Interview with Rusudan Galdava, Georgian Language Teacher at the "Roots" Cultural Center

By Maia Araviashvili

March 24, 2023 | New York, United States

Interviewer: Today, our guest is Ms. Rusudan Galdava. Please tell us a bit about yourself — when and where were you born? Some biographical background:

Respondent: I was born in the city of Kutaisi in 1953, into the family of a military officer. My mother did not work. I graduated from Public School No. 32 in Kutaisi and then continued my studies at Akaki Tsereteli University, majoring in History and Philology. After that, I got married and moved to the city of Sokhumi. I worked in a kindergarten there — it was Port Kindergarten No. 9 — where I was a teacher. I had two sons. Due to the well-known events [i.e., the war in Abkhazia], I left Sokhumi and moved to Tbilisi. I started working at Kindergarten No. 66, which was part of the Aviation Factory — first as a teacher, then as a methodologist. Later, I worked as the Vice Principal for Academic Affairs at schools No. 83 and No. 152. After that, my life changed completely.

My sister-in-law moved to the United States, and later she invited my husband to visit her on a tourist visa. He spent six months here — and then he stayed.

Interviewer: What year was that, Ms. Rusudan? In which year did your sister-in-law leave, and in which year did your husband follow?

Respondent: I don't remember the exact year, but I believe my sister-in-law came in 1997, and my husband came in 2003 on a tourist visa. At that time, we were going through the civil war in Georgia. He applied for political asylum here, which was granted, and later he brought me and our younger son through the family reunification program. Our younger son, who was 21 at the time, actually came before me. Our older son stayed in Georgia.

I arrived in a foreign country, but to be honest, I didn't feel like a stranger. My husband was already here, along with my son, my brother, my sister-in-law, my husband's sister, and her child. A kind of family environment had already been created — they were waiting for me, expecting me to arrive.

In Bay Ridge, one of New York's neighborhoods, a kindergarten was opened — the administrators were Ukrainian, and they already knew I was coming. I had 18 years of experience working in kindergartens, so they invited me to work there, and I did well. I worked for a year, but then I had to leave because I needed health insurance. The kindergarten didn't offer a package big enough to cover insurance, so I left. It was around that time that I received an unexpected offer: a Georgian Cultural Center called "Roots" was being established, and they invited me to become a Georgian language teacher.

It was truly amazing — something I never expected. When I left Georgia after so many years of working, I packed up my books, sat down, and cried over leaving my profession behind. And suddenly, in America, I was being offered a chance to teach — to teach our own children, no less! I arrived in 2007, and by 2008, I started working at "Roots." Since then, I've been teaching Georgian language and literature there.

But my work in the U.S. has become incredibly diverse. Honestly, I don't know if all of this would have happened had I stayed in Georgia. I had my professional experience, of course, but everything was turned upside down when I arrived here. I had to adapt, because the children here are born in the U.S. and make very specific pronunciation mistakes. There were no textbooks suitable for Sunday schools abroad. The diaspora itself wasn't well-formed or united at the time.

I worked on everything — and, by the way, my efforts didn't go unnoticed by the Georgian government. I was invited back to Georgia several times to receive awards. It's a very special feeling — to live outside your homeland but still be remembered by it. That means a great deal to an emigrant, and I've had the good fortune to experience it.

People often talk about how difficult emigration is — feeling like a stranger, facing something totally new. But I didn't go through that. As I mentioned earlier, I had family here, I was doing the work I loved, and that made me happy.

In 2020, it was the idea of Irine Jgerenaya, the principal of Public School No. 17 in Kutaisi, together with Father Luka Palavandishvili, the head priest of Saint Anthimos the Iberian Church

in Barcelona, and Marina Tsikoradze, a teacher at the Georgian Sunday School named after Saint Nino, which is affiliated with the same church, to establish an International Association of Teachers. I was also invited to join.

Since I frequently traveled to Georgia for various meetings and personally knew Sunday school teachers from nearly every country, we came together to create the *International Association of Teachers*. Irine Jgerenaya became the president, and I am honored to serve as the vice president.

Imagine — our first meeting took place in August 2020. It was attended by 64 teachers, as well as representatives from the Department of Diaspora, including our dear Aliona Chkhotua and Varden Nikabadze. Very respectable individuals participated, alongside teachers from all over the world. Since then, the association has grown significantly — many new schools have joined, and new ones have been established as well.

