

THE FIRST INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE ABOUT EVENTS IN THE CAUCASUS

WORD

DOSH

DIGEST



ISSUE #16

LOOKING FOR THEM AND WAITING FOR THEM

MISSING PERSONS





From the Editorial Board

Throughout the history of mankind, as long as people were at war, individuals have been disappearing without a trace. It has always been this way. Unfortunately, the wars that happened on the territory of the Chechen Republic over the period from 1994 and the following years were no exception to this general rule. 20 years have passed since the beginning of the first military campaign in the Chechen Republic, and the search for the missing civilians who disappeared during military operations continues to the present time. According to official figures, the destiny of more than five thousand people remains unknown to their relatives. According to informal data, the number of missing persons is much higher.

When a person is missing and everything is unknown is not only the tragedy for the missing person but also for the relatives and friends who are in painful expectation of any information on the person's destiny and location. They do not lose hope and continue the search, often unsuccessful, for their relative. Even an illusory hope to find the brother, the husband or the father prevents them to mourn their relatives. As the relatives of the missing persons say — this hope will stay with them forever.

The search for the missing persons continues and the magazine wants to make its contribution.

Dosh presents the next two tragic stories in its regular in column — "Looking for Them and Waiting for Them" — about those who went missing during the two wars in Chechnya: beginning in DOSH Issue No. 4(30) 2010 and continuing in all subsequent issues.

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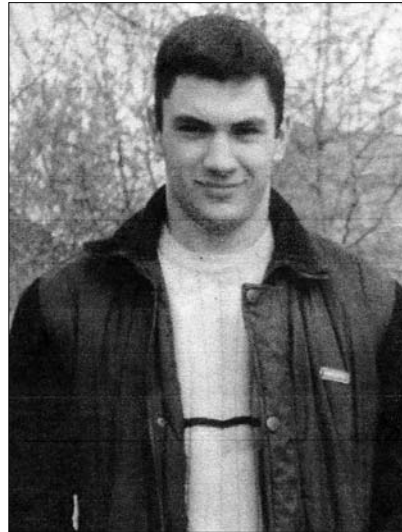
As if autumn is to blame

Story #21

Taisa Abdurzakova begins by pointing out that she has long since disliked autumn, particularly the Police Day holiday. Having said that, she starts telling her story.

Mrs. Abdurzakova's son, Vakha Abdurzakov (born 1981), was abducted on the night of October 24, 2002. It is understandable that, by now, the mystery surrounding her son's fate terrifies her even more than the death of another son, who had only managed to turn 15. I think it is worth telling the entire story in the order in which it happened.

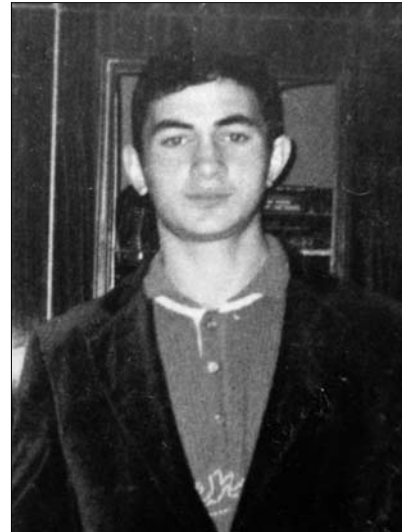
The Abdurzakov family lives at 234 ul. A. Sheripova, Urus-Martan. Their house stands off on its own at the very end of the street. The family had four children. All the political changes in Chechnya left their mark on the life of this family. Khavazhi Abdurzakov — the head of the family — tried as hard as he could to make ends meet with his welder, either at various construction sites or through his own private business. Besides this, the family had one cow and some sheep, but in 2000 it was very hard to find feed for the livestock. Artillery barrages and explosions made harvesting hay dangerous, and yet the sheep and cows were the only hope for both the family and its neighbors. The villagers decided to keep taking the livestock out to pasture as long as possible — that is, until the first snows. They drew lots and took turns taking the livestock out to the fields. One would tend to the sheep, another the cows — and so on, day in and day out. On November 10 it was the Abdurzakovs' and Mizaevs' turn to go. Someone mentioned that it was a military holiday — Police Day — and therefore it was hard to say what mood the soldiers would be in, but the young men took the livestock to the fields regardless. Tamerlan Abdurzakov took the sheep, Islam Mizaev took the cows, while ?limpasha Khanmuradov took



Vakha Abdurzakov

his own livestock, since his family had more of it than their neighbors and therefore would herd it separately. As a rule the shepherds would never go very far and would make sure to keep each other in sight. They would eat lunch together, lighting a common fire, baking potatoes and warming themselves beside it. That day was no different.

The head of the family, Khavazhi, had gone to the passport service that morning to renew his documents and had returned at noon. Almost immediately, there was such an explosion that all the neighboring houses were shaken and some even had their windows and doors blown off. After a short while a neighbor said that someone in the pasture had stepped on a land mine and been wounded. Khavazhi remembers thinking, "She said stepped on. If someone had really stepped on a mine, then he was killed not wounded." He was walking toward the pasture when he noticed a tractor, moving slowly to meet him. The tractor came closer and stopped. A dead body lay on its fuel tank; another lay on some branches placed across the plough. Khavazhi saw a foot protruding from the branches, recognized his son's shoe and could not turn away. He could not comprehend that the neck sticking out the other end, Tamerlan's neck, had



Tamerlan Abdurzakov prior to his death

no head attached to it. The poor father did not know that it wasn't even the neck but the backbone — that the entire upper half of the torso would never be found — that all three men had been killed — that what had exploded was a mortar round, which the soldiers had left in the field the day before and which was intended as a holiday present for the locals — according to information that some soldiers "volunteered" to him later on. "I'm going to go look for the head," thought Khavazhi and hurried to the field. He searched for his son's head without finding anything but the bloodied pieces of a human body. In the end, all he found was a hat. The hat was full of small pieces of skull on top of which lay — Tamerlan's eyes — filled with a look of arrested surprise. Khavazhi returned to the field three times, each time finding something new: fingers or teeth or something else.

To this day, he cannot forget his son's eyes and still-warm feet. Having learned the full truth, he sat beside his son's remains, stroking the feet. They were warm until two in the morning, at which point they began to ooze blood and grow cold.

Time passed until it was October 2002. On October 24, Vakha went to his grandmother to ask her to come by

for a visit. A few days earlier he had been discharged from the hospital, having been diagnosed with erosive gastroduodenitis. He had been referred to Nalchik for further examination and treatment. The entire family spent the night together, including the grandmother. At three in the morning they awoke to dogs barking. Khavazhi went out to the courtyard to see why the dogs were barking and found it teeming with soldiers. "Get on your knees! Who's in the house?!"

"Only my family," Khavazhi replied and, already kneeling, yelled to his wife to come out. Vakha also woke up. His grandmother was blind and could not see what was happening. She called for Vakha loudly. He called back and went over to her. The poor grandmother grabbed her grandson, covering him with her body. She begged for her grandson to be left alone, screaming that he was the only one she had. The unwanted guests did as they liked in the house.

They grabbed Vakha and commanded, "Men in this room, women in that one." Falling to her knees, Taisa begged the soldiers to leave her son alone. She pointed in the direction of Nalchik, explaining that her son had just come from the hospital and so could not have been involved in anything. The soldiers placated her: "We just want to have a few words with him. Don't worry." She remained sitting on the floor pointing in the same direction until, coming to, she jumped up and ran into the room where her husband and Vakha were being detained. There, she saw Khavazhi sitting completely still, stone-faced. In an instant Taisa understood everything. She rushed into the courtyard and from there into the street. She ran after the personnel carriers until they vanished from sight. As soon as dawn came, the parents began looking for their son. A long journey lay ahead of them.

Six months after the abduction, Taisa had a dream: Vakha was dressed in a

prison uniform with the number 5312 on his chest. Exactly fourteen months later, she had another dream in which she saw Tima, her youngest. He stood on a slight rise, enclosed with golden chains. When his mother tried to touch him, he stopped her with a motion of his hand and said, "If you touch me, I won't be able to tell you why I came. Vakha is not among us. You have cried a lot, but you can stop: He will return. I will come again when he returns."

To relieve the ensuing silence, I asked how old the two sons were.

"Tima was 15," said Khavazhi.

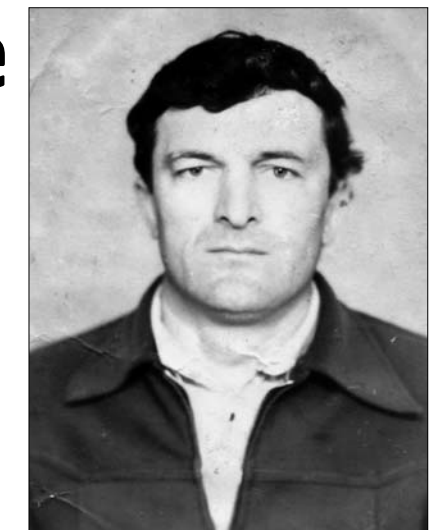
"Vakha was 21," Taisa choked on her tears. She huddled and shivered, as if she had gone back in her mind to those autumn days in 2000 and 2002, which had destroyed her life. Those two days are linked in her consciousness. The pain they brought torments her mother's heart. Indeed, she dislikes autumn, as if the season itself took her sons from her.

A wait as long as a lifetime

Story #22

Hardly had I finished writing the story about the inhuman treatment of Khasi Bashaev and his friends, when I heard another story about an old woman who is waiting for her son. She waits with such fervent impatience that anyone who enters her house is met with an intense expectation: perhaps this one will bring some news of her son? And here I was sitting before this old woman, trying to manage my anxiety, for, a minute ago she had asked me, "Do you know anything about Gila?" The question had caught me off guard. I was at a loss for words. A young woman helped me out, explaining that I was a journalist. "She will write about what happened, Nana. She was the one who wrote about Khasi Bashaev." I handed her the magazine issue with the

article in question. The woman took a long time examining the photograph and then said sadly, "I won't be able to see it. I have lost my sight from all the tears. I don't cry but the tears keep coming and coming. Khasi was good, like my Gila." Later on, I was told by her relatives that she waits for news constantly and asks everyone whether they know anything about the fate of her son. Only then did I understand that the cause of this was not senile forgetfulness but rather the fear that someone might forget to tell her something about her son. "People have become stale. They no longer take note of the sorrows of others. I am old, blind, sick. As long as Allah does not take me away, it means I am living for a reason. Therefore, I ask everyone. Perhaps someone has heard something but decided it wasn't important."



Gilani Yakhiev

She remembers the smallest of details.

She had seven children, three daughters and four sons. Amkhad Yakhiev (this was Gilani's official name) was the third child in the family. He was born in 1955. The family lived in the village of

Sharo-Argun, Sharoysky District, Chechnya. The children grew up and got married. All of them were hard-working, honest and kind. Their mother was proud of them but never said so out of humility. Today, Zatsi Yakhieva (this is her name) is convinced that they were the happiest of families. But the war destroyed everything.

May 21, 2000, was the most terrifying day for the family. Mr. Yakhiev started the morning by doing some chores: He did a little around the courtyard. Because he was planning on building a walkway over a nearby creek, he told his mother that he was going to go to the forest for some lumber. Soon he came back with the logs and then headed to the mill to grind some corn. He loaded up the seed potatoes and went to plant them with his wife and two daughters. The fallow vegetable garden was located near a military checkpoint, from which anything the family did in the field was clearly visible. Work in the vegetable garden had been delayed that year due to the frequent gunfire, but the family decided to plant the potatoes anyway. After all, the war could bring anything, but without food survival was impossible.

Having planted the potatoes, they were coming home when they sudden-

ly noticed three gunships flying very low to the ground. It seemed to the fellow villagers who witnessed this, as though the helicopters were escorting the car. Everyone knew that the car belonged to Mr. Yakhiev and so no one thought anything of it. His reputation was impeccable. Mr. Yakhiev was among the few who refused to take up arms and disliked weapons in general. The helicopters "saw" the car home and suddenly opened fire. One landed right in the courtyard. Mr. Yakhiev jumped out of the car and darted behind some containers lying in the yard, but this did not save him. Soldiers poured out of the helicopter and surrounded him. To his mother, who watched it all happen, the moment stretched into an eternity. The soldiers threw her tied-up son into the helicopter. The two other helicopters continued circling overhead and shooting around the house until the third one took off. Then, the helicopters flew off, taking with them her son, who had never caused anyone any harm.

