Newly Arrived Georgian Immigrants – Hope for a Better Future, Part 2.

Respondent
Anonymous Person 4
Tamriko

Interviewer
Nini Sikharulidze

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Introduction
Anonymous Person 4 Tamriko tells us about the story of her emigration to the U.S. in 2012. She focuses on the daily immigrant life and the older generations of immigrants, and shares her goals and wishes for a better future of her homeland.

Background

Nini Sikharulidze: Hello, Tamriko. Please introduce yourself and tell us about your story.
Tamriko: My name is Tamriko, born in 1980 in Tbilisi. My emigration begins in August 2012 to the U.S. The search for a better future led me to make this decision. This decision was deliberate for the future development of my family and my children. I flew out with Turkish Airlines and entered with a tourist visa. I came to New York as a tourist. I moved around a lot.

Nini Sikharulidze: Did you find a job in NY?
Tamriko: At first, since I settled in Brooklyn, New York, I started working with Upstate New York, where I worked live-in for almost four years. I found a job quickly. I really liked the family where I lived and worked. However, it was difficult for me to adjust to all this because I was used to a different lifestyle.

Nini Sikharulidze: What difficulties did you encounter in the beginning of your journey?
Tamriko: Although I thought I was ready for this challenge, it was very difficult psychologically, especially for the first five years. During this time, I was working 24/7. I could take a two-day vacation once every two or three months. This went on for seven years. I will say that I was lucky in the family I worked for. They were extraordinary people. They accepted me as a family member. I worked for an elderly lady whom I took good care of. I imagined that I was taking care of my very own grandmother. Although this woman had no memory (she had dementia), she recognized my name and voice despite her dementia. Nothing is ever lost, including service and kindness. After her death, the family suggested that I stay, continue to live with them, although my plans, commitments, and goals required more action on my part. I left, but I still have a good relationship with this family.

Nini Sikharulidze: What led to your decision to emigrate?
Tamriko: My emigration was connected with the war. In 2008, the war between Russia and Georgia took place, which dramatically affected business in Georgia. I was in this field, a manager of one of the leading and powerful companies, and my income was decreasing significantly after 2008. Then I realized that I had to do something, and the solution turned out to be emigration. In addition, I had young children and my children needed to be set on the right path, given an education, which at that time, before the war, I was extraordinarily successful in with the working conditions in Georgia. However, after the war, it was the most difficult four years, I would say it was a crisis, because I could barely do a quarter of what I was capable of before the war. Frankly, the conditions of the war made me realize that in order to achieve my goals, I had to, unfortunately, take the step of leaving my family, my beloved children and emigrate.

Settling in the U.S.

Nini Sikharulidze: It must have been truly difficult to leave your family.
Tamriko: Early on, the most difficult obstacle in my immigration was separation from family. In my opinion, all immigrants are heroes because it is the most difficult process. This is very traumatic for human psychology. Family is very important for any person, but as you know, we Georgians are very dependent on each other and our family members. We are emotional people.

Nini Sikharulidze: How do you feel about returning to your motherland?
Tamriko: The most difficult period is probably still going on, because there is not a day that I can accept that I will not return to my homeland. It will be 11 years since I left for the U.S. this summer. I visited Georgia for the first time 5 years after the start of my emigration. Since then, I have been going regularly without problems because my documents were in order after 5 years, and I was able to return to my country.

Nini Sikharulidze: How did you spend these 5 years that you were undocumented and unable to visit Georgia?
Tamriko: There were the most difficult five years because it's very difficult for a person when they know that they don't have the right to leave the country because they are undocumented. The U.S. taught me to be patient, and from today's perspective, I realize that this was probably my journey to take. The U.S. is a country where dreams truly come true. However, it is also a country where you need a lot of patience to achieve your dreams. I really appreciate this quality in me now.

