Pakistanis, Turks or whoever it may be, they have the worst possible attitude toward Georgians. That's what my experience tells me. I'm not talking about average Greeks. I'm talking about the state agencies.

Let's say, for example, the police arrest you for an illegal stay, or whatever the charge may be. You have the fewer rights than anyone else. An Albanian has a stronger say and support. Let's take the Albanian diaspora for example. Once an Albanian is arrested, the diaspora is already there. The diaspora, the consulate,

the embassy, they are all there to support their citizens. As for our people, there's no getting them out of their offices. They put on a tie, sit in their armchairs and fancy themselves big shots. If they're not your acquaintances or relatives, or if they don't expect any money in return, there's no way getting them to do something.

The quality of healthcare services here is also very low. It's a total mess. What European Union? We in Georgia are a hundred years ahead of them. Everyone who knows what's going on (Georgians, Pontic Greeks or Greeks) rushes to Georgia to receive medical treatment. Otherwise, they [local doctors] will kill you. I'll give an example. My brother-in-law went to a doctor. His job involves painting coffins, so he has worse eye-related problems than I. The doctor examined him and said, "I apologize. I don't know how to write a prescription," and referred him to another physician. They cannot diagnose illnesses. They take x-rays and cannot read them. They tell you, "Send the results to Georgia, bring me their reply, and I'll prescribe a type of treatment compatible with the reply." That's what the situation is like. I wonder how these people survive in the first place.

There are two channels for wiring money to Georgia, banks and graphios [multifunctional offices, offering a variety of services, including money transfers], that is, private businesses. They're called graphios here. I don't know what they're called in Georgian. Buses to Georgia leave from a certain bus station. You go the station and say, for example, "I want to send one hundred euro to Khashuri." You pay. Then they write down the name and last name and call their branch. The recipient goes to the branch and picks up the money right away. They have branches in every city. These businesses have one advantage over banks. There are situations when I don't have any cash, while my family calls me and urgently requests money. The bank will not wire money without you paying here. You go to a graphio branch, on the other hand, and request to wire one hundred, two hundred, five hundred euro, and they transfer money with no problem. They know you'll repay them at an agreed time and they trust you. They trust me because I'm their regular customer. If it's your first time with them, they won't do it for you. These graphios are mainly run by Pontic Greeks who have already become citizens here, yet are well acquainted with Georgian culture and character...



Crime is the main problem here. The Greeks encounter many difficulties in this regard. There are Greek criminals, of course, but Georgian criminals abound. They abound because half of people [criminals] who fled Georgia are in Russia, while the other half is in Greece. You cannot pull a racketeering scheme on the Greeks. Instead, criminals extort shares from parcel post services. For example, it used to cost fifty cents per pound to mail a parcel. Now the price has gone up to a euro and a half. If you inquire the reason behind it, the answer will be that they [criminals] said so. Criminals who fled Georgia are either in Russia or Greece. Thus, postal services blame it all on them. Go figure! They may be lying, charging you a euro and a half and putting the blame on criminals. Also, it often happens that people in Georgia are promised to be delivered to Greece and provided with a job for 3 000-3 500. These people are brought here and then wind up in the street. These false promises are made by Georgians. Greeks would never make such promises in Georgia. Some people think that trafficking only implies forcing people to work in brothels.

In addition, true crime is a different story. Burglary is most widespread. Fifty-sixty percent of criminals charged with burglary are Georgians. Forget about the Albanians! Georgians have surpassed everyone, which makes the Greeks mad. I always say, "It shouldn't be this way! I work hard and so do many people here. Things are bound to turn sour for us." Just the other day, a Greek person mentioned in a conversation with me that it was announced on television that between two and three hundred burglaries take place every day in Thessaloniki only! People are embittered because of it. Twenty people get arrested every day, ten or even fifteen of them being Georgians. Then, when an embittered Greek arrests you, a hard working person, he/she does not care anymore, and if you push it or resist, they may charge you with every burglary in Thessaloniki. Some things happen here!

The Greek policy on migration, if we count out the last few years, has not been obstructive. Presently, however, we are deprived of all our rights. When the new government came to power, it was expected to carry out legalization, yet nothing has been done so far. The control has become even tighter and the whole nine yards. Police raids take place every minute and every second. Yet, here's why this purge is undertaken. They carry out purges before the

ratification of a new law. Whoever survives these purges, will be granted permanent residence after the law is ratified.

Going back home is not a problem. You buy a ticket and get a temporary passport at the consulate. I have one problem though. That man who brought me here... I don't know if he was really clueless, or maybe he did it to me on purpose... I never had a chance to see that young man to ask him why he made me tear up my passport. He made me shred it after we made it to Greece, fearing that we would get arrested. I shouldn't have torn up my passport. Still, it won't be a problem. The consulate will issue a passport to me. It'll only take three days. And then I'll get on the plane. Thus, if one wants [to go back home], there aren't any obstacles. Quite the opposite, the Greeks will rejoice if one more person leaves here.

## ANONYMOUS

Interviewed by  
MARINA TABUKASHVILI, 2010

I worked at a school. After having graduated, I was assigned to a school in Zugdidi as a physics teacher [Zugdidi, a city in Western Georgia]. My spouse's cousin also worked in our school. She taught English. In addition, I worked part-time, leading various non-curricular activity groups for our schoolchildren. This young woman was also involved in these activities. She's older than I. She attended our group sessions. She must have had in mind for me to become her sister-in-law. In one word, she liked me as a sister-in-law. When she revealed it to me, I went berserk, "Marriage? No way!" In addition, my future husband was like twelve years older than I. He was much older than I. One time, he showed up, or was made to show up... and I laughed my heart out. Later, however, things worked out, and so did our relationship... He would often come to see me and somehow... Well, I was vacationing in Borjomi one summer, together with my friend and her child, and that's exactly when I was taken in marriage. My mother cried inconsolably when I was taken...

No. I wasn't taken forcefully. I had made up my mind. Then we went to Leningrad. At first, we stayed in Sokhumi, and then we moved to Leningrad. I didn't know what life in the village was like. I had no idea how to tend cows and oxen. I was totally clueless. You know how it works in the village. Everyone gets up early, tending livestock and so on. It works differently in the city. People get up in the morning to go to work. That's how it worked in our family too. My parents went to work. My brother went to work, and so did I. I had no idea, and I was totally clueless, and when we went to the supermarket (in Leningrad), it was packed with people waiting in endless lines, so I asked, "What is up for sale?" Rubber boots was the answer. My husband suggested we buy a pair. I was like, "Look at the line! And why would we need rubber boots in the first place?" I reasoned he wanted them for his mother. I didn't think he wanted them for me. The seller was an elderly woman who told me to try them on. I snapped, "Why would I need them?" I was

told to try them on just in case, “You never know. There’s asphalt all over the place all right, but let’s grab a pair just in case. You may need them.” I couldn’t thank him enough afterward. I should have known where I was going. We bought a pair of boots, and they eventually turned into memorabilia. Then, after my feet grew in size, Giorgi started wearing them, followed by Sopho. She said once, “I’ll never throw these boots away. I’ll keep them for my children to tell them how daddy has tricked you.”

I was working in the school when the war period started [in the yearly 90s]. My husband was working in a canning factory and I in the school when all this unrest arose and schools were shut down and this whole mess started. There was no transportation! None whatsoever! I remember feeling lucky and happy when finding a tractor and riding on its side to get to the marketplace. I remember how my husband’s best man came to visit with us. My husband got a hold of a truck to provide him with a ride home, and it was considered the greatest honor. And he got to sit next to the driver at that!

Those were horrible times. We went through so much horror, especially we who lived on the border. It was truly horrible when the place was bombed, when the government dropped bombs on the ship and supporters of Zviad [Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1993), first President of Georgia]. When? Shortly before the fall of Sokhumi. The government sent a ship with goods to Sokhumi. Loti Kobalia’s people who had camped in our village took over the ship [Vakhtang “Loti” Kobalia (b. 1950), a retired Georgian colonel involved in the civil war of the early 1990s in which he led forces loyal to the ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia]. They apprehended the ship’s crew, had them disembark, and spent three days unloading the goods. They unloaded at nighttime. There was an immense amount of sugar, as well as flour in sacks, other stuff, probably including guns. They transported it all to Zugdidi in trailer trucks, saying that they needed the goods for their soldiers, so the stuff had to be stored. In four or five days after the takeover of the ship, the government bombed both the ship and the coast. There were two aircrafts taking turns and dropping bombs. Those were small green aircrafts with red stars painted on them. Everything around us was bombed, and the children still remember how we hid in the tangerine orchard. My husband was not at home at that time. I clearly remember Sopho,

wrapped in swaddling clothes... There was nothing that would impel me to go inside the house and salvage it. As it turns out, one loses interest in everything at a time like this. Those were unbelievably horrible days. By dropping bombs, they probably sank that ship, so that Zviad's supporters wouldn't retain it. No one died that time, not among the villagers or Kobalia's group. It was only rumored that two of Kobalia's people who were guarding the ship sank with it. The bombing took place in daytime, after 1 PM. I remember frying chicken and lulling my child to sleep at the same time. It lasted like thirty minutes. How do I know that those aircrafts were sent by Tbilisi? Kobalia's people said so. Everyone in the village said so...

