



**Rusudan Berishvili,
68, Chokhatauri**

"The wife of a man who died in Abkhazeti got in a very difficult situation and she had to leave her children with her elderly parents to go to Greece. When her mother died, her relatives put a mobile phone to the dead mother's ear for her to hear her daughter's wail from Athens.

If I could I would change the law to stop this kind of migration. We are in a difficult situation! A very difficult situation! But we should bear our pain at home."

**რუსუდან ბერიშვილი,
ჩოხატაური**

„აფხაზეთში დაღუპული ვაჟუკაცის მეუღლეს ძალიან გაუჭირდა, შვილები მოხუც მშობლებს დაუტოვა და საბერძნეთში წავიდა. როცა დედა გამოასვენეს, ყურზე ტელეფონი მიადეს, ისმოდა შვილის გოდება ათენიდან.

რომ შემედლოს კანონს ისე შევცვლიდი, რომ ამ საშინელ გადახვენას შევაჩერებდი. გვიჭირს! ძალიან გვიჭირს! მაგრამ ჩვენი სატკივარი აქ, ჩვენს კერიასთან უნდა მოვიმტკივნოთ“.

Getting Old n Georgia

Rusudan Berishvili- Chokhatauri, Pensioner, Teacher

I should not be standing here! Why am I scared?!

The woman standing at the gate of a church looked away from me but she wasn't able to quicken her step, wasn't able to control her frozen legs.

I asked her to stop and open her fist where I saw a 10-tetri coin. I added one lari.

She wasn't that old, about 60. She was trying to cover herself with a scarf and was frowning. I suddenly realised that she was trying to hide from me. She had her right hand held out again, as if frozen.

We were both silent and she interrupted this very awkward situation in a way that often happens - with thanks and blessings.

I should not be standing here...

I didn't recognize her but her voice seemed familiar to me...

I repeated what she'd said to me on my way home and when I arrived there. Where will this woman, and many others, be standing now and later, when she's older?

What will it be like to get old in Georgia?

I had black thoughts in my dreams as well: where am I standing now? Where will I be standing when more years are added to my current age of 68?

I was very scared.

Nowadays, old age is an unbearable burden for many old people. You have to isolate yourself from bitter reality and you live in the past. And you think and think and think... You prefer this way, as your past might be difficult but there was still a bright childhood and a cheerful youth.

And to stop thinking about the fact that I should not be standing here, I decided to go to the remote mountains of Guria, namely the village of Surebi in the Supsa gorge, which has given a certain strength, arrogance, seriousness, beauty, talent and pride to all its children.

My village has an unusual history. It was a village that was full of children and where the biggest chair near a fireplace in each family belonged to an old person.

Surebi¹ is depicted in Noe (Noah) Ramishvili's² book and it has been the home of many distinguished Georgians. "From Surebi? They are all Mensheviks there in Surebi. They should all be executed!" Joseph Stalin said these words to Ms. Nino Ramishvili³, when she met him in the Kremlin. Stalin did not apologize to her despite the fact that the whole world applauded Nino from Surebi.

¹ Surebi - a small village in West Georgian region of Guria [the editors].

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noe_Ramishvili [the editors].

³ Nino Ramishvili: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nino_Ramishvili, official web-site of the dance group established by Nino and her husband: <http://sukhishvili.com/history.php>. Many Georgians feel great pride when talking about the group of "Sukhishvili" [the editors].

How did Gurians⁴ from [small places with limited opportunities such as] Surebi, or Georgians, people of such a small nation, reach the peak of their careers, become famous? I have only one answer to this question that I will believe until my death - by reading books!!!

By reading books that were difficult to find during the war. By reading books that bare-footed children read at fireplaces.⁵

And again by books that computers have taken away from our children...⁶

No! No! Please do not accuse me of remaining in the 17th century because of my age.

I do not say that we should ignore technical progress and go back to the olden days, wear old Georgian dresses, daggers, and have long plaits, but...

But what should we do to stay Georgian?

The nine-year anti-Georgian process almost achieved its goal. Most Georgian children do not sing Georgian songs or watch Georgian films, which are seldom shown anyway. They do not know that a life is not only about feelings and that a family, husband and wife, are not Turkish socks⁷ that are to be changed every week.