"I didn't cry at all," said Ms. Yakhieva, laboriously pronouncing each word. "The tears simply flowed down my face on their own. They kept on flowing since that day until, finally, I went blind." Usam and Aset, Mr. Yakhiev's brother and wife, started the search,

but six years after Mr. Yakhiev's abduction, Usam perished in a car accident. According to their mother, even the death of her other son did not dull the pain caused by Mr. Yakhiev's abduction. Recounting Usam's death, the old woman spoke of how energetically he had looked for his brother and how, once, an unknown man came to their house and told them that he had information about their vanished son — but would only divulge it for money. There were many such people, insensitive to the relatives' feelings, but Ms. Yakhieva only kept a grudge against those who took her son. In response to my asking whether her son was a member of an armed group or whether he was a sympathizer, Ms. Yakhieva replied confidently, "My son never participated in anything and never did anything to anyone, unless it was something good." Having finished her tale, Ms. Yakhieva bowed her head wearily. She was looking past me. It seemed that her eyes, which had lost their color, were directed at the spot where she hoped to see her son appear. Even if she has to wait for the rest of her life, she will continue waiting and asking everyone about Gilani. May no one ever tire of responding to her. May no one ever consider her wait hopeless.

A sentence in a surname...

Story #23

Musa Akhmadov (b. 1951), detained at a checkpoint near Kirov-Yurt, Vedensky District, on March 6, 2002.

Mention of Vedensky District surfaces periodically in reports about engagements between security forces and the insurgency. By the time of open hostilities in the early 2000s, Chechens generally associated Vedenov with hell on earth. At that time the district's

inhabitants found themselves caught between Basayev's irregulars and federal units, as a result of which the district saw numerous zachistkas ("sweeps" or "cleansing" operations). The village of Makhkety and its inhabitants fully understood what it meant to be under the relentless and cruel scrutiny of "the guardians of the Constitutional order." Some men, young and old alike, would be found murdered, while others would go missing without a trace. No one ever investigated these summary

executions and abductions. In the rare instances that the federal authorities did initiate an investigation, the victims would be deemed as militants for reporting purposes. This story is about one of the vanished.

On March 6, 2002, Musa Akhmadov, born 1951, a resident in Grozny who had moved temporarily to Volgograd for work, came home to visit his old father in Makhkety. Because of the war, doing so was incredibly dangerous, but even the war did not absolve the

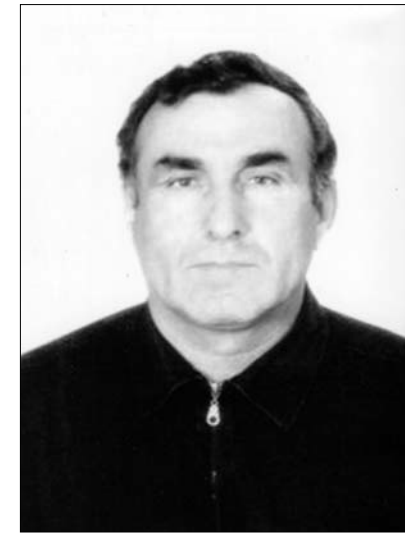
Chechen from his responsibility to care for his aging parents and relatives.

The road to Makhkety passed through numerous checkpoints. One of these was located very close to the village, in the vicinity of another village called Tevzina, officially known as Kirov-Yurt. This area was "guarded" by the 45th Regiment — a consolidated mobile unit of the federal forces that was stationed near the village of Khattuni. And so on March 6 at two in the afternoon, Mr. Akhmadov was stopped and ordered out of his car for a document check. The senior officer at the checkpoint that day had simply "confused" him; at that time, the authorities were searching for two other Akhmadovs — criminal brothers from Urus-Martan. The man in charge decided that Musa was part of the same gang, handcuffed him just in case and radioed APC No. 719, which, as the locals well knew, was tasked with transporting detainees.

It took just two hours for Mr. Akhmadov's wife — Madina Akhmadova — along with his relatives and neighbors to get to the checkpoint. "There are as many Akhmadovs in Chechnya as there are Ivanovs in Russia!" screamed Mrs. Akhmadova. "Why didn't you confuse him with another one — a writer, doctor, or scientist? You've basically killed a man!"

As his relatives later discovered, Mr. Akhmadov had been thrown into APC No. 719 and taken to the 45th Regiment, in order to ascertain his identity. Emerging from the 45th Regiment checkpoint, the chief of police, Andrey Karasev, told relatives what they already knew: that Mr. Akhmadov was not "that Akhmadov" and that after some strictly formal issues are resolved, "tomorrow morning you will be able to take him home." Yet Mr. Akhmadov did not emerge from the checkpoint the next morning.

As is customary in such cases, the relatives started their own search, chief among them Mrs. Akhmadova. She



Musa Akhmadov

found out that Mr. Akhmadov had been taken to Khankala that day. Since then, she has heard no news of him. The soldiers refused to reveal Mr. Akhmadov's whereabouts, preferring to issue threats instead: "Don't you dare complain or we'll take those who still remain!"

"I turned to every possible authority," recounts Mrs. Akhmadova, "I wrote repeatedly to Akhmad Kadyrov, the president of the Chechen Republic at the time, to the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, to all governmental and non-governmental organizations. The only thing I managed to achieve was the initiation of a criminal case. Other than that, there has been nothing. They told me that they could not establish Musa's whereabouts and those responsible for his detainment, that he had been abducted by unknown persons. But that would mean that the Kirov-Yurt checkpoint was manned by who knows who for 14 hours. And that the crew of APC No. 719, as well as the entire 45th Regiment, consisted of unidentified persons. In which case, who was so busy establishing 'Constitutional order' in the Chechen Republic? And where should one look for those they detained? Neither my husband nor my sons ever participated in the insurgency or any armed conflict whatsoever."

Everyone who knew Mr. Akhmadov remembers him as a law-abiding, hard-working, considerate and kind man. He hated politics and thought that the best thing to do was to avoid it (as if that could have saved him). Whenever any political discussions cropped up at home — leading to the inevitable questions of "who is to blame for the war and what should be done" — Musa would simply leave the room, explaining that he had work to do.

It was a good family: a father, a mother and four sons. They raised their children, earned their bread fairly, cared for their relatives and helped others as best they could. The Akhmadovs lived in Volgograd Oblast for a long time, creating a large household from nothing and teaching their children the value of work. They returned to Grozny in the early '90s because they wanted their sons to get a higher education and to raise them among their native culture, customs and traditions. The First Chechen War started not long thereafter. Somehow they survived it. And yet the second one claimed a loved one: not through a stray bullet or an illness — he simply went missing — without a trace, without a grave. How can his family — his wife, his sons, his aging father — how can they go on living with this?

Over the course of several years, Anna Politkovskaya penned a column for the Novaya Gazeta titled "Disappearing People," which was dedicated to missing persons like Mr. Akhmadov. She would write about how the commanders (the father figures) of Russian units fighting in Chechnya would force-feed their soldiers hateful propaganda against the Chechens, cultivating a collective hate toward the Chechen people. According to them, the Chechens were criminals and savages. Some soldiers considered the local inhabitants animals that needed to be destroyed. And this is precisely what happened to thousands of people like Musa Akhmadov.

Three from one family...

Akhmed Baisultanov (b. 1962)

Khampasha Baisultanov (b. 1968)

Suleiman Baisultanov (b. 1974)

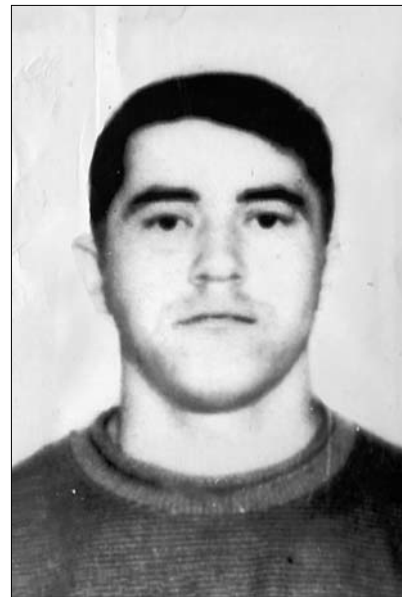
— taken away by federal soldiers on January 1, 2002
from their home in Tsotsin-Yurt, Kurchaloevsky District



Akhmed Baisultanov



Khampasha Baisultanov



Suleiman Baisultanov

Story #24

By Chechen standards, the Baisultanov family from the village of Tsotsin-Yurt was quite small — there were only three children, all boys. They lived an ordinary life, keeping some livestock and maintaining a vegetable garden. The boys had been taught the value of work and attended school. The father, Ezirali Baisultanov, raised them strictly. The children grew. The older two married and had children of their own.

The Baisultanovs managed to survive the first military campaign — its bombings, zachistkas and destruction — without losing a member. Then came the struggle to survive during the inter-war period. There was neither work nor basic living necessities; instead, there was a constant fear for their children's safety.

The eldest son, Akhmed Baisultanov, lived in the 4th microdistrict of Grozny, making a living with his wife by selling juices and mineral waters. They made very little money — just enough to make ends meet and barely feed their children, of whom they had four.

The second son, Khampasha Baisultanov had remained in the village with his father because the latter was gravely ill and could barely walk. Khampasha worked as a cobbler and thereby maintained his wife and two children. The youngest brother, Suleiman Baisultanov, lived with his mother but visited his father frequently. The sons took turns looking after their ailing father, at times doing so all together.

Then came the second military campaign and with it again the bombings, the shootings, and the soldiers' excess.

Toward the end of December 2001, the village was subjected to a zachistka lasting twenty days. The soldiers had come to the Baisultanovs' house before, but the first time only Khampasha had been there with his family and his father. That time, the soldiers had left the bed-ridden old man and Khampasha, who spoke Russian very poorly, alone. They checked their documents, looked around the house and courtyard and went away.

On January 1, the federal forces came again. This time all the sons were there. Akhmed was visiting his father and Suleiman had come in the day before as well. Something about this struck the soldiers as suspicious. "Last time, you were here alone," they yelled at Khampasha, who could not understand a word, "but now there are three of you. You must be plotting something.

No doubt, you're all militants!" This assumption served as grounds for the soldiers to take everyone away and ransack the house. After all, if there are three young men in one household, then they must be militants!

There has been no news of the brothers since. As there was no one else to do so, Akhmed's wife searched for all three on her own, applying fruitlessly to the local authorities and federal agencies. At some point in the early stages of her search, she received information that all three were in Rostov. She was visited by some unidentified persons, who called themselves intermediaries and promised to help free the brothers: not for nothing, however, but for 270 thousand roubles, an enormous sum for this simple and poor family. This money was supposedly the ransom demanded by the federal troops. The relatives sold everything they could, almost for nothing. They sold their land in the village and their apartment in Grozny and received some more money from people who wanted to help. But having raised the requisite sum, the relatives of the abducted Baisultanov brothers were in for another shock. The so-

called intermediaries simply took the money and disappeared. Imagine the condition of people who lost everyone and everything! And yet, there were countless such cases in Chechnya — in which some scoundrels would exploit the despair and mental states of those whose relatives had been abducted.

Eleven years have passed since that time. At the time of his detainment — or better yet, abduction — the eldest brother was 40, Khampasha was 34 and, the youngest, Suleiman, was 27. He was planning on getting married and was waiting for the war to end so that he could start a family.

In the intervening years, Akhmed and Khampasha's children have grown up. Some have married. Life goes on, after all. I spoke with Khampasha's wife, Leila, and son, Ramzan. They did not complain but simply recounted the facts of their tragic family history. They have grown used to their sorrow and, it seemed to me, have lost any hope that remained — over the last eleven years none of the authorities had helped them in any way. Meanwhile, Khampasha's family is impoverished. Leila and Ramzan are disabled but can-



not officially declare their disability — they have no one to help them with the requisite legal process. Their only income is social support paid to Khampasha and Leila's daughter, Dagmara, who is still a minor and therefore receives support for the loss of her father, the family's breadwinner. This pension amounts to four thousand roubles. Meanwhile, Ramzan has a wife and an 18-month-old son.

Community human rights organizations do what they can, but they cannot fully take on the roles of law enforcement, judicial, and social security agencies. And because of this, people who have found themselves in situations like that of Leila and Ramzan Baisultanov, have nothing left to do but put their trust in God and Higher Judgment for finding some truth and justice...

The only thing left is to hope and wait...

Story #25

Supyan Adamov (b. 1980)

Ruslan Adamov (b. 1983)

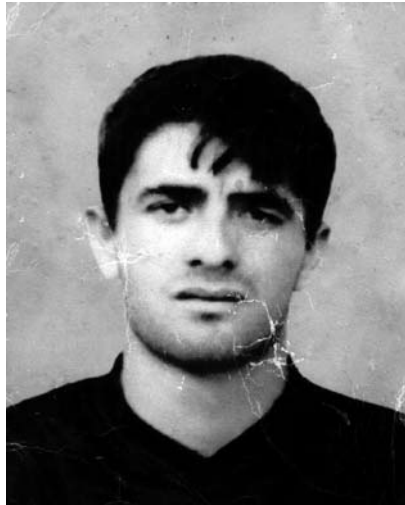
abducted on July 16, 2001,
in Selmentauzen, Vedensky District

This story is one of so many similar ones that it might as well be written on carbon paper. The Adamov brothers, with their visiting sister and niece, were about to go to bed when the dog in the courtyard yelped. "I looked out and saw 20 soldiers," recounts Zumani Adamova, the mother of the abducted brothers. "I looked at the clock and saw that it was 11:30. The armed men were wearing

uniforms and masks. They appeared unexpectedly. They gave the dog something and it fell silent. There were more soldiers on the other side of the gates, in the street. An hour earlier, a helicopter had landed near the village. It seems that the soldiers had come in it. I began to shout that some soldiers had come. We had two houses around our courtyard: one across from the other. The boys slept in one and we slept in the other. The soldiers burst into both houses, probably already aware of who was where. The neighbors' boy had seen them but couldn't warn us in time."