The authorities sent those aircrafts to annihilate supporters of Zviad, sink the ship, so that they wouldn't keep it. They dropped bombs and the supporters of Zviad fled. They fled and left all these facilities and armaments behind... They fled... They ran like hell.

A little later, when the situation improved, ten to fifteen members of Kobalia's battalion returned. As they said, they stayed here to guard the battalion's property. The rest of Kobalia's battalion was in the forest.

Before that incident with the ship, in the midst of the Abkhazian war, Loti Kobalia's battalion was stationed here. It was unbelievable that Colonel Vakhtang (Loti) Kobalia, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the lawful Government of Georgia and then a certain Vanichka, supposedly the military detachment warehouse supervisor, showed up. This cattle thief, a man with a nasty reputation, this Vanichka, a total stranger, approached us pretending that the Colonel had sent him to fetch a pot, or a cow, or anything he wanted, and appropriated everything as though the Colonel had ordered him to do so. My husband would ask him, "Who sent you?" The reply was, "Colonel says that he needs..." My husband constantly made jokes about it, saying, "Colonel says."

There were robberies, of course, there were! People sacrificed oxen or cows in memory of some poor soul, and Vanichka was a pro at it [appropriating other people's goods].

It was Loti's birthday. Women kept running back and forth. People swarmed all over the place, busying themselves. Those women with military caps, side caps on their heads (I wonder how they kept them on their heads!) served the table. It was a big deal! It was Loti's birthday! Loti's people needed all kinds of things, so

those women served them. Those women were given two loaves of bread each on a daily basis. They were our fellow villagers. Famine was all over the place, so they agreed to serve... they were paid two loaves of bread and, if I remember correctly, five or three GEL. I don't remember exactly what their pay was. My Sopho was little at that time. One morning, as I was walking her, I noticed a woman riding a horse right on the other side of my fence. I wondered who she could be. How could I have known it was Loti's wife, or whoever?

"It's the queen," was the answer. I asked Aniko. She was a girl from Tzalenjikha, our neighbor's cousin. She stayed at our neighbors' and worked with them for the National Guard [a major paramilitary force during the 1998-1992 civil war in Georgia; sided with Zviad Gamsakhurdia]. I also had to ask this question with due respect. I had to take it seriously, so that they [National Guard military men] wouldn't get suspicious of us. They looked negatively on us who weren't involved in this whole process. We were not Zviad's supporters. We were simple citizens, supporting neither this nor that side. How could one side with anybody when Georgians were killing Georgians? We only minded our own business, somehow managing to make a living through our labor. Thus, I asked with all seriousness who was that lady, "Is she a guest?" She [Aniko] answered, "No. She is Loti's wife. It's Loti's birthday today." Cakes and loaves of cheese bread were delivered to his doorstep, and a full-blown party ensued.

The Enguri Paper Factory buildings, eight two-story facilities in all, used to be here on the seashore. They used to be called Patsatsia's buildings. Loti's battalion was stationed in these buildings, while Loti himself lived in the biggest of them all called the Brethren House. It was all decorated with rugs and lavishly adorned. It even had an indoor pool (I wouldn't believe it. I only saw it after the building was ruined). No other building had an indoor pool, be they the buildings of the China Factory or the Aviation Factory. They accommodated and hosted guests in those buildings. They had guests. Zviad also visited with them for several days. I never saw him...

Thus, on Loti's birthday (it was in the summer), they went horse riding. Loti and his queen rode white horses. Loti wore a white nabadi [a traditional shepherd's fur coat] and white kabal-akhi ends wrapped around his neck [traditional men's headgear with long ends on either side]. He had a white beard... He wore no

headgear... The woman was dressed in pants, a cap on her head, and also rode a white horse.

They were not overly well armed. How should I know? They celebrated May 26 in Zugdidi [Independence Day in Georgia], in 1993. They held a military parade to celebrate the Day of Independence of Georgia. They rehearsed for the parade here for several days. This parade featured outdated armaments, equipment, cannons, and all that stuff that had been left at the Russian, old Soviet military base. It was located where the Patriot Camp was eventually built [patriot camps, state-sponsored summer camps for the teenagers of Georgia initiated by President Saakashvili]. They warned everyone in Zugdidi to attend the parade, even bringing people from villages in buses. Loti Kobalia was in charge of the parade in Zugdidi. They got a hold of armaments after that...

When Abkhazia fell... Loti's people were in the forest. Abkhazia fell in September. I woke up one morning and what do I see? I don't remember if it was the Ochamchire Battalion or some other detachment, but I heard the terrible noise of tanks. There were so many of them! While their convoy was passing by my fence, the tail reached the village center.

As it turned out, at the command of Loti Kobalia, the army detachments that had left the Abkhazian war were met at the Enguri Bridge and prevented from getting on the other side. As a result, they were cornered here. Military machines, guns and armor, automatic rifles were scattered all over the place... One could grab as many as he please... Then people from everywhere kept coming and taking this armament that had been piled here... Gun trade was underway... Governmental detachments that came over here sold their armaments... They wouldn't be allowed to carry their armaments anyway... They would be stripped of their armaments so they preferred to sell their guns, make some pocket money rather than have them confiscated... There was no escape anyway... They would have their armaments confiscated no matter what...

My children and I, for example, spent three or four days away from home because of what was going on here on our street... Guns were scattered here. Some sold them for fifty rubles, while other exchanged them for goods... It was a total mess... Then everything went quiet... The Ochamchire people abandoned their armaments. Heavy military vehicles, guns and so on were stored at the old, aban-

doned guard post, the Russian border guard post. I don't know what happened to the armaments afterward... Whatever the Ochamchire Battalion failed to sell was eventually confiscated. The Ochamchire people sold everything they could and left. Not all of them left however. Some stayed and joined Loti's battalion. They were Georgians from Ochamchire, while some only spoke Megrelian and Russian.

Loti's battalion grew stronger, and it was decided to take over Tbilisi. So they left. There was weak resistance in Poti [a port city in Western Georgia, located on the eastern Black Sea coast], so they took over the city nearly without fighting, priding themselves on it... Then the army started off from Tbilisi, reaching the Tskhenistzkali River where they were halted by Loti's battalion, resulting in a clash. That's when that young man, Dato Bolkvadze, was executed [a journalist from Tbilisi executed on 28 October, 1993]. Loti Kobalia's battalion practically broke up after that. Some of his people came back here, took goods from the houses where they were stationed, and left.

Then there was hunger, no electricity, and they... They would show up and whether you liked it or not, you had to... Yes, Mkhedrioni [founded in 1989, a paramilitary group and political organization in Georgia; narrator means the events of November 1993]. You had no choice. You had to give them something. No one could afford feeding so many people...

They approached relatively well-to-do families, demanding this or that. Otherwise, they would simply take whatever they wanted. They just showed up with their guns and told you to give them something, or do something for them, or get and fetch something for them... Chaos was total. I remember, for example, how my husband kept a car in the garage at his mother's home. It was his friend's car. They took it away as well. They had a list. Probably someone in the village supplied them with information about the possessions of one or another household. They came to us straightforwardly demanding money. They told my husband to give them money or gold, and this is how it happened.

We used to own a citrus orchard, harvesting tons of citruses. That was the last season when... That year, citruses were exported to Russia for the last time. Citruses were no longer exported to Russia after that year, it was all over after that, and we had some money saved to renovate our home and buy some furniture. We kept the



money at home. So they showed up, sniffing around all day. Then they forced my husband to come home, threatening to do this and to do that, made him stack that money and carry it to them... One of them accompanied him, while the others waited outside. They made him carry the money for about a hundred yards and then took over it themselves. To make it short, they took away cars, everything, you name it. It happened at the time when they burned down homes in Kakheti and Darcheli [a village in Western Georgia]. It was exactly that period. There have been no incidents involving rape in our village, but there was a lot of robbery and pillage, a lot of it.

Then, after Mkhedrioni left, Russian peacekeepers were brought in. They were brought in, and concerns arose as to what kind of relations they would have with locals. They were stationed in the center, which meant that they would deal directly with locals. Fear was still in the air. We all gathered at home at 7 PM as there was no electricity, and we were scared of darkness. There was no electric power, nothing, and we had such small children... Gunfire was heard, and we didn't even know why they fired guns. We didn't have cell phones at that time. They would get drunk and open fire.

Peacekeepers! Yeah, right! They drove tanks like crazy, while we were scared to take our children to school because of their driving... driving drunk... Then there were conflicts. When you hit and kill a farmer's cattle or swine, he will surely reproach you. This was the reason behind a lot of havoc. Then the village governor would get involved, as would the commander, or whoever it was, on behalf of the peacekeepers ... That was our life at that time. Now, when the August events broke out [the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia], they were still stationed in our parts, and everyone thought that we wouldn't be attacked since they were stationed here. On August 10, we were bombed. Five bombs were dropped. I remember hosting a friend with a little child and my nephew with a three-year-old child. We had just come back from church, and my brother came over and told me, "You may have decided to die, but let me take the children at least! Let me take them to my place!"

