

New Wave of Georgian Immigrants –
The Road from Georgia to Mexico, Part 2.

Respondent
Anonymous Person 3
Nia

Interviewer
Nini Sikharulidze

Interview date
June 6th, 2023

Introduction
Anonymous Person 3 Nia talks about her immigration story in 2022. She specifically touches on her journey through the Mexico border.

Background

Nini Sikharulidze: Hello, Nia. Tell us about yourself, please.
Nia: I was born in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1980. The story of my emigration begins in 2022. I set a goal for myself to come to the U.S. I started organizing my documentation. I could not obtain a U.S. visa, and so, I decided to come by crossing the border. After coming through the Mexican border, I surrendered to the American border patrol. I came to the U.S. because of its prospects, for the opportunities that I could make use of to create better future for my children.

Crossing the U.S.-Mexico Border

Nini Sikharulidze: Tell us in detail about what you have experienced while crossing the Mexico border.
Nia: I flew from Lisbon to Cancún. From Cancún to Tijuana and then, I walked two or three kilometers until I hit the U.S.-Mexico border. That's how I surrendered to the American border guards. The process of crossing the border, in my case, lasted three weeks.

Nini Sikharulidze: How many days were you detained at the border, and what were the conditions like?
Nia: Following my surrender, I spent 5 nights at the border after being detained. The detention conditions were horrible. One room was made to accommodate 25 people. I was in the ladies room, of course. It was cold. We had a piece of material as thin as foil to cover us, which was supposed to keep us warm. You had to wear only one shirt, long-sleeve or short-sleeve, it didn't matter. You had to wear one layer at a time. Everything else was thrown away. All kinds of documents were taken from us. From there, I don't know based on what principle they operate: some people are let out immediately and some are taken to "detention," the so-called detention center.

Nini Sikharulidze: What happened in your case?
Nia: I was taken to a detention center. I don't know why. No one gave us any information: why, what for, where are you going, why are you going. Nobody tells you anything. They put us on the bus and I realized that we were going neither to the airport nor being deported. I saw several buildings. It was in Arizona. I was detained there for 7 days. They did not give any information there either. I didn't know when they would let me go, where they would let me go, if they would send me back or if they would let me stay in the U.S.

Nini Sikharulidze: Let's return to the conditions you found yourself in at the detention center. That must have been scary.
Nia: To this day, I get very anxious when I remember the thin mattresses in the detention center, this small room, so many people together, the cold… The conditions were horrible. In general, I

am not picky with food, but the food was horrifying. The only thing I could eat was an apple. You are fully imprisoned. You can't see whether it's day or night, what time of the day it is… The only positive aspect was that when they brought in food, they took us out of the cell and they cleaned and chlorinated everything. The rest was catastrophic. Some people are hysterically crying, no one is talking, most are sleeping or keeping quiet to themselves. I can't put it into words, I really went through a very challenging path.

Nini Sikharulidze: How did you get out of there?
Nia: Then I got the notice of "bond," in our language, meaning bail. I paid $3,000 and was released. At first, they took me to the Red Cross center where they provided us with food and hygiene products. Then, they put us on a bus and took us to the airport. My friends bought me a plane ticket and I arrived in Atlanta.

Settling in the U.S.

Nini Sikharulidze: Did you stay in Atlanta, or where did you decide to settle?
Nia: I didn't stay long in Atlanta. I flew to New Jersey. At the moment, I live with some relatives. Now I am at the stage to take care of my documents. Settling documentation is a very difficult process in the U.S. In terms of job opportunities, it is much easier to gain a footing in New Jersey than in Atlanta. If not with the help of my loved ones, I don't know how I would get through this. Here, I have 6–7 friends who always support me. Even when I was in the detention center, I had the opportunity to call once a day. I called them and they are very comforting. I was very anxious, and I was crying all the time. I didn't know what would happen. I am very lucky in my friendships.

Nini Sikharulidze: Did your expectations match the reality of the U.S.?
Nia: My expectations did not correspond to my reality. I knew what I was coming for, my goals, but I was left to face a completely different lifestyle and people. The relationships as we know them do not exist here, the fact that in Georgia we can have systematic, daily contact with relatives… Here, everyone works, everyone is busy. My daily life is also very different now. Now, I'm working. I am looking after an elderly lady. I work two weeks and go out two days a week. This is very difficult for me. Yes, I met a very good family, thank God that I feel good in that regard, but I miss relationships, going out. I am used to a completely different life. I'm stuck here. It is very difficult for me to transfer from that life in Tbilisi to here. Of course, this is further complicated by the fact that I already have the documents here.

Preservation of the Georgian Culture and Future Plans

Nini Sikharulidze: How do you keep in touch with your homeland?

Nia: Here, in the U.S., I only have connections with Georgians. In my circle of friends, we try to preserve traditions. Be it a holiday, Easter, birthdays, New Year… We try to get together and celebrate these holidays. It is very important for us.

Nini Sikharulidze: How do you evaluate your decision to come to the U.S.?
Nia: Now that some time has passed, I think the risk was worth it. If I had it to do over again, I think I would have risked it again and cross the border. When a person has a goal that he wants to achieve, in my opinion, it is necessary to sacrifice something for it.

Nini Sikharulidze: What do you plan for the future?
Nia: I have not yet decided and arranged my future plans. I have two children who also want to come to the U.S. I don't know how much we will be able to do. Well, I'm not going to live here. I plan to return to Georgia. I can't live here. This is not for me. I already miss everything. Aside from my people, I miss my streets, I miss my house, I miss everything.

Nini Sikharulidze: Would you offer some advice to the newer generations of immigrants?
Nia: I wish the new generation of emigrants, who are going to take this path, to ultimately return to their country. I would definitely say that. The second piece of advice would be to not give up. Little by little, they will succeed in whatever they set their sights on. What matters is determination, but I think that after achieving the goals, Georgian immigrants should return to their homeland. That is certain.