The soldiers brought Mrs. Adamova's sons, Supyan and Ruslan, from their

house barefoot and with their hands tied. Their mother tried to run to them but the federals shot at the ground before her feet. It was strange that the shots did not hit anyone. The sons were led out into the street, while the mother continued trying to break through to them. The federals cursed and shot their weapons. They brought her children to where the helicopter was waiting. "Three of my sons had been in that house. I thought that they had killed Lom-Ali, the youngest, because they had not led him out. He was only 14. I ran to the house but Lom-Ali ran out to meet me. He covered my mouth with his hand and whispered to me that he



Supyan Adamov (b. 1980; abducted July 16, 2001)



Ruslan Adamov (b. 1983; abducted July 16, 2001)

had heard the federals saying over their walkie-talkies to shoot anyone who ran after them. It turned out that when the federals had burst into the house, Supyan hid his brother between the armchair and the couch, but the soldiers noticed him anyway when they looked around with a flashlight. One of them dragged the boy out by his hair, but another told him, 'Leave him!'

The soldiers had appeared outside of the village three days earlier. For three or four days, some of them would pass through the village. The locals and Ruslan, one of the brothers, asked them what they were doing there. The soldiers replied that, supposedly, one of their own had deserted. The son passed this information on to his mother but added that he did not believe them because they were looking for their deserter in a very "strange" manner. Later Mrs. Adamova realized that the soldiers were simply reconnoitering the village.

After her children had been taken away, Mrs. Adamova and some relatives rushed to the soldiers posted outside of the village. She demanded that they return her sons, but the soldiers responded that they had nothing to do with their detainment. The curfew was still in effect then and after nine in the evening, anyone who went outside of their gates could be shot.

Two days later, the soldiers who had appeared so suddenly, left the village. Mrs. Adamova appealed to the detachment posted in Khattuni and was told

that they would look into it. Before all this happened, back on May 9 of the same year, federal forces had taken Supyan from Makhkety where he lived with his family, allegedly because he had participated in a raid on Budennovsk. As Supyan's wife had explained, they had caught him on camera. However, the boy could not have participated in that raid, as he was only 9 at the time. When Mrs. Adamova asked why he had been taken that day, the soldiers suggested she bring them an assault rifle — then they would tell her. Then they went even further, extorting the mother by threatening that if she did not bring them the weapon, they would transfer Supyan to Khankala. Thus, at their behest and with their assistance, she was forced to buy and bring them the rifle as a ransom for her son. This was a widespread custom among the federals. In addition to this, they forced Ruslan, the youngest son, to sign his name to some document. The boys, dazed from all that happened, had no idea what it meant. Later the lawyer explained that they had signed an affidavit stating that both were militants.

An hour later, Supyan was brought in with a bag over his head. When the bag was removed, the boy looked very strange. It turns out that when the soldiers brought Supyan back on their Ural truck, they had thrown him out of the cab and he had hit his head very hard. After a while Supyan came to his senses somewhat. He had been beaten

severely and could hardly move. His torso had the signs of knife cuts on it. There were burns near his eyes and lips and he would later recount that his tormentors had burned his face with red-hot steel.

Two weeks later, the soldiers took Supyan away for a second time, taking him out of the car in which he was riding with his mother. They let him go two days later, having asked him about his brother Ruslan's whereabouts. "I told them that we aren't militants or criminals, that we have no reason to hide and that my brother is at home," he explained to Mrs. Adamova.

And so, a month-and-a-half later, the soldiers returned for both brothers.

Yet again, Mrs. Adamova turned to the public prosecution service. The personnel who came out from the office to the village threatened that they would destroy the entire family if she lodged any complaints. But this did not stop the mother from continuing her search and lodging further complaints. Two weeks after her son's abductions, she received a note from them written in the handwriting of her eldest son. "We are located in House-2," he wrote. She thought that this was some kind of address. Later, someone explained to Mrs. Adamova that "House-2" is a place between Serzhen-Yurt and Shali, where, at that time, a GRU unit had been stationed.

"I applied everywhere I could think of," recounts Mrs. Adamova, "including the Commission on Human Rights, but nothing came of it.

"By chance, in October 2001, I was in Shali, among a crowd of people looking for their relatives. A man named Musa told me about two youngsters who take out the trash under escort in the Shali FSB building. Based on his description I realized that he was speaking about my sons. I showed him their photographs and the man recognized them. Another acquaintance helped me verify this information. But I never did manage to see them.

"One day in 2001, I was sitting not far from the FSB building in Shali, hoping to find out something about my children. Some soldier from there came up to me and asked me about my sons. He told me that they were being held with a group of other detainees in the basement. Once the group reached 500 people, it would be sent either to Mozdok or Nalchik. He was Bashkirian and he told me that they got some water and a piece of bread each day. Ruslan had been severely beaten before prayer, when he had called out adhan for the first time. However, afterward he was permitted to pray and sing adhan. Ruslan was very religious.

"In response to my complaints, in 2012 the case about my children's

abduction was reopened. It had originally been examined in 2001. At the moment there have been no developments."

Mrs. Adamova also said that the soldiers came for Lom-Ali several times, to his school and house. He was issued a passport which purposefully contained typos. As a result, she had to go to the authorities repeatedly, re-applying for her son's documents and lodging complaints against the prosecutor's office. Finally, a Russian prosecutor helped her get a proper passport for her youngest son. Since then, he has been left alone.

Mrs. Adamova raised her children on her own — she divorced their father when they were still young. The boys

were normal students. Ruslan wanted to become an athlete and did weightlifting. Supyan wanted to become a policeman. He was already married when he was taken away. His son was two years old and his daughter was one. Lom-Ali has since grown up. He is married and has three children. He makes his living at construction sites with his mother. Supyan's son, Buvaisar, is in the 9th grade.

What remains to a mother who has spent 12 years wearing out the doorways of various agencies and raising the children of one of her missing sons? She can only wait and hope that, at some point in time, she will discover her boys' fates.

«I remember him always and I am always proud of him!"

Story #26

Akhmed Alsultanov
(b. 1924), missing since January 1995

The people whom we write about in this column are by and large young. The protagonist of this story is an exception to this rule. When Akhmed Alsultanov disappeared, he was 70 — an aging man, a veteran of World War 2.

Before the Chechens were deported, Mr. Alsultanov lived in Shaami-Yurt, Achkhoy-Martanovsky District. When the war started in 1941, he was a cadet at the Baku Flight School. Of course, Mr. Alsultanov had the option of continuing his education but in 1942, having overstated his age, he chose to go to the front. He became a radio-gunner in the 244th Bomber Air Regiment, stationed near Krasnodar. His friend and fellow cadet, Aleksandr, accompanied him to the front. Aleksandr was from Grozny. They flew together in the same plane.

Their combat tour began at Malgobek and ended in Belarus. Here, their plane was hit and the friends, realizing that it could not be saved, jumped out with parachutes... and lost track of each other for many years. Some Red Army soldiers retrieved a wounded Mr. Alsultanov from the water. He did not know what had happened to Aleksandr and decided that he had perished. This was in 1944. After being discharged from the hospital, Mr. Alsultanov returned to his regiment and continued fighting until May 10. On that day, he was called in by his commanding officers and notified that he was "an enemy of the people" — like all Chechens — and that he was therefore not worthy of fighting for this great nation. This came as a hard blow to Mr. Alsultanov. His fellow servicemen — knowing well this courageous and warmhearted young man, who had been decorated with medals and honors for his heroism — were distressed for him, but



The last photograph of Mr. Alsultanov

there was no countermanding the order. Mr. Alsultanov was ready to do battle with enemies in the skies but had no idea how to fight injustice on the ground. His fate was no different than that of thousands of Vaiknakhs, who fought in the war...

Mr. Alsultanov was sent to Kazakhstan, where his parents and close relatives had been deported to as well.

His family first lived in Kokchetav Oblast and afterward in Chimkent. The former airman and hero became a displaced resident. Over time, he became a shipping clerk at a factory and got married.

Following Stalin's death, at the end of the '50s, the Alsultanov family returned to their homeland. Mr. Alsultanov settled in Grozny. In 1960, at the Dinamo Stadium, the unlikely happened: Absolutely accidentally, he ran into his comrade-in-arms, Aleksandr. Both men thought the other dead since their plane had been shot down. Now they became inseparable, bringing their two families together in friendship. Mr. Alsultanov's mother would say that they survived and met each other again through the extraordinary generosity of Mr. Alsultanov. Those who knew him were of the same opinion. When I asked what Aleksandr's last name was, Mr. Alsultanov's relatives told me that it had never occurred to them to even ask. "He was always just uncle Sasha for us," Mr. Alsultanov's daughter, Bilzhan, told me.

Mr. Alsultanov left behind a large family — two sons, four daughters and thirteen grandchildren. He ensured that his children receive good educations. There are among them construction workers, economists, a teacher and a food industry worker.



Mr. Alsultanov with his countrymen – veterans of WWII

The war changed everything for this hardworking, orderly family, not sparing even the youngest generation.

At the beginning of the First Chechen War, the Alsultanov family went to Vedeno to stay with relatives, though Mr. Alsultanov himself remained in Grozny. Try as they might, nothing could convince him to leave. "What could happen to me?" he would tell his wife and children. "Who would touch a veteran of the Great Patriotic War?" It seemed unthinkable to this man — who had lived fairly, defended his motherland and had been decorated in doing so — that his own native Russian army was capable of harming a Russian citizen, regardless of his ethnicity or place of residence. Plus, his brother Bilal also remained in Grozny.

Unfortunately, everything turned out differently. According to his neighbors, Mr. Alsultanov and some other men were taken away during a zachistka at the beginning of January 1995. When his children learned of this, they began looking for their father among the imprisoned and deceased inhabitants

of Chechnya. Their searches dragged on right up to the Second Chechen War. Then, toward the end of 1999, the family was again forced to leave Grozny, this time to Moscow, due to their mother's illness. Zalpa, Mr. Alsultanov's wife, who had suffered greatly as a result of her husband's disappearance, had a stroke following yet another tragedy: Mr. Alsultanov's brother, Bilal, died in 1999. Having returned to Grozny to find out whether their mother had survived, he was killed by a sniper's bullet. The neighbors buried him in the courtyard; later, his relatives re-buried him in his native Shaami-Yurt. This latest death was the end of Mrs. Alsultanov. Unable to recover from her stroke, she died two years later.

Mr. Alsultanov's children renewed their search for their father at the beginning of the 2000s, approaching every possible authority and advocacy group. Nonetheless, they barely managed to get a court to formally declare Mr. Alsultanov a missing person.

Mr. Alsultanov's granddaughter, Amina, knows her hero grandfather's biography very well. In her essay on the topic "What does it mean to be a Chechen?" she wrote: "To be a Chechen means to be an honorable person and to feel a duty to glorify your heroic people. I would like to tell the story of one of them. He is my favorite hero — my grandfather. He bombed our enemies near Malgobek, Sevastopol and Kerch. My grandfather was a true Chechen. His numerous war decorations attest to his service. Everyone respected him; he was an honest and scrupulous person. However, to my enormous sorrow, having survived the Great Patriotic War, he went missing without a trace during the Chechen War. I remember him always and I am always proud of him."



Mr. Alsultanov
at a meeting of
WWII veterans

What are we guilty of...?

Story #27

Adam Makharbiev (b. 1973),
abducted April 24, 2001

An elderly woman paid a visit to the DOSH editorial offices in Grozny. Even someone not very observant would notice the habituated sorrow in her eyes. He or she would not be wrong.

In 1970, Zura Makharbieva settled with her family in Gekhi. Her husband, an accountant and process engineer, worked at a cannery for 45 years. The family had three children — two daughters and a son named Adam, the eldest. Adam did well in school and enjoyed sports. After school, he joined the fitness department at the pedagogical university, graduating in 2001. He got married right before the Second Chechen War. A year after his son Movsar was born, the young couple had a daughter, Malika. Mr. Makharbiev's wife, Khava, was from Grozny; the couple had met while studying at the university. After marriage, Khava moved to her husband's village. They got along well together and loved each other deeply.

