

Gulnara Karakulova Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 38:50] [Session one: 7 April 2013]

[00:00] Gulnara Karakulova [GK] born Jambul Oblast, Kazakhstan in former Soviet Union. Family history, one of five children. Move to Moscow age six to join father. Describes returning home in summer holidays and being received differently because 'city' girl from the capital, wearing European clothing. Anecdote about arriving at the station in bright colourful clothes. Introduces siblings and younger brother Bolat [B], a lawyer who volunteers consultancy at the Women's Resource Center, headed by GK where ran shelter for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking and B on call when no staff.

[06:35] GK Born 6 October 1966. Description of strong ideology of Soviet school and dreaming of meeting Lenin – in primary school GK was a Little Octobrist – and contradiction of second dream, of visiting America.

[08:52] Inspiration of father's teaching profession leading GK to academia and university study of Russian Language and Literature, going on to teach Russian Literature and Oriental Literature, and later Kazakh Literature, previously little taught in Soviet times. Mention of large library at home, books collected by mother including Theodore Dreiser, Charles Dickens, Jack London.

[13:06] Description of mother's various jobs and talent in sewing, involvement in public work in Moscow, helping to serve school meals. Move to Shymkent, Kazakhstan when GK in the fifth grade and mothers' work as a despatch clerk at Soyuzpechat, Soviet agency distributing of periodicals and printed materials, consequent access for home library for her five children. Mention of popularity of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* at the time – mid 1970s.

[16:22] Story about exposure to psychology books age 12, as father's teaching subject, GK's desire to study Psychology in Leningrad, mother's refusal to allow her travel so far as GK completed school age 16. Mothers' support, taking day off work to go to accompany GK to university entrance exams and interviews. Description of siblings' parallel paths and elitism of university departments.

[21:50] University life in Shymkent. Description of agricultural work given to students. Story about expectation for each student to collect 200kg of cotton per day and GK being noticed for collecting only 30-50kg.

[24:42] Start of career and teaching at Russian-Uzbek school. Difficult of teaching senior grades as only five years older than students as graduated age 20. Description of long days teaching and additional assignment to do public work, made Head of the School Labor Union Committee.

[28:57] Start of interest in women's issues at university. Dissertation on systemic structural analysis of fiction led to internship in Almaty where saw announcement from women's centre of European Commission grant for training programme Rights of Women Educational Program for Women, GK chosen for project. Explanation of

training and implementation in own area, raising awareness for women to realize rights.

[35:45] Comments on influence of paternal grandmother.

Track 2 [duration: 18:45] [Session one: 7 April 2013]

[00:00] Decision to begin voluntary work creating women's group in Shymkent, while continuing teaching work at university. Discussion on impact of training and speeches from Germany, realisation that women there also had struggle. Comment that wanted to help people since childhood. Interest in exploring the character of women in literature dismissed by academic supervisor as not relevant. Realisation that academic world not enough and difficulty of decision to resign.

[05:17] Start of organization, gathering women, conducting seminars. Official registration of Women's Resource Center, 1999. Reflection on Jeltoksan, political event while at university and youth presented as 'enemies of the nation', arrival of the '90s and unemployment, food shortages. Anecdotes from that time. Explanation of Kazakh cultural observations and hospitality even in hard times, and creation of centre being a support to women.

[10:33] Crisis centre, established with help of Soros Foundation. Discussion on patriarchal norms being stronger in south of country and contradiction of education of women, who cannot protect themselves at home. Story about preconceptions of female doctor at leadership seminar.

[14:30] Launch of microcredit project to enable access for women wanting to start own business, taught business plans. Describes success with examples.

Track 3 [duration: 1:03:00] [Session two: 10 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes early childhood books, Russian writers, Puskin, Turgenev, and *One Thousand and One Nights* as the first GK read by herself. Today reading online publications related to women's subjects around the world. Mentions Osho.

[02:35] Mentions friendships and lack of nostalgia or attachment to old classmates. Observation on amount of time devoted to work and life-long commitment to women's issues and need to sustain effort, example of domestic violence. Describes natural compulsion to help and responses from community. Detailed description of one-week Women's Leadership Camp, 1999 aimed at 15-24 year olds to raise awareness of issues at critical age when young girls confronted with many challenges.

[11:47] Comments on politics involved in presidential awards in Kazakhstan and acknowledgement of work in this field and GK's unwillingness to get involved in bribery. GK awarded diploma, 2005 from Minister of Ecology (who was Head of the Commission on Women and Family), for organizing A Woman with Wings 2, fair for women's NGOs, and acknowledgement from regional authority.

[16:05] Work with International Migration Organization and publication of book outlining a woman's rights in a human trafficking situation and best conduct,

including in court, against allegations about her role in trafficking for sexual exploitation. Also distributed to women in shelter and guidelines on conduct explained by lawyers and psychologists.

[18:27] Explains sources of funding, and cases when reach out for support. Example of Sairam Orphanage and work with 30 girls, appealing to female only directors of business, enabled the giving of actual tools of trade – hairdressing, manicure – to trainees upon graduation.

[21:02] Women’s Resource Center previously recipient of small grants from US and Canadian Embassies, USAID, World Bank but now fewer international agencies in country. Institutional development supported by WLP [Women’s Learning Partnership] enabling leadership courses. First leadership camp funded by Mobil Oil Corporation.

[23:10] Discussion on GK’s attitude and approach to men, minimal contact and communication as a consequence of work with women. Discussion on relationship with family and necessity of setting boundary with natural demands on time.

[26:48] Comment on religion and different faiths in Kazakhstan as a result of dynamic history and nomadic life. Description of Muslim holidays observed and community offerings made in GK’s family, food made. Discussion on changing norms and observation of the *hijab*.

[30:18] Explanation of introduction to WLP through Uzbek partner organisation’s request to hold training in Kazakhstan in politically sensitive period where NGOs unable to work freely. Start of relationship and attendance of WLP convening, USA.

[32:51] Description of portrayal of women in Kazakhstan media at the time, successful women on the covers of magazines and rich, land-owning village women characterized on TV, and contradiction of lower than 10 per cent of women in reality. Message that a woman can take control of your own life, even without money, be a leader in community, be a politician for global issues. Discussion on empowerment through independent control with example of a hen-wife. Story about GK approached to be on the cover of magazine and conflict therein, refusal to fall into system.

[39:48] Comments on impact of WLP on perspective, admiration for Mahnaz Afkhami in context of her life journey, GK’s learning from international partners and interaction, and sharing with staff on return to Kazakhstan.

[43:49] Explanation of Law against Violence, 2009 as pertinent issue for women in Kazakhstan, after ten-year campaign. Problems with law but exists so foundation to work from. Example of Status, an NGO with project Access to Services for Suffering Girlfriends working with elements of law that could help.

[46:45] Reflections on positive and negative aspects of working with women and activist label. Story about moment of realization when mistreated in a bank and returning to demand correct service.

[50:56] Description of approach to community problems and door to door start for representative picture of problems faced. Case of discovering unregistered village so unable to apply action points and strategy, eventual success in gaining village status.

[54:09] Comment on opposition from other NGOs, and GK's dismissal of their opinions.

[56:59] Account of high point in women's movement in Kazakhstan, establishment of National Commission on Family and Women, 1998.

[58:13] Comment on husband and family understanding of work. [58:54] Description of volunteer set up, and experience of training methods. Salaried staff according to projects. Mention of current project, Education – Key to Success, funded by Kazakh Public Fund, BOTA, with six salaried staff.