

Survivors For All Time Stories of the Armenian Genocide


Compiled and edited by Carol Bedrosian ❁ Introduction by Laura Boghosian



"My Armenia" by Meruzhan Khachatryan

Often called "the forgotten genocide," the stories from Armenian Genocide survivors haunt us with horror too unimaginable to have lived through, yet infuse us with hope that even in the midst of monstrous evil and injustice, the courage and endurance of the human spirit can sustain us.

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In April, Armenians will commemorate the 95th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923, a crime against humanity in which 1.5 million Armenians were massacred by the Ottoman Turkish government. Those who survived were exiled from their 4,000-year-old homeland; today, they and their descendents are scattered around the world, forming a diaspora of approximately eight million people. It is rare to meet an Armenian today who did not lose a family member in what is sometimes called “the forgotten genocide.”

Located in the southern Caucasus and bordered by Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenia has a population of three million citizens. Mount Ararat — the snow-capped mountain around which the Armenian nation developed and the beloved symbol of the Armenian people — looms over the capital city of Yerevan, but lies across the border in Turkey. It serves as a poignant daily reminder of what Armenians have lost.

A short-lived, independent Armenian state was established at the close of World War I, but fell to a joint Turkish-Soviet invasion in December 1920. Ninety percent of historic Armenia’s territory was forcibly incorporated into Turkey, while the small portion of Armenia that had for a century been controlled by Russia became part of the Soviet Union. This tiny remnant of the Armenian nation was reborn as the Republic of Armenia when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991.

Each year on April 24th, Armenians gather worldwide to honor the survivors and memorialize those who perished in the Armenian Genocide. Desiring to rid itself of an inconvenient minority in its quest to create a more homogeneous Turkic empire, the Turkish government embarked on a planned, systematic program of extermination of its Armenian population on April 24, 1915 by arresting, and later executing, over 250 Armenian community leaders, intellectuals, members of parliament and high-ranking clergy. Armenian men, who had been drafted into the Turkish army at the commencement of World War I, were segregated into labor battalions and later taken to isolated spots to be murdered. Turkish troops then ordered the remaining Armenian population — defenseless women, children and elderly — to begin marching to the desert of Deir ez-Zor, torturing, raping and massacring them along the way. After eradicating its Armenian citizens, the Turkish government confiscated the land and wealth they had left behind — businesses, factories, schools, churches, farms, homes and bank accounts — and claimed these assets as their own.

The result was the disappearance of an ancient civilization and culture from its native land. Traumatized survivors were forced to rebuild their lives in foreign lands, such as Lebanon, France and the United States. A generation would grow up as orphans, and the next would be deprived of grandparents.

The plight of the Armenians captivated the American public in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. After earlier Turkish massacres of Armenians in the mid-1890’s in which 300,000 Armenians were killed, American political and intellectual figures led the public in protesting the slaughter and in raising relief funds. An 1896 Congressional resolution condemning these massacres was the first international human rights legislation passed in the United States, according to historians.

Following the genocide, American efforts to provide aid for the survivors and to foster Armenian independence expanded dramatically. The American public donated over \$100 million for Armenian relief. A banquet in 1919 organized by the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, brought together hundreds of influential Americans, including several presidents, in support of the Armenian nation. Theodore Roosevelt, an ardent advocate for Armenia, telegraphed his intention to attend, writing:

“Armenia has been a proud bulwark of western civilization demonstrating long ago her inalienable right to democratic self government. Her awaited hour of liberation is upon us. It is our required duty to see that justice and freedom be opportuned to all who seek its hallowed ground. None are more deserving than the Armenians.” He died just hours later.

Given this history, it is a testament to the success of Turkey’s extensive maneuvers to conceal its crimes that many Americans today are unaware of the Armenian Genocide. Turkey’s denial and cover-up of the Armenian Genocide began even as they perpetrated it, and it is a crime in Turkey today to talk or write about it. Last year, the respected anti-hate group Southern Poverty Law Center documented Turkey’s multi-million dollar campaign of genocide denial, detailing the efforts by lobbyists and academics on the Turkish government’s payroll to influence American lawmakers.