In 2001, Mr. Makharbiev got a job with the Zavodsky District police department. He worked there about a month. On March 24, he went to work as usual. He did not have a car and so had to get a ride from someone to get to and from work. In the evening the family was waiting for him to come back from work. He would usually return around six in the evening. But that day, a young man came running into the courtyard and said that Mr. Makharbiev had been detained at a checkpoint between Gekhi and Urus-Martani and that he was being held there at gunpoint. Surprised, the family did not know what to do but decided to go to the checkpoint right away.



Adam Makharbiev

Once there, they found some military cars — a Ural truck, a UAZ van and an armored personnel carrier. Mr. Makharbiev was nowhere to be seen. Zura Makharbieva approached the UAZ but learned only that some people were in there. She was shoved roughly to the ground. Her husband helped her get up. "I felt no pain at the time," recounts Mrs. Makharbieva. "We got in our car and followed them. But because the curfew hour had come, our car was not permitted to pass, so we left it and continued on foot. It was a cold and rainy day and I was barefoot, though I only realized it later on."

The military transports entered the Urus-Martani district garrison headquarters. Mr. Makharbiev's relatives tried to enter behind them but were not allowed to pass beyond the gates. Through an intermediary Mrs. Makharbieva managed to apprise her brother, who lived in Urus-Martani, of what had happened. He arrived and, finding her barefoot, bought her some galoshes and socks.

German, Mrs. Makharbieva's brother, then tried to find out where Mr.

Makharbiev was being held. They learned that he was inside the headquarters and were told that — following an interrogation and an identity check — he would be released the next day.

The next morning, everyone was there waiting, but nothing happened. It was the same the next day. On the third day, the infamous Gen. Gadzhiev, Commandant for the Urus-Martani District, came out to meet them and told them that Mr. Makharbiev would be released only once some facts were ascertained. "I demanded that they officially declare either my son's innocence or guilt, as they are required to do, within 72 hours of his detainment, to no avail," explains Mrs. Makharbieva. "We went on standing there and waiting with the other women. Gadzhiev came out again and told me: 'Your son was here, but he's run away!' I replied, 'How could my son run away if even a mouse can't get into the headquarters?' In response, he threatened me: 'You're too much of a smart ass, your tongue is too loose, I'll kill you.' Gadzhiev threatened me like this many times. He took my passport to keep me from getting past the checkpoints in search of my son — to keep me from lodging complaints. Two or three weeks later, he returned it to me, tattered and dirty, worthless. I had to send for another one — that was an ordeal in and of itself. I had to walk on foot carrying reams of applications and papers from Gekhi to Urus-Martani and back. There was nowhere to sit down and rest. We, the women whose relatives had been abducted, stood there for weeks hungry and cold, or roasting in the sun, listening to constant threats about how they would destroy the other men in our families."

Mrs. Makharbieva wrote complaints to the district's public prosecution serv-

ice, as well as to the service's republican and federal levels. The investigators, Mr. Gorbantsov and Mr. Elfimov, only pretended like they were investigating the case; the latter even threatened her. On the whole, some made promises, while others issued threats. In this manner, mothers, sisters and wives spent many long years looking for their relatives, while running the risk of being abducted or killed themselves.

Like the others, Mrs. Makharbieva turned to Memorial, which helped draw up the cases and legal actions for submission to courts and international organizations. "In the past few years, no one bothers with us," Mrs. Makharbieva says bitterly.

In response to her request for consideration by the Russian-Ombudsman for Women's Rights, Mrs. Makharbieva received only stock responses like "fill out a claim" and "we will respond to you in writing." And yet, this matter does not solely concern the abductees, but also their relatives — their parents, brothers, sisters. And what about the

children, robbed of their father, their breadwinner, surviving on miserly social benefits? These benefits are several times smaller than the ones issued to the orphans of deceased security personnel.

Khalid, Mr. Makharbiev's father, suffered a stroke and died. He could not bear the many years of pain and suffering caused by the disappearance of his only son.

Mrs. Makharbieva has been disabled since childhood: She was in a fire when she was young and now cannot bend her wrists. Of course, this was not the worst thing to happen to her. Nonetheless, following Adam's disappearance, she developed many chronic ailments.

Mrs. Makharbieva has seen her daughters pass away at different times — one during childhood, the other, Kheda, during an accidental shooting in 2006. Kheda had graduated from the medical school at Chechen State University and did everything she could for her nephews. Just before her death,

she had spent her entire month's salary on clothes and groceries for them.

Mrs. Makharbieva frequently risked her life. She found her way into Khankala in search of her son. "I watched them set dogs on a young man, killing him before my very eyes," she recalls. "He screamed from the pain and begged me to turn away so that I wouldn't see him naked in his tattered clothes... The soldiers told me that they would do the same to me, if I ever approached the gates to Khankala again. Another time, they led me up to a pit that they had decided to throw me into. That was when, searching for Adam, I had managed to get to Shamanov."

Mrs. Makharbieva and her fellow women do not have the opportunity or means to treat their ailments. No one wants to take on the task of their psychological rehabilitation. Neither the local authorities, nor the ones from the District or the republic aid them in anything, even after numerous requests. No one explains to them why they are being refused.

On Hold without Limitation

Story #28

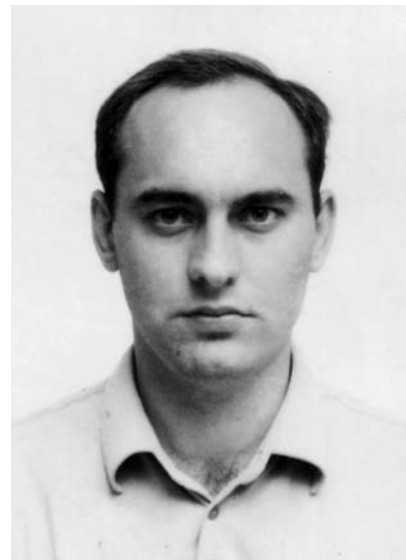
Timur Tsakaev (b. 1976),
abducted July 2, 2011, in Alkhan-Yurt

Since as far back as 1983, the Tsakaevs lived on 2nd ul. Kurinskaya in the Leninsky District of Grozny. The family had four children, two sons and two daughters. Timur Tsakaev, the first-born, was especially beloved. Mr. Tsakaev's mother, Khamsat Tsakaeva, was so close with her son that everyone referred to them as friends. Mr. Tsakaev was not ashamed of showing his affection for his mother and always tried to help her around the house and with the shopping, supporting her any way he could.

Mr. Tsakaev went to School No. 2 (in the center of Grozny) and was particularly interested in history. After graduating in 1997, he matriculated into the Department of Law at Chechen State University. At the beginning of the Second Chechen War he was a student in the correspondence department.

During the first war, after getting married, Mr. Tsakaev moved to Kaliningrad, got a nice job there and came back periodically to visit his relatives and attend sessions. It seemed like everything was working out quite well. In 1997, he had a son, whom he named Saipulla.

Back in Chechnya, the Tsakaev family was faced with surviving the difficult interwar years. Somehow, they got by.



Timur Tsakaev

In September 1999, everyone set off for a village where Mr. Tsakaev's uncle was getting married. When they came back, they found the city basically empty. That was when they realized that a new tragedy was coming.

In the autumn of 1999, the Second Chechen War began. Mrs. Tsakaeva took her three children to her mother's house in Gekhi. Mr. Tsakaev's father, Adam, went home to his relatives in Alkhan-Yurt. While there was still time, he stopped by Grozny to find out whether their house was still standing.

The war dragged on and Mr. Tsakaev's father left the country with the intent of sending for his family later on. But Mrs. Tsakaeva's grandmother was on her deathbed and her sister was disabled. Mrs. Tsakaev could not leave them on their own, especially during wartime. Milana, her eldest daughter, was married, while Mrs. Tsakaeva's two younger children, Diana and Magamed-Salekh, did not want to leave without their mother.

In the autumn of 2001, Mr. Tsakaev returned from Kaliningrad with his family. Concerned for his relatives, he decided to stay and wait until the situation improved. He rented an apartment in Ingushetia but would come visit his relatives. His mother asked him to stay away, afraid that he would get caught in a zachistka or be taken away at a checkpoint.

On November 1, Mr. Tsakaev set out to visit his paternal grandmother in Alkhan-Yurt. On November 2, at three in the morning, their house in Alkhan-Yurt was surrounded. Mr. Tsakaev's uncle was beaten, while Mr. Tsakaev himself was taken away.

Mrs. Tsakaeva learned the news from her sister-in-law, who had ostensibly come tell her that Mrs. Tsakaeva's sister had taken ill. However, Mrs. Tsakaeva understood that something else was the matter. She had had a premonition of tragedy. Two weeks earlier, Mr. Tsakaev's third child was born.

His name was Magomed and he was being cared for by Mr. Tsakaev's grandmother.

Mrs. Tsakaeva did not believe that, in such a perilous time, her sister-in-law would come solely on behalf of her sick sister. She asked, "How is Taga?" (This was her nickname for Mr. Tsakaev.) When she learned what had happened, Mrs. Tsakaeva dropped everything and rushed to Alkhan-Yurt. Shocked, she could not fully comprehend what was happening. She had heard of similar cases numerous times but never entertained the thought that her son — the most precious person in the world to her — could suffer the same horror. The federal soldiers had beaten her brother-in-law so severely that for a while afterward he could not walk. Once he had recovered a little, he began to inquire into Mr. Tsakaev's whereabouts. Mrs. Tsakaeva was torn between ailing relatives and the rampant desire to look for her son. Her brother-in-law did not permit her to go with him to the various headquarters and various military organizations.

Thus began the endless searching. The family was told that Mr. Tsakaev could be ransomed. Intermediaries and informants appeared, offering to provide information about their abducted son for money. Some even offered to assist in his release. The relatives did all they could to get the money together. But every time, their trust was repaid with betrayal. The intermediaries were simply extorting them, speculating on their tragedy. Thus drained of the money they needed to survive, the family fell into debt. In Chechnya, this kind of thing happened thousands of times to those whose relatives had disappeared.

One day in 2002, standing outside of the Urus-Martan garrison headquarters, Mrs. Tsakaeva saw a group of women. She came up to them and asked them what they were doing. The women replied that they were looking for their abducted sons, brothers, husbands,

fathers. Since then, Mrs. Tsakaeva began going with them to the headquarters, the police precincts and the prosecution service offices.

In the winter of that year, someone told the mothers that an assembly of deputies from the State Duma was supposedly going to gather in Gudermes and that they could voice their misfortunes there and tell about their vanished loved ones. The women decided to take this opportunity to apprise the representatives of the Russian government of what had happened to them. They went to Gudermes but as they approached the building where the assembly was being held, they were surrounded by police — as though they had been expected — loaded into buses and taken to the Gudermes remand prison. The women were held there for three to four days. First they were interrogated one after the other and then they were placed in a very dirty and cold jail cell. Later, the police threw an older Chechen man in there with them, whom the women had asked for directions to the assembly. The man begged the police officers to release the women, saying that he would sit out their terms. In response, he received curses and insults. Only through the efforts of Memorial and other human rights organizations, which publicized what was happening, were the women released. It should be mentioned that the federal forces treated the women more respectfully than their "native" police.

Mrs. Tsakaeva and the other women spent those days of confinement in a basement, which gravely afflicted their health and mindset. For many months after, the women could not sleep from their nightmares. Every one of them had lived through a very stressful time and was in a very poor condition at their release.

And after it was all over, the women went back to their painful waiting and searching for their loved ones.

P.S. In the intervening years, Mrs. Tsakaeva's youngest daughter got married, but her family life did not work out and she was forced to return to her mother. The youngest son also married and now has two children. He took his family to Germany but life did not work out for them there. He is back in Grozny now. He has no work and survives by doing odd jobs here and there.

Mrs. Tsakaeva supports her entire family — 6 people — with her pension (nine thousand roubles). Mrs. Tsakaeva's husband died, having spent 10 years abroad. Mr. Tsakaev's uncle, Musa, who had begun the search, died in 2004. Mr. Tsakaev's grandmother died a little later.

Mrs. Tsakaeva tries to stay strong, like all the other mothers of those who

were abducted and who went missing without a trace. Every year, it becomes harder. The waiting and the pain, the pain and the waiting — it is a closed circle from which, for now, there is no visible way out. Only her hope and faith in a higher power helps her and her fellows.

And so goes on a wait that has no date of expiration.

An Endless Search to No Avail

Story #29

Zina Pukhigova was born in the famed Chechen village of Valerik, which had been immortalized by Lermontov. In 1975, when she was 17, she married Salman Pukhigov. Mr. Pukhigov had served in the army, reaching the rank of sergeant. Upon being discharged, he began working as a driver. He met Mrs. Pukhigova by chance, as she was returning from a mineral spring one day. This accidental meeting entwined both youths' destinies.

A year later they started a family, eventually having six children. Mr. and Mrs. Pukhigov wanted a son very much, but their first five children were all daughters. However, wishes were granted with their sixth, whom they named Magomed. Today he is 23 years old.

