

# Town with the strongest heart in the world

**Nobody in Tamysh has died of heart failure for nearly a century. What's more the average lifespan of the townsfolk is 120! To what do these sturdy people owe their good health and exceptionally long lives?**

By HENRI GRIS

**T**O Professor Nodar Kipshidze the issue was simple: you adopt the Tamysh system of heart care and you're assured of a second century of life.

"Nobody in Tamysh," he said, measuring the words as he spoke, "has died of heart failure in the past 95 years, according to the town records. It's probably longer but it was not until 1887 that records were set up.

"Additionally, as a local cardiologist, but more importantly, as medical officer of Tamysh I can state with authority that no such death occurred within my own memory."

For the record, Dr Kipshidze, director of the prestigious Research Institute of Experimental Therapy in Tbilisi, Soviet Georgia, has kept a wary eye on this incredible town of centenarians in Abkhazia, the western half of Soviet Georgia, for the last 30 years.

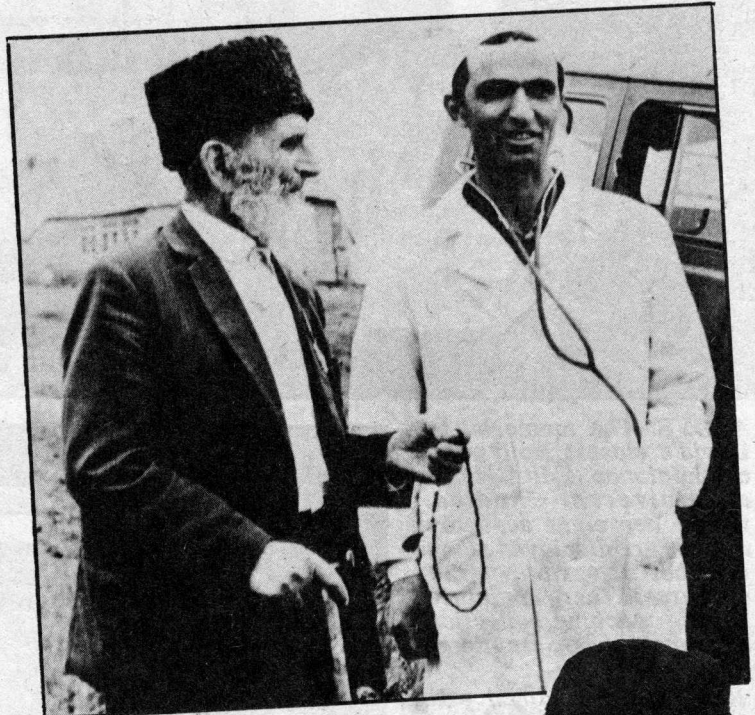
"In certain towns and villages," he said, "people who die while well into their second century represent the majority of our older folk. In Tamysh, a larger village — you might call it a small town — of some 2000 inhabitants, nobody ageing normally has died under the age of 120.

"If I stipulate normal ageing, it's because even Tamysh people have died at an earlier age of a variety of illnesses. Significantly, however, epidemic diseases I encountered had been contracted by them elsewhere.

"Also, Tamysh has had its share of disasters, of fires,

*RIGHT: By the time Shirali Mislimov (left) reached the age of 168 medical staff were continuously on duty outside his house, to assure him of help in an emergency. In the end though, he died when he decided he had had enough.*

*BELOW RIGHT: Hale and hearty: As full of fun as ever, Shirali Mislimov enjoys a joke with his third wife Khatun, who was 106 when the photograph was taken.*



**'This town has unwittingly hit upon the world's ideal diet'**

especially during an occasional severe winter, of food poisoning. Hunters have fallen off cliffs as a 108-year-old local man did recently. He had set out for the mountains on his own to hunt mountain lions. And Tamysh has had its share of drownings in the very cold and fast mountain streams.

"But nobody has died of a heart attack, or for that matter of a stroke, two sad and shocking endings totally foreign to Tamysh. And the chief reason as far as I could ascertain has been the Tamysh diet.

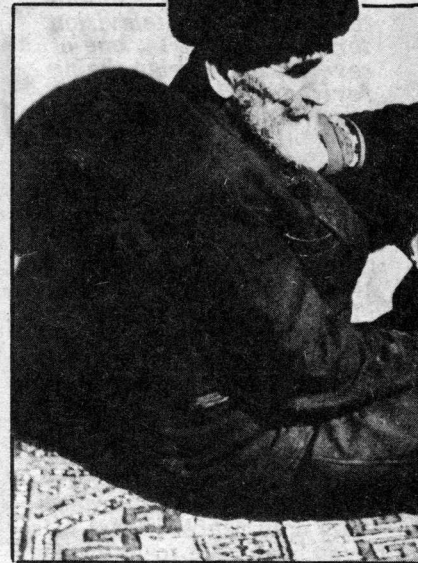
"There are additional factors contributing to Tamysh's longevity, but after studying the data for many years I have come to this absolute conclusion: this town has, unwittingly, hit upon the world's ideal diet — to

guarantee a healthy heart for a hundred years plus."