Over 20 countries, the European Parliament, the World Council of Churches, and numerous international bodies, including a United Nations sub-committee, have recognized the Armenian Genocide, as have 42 of 50 U.S. states. In 1997, the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) unanimously affirmed the Armenian Genocide and condemned its denial by the Turkish government and its supporters. In a heartening development, courageous Turkish intellectuals have begun to speak out about the Armenian Genocide, inspiring 30,000 Turks to sign an online petition apologizing to Armenians.

Yet the United States has refused, thus far, to affirm the Armenian Genocide in an effort to appease Turkey, which hosts American military bases. In a March 2009 letter to President Obama urging him to formally acknowledge the Armenian Genocide, the IAGS pointed out that the Armenian Genocide was “the template for all modern genocide.” Turkey’s denial, they attested, “has emboldened perpetrators ever since.” Indeed, just prior to his invasion of Poland on the eve of the Holocaust, Adolph Hitler asked his generals, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” Today, those words are inscribed on a wall of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

While campaigning for the presidency, Barack Obama declared, “America deserves a leader who speaks truthfully about the Armenian Genocide...as President I will recognize the Armenian Genocide.” He further stated that the Armenian Genocide is “a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable. An official policy that calls on diplomats to distort the historical facts is an untenable policy.” Upon taking office, however, President Obama, like his predecessors, capitulated to Turkish threats and failed to use the term “genocide” in his remarks on April 24, 2009. In breaking his very explicit pledge, the president betrayed not only Armenian Americans, but the values of truth and justice that the United States alleges to uphold.

In September 2009, Hillary Clinton led the U.S. State Department in exerting enormous pressure on a weak Armenian government to sign protocols that would “normalize” relations with Turkey without accounting for the past. Armenians in the diaspora, as well as Armenia, were outraged by this agreement that imposed dangerous and humiliating terms on Armenia. Turkey, with American backing, succeeded in inserting provisions that formalize Turkish sovereignty over Armenian lands and relegates the Armenian Genocide to “further study” by a historical commission, a development that the IAGS says “would only serve the interests of Turkish genocide deniers.”

So why does the United States embrace Turkey and reject joining countries such as France, Russia, Argentina, Lebanon, Greece, Poland, Switzerland, Canada, Italy, Venezuela, the Netherlands, Vatican City and

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others in affirming the Armenian Genocide? Aside from controlling access to American military bases, Turkey is the transshipment point for Caspian oil and gas; pipelines run from Azerbaijan through Turkey, bringing energy supplies to the West. Turkey is also a major customer of U.S. weapons manufacturers; defense contractors including BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and United Technologies, as well as oil giant Chevron, have lobbied the U.S. government against Armenian Genocide recognition. Finally, influential Jewish American organizations have long lobbied for the Turkish government against acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide in support of Israel's strategic alliance with Turkey.

Bowing to these powerful interests, the U.S. Departments of State and Defense have repeatedly blocked Congressional recognition of the Armenian Genocide, sacrificing Armenians — and human rights — to economic and political interests. In effect, our government has become complicit in genocide denial.

Genocide denial, according to scholars, is the highest form of hate speech and the last stage of genocide. In testimony to Congress last year, genocide scholar Gregory Stanton explained that denial perpetuates genocide by attempting “to destroy the victim group psychologically and culturally, to deny its members even the memory of the murders of their relatives.” He added that recognition “is as essential to healing as closing an open wound.”

Despite Turkey's denial and the myriad forces arrayed against them, the Armenian people are determined to attain universal recognition for the Armenian Genocide and to strengthen the developing country of Armenia. A nation of survivors, Armenians will succeed in their quest to achieve justice.

