

CELEBRATIONS ON JUNE 1ST - INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR CHILDREN'S DEFENSE

June 1st, known as International Day of Children's Defense, is a day when the lives of children are celebrated all over the world. This year, Tbilisi YMCA celebrated this very special day with House of Tomorrow, shelter house on Tsurtsunia Street in Avlabari District. This event took months to plan, and it went on with no problem.

The reason for such an event was quite simple. "We asked the kids how would they celebrate this day and they replied, 'Do you think someone will visit us?' This served as an engine for organizing this event. We wanted to make them feel they are one of us, needed, loved and protected by others." (as quoted by Tengo Gogotishvili, Tbilisi YMCA Chairman, in Advocacy Magazine June, 2003)

Tbilisi YMCA collected clothing and toy donations from such local schools as QSI (Quality Schools International), Georgian-Italian School "Tsiskari", and School of Tomorrow as well as individual donation from friends of the Tbilisi YMCA. All of these clothes were washed by

donated by Nino Vasadze's restaurant "Luchela", cakes were made and given by Delaina Reeser, Manana Sopromadze and Nino Garkrelidze. Other pastries and ice-cream were also provided by the Tbilisi YMCA.

For the entertainment part, Tbilisi YMCA enlisted the help of many famous Georgian music artists. With great pleasure and excitement, music stars such as Roma Rtskiladze, Tika Jamburia, Agnesa, Achi purtseladze, Buka, DoReMi, Emi, Tsitsana Sepiashvili, Dzebnilebi and Jeronimo, and Otiko Andriadze all agreed to put on a concert for these children free of charge. Even the Georgian Actor, Malkhaz Kvrivishvili, know as Gio from a very famous Georgian movie-serial "Dlizi Tsin", showed up for the event to spend the day with these children.

The day started at one o'clock in the afternoon for the YMCA staff. They loaded the 25 plus boxes into four cars along with the drinks and some food. As soon as they arrived to the shelter house, the children excitedly greeted them. Soon, after some

talking with the children, they started setting up for the big event. The guys with sound equipment came to set up the stage and YMCA staff and the children set up the food and beverage table. The musical stars started to arrive at about 3 o'clock. Dzebnilebi and Jeronimo were the first to arrive. All of the stars took time to play, talk and dance, sign autographs, and take pictures with the children throughout the concert. Achi Purtseladze started the concert and kept things running throughout

the day. Each musical guest performed two songs, some performed more.

After the concert was over, the stars said goodbye to the children, signed a couple more autographs and posed for a couple more photos. Soon after they left, the children received their clothing and toys with much delight. Many of the children were heard saying throughout the day, "Thank you for this beautiful day." (quoted from Advocacy Magazine June, 2003)



Tbilisi YMCA volunteers with present, food and beverages ready to leave the office

YMCA staff left the shelter house at about eight o'clock in the evening. The children, sad to see their friends go, said their good

"Thank you for this beautiful day" were the most frequently heard words in Avlabari children's house

byes. This day was really a celebration, a thankfulness that these beautiful and wonderful children are alive.



Tika Jamburia signing autographs for the children

YMCA staff, packed in bags like new clothing, and placed in brightly, wrapped boxes. There were clothes of all sizes, which is what the children needed, and they were so happy to see all of the big "presents" being given to them.

But a celebration is not a celebration without food, drinks and entertainment. Seventy-five bottles of Nikora Lemonade was donated by Guram Tsertsvadze. Coke products were donated by Thom Carlson, Khachapuri for everyone was



Georgian stars singing for children

Day trip to Borjomi

Tbilisi YMCA, School of Tomorrow, House of Tomorrow and Tbilisi Youth House took a trip to Timotesubani church and Borjomi Park on Sunday, May 25, 2003.

At eight o'clock in the morning, everyone met and got seats on the bus as quickly as possible. Everyone was excited to go on the trip, and even though it was early in the morning, everyone was awake and talkative. Tbilisi YMCA opted for a large, almost new, double-decker bus to transport everyone to the destinations. The bus was very nice, sat 70 people, and had a lot of space. The whole ride there and back, the children were free to play, sleep, and run around because of the roomy interior of the bus.

