



Georgia *on my mind*

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Fellow trainers (from L to R) Susannah Ross (radio production), Hazel Slavin (WerkShoppen Commandant) and Nicci Crowther (video production).

Back in Tbilisi—aka Khatchapurivili

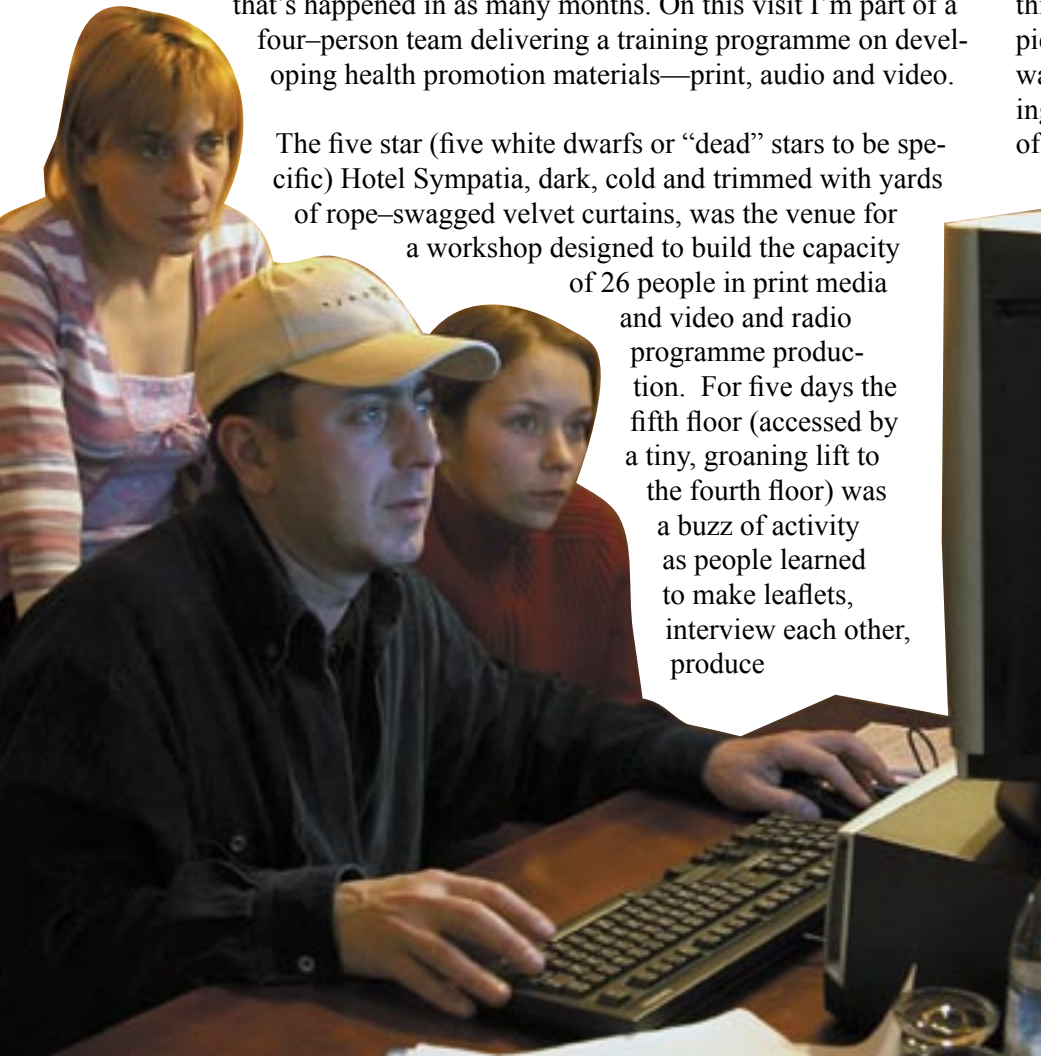
The other day I woke up in Tbilisi, Georgia... again. The third time that's happened in as many months. On this visit I'm part of a four-person team delivering a training programme on developing health promotion materials—print, audio and video.

The five star (five white dwarfs or “dead” stars to be specific) Hotel Sympatia, dark, cold and trimmed with yards of rope—swagged velvet curtains, was the venue for a workshop designed to build the capacity of 26 people in print media and video and radio programme production. For five days the fifth floor (accessed by a tiny, groaning lift to the fourth floor) was a buzz of activity as people learned to make leaflets, interview each other, produce

storyboards and video of, amongst other things, the cutting of a pizza into four pieces. The highlight of the workshop was seeing a group of participants blowing up condoms on the rooftop balcony of the hotel.

The material produced was targeted at injecting drug users with messages about not sharing syringes and needles and at university students with messages about safe sex. The success of the workshop was measured by group productions of three short videos, four radio spots, six leaflets and three posters and an enormous amount of enthusiasm.

The workshop exposed participants to health promotion theory, target group selection, message development guidelines and pretesting guidelines. Eleven participants who opted to follow the print stream were given a crash course in Adobe InDesign. Assistance was provided by local InDesign Maestro, Mr Amoo (at the keyboard, left).



A walk through Old Tbilisi

Old Tbilisi is different...different from everything you have seen before.



The "new" Jewish synagogue in Old Tbilisi.

It is neither a typical ex-Soviet capital, nor a centre of the Orient, nor a standard example for the Christian Orthodox world, although it has elements of all of them. It's the contradictions and ambiguities which, in my view, make Tbilisi so special—a unique mix of ancient cultures and religions.