Teriz Enokian (1900-1984) & Nevart Janigian (1904-2000)

“Turkish soldiers came into the village and after they had confiscated all the arms and weapons, ordered the inhabitants to come out of their homes, which were then locked up. The peoples' belongings were taken away from them. In the pouring rain, the villagers were marched off to the army barracks where they stayed for one week before the soldiers came and stripped them of all their remaining money and jewels. Men and women were separated as soon as possible.

The men were taken and forced in labor camps where they eventually died of starvation, poor health and other causes. The young, attractive girls were beaten and raped and forced to work in the brothels. When they were no longer useful they were killed. Women with children were subjected to similar brutalities, but even worse. The fear of being caught was so great that, if possible, the female captives tried to commit suicide in any way possible, sometimes jumping off cliffs.

Some of the women and girls were separated from the rest to serve as domestics in the homes of their captors. In one such case, a young girl was snatched from her mother's arms to serve a captain's wife as her servant. Ironically, this girl's sister also ended up in the keep of a Turkish priest who was sympathetic to the plight of the Armenian people.

Fortunately and miraculously, some of these victims survived the Turkish brutalities. In the case that I have described, one of the sisters was my mother, and the other was my aunt, who was like a second mother to me. Somehow, with the aid of an underground support system, my mother

RESOURCES

- Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), 65 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472. (617) 926-2562. www.almainc.org
- www.genocide-museum.am/eng/index.php. English-language website of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in the Republic of Armenia.
- www.armenian-genocide.org/. Information on the Armenian Genocide.
- www.GenocideEducation.org. Educational materials on teaching about genocide.
- www.anca.org/genocide_resource/index.php. Armenian National Committee of America. U.S. official records, state recognition and a pending Congressional resolution.
- www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=935. The Southern Poverty Law Center intelligence report on the Turkish genocide denial.
- BBC documentary on the Armenian Genocide: “The Betrayed.” video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7833166317264817428#
- www.constellationapproach.com (Boston). Family Constellation Work addresses healing of ancestral trauma.
- www.meaningfulworld.com (New York). Dr. Ani Kalayjian, disaster and mass trauma specialist.

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and aunt were able to get away, and after living in orphanages in different countries, they found their way to the United States.” — Submitted by Ralph Enokian, Albany, NY

Zartar Rose Bandazian (1912-2000)

“In 1915, my mother, Zartar Rose (Dervishian) Bandazian, at 3 years of age, walked from a village in Kharpert to eventually arrive a year later in Alexandrapol, now called Giumri, Armenia. After my grandfather was shot, my grandmother took her 6 children on the northern route to Armenia. Only 3 of the children survived starvation, typhus and marauding on the treacherous journey.

The children were eventually transported from Alexandrapol to an orphanage in Yerevan on Abovian Street. It was a chaotic time. In the 4 years that my mother spent in Yerevan, there was constant fighting between the Reds, Whites, Turks. My mother spoke of the meager food rations at the orphanage — a piece of bread the size of her palm that she nursed all day, starting with crumbs picked up one by one.

The children may not have had full bellies, but they had a wonderful diet of physical fitness and Armenian culture. It was there that my mother learned to read and write Armenian, sing songs, recite poems and dance. She was thrilled with the dancing that was taught by the famed Tatoul Altounian. It was classical Armenian dance with all its grace and charm that my mother tried to teach me: how to hold your hands, your steps, your gaze. My mother never had any more Armenian instruction after that

time, but she forever had what had been instilled in her at that time and she dipped into it all her life as she sang the Arshin Mal Alan tunes with her beautiful voice and danced so gracefully.

I am so grateful that my mother lived to see the second republic of Armenia in 1991, to sing the national anthem at its first anniversary at the embassy of Armenia, tears streaming down her cheeks." — Submitted by Mary Ann Bandazian Kibarian

Goussineh Basmadjian (1890-1971) Djagadagir — "Destiny"

"My maternal grandmother was a schoolmistress in her village and 25 years old in 1915. Every morning she led the children through a secret passage to a basement classroom used for the instruction of Armenian, a language forbidden by the rulers. Singing at the top of their voices, "Aravod lousso, Arekagn artar, Arr iss louis dzakya..." the children studied the Armenian alphabet and Grapar — classical Armenian — at the same time.