I saw my children off. I let my brother take them. It was noon. I stood by our gate. My neighbor approached me asking, "Should we get bombed, what are we going to do?" We were in the middle of this conversation when aircrafts appeared out of the blue. It was so quiet, and all of a sudden they dropped something.

There were no victims though. No one was hurt. You know how the roof in some households leaks when it rains? That's the damage caused by that bombing... After they dropped the first bomb, I hardly made it from there. I couldn't leave my family alone! My guest rushed outside. She was trying to put the baby to sleep in the living room when the chandelier collapsed. The whole world turned upside down. I told her, "Make it outside somehow!" When I reached our neighbor's house, the second bomb landed, its shrapnel raining down on the neighbor's home and demolishing its roof. Then a sizable piece landed right next to me. Had it dropped on me, I would've given up the ghost. To make it short, it was horrible.

On the following day, the Ganmukhuri patriot camp was bombed [a village at the Abkhazian administrative boundary line]. I was no longer at home at that time. I had gone. I had left the house.

I returned in two days. I came back. It got dark, and gunfire ensued. Now these peacekeepers, after they had fortified themselves, came after us at night, intending to check every household. Unease escalated. Male neighbors kept watch in the street. When they yelled, "Look out! They're coming! Tanks are coming!" we fled in the middle of the night. Drunk out of their wits, they pretended to uphold order... We all fled together. We ran through tangerine orchards. Mosquitoes attacked us, causing quite a commotion. A week later, after the situation calmed down a little (the Russians had not left yet), I brought my children back. At night, a male neighbor rushed to me, "Watch out! They're firing guns somewhere and they're headed this way to slaughter everyone!" And once again we fled... It was sheer terror, sheer terror... It continued this way for about twenty or twenty-five days, or maybe even a month, until the process of their withdrawal started. However, at the initial stage, as I remember, their troops were not withdrawn. Their withdrawal took place at the following stage. A whole column of vehicles left. We were in the church, scared about what was happening and what they would do to us... They were ordered to leave, so they cleared out their military base. They only left the frame. They even removed the windowpanes in the place where they were stationed, and only then left.

Before the August war broke out, Russian Peacemakers sold goods on a daily basis, it was an everyday occurrence. We would inquire if the Peacekeeping Forces had any butter, for example, or canned stewed beef. If they had a new commander, it became

impossible to get anything from them for about a week, after which this process of trade went back to normal. Everything was sold for half the price, canned goods, glass jars, flour, potatoes, you name it; t-shirts with PF (Peacekeeping Forces) inscribed on them [in Russian], pants, military overcoats, rubber footwear... There was a shortage of these goods since everyone in the village needed rubber footwear. To make it short, these goods were in high demand.

Whenever we needed footwear or anything else, we would turn to them. We didn't go all the way to their gate though. There was a local resident who knew it all. He went over to them and brought goods. I have never been inside [the military base]. You had to go to a house that stood in front of the base, and they brought everything you needed from that house... or, I called to let them know what I needed. They replied that they would have it the following day... By the way, they had very good beef, canned stewed beef, and we bought it at a low price, half the price. In addition, when my husband brought workers to help him harvest crops in our garden, this beef went so well with potatoes. They had good butter too, and so... Rubber boots were in high demand. Our men were all dressed in military raincoats. It was unbelievable. By the way, I still have one. I wouldn't put it on, of course. My husband wore it when he herded cattle. I had them bring me two raincoats. I gave one to my brother-in-law, while keeping the other just in case, and I still have it right here.

Now here's the thing. There is land, there is the harvest, yet there is no money. There was an idea... Well, let's forget about the idea... During Communist rule, people worked on this issue with all seriousness. My husband was also in it. A serious project was developed, yet it was blocked by the then Secretary of the Zugdidi District Committee [of the Communist Party]. As I remember, people even went to Tbilisi concerning this matter. We used to be in good terms with Russia and while these good relations persisted, there was a market, there was money, there was sponsorship for the implementation of this project, yet it was blocked in every way by Secretary of District Committee. For some reason, he didn't want it to take place here. It was planned to build a juice processing micro-plant. After everything turned upside-down in the country, this idea remained a mere idea. Back in those days, during Soviet rule, there were collection points that accepted fruits and citruses

from citizens at prices based on the quality of goods. We delivered goods and, as it was customary, people received their pay in the bank... To make it short, exporting goods wasn't our problem as other people took care of that... Yes, there were Soviet farms... For example, my husband worked with citruses for a while, exporting it to Russia's markets, all over the place... Citruses were sorted out. Low quality citruses went to the canning plant in Zugdidi. There were long lines at collection points, so my husband spent two days at a time to submit his goods. No limitations existed in terms of goods, that is, we submitted sour plums, apples, pears. After it all was destroyed and collapsed, we wound up bereft of everything...

1993 was the last time citruses were exported. Since then, no export has been undertaken. Some may export small amounts by ship, but the amount is infinitesimal. Someone [a buyer] may show up once in a while. Ten years ago, for example, someone showed up... I should know about it quite well as my husband was involved in this process. They would come and request, let's say, forty tons of tangerines or sour plums. Then the requested goods were collected from locals who were given trays for that purpose. Then it was all exported in trailer trucks. A year ago, a certain individual did the same thing. Otherwise, nothing of the kind is done at the state level. That individual's goods were loaded [on a ship] in Poti. He requested one ton of citruses, he requested lemons. It was a private entrepreneur. Thus, maybe once a year, someone may export five percent of the harvest. Some individuals may show up and export goods, while 95 percent remains here. About 50 percent of the 95 is acquired by women.

It is truly an unbelievable way of torturing and tormenting a human being, I'm talking about women's sufferings. It's easier to do all the chores around the household, milk a cow, hoe... What happens now is that a woman comes to me, for example, who has no money for bread and asks me, let's say, "Let me buy your tangerine for twenty tetri a pound. I'll submit tangerines at the marketplace next to the Railroad Station in Tbilisi for forty tetri a pound." All right, I sell it to her and she says, "That's the top price." She has to make a ten tetri profit a pound and pay me twenty, while transportation costs an additional ten tetri per pound. Sacks are also needed. Then the driver charges for transportation to the marketplace in Tbilisi, of course. No one would do it for free. That's your additional ten tetri

per pound, as a rule. Thus, she makes a ten tetri profit. This woman can... Well, sometimes two women team up for this purpose, yet the profit will be cut accordingly, so women prefer to do it alone. What happens next is that they travel in the freezing cold, rain. Suppose she's leaving the day after tomorrow. She has to have like 600-700 pounds ready. If they work as a team, that'll make 1 400 pounds. They have to pay for two seats on the minibus. The driver won't let a single passenger carry 1 400 pounds. He won't do it because he will end up losing 15 lari per trip, which makes 30 lari in all. This is something crazy to go through. As a human being, I, for my part, feel like weeping every time I see this.

I say, "You're impossible! How can you pluck fruits in this rain? What are you doing?" And the reply is, "It's not an option. The minibus departs tomorrow. What do you care? We'll pluck them." So they go into my orchard in the rain, working in haste, plucking 700 pounds in two days and placing the crops in sacks. Then they tie the sacks with special ropes and weigh them. All right, let's suppose I feel sorry for them and I volunteer to help them carry the sacks to the minibus, or have the minibus pull into my yard, "You cannot lift these sacks, let me help you, let someone else help us." The minibus driver gets tired of carrying these sacks, "I cannot take it anymore." If these women hire someone (someone may help you once but the next time you have to pay or give cigarettes), they lift the sacks and place them on the roof rack. It is a living hell. Finally, as they finish loading, the minibus starts off, and they take their goods to the Railroad Station marketplace. They have their feet on the tangerine while on the minibus. So they sit in the freezing cold. If the driver turns on the heater, the tangerines will go bad, especially if they're slightly frosted.

Before boarding the car, they rush home to change clothes, but they are often unable to, so they walk around in shabby clothing... It is a horrible sight. Let's say, you left at 8 AM. Let's count. Nine, ten, eleven, noon, one, two, and three... You'll make it to Tbilisi by 3 PM. In addition, the driver keeps dozing off. You have to understand. He never rests. During the season, they keep coming and going, back and forth, being practically unable to take a rest. If you arrive in Tbilisi and it's not raining, you hit the jackpot. In addition, people carry other things too, like scales and small bags... They do it so because they may not be able to sell their goods at

wholesale, that is, they may end up scaling particular amounts for retail buyers... Yet, if it's raining... I witnessed it... It rained when I went there.

It was in the middle of December. Oh mother... It was... It was the worst moment in my life, the worst moment. I nearly froze to death to begin with. I was dressed in a warm tanned sheepskin coat. That woman, Tsiala, and I stood there all wrapped up in clothing... It is a true struggle for survival. Respect, good manners, apologies, and the like do not apply here. It's a dog eat dog world. Since it was my first trip... As it turned out, the seats directly behind the driver are the worst since as soon as the driver rolls down his window, the cold air hits you right in the face. Thus, Tsiala and I... Tsiala was a teacher, a German language teacher, so she and I always remember how we sat in those bad seats like morons. Others sat comfortably in other seats... Oh mother! It was craziness incarnate. Crates with citruses were stacked everywhere but my head. There were five women, so count how much citruses they had... There was screaming and shouting. That man obliged me. He knew I was not a trader and it was my first time doing something of this kind. I decided to get involved, hoping to make like a 150 lari profit. I would make a 150 lari profit and this way contribute to my budget, becoming able to buy something for my family with 150 GEL. I reasoned it would be no big deal, so I decided to get involved...

