

Happy people rarely mind time but may collect watches

Zyabki village in the Vitebsk Region's Glubokoe District is located on the bank of Lake Dolgoe — the deepest in the country. However, such places aren't famous only for their landscapes; they are also home to some inspirational people. Vasily Tishonok's house stands directly on the shore of the lake and is where he stores his clock collection. Gathered over many years, he has so many that his home might even be described as a museum.

By Veronika Terekhova

Emerging from the bus, I walk through deep snow to the village; all is silent around me, with only one person hurrying to meet me, waving his hand. Vasily can't be late when there are fifty clocks to remind him of the time.

"There are even clocks on the terrace!" I exclaim, and he explains that they have to stay 'in quarantine' due to their age. He notes, "It isn't a decision dictated by interior design but by their mechanisms; old clocks need time to hang in the cold."

The house is so full of clocks that it's easier to say where none hang than to list the places where they do. From every side, clocks old and new, foreign and domestically produced, square and spherical, showy and plain stare back at me, ticking and whirring, as their mechanisms move. I ask if the noise ever bothers him but it seems that he hardly notices. Our conversation is constantly interrupted by the striking of clocks, as some exhibits chime on the quarter hour. Mr. Tishonok's ears have long become used to their ticking, so he has no trouble sleeping through the night.

Thirteen large chiming clocks are found around the house and he has no idea how many smaller exhibits there might be: they adorn drawers and window sills, shelves and wardrobes. His estimate is about fifty. He recollects, "The first chiming clock I ever held dated back to 1861. My grandmother told me that this was when serfdom was abolished. The clock was broken but I repaired it and hung it on the wall. However, old age finally got the better of it and it fell to the floor. The casing broke, leaving only the mechanism."

In the 1970s, his passion for clocks truly took off. He smiles, "I don't know how my eagerness arose but I do remember an old clock breaking and being excited to discover why it had stopped working and being keen to mend it."

Some twenty years ago, when the family was living in

the neighbouring village of Plisa, the house was full of usual clocks. By the time they moved to Zyabki, the residents already knew of his hobby and so would bring him clocks.

The collector shows me one timepiece and tells me, "A friend brought me this in a sack. He came to ask for help in repairing his car and then gave me the clock from his boot in thanks. I realised that, although the clock was broken, it was precious. I restored it and it became my first serious exhibit. It's the most precious in my collection."

The history of its two neighbouring clocks is also rather curious. In the 1870s, two brothers left for France to earn money, and each brought home a wall clock as a souvenir. Mr. Tishonok negotiated with their granddaughter, who inherited the clocks, and she finally agreed to sell them. The most ancient are in the 'quarantine' zone outside, having been brought by an acquaintance for repair. Vasily dreams of exchanging them for other clocks, as they are at least 150 years old.

Wandering through the house, there are German, French and Soviet clocks to admire, each with their own history. The collection even has aircraft, tank and automobile clocks. He tells us, "This clock was pensioned off from work, so I took it home. This other one came from Gomel and this one's from Germany. At first, I could hardly believe it, as it had a Soviet mechanism. Later, I found out that, during the war, Orlov's Watch Plant was evacuated to Germany. This clock arrived from Leningrad and I love it. It's precious, being over 150 years old, and was manufactured by Gustav Becker. Unfortunately, it has lost its chime, as it was repaired badly, losing half its components."

Vasily is an electrician by trade, so I wonder how he happened to learn about clocks. He explains, "I didn't study or read any special books. I just have an innate feeling for the mechanisms: intuition or experience. If you search hard enough, you find the answer. Clocks hold no mysteries; there are just some basics



Master breathes new life into clocks and watches

you need to know."

People often exchange clocks with collectors or just donate them. For non-collectors, the age or rarity of a clock is hardly important. Recently, one elderly woman in a neighbouring village lamented that Vasily had come too late and she had already thrown away her old, three-tiered clock. Vasily's house is filled with less significant clocks, which arrive in various ways. Some are brought by friends, or donated, or are brought for repair and never collected.

Once, a museum in Glubokoe suggested borrowing all the exhibits for an exhibition at the district centre but Vasily refused. His decision wasn't inspired by selfish reasons but, rather, because it's harmful to transport clocks. He explains, "It can cause the mechanism to fail. Anyone who wants to see the clocks can visit my house; it's my own museum."

After viewing the clocks, I notice that many show different times, so which should I believe? He stresses that it's quite natural, as so many

factors influence clocks' accuracy. "Time can vary if I, for example, check them against my wrist watch on the 1st and 15th day of the month," Vasily explains.

Interestingly, he has a separate collection within his major collection: of wrist watches. They decorate staghorns on a wall board. "I'm like really an oligarch, constantly changing my watches — wearing a different one on Monday or Tuesday. Each day of the week has its own," jokes Vasily.

His work place is modestly waiting for him in the corner, with a bright lamp, screwdrivers, mechanisms and various tools. "One needs inspiration and the right mood to do work with clocks," Vasily emphasises. "However, if someone asks me to repair something, my passion immediately awakens. I sit at the table, trying to solve the puzzle. Sometimes, I feel guilty if a broken clock has been lying around for six months. I sit down to work, as all clockmakers have a major desire to see clock hands showing the right time. It's wonderful to see them revived to life again."