Finally she was deported like millions of her compatriots. The march in the desert, the starvation, the selling of goods, then bodies, the rapes, the killings and the other forms of man's inhumanity to man, finally ended with their arrival in Aleppo train station. Trainloads of Armenians were brought there, collected from villages and towns along the rail tracks. It was hot and dusty. On the crowded platforms indistinct voices were heard shouting out family names in the hope of finding surviving relatives. Arakelian. Manougian. Karakashian. Gemidjian. Malkhasian. Basmadjian. The resulting cacophony was deafening. Suddenly, amidst the crowd and the noise, my grandmother heard her name, 'Ba-ass-madj-ia-an.' Looking up, she saw her husband's weary face.

A euphoric embrace was followed by her faint voice telling him about the death of baby Vahram, their first-born baby, one year old.

"Do not cry," he said to her, "now that fate has reunited us, we will make new babies." Indeed, they were blessed with another baby boy who they named after the first one. Then they had my mother, Arminée, followed by my aunt Arpinée. Soon the "Holy Family" — father, mother, and three children — settled in Egypt.

All this is very important to me because without these circumstances, I would never have existed. We would have never existed. *Destiny. El Maktoub. Djagadagir!*" — Submitted by Nora Armani, who performs her grandmother's story as part of her self-penned one woman play, "On the Couch with Nora Armani," which has been performed in English, French and Armenian.



Family of Teriz (Moomjian) Enokian, pre-1915: From left to right, are daughter Anna Moomjian, father Avedis Moomjian (seated), relative Kevork Moomjian (standing behind father), mother Yesapet Moomjian (seated), sister Theresa (Teriz), who has her right arm on her mother's shoulder, and sister Nevert. Only Teriz and Nevert survived. Photo courtesy of Ralph Enokian.

Almas Boghosian (1907-present)

"I was born in Hussenig, Kharpert. My older sister was going to school, but I wasn't going yet. One day she was very late. When she came, my mother said, "How come you're late?" She said, "We went on *bedooyd*." And I said, "When am I going to school so I can go on a trip too?"

When the massacres started I told my mother, "Where are we going?" "We're going on *bedooyd*," she said. Oh, I was so happy!

Gendarmes came to the house when they came to massacre everybody. My father put me on a donkey. My younger sister, two years old, was on my mother's back. My older sister held my mother's hand. That's how we started the massacres. After we go awhile, all of a sudden the women started screaming and crying. All the men were taken — every male over 15 years old. They killed them.

The gendarmes were on horses, riding on the sides of the Armenians. When we passed water they wouldn't let the people drink. So we die like that. Kids can't walk, sitting there, can't move. Food for the wolves.

We were walking, walking. When my father was gone, we lost the donkey. My younger sister was crying, "Water, water." She died. I was always crying, "I want water." You don't ask for food. You need water. My mother said, "Oh, we're going to reach some garden, we're going to have water, we're going to have milk."

We reach Suwar, a little village. There was a store there. The guy was very good to us. He gave something to my mother; he gave me a treat. And my mother said, "You stay here. We're going next door to buy bread, and I will come take you." I fell asleep. When I open my eyes, nobody there. I started crying on the floor. Poor guy.

He took me to Deir ez-Zor to live with his family. He had a daughter

about 14, 15 years old, and his wife. In not even two months, I learned their language, Arabic. I lived four years with them.

One day, a dirty, dirty girl, ran out and grab me, started to kiss me. She said, "I'm your sister, Maritza." I ask her, "Where is Mama?" She said, "After she gave you away, she died the next day."

