

Appendix F

Excerpts from two interviews on *Stress and other things*

The following is an excerpt from the interview with Susanne, a 39 year old teacher who started her own kindergarten, is a mother of two children. She was introduced in Chapter 4 when she talked about her husband's hypertension and how her infertility was cured by a *hekim*. In response to my question, "Have you changed during these past few years?" she responded:

"We went through so much. Cold, hunger, *stress – stress* on me, too. My child's heart problem is from those problems. We couldn't get the right nourishment. It was now that you see how bad the children's health is – we had pregnancy in that dark, starving situation. My sickness is also from that – my stomach problem was all from that stress.

"Why did we stay – when we could leave? I can't live anywhere else. (Susanne's sister lives in California) Now we are still in stress – I worry about bread for tomorrow – will it be there? Light? When the lights go out in our house, I feel very bad now, as if it brings back the whole experience of what we went through during those years. We hate eating by candlelight. Some people think it is romantic, but it isn't for us. There is nothing romantic about candlelight. I HATE eating by candlelight. No one in our family had heart problems – why else did this happen to our son?"

[What about open borders now is it a good thing?] She waits, and thinks carefully about the answer. Then, "Yes, it is a good thing. If people want to go they should be able to go. I don't have any fears about people coming in."

[I push her knowing that she has had a problem with a foreigner. She told me the following story.]

"I run a kindergarten and the children play in a certain area – you know where the Black Cat is. Well, the woman representative of the foundation of a the wealthy Armenian-American, came out one day and told me that the children could not play here any more because they were damaging the park. I asked her by what right had she to tell

the children not to play there? She said that her employer had purchased the property and therefore she had this right.

“I got very angry. I told her this is these children’s fatherland and I worked toward making the children feel at home in their fatherland. This is not *her* fatherland and therefore whether or not he purchased it, he had no right to turn the children out. ‘I lived here through the bad days,’ I said to her, ‘not you or your employer.’ ‘You have not lived here.’ I am not going to let anyone stand in my way. I will not let them put my children out by their saying this is our private land. My children will play here. I told her, ‘If you did not want the children to play on your private land you shouldn’t have bought it.’ Then this woman said to me, ‘And what if I see you in court?’ I said, “that will be just fine with me.’ ”

As I listened to the story, I shared her outrage. I knew that she was telling me this story because, although I am a foreigner in essence – I was there in the hard times.

(The interview to end had come – my driver was waiting to take me to my next appointment. I was very upset because I had so much more to ask Lucia. I was keenly aware, however, as in all of the interviews that people were giving me precious time. People are under new time constraints – the clock is ticking for them in a way it never did in the communist era. Women especially have to tend to the children, go to work, do the housework, and cook everything from scratch. It is not easy to find time for an interview after work, before going home. Susanne is fortunate, she told me; her mother is home to greet her children after school and get dinner started. Nonetheless, she had to cancel two appointments before we were finally able to meet.

Excerpts from Narine’s interview, a 61 year old chemist who lost her job after Armenia became independent.

Narine lives with her husband and three grown children. The interview took place in her living room. Sparsely decorated, the entry hallway was lined with books. The living room was almost barren – a sofa, small table, a rug, some china displayed in the china closet –common in all Armenian homes. Narine appears about 10 years younger

than her 61 years. (This is quite unusual for Armenians past 40 years of age –they generally appear 10 years older than their stated age.) She was wearing a sleeveless housedress. During the nearly 3 hours interview, she did not offer me any refreshment; very unusual for an Armenian. I understood that she had nothing to offer. After I explained what the interview was about she started to talk before I asked her any questions.

She started, “They say that a man’s spiritual (*hokegan*) life can be revealed by the sicknesses he or she has. For ex. – concrete let me say—if the doctor says we need protection against viruses – one minute it is AIDS, then it is typhus, then it is something else – I don’t know – how can you protect yourself against all of these? There are a million viruses. Which ones are you going to protect yourself against? Are you going to make vaccines against all of these viruses? It is not possible; it is also not good.

“You must let the body heal itself. If you take all of these medicines your body cannot heal itself. The man who works, has a good family, who has good thoughts (*bari marta* – the good man), well, you never see him sick continually. He doesn’t get sick. I don’t say that he doesn’t die, that is God’s plan, but he isn’t sickly.

[Was it better under the communists?] “No – no—not that it was so great the, but it was more equal! When did we ever see a poor person every taking something from the garbage? Now we see this – it is terrible. I get \$12 a month for my pension. How can a person alone live on this? They cannot. Now I cannot get even a dress for myself. We had a car – we sold it. We sold everything in order to eat. Now all together in our family – we earn \$200 a month. My son is a graduate of the Institute with a high degree in mathematics. He had a hard time finding a job – he finally did. Now he also has students who come for tutoring. That brings in some extra money and makes a big difference for us. We used to make the equivalent of \$700 – see how our standard of living has fallen more than three times.

“What do I need this freedom for? There are people have taken all that belongs to the people for themselves. Is this capitalism?

“Sickness has increased now – I feel I am beginning to get sick. We had a lot of stomach problems and then we realized that we were eating only ‘bottled’ foods all winter. What vitamins can be left after all that boiling? Those bottled foods are bad for

the stomach and bad for the liver. I never bottle anything – we never did. We ate only fresh food. In the winter we used to have foods coming from other places and we were able to buy them.”

[Do you have any fears for today?] “Now, my only fear is not having work. There is no industry and everything has been closed and sold off. No one asked us. We were the workers there, but we were just out. Imagine, my son is a graduate of the Electrical Institute of Moscow – one of 5 major institutes in Moscow -- and he has to tutor to make a living.

“I am afraid of getting sick now. What will happen if I have need for hospitalization? I do not have the money to pay for surgery or for the ambulance even. What will happen? I do not know. I am an academic – a chemist – but I’m willing to wash dishes to make money – but there isn’t even that now. I cannot go anywhere, I am stuck here because I have no money. Freedom for man is the greatest thing, but now we are stuck.

“Our families are scattered everywhere though. My sister is in the US, my husband and son went to Russia for 6 years to work, our neighbors have gone. It is very difficult.

“It is terrible to think that you cannot do anything to help yourself – to feel you cannot change your situation – that you are powerless. To feel myself as someone I decided to make little potato dumplings --*brioshkis*. For several years I would get up at 5 a.m., buy fresh eggs and start to make the *brioshkis*. I made them with eggs and butter so that they were exactly ‘homemade’ – not with baking soda. I would make 60 everyday – with beautiful designs. I cooked them on the kerosene heater that we had. There was no electricity then. I took them to the local stores. The women who bought them liked them so much they wanted to meet the woman who was making them.

“I made 900 drams in profit a day– that means about \$50 a month was left for me. It was work – it was *me* doing something. It didn’t matter that I am a chemist making *brioshkis*! That was in 1994 – we had nothing! It told me that I would not stay hungry. It showed me how little man needs to live! I’m not asking for \$1000 a month.

“At that time we hadn’t adapted to life as it was, yet. Now we have adapted.

Now we don't think about tomorrow anymore. If I don't have it tomorrow, it doesn't matter. For me it doesn't matter – but I worry about my children.

“Today, if you have money you are a man and if not, you are not a man. Yesterday, we did not use this same criteria by which to measure a man's worth. These categories did not exist. We were naive. We didn't understand what was going on in the world. We were used by the powerful nations. We thought that good things would be coming – we didn't see the picture ahead. Now I don't see it. I don't know what lies ahead. I don't know where this is going.”