You sit there, squatting. You cannot stretch your legs. You cannot do anything, and the wind is blowing right in your face at that. One of the two women sitting in front of me falls asleep, while the other stays alert to hit the driver if he happens to doze off. It was a living hell... I apologize for taking so long... I'm making you late now... It was indeed a living hell... Finally, we got there only to find a line of people like us from all over Georgia, oh mother! It was raining cats and dogs. I inquired, "Where should we stand?" "What?" "I said, where should we stand?" "Right here!" I had brought a big umbrella, so Tsiala and I stood under the umbrella. It was dark. We were waiting for customers. That's when I felt unwell. I was told, "Everyone here recognizes you as a rookie. It's your first time here, so keep your mouth shut. You have your stuff to sell and we have ours. If you sell yours at a low price, we'll suffer losses. Don't you dare drop the price!" I replied, "I'm no trader. I only want to sell my goods. I won't stand in your way!" They all forgot about me

though, everyone is busy with his own problems. Now what happened was that elderly women with canes started coming to buy twenty or forty pounds. I was prohibited from selling my citruses to them though because I was about to sell them at a low price. I said, "Please just let me get rid of this stuff! I cannot take it anymore! I can no longer stand here!" "Are you crazy?" "Yes." That's when I started to look for a restroom like crazy, yet to no avail. To make it short, I could no longer hold it.

I looked for elderly women to ask about the directions to the restroom. At first, I was told that the Railroad Station restroom was being renovated, thus being out of order. As it turned out, however, the backdoor entrance had been left open. That's what a woman from Zemo Muketi told me. I beseeched her and she agreed to accompany me. She told me, "It's been five years since I left the village. I cook cornbread at night and sell it together with cheese at daytime. It's been five years now." We arrived. The smell was unbearable, horrible... The place was wet, and a vat with water stood there... And what do I see? Three women lay on bare concrete right at the restroom door, sleeping. I was taken aback, thinking how to enter the restroom. "Just step over them," the woman from Muketi told me... I asked her not to leave me. She obliged me by waiting for me. There was a cashier too, sitting there and yawning.

I went back to my sacks. We were standing in front of the Kolkheti Hotel. There was a sign on the first floor of the hotel. It read "Meat Dumplings". I asked passersby what kind of diner it was. As it turned out, it was a brothel. Everyone knew it was a brothel...

Everyone who passed by in the rain could tell I was no trader. I beseeched everyone, "Just take it! Please help me get rid of it! I don't want anything from you!" Finally, after I made it home, I calculated and I turned out to have sold my oranges for ten tetri a pound. The harvest was bountiful that year, like a thousand pounds, yet I only made a hundred lari on it, not even that. I came back, wet and covered in dirt. I also caught a cold. Giorgi came back from the university and said, "Look at you!" I asked him not to tell my nephews. They didn't know about it. They would kill me, reproaching me for catching a cold and so on. To make it short, our marketplace proved to be a bad one... Oh mother!

Others [traders at the marketplace] stood in the heavy rain, all wet and dripping, and sold everything to the last pound. They

themselves had bought it, so they had to pay the owner, right? After they sold out for whatever they charged, they started counting. They all had calculators, counting profits and losses. Some profited ten lari in all, some fifteen and others sixteen. Someone made a sixteen lari profit. That was all. This person said, "I cannot go home to my children empty-handed," rushed to buy sour cream and some other stuff with those sixteen GEL, and then set aside some money for the driver and some for the owner, the one from whom the sold citruses had been purchased. People are starving, can you imagine? Hot oven-baked bread and cheese were sold at the exit. It was a fast day. You should have seen the havoc there. It was dark, so the driver turned on the light in the vehicle. Cheese bread was too expensive to buy. It was like five GEL. The driver suggested we collect money and buy bread and cheese. I contributed money too. They brought a small loaf of bread with a piece of cheese on top. I said, "I don't eat cheese, so whoever wants it can have it." And my cheese disappeared. Oh mother, they nearly killed one another over a piece of cheese... "Who stole her cheese? Someone ate it, right?" My heart sank... Horrible things happen in that place. It is unbelievable torment, unbelievable torture, and the worst thing a human being can go through.

Now after having come back home, some may find out that they have suffered losses. Yet, the owner of the citruses has to be paid, so somehow they have to replenish the missing amount. Some just cannot hold their horses. They go back home, change clothes, and are ready to go back the following day. They come to you and request in advance, "Don't let anyone pluck your crops." No one will come to you anyway. It's all been divided between them [traders]. Rain or shine, it doesn't matter. They have to pluck crops regardless. That's the kind of torture it is. It was 2009. In 2010, I didn't go. It's the same story every year though. It's about to start. Citruses are still green. After they change color toward the end of this month, however, this torment will start all over again.

Had there been one [juice] processing micro-plant, no one would have taken crops to the marketplace. People would find employment. There would be some progress. The plant would produce juices, natural juices, a wholesome product, and people would be employed. Those would no longer go through torment and torture, would they?



## **ANONYMOUS**

Interviewed by

TSISANA GODERDZISHVILI in Greece, 2010

It'll be five years this coming February since I moved here to Greece. It's not much, yet it's not too little either. Fifteen or twenty years are much. I never traveled much throughout Georgia, not to mention traveling to Greece. You can ask me and see it to yourself that I know Thessaloniki better than Tbilisi. I came here and have been in Greece ever since. I don't have legal documents, which is a big problem. Only if I had documents and could travel to Georgia... Only if I could see my children and grandchildren at least once every five years... Only if I could go home... I don't know. When my husband passed away (he passed away last December), you can imagine what I went through because I couldn't go home... I still cannot get over it as though something were torturing me. It seems as though it were my fault, as though I had done something wrong. I left my family for the sake of my family. You may have noticed I sort of look after my appearance. I only do it to avoid looking like a complete train-wreck. That's the way I am. Now look at my arms. I burned my one arm, all for the sake of my children. A dead spouse probably requires more than a living spouse, I mean, the funeral, cemetery, commemoration services, birthday. In one word, my whole salary is gone to the last penny as soon as I get it. I used to wire money through the bank, but now my passport has expired. Sometimes, when I'm in real need, I call graphio and ask them to wire money for me, promising to return it by all means. I have to return it by the following Sunday no matter what. I sometimes wire money using other people's passports. I just wait for someone to enter with a passport.

I have three children and four grandchildren. Two of them I haven't seen yet. When my daughter got married, I went through so much trouble. I walked down the street screaming and crying, while people kept staring at me. I no longer felt shy or embarrassed so hard it was for me to hear this news. I left her when she was twelve. I had great expectations about her... and she got married! She spent every night with me, cuddled up with me, until I left. At

first, she seemed to be excited about my leaving, reasoning that her mommy would send her stuff. On the night of my departure, however, I accidentally came across a letter that read, "I wonder if I would prefer to be rich and have no mother by my side or be poor and have her here." Can you imagine reading this and then leaving? She missed me later and wrote letters. She was left unattended. Her brothers were married, taking care of their own families. She could find no one to be her support. Then she moved in with my brother, but he's a tough man... She left. Then I turned to my sister for help. She lived with my sister and quite well at that. Nevertheless, she says now that she needed someone to support her and that's why she got married. She was sixteen, a schoolgirl, when she married a man she had only known for a couple of days. Then years passed... and the death of my husband literally devastated me. I've recovered now more or less because my friends tell me, "Let's imagine it's you who has passed away. Your husband would live on. He wouldn't spend his life in misery and sorrow." That's what keeps me alive. Deep in my heart, however, I always dream of my husband, his hands, his care.

Had my children told me after my husband's repose to return to Georgia, I would've, yet they told me, "Your coming back won't do daddy any good, while your staying over there benefits our family better." So I didn't go but my son's wife did. Imagine what I was going through in those days! I told my children to videotape everything in detail, how they dressed him and what they did. They couldn't tape the whole funeral however. They said they were too busy. Then they videotaped the reception held to commemorate his birthday and sent the tape to me. I would've secluded myself in a room to watch the tape if I could afford it. I didn't even have a room of my own though. I was in such need... Whenever I could find time after his repose, I watched the tape and wailed. The more I wailed the more relief I found.

