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Retirement Association of Portland State
(RAPS)

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RAPS Sheet, January 2009

Retirement Association of Portland State

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Retirement Association of Portland State

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Our traveling retirees Crisis recalls '03 trip to Georgia Republic

By Bob Tufts

The recent events in the Caucasus have stirred recollections of our travel to the Republic of Georgia five years ago, in August 2003. For my late wife, Ellen, and me, it was far more than a vacation. Her daughter and family were into their second year of her son-in-law's two-year assignment as co-director of the National Democratic Institute's office and mission in Georgia. What follows is basically a visitor's observations.

Our Austrian Airlines flight arrived in the pre-dawn darkness of T'bilisi's airport. From my window seat, I could see scattered city lights and could make out the airport terminal and boulevard streetlights that led to the airport. Our drive into T'bilisi on the boulevard was dark; apparently



Bob Tufts photo

T'bilisi and the Mtkvari River from Narikala fortress

those lights are only turned on to guide incoming flights. The entire airport scenario was how I would have pictured a James Bond movie setting for a remote Soviet city airport in the midst of the Cold War.

Georgia is an ancient country of 4.5 million people who have learned to survive millennia of invasions, empires, and trading routes. In the closed Soviet economic union and system, Georgia ranked very high with its reliable infrastructure and heavy industry, full literacy rate, temperate climate, destination resorts, and ancient institutions. In 2003 it was a proud, self-sufficient, independent nation with lost trading networks and manufacturing, an average annual wage reduced to under \$1,000 (now \$4,400), and internal political instability.

In our first days we walked much of T'bilisi. Old Town had second-century underground sulphur baths, caravansary, a mosque, an Armenian Orthodox church, a synagogue, and the old access road to the ancient and modern Nariqala fortifications above the city. Main street, Rustavelis Gamziri, was a broad boulevard of shops, museums, theaters, and government buildings. Many merchants had a portable generator outside for the not-infrequent power failures. The national museum staff could only show us the basement exhibits of ancient (three millennia) goldsmithing

Next up:
Tom Palm on Estonia
Thursday, Jan. 15, 1:00 p.m.
327 SMITH MEMORIAL STUDENT UNION

President's Message

Should the RAPS Web site add more links to a greater variety of Web sites? That question was raised at the December RAPS board meeting. Before deciding on a policy on this issue, I realized I needed to look more carefully at the RAPS Web site. You, too, can check it out at www.raps.pdx.edu. Here is what I found.

Did you look at the Web site to find out if the Holiday Dinner, scheduled for December 17, was still on? As soon as the decision was made to cancel it due to inclement weather, a notice appeared on the Web site. Once the board makes a decision to reschedule an event, you will find the announcement under Calendar of Events.

Would you like to look up something in an old issue of the newsletter? You will find issues dating back to 2000 on the Web site. Would you like to look at photos from RAPS events? Look at the array of photos on the Photo Gallery link. I found myself in several of Larry Sawyer's photos from the RAPS hikes, and you can be there, too, if you join one of the hikes. Looking at the photos from the 2007 Holiday Dinner, I especially enjoyed one of my long-time colleagues in the Applied Linguistics Department and current RAPS board member, Jan DeCarrico, raising her wine glass in a toast!

There is also a Membership link. If you received a free one-year membership upon retirement in 2006, you can go to that link, fill out a form, and renew your membership. And, if you expect to live another 20 years, or don't like to keep getting reminders, you will save money by signing up for a lifetime membership.

Finally, I looked at the Other Links section of the Web site. There I found links to other PSU sites of particular interest to retirees, including one to the Senior Adult Learning Center. One of the links to government Web sites is for Senior Health Insurance Benefits Association (SHIBA), which provides free counseling on Medicare, prescription drug coverage, and long-term care insurance.

At our January board meeting we will consider a policy about links to individual Web sites of PSU faculty. Contact me if you have questions or comments about that.

—Marge Terdal

Georgia: Visitors cautioned to avoid Ossetia

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because they hadn't been able to pay their electrical bill for three years.

While considering our tourist travel, we were cautioned to avoid the Ossetia region because it was considered "lawless." In central T'bilisi, the flagship Soviet-era Hotel Iveria, a 20-story, completely balconied structure, was now a vertical refugee camp housing Georgians who had fled South Ossetia in the '90s. Later we met a vacationing German motorcyclist. While in the South Ossetia foothills, he was robbed by highway bandits brandishing AK-47s who took everything except his cycle and the clothes he was wearing.