Nini Sikharulidze: Did you grow to love the U.S.?
Tamriko: I am extremely grateful to this country. I love this country very much and appreciate this country, of course, but I will never forget my motherland. I generally believe that if you don't love your motherland, you can never love someone else's. It is very difficult to convey all this in words. Around me, every Georgian immigrant wants to return to his homeland. There are several families who have already returned.

Nini Sikharulidze: So, a lot of people you know have returned to Georgia?
Tamriko: Yes, and that is not surprising. I mentioned at the beginning that I was very lucky when I worked for that family for 5 years. They accepted me as a fellow family member. What I mean by this is that those people understood my emotion, they absolutely understood what it meant for me to live outside my family and without my family. The hardest part is when you are away from your family. The people I worked with supported me as much as possible and helped me in everything. I had no restrictions on when I could call family members, and answering the phone whenever needed was no problem.

Older Generation of Immigrants

Nini Sikharulidze: It has been almost 11 years since you emigrated. Back then, there were not as many Georgians in the U.S. as there are now, right?
Tamriko: During my emigration, there were not many Georgians here. Now the waves of emigration are changing. I had one friend who met me in the U.S. that I could rely on. I also made a friend back then, with whom I still have good relations. At that time there were not so many Georgians. Now many of my childhood friends have arrived, many relatives and just acquaintances. Back then, immigration was even more difficult because you could only rely on yourself. I would like to mention one thing that I often repeat: faith grows stronger in emigration. In a way, God is closer to you. Probably because you are more alone with yourself. He will always show you which path to take and how to get to the right place, to the goal that brought you here.

Nini Sikharulidze: What was it like back then to work on becoming documented in the U.S.?
Tamriko: At the time of my emigration, there was not much information on how to settle the documents. I paid money for all the services with lawyers, but the situation turned in such a way that I had to learn how to do these services myself. Despite the fact that I changed three lawyers in arranging these documents, it was fate that I had to figure out the process myself and take care of my own immigration case. Since I learned this, I try my best to help everyone with my knowledge. I know what it means to have to pay so much money for this kind of work for immigrants to get their documents in order. As much as I can and as much as I know, I selflessly help all Georgians in this matter. Be it the first steps of emigration, filling out immigration documents, advice on which form to fill and what documents to obtain, and so on… as they say, everything "step by step."

Immigration Stress

Nini Sikharulidze: How did you deal with the stress associated with immigration?
Tamriko: This is the hardest journey. And of course, I couldn't fight the stress by myself: I was prescribed antidepressants.

Nini Sikharulidze: You are not the first person to tell me that a lot of Georgian immigrants are on antidepressants…
Tamriko: Many immigrants turn to antidepressants to cope with stress. As you know, it's the fight with yourself and with your emotions that's the most challenging. There comes a point when you somehow can't handle it all on your own. At that point, it's absolutely normal and right to take scientifically proven medications, which worked and allowed me to have more peace of mind and ease these feelings and anxiety.

Nini Sikharulidze: You had mentioned that you have children. Tell us about them.
Tamriko: Yes, and during these 11 years, I am most proud of my children. Any parent always tries to put their children on the right path, to give them education, to ease difficult life stages as much as possible. I am proud to have children who are on the right track, are educated and continue to pursue their goals. For me, the biggest achievement would be for them to be successful, love their work and most importantly, for them to be grateful to both their homeland and the U.S. My eldest son got into a very prestigious university this year. He is very goal-oriented, and I really hope that he represents Georgia well. It will be the most important honor and pleasure for me. I am waiting for the day when he will make Georgia proud.

Nini Sikharulidze: When did you bring your children to the U.S.?
Tamriko: It took 5 years to bring my children to the U.S., but now, everything is going perfectly, thanks to God. The U.S. is really the land where dreams come true. It was the hardest 5 years to get the paperwork in order. It is very difficult to convey this. Those are the years you can't make up for. I can't tell you what would have happened otherwise, but my children also felt the difficulty of these years. If for us, adults, this process is difficult, isn't it even more intense and emotional for a child?! Therefore, the first immigration steps are associated with great difficulties, both for the person who makes this decision, and for his family members, and especially for children who are minors who miss their parents. However, despite all this, even after 5 years, a barrier did not appear between us. This is also a pride for me, because 5 years is not a short amount of time. When you maintain that balance, and when you do all of this so that these five years don't alienate you, it's due to both parties. This is something I am proud of. My every morning started with contact with my children and the night ended with contact with them as well. With the help of twenty-first century technology, we have the ability to stay connected at any moment.