He didn't suffer much. He died instantly. He loved to drink. He worked and drank at the same time. He had some liver problems. We had him undergo treatment and he recovered. One time, I came home after hours at one in the morning. (Now this is how I am. Even if I have problems of my own, I try to be cheerful wherever I go. My problem is my problem, and it has nothing to do with you, so I cannot but cheer you up instead of walking around with a

long face). I looked at my daughter-in-law. She had already bought a ticket. At least, she could go to Georgia. She bought a ticket on Sunday evening. She was supposed to leave on Monday morning. She had her stuff packed. I was happy for her because she was about to go to Georgia to see her husband and child. At the same time, however, I was sort of saddened. Thus, I entered the house. My daughter-in-law knew everything. My son had already called her, "Where is my mother? Is she at work? My father has passed away. I cannot tell her. Please you tell her." My daughter-in-law replied that she couldn't either. I entered the room when my son was on the line. I opened the door and my daughter-in-law immediately hung up. I entered the room, smiling. The mother of my daughter-in-law looked sad to me. She looked suspicious to me. I had had a premonition earlier as though expecting something big to happen. My daughter-in-law and I work together. She got off early and went home at six or eight in the evening, while I stayed at work. I got sort of anxious after she left. I broke out in tears. My friend asked me, "What's the matter with you? Are you upset because your daughter-in-law is about to leave?" "Don't ask me any questions. I'm dying to weep." I went outside, wailing. My heart sunk and my eyes became red. After having wept, I felt relieved. Then I went home, pretending to be merry. My daughter-in-law told me, "Kote called. He wants you to call him back. He needs to talk to you. He said his father's not well." I replied, "What do you mean not well? I spoke with my husband yesterday. He told me he was feeling all right. He recovered and went to work. I wish I knew earlier. Now it's raining and it's one in the morning. I cannot go back on the street to use the phone booth." "Here! Use mine." I called and asked him, "Kote, what's going on? How is he?" He replied, "Not bad," and hung up on me. I didn't like it. I had a premonition but I didn't suspect death. I reasoned he was about to have a surgery or something. I called back. My other son picked up the phone this time. "How's your father?" He replied, "Father is gone." "What? He's gone? He was alright yesterday!" I screamed in the middle of the night. I was dumbfounded. I broke out in tears. I even blamed myself, "Had I been there, nothing would've happened. I'm the one to blame. It's all my fault." Needless to say, I was up all night. I didn't go to work in the morning as my eyes were puffed up and swollen. I called my friend who promised to explain to my

both my children what had happened to me, advising me to stay in. Yet, I was the one with the key to our workplace. I had to open the door. Otherwise, no one could get in. Thus, I went there with these puffed up and swollen eyes. Yes, they all, my coworkers, even the Greeks themselves, took it to heart. I stayed to work that day. What can you do? That's life.

My husband's relative, his cousin, who is a bishop in Tbilisi, has told us that when women leave their families like I did, men snap, being unable to run their families. He said that women have the ability to put themselves together when men leave, while men do not. As it turns out, this is what happens in the majority of cases. When my nephew came here, he told me all about what my husband had gone through. He kept worrying about everything. Then he turned to drinking. He used to drink before but not as much as he did after I left. He lost interest in anything. Probably that's why I didn't go crazy when I found out that he had someone else. He himself told me. I said, "It's alright. You can have her." I even sent her money and spoke with her, asking her to take good care of my husband and promising to recompense her, which I did. I knew that my husband wouldn't remain long without a woman. Instead of having ten, I reasoned, it would be better for him to have one. At least, she would look after him if he got ill, and she did take care of him. I would call her, thanking her and letting her know that I was counting on her. I learned from everyone that she loved him, even from my daughter, "She pets daddy. She pets daddy." Well, let her pet him. What could I do? If I had a chance to go back, he would want me once again and my husband would be my husband once again. If he did not, well, I would probably get used to that too. He passed away in that woman's house.

Yet, that woman couldn't come to my home for the viewing, could she? I felt sorry for her too. Think about it. She loved him, he died by her side, yet she was unable to mourn him. Then I called my son, "Let her come and mourn him." Since I gave my permission, my relatives wouldn't refuse her. I even called that woman, "You have my permission. Go and mourn him. Mourn him for me too." I sent her fifty euro to buy a black dress and flowers in his memory. Next day, she indeed went to the market and bought flowers. My daughter called her, "Aunt Dodo, where are you? Why aren't you coming?" She replied, "Let me buy flowers and then I'll

catch a cab.” “Forget about flowers. Hurry up.” As it turned out, my daughter was in a hurry because my father and brother were about to show up and they wouldn’t like seeing a female stranger mourning their daughter’s husband. She was rushed, so that she could mourn him. My daughter told me, “She wept so bitterly that she made us all cry.” Thus, I gave her my permission. My husband had had no mistress before her. He loved me dearly. When he mistreated me, I told him, “Stop it! Or else I’ll make you miss me!” “What will you do? What?” he laughed. He couldn’t even imagine that I would leave our family. That’s the kind of woman I was. I always kept my word.

We eventually encountered serious economic problems, so serious that sometimes we had no matches to light a candle. My husband carried the weight on his shoulders. He was constantly irritated. He couldn’t lay it all out on his daughter-in-law or mother, so he kept calling me names. If I went over to our neighbors, he would find me, herd me back home cursing, “You... What are you doing here?” Thus, I got this idea of leaving. I threatened him, “Don’t treat me like that, or you’ll never see me again!” Alas! Then I would feel sorry for him and worry about him. That’s why I didn’t mind his having an affair. People called me crazy, but I was not crazy. I wanted my husband to be alive. I’ve always dreamed of going back home, sweet-talking to him, keeping him by my side forever. We did have our problems and misunderstandings, yet I wouldn’t pay attention to them. Now I have children and grandchildren. Nevertheless, I believe I have no one to take care of me.

On the day of my husband’s funeral, there was no one to take over for me at work. My daughter-in-law was not here either. What was I supposed to do? I was forced to go to work. I didn’t go early in the morning though. I bought 100 euro worth of phone cards and lined them up like this. I sat in the room all by myself. My neighbor, a young man, was in the next room. I sat in the room and wept. I called every minute, asking what was going on. Then I made a request. I asked them to turn on the loudspeaker, so that my voice would reach my husband. I wailed, and everyone heard me, “I wanted to find you just the way I left you... We’ve raised our children together... We could take care of ourselves when we grew old...” and things like that. Then I asked my daughter-in-law, “Did he hear what I said?” “How could he hear you? He’s dead!” Now

she laughs at it. I was so aggrieved that I had no idea what I was saying. I thought I could make him hear me and found relief in it.

A little later, my neighbor, a Greek woman, came over, inquiring how her Georgian neighbors were doing. She looked at me, noticed my swollen eyes and asked, "What happened?" I replied, "My husband passed away, and today is his funeral." She comforted me, saying that we will all go up to Heaven one day; we're all God's children. That's life. That young man, our neighbor, could no longer stand looking at my grief and left. I found him downstairs on my way to work.

My Greek coworkers approached me and expressed their customary condolences. They kept calling me. They told my friend to let me have her cell phone and talk as much as I needed. That's how sorry they felt for me. They took it all to heart. My life went downhill. I no longer applied makeup. My acquaintances would stop me in the street and ask what had happened to me. I looked like a bum. I grew old all of a sudden. Even my friend told me, "I cannot stand the mere sight of you in this shape." I was afraid to walk down the street because I could be stopped and apprehended.

Then I decided I had to catch up with life. Now I'm often told I don't look Georgian, I look more like a European, which is very important. Now I can walk in front of policemen's noses, just like that! It's a gift from God that they don't notice I'm not Greek. Georgians show their obvious background. I do too, yet I try hard not to. Now you're looking at me thinking that I look like a happy woman, a woman suitable for Europe, while deep in my heart nothing vibrant, nothing human ever takes place.

I wrote poetry before coming here. I used to get inspired in the middle of the night, rush out of bed, and light a candle. My husband scolded me, "Look at this versifier!" Sometimes, being unable to light a candle, I pulled a piece of paper and a pen from under my pillow and wrote, unable to see what I was writing in the dark. When I checked in the morning, I found the letters all drawn over one another. I must have like a hundred poems on life here, on people who live here. I knew nothing about life here back then but I had heard from my friend who later brought me here. That young woman was always sleepy every time she returned to Georgia. I thought, "Look at her! She has a job, she has money, why won't she go out?" Now she reminds me of my saying, "Look

at her!” Thus, I had written poems on immigrants. Now that they read these poems, they say, “Oh, it’s about me! It’s about me!” Now these poems relate to me too... I don’t write anymore. Why? Beats me! I seem like someone else now. This place changes people, makes them cold.

We were eleven people in the family, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, I, my husband, my three children, two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren. Our house was not too big, just enough to accommodate everyone with a separate room and make us feel comfortable. In winter, especially when there was no heating, we slept in one room, ten of us. A full batch of bread we baked every day barely lasted through the following morning. It was all good though. There was happiness to some extent. My husband was the main breadwinner in the family plus my father-in-law’s pension. My husband was a craftsman. He was very good at craftsmanship and had his own clientele. But his business slowed down so badly in winter that we faced extreme need. He was very crafty though and managed one way or another. Even in times of extreme hardship, God provided. Every time I said, “We’ve nothing left. What are we supposed to do tomorrow?” someone called, “Jumber, I have a job for you.” He would make a couple of pennies and that’s how we survived. We were happy. Although we were in need, we all stuck together.

Why did I come here? I never imagined I would be forced to come to Greece. As they say, life is full of surprises. It is true. Finally, after life became too hard and my husband even harder to deal with, I told my children, “I’m going to Greece. I just don’t know if your father will let me go. Now, children, let’s agree on one thing. If he doesn’t let me go, I’ll go anyway. He’ll find out eventually but there won’t be anything he’ll be able to do about it.” My children didn’t work back then, and neither do they have jobs now. Things would get better for them if they too could come here.

