REMEMBER

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REMEMBER 24

REMEMBER ... 24 ... RECOGNIZE

PROJECT 24: REMEMBER

These are the human faces of history, people for whom “genocide” is not political dispute but lived experience. These are the ones left.

On April 24 – Armenian Day of Remembrance – we honor 24 who survived. There is urgency to remembering. In the months since our interviews, only 17 of these are still with us.

They all live (lived) in Armenia, coming here in flight from unspeakable atrocities measured out by the Ottoman Turks between 1915 and 1918. Naming that phenomenon “genocide” does not lessen the horror of the acts. But it offers a measure of dignity to the victims. Recognition, too, offers the opportunity for contrition.

Like chambers of the very fruit that symbolizes this reduced land – the pomegranate – the survivors were torn, severed is better to say, from the source of their vitality; scattered like so many seeds.

These people found safety in Armenia. But not many found comfort. And even those who adjusted to new surroundings, lived inside an unseen and unhappy world that followed them from childhood.

Of course these are stories of courage. Such accounts – whether genocide or Holocaust or acts of individual endurance – always are.

Survivor Vardan Jumshudyan (1912-2006) put it better than any statesman or lobbyist: “No state can call itself a democracy until it puts truth above politics...”

But how many survivors – whether these finishing out their lives in Armenia, or the diminishing numbers worldwide who are part of the community of original suffering – would have chosen their experiences, for the sake of exemplary bravery?

The world should know the names of those who are made to suffer because of hatred tolerated, hatred allowed to hide in the shadow of revised history, hatred free to strike again because it is called something else.

Governments should know that political goodwill purchased by meeting suffering with silence, stains a nation’s soul.

Generations should know that evil begets evil. Look to today’s Darfur for proof.

“Who remembers the annihilation of the Armenians?” Hitler asked.

Some have remembered, and have stood against evil: The nations of Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, plus the Vatican and the Council of Europe, have adopted policy acknowledging that what happened to the Armenians last century across the plains and mountains of Turkey was “genocide”.

What right-minded people could not agree?

AGHAVNI:

Peace is only a name

Her name, Aghavni, means "Dove".
It is a name meant, also, to symbolize the soul and peace.
In 1915, at the age of four, Aghavni the little dove found her place of peace in an orphanage in Lebanon. Like thousands, Aghavni Gevorgyan was separated from her family when invasions by Turks made orphans of Armenian children.
Aghavni had two brothers, from whom she had been separated. One, Hovhannes, settled in France, never to see his family again.
Aghavni's cousin, Armenuhi, was also living in Lebanon. One day she recognized Aghavni among the orphans. And another new "nest" was found for Little Dove.
Sometime later – and 17 years since disappearing – a more familiar face returned to Aghavni's life.
A photo with her mother reminds her about their reunion in 1932, and still brings tears of joy to Aghavni's pale cheeks.
"My mother had a scar on her neck," Aghavni recalls. "It was only when I had my second child that she told me the cruel story of it."
She had a gold chain on her neck. During the resettlement, the Turks wanted to tear it off, but couldn't. Her mother came to wear a scar instead of a gold chain.
In 1933, Aghavni married Gevorg in Aleppo. Gevorg was from Western Armenia and was rescued by a family of Turks who were sympathetic to the Armenians.

He learned about being an Armenian from a Turkish boy who named him "Gyavur". The mistress of the house where he lived explained him that "Gyavur" meant Armenian.
"What is Armenian?"
"You are."
"In that case where is my mother . . ."
This is how the boy of about 12 learned about his ethnicity and had so many questions, answers to which he thought he could find only in his village. The quest for the answers led him back to his village, his aunt's house and his sister.
Aghavni interrupts her story here saying, "Old people talk a lot. And the more they talk, the more grief you learn."
Aghavni and her husband moved to Armenia in 1946, bringing their six children with them. They had three more in the motherland. They rented an apartment in Arabkir district near a dry cleaners.
They had hardly moved in when a young woman came with a request to fix the key of a suitcase. They were lucky since Aghavni's husband, Gevorg, was a craftsman and could repair nearly everything. But even luckier was Aghavni, as the woman was to travel to Western Armenia, and could bring some news from Aghavni's brother whom she lost after 1915. And she did.
Aghvni also tells the story of her younger brother, Hakob, who was also saved after Turkish attacks. Saved, like Gevorg, by Turks. And remembered, like her mother, because of a scar.