Shorena Begashvili, Nina Tskrialashvili and Ia Parulava⁸ do not personify a Georgian woman. If they like to read books - and thanks be to God that some young people like reading - they would know why David the Builder said: 'Sorry sister that I cut out our love for Georgia.'⁹

Love is the basis for a strong family but only love is not a family. Sometimes we think that we have met a real love but Balzac's words can come true: 'Even real love tells lies no less than seven times a day!!!'

What do you want, old woman, you may ask. Having lived almost 70 years I have seen a lot and reappraised many things.

Modern times, especially the last 30 years and particularly the last nine years, have changed a lot in terms of Georgian love.

What was it like and how was it? There was true love but there were marriages without love as well. Sometimes virtual strangers got married. They should have acted as one soul, one body, but couples who married at church had special strength and responsibilities and they quietly walked through their lives. There were many children born and who grew up not only for their families but for the country... An unwritten law to respect older people was observed that was called Georgian politeness.

The responsibility assumed for families and the country is not only sex and never-ending discussions on sex in the press and on television! Even in schools!!!

[...]

It is important to listen to advice given by mothers and grandmothers as they are Georgian women and this makes them proud.

What would I change? It is impossible to imagine Guria without politics. Let's not drift apart from each other, my dears, and amuse ourselves a little with politics.

⁴ Guria is a region in Western Georgia; usually its citizens, Gurians, have a reputation of being witty, smart, noisy and joyful with a good sense of humor and quite a temperament [the editors].

⁵ Even if a book could be obtained there was no electricity in those villages, and books had to be read with a candle or at the fire-place [the editors].

⁶ Suggesting that children who spend too much time with computers are not developing as they should. They play games and have stopped reading [the editors].

⁷ Turkish products are omnipresent on the Georgian market. They are often considered to be very affordable but of low quality, so they have to be frequently replaced [the editors].

⁸ These are names of Georgian celebrities [the editors].

⁹ This is a quotation from Konstantine Gamsakhurdia's novel *David the Builder*. David the Builder was the most prominent king of Georgia in the 11th century [the editors].

A little! You may remember how angry and agitated Misha [Michael Saakashvili] was on television prior to the 1 October election!

Why is it that older people do not smile confidently? Quickly, immediately...?

Was dental equipment brought to Guria? Who managed to repair teeth and how much did it cost? I do not know this but I saw this equipment packed in boxes standing in sand in Supsa and Natanebi prior to 1 October. Some lucky old people laughed a lot with their restored teeth or without teeth.

How can you rely on and pay respect to somebody?!!!

I would change the age when people receive a pension, as life is currently hard and it is difficult for old people to live until they receive a pension.

The Ministry of Health should change its insurance system as most insurance premiums are useless. "Is it necessary for my belly to be cut open for me to use my insurance? Give me some money to buy medicines," say distressed Gurians.

People have difficult lives, they get old and die.

'He was an old man and it is not strange that he died,' say people who come to express their condolences.

The relatives of the old person who died cry a lot. Are they crying for the loss of the pension or their grandmother? Gurians can find humour in all situations.

But is this a joke or a bitter reality? The pension of an older member of a family is often the only source of income for many large families!!!

How many things should have been said and how many things are left unsaid?

When I started writing, I couldn't stop. I see that I have written almost five pages. It is time to stop now but I have one further unpleasant story to tell you.

The wife of a man who died in Abkhazeti got into a very difficult situation and she had to leave her children with her elderly parents to go to Greece. When her mother died, her relatives put a mobile phone to the ears of the dead mother for her to hear her daughter's wail from Athens.

If I could, I would change the law to stop this kind of migration. We are in a difficult situation! A very difficult situation! But we should bear our pain at home.

Georgia will soon disappear from the world map because of its current policies, as many other countries and languages have disappeared over the centuries.

If so, neither old nor young people will be important as nobody cares about these things as Georgians do.

Then, nobody will be worried about a daughter crying from a remote country or bitter words being uttered by a dignified Georgian woman saying that she should not be standing here.

Getting old is like this in Georgia. Tomorrow, I may, myself, not know where to stand.

Rusudan Berishvili.

Chokhatauri