We visited Gori on our way to a three-day adventure into the southern mountains. Given the geography and economy of Georgia, whoever controls the central city of Gori (20 miles from South Ossetia) sits astride the Republic's river, only railroad and highway, and the Caspian Sea-Black Sea oil pipeline, adjacent to the newer Caspian Sea-Mediterranean Sea oil pipeline. Gori's current fame is derived from it being Stalin's birthplace and its grandiose Stalin Museum. The museum preserves the two-room house of his childhood and his personal World War II railway carriage. The

only other visitors that day were a uniformed Russian officer and his family and our American family that included a veteran who had worked for a Cold War spy agency. In Stalin's recreated office, one of the matronly museum personnel deposited the grandchildren into his chair—I couldn't help but muse about two nice Jewish boys sitting in Stalin's chair.

Politically, in 2003, Georgia was in a great struggle with the post-Soviet breakup as it sought its own identity, global role, and sustainable economic and political institutions (aided by western NGOs). Internally, non-Georgian ethnic groups—Ossetians, Abkhazians—sought recognition. Georgia sought to throw off two centuries of Russian domination, both Czarist and communist; her elections were monitored and challenged. But in November 2003, the "Rose Revolution"—a public outpouring of street support for democracy—brought a change of president when Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgian president from 1995 to 2003 (and USSR minister of foreign affairs, under Mikhail Gorbachev, from 1985 to 1990) stepped aside. Shevardnadze later blamed NGOs, and specifically NDI, for his downfall.

RAPS club reports

Book Club: An Inauguration Day discussion

Our first meeting of 2009 will be held at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 20, at the home of Dez Roberts, 2610 SW 84th, Portland. Please contact her at 503-292-6095 if you would like to join the discussion. Our selections for January are *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, both written by Barack Obama, and both timely reads. The second book is described on the back cover as:

The Audacity of Hope is Barack Obama's call for a new kind of politics—a politics that builds upon those shared understandings that pull us together as Americans. Lucid in his vision of America's place in the world, refreshingly candid about his family life and his time in the Senate, Obama here sets out his political convictions and inspires us to trust in the dogged optimism that has long defined us and that is our best hope going forward.

The book selected for February is a *New York Times* bestseller, *The Glass Castle*, a memoir written by Jeannette Walls.

—Mary Gordon Brannan

Bridge Group: Bids on Jan. 13

Not only do we shuffle (more than one way), we also deal and make contracts that we routinely break. Unless Portland is ice-bound, we will continue our nefarious ways in January, meeting at Willamette View at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 13. If you would like to play, please let me know as soon as possible and no later than Friday, Jan. 9. Or if you have questions, call me at 503-292-0838 or e-mail colinkeld@gmail.com.

—Colin Dunkeld

Hikers: A trek to the dinner table

The RAPS Hikers will hike to the dinner table when the Sawyers host a potluck for past and present hikers on Friday, Jan. 23, at 6:00 p.m. The occasion will be used to plan future hikes. RSVP to Larry Sawyer at 503-771-1616 or larry_sawyer@comcast.net.

—Larry Sawyer

Mark your calendar

Jan. 15, 1:00 p.m.

Tom Palm on Estonia
327 Smith Memorial Student Union

Feb. 12, 6:00 p.m.

RAPS Dinner
Multnomah Athletic Club, 1849 SW Salmon St.

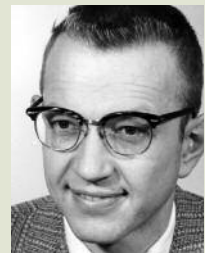
Feb. 19, 1:00 p.m.

Charlie White: panel on RAPS history programs
338 Smith Memorial Student Union (Vanport Room)

PAST TENSE

Epler's legacy: 'Friday Night Lite' on the plains

A full decade before Stephen Epler launched the 1946 academic program at Vanport that produced PSU, he coached the Chester, Nebraska, high school football team. The Great Depression's economic distress and dust bowl conditions resulted in declining rural area school enrollments throughout the Great Plains region, making it increasingly difficult to maintain traditional small-town athletic programs, even though students and townsfolk enthusiastically supported football. In 1934 Epler rescued this popular athletic-educational activity by introducing game modifications, making it feasible for low-enrollment schools to field teams with six or eight positions. Six-man football caught on instantly and grew to the point where—according to feature stories of the day in the *New York Times* and the *Omaha World Herald*—several hundred schools from Texas to Saskatchewan scheduled "Friday Night Lite" pigskin contests.



