Newly Arrived Georgian Immigrants – Hope for a Better Future, Part 1.

Respondent
Anonymous Person 2
Tamara

Interviewer
Nini Sikharulidze

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Introduction
Anonymous Person 2 Tamara talks to us about her immigration story in 2017 to the United States. She speaks about her daily life as an immigrant.

Background

Nini Sikharulidze: Hello, Tamara. Could you please introduce yourself and speak to us about your story of immigration?
Tamara: My name is Tamara. I was born in 1980, in the city of Tbilisi. Until 2017, I did not think at all about emigration. I can't say that I dreamed of living in any other country. I didn't have much idea about the U.S. either.

Nini Sikharulidze: How does the story of your journey to the U.S. begin?
Tamara: The story of my emigration to the USA begins in 2017. I got a U.S. visa in 2014. I arrived in July 2017. Since then, 6 years have passed. My decision to emigrate was caused by my family's economic situation. Both my ex-husband and I lost our jobs. I flew to New York via Baku-Tbilisi with a visa to come to the USA. However, I settled in New Jersey from day one upon arrival. I was on a tourist visa for the first six months.

Settling in the U.S.

Nini Sikharulidze: Were you relying on some relatives or friends for support in the U.S.?
Tamara: I settled in New Jersey with the help of friends. I have many Georgian friends here. However, of course, emigration comes with its own great challenges. The two most difficult and painful challenges for me were the language barrier and separation from my family. I had to leave two children in Tbilisi. Job searching was also very difficult. However, the good thing was that I had no illusions. I didn't have rose-colored glasses on. I found what I was actually expecting to find in the U.S.

Nini Sikharulidze: Did the fact that you had many acquaintances help you to overcome these adversities?
Tamara: My Georgian friends helped me a lot. They found me housing and gave me assistance to find a job. They make life here easier for me to this day. Of course, my life here in the U.S. is radically different from my daily life in Tbilisi. I work 24/7. I have two or four days off a month. Imagine you are in someone else's house, not your own. Everything changes completely. You don't sleep in your bed. You are not with your family. However, there are positive differences too. The biggest thing is that you have hope for the future. You think that you can change your future for the better, and that everything is the result of hard work. You have hope for the future, and you are relatively economically stronger.

Nini Sikharulidze: What drove you to stay and continue your journey of immigration?
Tamara: Despite these obstacles, I stayed in the U.S. because of my children. Hoping they don't have to go through the trouble I went through if they had to come here. You are never safe from anything. You don't know what the future holds for your children and how strong the country

will be when they grow up. I took this responsibility upon myself. I want to bring them here. As parents, we stay in the U.S. to make life easier for our children so that they don't go through what we are going through here.

Nini Sikharulidze: Have you started your immigration case to settle documentation?
Tamara: Just now, I am starting to arrange the documents. I am preparing documents to send to the immigration services. My ex-husband won a political immigration case and my children will be able to come to the U.S. through his approval. We are very close to bringing our children to the U.S. in the near future. Ultimately, the process took more than six years.

Preservation of the Georgian Culture and Future Plans

Nini Sikharulidze: How do you manage to keep the customs of your life in Tbilisi throughout your immigration journey?
Tamara: I am in touch with my relatives, family members and friends every day. In the U.S., we try to preserve Georgian traditions and customs as much as possible. Easter and Christmas were the most important holidays for us in Georgia. We also celebrate these dates here. In the U.S., I have connections with many other Georgians. This is a very significant positive aspect.

Nini Sikharulidze: How do you feel about your decision to immigrate to the U.S.?
Tamara: Six years have passed since my emigration. Some days, I look at my decision to come to the U.S. very negatively. There are also moments when I look at all this positively. This should also be the case: emigration is justified in some cases, but not in others.

Nini Sikharulidze: What pros and cons do you see, for example?
Tamara: For example, the positive thing is that I help my children to easily overcome difficulties, whether in Georgia or in the U.S. The downside is that I was separated from my children by coming here. The youngest child was too young when I left. She is going through that sensitive teenage stage right now. The oldest was eighteen years old when I came to the U.S. Nevertheless, it was even more difficult for him to stay without his parents. I think that this is a big negative factor and also an immense tragedy. It affects both the young and the old. These big challenges took a toll on my psychological health. I started taking antidepressants in the U.S.

Nini Sikharulidze: What are the goals you hope to achieve here in the U.S.?
Tamara: I am here in the U.S. with the plan to return to my homeland. I definitely want to return to Georgia. I want and think that within ten years from now, I will achieve all my goals and return to Georgia.

Nini Sikharulidze: In your opinion, are there unique difficulties associated with immigration for Georgians as compared to people of other countries?

Tamara: Being a Georgian in the U.S. is difficult, but I am happy and blessed to have people who are going through the same experiences. This is a unique relationship amongst Georgian immigrants. I feel that my Georgian friends in the U.S. stand by me and that there is no issue or problem in which I will not have their help, support, and encouragement.

Nini Sikharulidze: Would you offer some advice to the newer generations of immigrants?
Tamara: I would advise the new generation of Georgian immigrants not to be lazy. Both physical and mental hard work will be required of them. I believe that with effort and hard work, a Georgian immigrant will be able to succeed in the U.S. The most important thing is to believe in ourselves, our abilities and our roots. Also, it is important to believe that we will one day return home.