The family moved to Astrakhan Oblast a year after their wedding. In those days, young Chechen families often moved to other parts of the country for the sake of work. They became farmers typically, working day and night and teaching their children the value of work. The years passed and the children grew up. Right before the First Chechen War, the family returned to the republic, not suspecting what lay ahead of them. They wanted to raise

their children, especially their daughters, surrounded by their relatives as well as Chechen traditions.

Mr. Pukhigov instantly began working. He bought a truck and started a hauling business. Mrs. Pukhigova continued doing what she had always done — she rented a hectare of land in Goity and began growing vegetables. The girls went to school. At first the family lived with their in-laws, but in due time they bought and moved into a separate house.

Then came the First Chechen War along with its horrors, shootings and air raids. Luckily, everyone in the Pukhigov family survived it.

After the war Mrs. Pukhigova began going to the market to sell her produce, though the land she had rented was already gone by then. Mr. Pukhigov was elected as head of the village administration, but quit his post after three months because conditions were so difficult. He began helping Mrs. Pukhigova with her business. In this way they survived the difficult interwar years, until the Second Chechen War arrived. In the first days of the war, Mr. Pukhigov was gravely wounded in a rocket attack on Grozny's central market, where he and his wife were selling produce. His leg had to be amputated. Once again the family was forced to survive the



Zina Pukhigova

months of war in their village — the shootings, the zachistkas, the document checks.

A year after the war began, on the night of February 11, 2001, approximately twenty people in military uniforms burst into the Pukhigov house. The soldiers searched everyone but found nothing illegal. Despite this, having finished their search, they took away Mr. Pukhigov. His family has not seen him since.

That same night, five other people were detained, all of them the

Pukhigovs' neighbors. But they were released after a couple days. Three of them had been held in the same room as Mr. Pukhigov at the Urus-Martanovsky District garrison headquarters.

Mrs. Pukhigova began searching for her husband early in the morning. She turned to the local authorities, including the public prosecution service, which initiated a criminal investigation into the abduction.

It turned out that Mr. Pukhigov had been detained by servicemen from the district headquarters and was being held there as well. Interviews with the witnesses — the aforementioned neighbors — confirmed this fact. Another witness to the detainment had been the commandant of Goity, a certain Yuri Nikolaevich (Mrs. Pukhigova could not ascertain his surname, only his patronymic).

Mrs. Pukhigova met with the then-district commandant, the infamous Gen. Gadzhiev. He confirmed multiple times that Mr. Pukhigov had been detained by his personnel, though he refused to do so officially. He claimed

that Mr. Pukhigov would be released after the required checks were run.

Mrs. Pukhigova spoke with Mr. Gmyrin, the head of the FSB Directorate for the Urus-Martanovsky District. He also claimed that Mr. Pukhigov was being held at the headquarters and recommended that Mrs. Pukhigova write to all possible authorities.

In this manner, several weeks passed in the course of which Mrs. Pukhigova tried various ways to obtain official information about her husband's whereabouts. In the end, the commandant repudiated his own words and refused to provide information about Mr. Pukhigov's whereabouts.

Meanwhile family relatives had been looking for Mr. Pukhigov in other places. But any traces of him vanished. Neither the authorities nor the public prosecution service undertook any effective measures to release Mr. Pukhigov, even though there was plenty of conclusive evidence that he had been detained by personnel from the garrison headquarters. In interviews with the witnesses who had been

detained alongside Mr. Pukhigov, the witnesses confirmed that they really had been in the garrison headquarters building. The commandant of Goity was not interviewed, despite being present when the soldiers removed Mr. Pukhigov from his house, and despite the presence of a Niva SUV, belonging to Goity headquarters personnel, at the site of the detainment.

Mrs. Pukhigov looked for her husband for many years and throughout many cities that were the rumored locations of Chechen citizens abducted by federal forces. After all her attempts ended unsuccessfully and having passed through all judicial levels, Mrs. Pukhigov filed a claim with the European Court. In 2010, the Court sustained her claim, awarding her monetary compensation. The Pukhigovs' daughters are all married and have children of their own. Altogether, the Pukhigovs' have fifteen grandchildren. Magomed, their son, studied law but has not managed to find work. In the meantime, he works as a taxi driver. The family has not ceased searching and waiting.

The years of hope and expectation...

Story #30

Wahid Yakhyaev and Rosa Akhmadova got married in 1978. They lived in the same village and crossed paths from time to time. They met only once Mr. Yakhyaev had returned from the army, when Mrs. Akhmadova was in the eighth grade. He told her that he could wait until she grew up but the young couple pushed on with their relationship regardless.

Mr. Yakhyaev worked at the Grozny radio factory, having learned to be a machinist from his father who had been a specialist in the craft. However,

following the USSR's dissolution, local industry gradually dissolved as well. Mr. Yakhyaev began earning money driving a taxi and did other small jobs that he would get because of how adept he was at working with his hands. The youngest of his family (he had two other brothers), Mr. Yakhyaev had to support his entire family as well as his aging and ailing parents. He did not leave his village, either during the first or the second war, not wishing to leave his parents alone.

The Yakhyaev family had four children — two boys and two girls. When their father disappeared, the eldest



Rosa Akhmadova, the wife of the abducted Mr. Yakhyaev

son was 21, the younger son was 14, the elder daughter was 11 and the youngest was 2. Everyone lived in the same house together. During a *zachistka* in Goity, Mr. Yakhyaev was taken away in the aftermath of a house search. The soldiers claimed that they were from the garrison headquarters. Naturally, this is where the family went to look for their husband and father. After a lengthy discussion, the Russian detective named a sum of money for which he would be willing to release Mr. Yakhyaev. The family paid and, indeed, he was released — on the grounds that, supposedly, he had been detained in error.

Following these events, Mr. Yakhyaev's parents insisted he go to Ingushetia, if only temporarily. Yet, as he was traveling to Nazran with a friend a week later, Mr. Yakhyaev was detained once more at a checkpoint near the Central State Traffic Patrol Department. His friend began looking for him right away. Mr. Yakhyaev's relatives found him three days later at the Zavodsky District headquarters in Grozny. Again, the soldiers promised to release Mr. Yakhyaev for a ransom of either three thousand dollars or an assault rifle. The family was again forced to go into debt to raise the money. Again, Mr. Yakhyaev was released on the same grounds — "detained in error."

Understanding that it was impossible to risk anything once more and that what was happening was a racket in which the soldiers were making money by detaining innocent people, the family decided to send Mr. Yakhyaev to his mother and relatives in Uralsk, Kazakhstan. But it was too late.

On the night of April 21, 2002, approximately fifteen soldiers — three of them masked — burst into the house. It was clear that Mr. Yakhyaev had been abducted by state security personnel due to the following facts:

The men had come in military transports: an armored personnel carrier, a Ural truck, and one UAZ van (a gray *tabletko*). One of the soldiers said that they had come from the district headquarters and that, supposedly, they were conducting a document check.

The house was subjected to a warrantless search, though, to Mrs. Akhmadova's surprise, the soldiers were very polite the entire time.

Then the soldiers checked the passports of all the male members of the family. When they looked at Mr. Yakhyaev's passport, they said that this was the man they were looking for and suggested he dress quickly. Mrs. Akhmadova inquired why the soldiers were taking her husband and where to. She reminded them that under General Moltensky's Order No. 80, military personnel were required to indicate the destination that detainees were taken to. The soldiers responded that they were taking him to the district headquarters and that she could inquire about him there the next morning.

After Mr. Yakhyaev had dressed, the soldiers left with him, telling the family that if they left the house they would be forced to open fire. Despite this threat, however, Mrs. Akhmadova ran out to the yard and watched the convoy drive off in the direction of Urus-Martan.

The next day Mrs. Akhmadova and other relatives began making inquiries with the district headquarters administration. At the time, the commandant was N. Golovanov. He claimed that his personnel had not gone anywhere the day before and that they had not detained her husband.

Only when Mrs. Akhmadova turned to the district prosecution service was a criminal investigation initiated. All the members of the family were examined and all of them gave detailed accounts clearly asserting that Mr. Yakhyaev had been detained

by state security personnel. Despite this, Mr. Yakhyaev's whereabouts could not be established.

A lot of time has passed since Mr. Yakhyaev's abduction. Throughout, the public prosecution service has groundlessly drawn out the criminal investigation.

After all the anxious waiting and searching, Mr. Yakhyaev's father went blind and his mother fell ill. Mr. Yakhyaev's parents died one after the other. A year later, Mr. Yakhyaev's oldest brother, Takhir, also died from a heart attack. Now, only Vakha is left.

Mr. Yakhyaev's children have grown up — his sons are married, as is the elder daughter. He would have been the grandfather of eight grandchildren. His youngest daughter, Petimat, is in the eighth grade. She does not remember her father and yet cannot forget one horrible image from the night of her father's abduction: When one of the soldiers tore away the sheet that she was hiding beneath, she was confronted with his hand and its one long, curved nail. After that night, she would become terribly frightened whenever she encountered men in military uniforms.

Mrs. Akhmadova turned to every possible Russian judicial authority, starting with the local ones and working her way up to the federal level. Nothing happened. Finally, she lodged a claim with the European Court. Her case has been under examination for two years now. She is waiting and hoping that at least some kind of justice will be restored.

Mrs. Akhmadova often dreams that Mr. Yakhyaev has returned home. Each time, he asks about his youngest son. She tells him that this is only a dream but her husband replies that she is awake and that he really has come back. It has been eleven years now that she has been waking up and starting a new day without him — with the pain of waiting and the hope that her loved one will return.

"If he's wounded, he must be a militant!"

Story #31

Walid Gerasiev (b. 1977), detained by federal soldiers during a *zachistka* on February 5, 2000, unaccounted for since.

We met with Vaisu Gerasiev, father of the missing Walid Gerasiev, toward the end of December 2013. Sitting before me was an older, ailing gentleman who had spent the last thirteen years looking for his son after he was taken away by federal soldiers. He brought with him a folder of documents assembled over his many years of searching — a stack of applications to the various investigatory and judicial authorities of the republic and the Russian Federation. He told us of his tragedy and the injustice he encountered anywhere he looked for information about his son.

The event that so changed the life of the Gerasiev family occurred at the beginning of February 2000 during a *zachistka* in Shami-Yurt.

On February 3, Federal forces suddenly began shooting at the village, from the sky and from the ground. The village inhabitants hid themselves in basements and bomb shelters. One of these belonged to a relative of the Gerasievs, Omar Vagapov. About ten villagers crammed themselves into his basement. Among them was Walid Gerasiev, who had just returned to the village the day before. The villagers spent two days in the basement, while the bombing and shooting went on overhead.

In the morning of February 5, the *zachistka* began: Russian soldiers began combing the village for militants — such was the federal forces' typical plan of action. Everyone who was in the basement, including the women and children, was brought out to the court-

yard. The soldiers began checking their documents. Mr. Gerasiev's passport passed the check, but the soldiers took issue with his arm because it was bandaged. The soldiers began inquiring what was wrong with it: Why is he wounded? He isn't a militant, is he?

What had really happened was the following. Mr. Gerasiev had asked Mr. Vagapov, his relative, to help him gather some firewood. It was winter and there was nothing else to heat the house with. People would go to the forest to gather firewood at their own risk, surviving the best they knew how. Thus, on February 3, Mr. Gerasiev and Mr. Vagapov were transporting firewood with Mr. Vagapov's tractor when the tractor got stuck. As a result, the two men had to go home to get a towing cable. Mr. Vagapov was on his way back with it, riding his motorcycle, when the shooting began. Both men dropped everything and ran from the forest. One shell hit the tractor, damaging it and the motorcycle in the process. A fragment wounded the back and hand of the fleeing Mr. Gerasiev.

When Mr. Gerasiev and Mr. Vagapov returned to the village, they encountered a state of general panic: People were screaming, running in the streets, looking for shelter. Some of them rushed to Mr. Vagapov's basement.

Everyone was trying to explain to the soldiers why Mr. Gerasiev was wounded. But the soldiers did not want to listen to anyone. Instead, they made threats and forbade anyone from speaking at all — in Chechen or Russian. They took Mr. Gerasiev aside and it became apparent that they intended to take him away. That was precisely what happened. Placing Mr. Gerasiev in a KAVZ bus, converted for prisoner transport, the soldiers left. Later on, some people who were look-



Vaisu Gerasiev with a picture of his lost son Walid

ing for their relatives — whom the federal forces had also taken that day — saw the same bus in the courtyard of the Achkhoy-Martan military headquarters. That day, along with Mr. Gerasiev, the soldiers detained two brothers — Alvi and Akhmad Doshaev — as well as Islam Ibragimov. A month later, Akhmad Doshaev's body was found in a river near the village. The others remain unaccounted for. Not one of them was associated with the insurgency in any way.