Every day my sister was sitting there looking at our house, hungry, nothing to eat. I took her something to eat. One morning, I didn't see her. I asked a kid, "Was there a girl there?" They say that they put about 10-20 kids in a boat, and right in the middle of the river, they turned the boat over. And one was my older sister. Then, they start taking the Armenian kids and putting them in orphanages. They took me to Aleppo, Syria. There was nothing to eat. We had lice in our hair and all over our bodies. No soap, no washing, nothing. One day they call me. You have an aunt in America. My aunt brought me to America in 1922. I was 79 pounds." — Submitted by great-granddaughter Taline Boghosian, Lexington, MA

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Mesrob Kloian (1902-1968)

“They gave us one day to get ready. We were forbidden to carry any weapons, even a pen knife. Any they found with weapons would be instantly put to death. So the next day we left our villages escorted by gendarmes. We walked all day and were led through desolate areas where there wasn’t even a drop of water; then we camped at night. On the third day of our march we were led into a narrow canyon where we camped.

The next morning as we prepared to leave the encampment we heard some shots. In the wink of an eye we were completely surrounded by hundreds of bandits who had taken position around the convoy. They were accompanied by the Turk gendarmes who had been guarding the caravan. Among them were Kurds, Turks, Cherkes, Zazas, as many women as men, all armed with rifles, swords, yatagans, scythes, clubs, and axes. I was beside my mother and father and our whole family was there together.

At the shot of a rifle the massacre began. The ground was instantly covered with bodies everywhere. My sisters, brothers, sister-in-law, niece, and nephew were killed or carried off. I saw my father try in vain to save my mother as two Turks carried her off. I ran behind my father as he climbed a hill. There were a hundred of us running in all directions but we were soon surrounded by Turks who searched the men, one by one. After taking everything they had, including their clothes, they cut them down with swords, axes, killing them right where they stood.

I escaped and hid in an abandoned stable that night. I awoke to hear cries and screams, and through a crack in the door, I saw that under the trees surrounding the camp they had piled up hundreds of babies that had lost their mothers. They were trying with their yatagans to see who could sever the head of each child with just one blow. For them it was a game. To add to their sport, they placed babies at fifteen or twenty meters up against a tree or bush, to see who could shoot the best. What I saw there that day and in the narrow canyon has haunted me all my life.” — *Excerpted from a 100-page handwritten memoir by Mesrob Kloian in 1960 and submitted by nephew Richard Kloian of Richmond, CA.*

Mannig Dobajian (1906-1985)

“Mannig Dobajian of Adapazar, Turkey, survived the Armenian Genocide. At age 12 she found herself foraging the famine-stricken city of Mosul in northern Iraq, the memory of her perished family burned into her conscience. The gendarmes whipped her father to death, shot her grandmother for slowing the foot caravan of the deportees and shoved her cousin off the cliffs into the raging Euphrates River. Mannig also experienced the agony of watching her little sister suffocate in the crammed cattle train and then seeing her mother, brother and aunt die of typhus and starvation in Der Zor. She and her older sister, Adrine were the only survivors in her family of eight.

After nearly two years of orphanhood, fighting over edibles with other orphans in cold alleys in Mosul, Mannig and her sister were harbored in the orphanage established by an American/Armenian charity for the Armenian children. Housed in army tents and fed meagerly, Mannig was content among 900 other orphans. She excelled as a student and coordinated programs to entertain the visiting benefactors, including Mardiros Kouyoumjian and Sebouh Papazian, two benefactor bachelors

from Baghdad. She addressed Mardiros flirtatiously as “Dear Father of the Orphans.” He became infatuated with her wit, beauty and boldness.

Mardiros knew how his aristocratic family would react to the love that bloomed in the orphanage. He battled his conscience and lost to his heart. He summoned Mannig to his lavish surroundings of the pavilion he inhabited amid the squalid army tents housing the orphans. He lit his lanterns and played *Plaisir d’amour* on his gramophone. In awe, Mannig tread on plush Persian carpets with her bare feet. Mardiros removed his shoes and waltzed with her. She heard him whisper, “I love you,” and “Will you marry me?” He was thirty-two, an aristocrat, and she was fifteen, an orphan. She loved Mardiros, but would not abandon her sister. He assured her his friend Sebouh was in love with her sister and was asking for her in marriage.