". . . the mass murder of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 is a case of genocide which conforms to the statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide."
Association of Genocide Scholars, June 13, 1997

The scar would mark his face when he together with his brother were helping their father to shoe a horse. Little Hakob was not strong and skilled enough to hold the horse's leg and the horse kicked him.
Once again, a Turkish subject lent a helping hand to Aghavni's family. One of the Turkish shopkeepers burned horse's mane and put it on the child's eye, saving it. After Turkish attacks started, the same man paid a Kurdish man several gold coins to take the boy across the Euphrates, to safety.
He moved to Armavir, Krasnodar region in Russia and found a job in an Armenian's shop and settled down. He married the shopkeeper's daughter. They had two children.
In 1937, there was an announcement according to which all those who wanted to leave the country were free to go in 24 hours. Hakob did not. He had a family and he was already settled down. Nevertheless, he managed to send a note on a cigarette paper where he wrote: "The wound above my eye is cured". The note reached Aghavni and she knew he was alive. However, they never met.
Aghavni had nine children. Five of them are now alive, but only three live in Armenia. She lost contact with her brother and nephews who are now in Russia and France.
The one named Little Dove has tried to bring her family together. It seems, though, that the events of 92 years ago are too far reaching, even after wounds have become scars.

AHARON:

Mother's memories of sweet Van

Aharon Manukyan's eyes widen when memories of his childhood take him back to his home in Van, then to an orphanage in Alexandrapol and the big, round chocolates of a Mr. Yaro, a patron of that children's home.

The orphanage became the boy's home when he became exiled like so many thousands who were chased from their homes during the Armenian Genocide. Not so many survivors remain these 92 years later. Aharon was only a year old when his family was run out of their home. His account of deportation relies on stories told by his mother.

His face shows all its age when he retells his mother's account . . .

The Vanetsis put up a fight against Turkish invaders, aided by Russian forces. But when the Russians pulled out, the 200,000-strong Armenian population left for Eastern Armenia. Aharon's father died during the battle to save Van.

"My mother passed the deportation path with me in her arms and (brothers) Meliqset and Vahram pulling on her skirt," Aharon says. "When we were crossing the river it was red, and the water carried corpses."

Aharon's mother, Mariam, hid their family valuables in her father's grave in Van, then set out on foot for Etchmiadzin with the three children. There, she had to beg for food to keep the children alive. Soon, she took the children to the orphanage in Alexandrapol (now Gyumri), then returned to Etchmiadzin to look for a job.

Aharon remembers the years spent in the orphanage.

"The orphanage belonged to an American couple. The husband's name was Mr. Yaro and the wife's name Miss Limin," Aharon says, pronouncing names of orphanage trustees like a five-year old child, distorting the pronunciation. "They were very kind people. They lost their only child and devoted all their love to the orphanage children."

He lists the orphanage food as if so many decades had not passed since he ate them: milk, soup, gata, halva, dried fruit. The orphanage seemed a paradise for a child who passed through starvation."

The American couple adopted Aharon and his brothers and intended to take them to the United States. Aharon's mother learned about it and rushed to the orphanage. She had found a job in Yerevan and could take the children with her.

> ***" . . . it appears that a campaign of race extermination is in progress under a pretext of reprisal against rebellion."***
> *Ambassador Henry Morgenthau to US Secretary of State, July 16, 1915*

"My mother was in charge of technical services at a laundry in Yerevan. In a short while, Mrs. Limin came. She offered 40 pieces of gold for my mother to let me go with her to America. She told my mother that I reminded her of her dead son. But my mother refused," Aharon laughs naughtily. "I would be a wealthy man now. They say Mr. Yaro had 200 offices in America."

Aharon has bright memories of his mother. During her whole life Mariam spoke endlessly about the town of Van, one of many settlements lost to Turkish occupation.

