

Profiles of the Rose Revolution | Internal White House Wire

It's cold today and the six or seven people crammed into the small office is testament. Crowded around the small gas heater in the corner, they chat about the latest comings and goings in their sharp, plucking Georgian while anxiously waiting for the power to return. I am nonplussed, sitting at my desk and drumming the table impatiently; I have work to do that requires the computer, and it can't wait. Bundled in my Carhartt coat, and despite the groan of the tired gas heater not five feet away, my breath comes out in small white plumes. Welcome to the town of Borjomi, Georgia on a late autumn morning.

My counterpart, Marina Kupatadze, is seated across the room from me at her desk, flipping through an enormous binder sitting on her lap. On the spine I can make out the Georgian, indicating that she's reviewing old financial statements of our organization - the Samtskhe-Djavakheti Media Development Center. Marina, 44, is the day-to-day manager of the NGO and the passion behind the project; though old enough to have seen some of the best and worst of the USSR's influence on Georgia, she's part of a class of Georgians who refused to watch their country crumble beneath the oppressive weight of corruption, conflict, and statism that characterized the 1990s. A journalist by profession, Marina uses the power of mass media to help propel the wave of reforms spearheaded by the government and the third sector.

Of course, any discussion about reform in Georgia inevitably segues into the infamous 2002 Rose Revolution, a bloodless coup that toppled anti-democratic forces and gave way to the ambitious transformation program that one could say has performed nothing short of a miracle. From the now highly-touted business climate to the stratospheric annual growth, the energy here is palpable.

"The country is much more beautiful," Marina tells me while considering the changes since the Revolution, "and while the electricity situation is far from perfect" - her hand gestures the unblinking power strip on the floor - "it's remarkably better."

Many Georgians I meet are keen to first point out the problems that remains, a practice I try to discourage, but when asked about the positive, they are generally unrelenting when reciting the litany of improvements. A relatively new Peace Corps Volunteer myself, I even find myself gushing over the rapid change that has occurred in Georgia - and not just in Tbilisi - since I arrived in mid-June.

Marina's children - Giorgi, 19, and Keti, 17 - are both students in some of Georgia's most highly reputed universities - the Caucasus School of Business and the Georgian-American University, respectively. "The quality and availability of education today is leaps and bounds ahead of what we had before," opines Marina, her face awash with pride, "Today, Giorgi has a government-sponsored scholarship, something that used to never be possible."

So much positive change built upon the foundation laid by the Rose Revolution, itself a stunning example of positive precedent. "Imagine," she challenges, "such great change prompted not by men with guns but normal people with flowers - roses!" Marina's eyes widen and get that faraway look; "I was very tense and nervous, we all were. But beneath that was a hope, and excitement, that still continues today."

It's not a stretch to say people like Marina are the natural outgrowth of the Rose Revolution's idyllic spirit. I see her hunched over a cluttered desk, piled with ecological posters, grant applications, project designs, and sticky-notes scribbled with the latest ideas. One hand is thumbing through a booklet about ecotourism and the other holding a phone to her ear; it's clear that because of people like Marina, Georgia isn't finished with its surprises or miracles. The Revolution never ended - it's only really just begun.