Preservation of Georgian Culture

Nini Sikharulidze: How do you manage to maintain Georgian traditions throughout immigration?
Tamriko: Now my children live with me. We maintain our traditions. Our traditions, our beliefs and our values have always been, are and will be the most important to us. As every Georgian knows, we come from a very traditional country. We love and value our traditions very much. In the U.S., my family still celebrates holidays, tries to go to church. In general, we try to preserve everything that is Georgian. Here in the U.S., we approach this more emotionally than in Georgia, because we also feel a different, more intense responsibility.

Nini Sikharulidze: Do you keep in touch with other Georgian immigrants?
Tamriko: Here I managed to establish an even more special emotional and close bond with the Georgian immigrants. We have a large Georgian community. We Georgians often gather in the Georgian church. We try to stay together. We try to help each other as much as possible, to

celebrate holidays together as much as possible. We love and enjoy being together. Our being together somehow eases this journey. That's why we try not to lose one another.

Nini Sikharulidze: Would you go through this emigration journey again?
Tamriko: I have frequently thought about this, whether I would go through this again. I am not certain. I will tell you one thing: first of all, I am grateful. I am grateful to God, then to my Georgia, then to this country. When I think about it, before leaving for the U.S., I prepared myself for a long time psychologically.

We generally have a very solid, close-knit and interdependent family. I probably prepared to deal with immigration stress for over a year. When I left, I thought I was ready for emigration, however, I soon realized that a person is never ready for it until he faces the reality. I started with gratitude and I will continue on the same note: I am first of all grateful to God. Still, if they told me to go on this journey again, I wouldn't. But I did it, I survived, I am strong and I thank God that this journey has rewarded me and made me appreciate its difficulty. No one can weigh what is better and what is not, but I am very satisfied and happy with the current situation. In the U.S., all my hard work, my patience and every minute I spent was appreciated.

Nostalgia for Homeland and Future Plans

Nini Sikharulidze: What do you miss the most throughout immigration?
Tamriko: I miss my home the most. I appreciate and love the country where I was born. I love and miss my people. I miss relationships because due to the lack of time here, we Georgian immigrants do not have enough time for one another. I miss our *Supra*, conversations at the table, recalling interesting stories… I miss this emotion that means being at home.

Nini Sikharulidze: What would you wish or advise for immigrants who are now following the same path as you did 11 years ago?
Tamriko: I wish success to the new generation of Georgian immigrants. My advice would be to be able to work, hardwork I mean, and be able to allocate time correctly. I would advise them to be psychologically and physically healthy and to know that everything will work out for them. When I meet the new generation of immigrants, I tell them that this country will teach them patience and then reward them for that patience. This is a country where hard work and patience are valued and you always reach your goal. This is truly a unique country.

Nini Sikharulidze: What are your dreams?
Tamriko: My dream is to see my country reunited. I wish Georgia to reunify. Everyone knows that 20% of our country is occupied by Russia. Our small country has just gone through a big war in 2008, which killed many young people. We are a small country and that's why we should try to have peace in our country. I wish my homeland exactly this peace, unification, strengthening and consolidation.

Nini Sikharulidze: Is there anything else you would like to add before we wrap up?
Tamriko: I would like to wish the Georgian Studies Program and other immigrant students a lot of success, goodness, and achievement of their goals. I would like to wish that the achievements of this program go down in the history of our country. I wish for Georgian students to share the knowledge and education that this truly extraordinary country offers with their homeland and future generations and use their experience for the benefit of our country and in the education of the next generation. Also, never forget your roots.