"My father never misses a chance to speak of Van," says Aharon's daughter Ruzan, 49. "For example whenever we eat fish he says: 'You should have eaten tarekh (herring) from Lake Van'. We all know he also has never had it, but we understand that it is very important for him to speak of Van. It is kind of paying tribute to his homeland and to my grandmother."

Aharon looks at nowhere and smiles. He is not in the room, but moved to his past now . . .

In 1945, inspired by his mother's stories and the family's fate, Aharon graduated from Yerevan State University in the faculty of history. And he never forgot that he is Vanetsi.

He says he is partly satisfied, knowing that some countries have formally acknowledged as fact the Armenian Genocide.

His glance is again far away in the past, and he sometimes smiles, indulged in sweet memories. And sometimes frowns from a history that has labeled him "survivor".

ANAHIT:

Two escapes on a long road to safety

"It was fall, and my father had left the village to take fruits and other products to officials as a tax payment. That's when the Turks came."

Anahit Harutiunyan was born in 1910. When she was five her family and others were forced to leave the village of Gomadzor, in the Basen region. Her eyes are like glass now, irises almost invisible. The skin is too soft and delicate to touch.

"You have to speak loudly in her ear," Anahit's granddaughter- in-law Gayane says, "she'll tell you everything she remembers."

In the village Anahit's family lived just like other villagers.

"We ploughed, sowed, milked cows and sheep," Anahit says. "We had everything we needed."

Until 1915. The start of the Armenian Genocide was the end of the peaceful village life.

"When mother realized we had to leave she began to panic because father was away," Anahit says, "but fortunately he returned soon." The family quickly packed and left, seeking safety on the other side of the Arpachay (now Akhuryan) River.

"When we were going through the water I fell out of my mother's arms," Anahit says, "but somebody went after me and saved me."

The refugees went toward Lori, in Eastern Armenia. On the way Armenian officials sent them to Bolnis in Georgia and gave them assistance. One of Anahit's sisters got married there. Then, after about a year hearing that the Turks had left Basen they returned to Gomadzor. Everything there was the way it had been left. The people went on living the way they used to.

But in 1918 Basen came under attack again by the Turks, and for the second time the family had to run. Before they could escape, Anahit's cousin and his wife were killed.

"My cousin had a gun. They told him to turn it in. He refused. They shot him and his wife to death," Anahit says. "We had to leave their bodies where they were…"

On their second journey for safety, Anahit's family was among those rescued by General Andranik Ozanyan's units, who took Anahit's family and the rest of the villagers all the way through Eastern Armenian territory to Karabakh.

Life was difficult there. Anahit's father died, and the family moved again. They reached the present day Gyumri territory and settled in Mantash village. Anahit spent several years there having to work all the time.

"We lived in cattle sheds and worked in people's homes, my mother, brother and I," Anahit says, "My mother died soon. I was only 13."

Anahit's older sister, who got married in Yerevan, took her in. Yerevan has been Anahit's home ever since. Her brother stayed in the village. When Anahit was 15 her sister, who was about 20 years older than her, found her a husband.

"I was only a child. I didn't want to get married," Anahit says, "but as much as I fought, I got married."

"...the Armenian massacre was the greatest crime of the war, and the failure to act against Turkey is to condone it... the failure to deal radically with the Turkish horror means that all talk of guaranteeing the future peace of the world is mischievous nonsense."
US President Theodore Roosevelt, May 11, 1918.

Now Anahit has 24 descendants. Out of four children the daughters, Hranush, 77, and Sirush, 75, are alive. Anahit lives with her grandsons, granddaughter-in-laws and great grandchildren in Nor Aresh. The houses of the family are close to each other. There are always people around Anahit to take care of her.

"There are not many families like ours now," Anahit's grandson Hakob says, "people should know how to take care of each other and their elders."

"Our grandma is very pretty," says Gayane, her granddaughter-in-law. "Maybe we should get you married again?"

Anahit laughs.

ANDRANIK:

Memories of hardship, memories of kindness

Andranik Semerjyan remembers well the heat of the summer of 1918, when Turkish women in yashmaks walked timidly in the streets past policemen whose red fezzes caught the eye in the sunshine.