The first stop was Timotesubani church. It is a beautiful place surrounded by green trees, grass and flowers along with a



YMCA volunteers and day trip participants hanging out in Timotesubani

large stream. While we were there, we all had a chance to go inside the church and check out the ancient frescos, crafted in the 12th and 13th centuries, that covered the simple, yet amazing church walls.

After some picture taking and chatting, everyone gathered back into the bus and we headed off to Borjomi Park.

Upon arrival to the park, everyone jumped off the bus, eager to venture into the park. After walking for a while, enjoying the nice weather, we stopped at the Borjomi Spring where a nice elderly body offered us the warm Borjomi mineral water straight from the spring. The water is said to be good for your insides if you drink it. Almost everyone drank some. Some people loved it, some liked it and some hated it, but either way, it was worth tasting.

Soon after, we all found places to sit and eat our lunches in the wonderfully breathtaking scenery inside Borjomi Park. After everyone's stomachs were filled, the children took off to play and walk around the park. Part of the group went hiking

on one of the trails while others headed towards the park rides. The younger children went on the rides as the older children talked and played in the river that runs through the park.

We all met back together again at the Borjomi pools. It is said that if you swim in the water, it does wonders for your skin.



Borjomi park. By Borjomi spring

So taking this into account, many of the children jumped into the water, even though all they had were the clothes they were wearing.

Soon it was time to leave, and mostly everyone soaking wet, descended back to the bus. Through the beautiful green mountainsides, flower covered ground, and old, wooden bridges, we finally made it to the bus. Everyone, sad to leave, reluctantly stepped into the bus. We all headed back to Tbilisi, which no longer seemed so nice since visiting the ever beautiful Borjomi Park.

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Visitng Tbilisi ZOO

The Tbilisi YMCA took 6 of the younger children from Avlabari Shelter House to the Tbilisi ZOO. The children were able to see wild animals like lions, monkeys and elephants as well as birds such as peacocks and eagles. The children as well as YMCA staff stayed very entertained at the monkey cage as they watched the

monkeys swing from rope to rope chasing each other. The children also had the pleasure of riding on many of the numerous rides the park has to offer. Although the trip had to be cut short due to rain, the children did not leave without the coveted cotton candy that many of us remember from our youth. The children returned home with happy smiles glowing on their faces.

EASTER SUNDAY

Easter Sunday for YMCA volunteers was spent at the House of Tomorrow Shelter House. The YMCA provided the traditional red eggs and Paska (Easter cake) for the children to enjoy. A rush of excitement filled the faces of the young children as they were served these delicious Easter treats.

After all of the egg cracking and cake eating was done, the volunteers took time to play games with the children and talk to them. Some of the children, wanting to make the American volunteers feel at home, offered to play a game of baseball.

After all of the goodbyes and hugs were done, the children, although sad to see their friends

from the YMCA leave, were happy that they were thought about on such a wonderful and special holiday.



Children and YMCA volunteers playing at the stadium of shelter house

DAY CARE FOR SHELTER CHILDREN

Tbilisi YMCA, in an effort to help underprivileged youth, has started offering free English classes to some of the children from Avlabari Shelter House. There are two classes for English as well as a Georgian "Book Club" in which some of the children read books and then discuss what they have learned from this book. The object of the "Book Club" is to help the students with their Georgian (reading, writing, speaking, grammar, etc.) while learning about famous writers, foreign and Georgian. At the present, the children are reading Mark Twain's classic *Tom Sawyer*, which has been translated into Georgian.

Seeking a quiet place to study, as the shelter house is always full of children, the students, serious to learn, started coming to the YMCA to study and stay until evening when their classes start. This unexpected "Day Care" was welcomed with open arms by YMCA staff, which now offers lunch to the children and provides for their transportation costs. While the children don't always study the full time they are there (they arrive at 11am and stay until 9pm), they are provided with a safe place to play and a place to hang out, a place of their own.