Just picture it — Sunday school teachers from different countries meeting each other. It was an incredible joy. The first meeting lasted six or seven hours. We didn't even notice the time pass. That day was filled with joy, longing, discovery, and a sense of embracing the homeland — maybe all of it at once.

Interviewer: And where did this meeting take place? Sorry to interrupt you.

Interviewee: It was on Zoom — the first meeting was held via Zoom, and the next one was led by Varden Nikabadze, who spoke about the challenges of modern teaching methods.

Later, something wonderful happened (smiles) — we celebrated World Teachers' Day, October 5th, virtually via Zoom as well. We gathered in our respective consulates and celebrated that way. Some of the women even cried! (smiles)

And you know, there are teachers in many countries who have gone abroad to treat their own health issues — and with their own personal funds, they've managed to organize schools. Completely voluntarily. They go out and look for children, gathering them little by little.

In Antwerp, Belgium, we have Manana Khorbaladze. In the beginning, when children came to church, she would use tongue twisters (ენის გასაჭეხი) to warm them up and then teach them to read and write. They didn't even have a proper room or space to use — but slowly, everything came together.

By the way, churches played a huge role in this process. They really supported the creation of Sunday schools.

Interviewer: In what ways did the churches support these efforts? For example, did they provide space or help with resources? In what form did that support come?

Respondent: Yes, yes — when there were no liturgies or church services, they would allocate a room within the church for us.

Now, in Canada, a plot of land was purchased, and a church was built on it. A Sunday school was opened right there as well. The same thing happened in France. What truly surprised me was the fact that in both Canada and France, Romanian Christians helped with the church construction — completely voluntarily. Young men would come after work and contribute their labor with great dedication.

Before we had our own church in France, Romanian believers would allow our Georgian priests to conduct Easter services in their churches, saying, "Go ahead, hold your Georgian service here." That gesture was so unexpected for me — the love and generosity of the Romanian people toward Georgians. I didn't know much about that before.

During the New Year season, we carried out a project called *"Christmas Traditions of the Countries We Live In."* We held the meeting again via Zoom (smiles). By that time, schools from Georgia had also joined us. Kutaisi Public School No. 17, which is a very strong school, participated. They traveled to Variani, to the house-museum of Iakob Gogebashvili, and joined the Zoom session from there.

We, from the U.S., also joined — we showed how we decorate the Christmas tree here, and where the tradition comes from. The project turned out to be so interesting, and so many schools participated, that we ended up holding a two-day event lasting several hours each day.

Our association's president is also the author of new projects, and it was her idea to create an artistic-documentary film about Georgian Sunday schools abroad. We invited director Nikoloz Khomasuridze — the same director who made the film about Ekvtime Takaishvili.

He accepted our invitation and first came to the United States. They filmed at *"Roots"* (Pesvebi), then went to New Jersey where we have another Sunday school, and after that, to Philadelphia. Our Metropolitan Bishop Saba Intskirveli serves there. In total, the film covers 12 Sunday schools across Europe and the United States. According to the director, the premiere is scheduled for around May — both in Georgia and in the countries featured in the film.

The film showcases our children in their everyday lives — there's dancing, Georgian language lessons, and scenes of children doing activities with their parents. It was a very interesting and meaningful project.

The crown jewel of our two years of work is the textbook *"Sagzali"* (საგზალი - meaning travel supplies/food for the road), which we created based on the Gospel. It is designed to unify the roles of family, school, and church. The very first word we teach is *"Jesus"*, and then we proceed gradually from there.

The book is beautifully illustrated in calligraphy — every single letter is artistically designed. The author is Marina Tsikoradze, a teacher at the Saint Nino Georgian Sunday School in Barcelona. I would also like to mention that Ms. Marina held free year-round calligraphy classes for the children of *"Roots"* in New York —from Barcelona.

The book was published with the blessing and prayers of Metropolitan Ioane of Kutaisi and Gaenati, and His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia.

As you can see (shows the book), the next lesson is about the family, and it includes an icon of the Holy Family of Mary. Our children receive Holy Communion and know what an icon is — that it represents young Mary and her parents, Anna and Joachim.

The Patriarchate's publishing house printed the book for us free of charge. The parents brought the copies to me, and this is the book I now use to teach.

Interviewer:

So, as part of this association, you collaborated with the Patriarchate — you teachers probably worked on the content, and the Patriarchate took responsibility for publishing it?