Turkish officials had declared a curfew for Armenians and fear gripped the two Armenian districts in Izmir – Getezerk and Qarap.

Andranik, born in 1907, recalls: "The Turks were saying 'do not come out of your houses or we shall not be responsible for you'."

In 1918 around 30,000 Armenians lived in Izmir.

Although the curfew applied only to Armenians, other Christian nationalities in the town, including Greeks, were cautious. In Izmir, people had heard about the dreadful atrocities of 1915 in Armenian towns and villages and they waited fearfully for the hour when it would be their turn to face slaughter.

"But our turn was not yet to come. We were lucky at that time. For fear of the French, the Turks would not touch us," says Andranik.

Close to the Armenian district, where the water-seller Hambartzum lived with his wife and three children, was the French Consulate. The Turks were anxious to avoid trouble with French officials, and employed other measures to get rid of the Izmir Armenians. Confined to their houses and deprived of all means of existence, the Armenians were expected to die of hunger.

"We lived hungry days," Andranik remembers. "My father sold water in an old pitcher to earn a living, but he would not come out of the house and we had to stay hungry."

The hungry children – 9-year old Andranik, 11-year old Khatun and 13-year old Vardivar, were huddled together on the couch, when suddenly they heard a faint knock at the door.

It was a Turkish woman living in the neighborhood, who entered timidly with food for the children. For several months the woman, whose name Andranik no longer remembers, visited with food hidden under her yashmak.

In this way, at risk to her own life, she saved the Armenian water-seller's family.

"Then we heard that French ships had come to take us," says Andranik. Under cloak of night, the family made its way to the port and the French ship, which carried them to Athens, Greece.

"My father started selling water there, but it did not last long," Andranik remembers. "He soon went to war, joining the Greeks who fought against Turkey. We were friends with the Greeks. They protected us and we had to protect them."

"We are appalled by the terrible violence done to the Armenian people, and dismayed that the world still knows such inhumanity."
Pope John Paul II, official prayer at the Genocide Memorial, Yerevan, September 26, 2001

During the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922, Hambartzum was taken captive and did not return for more than two years. When he did, says Andranik, he carried the news that all of the remaining Armenians in Izmir had been exterminated.

The Izmir of his childhood survived now only in Andranik's heart. The family settled peacefully in Athens and Hambartzum and his wife had two more children – a boy and a girl.

When, in 1946, the opportunity came up to settle in Soviet Armenia, Hambartzum and his large family, now including grandchildren, decided to move to their homeland. They wanted the children to grow up as Armenians.

At the dockside, Hambartzum had a shock: he met his brother, whom he lost in Izmir and had not seen for more than 25 years.

Andranik says that sunny days met them in their homeland, adding with a sigh: "There is nothing more about this to remember . . ."

His wife, 85-year-old Gayaneh, nods her head gracefully and smiles.

"I would only add," he says suddenly, "that although the Turks were our enemy, each time I remember that Turkish woman, my heart fills with gratitude for human kindness that does not acknowledge nationality."

ANDRANIK:

Bridges of hope, and a Turkish hero

Red and white grapes twist in the old man's hands, slipping into the bowl. Andranik Tachikyan begins separating the sweet tasting bunches of grapes – one to eat, one to make wine.

He was a small child when he used to take bunches into his hands squeezing them and having fun of it.

Andranik's family was well known in the Turkish city of Tripoli (now in Lebanon).

His parents and ancestors, Andranik says, were wealthy and had a big garden, a pharmacy, endless fields of wheat and tobacco and a mansion that they lost in one day when the mass extermination of Armenians began.

"My father was Dutch, his name was Pierre Van Moorsel. He was a famous man, a doctor and engineer, who had built several bridges," tells Andranik, taking his father's visit card from a pile of papers. "My mother was Armenian, her name was Arshaluys. She was a kind woman, who lost almost everything during the Genocide and stood against all the pain and trouble alone."

