

## **My Story**

### **Matiko Todua- Soselia – age: 79, Senaki**

Old age is regarded differently in different countries. Tamaz Cheishvili says: “Where there is a real democracy and freedom of speech, there old people can look forward to retirement as they are economically viable and can spend the remaining years of their life happily and interestingly!!!”

In Georgia, old people thank God every day for a new day and ask for a quiet night and for the next day to be peaceful. In the morning they feel thankful to the almighty God. They thank God for a peaceful night and ask that this day can be happy, so that they can do useful things and pray to God, but only 10% of them ask God that they may get very old. Everybody would like to live a long life but they prefer death to an unfair and unbearably difficult life.

Thus, getting old for 90% of people in Georgia, including me, a mother of two sons buried the same day, is an insult and punishment, as there is no justice in this country.

Our distinguished younger generation can create conditions that lead to old people asking God to prolong their lives. For this, it is necessary for young people to become familiar with the lives of the older generation and to seek their advice. Life lessons differ and depend on professions.

I was born in 1935. I am a teacher and a war veteran. I have seen good and bad things related to children. I have seen mothers crying, fainting, clawing at their faces when their sons were taken to serve in the army. I have seen sickness and hunger. I have heard pleas from weak children for food. A request for cheese and gomi: “I am dying, mother” – “No, you won’t die!” I remember my father buying a plot of land with gold that he’d earned through his hard work. The land was used to plant an orchard, which my mother tended. Trees were shaken to get half-ripe apples and pears to boil and eat. If there was some milk, we ate the fruit with milk.

I remember a married couple who had two sons. They had a tiny house with a fireplace in the centre. They used to have a good life but their house was expropriated during a period when kulaks were oppressed and it was given to a peasant because his house had burned down. The family didn’t have any bedding. I remember helping my mother by taking a quilt and a mattress to them when their eldest son was sick. I remember a former military medical assistant, called Ilarion Chachibaia, who served several villages. He used to ride a horse taking his bag full of medicines with him. I remember many other things, one being that it was difficult to get clothes and most schoolchildren wore shoes made from pig’s skin, after pigs were slaughtered for New Year, others were barefoot. Living a hard life broadened people’s vision, they started to grow cotton and process it at home. Others became involved in breeding silkworms; they made thread, sewed mattress covers, knitted socks, dresses and trousers, and not only for family members but those in the army and those wounded in the war. They spent many sleepless nights sewing and sent clothes, together with churchkhela and sweets made from grapes, to the Front. The school coordinated these efforts.

People started to plant grain and peas in addition to beans, maize and pumpkins. They grew the so-called broomcorn (sorgum) to more economically use maize for poultry feed. Women wore men’s clothing. Some were professors but had to exchange clothes for bread, flour, eggs, chicken and honey. I have such memories of war and post-war years.

Once a typhus outbreak struck our village. I will never forget the cries of a mother of six children who became sick with typhus and the sound of a stick being knocked on the wall, a request from the children to help them. As soon as my mother heard this, she used to wash her hands and face with crushed garlic and vodka (chacha) with sliced onions in it, and she drank vodka too. She would calm us down and then rush to the woman who was ill. She helped to look after the younger children. Little by little everything returned to normal.

I attended the Nogi school, which covered seven years of education. We didn't have enough books. Despite poor conditions, everybody studied well. A lot of events were organized, there were a lot of preparations for public holidays, and all of these made us happy and joyful.

[...]

I remember that I was asked to go to the staff room and our director said: "Do you know who Akaki Khorava is?!"

"Yes, I do. He is an honoured actor of Georgia," I replied.

The director said that Akaki Khorava was a deputy of our region and the next day there would be a meeting with him in Kitsia. She gave me a piece of paper and asked me to read aloud what was written on it. I read it.

The director said that I would recite what I'd read by heart and asked me to leave.

I woke up early in the morning. I picked flowers and went to school. We were taken to the meeting hall. Akaki came in with his entourage...

I was called to recite my speech, which I did, and then I gave our deputy flowers. He put the flowers on a table and lifted me up. He pulled up one of my hands and I greeted the audience. Then, he put me down. He kissed me on the forehead and said: "When you grow up, you will come with me..."

In 2012, I read an article about Akaki Khorava in the 9<sup>th</sup> issue of the journal Samegrelo. I remembered my childhood feelings of joy. I remembered his best roles and his great professional skills. I remembered the time before I went to school. My elder sister Tamar studied at the Akhuti secondary school, as the Kitsia school was a bit further away, and sometimes she took me to her school. The director, Maksime Jalajonia, used to ask me to recite poems. Once, after I had recited several poems, he told me: "Now please read us a poem by Ketskhoveli, Last Day, and we will not bother you any longer." I finished and everybody smiled and applauded. God bless Taras Siordia who took me to a shop, bought me some sweets and then we returned home.

"Uncle Taras, why did you smile there?" I asked sincerely.

"You yawned when you finished the poem... And some said that the child is tired and should be left to rest. That made me smile," said Uncle Taras.

I continued my studies at the Akhuti secondary school, after I finished my studies at the first Akhuti school. My sister's former director used to teach me history. His name was Avtandil Baramidze. I was the first pupil who he asked to answer a question. When the lesson was over, he remembered my childhood and then said: "Do you remember that Tamar was presented with Stalin's picture when she won the regional competition?"

"Yes. It was hung in our living room," I answered.

"Oh, it was a good school year. In addition to Tamar, three more pupils finished school with distinction: Gobron Jokhtaberidze, Efren Sajaia and Tina Jijelava," remembered Avtandil.

Once I graduated from university, I started to work. For 40 years I worked as a teacher and was fully committed and dedicated to my job and my pupils. When I meet my students now, I forget all my sorrow and problems.

My employers and country appreciated my commitment and dedication. Thanks to them.

The young people from the old people's home treat us with great respect and follow our advice. An old person is often chosen to be a leader because of his intelligence and fairness. It is enough to remember Khevisberi Gocha. Their wisdom has brought us to the present times, otherwise we would have been completely destroyed as many had threatened to do so...

We have a good and dignified younger generation. I hope that they will listen and follow the advice of people who have lived a long life and that they will never say that they don't need our suggestions!

I hope they won't forget the following wise words: 'There is no greater misfortune than when people lose truth, society, morale, national freedom and responsibility for the present and future.'

I would like to write a bit about the role of older people in politics. If I had the proper authority, I would engage experienced and smart older people and appoint worthy young people as their assistants, young people who are educated and have good ideas; I would increase all types of pensions so that older people do not have any financial problems; I would provide a 50% discount for medicines for older people; I would give some medicines free of charge (for mental problems, joint problems, insomnia, etc.); I would give gifts to war veterans; I would annul a period of limitation; I would publish books written by older people, sell them and pay the writers royalties to help these older people to do more; and I would give older people 2-3 vouchers for sanatoriums.

I would again like to thank everybody for asking me to write this story of my life and to have the opportunity to remember some of my earlier days. You have given me some hope for the future!

Sincerely,

**Matiko Todua-Soselia.**

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