Vaisu Gerasiev has seen a lot in his lifetime. He grew up without his mother, who died during the diaspora, and was raised by his aunt. Returning from exile in 1961, he married Aset, a woman from his village. He worked hard as he had a large family with nine children to support. For many years he worked at the local state farm; later he grew fruits and vegetables in his own orchard and vegetable garden — supporting the entire family thereby. All of the children

worked side by side with the adults and knew what it meant to earn their bread honestly. Hardworking and easygoing, Walid did not need to be told twice what needed to be done. He was friends with his classmates but did not seek diversion — he had no time for it. In his short life, he never found the time to do anything nice for himself.

Mr. Gerasiev continues the search for his son, despite his age and ailments. His older sons (Walid was the fourth child of the family) do everything they

can too. The daughters are married, but three of them are already widows with children: Their husbands died at different times, all young and all from illness. Thus the daughters and their children require support as well, even if it is hard to come by. Mr. Gerasiev is used to difficulties, but he cannot come to terms with the injustice and cynicism of those whose official duty it is to search for those who went missing during the war — those, whose duty it is to support, if only just the morale, of the relatives of

the missing. Instead of doing these things, officials evince an utter indifference. And what can one expect, if Walid, who vanished 13 years ago, remained a registered voter for the village administration until 2012?

Having passed through all instances of the Russian legal system, the missing persons case of Walid Gerasiev is awaiting examination by the European Court. Maybe Mr. and Mrs. Gerasiev will wait long enough to see some justice happen here on Earth.

I must keep looking for my brother — no matter what...

Story #32

Andarbek Bugaev (b. 1977), abducted in Khankala on July 27, 2004

A young woman came to the editorial offices of DOSH. One could tell by her eyes and expression that she brought a deep sorrow with her. Unfortunately, we have grown accustomed to visitors bringing bad news. This visitor turned out to be Rosa Kharaeva, sister of Andarbek Bugaev who was abducted in 2004. The circumstances surrounding her brother's abduction are quite similar to those surrounding the disappearances of thousands of others — of those who went missing in Chechnya during the 2000s.

At three in the morning of July 27, 2004, armed men in combat fatigues and masks burst into the Bugaev house. Having rudely pushed around the still-sleepy and dazed occupants, the soldiers took the owner of the house and drove off in an unknown direction. The soldiers had used two UAZ vans as transportation. Mr. Bugaev's relatives began looking for him right away, filing a complaint with the Grozny public

prosecution service. Staff from the prosecutor's office came out to their house, conducted a survey of the premises and announced that they lacked the jurisdiction to do anything further. The victim's loved ones began to search for him as best they could on their own: By that time in Chechnya, the process of searching for the missing — much like the process of abducting the innocent — had already been well worked out. At first the soldiers promised the hapless, despairing relatives that they would figure everything out and release Mr. Bugaev. Later, some men who were "in the know" showed up — intermediaries who demanded compensation for their services. As time went by, all traces of the victim disappeared.

Almost a year later, Mr. Bugaev's relatives were called into the Economic Crimes Department to provide witness testimony. They were questioned by a detective named Mr. Khakimov. The relatives had information that Mr. Bugaev was being held by the FSB, but the agency denied this emphatically. Of course, this particular agency would never confirm any information about an abduction.



Rosa Kharaeva, sister of the abducted Bugaev

Mr. Bugaev had a young son who was the joy of the family. The boy was only one-and-a-half when his father disappeared. Mr. Bugaev sold produce with his wife at the city market. The work was difficult and dangerous: At any moment, one could find oneself in a crossfire. The soldiers could take what they wanted whenever they wanted.

Mr. Bugaev grew up in Kalmykia, in a large family with five boys and five girls. Many Chechen families moved to the various regions of Russia to earn money and support their children. The Bugaev family raised livestock, teaching their children this hard rural trade from a young age.

The family returned to Grozny toward the end of the '90s, once the children had grown up. They bought a house and, bit by bit, their life back in their native land began to come together. The girls began to get married; the boys followed suit. When he was 25, Mr. Bugaev too got married and quickly had a son.

During the First Chechen War, the Bugaev family left Grozny for Tangi-Chu where they had relatives to stay with. They remained there during the most intense hostilities. But even living in the village did not spare them from the war's horrors: The villagers would be constantly beaten and insulted by the soldiers and were faced with intermittent zachistkas, in the wake of which, inevitably, some young men would go missing. In the interwar period the family was forced to remain in the village because their house in Grozny had been too damaged to live in. Then the Second Chechen War began. The parents remained in Tangi-



Andarbek Bugaev, abducted by the military in 2004

Chu, while their sons and daughters-in-law fled to Ingushetia, where they ended up living in refugee camps. Mr. Bugaev stayed with his parents: According to Chechen custom, as the youngest son, he could not leave them. After the war ended the older brothers returned to Chechnya with their families. They began helping support their parents and so, at last, Mr. Bugaev had the time to start a family of his own.

Having lived through so much, Mr.

Bugaev's father died in 2007, never having learned his son's fate. His mother passed away three years later, falling suddenly ill during her husband's funeral. Before his death, Mr. Bugaev's father asked Mrs. Kharaeva to continue to look for her brother — Zila Bugaev hoped that one day he would be found, dead or alive. In his simplicity and kindness he went on believing that an innocent person could not simply disappear without an investigation or a trial...

After some time had passed, Mr. Bugaev's ex-wife went abroad and remarried. Her son lives with her in Austria. Perhaps, growing up in a different country and in a different family, he does not often recall his father who went missing during a distant and foreign war. Meanwhile, here in Chechnya, his aunt Rosa had carried on her sisterly duty these long years. She draws up complaints and claims, goes to different courts and prosecutor's offices. And, just as hundreds of other mothers and sisters, she cannot achieve anything: She receives nothing but runarounds in response to her pleas. Having passed through all the Russian courts, the case of Andarbek Bugaev's abduction was submitted to the European Court at the end of 2010. At the moment, it is awaiting its turn for examination.

He always defended justice...

Story #33

Sobur-Ali Bedigov (b. 1956), abducted by federal forces on June 14th, 2001, in Serzhen-Yurt.

The protagonist of this story met Birlant Baimuradova, a native of the village of Avtury, in 1980. After graduating from the cooperative school Birlant began working at a store near the Avtury poultry farm. Sobur-Ali Bedigov,

who worked as a truck driver, would often go by there. The two fell for each other. Birlant was attracted to the young man's courage, dignity and acute sense of justice. By then, their earlier marriages had fallen apart. Mr. Bedigov was raising two sons, aged two-and-a-half and three. Birlant's son from her first marriage chose to remain with her ex-husband's family.

The two married a year later and had four children — two sons and two

daughters. But a few years later, they were struck with a tragedy: Their first-born, Islam, died in a car accident.

Mr. Bedigov supported his family by driving his Kamaz truck. Mrs. Bedigova, as per Chechen custom, raised the children and took care of the household. She accepted her husband's older sons as her own, never discriminating between her children and her stepchildren. Time passed and the children grew older. The family lived in a beauti-

ful Chechen village called Serzhen-Yurt — Mr. Bedigov's birthplace. However, difficult times came, bringing with them changes in Chechnya's political structure.

At the outset of the First Chechen War, the mountain and highland villages were bombed severely. Serzhen-Yurt numbered among them. Mrs. Bedigova took her children to her relatives in Avtury. Mr. Bedigov remained at home, but when the federal forces entered the village, he went to live with his family along with some fellow villagers. As soon as the federal forces began letting people back into Serzhen-Yurt, he returned. Their house had been damaged severely in the bombardment. The doors had been knocked off their hinges and the windows and the roof had been blown away by the shockwaves. Everything had to be repaired, but there was no money to do so. After all, the family had small children to take care of, as well as a newborn daughter. Thus, came a very difficult time — though, to be fair, thousands of Chechen families went through the same trials.

As always, Mr. Bedigov continued to support his family with his miraculously-unharmed Kamaz. He transported vegetables and other products to the market. Mrs. Bedigova helped him however she could. Money did not come easily for the family. Mr. Bedigov worked in the heat and in the cold, carrying heavy loads. All of this exertion affected his health: By the beginning of the Second Chechen War, he could no longer walk.

As soon as the bombings began again, the family went to Mrs. Bedigova's relatives in Avtury, remaining there for about four months. At the first possible opportunity, Mr. and Mrs. Bedigov left the children with their grandmother and returned to Serzhen-Yurt. Once again they were faced with the task of repairing the destruction. Since they had no money to live on or

feed their children with, they were forced to sell the Kamaz.

In the meantime, Sobur-Ali's older sons had grown up: Ilyas was 22 and Khizir was 21. The parents arranged marriages for the boys — it was as if their father was in a hurry to make sure they were taken care of.

At three in the morning of June 14, 2001, approximately 30 federal soldiers in masks burst into the Bedigov house. Snatching Mr. Bedigov from his bed, they beat him severely. After that, they beat the youngest son and threw him into the basement, rigging the door with a grenade. The older brothers were not there during the raid because they had left to work in Grozny the day before. The soldiers shoved Mrs. Bedigova and the younger daughters into the kitchen, locking them in. Then, they ransacked the house, taking anything of value and breaking or shattering anything they could not carry away.

Having indulged in such excess, the soldiers took Mr. Bedigov and drove off in their APCs and cars — the license plates of which had been covered up. (This was a customary tactic used by the federal forces to prevent witnesses from identifying their unit.) One villager saw them leading Mr. Bedigov — a bag on his head and his hands tied — in the direction of Benoy. Beslan Saidev, a young man working as a bailiff in Shali, was abducted the same night. He was taken away almost in the nude, likewise having been snatched from his bed. The soldiers ransacked Mr. Saidev's house as well. The next morning, after blocking the roads leading out of the village, federal forces began a zachistka, during which they continued ransacking villagers' houses.

The Bedigov family began looking for Sobur-Ali. On top of this grave family tragedy, they now had no means of supporting themselves. The zachistkas went on in the village and Mrs. Bedigov became afraid for her sons. As a result, she sent Khizir and Ilyas, along with their families, to stay with their mother



Sobur-Ali Bedigov

in Novgorod — the two women kept up relations. They spent a year living there, before going abroad. At the present time, they have been living in Europe for ten years.

Beslan — the younger son of Mr. and Mrs. Bedigov — is married and has two children. He cannot exert himself physically, due to the severe health issues brought on by the beating. The elder daughter, Rukiyat, is married, while the younger, Ramnat, just graduated from school. The family survives on Mrs. Bedigova's social security. The older sons help too.

Mrs. Bedigova showed me a thick dossier of documents: These were her claims and complaints to the various judicial authorities, running the gamut from the district-level court to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. Everywhere she applied, she was met with stock responses and evasions. No one in government has any time for a man abducted by the same federal forces that serve the government.

Having passed through the hell that is Russian legal procedure, Mrs. Bedigova approached the European Court, which examined the abduction of her husband, Sobur-Ali Bedigov. At least somewhere — if not in our "lawful" state — human life and human fate still hold significance...

In a land without law, people place their trust in a higher court...

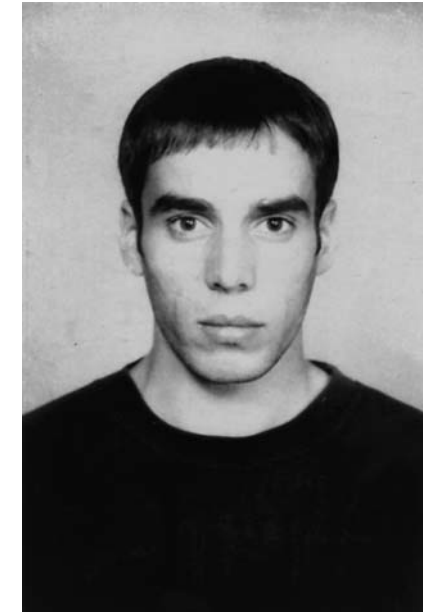
Story #34

Rizvan Musliev (b. 1977) and Beslan Musliev (b. 1981), abducted by federal forces on June 8, 2002, from their home in Shali

The Muslievs are an ordinary, large Chechen family from the valley village of Shali. The head of the family, Mugadi Musliev, spent many years working at the Argun Reinforced Concrete Factory. Later he worked at the Shali administration complex. His wife, Rukiyat Muslieva, raised the children and tended to the household. The two met and married in 1972. They lived happily, overcoming life's challenges — typically, monetary ones — side-by-side and raised their children, of whom there were five: three sons and two daughters. The children loved and respected their father very much but maintained the traditional distance in their relationships with him. Meanwhile, their mother was everything for her kids. They would come to her with their joys as well as their troubles. Naturally, their parents wanted the best for them. The father hoped that his children would receive a higher education, obtain a good and respected profession and manage their lives for the best. But by the beginning of the '90s, when the sons and daughters had grown up, a new era began in their country and republic: It was as if everything had been turned upside down. Then, the war, euphemistically referred to as the "First Chechen War," began. The family survived the shootings and the bombings, eternally fearing for their children. Barely had they managed to come to their senses than the Second Chechen War broke out: bringing with it again



Rizvan Musliev



Beslan Musliev

the same horrors, the same fears, the same destruction. Nonetheless, the scariest calamity still lay ahead.