"When the bridge was ready all our family used to sit under the brand new bridge and loaded cars used to pass over it," remembers Andranik, who is now 96. "That was the way a bridge builder proved that building a bad bridge would first of all threaten the life of his family. But everyone knew about the strong bridges my father used to build. We were confident nothing would happen to us. But neither his fame nor his nationality saved him."

Fixing his eyeglasses Grandpa Andranik brings the military green tie and garment into order and begins bothering with his documents.

The old man who served in the Military Registration and Enlistment Office for 55 years tries to substantiate everything he says, bringing arguments showing the shabby-yellow documents or photographs.

"This is the only picture of the massacre times," he says. "This is the only thing that has remained from our wealth, years and life."

Mother Arshaluys is in the middle, and Andranik and his sister Mariam are on the sides.

The faded photographs are as old as the fading remembrance, the childhood memories and difficulties of Genocide times.

"I was small; there are some dates and names I can't remember, but there are several things I remember very well," tells Andranik. "The Turks on horses with swords in their hands either killed people or threw them into the river. The scene was horrifying. Although my father was Dutch, they killed him and my older brother as Armenians. We were shocked and horrified. We did not know where to go and what to do without father. We left home, fame, wealth and took the way of refuge – starving and barefooted."

> ***"Whole Plain Strewn by Armenian Bodies"***
> *Headline, New York Times, March 19, 1915*

Andranik remembers their gardener, a Turk, reached them in a difficult moment and "saved us away from the sword".

"Our Turkish gardener was very loyal to my father and our family, because we treated all of them very well. As soon as the massacres began, he saved us, endangering his own life. He took my mother, my sister and me under a bridge my father had built," he says. "Everything went wrong, people could not save their children from the Turks' swords; we would not survive if it were not for the gardener."

Andranik remembers the grass was high under the bridge and the gardener kept them there.

"We stayed there for a while. Every day our gardener would secretly bring us sunflower seeds, hazelnut oil cake and we ate it until the Americans entered Tripoli," he says. "Then the Americans found us and sent us to Greece by sea."

Andranik says he remembers the orphans and the exhausted people gathered by the ship.

"Everyone cried by the ship, for they couldn't believe they had been saved at last. My mother would also cry, she would squeeze us to her breast and cry loudly," he remembers. "Then the ship took us to Greece. We moved to Armenia from Greece."

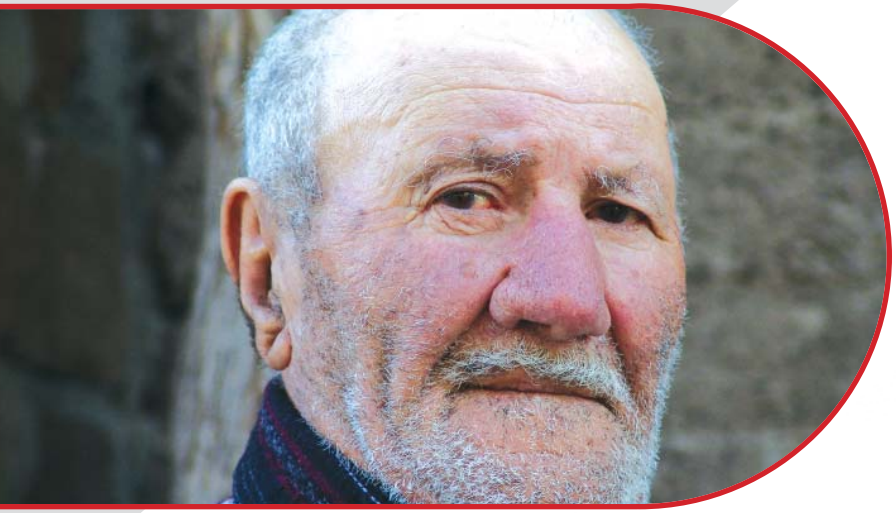
Andranik says they saw many difficulties in Armenia at the beginning.

"We had a marvelous big house in Tripoli and lived in gorgeous conditions. When we came to Armenia we were given a barn in one of the suburban state farms of the city."

And then he adds: "But we were happy we were alive."