Vic Dahl

Upon joining the PSU History Department in January 1959, a colleague of mine related Epler's founding father role to me and casually mentioned his six-man football innovation. That resonated with me inasmuch as the small town secondary school that I attended had adopted six-man football in 1937, enabling me to play every autumn for eight years. When PSU honored founder Stephen Epler, the "Vanport Visionary," at its 50th anniversary in 1996, I introduced myself in a receiving line and thanked him for founding an institution where I had enjoyed a lifetime career. I added that he had positively influenced my earlier life while I had played six-man football in junior and senior high school. At that point, he immediately led me to a corner table to quiz me about my involvement in the game that he had invented. I owe him a two-part debt of gratitude for his ingenuity, perhaps most of all for his invention.

—Victor C. Dahl, Professor Emeritus of History

Past Tense features glimpses into Portland State's history. To submit a story (or an idea for one), email the RAPS History Preservation Committee at raps@pdx.edu.

Courtesy PSU archives / 1959

Weather delay: RAPS holiday dinner rescheduled for Feb. 12

Perhaps the more delicate among us described the weather as “inclement,” while the rest of us probably chose other, more colorful adjectives. Either way, the snow and cold last month forced the cancellation of the annual RAPS Holiday Dinner scheduled for Dec. 17.

Mere weather, however, did not deter our intrepid dinner planners, who quickly swung into action and set a new date for the dinner: Thursday, Feb. 12.

All the particulars are the same: it's still at the Multnomah Athletic Club, 1849 SW Salmon Street, Portland; no-host bar begins at 6 p.m., followed by dinner at 7, and entertainment by vocalist/pianist Laura Curnard and guitarist Ben Graves at 8; and the three entrée choices remain chicken stuffed with crab, herb-stuffed pork tenderloin, and portabella mushroom shepherds pie. The dessert, however, has been changed from croquembouche to chocolate mousse. C'est la vie.

Cost is still \$50 per person. If you paid for the canceled December dinner, you can apply the same payment to the February dinner. If you paid for the December dinner and cannot attend the February edition, you can arrange for a refund by calling MiMi Bernal-Graves, RAPS office manager, at 503-725-3477, or e-mail her at raps@pdx.edu.

She is in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.

On the other hand, if you couldn't have made the December dinner no matter the weather but would like to join your RAPS colleagues on Feb. 12, just fill out the form to the right and mail it by Tuesday, Feb. 3, to: RAPS Office, Koinonia House, Portland State University, PO Box 751, Portland, OR 97207-0751.

THE RAPS FEB. 12 DINNER FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE 2008 HOLIDAY PARTY

NAME(S) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

Meal choice: ☐ Chicken ☐ Pork ☐ Shepherds Pie / Total number of meals: ☐

Cost: Number of people attending _____ x \$50 per person = \$ _____

Method of payment:

☐ My check is enclosed made payable to PSU Foundation.

☐ Please charge my credit card:

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ AmEx ☐ Discover

Card number

Exp. date Name as it appears on card _____

Signature of cardholder _____

Mail this form by Tuesday, Feb. 3, to:

RAPS / Koinonia House / Portland State University / PO Box 751 / Portland OR 97207-0751

RAPS to the rescue: Volunteer activities from lecturing to tutoring

Several opportunities to volunteer are available to RAPS members, ranging from lecturing at a Portland assisted living center to helping Portland State students from Japan improve their English writing skills.

◆ Give a lecture

Rose Schnitzer Manor at Cedar Sinai Park, 6140 SW Boundary St., is looking for people to lecture in their areas of expertise for a Tuesday evening lecture series. The contact is Katherine Hansen; she can be reached at 503-535-4000.

◆ Develop a plan for a new RAPS scholarship

Contact: Bob Vogelsang, 503-292-5955
drvogie@yahoo.com

◆ Mentor writing skills for Japanese graduate students

Contact: Pat Wetzel, 503-725-5277
wetzelp@pdx.edu

◆ Send cards and/or visit RAPS members who are ill or grieving

Contact: Vic Dahl, 503-636-5784
vbdahl@hevanet.com