The two orphan sisters married the two Armenian gentlemen and lived in Baghdad, Iraq — my birthplace.” — *Submitted by daughter Aida Kouyoumjian, Mercer Island, WA*

Arshaloos Shahbegian (1893-1970)

“Before the death march began, my mother crawled on her belly off the road undetected for three miles to the city of Mezre to beg the Turkish Bey, who was a friend of her father, to take in her two youngest brothers, her young first cousin and her eldest daughter. She had just given birth to her fourth daughter only one-week prior.

When the Turks descended upon her village, they stripped the people of all their money, valuables and clothes and searched for valuables that might be hidden in their private parts or mouths. Three of her four daughters were slaughtered; the eldest was carried off by the Turks. My mother endured the death march and raping for six years. She was sent to Der Zor 3 times and survived. The first two times when she was taken to Der Zor to be slaughtered, she survived by staying in back of the masses of Armenians. There weren’t enough gendarmes to kill the masses. They used their Turkish swords so they could fall into the ditches. My mother fell into the ditch along with the dead. She would lay there with the dead bodies on top of her in the hot sun with snakes hissing all around.

At nightfall, the Bedouin Arabs would call out to see if there were any Armenians alive so they could save them. They would feed and clothe the survivors but they had to be on the run again so they wouldn’t be killed. At one point on the march all the women were walking naked. The mayor of an Arab village was horrified so he gave the women potato sacks to hide their naked bodies.

As a young girl my mother had been trained by the ARS and ARF how to nurse the wounded at all stages. Consequently she worked herself into the position of being head nurse at the Turkish Army Hospital outside of Der Zor. A Turkish soldier tried to rape her so she fought back and killed him. She had to go into hiding and was on the run. She became a skeleton beyond recognition. She was captured and sent a third time to Der Zor. During her time in the hospital the Baghdad Doctor General had fallen in love with her. When he learned what had happened, he sent his aides to search for her. When it was announced she would be saved with her relatives, she refused to identify herself because she felt it was a hoax and she only yearned for death. When she revealed her identity to the old man beside her, he begged her to save herself. She did and claimed the 200 or so people around her as relatives. My mother finally made it to the US and ended up saving many others.” — *Submitted by Florence Shahbegian, Whitestone, NY*

Sinam Eranosian (1900-1996)

"Sinam Eranosian, my great-grandmother, my mother's grandmother, was a young girl in 1915. The first to arrive in their village were the Kurds. The men were immediately separated from the women and children. A Kurdish girl with her mother and father took a liking to my great grandmother so they decided to take her along after the mob was done taking what they wanted out of the homes. She ended up in the wagon, screaming and crying for her mother, who eventually broke away from the villagers holding her back and began to chase the wagons. My great-grandmother saw her mother get shot and that was the last time she saw anyone from her village.

She was kept with this Kurdish family for many months, maybe as long as 2 years. She stayed in the house and helped the mother with the cooking and cleaning and played with the little girl. One day the Turks came to the village and brutal fighting took place. She was taken to a Turkish military camp where for many months she was kept in the basement and used to service the officers when they came back from their battles. She always knew when they would come back because two women would come downstairs and prepare her for the men who would rape her. One night a man bound and gagged her, put her into a burlap bag and carried her outside where she began a long journey tied to a horse. She was eventually dropped off at an Armenian orphanage in what turned out to be Aleppo, Syria.

She wouldn't eat, speak, or walk for months. They would put her in a wheelchair and sit her outside in the sun all day and put her back into bed in the evening. Eventually, they got her to eat some broth, next, some bread and finally she spoke her first words..."I want to die." But the ladies wouldn't let her die. They told her they needed her help with all the younger Armenian orphans that were arriving each day. They told her that maybe someone from her village would eventually arrive and that hope is what got her to come around. No one from her village ever arrived. But one day, an Armenian man arrived looking for a wife. That man was my great-grandfather.