ANDRANIK:

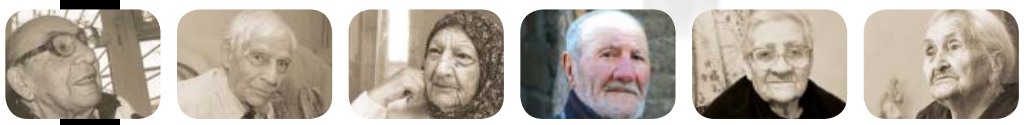
Unlikely dreams and nightmare memories



Andranik Matevosyan holds a secret wish in his soul, which he knows will not come true.
He wants, just once more, to see Kars. But shut out by age and a closed border, he knows he's likely to leave this world with the yearning unrealized.
"Of course, child, of course I have dreams," the old man says. "As long as I live, my dreams will live with me."
Andranik was 6 when in 1918 his family escaped Kars during the middle of the Armenian Genocide. Of course he was small, but he remembers the sufferings he underwent as if they were today.
"There was not one or two of us, we were hundreds of people running away. With shock and terror in our hearts we would go. We did not know where we would end up or what would be. The thing that mattered was to escape. Otherwise, Turks would kill us. But people were exhausted and died of hunger," remembers Andranik.
People were forced to leave the things they took with them on the way, unable to carry their belongings anymore. And when, exhausted, they fell along the way, they would look for ways to save their children.
"As soon as I speak I remember newborn children thrown into the river by their own parents, when they felt unable to go on. They thought if they died, their children could fall to the lot of the Turks, while the water might carry them onto the shore and they could survive that way," Andranik recalls and, emotional, keeps silent for a few minutes.
Along the way Armenians would pretend they were Kurds and did not speak Armenian, in hopes of confusing the Turks they met, and that way maybe escape. Andranik remembers how his father distorted Andranik's mother's face by scratching it, putting soot on her and messing her hair in order to save her from being kidnapped by Turkish men.
The refugees often went without sleep. Only once in a few days they would have a rest under trees.
"I never forget the eyes of my parents, when one morning we started out and my mother suddenly remembered that we had left my young sister under the tree. My mother beat her hands on her knees, cried, until my father fetched the child. They could not be blamed either: they seemed like they had already lost their consciousness. They couldn't understand any more what was going on, and they were running. That's it," says Andranik.
On the way the Matevosyans lost dozens of relatives and neighbors. Going for a month, resting in many places, they reached Batumi.
"We were thrown into barracks like sheep are thrown into a barn, in order to accommodate us. Those who wished were sent to England, those who did not go, remained in Batumi. We also stayed. There were only few of us alive and my Grandma Shushan decided we should not be separated," Andranik says. "So we remained in Batumi. The war ended, Lenin came and there was no threat any more."

"In 1915 the Turkish Government began and ruthlessly carried out the ruthless massacre and deportation of Armenians in Asia Minor. There is no reasonable doubt that this crime was planned and executed for political reasons."
Winston Churchill

In 1928 the Matevosyan family moved to Russia. There Andranik made a family with his compatriot Siranush, from Kars. During their joint life they had 7 children and 25 grand and great grandchildren.
In 1936, they moved to Armenia.
"My parents were common peasants. They cultivated soil, kept animals. I continued their honest work; I became a worker. I made a house with my own hands in one of the old districts of Yerevan called Sari Tagh. I worked and raised my children with my old Siran.
"But Siran went ahead of me. She died a year ago. Now nothing is left for me any more, I will go myself and will take my memories with me," says the survivor, and carefully wipes the dust from his wife's picture.



AVAG:

Genocide took everything except life

"Every day we waited for death. Every morning when the sun rose, we did not know whether it would get dark or not."

The words are written by the trembling hand of 96-year old Avag Harutyunyan.

In a thick notebook the old man has written the story of his life, beginning not on the day of his birth but on a day in the spring of 1915, when Avag's life would become defined by historic suffering.

The Genocide deprived him of everything but life. Like the wicked devil in the tale of his childhood the massacres took his father, his mother and his sister, and by the time he was six he was alone with his memories, that he now shares from his home in Ararat.