Respondent: Yes, yes — it's essential to consult with the bishop to ensure that every word is used correctly, especially since the book includes excerpts from the Gospels. We introduce all four Evangelists in a very simple way so the children can remember their names.

It's easy to remember names like Giorgi, Nikoloz, Andria, or Mate. But names like Mark — to be honest — are rarely encountered these days.

Every year, we have around 100 to 120 children at *"Pesvebi"* (Roots), and these children

participate with me in the projects of the Teachers' International Association. The directors of our cultural center are Ivane Goderdzishvili and Shorena Barbakadze. At every meeting, I always ask them to attend the sessions so people can get to know them, but they always reply that my presence there is enough. They are very humble individuals and don't like to be in the spotlight.

Through the Teachers' International Association, we became involved in the London International Scientific Conference. It was a truly fascinating conference, focused on the history of Georgia and world history in general. We started working on this project in 2020, and so far, nine conferences have already been held, with the tenth scheduled for the end of May.

Just imagine how important it is for children born abroad to learn about the history of Georgia. Let me briefly share some of the topics from these conferences:

1. The legacy of Phaistos – the Phaistos Disc
2. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's theory of race, based on "The Skull of My Beautiful Georgian Woman"
3. Early humans and Georgia
4. The coming of Christianity and its historical context
5. Shota Rustaveli and the universal values in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*
6. Georgia as the cradle of cattle breeding (მესაქონლეობა) and agriculture– here we also discussed Georgian beekeeping.

Let me digress a little: here in Pennsylvania, we have a piece of land and keep bees — mostly Italian, but we also have Georgian bees (smiles). Italian bees are very hardworking, but our Georgian bees have longer proboscises and produce more honey. The children became very interested in this topic. While we were working on it, our Shorena choreographed a "bee dance" with the kids!

Our children also get to know successful Georgians living and working in the United States.

These projects were funded by the Rustaveli Society, and a documentary film is being produced — it will be uploaded on YouTube. Then we had a very interesting topic, "Dance in Archaeology." Now, on the 26th, we have the next conference: "The History of Pharmacology." We covered both Georgian pharmacology and the pharmaceutical traditions of other countries — from *karabadini* (traditional Georgian medical books) to modern American pharmaceutical companies. The

following topic will be the history of Georgian art, and the final, tenth topic will focus on the histories of Kakheti and New York.

This time, I involved the parents and offered them the opportunity to choose which places in New York they would like to explore. It turned out many were interested in the Metropolitan Opera, museums, and various neighborhoods. We'll see which topic gets the most votes — that's what we'll work on. The project concludes in May, and the children who participated in the conference series will be invited to Georgia and awarded medals and certificates.

Children who participated in all ten conferences will receive medals, while those who joined even just two will receive certificates. The truth is, we began this project back in 2020 — the children are growing up and entering college, so their efforts must be appreciated.

The author of this conference series idea is Mrs. Liana Jikia-Gogrichiani, head of the Georgian Sunday School in London, a school that has twice won the Golden Orsen Award. It's an exceptionally strong school with equally strong teachers.

I also want to mention something I appreciate about America: I really admire the fact that if a child wants to study — no matter what the field — they have the opportunity to pursue what truly interests them: architecture, art, dance, music, and so on.

Right now, there are many successful young Georgians in America. The diaspora has grown, strengthened, stabilized — several new cultural centers have opened. We support one another. There is the *Dancing Crane Company*, run by Lika and Viktor Sirelsons, and our Tsutsa Kapanadze works there.

There is also *Irina's Dance Academy*. We host joint events and collaborate closely. On April 14, we are organizing an evening dedicated to "Mother Language Day," and representatives from our consulate will attend. For now, we only have an acting consul, but he is a wonderful person, and we will be honored to host him.

Everything I've just listed — all of it together brought me so much joy, I felt like I had wings. One woman even wrote to me, saying, "You seemed so happy, I envied you."

But unfortunately, my oldest son, who had survived several wars — starting with Iraq — passed away here. He left, and it was as though he took my life with him. Life lost all meaning. I didn't even think about returning to work — I couldn't imagine it. But the parents and the children kept coming to my house, saying, "Please, don't leave us." That's how the lessons continued.