He had come all the way from America looking for a light-eyed Armenian wife who could pass for his deceased wife on her American passport and my great-grandmother was the only one with light eyes. She refused, however, wanting to spend the rest of her years behind the safety of the orphanage walls, and only agreed to marriage after the man promised to send the orphanage much needed funds every year. He also promised to search for her family from America. And he begged her to have children, as many as possible, to make up for all the Armenian children killed by the Turks.

My great-grandfather kept only one of his promises to my great-grandmother. He supported the orphanage for its entire existence, always sending money. He never looked for her family, though, afraid if she found someone she would leave him. He never called her by or let her use her name, afraid

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This photo, taken by an unknown German businessman, shows a group of Armenian men being escorted out of the city of Kharpert by armed guards to the prison in Mezereh, a nearby military center. Photo courtesy of Project SAVE Armenian photo archives.



the United States government would deport her. It wasn't until her husband died that she found the letters from her relatives looking for her that had been directed from the orphanage to my great-grandfather, who had never responded." — Submitted by great-grandson Jake Der Hagopian, age 16, Moorestown, NJ

Hagop K. Kalayjian (1906-1982)

A Survivor's Memoir

"We began to walk along the edge of the river. It was summertime, the weather was hot, and we were hungry and thirsty. We slept in our clothes on the ground or on rocks. We were never fortunate enough to sleep on green grass. At one point, we came to a place that was somewhat hilly where we could rest and sleep before the evening darkness set in. That night my sweet mother gave birth to my baby sister. We saw our little sister when we awoke the next morning. Again, they made us set out in the early morning hours. We were hungry and thirsty.

Despite her depressed and worn-out condition, my sweet mother had to

continue on the way, carrying her newborn child. Clutching her skirts, we too were proceeding toward certain death. We couldn't rest during the day; we had to walk until evening. The order was that the sun had to set first. In that summer's heat we had to walk endlessly from morning till evening. My sweet mother, clutching my baby sister to her bosom, and I began to fall behind. We knew quite well that danger threatened us if we lagged behind the caravan.

Before we knew it, a group of wild Kurds — men, women and young boys — attacked us. I

defended my sweet mother with all my might. Unable to help her, I began to run away quickly. It was quite a while before I caught up with the caravan. I found my brother and sister together, sitting under a tree. When we woke up the next morning, we saw that my sweet mother had come. I said, "Mommy, where's my little sister?" She said, "The Kurds abducted her." Do you know what the beasts did? They removed whatever my mother was wearing and left her naked. She had walked all night and found us at dawn. Kind women, seeing that my mother was naked, immediately gave her clothes to wear.

Early in the morning, they made us set out on the road again. I began to say to her, "Mommy, the Kurds are coming again to rob us." She didn't say anything and then, suddenly, fell to the ground and breathed her last breath. I stood there for a while and then saw that, from afar, a Kurd was coming toward us, riding a white horse. That's when I left my sweet mother there. Instead of being buried in God's holy ground, she became food for wild animals and squirrels. The same lot befell untold numbers of other mothers and sisters. All this happened in the vicinity of the town of Sourouj."

— Submitted by granddaughter Anahid Ugurlayan from Jackson Heights, NY. "A Survivor's Memoir" was translated from Armenian into English by Aris Sevag and was published in the winter 2008 issue of Ararat magazine.

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Hagop Jamgotchian (1905-2002)

"We suffered a lot, especially when crossing a barren mountain, which I think was called *Akherdash* (meaning "heavy stone" in Turkish). I don't know how long it took to arrive at Marash; we kept walking but never arriving. Finally we arrived. They settled us in and around an inn. There were still plenty of Armenians in Marash, who spent the whole night, until daylight, nursing the sick. The eyes of almost all the deportees were burning from the bright sun and the dust. The Marash Armenians treated everyone's eyes with medicine and gave clothing to those in need.