As a result of being an important station on the ancient Silk Road, Old Tbilisi includes Turkish, Jewish, Armenian, Greek and Georgian

quarters on both sides of the Kura River. Fortunately, in spite of its cultural diversity, Old Tbilisi was never troubled by ethnically or religiously motivated violence.

Old Tbilisi is overlooked by the ancient Metechi church sitting on a rock on the left side of the river. Metechi church is one of Georgia's most famous churches and typical of classic Georgian Orthodox architecture. In the same area old houses on a cliff above the

riverside have been restored, their wooden balconies leaning far over Kura river.

Cross the river and you will find Tbilisi's oldest settlement. Opposite the Metechi Bridge are the ancient Turkish sulphur baths, which are still in use.

The square next to the baths is surrounded by restored blue, white and yellow houses, a turquoise arch and an old mosque in the background. This could be a scene in Istanbul, Damas-



Restored houses with traditional wooden balconies overlooking the Kura river.



A view of Old Tbilisi from the Narikala Fortress—the best place to enjoy a fabulous view of the whole city.

cus or Samarkand but probably not what one had expected from an ex-Soviet capital.

Gorgassali Square, near the Turkish baths, is where all of Tbilisi's cultures meet at one point. The synagogue, Jewish houses, shops and restaurants are just a few



Metechi church in the foreground overlooks Old Tbilisi across the Kura River.

steps away, so is the Armenian Byzantine church, and so too is Zioni Cathedral, the centre of Georgian Orthodoxy and seat of the Patriarch.

Above Old Tbilisi and Kala district, the ruins of 5th century Narikala Fortress are the best place to enjoy a fabulous view of the whole city. In the middle of the castle, Narikala chapel has been restored and is now Tbilisi's favourite wedding church. The scene is only spoiled a bit by the monstrous statue of Kartlis Deda, the Mother of Georgia, which was erected on top of the mountain in Stalinist times.

Unfortunately, some areas of Old Tbilisi suffered badly from neglect and decay under Soviet rule, but restoration work is underway in many places.

Public opinion split over events in Georgia

After a year of optimism in 2004 Georgian public opinion has shifted recently with more people thinking the country is heading in the wrong direction a recent poll indicates.

Belief that the country is heading in the right direction peaked in December 2003 at 68 percent but has now fallen to only 31 percent. Conversely, while in December 2003 and for most of 2004 only fourteen percent of respondents believed the country was going in the wrong direction, 39 percent now believe the country is moving in the wrong direction.

While numbers are nowhere as dramatic as they were two months before the Rose Revolution when 84 percent considered the country was heading the wrong way, the contrast between optimism in 2004 and increasing pessimism in 2005 is alarming.

But elsewhere the survey indicates more people agree that Georgia is better off after the revolution than disagree. Asked if they would like to return to the pre-revolutionary period, only 8 percent said they would while a resounding 72 percent said they would not return.

Gori—home of Georgia’s “Local Hero”

“Velcom to Gori. You vill not leave for very long time. Da! Enjoy your stay.”



GoMM correspondent Hazel Slavin reports from the garden city of Gori

Gori, the birthplace on 9 December 1879 of Baby Djugashvili, better known as Uncle Joe Stalin, who penetrated the Gulag market by issuing franchises across Si-



Stalin’s one-room birthplace covered by a marble pavilion.

beria, is a place to fight your way out of as fast as possible.

The one-room house in which Stalin was born is preserved in an open-sided marble pavilion and the Museum is a giant Italianate building complete with

Pardon me boy, is that the Kamchatka Choo-Choo? Stalin’s train is on display at Gori’s Stalin Museum.



campanile. Inside, in the dark and cold (very, very cold) museum, the hundreds of carefully air-brushed pictures of Gori’s “Local Hero” show him as baby, child, student and revolutionary, surrounded by other luminaries such as V.I. Lenin (whose image gets smaller as Stalin’s gets bigger), Vyacheslav Molotov (inventor of the infamous cocktail) and Felix Dzerzhinsky (founder of the KGB).

An eerie bronze death mask displayed on a red velvet pillow is the centre piece of the museum; lack of electric light during our visit meant we had to approach the mask via a carpeted and circular ramp and view it with one tiny candle.

Stalin, who was scared of flying, travelled throughout Europe by train (the well known “Kamchatka Choo-Choo”) and his compartment with private shower room, complete with walnut panelling, steel and glass fixtures and fittings, is preserved next to the museum.

The town of Gori is an

example of the worst architectural and planning excesses of Soviet times; crumbling apartment blocks, wide wind-blown streets with broken pavements and roads with more pot holes than tarmac.

What were once giant factories that produced according to rigid five year economic plans¹, now stand open like caves with their



The Stalin Museum in Gori. A giant Italianate building complete with campanile.

rusting² machinery left just as it was when the new consumer market had enough Zil cars, balaclava helmets and Ilyushin aircraft (tickets issued for a free flight after any three crashes).

An enormous statue of Stalin in an army greatcoat remains staring over an empty square in the centre of the town.

¹ The 5 year plans imposed rigid production schedules, for example, 10,000 teapots a month in one factory and 500 packets of sanitary towels in another. This ensured an annual teapot mountain and a complete absence of sanitary products available (true).

² Swann Enterprises has entered the Futures Market by buying up massive quantities of WD40 just in case the factories open again.