On June 8, around six in the morning, an armored personnel carrier and a van stopped before the Muslievs' house. Federal soldiers jumped out. One half of them fanned out along the street, taking up firing positions and completely surrounding the Musliev house as well as approaches toward it. The other half burst into the house where everyone was still sleeping. Every soldier, with the exception of one, was wearing a mask. The one without a mask acted like the leader. He was very unpleasant in appearance: short, bald, overweight and missing a tooth. Having searched everywhere — the house, the attic, the unfinished building in the courtyard — the federal troops led the brothers, Rizvan and Beslan, barefoot and half-dressed, into the yard and

threw them to the ground. After that they brought out the aging head of the family, Mugadi. The soldiers responded with insults and curses to the shocked and terrified residents' requests to identify themselves and explain why they had come. Indignant, Mrs. Muslieva inquired why they were taking her sons. The soldiers replied that they wanted to check them: If her sons were found uninvolved in anything, they would be released. In her turn, Rukiyat produced an official notice issued by the Shali public prosecution service, which averred the boys' noninvolvement in any activities — particularly criminal ones — against security forces. The thing of the matter was that the brothers had already been taken away before, supposedly to ascertain their involvement in criminal mischief and membership in illegal armed groups. The vetting process lasted about ten days at

the beginning of January, 2002, either in the offices of the FSB or of the public prosecution service, but eventually the boys were cleared of any wrongdoing and even issued an official notice attesting this fact. Naively believing that the notice could help her sons, Mrs. Muslieva showed it to the soldiers. The soldiers, however, ignored the document — it was meaningless to them.

Then, the federal soldiers took Rizvan and Beslan out to the street and shoved them into the waiting military transport. None of the relatives were allowed to follow under threat of death. Such were the soldiers' orders: "Don't show your face or we will shoot to kill!" Then they left. The family has not seen Rizvan and Beslan since then — no one knows what happened to the brothers.

I spent a long time talking with Mrs. Muslieva and her eldest son, Ramzan. We spoke about their loved ones, about how the family has gone on living these long years without them, as well as about what has happened to this once happy and fortunate family. Of course, everything changed — or rather, everything came crashing down on that horrific June morning in 2002. Mr. Musliev approached all the relevant authorities about his abducted sons, indicating the APC's number — 023 — as well as the soldiers' insignia. But every attempt was fruitless. The investigation would either be reopened or closed again ad infinitum. The family tried looking themselves but found nothing. In 2006, Mr. Musliev, his health having suffered from

this calamity, passed away. He was such a respectable, faithful and law-abiding man that he could not bear this terrible injustice on the part of the government toward his family and people.

Mr. and Mrs. Musliev's daughters have grown up and married; they have children of their own now. Ramzan is the only surviving brother and even that is thanks solely to the fact that he left the day before his brothers' abduction to visit his ailing grandmother, staying the night with her. He too is married and has three children. Out of this entire family, he is the only one who has managed to receive a higher education — his father's dream for his children. However, work has eluded him. Everywhere he turns, he is asked to pay significant amounts of money to receive a position. Mostly, the family survives on Mrs. Muslieva's pension and meager salary. Despite her advanced age and failing health, she is now forced to work part-time at a caf?.

As we spoke Mrs. Muslieva tried her best to maintain her composure. However, recalling her sons, whom she has spent eleven years searching and waiting for, she could not restrain her tears. Rizvan and Beslan never caused her any trouble, studied well in school and always helped out around the house. They were always polite with their friends and neighbors. Rizvan married his sweetheart two months before his abduction. His entire life lay before him. The young wife went on living with the family for the next five

years, hoping for her husband's return. As for Beslan, he was the favorite. Everyone loved his happy nature. Everywhere he went, he was followed by laughter and jests. Mrs. Muslieva recounts her daughter saying that if it had not been for one of those soldiers, then perhaps Beslan would not have been taken: Locked in the kitchen with her sister and sister-in-law, the youngest daughter, Zalikhan, overheard some federal soldiers speaking just outside the window. One of them said to the other, seemingly his superior, "Let's leave them the youngest — look how their mother is suffering!" But the other did not even deign to consider it.

Of course, this is only an illusion that a desolate mother latches onto — as to the hope that she will one day discover what befell her boys. And yet, if those who started this cruel assembly line of forced disappearances and summary executions of innocent people were capable of human morals, compassion or even lawful conduct, then thousands of Chechens — Russian citizens — would not have to spend decades looking for their abducted loved ones who have gone missing without either trace or grave. Instead, they can only place their trust in a higher court. When it comes to terrene jurisdictions, all they have is the European Court, where the case of Rizvan and Beslan Musliev's abduction has already been examined and is awaiting its logical conclusion.

times and telling of the government's inhumanity and callousness toward its citizens.

Zaindi Elmurzaev, the father of the abducted, was telling me about his first-born son, Ziyavdi Elmurzaev. He never hurt anyone, nor brought his father any shame during his 22 years on this plan-



Ziyavdi Elmurzaev

et. He was his father's buttress in the raising of the other four children — Mr. Elmurzaev was an example for them. He studied well in school but, due to the war, only managed to finish the seventh grade. Despite this, he helped his parents around the house as well as with work when they had any. Realizing that he needed to help support his younger brothers and sisters, Mr. Elmurzaev taught himself to repair cars — he was very adept at working with his hands.

Right before the Second Chechen War, Mr. Elmurzaev married and had a daughter. At the time of his abduction, she was just over a month old. Her father never got the chance to see her grow up.

Ziandi Elmurzaev — the head of the family — graduated from School No. 3 in Starye Atagi. This was the same school his children later attended. He met his future wife, Malkan, by chance, when he went to the neighboring village of Chechen-Aul to visit his relatives. Back then he was studying at the Rostov Police Academy and was a desirable groom. The young couple quickly fell in love and married a year later. Following his studies, Mr. Elmurzaev worked in various positions with the police force and later joined the State Traffic Patrol Department. He spent the last few years before the war as a local police officer in Chechen-Aul.

The first war brought many misfortunes to the inhabitants of the republic,

but the Elmurzaev family survived unscathed — only their house was destroyed. The children were still young and Mrs. Elmurzaeva would take them to their relatives as soon as shooting broke out. The second war turned out to be more horrific than the first: The village became subject to terrible bombings from the very opening of hostilities. Their neighbors died, as did their acquaintances, and at times it was impossible to go outside the gates for fear of being abducted or killed. It was almost impossible to bury the deceased, as their religious rites required. The village was overflowing with soldiers and there were constant zachistkas, accompanied by ransacking.

Early in the morning on August 4, 2001, during yet another zachistka, Russian soldiers entered the Elmurzaevs' courtyard and began demanding arms from Zaindi. The man could not understand what they were talking about. At the same time, a portion of the soldiers burst into the room where Ziyavdi was sleeping, and dragged him out to the courtyard basically in the nude. The intruders showed the father some kind of bag containing a new-looking assault rifle and grenade launchers. They claimed that they had discovered this bag in his son's room. Imagine what kind of person would keep weapons under his bed in Chechnya in those days. Naturally, this was no more than a base and cynical frame-up — the kind often employed by the federal forces.

Zaindi and his son were tossed into the personnel carrier and driven to the village mill, where the federal staff headquarters for Stary Atagi was located. Once there, the soldiers began to torture father and son, by turns, in front of each other. They hung Zaindi by his legs from a tree and beat him with plastic bottles filled with sand. They put a metal helmet on Ziyavdi and began beating him on the head with a wooden board. They beat him until his ears bled. The soldiers demanded that they

reveal the names of the Wahhabists. The next day, they released the father after forcing him to sign a document in which he relinquished any possible complaints he had toward the federal forces. Of course, when your son remains the hostage of sadists, lodging complaints is hardly an option. A few days later, Zaindi was summoned to a court in Doykur-Evl (Tolstoy-Yurt) where he watched his son be sentenced to two years of probation for "keeping weapons." Ziyavdi returned from his ordeal in a terrible state: He had suffered extensive internal damage, did not want to speak and could barely walk. To allow his son to recover, Zaindi sent his family to Sleptsovskaya in neighboring Ingushetia. Four months later, in April, the family returned home and, exactly two weeks after their return, the soldiers showed up for Ziyavdi again.

At seven-thirty in the morning of April 21, 2002, federal forces burst into the house, grabbed Ziyavdi and took him away in APC No. 422VV. They were accompanied by two more APCs — Nos. 344 and 346. All the personnel carriers first went to the mill and then headed toward Grozny escorted by a VAZ 2106 and a UAZ truck. Zaindi, along with some other villagers, tried to block the way of the transports leaving with his son but the soldiers opened fire over their heads. Since that day, Zaindi has not known his son's whereabouts.

There is one more strange detail in Mr. Elmurzaev's subsequent fate. On the day of his abduction, which took place in the presence of multiple witnesses, a report issued by the Regional Operations Headquarters for Coordinating Counterterrorist Operations in the North Caucasus contains the following: "Upon offering armed resistance, the active member of an armed group and inhabitant of the village of Starye Atagi, Ziyavdi Elmurzaev (call sign 'Bairam') has been destroyed. According to available data, Z. Elmurzaev was affiliated with the

Twelve years without an answer...

Story #35

Ziyavdi Elmurzaev (b. 1979), abducted by federal forces on April 21, 2002, from his home in Starye Atagi.

An elderly man with a lucid, childly gaze was sitting across from me in the

office, telling me a horrible story which I would periodically interrupt to clarify certain necessary details. The details themselves were also horrible, but without them, all the stories of those whose loved ones had been abducted by soldiers, would meld into one and the same tale, repeating thousands of

armed gang of M. Sadaev, itself a part of al-Khattabi's illegal armed group." I can go so far as to picture the staff "rat" composing this gibberish.

A few months later, Mr. Elmurzaev's parents received a letter from Mr. Tyumentsev, the head of the Oversight Department for the Criminal Investigations Agencies of the Public Prosecution Service of the Chechen Republic. The letter stated that Mr. Elmurzaev was serving out his sen-

tence. Despite the letter's contents, this came as an immense joy to the entire family — after all, this meant that their son was alive! But when the father took this document to the public prosecution service, he was told in the administrative office that the letter had been sent in error. About the same time, a relative who had long since lived in Russia called Zaindi and told him that he had seen his abducted son on one of the federal TV channels — in a show that

included live footage from court. Mr. Elmurzaev was shown being convicted for his participation in the insurgency and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment.

Try as they might, Zaindi and Malkan have not been able to find out anything else about their son — whether he is dead or alive and serving his sentence. The repressive mechanism of power is adept at preserving the secrecy of its crimes...

"We never detained him..."

Story #36

Adlan Eldarov (b. 1964), abducted August 9, 2000, in Gekhi, Urus-Martonvsky District.

The ancient Chechen village of Gekhi — immortalized by Mikhail Lermontov in his poem "Valerik" — was bombed several times in Russia's new wars at the turn of the 21st century. Whereas in the 19th century the belligerents would meet in hand-to-hand combat, today, one side preferred to first bomb peaceful villages and later defend them knowing that no one would be able to offer resistance.

The Eldarov family was well known in the area not only due to its local roots but also because it was the most hardworking. Every Eldarov generation worked in the Gekhinsky sovkhoz — the parents, their six sons and their grown grandchildren. Elsi, one of the brothers, had spent 38 years working the sovkhoz earth, until the large state farm was unincorporated and all its assets were sold. This was done without paying its workers the few years' salary owed to them. But the large family could have survived even this, were it not for the misfortune that befell them during the second war.

The youngest Eldarov brother — Adlan Eldarov — also worked in the

sovkhoz. He was not particularly healthy, neither physically nor mentally, and therefore his older brothers always took care to protect him. Elsi looked after him and had arranged a job for him driving a tractor, as his youngest brother could not manage physical labor well. Due to the war, as well as family issues, Mr. Eldarov married rather late — only three months before his abduction — at the age of 36. Then, having caught a chill driving the tractor, he developed tuberculosis. Since he could not read or write, he never paid any attention to politics. He had a very calm demeanor; he was a quiet and kind young man.

Early in the morning of August 9, 2000, Mr. Eldarov went to join the tillage, but then the shelling started and everyone decided to go home. He did not yet know that federal troops had begun a *zachistka* in the village. As he was approaching the house's gates, he saw soldiers on the street and in the yard: His house was already being searched. Instead of going home, Mr. Eldarov took the back streets to Elsi's house, which was nearby. Meanwhile, the soldiers found a snapshot among the books, which showed Mr. Eldarov with his brother Aindi and the latter's co-workers — policemen from Grozny's Oktyabrsk police precinct. This photo became a fatal clue in Mr.

Eldarov's fate. The soldiers came to Elsi's house and took Mr. Eldarov, promising that they would simply establish his identity and release him in 20 minutes. To this day, Elsi cannot forgive himself for trusting them. And yet, what could he have done even if he had not believed them? He would have been taken too. Some time later, unable to bear such a misfortune, his brother Aindi passed away after suffering a heart attack.