Then there were three conferences left. The children had been preparing and studying for the third year already. We used to meet on Zoom, study together, research materials, work on them, and present everything at the conferences. I felt so sorry for all the work the children had done — I couldn't just let it go — so I agreed to continue working.

In short, I had a happy, fulfilling life here, full of joy and interesting experiences. But now everything has lost its meaning.

At the moment, I've joined a continuous prayer group — these are 24-hour prayer circles, where Psalms are read constantly. Georgians from many countries are part of it: Georgia, Austria, Germany, Israel, America, Belgium — in short, people from many different places are involved.

Interviewer:

You initially came to New York, right? And most likely the reason was that your family members were already here?

Respondent:

Yes, yes, I never even considered moving to another state. My sister-in-law moved to Miami and invited us to join her, but I've embraced this state so deeply that I couldn't live anywhere else.

Two years ago, my husband and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary, and the Democratic Party hosted a lovely reception for us and awarded us with a commemorative certificate. We're trying our best to adapt to this country. This state expects you to be law-abiding and decent, and in return, it doesn't restrict you — you can work, study, buy a house, land — do everything within the boundaries of the law. That's something to be appreciated. It should be like that in every country — the rule of law should prevail everywhere.

Interviewer:

Aside from having close relatives here, what was the main reason you decided to come to America? What was the primary factor in that decision?

Respondent:

As I mentioned earlier, it was the 1990s — life in Georgia was very difficult. There were constant power outages, cold, and unemployment. Then, my husband came here and didn't plan to return. If I hadn't come, I would've lost my family — so I came, and I kept the family together. If you ask whether I wanted to leave my homeland or dreamed of moving to America — not at all. I

spoke French well and was asked in Kutaisi to transfer from the Georgian language department to the foreign languages department. If I had gone anywhere, I had hoped to see France — that was all. I never even dreamed of America.

Still, with age, I've started to feel nostalgia — a deep sense of longing. Maybe it's what they call the "call of the land," I don't know. We have a house in Tbilisi.

Interviewer:

Have you thought about returning — either now or sometime in the future? Do you have plans to go back to your homeland?

Respondent:

Yes… yes, as soon as we were about to retire, we wanted to return. Now, though, we've buried our child here. If we do leave, we will definitely arrange for the reburial, but he has three children — all of them are here. I don't know if they'll ever go back or not. All of this is so emotionally overwhelming, so new, so hard to comprehend. Everything used to be well-organized, stable. But now… Lately, I've been obsessed with Akaki Tsereteli's words: *"But for how long will this world bring joy to anyone?"*

All my life, I never thought about these words, but for the past month — or maybe three weeks — they've been echoing in my head. A mother's heart senses everything, and I felt something terrible was coming. It's like I knew something was about to happen. *(Silence)*

Interviewer:

You've been through a very heavy, painful experience.

Respondent:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Looking back and comparing life in Georgia and the U.S., how different are they? What were your expectations before you came, and did reality match them? You said earlier that you didn't really face many challenges here and didn't even feel like a foreigner. But if you think back to that initial period, when you first arrived — those early challenges and experiences — what do you remember?

Respondent:

Right now, we live in Varketili. In our neighborhood, five veterans have moved in with their caregivers. They really enjoy our traditions. In the evenings, they gather in the courtyard, everyone brings a dish, something to drink, they chat, play backgammon, and enjoy themselves. Our foreign friends really love this part of our culture.

As a young country, America strives to establish good traditions. Maybe that's why they bring in immigrants from different countries — to observe their national characteristics. Today, it's easier to survive in America. You have everything you need, but somehow, it doesn't feel like it's truly yours. It lacks the sweetness — the feeling of home. That deep, familiar sweetness. And over the years, you may start to feel like a guest rather than a resident.

Still, we've created our own little Georgia here, in Brooklyn. My husband is what you might call the "super" of our building. He's brought in nine Georgian families to live here, and there's a lot of visiting, helping each other, sharing whatever someone might need.

We brought grapevine seedlings from Georgia and planted them in our backyard. We've created a little garden — our own fruit trees are blooming there. We planted Georgian cucumbers and tomatoes in large buckets. Some neighbors prune the vines, others water the plants — and that's how we live. My cousin just sent me cucumber seeds — we first planted them in cups, they've sprouted now, and we'll soon transfer them to the yard. So whatever we miss from our homeland, we try to recreate it here.