Day trip to Armazi Fortress

On Sunday, May 4th, 2003, the Tbilisi YMCA and the School of Tomorrow arranged a joint day trip to Armazi fortress that also included a group of young people from the House of Tomorrow, a children's shelter located in Tbilisi.

Some 50 people (including chaperones and youngsters) gathered at the train station at 10:00 am for the brief train ride to Mtskheta station. From there, it was almost a two hour hike to Armazi. The trail that led to this pre-Christian fortress was actually little more than a path that followed a graceful stream up the mountainside.

It was a warm, sunny day; a perfect day for a hike. Along the way, minor obstacles were having to crisscross the rushing stream at frequent points, climbing steep inclines, and battling the undergrowth. These challenges only added to the fun that we as a group encountered. Everyone helped everyone else, which proved to be a wonderful way for everyone to get involved and to begin to get to know each other. At one point, a substantial number of young people

began an energetic game of rugby, soccer, etc. in the forest.

All had a great time and were very eager to go on another day trip. Because of the tremendous success of this day trip, more soon followed. Trips were planned for Betania and Borjomi in the weeks that followed, and all were just as fun and entertaining.



Children playing football in Armazi gorge

Americans holiday in America

In January 2003, Tbilisi YMCA had the privilege of meeting three Americans who became very special and precious to the YMCA. Patti Hammer and Roy and Wanda Mason have contributed greatly to the YMCA, both financially and morally as well as helping through donations. They have all donated countless books and magazines to the YMCA Library. When June 1st came along, they helped the YMCA to collect donated clothing and toys from the school they worked at (QSI). Patti has also given financial aid to the YMCA, and Roy and Wanda supported the YMCA by taking Georgian classes and donating money towards a charity case of special interest to help send an underprivileged child, dedicated to football, to football camp.

To show their appreciation, the YMCA through a going away party for the three

at *Luchella's* (a restaurant in Tbilisi). The YMCA staff was all there to say goodbye to their friends. There were sausages, potatoes, khachapuri, cheese, salad, and much more. Everything was very tasty and there was much toasting to the great threesome, wishing them a safe trip home and great times in California (their final destination).

Roy and Wanda will be back in Tbilisi in August with their daughter Helen Mason and will be going back to work at QSI. They plan to continue their Georgian classes and YMCA can't wait to have them back. Patti, who has travelled all over the world, has decided to stay in California with her family, especially with her three year old grandson, Andrew Pherson. YMCA wishes her luck with her life in California and hope that she will return soon to see her friends at the Tbilisi YMCA.

Visiting Gldani Shelter House

When in June, the RodarAct came to Tbilisi YMCA for assistance in a joint project at Gldani Shelter House, the YMCA could not refuse. Offering some donated clothing and toys, the YMCA happily packaged the items in the same way as the June 1st's celebration; bright packaged boxes and all.

Gldani Shelter House is a home for children with mental and physical handicaps. As most shelter children crave the attention of people, the need for this contact seemed even greater at Gldani, for society has seemed to have totally forgotten these beautiful children who have much to give despite their handicaps.

While at Gldani Shelter House, the YMCA and RodarAct volunteers worked together to put on a miniature June 1st. The children were happy and thankful that someone had thought of them. The volunteers spent time with the children, talking and playing lots of games.

The children had a great time as did the volunteers. The volunteers learned something important that day. They learned how truly spectacular and gifted these children are!

New residents of the YMCA

There are two new residents in the YMCA office, security guards so-to-say. They may be small and furry, but they are a part of Tbilisi YMCA. They are a couple named Stewart and Sara, and they happen to be hamsters. Come and see them at the YMCA.

Day Trip to Betania

The Tbilisi YMCA planned a trip to Betania (in the canyon of River Vere about 18 km outside of Tbilisi) for the youth of Tbilisi on May 18, 2003. Not only did the YMCA volunteers attend, but The School of Tomorrow, Tbilisi Youth House and House of Tomorrow youth also attended the event.