Mr. Eldarov was taken by a man named Vadim — an officer from the Economic Crimes Department of the Penza Department of Internal Affairs. The car he was driving was a UAZ-469 with state license plates OBS 31-62. He explained that he was acting under orders and promised to bring Mr. Eldarov back personally. Elsi has not seen his brother since. That same day, he and his relatives rushed to look for Mr. Eldarov. They learned that the RF Defense Ministry regiment and the MVD officers performing the day's *zachistka* had detained approximately 200 people. According to witnesses, as well as the detainees themselves, they had been herded like livestock into one group near a country road, beaten and then stacked on the ground, one on top of another, like cords of firewood. The slightest protests on the part of the detained were harshly punished on the

spot. For instance, the soldiers scalded a harmless and disabled dwarf with boiling water, before crushing him with their armored personnel carrier.

The villagers returning from this cruel execution recounted that Mr. Eldarov too had been badly beaten by the soldiers. They said that he had lost consciousness repeatedly from the beatings and a tearing in his spleen — which fact was further attested to by the military doctor present at the scene. He had been the one who administered the IV to him. Having loaded the unfortunate man into an APC, the soldiers took him away supposedly to hospitalize him, since eventually he stopped coming to and was talking deliriously. A few others also disappeared that day with Mr. Eldarov. In September of the same year, the corpses of three villagers detained during the same *zachistka* were discovered. They had been brutally killed. Mr. Eldarov, however, was not among them.

Elsi Eldarov has spent the long years since his brother's abduction wearing out the doorways of the prosecution service, courts, as well as numerous offices occupied by supervisors, advisors and aides. Yet no one has taken any measures to find his brother. Only the acting prosecutor for the Ilyushenko District forwarded Elsi's complaint to the Penza Oblast Department of Internal Affairs. According to the prosecutor, the agency responded that they had not detained Mr. Eldarov and had no information about him on file. Back in August, the senior officer at the *zachistka* in Gekhi, a police captain from the Penza Internal Affairs Department named Oleg Efremenko assured Elsi that his brother had been handed over — healthy and alive — to Gen. Nedobitko's soldiers. What they did with him subsequently — whether they passed him on to someone else — remains unknown.



Adlan Eldarov

Justice is victorious after all...

This is the first thought that comes to mind when you see the long search for truth — all the lengthy appeals to numerous judicial authorities — culminate in one objective judgment. The fact of the crime has been established and the victims may finally find at least some kind of solace in knowing that evil has been punished.

Unfortunately, in our nation this is the exception rather than the rule. Those who work for human rights organizations know this through first-hand experience. But this only makes such victories in the lopsided struggle with the state machine all the more valuable. And therefore, the work of the many who helped reinstate human rights after their desecration also deserve respect and recognition.



Magomed Barakhoev, director of the Legal Initiative for Russia, Ingushetia

On February 27, we attended a reading of the European Court's judgment on seven cases concerning the abductions of inhabitants of the Chechen Republic by federal troops in the early

2000s. The event was held in the Nazran offices of the human rights organization Russian Justice Initiative (RJI) and was also attended by relatives of the abducted: people who had spent a long time trying to obtain some sort of information about the fate of their loved ones, turning to every possible Russian state authority to no avail. It was only through the professional legal aid provided by this well-known organization that they were able to submit the facts of the crimes committed against their relatives to the European Court of Human Rights for examination.

Magomed Barakhoev, the head of RJI in Ingushetia, specializes in criminal law and has been working for the organization since 2006. He started

out working as a lawyer and then became a legal director. He has been director for a year now. The organization has been working in the North Caucasus for thirteen years, providing pro bono legal assistance to victims of human rights violations and their families. The organization takes on cases involving human rights violations against Russian citizens during counterterrorism operations, as well as judicial proceedings, compensation, eviction, detention, rights violations against women and children, free speech and freedom of assembly violations, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion violations, rights violations due to ethnicity, and the forced disappearances of family members.

Returning to the verdict's reading, we must note that there are no precedents in which an organization operating in the North Caucasus has ever investigated and attained simultaneous conclusions to such a number of cases.

Recently, the ECHR found for the plaintiffs in two further cases, which were submitted by the Mothers of Chechnya organization, long since



Relatives of the abducted people at pronouncing the verdict of the ECHR at the Nazran office of LIR

headed by Madina Magomadova. The stories surrounding these two cases were published in our previous issue. Speaking with us, Magomed Barakhoev pointed out that working such cases involves a long and complicated process. The plaintiffs and claimants are approached by unscrupulous people who represent themselves as experienced lawyers, when in fact they simply wish to make gain from the misfor-

tune of those whose abducted loved ones have disappeared without a trace. There are entire offices making money from the misfortune of others in this manner.

That day, I spoke with the claimants — relatives of abducted Chechens. These people — mothers, fathers, brothers — had no doubt oftentimes related their terrible and similar stories of how soldiers burst into their homes and took away their loved ones... After the abduction, one has no choice but to go on living with the misfortune, trapped in a cycle in which despair gives way to hope and hope, in turn, to despair. They must constantly go on looking. During the reading of the verdict and the awarding of monetary compensation to the plaintiffs for their moral suffering, I did not see a single trace of happiness in their faces. Having listened to the judgment in silence, they began to ask questions. Not about when and where they could receive the awarded money, but where they should look for their relatives and what they should do next. They are faced with more of the same — the search and the hope.

The tragic stories printed above are two of the seven cases in which the ECHR handed down judgments.



"You can pick up your son tomorrow from the police station"

Story #37

Islam Ibragimov (b. 1982), taken from his home in Shali by soldiers on January 17, 2003.

We became met Vakhita Ibragimov — father of the abducted Islam Ibragimov — at the reading of the ECHR verdict in the Nazran offices of the Russian Justice Initiative organization. We agreed to meet him in Grozny in order to record the tragic story of his family, which began on January 17, 2003.

At four in the morning, armed men burst into the Ibragimovs' house. The entire family was home: Mr. Ibragimov's mother, Mr. Ibragimov himself, his wife and four of their children — three sons and a daughter. Mr. Ibragimov woke up from the noise. Looking through the window of the neighboring room, he saw that an armored personnel carrier had broken through their locked gates and driven into their courtyard. At least ten soldiers in camouflage and masks jumped out of the APC. Before he could even leave the room, a soldier forced him to the floor and demanded his documents. His wife gave them his passport, military service card, and birth certificate. The documents had all already been gathered because Mr. Ibragimov was going to take them to the military enlistment office that day.

The soldier looked at the documents and then yelled to someone outside in perfect Russian, "What do you want me to do with this one?" Mr. Ibragimov did not hear the reply but shortly thereafter he was led out to the courtyard. There, Mr. Ibragimov saw

his two sons — Islam and Ilyas — who had been brought out in the gym pants and t-shirts that they slept in. They had been sleeping in a separate house with their grandmother. None of the men had been allowed to dress; all three were barefoot.

The soldiers then pulled the men's shirts over their heads and loaded them into the APC waiting in the yard. They drove for about 20--25 minutes, then stopped and all the detainees were brought out and laid onto the ground. A few minutes later, Mr. Ibragimov and Islam were again shoved into the personnel carrier. Ilyas, as his father later discovered, was transferred to another APC. Five to six minutes later, they were again brought out, laid on the ground and ordered to provide their names. That was when Mr. Ibragimov realized that, besides Islam and himself, two more of their relatives were with them: Rashid and Amti Sadulaev, who lived in a neighboring house.

The soldiers led everyone into some kind of trailer and laid them again on the floor. A little later they were allowed to get up and sit on a bench. The soldiers hit each man two to three times. Forty minutes passed, after which Mr. Ibragimov and Rashid Sadulaev were led out and put in a military Ural truck. At this point the soldiers removed their shirts from their heads and tied blindfolds over their eyes, tying their hands behind their backs as well. They drove for about a half hour — Mr. Ibragimov does not remember in which direction.

Upon arriving to their destination, the soldiers brought the men out and led them into a building that resembled a garage, judging by the traffic coming



Islam Ibragimov

in and out of it. Their hands were untied and Mr. Ibragimov was handcuffed to a radiator, while Mr. Sadulaev — as Mr. Ibragimov later learned — was placed in a pit of the type typically used in garages to conduct inspections and repairs. Here they spent two days. No one touched them or beat them, but no one fed them either. Judging by the sounds, Mr. Ibragimov thought that there was a gym nearby. In the mornings he could hear the adhan. He supposed that he was at the Staroataginsk mill, where the staff headquarters for the federal unit deployed to the Grozny district was located.

Throughout his detention Mr. Ibragimov was approached by an unknown man. Mr. Ibragimov would ask him about his sons and the man would tell him that everything was okay with them and that they would all soon be released. It turned out that the abduction had outraged all of Shali.



Islam Ibragimov with his parents at a construction site

That same morning of January 17, the villagers took to the street in protest before the municipal administration building.

Around six in the evening on January 18, the soldiers placed Mr. Ibragimov and Mr. Sadulaev into an APC, put bags over their heads, drove them somewhere for 15--20 minutes and then made them get out. The soldiers untied their hands, laid them on the ground, ordered them to count to a hundred and left. Mr. Ibragimov was hoping that they had also dropped off Islam and Apti a little further on but they were nowhere to be found. Realizing that they were in the vicinity of Argun, Mr. Ibragimov and Mr. Sadulaev went out to the road, flagged down a passing car and went to Argun from where they took a bus home, arriving at seven in the evening.

Ilyas — the younger son — was already at home. It turned out that the other APC had taken him to Tsotsi-Yurt and released him there. He knocked on someone's door and the people living there drove over to his house to tell his relatives that one of Mr. Ibragimov's sons was staying with them. That same evening of January 17, his relatives brought Ilyas home.

According to relatives and neighbors, seven APCs had taken part in that morning's operation. All of their license

plates had been covered with dirt. One APC had driven into the Ibragimovs' yard, while another drove into the yard of Mr. Sadulaev and a third into that of Apti Sadulaev (the two men are cousins). The other four APCs remained in the street. The gates to Rashid Sadulaev's courtyard opened outward instead of inward and therefore, as usual, gave the soldiers quite a bit of trouble. The personnel carrier had to make several attempts to break through. According to witnesses, several of the soldiers fell off the personnel carrier and one even sustained an injury. During one of the attempts, a wooden container also fell off the transport: the kind one often sees attached to the side of an APC. The Sadulaevs discovered it after the soldiers had left. When the public prosecution service arrived the next morning, on January 18, the Sadulaevs gave them the container. Surely, it would not have been difficult to identify the soldiers' and transports' unit using the markings on the container. Nevertheless, after the investigators had interviewed the witnesses and examined all three courtyards, they did not establish anything, as per usual.

"We haven't heard anything about my son Ilyas [Ibragimov] or Apti Sadulaev since then," explains Mr. Ibragimov. "Military personnel of varying ranks assured me orally and repeatedly that the two detained men were in Khankala providing statements. My relatives, Khasin Abkaev, Lechi Dzhambekov, Bachal Baisuev and Musa Dakaev, who was the mayor of Shali at the time, have spoken with the soldiers many times. They have also met with General Makarov, as well as others. These men confirmed that the boys were in Khankala and will be released once they have finished making their statements. Why they were detained, what they were suspected of, and what events they were making statements about — are all questions that no one has answered.

"Around the beginning of February 2003, I remember watching a conference on local Shali television with the then-commandant of Shali — Mr. Frolov, I believe. As this was a high-profile case Mr. Frolov was asked about the fates of Islam Ibragimov and Apti Sadulaev. His response was the same as that of the others: The men were alright and were giving statements etc. I heard these words myself. The next day we went to the offices of the television channel to make a video copy of the conference. We were told that there was no recording of it."

The Shali public prosecution service opened a criminal case and adjudged Mr. Ibragimov a victim. Then came the long ordeal: Each filing with the law enforcement agencies and military organizations of the Russian Federation, at all the various levels, culminated with a formal reply stating something like "our military personnel did not participate in this detainment operation."

Mr. Ibragimov showed us Islam's school credentials and the neighbors' testimony. He seemed reluctant to praise his son who had disappeared eleven years ago. And yet his son was a wonderful person! The firstborn in the Ibragimov family, he was the pride of his parents and relatives. He studied very well in school, helped his loved ones as well as anyone needing assistance, and was, along with his brother Ilyas, always beside his father in any kind of deed. The Ibragimov family was always a paragon of integrity and true religious faith: Along with his sons, Mr. Ibragimov performed the burial rituals for the deceased of Shali for many years. Mr. Ibragimov's mother, Zaluba — who had raised her children on her own — adored her grandson. Unable to bear his disappearance, she passed away soon after. Meanwhile, his father, mother, brothers Ilyas and Uvais, and sister Amnat continue waiting for Islam, hoping to see him again...



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