It is now 30 years since the young Georgian doctor Nodar Kipshidze picked Tamysh as an object of his study and observation. He went to live in the town after securing the position of medical officer assigned to Tamysh by the Georgian Ministry of Health. It put him in charge of the local centenarians.

He trained several eager youngsters to become his nurses, and they all sat around, waiting for patients who never came.

"Disgustingly healthy, these people of Tamysh," he shrugged. If anyone was ever sick in Tamysh it was the children suffering from tummy ache. He treated them with old-fashioned but effective castor oil. The emergencies that caused him to phone for an ambulance from across



the mountains were for emergency appendectomies.

Tamysh women's babies come into this world the way they do elsewhere in the Caucasus: with the help of a midwife, at home. Only twice was he called in to assist with

**And the townsfolk's health secret? Corn . . . morning, noon and night —**





**ABOVE:** Astride a stallion at over 100: Tamysh's men ride their horses until their last day, and this centenarian is high on his steed with a fourth generation child. Next to him is "grandma" in the family car, ready to drive off — at 120 she still drives herself.



day child was invariably robust, in full control of his or her faculties, nonchalantly and assuredly entering what we now call our third age." But he also attended funerals. It was on these occasions that he discovered a strange phenomenon. The average age of the dead man or woman: 120.

"The government of our republic," he reflected, "was always eager to ascertain the circumstances which gave Tamysh No. 1 spot among the places where people live longest. I had been sent there to find out."

It has taken him 30 years, and his study is still far from complete because "it takes time and more time. In research we use animals with a short lifespan to study and to experiment with drugs and regimes that may extend lives. In Moscow our famous

academician and physicist Professor Nikolai Emanuel has been administering a longevity serum to hundreds of laboratory mice which has doubled their lives. He has yet to apply it to humans.

**"O**VER in Kiev, our noted gerontologist Professor Dmitri Chebotarev is working with humans but it won't be until the year 2072 that the results of his project will be added up and published. His study involved 1000 human volunteers and many of them should have reached the age of 150 by the time the findings will be out for all of humanity to benefit from. It's 90 years away.

"Yet Tamysh has already provided us with preliminary findings sufficiently detailed

to apply to people living elsewhere. For the records, I am one of them."

After spending five years in Tamysh, Kipshidze moved to Tbilisi, a metropolis of 1,225,000 inhabitants, but he's still in charge of Tamysh, officially and factually. His institute keeps a tab on the state of health of Tamysh while he himself periodically visits its old-timers to check them out.

"I switched to the Tamysh diet while I was the resident doctor," he went on, "and I've never strayed from it. Am I pleased with the results? You bet I am. At 60, my heart is that of a young man. There isn't even a hint of atherosclerosis in my veins. My blood pressure is normal, 120 over 80, and my cholesterol count is about 200. Yet I allow.

Please turn to Page 22

**and a ban on fried foods, sausages, potatoes, cakes, sweets, coffee**



From Page 21

myself some wine with my dinner, and even an occasional cigarette. I eat two healthy meals a day, consuming 2500 calories a day, I do not need to watch my weight, and I sleep like a baby." Also, he hasn't been sick in years.

"I have good reason to expect that I too may live to see 120. I might even live longer, what with modern medicine continually coming up with new solutions to man's old problems."

The mainstay of the Tamysh diet, Professor Kipshidze said, is corn. "They eat corn in the morning, at noon time, at dinner time, at night. They eat what you call corn-on-the-cob, but more often than not they boil it, turning it into a white paste they call mamalyga. It's served in soup dishes and is consumed with all their meals. And they dip into it with their fingers.

"Extensive studies at our institute have established the fact that corn may be one of the most effective anti-atherosclerosis agents and thus prevents a clogging up of the arteries. Between the corn and the light local white wine the arterial system of a Tamysh man is kept clear of fats."

Another important asset of the Tamysh diet, contributing to a healthy heart, is sour milk and its products which include cottage cheese, farmers' cheese, kefir and yogurt. Also goat's milk.

"The people of Tamysh," he said, "drink a minimum of two glasses of milk a day, down three or four big helpings of sour milk, matsoni, yogurt or kefir a day. They start with it in the morning, mixing in green onions and parsley and they finish their day with it in the evening."

The meat they eat is either boiled or barbecued, never fried — frying is taboo in Tamysh — and is mostly fresh; calf or lamb or chicken killed not much more than an hour earlier. They eat meat sparingly and not more than three times a week, and chicken the rest of the week.

They precede the main course with vegetables, anything from lettuce to spinach, string beans, celery, leeks, beets, cabbage and onion. Their favourite spice is red pepper, and they use it in

profusion.

As fruits go they stick to the local figs, pears, lemons, apples, oranges, pomegranates and grapes, but they don't indulge.