The trip required three 30 seat busses which was still not enough for the 100 plus children, teachers, and YMCA volunteers. The busses were crammed with excited children. Even before we reached Betania, our adventures started. Half way through the trip one of the busses broke down. In order to pick up the busses occupants, the two running busses went back down the hill, but not

before many of the children decided to get out and walk. After all, it was a beautiful sunny day. The children readily gave up their seats to enjoy the nature that surrounded us. In fact, once we were all together again and the busses picked up some of the walkers, many of the people who were walking decided to keep on walking.

After we all hitched a ride on one of the two busses, we stopped not much farther down the road. Because of the steep, rough roads, the busses could not go any further, we would have to walk. No problem, it was all down hill and, for the time being, we forgot about having to walk up hill later. At that moment, we were having a nice walk in nature down steep hills to the church.

The church was built in the twelfth century and there is a fresco of King Tamari with her father, King George the third, and her son, Lasha-Giorgi

which is well preserved. The church has a plain exterior, but the inside is decorated articulately and delicately. The garden was also lavishly decorated with long green grass and beautiful flowers.

When we got to the church, we sat in the grass and got to know everybody a little by chatting, playing, etc. It was all a lot of fun, but soon we started up the steep hills, back to the busses for lunch.

After a while, we all reached the top of the hill where the busses were at and parked ourselves wherever we could find a seat to eat lunch. The House of Tomorrow's lunches were provided by the YMCA, and the children loved every bit of food we gave them. Egg sandwiches, meat sandwiches, cheese sandwiches (all filled with vegetables) and strawberry cake was the menu for this trip. After everybody was done eating and resting, they went back to talking and playing. Some of the children played football, while others rolled in the grass, soaked each other with water and played with slingshots. Still others were singing and dancing, etc. A good time was had by all.

After much time had passed, we all crammed back into the busses (we now had three) and road back home to Tbilisi. Everything was perfect.

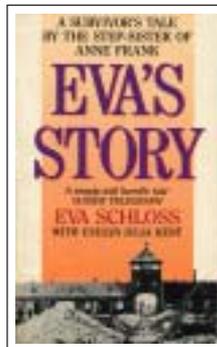


Children going up the hill for lunch and entertainment

BOOK OF THE SEASON

In this issue, we have decided to do something new and continue it through out all of the issues. The article is called "Book of the Season" and will feature a different book each time with an overview and critique of the book. So look for the "Book of the Season" in each issue.

The book of the season is called *Eva's Story* by Eva Schloss, the stepsister of Anne Frank. The autobiographical account of her and her mother's survival during the Holocaust in World War II is



as moving and heart wrenching as Anne Frank's diary. This book not only shows one's will to survive, but also one's need for family to sustain the drive to live.

Taking place from pre-war until present day, the story leads you

through many different places and feelings. Eva, who had just turned 15 when placed into Birkeneau (the women's Auschwitz), was suddenly forced to grow up, but always had the protective, watchful eye of her mother fixed upon her. It was because the two women had each

other during the length of their stay in Birkeneau and after liberation, that the two survived the hardships. There are many fearful moments in which the separation of the two brought despair, but just as they were going to give up, they ended up back together again once again renewing their will to live. Although Eva lost a lot of friends and family because of the Holocaust, she now finds joy, pride, and comfort in the fact that she and her mother survived... together.

This book is a very good read for people of all ages. It allows you to feel feelings in which you may never otherwise feel and it allows one to understand the importance of a strong family. YMCA recommends this book as the *Book of the Season*.

*Other books like this offered in the Tbilisi YMCA library are *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, *Anne Frank Remembered*, and *Edith's Story*.

Relax with us:

PUZZLE

For being good at the garden fete, four children were each given two sweets. Jack had an orange sweet. The child who had a red one also had a blue one. No child had two sweets of the same colour. The child who had a green sweet also had a red one. Jim didn't have a red sweet and Joe had a green one. James didn't have an orange one and Jack had no blue sweets. Knowing that there were two sweets of each colour, can you tell the colours of the sweets each child had?

ANSWER:
James had an orange and a blue sweet.
Jim had an orange and a blue one.
Joe had a green and a red one.