In the morning, when we got back on the road, the Marash Armenians offered us donkeys, mules and bedding, but the gendarmes did not allow us to take them along. They forcibly threw them off to one side. We camped that night on the road between Marash and Aintab. There the gendarmes, who were escorting us, engaged in licentious and lewd behavior with the Armenian women and young girls.

We had been settled in houses belonging to Armenians in the vicinity of Aintab College. That area used to be called *Bagh Evleri*, which means "vineyard houses." We stayed there for fifteen days. During that time, the Turkish gendarmes separated the families who still had grown-up boys or old men and sent them away. I don't know where they went. None of those families has been seen again since. My hair had already grown long so my folks easily disguised me in girl's clothes. That's how I was saved." — *Excerpted with permission from My Legacy by Hagop Jamgotchian; Translated by A. Jamgochian. (2005, Dall Publishers, Yerevan, Armenia)*

Victoria-Nectar Vosgeritchian (1892-1978)

"My grandmother, Victoria-Nectar Vosgeritchian, was born in Osmania, Turkey. She came from a wealthy family. She was married to an officer of the Ottoman army and lived in Egypt prior to the war. She had to return to her hometown at the start of the war along with her two children, Elizabeth, age 8, and Nazareth, age 6.

In 1915 she was deported with her children to the Syrian desert. Upon arriving to Aleppo, she was forced to surrender her two young children to German missionaries to spare them certain death in the desert of Der Zor. My grandmother spent two years in the desert at the verge of death. She developed the skin pigment condition vitiligo, and her hair turned white at the age of 26.

She was brought to Aleppo where she was cared for by her relatives. Her two children were lost forever. Till her death, I remember her lament-

ing their loss. As children, we named our dolls and pillows Elizabeth and Nazareth in order to give her some comfort. She lost 5 of her brothers along with her husband and 2 children. After her ordeal, she remarried and settled in Damascus, Syria." — *Submitted by Ara Kayayan, Albany, NY*

George Vetzgian (1906-2001)

"I was born in Shabin Karahisar, a small town in Turkey. The Turkish people were very aggressive against the Armenians and the Christian elements of this town. Very often they would invade the privacy of the Armenian homes, taking for themselves whatever they were able to find without the consent of the family. Many times they would abuse young females in the presence of her family while the search was going on.

The people of our town decided to go to the mountains where they would not be molested and abused by the Turks, taking with them food, chicken, cows and water. When the Turks found out there were no Armenians left in the town, they became furious and vengeful. The Turkish soldiers forced their way up the mountain and began spreading terror and destruction.

The Turks separated the males from the females, then formed deportation caravans. All males over 13 years of age were deported then shot and killed on the road in cold blood. Women walked on foot for days to reach the concentration camps. Hungry, thirsty, and exhausted they were forced to keep going. Some of the young woman and young girls taken from the group were raped and their clothes ripped off their bodies, and they lay naked in the field.

My mother carried her one-year-old twins in her arms for many hours and her belongings on her back, but the babies were not able to live long. The boy died from starvation and the girl drowned passing over a large body of water. A year later she was able to locate where I was being held and managed to see me whenever possible.

One night I managed to escape from my camp. I went to my mother who was a great distance from where I had been staying. Mother decided that our next step was to get out of this barbaric and savage country as fast as we could. We traveled for many days under difficult conditions until we came to Constantinople. With the aid of the Near East Relief Organization, I was able to enter an Armenian orphanage in Istanbul. My mother was able to send me to America with my aunt Hagouhie who had to adopt me in order to be able to bring me to America. Two years later, my mother came to America and joined me here in New York.

When I came to America in 1920 we passed the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor and came to Ellis Island. Seeing the giant Statue of Liberty I knew we were forever free. Here one will find respect for mankind, respect for human beings, and above all, respect for your religion. It is a great privilege to live in peace and freedom. — *Submitted by daughter Adrienne Mousesian, Marlton, NJ*

Armenian American writer William Saroyan eloquently captured the indomitable spirit of the Armenian people when he wrote:

"I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia."