Their bread is home-made cornmeal bread or local unleavened bread and their favourite dessert is honey with walnuts. The latter, Dr Kipshidze discovered, is also a natural aphrodisiac and is helping the Tamysh oldsters to maintain their sexual prowess.

Their taboos include sausage of every kind, bacon and ham, pastries and cakes, potatoes, animal fats and artificial sweets. Also coffee. In place of coffee they drink tea, a lot of freshly brewed local tea.

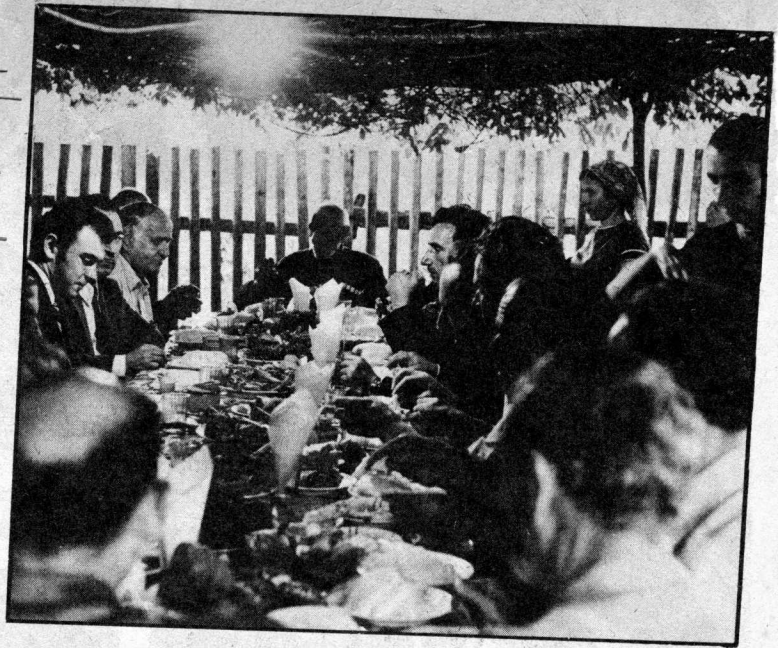
"RESEARCHERS have theorised," Dr Kipshidze said, "that the tea they drink may be the secret of their longevity. They grow it themselves and, labelled as Georgian tea, it's exported throughout the world.

"But similar theories have been advanced with regard to their beloved red pepper with which they spice seemingly all their meals. It, too, is home-grown. Also the grapes their wine is made of are grown in their own vineyards . . ."

Then, with a shrug of a powerful shoulder: "People keep wondering. Some say it's the local mountain stream water they drink. It has a strong mineral content and is akin to the mineral water called Borzhom which is bottled in Borzhomi in Georgia and sent all over the country. It's highly recommended by our medical people for use by patients recovering from a heart attack. And Tamysh is not too far away from Borzhomi, on the road to Sukhumi.

"They also wonder about the climate, but then the foothills of the Caucasus in Abkhazia where our longevous people are concentrated are not unlike the Sierras in California. Our Black Sea so many of them can see from their hillside homes is not unlike the Mediterranean.

"Also, one is reminded that our longevous people are mostly farmers living away



ABOVE: Evening meal: Supper is an all-family affair beneath the straw roof of an arbour, presided over by oldest man of the family clan. Only the older women of the family are allowed to share the meal however; the other women do the serving.

Pictures: Camera Press, London

from the hectic, industrial cities but then, if farming is one of the answers, it should apply to people the world over and make them longevous. Which it doesn't.

"To be sure, these Georgian farmers are quite well-to-do, thanks to their rich soil, the lush tea plantations and vineyards they own, individually and collectively. They live in new two-storey cement block homes that feature every comfort from television to living room sets imported from Germany. . . .

"None of the surmises are valid, really," he reflected after a brief pause. "We think we know but we have yet to satisfactorily answer every question. Not that their diet is the secret, pure and simple. As I said earlier there are other contributing factors one must not overlook.

"Above everything else it's their joy of life itself, rewarded in their old age by a society which appreciates their accomplishments. Tamysh is definitely old-age oriented; young people can't wait to be accepted into the select circle of older people, who love to play the role of the local wise men. They are

revered and respected.

"There's also such a thing as a love of one's work, however lowly, which in many cases grows into a veritable passion even when the work is merely picking tea.

"Nobody makes them stop work. Retirement is accepted as a way station highlighted by a reward, a state pension, after which things go on as before. It results in contentment, which is another key to longevity. And if you add to this a well-regulated day's routine, an even temper, an attitude of moderation, subconscious yet strict weight control, even a bit of justified cowardice — Tamysh has never reared a hero — you round out the reasons why the hearts of Tamysh beat so long and so strong."

Professor Kipshidze looked around the busy hall in Moscow where we were talking, caught sight of a couple of extremely portly gentlemen from a distant country, shook his head: "Yet, there is no reason for any of us to travel to Tamysh and settle there in order to protect our hearts. All you need do is to know what it's all about. Then Tamysh will come to you." ●

N.Z.W.W. FEBRUARY 14, 1983