I'm sure everyone brings something personal with them. That's what makes America special — it's so diverse, multiethnic. It gives everyone the opportunity to preserve and develop their own culture, cuisine, and traditions. It values identity and individuality. The most important thing here is that people are fed and not hungry.

Still, I want to say that the Georgian diaspora has grown significantly here. If in the past you'd rarely hear someone speaking Georgian, now it's everywhere — on every street corner. You no longer feel like you're in a foreign country.

America is a gracious host. I haven't seen this kind of welcome in European countries. They say Scandinavian countries offer good conditions for immigrants. Recently, things have improved for our people in Italy, and that's largely thanks to our young footballer — 23-year-old Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. This one young man managed to build a bridge of friendship between our two nations.

But I believe that, despite being a young country, America is a truly strong democracy. Everything here is governed by law. You don't need to rely on relatives or connections to prove you're right *(laughs)*. Everything here is done according to the law.

Interviewer:

How do you maintain connections with Georgia? You mentioned that you go to Georgia occasionally. How often do you visit, and aside from that, whom do you communicate with there and how frequently? Also, how do you maintain your Georgian identity here, beyond the work you do, which is directly related to this issue?

Respondent:

Well, you know, we have relatives there — cousins. I also have my students, around 200 children, many of whom are now married and have their own children. I keep in touch with them through Facebook, and we maintain regular contact with Georgia. As for the environment of "roots," you know when you enter and feel like you've stepped into a small piece of Georgia. When a child from Georgia comes here, they stop speaking English because at school, they're taught in English. I tell my students, "Yes, you speak English at school, but don't forget your native language. Speak Georgian at home." I also ask their parents to speak Georgian at home. I have a student who is 12 years old and has never been to Georgia. She was asking me, "Why is the mother tongue so important?" I tell her that it's because your parents are from there. Our main homeland is there, where your grandparents were born. I asked her, "Do you have grandparents?" and she said, "I don't know." Thanks to God, it's a rare situation for a child to not know their grandparents, but many are trying to preserve it.

Many of our graduates have gotten married, have children, bought houses, and they invite each other over. The community is gradually growing, and it's becoming like one whole organism. For example, at my son's memorial, people came from New Jersey and Philadelphia. It was a typical thing for them, but a French-origin family was there, and the man was watching and said, "I've never seen such solidarity in New York. Who are you people?" Well, of course, many people know me, my students have moved to New Jersey, and there's recognition. But the solidarity itself was amazing, and many were surprised. At the cemetery, there was no parking space because there were so many cars, and local people were astonished. You know, we are a small nation, and to see

that kind of solidarity — they couldn't believe it. Someone told me, "I've never seen this level of solidarity in New York." And this kind of thing, it probably stays with us. If we don't instill this in our children, we have it, but our children and grandchildren might not. That's why we need to try our best.

Now, in July, our group will have a big solo concert at the Philharmonic. In 2015, when the flood happened, they went to Georgia to do a charity concert, "Roots," and held two charity concerts in Tbilisi and Batumi to support the victims. Many people came to Georgia for the first time then. The following year, many of them went again. Now, in January, they start buying tickets — as soon as exams are over, they plan to go, and it's happening in large numbers. Sometimes the parents can't go, maybe because they're working, but they send their children. Now they have a group and are planning to take children aged 8 and up — four or five kids at a time. "I'm taking my two," they say *(laughs)*. Of course, this is all arranged officially, with permission slips and everything, but in any case, that's what's happening now.

Interviewer:

So, they are trying to help each other, right? In what other ways do they support one another? You mentioned that your husband basically settled the entire building with Georgians. What other forms of support do they offer? Is there a systemic approach, or is it more personal connections? How is this process developing and unfolding?

Respondent:

No, no, there are groups now, you know… we have a group of emigrants in America… Mzia Tsulukidze... earlier, money was often collected, and I asked for the help to one of my students, and Mzia Tsulukidze helped raise the money. We sent it, and she went to Turkey, did tests, they prescribed treatment, chemotherapy. They told her she had one or two months to live, but she's still alive after four years. I tell them, "This child knows she might die, but we try to do what we can." But gathering thousands and sending them suddenly, you understand what I mean. Then, Giorgi Nikoleishvili also has a group, and we helped a girl live for six more years. She had leukemia, and with Giorgi's help, we kept her alive for six years. Niko Chkheidze also has a community. We had COVID in our family—my husband, my daughter-in-law, the children, and I. Five of us were together, and we had COVID at the same time. At that time, my neighbor Eka, who is Niko's wife, brought us hot food through the window. Our consul, Mrs. Diana, helped us.