I came here illegally. I sneaked into the country. My friend and relative lives here who paid graphio three thousand euro. I worked and repaid her in less than a year. She was the one to have arranged my coming here. A graphio bus arrives in Zestaphoni [a city in Western Georgia]. I was informed in advance to be at an agreed place. My husband knew nothing about it at that time. It was in the evening. It gets dark early in winter. The bus had already left

Tbilisi for Zestaponi. My son and I were supposed to meet the bus, so we could be interviewed. The bus had already left, so we had to be on time. My husband would surely ask where we were going, so my son and I agreed to tell him that he had to meet with someone and didn't want to be out alone at night. Back in those days, it was normal for police to check on young men at night. Thus, we pretended he needed my company to avoid being stopped by police. I told my husband, "I'm going with Kote." My son and I walked down the street laughing, "We did it! We tricked him!"

The bus arrived. The driver spoke with us. I noticed he and everyone else were looking at me inquiringly. I realized later that they were measuring me, whether I was large or slim, so that they could squeeze me somewhere, hide me. Had I been chubby, I would've been rejected. Chubby people are not welcome there. We agreed to meet the driver's next route the following week at the same spot. Things were working out for me, so I had to tell my husband. One night, I revealed to him that I wanted to leave, "It will not matter whether I'm here or there if you don't trust me. I have to go anyway. It would be better for you and your reputation too if I could have your permission. If I sneak out, what kind of woman would it make me? And what kind of man would it make you?" He agreed, "Yes. I'll let you go." I didn't expect it. I rushed into the room to my children. It was freezing cold, and they were sleeping in one room, one son here and the other there, together with their children. I said, "I revealed to your father that I had to go, and he didn't say no!" They were so excited. They kept shouting, "No way! No way!" Even our neighbors couldn't believe it, "He let you go? He wouldn't let you come to our place!" I don't know what his reasoning was. He may have thought that a better life awaited us.

Then everything happened so rapidly. My husband exchanged lari, caught a cab for me, and helped me load my luggage. We, my son, my daughter-in-law, my little daughter and I, met the bus right on time, at the same place. We waited in the cab. We couldn't wait outside! My husband stood outside. I remember it was a frosty night. The bus approached, my husband waived his hand, and the driver pulled over.

This last experience clearly stuck in my memory. I broke out in tears after having said goodbye to everyone and boarding the bus, while the driver felt like laughing. The songs he played on the



radio made me cry. They still make me cry. There weren't many passengers. I sat comfortably in the front seat. Once in Sarpi [a border village on the coast of the Black Sea, on the border between Turkey and Georgia], I got off the bus and presented my passport. There weren't any problems, so we passed Sarpi. They hide you on the bus once you're about to leave Turkey and enter Greece. There is hollow rectangular niche next to the bus steps. That's where you hide, squatting. There were one boy and three women besides me in that small space. You have to be strong because you're kneeling. You know where they hid others? In small recesses under the seats on the bus. That's where they lay through the whole trip. They lay there, while people sat in the seats. They had a layer glued between the seats and these recesses, so that no one would find the hideout. I wished I could be there. It was winter, but we weren't cold. Quite the opposite, we were hot as the air became extremely stuffy after they closed the door behind us. The door was concealed behind a rug on the wall. Then they put a folding chair against the rug, and that was it. We were told to keep quiet and the door behind us was shut. The light bulb in our hideout was lit. I could hear armed border police officers board the bus, looking and searching and knocking on the walls and floors. We passed one border guard station, but we spent two or three additional hours waiting. It wasn't too long in comparison with eight hours that some people end up waiting in a hideout. You know why I didn't end up waiting too long? There weren't many passengers. It takes time, you know, to book every individual passenger at the border guard station. There weren't many passengers, so it didn't take much time either, and the bus left shortly thereafter. Sometimes buses are packed, and people end up waiting eight or nine hours, nearly choking to death. Then they opened the door and windows. They did, however, lock us up again once in a while. Then they let us out again and we sat in the seats like regular passengers. While on the bus, I listened to the driver's conversations and noticed that he kept reporting to that graphio. Had there been any problems on the border, he would have reported it immediately as they kept in touch all the time.

I didn't go through as many tribulations on my way here as did my son. He was locked in some kind of recess so small that he couldn't stretch his legs. He caught a cold too. The vent was

blasting. Then the insulation collapsed right on his sweating body. Imagine what he went through with that insulation material all over his moist skin. He spent nine hours like that. He looked like a question mark when he came here. People go through so much to get here... You know many have died on their way here! My adventure seems like a child's play in comparison with what others end up going through.

In one word, I made it here. I was met by a graphio representative at an agreed place. Then he called my female friend, saying that I had arrived and asking her to pick me up.

Once here, I spent three months sitting at home. I kept whining, "I should've stayed at home, though I might have starved to death." Everyone rushed out at the early break of dawn, leaving me all by myself. Then they returned in the evening, all tired and exhausted and in need of rest. The friend who had brought me here, her husband, another young woman and I shared an apartment. I used to see my friend more frequently in Georgia than I did here. I was scared to go outside, fearing that I was about to be chased and apprehended. Then I gradually learned to walk down the stairs and into the yard at first, and then I started to accompany my friends in the street. I was still scared though. Every time I entered the phone booth, I feared being arrested. Newcomers obviously show their origin. As time goes by, however, they show it to a lesser degree.

I didn't have any legal documents back then and I still don't have any. I have adapted to this country however. I go everywhere nowadays. I found my first job three months later. The only route I memorized at that time led to my workplace. I hopped on the bus, got off and then walked to that house. One time, unfortunately, I got on the wrong bus. It had the same destination but it stopped at different places. I got off. I wasn't far from that house, but I didn't know how to get there. "Mother, what am I to do? I'm lost." And I was late for work at that. Suddenly, I noticed the government building. It's visible from any place in town. I was saved. I reached the government building, huffing and puffing. I took a longer route; I was late for work and very nervous. The mere thought of that feeling of being lost was killing me. Finally, I found my way to work and walked down my usual route. Things like that happen all the time. I didn't speak the language to ask anyone for directions. The

absence of knowledge of the local language is yet another problem faced by newcomers. I remember working in a hotel and not being able to understand a word I was told. I would lead people into the room and gesture, trying to get them to point at what they needed, be it toilet paper, or bedding, or whatever. Then they grabbed what they needed and laughed. That's the hardship I've been through. My Greek is not presently perfect either. I sort of butcher it. The head of Tavern scolds me for not speaking. At the same time, when I do speak and make mistakes, people laugh at me, so I'm forced to keep silent.

My daughter-in-law and I work together in Tavern. That's the name of a restaurant. We wash dishes and make salads. We fry fish as well. In one word, we do everything. To make it short, I adapted to this environment. My first job, when I worked as a maiden, included cleaning and cooking. The mistress of the house still says, "I showed her once how to cook, and then she cooked the same dish even better than I." I probably know more dishes than any Greek. To make it short, I feed Greeks with my Georgian hands. My daughter-in-law, a young woman of twenty-four, also works hard. She came home at one last night and went back to work this morning. Once I leave for work tomorrow morning, I'll end up working until late at night. I cook for her, so she won't have to. We take turns cooking for each other. Thus, we work all day.

My daughter-in-law encountered no obstacles from her husband when it came to her moving here, because my son was first to have come here, while his wife and child stayed there in Georgia. His wife suffered from loneliness. She had a child, yet she needed her husband too. She left her child to come here with someone else's documents, a Greek woman's passport who had left Georgia. My daughter-in-law is blonde, so she had her hair dyed to match the color in the passport picture. They made her resemble a Pontic Greek. She traveled from Turkey by train. Aren't they supposed to check passports on the border? I don't know... She went through a lot. She spoke no Greek, so she had been warned in advance to pretend to be asleep once border guards started checking passports. So she did. They never suspected anything. She went through hell though. The owner of the passport in such deals gets his/her pay. Should the scheme go wrong, the owner will say he/she has

lost the passport, and the holder, that is, the person smuggled into the country, will become liable to punishment.

One time, a certain young lady tried to smuggle two women. The smuggler got off the hook, while those two women are still serving time. They'll do six months, and then they will be deported to Turkey. They have already been deported twice. These two women are locked up with forty men, Pakistanis at that. They've gone nearly crazy. Their parents are inconsolable. Thank God they're alive at all.

My daughter-in-law and son spent a few years here together. It's hard for men to find employment here, so my son worked occasionally. My daughter-in-law had a job, so my son was forced to go back to his child. My grandchild was four or five at that time, left bereft of both mother and father. My son was suffering, saying that a child needs a parent, one or the other. One night, he told me, "As soon as the sun rises, I'm going back to Georgia." Since he had entered Greece illegally, I advised him to stay. He left nonetheless.

