

## **The Story of an American Who “Got Lost” While Playing Dominoes with Jugaani Guys, Who Became a Man because of the Poverty**

By Marina Gogolashvili/Magazine “Gza”

***Six graders of the school of Jugaani village in Signaghi region apparently have a special school year. Their English language teacher is an American Robert Calica, or Mr. Rob, as Tamuna, Nika, Natia, Gio, Nino and Magda call their teacher.***

Giorgi Elashvili, who was born and raised in the city of Nalchik in Russia, just recently returned to his home village of Jugaani, where he has to learn two languages simultaneously – his native Georgian and English. Because of Mr. Rob he does English language lessons better than Georgian, says Giorgi.

Nika Zedelashvili believes that Mr. Rob has the games in his classes and once they are over they realize that they have gone a step further in knowing the language. Nika is also fascinated with the sports skills of his teacher, who as he says showed incredible skills in football, volleyball and basketball when he first entered the sports hall.

Natia Matiashvili and Nino Zedelashvili are proud that in return they teach Georgian language to their American teacher, similarly throughout various games. Games such as “The King of Silence” and “Journalists” serve to the mutual teaching.

Magda Kevkhashvili has more to say than her classmates do, since Robert is the guest and almost a part of her family.

**Magda:** “Nana teacher and I went to “Didube-Palace” to take him to Jugaani. To be honest, at the first sight other teachers attracted my attention more, but afterwards I found out that Robert is a very nice person and regretted my initial opinion. When we are home he acts like my third grade brother, Luka, and I. He also plays hide and seek and Legos with us. Every evening he does exercise for two hours and encourages us to do so as well... Oh, do you know that a little a while ago I lost him? We came out for a walk. There were local guys standing out in the street. A friend of mine called me and I went for a short distance from Rob. When I turned back there was neither Robert, nor the guys. I tried looking for him. My mother and I were quite concerned. At 7 pm he came home himself, “bichebtan domino daukra” [I played dominoes with the guys] – he said a Californian-Juganiian phrase and we laughed a lot.”

Children are already feeling sad that they will have to part with Robert in the summer.

**Nika:** “When the class is boring the time is never-ending. But Mr. Rob’s lesson runs fast. I want to make a farewell party for him. “

**Magda:** “Maybe a farewell carnival would be better?”

**Tamuna:** “we love him very much.”

**Natia:** “If somebody did not like him from the beginning, now these people love him even more. I would have been very happy if he would have stayed with us for the next school year as well, but I know it is impossible and I think we should make memorable gifts for him, so that he remembers us and our school for a long time.”

While children were talking about Mr. Robert, the teacher himself was in the informational center of the school and after leaving it he invited us to his “house”.

The English language teacher, Nana Davitashvili served as a translator.

When he is recalling his past, 25 years old Robert remembers of San-Francisco, the major city of the state of California, with huge numbers of people with different ethnic backgrounds and in this massive population one poor household without a man, wherein Maryann, the mother is bringing up two sons, Robert and younger Ricky (“But not Martin! – Robert laughs) without a father.

Tears come to Robert’s eyes when talking about a father and he says just one phrase: “I do not remember my father; I do not know who he is.” Afterwards he starts talking about his childhood again: “We used to live on government’s aid and of course the income was not enough. We could not afford the electricity bills and sometimes there were the days when we did not have food and were hungry in the dark and cold... I did not even have a toy in my childhood. There is a law in U.S. which prohibits the physical work of underage, and this is why I was unable to work until I was 14. I used to study in the school for poor people – “free schools”. The poverty made me a person. I was constantly reading the books, mostly scientific publications. My school is like your public school as long as curriculum is concerned. However there is big difference as well, for instance, there the school finances the whole excursion and school events. The library has huge amount of books, scientific material and stationary to which children have free access. Study process there begins at 7 in the morning and lasts until 3, but in-between the classes they have a lot of time to get lunch and restore energy. Here children do not even have time to have a pie because of the short breaks and this is why they are very tired during the final classes. Students here have indifferent attitude towards learning and teachers tell them to study; there students ask teachers to teach them more.

*After completing two courses in different colleges, 17 years old Robert continues his education at Corvallis University in the state of Oregon. Which is quite an expansive one and in overall his education costs him 20, 000 USD. He is studying, teaching and working simultaneously, which allows him to sleep only for 2-3 hours per night. Finally he has obtained his diploma and proudly presents it to us. This diploma allows Robert to teach youngster and provide them with perfect English language classes.*

As he completed one year course in Journalism at the university, he tried this profession as well. But as a realist he concluded soon that: “I could not live with this profession. Electronic media has almost totally expelled the printed one and I thought that this one would not be a long-term decision. Simultaneously I applied for many agencies and one day one of them contacted me about the teaching position in Georgia. I know geography well and knew Georgia well on the map. Because I was poor I overcame the fear of going overseas for a relatively long period of time. It was the first time in my life when I had to cross the borders of my country. My mother started crying at first but she supported me as well, since

she believes that I will be successful.” From San Francisco to Corvallis (Where I share a two-room apartment with two friends) there is 1,000 kilometers. It takes 16 hours by bus and costs 100 USD. My mother who came for seeing-off me did not have this amount to go back so I gave it to her. At first, when I entered Tbilisi with a bus I felt very scared. The driving was so unorganized that I was very concerned if I would have made it to the destination. Jugaani is a very quiet place and I like the relationships here very much. I have a lot of free time, which I usually don't and have been missing a lot. My hosts, Lia and Ramazi support me to live the way I want as well.

Regarding the study process, out of 30 students I can distinguish 10 of them, or less who listen to you, study and follow the instructions. Local teachers have very good knowledge of grammar, good culture of conducting the lessons, good vocabulary, but there are some problems in the pronunciation, and I think this gap will be filled out by us working here for a year.

A little while ago the President of Georgia visited our school. I thought of him as a warm person and his English was brilliant. Please make sure you write this, I am not the citizen of your country and I do not have any reasons to hypocrite. I did not think that the “wall of the police” was this good which made me understand that it was not good to go into that direction. But I understand that this was happening because of President's safety. Of course the same would have happened in U.S. with Barack Obama. But I hope you understand that normal citizens want to meet the presidents easily.

Robert Calica is very grateful to his host family, but he thinks that he has become “closer” to alcohol here and loves Saperavi a lot, but he has not yet got used to Georgian white wine.

He said that he will have a frequent communication through e-mails and phone with his host family, Kevkhishvilis once he leaves them and express his gratitude this way.

“And where are you going to go?” – is the question.

“I want to go to Korea, because as I know my grandmother from the Philippines. She passed away when my mother was still young. I will go and learn something about my people, study the Tagalong language. And I think that Chinese girl might be the best for me as a wife, maybe I can meet my fortune here” – he blushes, covers his face with hands and laughs, later he adds: “I understand that our conversation is going to the end. I want my last statement to be very good and sincere. I hope that my time spent here will be fruitful not only for the children of Jugaani School, but also for me. I believe that Georgia is becoming stronger with the relationship with my country, and even though some Georgians might not have jobs today, the future is very promising. The days spent in this lovely family, the road to the school, the school environment will always remain in my memories; and if I have a chance I will definitely come back in 5-6 years to visit you and ask – how are you Georgians? No matter what kind of life I have, good or bad, I will never forget one story called “Sakartvelo” (Georgia).”

**P. S.** after a second of silence, the English language teacher of the school of Jugaani, Misses Nana says:

- Rob, what am I going to do when you leave?

- This is what I am thinking too! – was the reply.