There’s individual help, and of course, group help. When the crisis center was set up, it was an extremely valuable and correct decision. Many people survived because of it. When COVID started and the crisis center was created, we initially sent money from here to Italy, and there were volunteers who bought medicine, rented apartments, because some employers were dismissing Georgian emigrants from their jobs and leaving them out on the street, they were scared and needed food, medicine, housing, and jobs. Then, it started in France, then Germany, and there was a miracle in America. We helped each other. Milena, a girl, was going to pharmacies with her own money, buying food and medicine, and delivering it to people with COVID. A lot of people appeared, and somehow, this hardship brought us closer together. Now, there are Georgian doctors at the Gonenrend Hospital. For example, Giga Adeishvili, a gynecologist, is the reason I’m alive today and talking to you. There’s Ia, a unique girl, and Aleko Thoreli, a cardiologist. They are like the “masters” of the Georgians there, and if anyone has a baby in Brooklyn, it’s usually Giga Adeishvili who helps. I don’t know, I’m not a conflict person myself. I’m a teacher, I’ve worked with children my whole life, and I can’t be in conflict. I probably don’t have those kinds of relationships with people, I don’t know. But everyone I’ve met, with whom I’m friends or close to, they are all helpful to one another. If you need something, it’s not like you’re left without help. I don’t know if this happens in Europe, but I think it’s a little less there. However, emigration is growing in Europe too, and I keep thinking about how many of us there are. We’ve been in so many places now—there’s even a Georgian school in Indonesia with nine children. My teacher, Diana, is there now, she used to teach at my school. Amazing things are happening.

Interviewer:

From this perspective, if you could make the decision again, would you have moved to America to live?

Respondent:

Ah... now?... I don’t know, I don’t think so. If I were in Georgia now, I would still be working at school, quite successfully, I had a private practice, I was preparing students for exams. By the way, I have prepared many students, including my colleagues’ children, and I’ve never taken money from them (smiles). One girl came to me once—we were at the city hall in New York, and she said, "Do you remember me? You’re Rusudan, right, my teacher?" I said, "You look familiar..." At that moment, our consul was there, and there were very serious people invited, including

doctors. And she asked if she could speak to the audience (she addressed the audience and said to Mrs. Rusudan). She remembered that in the 90s, I had taught her, she had come from another school, and then she stopped coming, and I called her to ask why she wasn't coming. She said, "We invested in business, lost everything in the 90s, lost our apartment, car, dacha, and now we live in a rented place, we can't afford to travel or prepare." But this girl was incredibly talented, and I told her, "What are you talking about? The entrance exams are coming soon!" And, of course, I prepared her, and she got into university for free. She was such a gifted girl, and now she lives in New Jersey with her family. She came to America, and she said, "You completely changed my perception of people, and you changed my life." What more happiness can there be than that? You might have wealth today, but it can be gone tomorrow, and relationships are the most important thing. I also used to teach at church, at the Church of the Virgin Mary here. I taught there for three years. Of course, the parents told me they would pay me, but I told them, "I come to teach Georgian to children born here, I don't take money for that." It's just not in me. When my son passed away, one of my students, not a child but already an adult, came to the funeral and gave me some Sefiskveri (სეფისკვერი - bread used for the Divine Liturgy) and told me, "Eat this so you don't get hungry, so you don't feel bad." I felt so touched—at a funeral, he came up to me, barely able to walk, and gave me that bread. I felt warmth in my heart. Those words stuck with me, and I thought about them all day. That child's kindness made me feel better despite everything I was going through. The next Saturday, on the Day of the Dead, I took a cross to the church, and the deacon blessed it and gave it back to me saying, "Take this, carry it." I thought, "Here, it's more valued in emigration, maybe in Georgia, it wouldn't have the same meaning, but here, it holds more value." You realize that people should be appreciated, respected, and honored in life—not just after. That's what matters. I told my children, "You have to appreciate what you have, while you have it." There's nothing more important than that. I don't get involved in political arguments; it means nothing to me. Appreciate what you have, thank God that you're happy, and that's enough.

Interviewer:

Thank you so much, Ms. Rusudan, for such a sincere and interesting interview...