Leaving here is no big deal. If I decide to leave now, I'll only be fined and some marking will be made in my passport, stating that I've violated my Turkish visa. I will not be able to come back if I don't pay my fine in the amount of six hundred euro. My daughter-in-law has two-year legal papers now and they will be soon extended to five years. Some are allowed to leave three times a year only, on the Dormition of the Mother of God, the Nativity of Christ, and New Year's Eve. My daughter-in-law, however, can leave any time she please in the course of these two years. My other daughter-in-law also wants to come here but she has a five-month-old baby, and so does my other son, yet it makes no difference whether I support him here or there. As a matter of fact, it's easier to support him while he's over there. Why should I bring him here? Even women's jobs are hard to find nowadays, not to mention jobs for men. Even I no longer make as much as I used to when I had no free time at all. The fewer vacancies are, the smaller one's income gets. When my income decreased, they found themselves facing hard times over there in Georgia. If I bring my son here and he fails to find a job, I'll end up paying his rent, buying him cigarettes. In one word, my expenses will double. Bills have to be paid and food provided over there too, so he might as well stay in Georgia with his family, while I'll continue to support them from here. Employment is a problem in Georgia as well. There are no openings. That's what

they say. Sometimes, when they call me requesting this and that, I ask myself, "Why won't they go find a job?" I'm friends with one server at Tavern. She keeps telling me I'm a fool. She sees how hard I work. We don't go out, dine or drink anywhere. We only go to work and then go home to get some sleep. "You're crazy," she says, "Let them go find a job, or do something." I argue that there are no jobs in Georgia. "I thought you said Georgia was good!" They don't work. They don't want to, and that's how things are.

We live within the city of Zestaphoni proper. We have a small yard and a house. We have a persimmon orchard, a small vineyard, and a small vegetable patch. Ox Head is beautiful. As a city, Zestaphoni is rectangular in terms of shape, and the far corner where I live is called Ox Head. The whole population of Ox Head is here. You know how it works? Someone comes here, followed by someone else, and that someone else than brings his/her whole family. Then they gain a foothold here, bring their extended family, and thus the whole neighborhood ends up here. That's what happened in our case as well. At first, my daughter-in-law's mother arrived, followed by me, then my son, my daughter-in-law, then her brother-in-law, acquaintances of that brother-in-law, and so on and so forth...

It seems that not only Zestaphoni but all Georgia is here. It's unbelievable. Still, there are more people from Kutaisi [the largest city in Western Georgia, second largest city in the country] in Greece than from any other place in Georgia. Western Georgia, as you know, is impoverished. Many have locked their homes and moved here. I've heard many say, "Home is where I feel good." It hurts me. To me, it's not that way. To me, there is but one homeland.

When the war (August 2008 War) broke out, I worked in a hotel. It was summer. The hotel was surrounded by mountains on three sides, while bordering the sea on the fourth, front side. There was no escape even if I wanted and had to. I couldn't even buy a phone card. The only way was to call acquaintances in Thessaloniki and ask them to put credit on my phone. Vacationers drove to the hotel in cars. I had no one to talk to. I nearly went nuts. I didn't have time to watch TV. Anyway, Greek channels didn't cover the war. I caught a glimpse of tanks on television once or twice, which troubled me sorely. When I went to my room after hours, at night, I made phone calls and learned the news. My daughter-in-law

was in Zestaphoni at that time, while her six-year-old child was in Tbilisi. My daughter-in-law was in distress, fearing that they [the Russian army] were about to enter Tbilisi. As soon as I entered my room, I broke out in tears. Then I went downstairs with my eyes swollen. My Kyria [a female employer] told me, "What's the matter, Maria?" "What do you mean what's the matter? A war broke out in Georgia." "If your family is safe and there's no war where you live, what do you care?" It hurt me even worse, "We're talking about my homeland! These are my people!" "Oh come on! As long as your family is alright, you've nothing to worry about." Not only I but we all experienced this war. We were nearly out of our minds. I believe this war had an impact on everyone.

Those of us women here who have legal documents love to go to Georgia. Some polish their nails, dye their hair, and buy fancy clothing and then leave, pretending to live a good life. Don't be fooled! We are servants here. We are debased here. Imagine going to work as a maiden and someone making sure you've left no dust after cleaning! Such nonsense makes you tense and stresses you out. If you're legal, they're scared of you. If a legal person sues an individual or organization and proves right, serious fines may be enforced. On the other hand, if you're illegal, they'll always cut you down. It all looks nice looking from there (Georgia)... You work, you have a salary, you lead a good life. Don't say life is good here! Nothing compares to my country, yet what am I to do? Five people out of a hundred may have a comfortable life and gain a foothold here. People like us, however, face death on a daily basis. You know what happens after you get arrested? It's so hard to survive in jail! Once in the street, you're in constant fear of being arrested sooner or later. I work hard, I'm doing my best, and why should I be persecuted? I don't do anything wrong. I only work like a mule. If I did something wrong, all right...

For example, so many people have borrowed money at interest or mortgaged their homes to come here and got arrested the following day after their arrival. I'm personally acquainted with one woman who had borrowed a lot of money to come here. Then she got arrested and spent three months in jail. She went back to Georgia but immediately returned to Greece, fearing that her creditors would be after her. She never went back to her hometown. She went straight to Tbilisi and arranged a deal with the

same Grafio people who helped her come back here. My boy was also arrested twice while he was here. He then simply went back to Georgia. He's been through so much... When trucks with police officers arrived at his workplace (they're mainly after males), he escaped, jumping from the ruins of one house onto another, and so on... He ran over the fields and into the woods. He found a ruined facility and hid there. He called us, saying he had no idea where he was. The police kept searching and informing local residents that they were after an escaped criminal. In the meantime, my boy fell asleep only to wake up after the police had left. He left the building. He walked and finally reached the highway. He noticed a bus. He didn't have any money or anything though. The mother of his Pontic Greek friend went to pick him up. He got off the hook that one time. Later, however, he got arrested at work. He was riding in the middle back seat of a car. When police pulled them over, he simply stretched his arms and asked to be handcuffed. "What was I supposed to do? I would've escaped if I were in the seat next to the doors." He is very quick when it comes to things like that. Nevertheless, he was arrested, spending three months in jail. He felt all right there though. You know how we Georgians are, especially young men. He said he drew a picture of a church while in jail. He didn't bully anyone but he didn't let anyone intimidate or use him either, quite the opposite.

He's friends with a young man from Kutaisi. They were arrested together both times. Georgians, by the way, have a good reputation in jail. On the other hand, jail is horrible no matter what. Everyone's scared of being imprisoned. This fear is fed by the absence of a legal status. There are places where you won't be able to get a job without a legal status. In Tavern, for example, where I work, it's allowed, while where my daughter-in-law's mother works, it's not. They do everything by the book. One has to present physical assessment documentation, while the workday lasts eight hours, not a second longer. If they want you to work extra hours, they ask you. If you agree, you get paid overtime. Where I work, no work hours are regulated and no physical assessment documentation is required either. I work for twelve hours one day and six the next day. It's good for me and for them as well. It helps me work two jobs. I start my workday there and then I come here. It's beneficial for the employer too to have me work for twelve hours one day and

for six hours the following day, right? If I worked eight hours a shift, that would make two shifts, which costs more, he pays me my regular pay for working for twelve hours. I work fewer hours the following day, less than eight. The aggregate number of my hours is more than eight hours times two days. In addition, the employer doesn't have to pay me ensimo [special insurance stamps issued in accordance with the number of workdays completed; an employee needs to collect a certain number of such stamps in order to acquire personal insurance coverage]. One time, when people from the Social Insurance Institute came to inspect the cafe [Tavern], my daughter-in-law was at the cashier's desk, while I was in the back. Two officers went straight into the kitchen. Our coworkers urged us to escape. It was too noisy and I couldn't hear their voices. The cook was a Georgian man who yelled at me, "Run, girl, run!" My friend and I jumped out of a window and hid. My daughter-in-law didn't run away, though she didn't have a legal status at that time. They asked her, "How long have you been working here." My daughter-in-law was instructed in advance, so she replied, "It's my first day. If I like it here, I may stay." There was one kid, a server, who didn't have a legal status either. As a result, our employer was fined in the amount of 500 euro for hiring people without registration. Had we not escaped, he would have ended up paying much more. They noticed us but opted against chasing us. Later, after they left, our managers inquired where we were. We went back much later. I don't know... That's what we have to go through... Still, God is merciful to us Georgians.

It is said that these people [the Greeks] are also Christians. Of course, they are, but they're somewhat cold. The nature and behavior of some make one believe they don't trust in God. The elderly are more religious. They are indeed followers of this faith. Youth, however, are somewhat cold. I work for eight hours non-stop, some employers tell me to take a break and some don't. Since the employer pays you, you are obligated to work and not waste even a minute. Yet, one does not always feel like working at full throttle. If they trust in God, they should treat you differently, in a more humane manner. When my husband passed away, I skipped one day at my job where I work for a certain woman as a cleaning lady. My daughter-in-law called her, explained my situation and let her know that I wouldn't be able to make it that day. Some time



passed. She paid me on a monthly basis, and I was supposed to work every scheduled day every month. She was a nice woman alright, but she told me, “You missed one day when your husband passed away. Aren’t you going to make up for it?” Now do people like this really trust in God?

