

Georgia, USSR Has Warm and Loving People

cont'd from preceding page

pitchers of juice appeared with the inevitable cucumbers and tomatoes. We had a choice of chicken or shashlik for the main course. The room started filling up mostly with young men. The musicians began and costumed dancers entertained us. After the show most of our family went back to the hotel to bed. Bill, Pam, Marcelle and I decided to stay awhile and watch the couples dancing. When Bill left for the men's room, one of the Georgian young men came over to ask Pam to dance. She was in a quandry but decided to dance with him. Big mistake. After the dance, he had no intention of letting her return to our table. It took all three of us to pry Pam loose. Finally, Bill returned to the table and apparently his male presence persuaded the Georgian to end his pursuit. We quickly left the club and walked briskly back to the safety of our hotel. A Georgian memory — the men are aggressive, persistent and chauvanistic. Beware!

The next day we toured the Georgian countryside in two cars with drivers, in a bus with a driver and three guides. We were told we could have the six prepaid guides should we desire them. Of course, Intourist knew we didn't need so many guides and would agree to let the extra three have a day off. We also didn't need two cars plus a bus. The bus would have been sufficient. This system of charging for extra guides and cars that aren't used works in the USSR because tourists are forced to use Intourist, as it is the only travel agency.

The best part of the tour was a stop at Mtskheta, a town in the countryside. The view was beautiful but when we returned to the cars we had a surprise. Our driver had parked under a mulberry tree and while we were gone had picked the berries for us. The mulberries were waiting atop newspapers on the hood of the car. They were large, ripe,



Eating mulberries picked fresh off the tree.

Photo/Patty Gorelick



Dancers in the supper club in Tbilisi.

Photo/Patty Gorelick

black, sweet and juicy — the best berries I have ever tasted. Although a few of the ladies in our group were afraid to partake, after one week with no fruit and hardly any vegetables, the rest of us gratefully stuffed ourselves with the rare fruit treat.

The mulberries were an inspiration to go to the Farmers Market in hopes of finding additional fruit for our group. Marcelle, Pam and I accompanied by a guide and disgruntled driver (he wanted to be through early) arrived at the crowded outdoor market. There were hundreds of stalls but we had to be quick because our driver was ready to leave. Our guide Lana told us to stay together. Obviously she knew about Georgian men. We found the pot of

gold — or rather cherries and apricots and Lana helped us negotiate the price. The vendors kept trying to put extra fruit on the scales and charge us more money but Lana finally managed to get us what we wanted. She also helped us purchase extra plastic bags so we could divide the goodies and everyone could have their own cache.

Back in the hotel lobby I gave Lana pantyhose, lipstick and money for being so helpful. She told me she wasn't good enough and didn't deserve it and promised to work on her English for the next American tourists.

We had just enough time to return to our rooms and get



Touliori Restaurant. Our bus driver Stass serving us shashlik.

Photo/Dana Gorelick

ready for dinner. The hotel suggested that we walk to the restaurant but fortunately Stass, our bus driver, agreed to take us. On the way, he stopped and we bought wine for dinner, giving a bottle to Stass. He immediately became our best friend. Upon arriving at the restaurant, Stass went into the back and emerged with the owner/cook who seated us personally. The food then came pouring forth with Stass carrying the lead platters to the table. There were the usual cold appetizers with cucumbers and tomatoes, but also different Georgian dishes we had not sampled before. Pita bread was part of this meal along with enough food for at least 30 people. American music was turned on and Stass asked who wanted shashlik. "No, no," we

replied, there was already too much. But there was no stopping it — out came the shashlik. We tried to give our leftovers to the four young Georgian men at another table but they couldn't finish their own food. Pictures were taken with the "swords" of shashlik and Stass, our driver/waiter. The owner came to say good-bye and we departed the Touliori Restaurant. On the way back Stass stopped and bought us a bottle of champagne. At the hotel we gave Stass pantyhose and lipstick for his wife and money, wine and cigarettes for himself. We would be departing in the morning for our next destination — Riga, Latvia, but I knew we would always remember the warm and loving people of Georgia.

— to be continued —

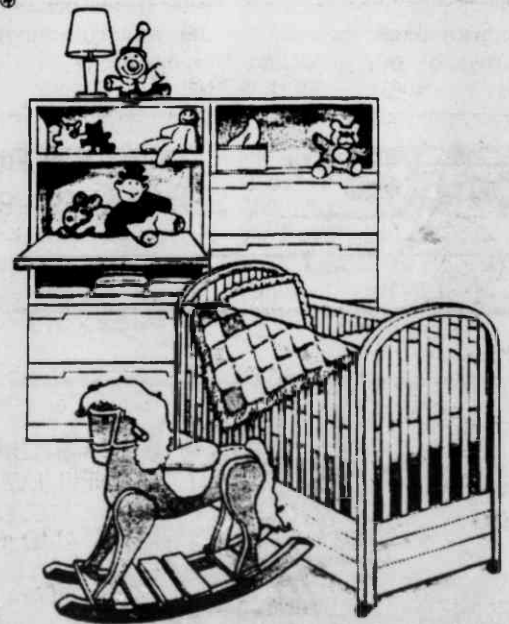


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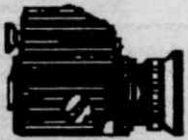


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