



"You know Georgian people are very religious. Very. So if they lose this hope for a good future, they will lose their faith in God."

--Irena Sarishvili

There are times when, no matter how hard you try, putting words down on paper will never do a story justice.

We were two naive journalism students hoping to find a couple good stories in the Soviet Union. We'd read about what had happened in Georgia. We thought we'd be lucky if we could get people to talk about the situation at all.

Nothing could have prepared us for our four days in Tbilisi. We had no idea how proud these people were of their "country," or how that pride had eventually caused them so much pain.

It seems hard to imagine seeing a grown man cry, just because you told him his country was beautiful. Or a group of complete strangers toasting you -- the Americans -- in a small, rural restaurant. Or college students who believe so strongly in democracy that they're willing to put their futures -- and their lives -- on the line.

Perhaps the hardest thing to understand in Tbilisi was why, in the shadow of such a powerful government, would so many people fight so adamantly for a day that, most likely, will never come. It strikes an unnatural chord of patriotism to think that democracy could mean so much in the eyes

of people who do not take it for granted. It's been months now since we left Tbilisi. Occasionally, we'll read small blurbs in major newspapers mentioning violence in the area between the Soviet military and small groups of Georgian nationalists. For the most part, however, all has been quiet.

Still, you can't help but wonder.

We made friends in Georgia. They opened their lives to us, their sorrow and their hope, asking only for understanding in return. We left them to their problems, and came back with a new understanding of how important freedom is.

We wonder how the Soviet government will deal with the nationality question in Georgia. We fear for the lives of the friends we left behind. We have no way of knowing how many of them are doing, or if what little we hear is true about their situation.

They had hoped we would tell their stories so that others could understand. We did so, with the constant memories of all they had given us. Though they never will read what is printed here, we need to say thank you (gmatlobi) and add that our thoughts are with them.

-- Lee Rood and Amy Edwards