Once I arrive at their home, they all leave. The place is a helter-skelter, dirty dishes and clothing piled up, beds messed up. I have to do absolutely everything, do the laundry, turn on the washing machine, sort out the laundry; wash the dishes, iron, put everything in place, and cook. Then I’m supposed to lock the door and leave while they’re still out. They do trust you though. I still have their key in my purse. The head of the household works in an outpatient clinic. Thus, that woman wouldn’t forgive me that one day I had skipped for four hours. I made up for it later when I had the time. I’ve been working for that woman since the day I came here five years ago. There are people capable of changing jobs every week, trying them to find a better one. I, on the other hand, cannot quit once I get used to a job. When I enter my employer lady’s home, I know everything, I know what to do and how, so it’s not as tiring anymore. I have everything scheduled by minute. I know that I have to do this in a certain amount of time and I have to have that finished in so many minutes. Going to a new home as a cleaning lady, however, is a pain in the neck. Let’s take the same Tavern. My job is not fantastic, but I’ve gotten so used to it, I’ve everything so well organized that it no longer seems hard.

I get paid once a week in Tavern. My whole salary goes to my family. I may send some today and end up wiring again as early as tomorrow, depending on the demand from there. The demand, however, is high, “Mother, money, please.” If I’m a little late with money, they wonder, “What? They don’t pay you?” They cannot believe that I don’t have as much as I used to. Salaries are not as high as they used to be. I make a total of 900 euro now. While my daughter-in-law had gone to Georgia, I worked double shifts. I sometimes made up to 300 euro a week. At that time, I didn’t have to go to work as a cleaning lady as my employer was on vacation. After she came back, I had to be at her house early in the morning, like eight or nine AM. I worked at her place until eleven AM, then I went to Tavern, working double shifts from morning till late at night. I was so exhausted. I was a total mess. I made 1 000-1

300 euro per month in those days. I only spent 50 euro on myself, I bought a 25-euro bus fare and phone cards, depending on how many I needed. At the same time, when you hear your cell phone ring and have no money on your account to call back, you go crazy, pacing back and forth at work and thinking, "Something must have happened at home. Our relatives only dial our number to let us know that they want us to call them back. Then my daughter-in-law goes outside and calls them back, while I stay inside doing my job. Then, when she comes back in, I watch the expression on her face, positive or negative. I cannot take it anymore. It's killing me. As a rule, nothing bad happens. Here, I just received a phone call. They want me to return their call. They probably want to ask me to get something for them... My rent is 50 euro. It's several of us renting an apartment, and 50 euro is my share. I paid 100 euro while my daughter-in-law was in Georgia. I sent the rest of my money to Georgia. I don't even have anything saved.

There's one thing that makes us Georgians sick when we walk down the street. They reason that since we are women and foreigners, we must be interested in men and fun. You know how local men look at us? They want to use and abuse you. They throw compliments at you, being sure that you'll give in. At the same time, you're trying to explain to them, "So what if I came to this foreign land? I didn't come here to have fun and lead a strange life. I'm not interested!" "What do you mean you're not interested? Aren't you a human being?" At the same time, you are not interested at all. You're tired and exhausted, walking home and not wanting to see or talk to anyone. They're all staring at you though, trying to challenge you. I've thought about it, "Why should it be this way? I never gave you any reason to treat me like that! How dare you!" It's beyond their comprehension that this is the way we are, we only sleep and work, sleep and work.

Our Georgians also think that if a woman has left her family to come here, she's willing to do anything. Not everyone is that way however. Not each and every one of us is that way. Many have found freedom here, which they never had back home. There are many people who have fled Georgia for one or another reason and found shelter here... People of this kind do not improve here and mess things up for us at that. I don't litter on public transport or

in the street, I don't do this country any harm. Quite the opposite, I work and learn, and there are many people like me...

There are, however, those who do not work and are on a constant lookout for an apartment to break in. Georgians sometimes push other Georgians around. Many families have been devastated. Georgians have invented all types of indecency. A Georgian sells out a Georgian. For example, a certain tall, gorgeous, blonde young woman was walking from work. Young women like her are often targeted. Someone stopped her and requested her documents. She replied she didn't have any, after which she was told to get in the car. Then they drugged her and, in her own words, "When I came to, I had no idea where I was." She regained consciousness only to find several young weeping young women like her. Then there was a man who said with a Megrelian accent [Samegrelo, a region in Western Georgia], "Why are crying? From now on, you'll be fed well and dressed in fine clothing." There were other men too who spoke Turkish. They probably intended to transport those young women to Turkey. I don't know. No, the Greeks wouldn't do something like that. And Greek women aren't abused in that way either. It's we foreigners who are abused. Greeks won't pester you in the street either unless you want it yourself. They're not that way. Georgians or Turks can only act like that. Then a certain woman showed up and asked that kidnapped girl, "What are you doing here?" and ordered the kidnappers to take her back. She turned out to be an acquaintance of that girl's father, from the same village. Indeed, she was taken back to Thessaloniki. That girl eventually lost it, endlessly crying, breaking things and yelling, "We have to run! They're after us!"

Our illegal status is killing us. If that girl had a legal status, she would be frightened. She wouldn't get in the car. I have heard many stories about illegal aliens being harassed. I have never been through anything of that kind. Nevertheless, I'm in constant fear. Recently, as I was walking home from work, tired and exhausted, I noticed police officers at the entrance of our apartment building. I turned around and left, fearing that they noticed me. My heart was racing. I was afraid they would chase me. I hid behind a corner at the crossroads. I don't remember how long I stood there. Then I called home, asking my roommates to look out the window and see if the police were still there. I only went home after they left.

Police officers can tell who is legal and who is not. I don't know if they can tell it by the expression on our faces or something. My daughter-in-law has legal documents. She was stopped one day, but she didn't have her documents with her. She told the police she was legal and they believed her. They looked at her. Her behavior showed no perceptible changes, so they didn't arrest her. If I get stopped, I won't be able to state that I'm legal, and they'll see through me anyway. When frightened, one falls apart.

To make it short, coming here from there was not worth all this trouble. In my particular case, it was not worth giving up the opportunity to see my children and grandchildren grow up, to see life flourish right before my eyes. I miss my family. Some illegal aliens here would be happy only to have legal documents here, so that they may walk in the streets freely, while I will only be happy to have a legal status allowing me to go back to Georgia. You know what I miss? Doing laundry for my children, debating what to cook for them... Here I no longer think about such things. I'm on my own here. It doesn't matter whether I eat at work or home. I miss family warmth. What matters to me here is waiting for the sun to rise, so I can get out of bed, get dressed and go to work. I get excited when I get on the bus. Since my workplace is far away from home, I get some time to take a nap if I'm too tired. My monotonous life is strictly scheduled. I can tell you exactly where I was and when in these past five years.

I've cried a lot in my life. I didn't have a happy childhood. After I got married, my life was no picnic either. Living here in Europe now hasn't benefited me much either. I can only speak for myself. I don't know about others... There are women here, very nice women, who have fun and take pleasure in life, while some of us are... Last Thursday night, I came down with something. I had a fever. I had a hundred degree temperature, yet I still went to work. My eyes were burning and I was shivering, and I had to wash everything in cold water. No hot water runs in Tavern. It's another means of saving money. I did my job in a hurry. How can I explain to my employers that I'm about to die? When they give out orders to bring them a certain amount of this and a certain number of those, I'm expected to memorize their request and make sure there aren't any mistakes. Nothing but "this amount and that amount" is killing me physically and mentally. On the other hand, I cannot afford breaking

down as my whole family depends on me. If I go back, how will my government support me? Now I can at least support my family. No matter what, it's better here in terms of employment. My daughter-in-law wouldn't stop dreaming about going back home. She did go home alright, yet later she admitted, "I couldn't wait to return [to Greece]. The money I had brought with me was nearly depleted. I couldn't replenish my budget. I nearly went crazy." If you have a job here, you can rest assured that at the end of a week you'll get your more or less big paycheck, while over there every morning is the same story. You don't get paid today and you won't get paid tomorrow either. There are no future prospects.

Had all these people [migrants] stayed in Georgia, the country would've wound up with a greater degree of crime and starvation. Though our support may be partial, we still support them from here. We do make at least some difference. What would they do if we stayed there? In the past, our government provided jobs for those unemployed, while now they couldn't care less. If I could have at least a half of my current income in Georgia, I would go back in a heartbeat. Some say that they want to go back but there's no way they are going back. One of my acquaintances has told me, "I'm not going back to Georgia as long as I'm alive." There is another detail. We always felt it was below our dignity to be a cleaning lady or a janitor. Nowadays, however, if I went back home, I would no longer feel embarrassed to look after elderly people or clean after somebody. You have to give it to the Greeks, they'll never look down at you no matter what your occupation, even if you sweep streets. You'd be surprised if you saw the type of women working as waste collectors, ones who empty trash cans. They take a bath after hours, get dressed and go out. You'll never believe that these are the same women. Word has it that it's the highest-paying job, and they get top bonuses at that. You won't get hired, however, unless you're legal. They won't let me near that job. Thus, if we, those who are here, go back to Georgia, no one will feel embarrassed to sweep, clean, or look after senior citizens. That's what Europe has taught us...

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