

# From Scotland to Georgia—with Love

At 4:00 am on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2010, five excited and sleepy Pupils from Thornlie Primary School in Lanarkshire gathered at the school gates, said goodbye to their families in the lamp-lit dark and set off on a remarkable journey.

Some had never been to an airport before and none had ever travelled so far—and they were going to the Republic of Georgia for the latest chapter of their multi-dimensional whole-school project.

Last spring the school received an invitation from Professor Manana Doijashvili, rector of Tbilisi State Conservatoire:

It is known that your pupils have been actively engaged in project work in Georgia and that your pupils have been very busy working on behalf of a small disabled Georgian boy who is in need of surgery. As part of their efforts, we know that they have been learning our traditional Georgian polyphony and performing in Scotland in order to raise funds. We would very much like to invite your children to bring their music, and to join us at our forthcoming Symposium on Traditional Polyphony. We will be delighted to welcome them as guests, and in fact, they will be the first children from outside the country to perform for us here in Georgia.

While focused on performing, the nine-year-old children also had another thought: to go the Temi community in the foothills of the Caucasus, and to see their friend Datuna and the other residents there. With this in mind they had jammed their suitcases full of family donations as well as essential band-aids and wound-dressings, to donate alongside money raised by their classes.



hat buying expedition with Nana

The full choir had recently performed at the Scottish Learning Festival and at the Edinburgh Festival of Spirituality, all the time raising more money to support a future life-saving operation for Datuna in Scotland; now these

five would have to stand up and be brave on their own, and in the best Georgian polyphonic tradition—'listen with the heart as well as the ear, hold your own part strong, and work in harmony with others'.

And sing they did—mostly unprompted—to appreciative passers-by at Heathrow airport, to an ovation from the rest of the aeroplane at Baku Airport, on the bus, to a street-gathering of old Armenian men at Ortachala, in the backstreet Tbilisi Bakery, and to a tearful family gathering at Zaza and Nana's

house, as well as alongside Georgian youth choirs, on State TV, and for Patriarch Ilia 2<sup>nd</sup>, Georgia's spiritual leader for the last thirty years. Not to mention warm, loving and rapturous receptions for their two performances at the Symposium.

And on the final day their bus bumped and wound its way across East Georgia, to the Temi Community in Gremi, where the five singers donated their gifts, comforted abandoned puppies, ran around the muddy grass, cuddled wee old ladies, played with Datuna, and clapped along to the residents' impromptu dance demonstration. The pupils sang and were sung to, and a toast was made to all travellers.

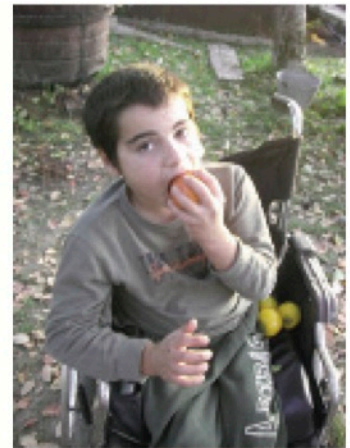
A destination is rarely a journey's end; one way or another it's always a stopping-off point, a part of a longer journey. What really matters therefore is how you travel, which should be with some spirit and courage and good intention. In those five magical days, the five singers generated good feeling all around; no whining, no bickering, just sowing seeds wherever they went, in themselves and others, with lots of openness and laughter and good grace.

I texted parents on the way home: *Children have been totally great—generous, friendly, brave, kind, polite and brilliant. An absolute credit to their school and their country, to their families and to themselves.*

Perhaps you can join me in an extension of that final toast: to Zoe, Amy, Nicole, Rebecca and Lucy, to all their fellow travelers, and to all good journeys of the past present and future. Mravalzhamier!

**David Hughes,**  
Head Teacher, Thornlie Primary School

*Thornlie is a small school serving one of the poorer parts of Wishaw in North Lanarkshire. Seven years ago, it had the highest suspension rate per child in Scotland and its level of attainment was noted as one of Scotland's worst. Since then it has worked hard, focusing on meaningful whole school projects in order to try and make differences to its immediate and wider environment, and in so doing, to its own community members. Engaging with the Datuna Project has been an essential part of this process of transformation.*



Datuna

## Datuna's Medical Fund

The life saving operation for Datuna is scheduled for May 2011. We have £12,000 set aside and it will cost a further £20,000 even though the staff of Edinburgh Sick Children's Hospital will donate their time for free. Thornlie School will be hosting and performing at a Fundraiser at St Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh on 23rd November, featuring the masterly Georgian Choir Shavnadaba. £10 tickets available from [ht@thornlie.n-lanark.sch.uk](mailto:ht@thornlie.n-lanark.sch.uk) or 01698-352539. Your donations to boost their efforts will be exceptionally welcome.