"The Turks wanted to kill everyone to the last Armenian." Like his hands, his voice trembles, and his brown eyes fill with tears. He tells of the road to refuge, on which Turkish soldiers made bets about pregnant women – about whether the child inside the belly was a boy or a girl. Then slicing the woman's belly open to see who won the bet.

Then his face brightens like that of a child and he says: "But we fought heroically . . ."

Grandpa Avag remembers the escape from Western Armenia had not begun yet when the men of their village were drawn to the Turkish army, including his father. His mother was alone with two children. She tied Avag to the back of an ox, his sister to the back of a calf, and they took the dark way of refuge.

"We were hungry, my poor mother found something to eat from here and there, but she wouldn't eat, she was exhausted and sick. When we reached the city of Baquba in Iraq, the English people took my mother to the hospital."

But his mother did not return from the hospital.

After their mother's death, six-year old Avag and his four-year old sister, Sanam, were cared for by an English soldier, then turned over to Avag's uncle.

"My uncle was young and couldn't take two children. He took me with him and asked my aunt to take my sister. But my aunt was heartless enough to say she can't take an orphan, she didn't want to care for a girl. And my sister stayed in a foreign city full of refugees.

"I still do not know if she survived or not."

"When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and, in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact..."
US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, 1919.

The three year escape led to the village of Khalisa in Ararat province.

The eight-year old boy was forced to work for an Azeri as a serf, and then when he learned to read and write a bit he was sent to the town of Ararat to work in a shop.

"In the shop I worked everybody had stolen something and had served in prison. But when after the three years of my work nothing was stolen there everybody was amazed. In the end they gave me a bicycle," tells Avag.

Along with working in the shop he studied at a seven-year school, then entered an agricultural college and started his work in the world of books.

"I did not know Armenian properly. I spoke all the languages at once. I knew the language of those people whom I dealt with – Kurdish, Turkish, Azerbaijani, but I began learning Armenian alone and was the best."

Longing for learning the 17 year old came to Yerevan and entered the Agricultural Institute, where he earned the Tairov scholarship for excellence in studies.

"He was alone in this life and reached everything with his industriousness and stamina, his grandchildren have inherited this feature from him – they like learning," says Avag's daughter Hasmik Harutyunyan.

Now, the Doctor of Agriculture carefully takes his awards and certificates out of the drawer, and tells proudly about the devotion and hardships he worked with to deserve them, when he has passed the road from an orphan and a refugee to the Doctor of Philosophy and Hero of Labor titles.

His grandson says that Avag works still, and that he is now studying English.

But today the most important thing in Avag's life is the book about his life. He has finished it. But now, he makes copies, writing each one over.

"He does not tell us why he copies by hand," says Hasmik. "He says he makes some corrections. But I think he wants to keep a copy for each of his grandchildren."

BAGHDASAR:

"We walked on corpses"

"We walked through the corpses, on the corpses. Bodies were everywhere. And the Turkish bullets and shells poured like rain on those still alive."

The terrifying memories of his childhood stir pain in the memory and heart of Baghdasar Hakobyan, now 95. He no longer sees well but the visions of his past come hurtling back through the decades like the "Turkish bullet" of memory.

For grandpa Baghdasar, the Armenian massacres and his escape are an indelible history that deprived him of relatives, parents and childhood.

He was born in the village of Ziraklu near Kars, where he lived with his parents, three brothers and a large extended family before the killings. A child at the time, he says he does not remember everything, but some scenes have haunted him ever since.

"Before we fled from Ziraklu, the Turks called my father and my elder brother and killed both of them," he remembers. "Then our lives turned into long years of refuge with terrifying stories."

Baghdasar says there were almost 30 in his family, living together in a big house in the traditional way for that time.

"When the slaughter began some of us somehow escaped, the rest were either missing or dead from illness or the Turkish bullet," he says. "They used to catch people and push them into the hay barns and burn them alive. The smoke spread into the air."

After the murder of his father and eldest brother, responsibility for the family fell on Baghdasar's mother Antaram. Baghdasar remembers her with a smile, trying to revive her in his mind.

The old man says the Turks would take away the beautiful Armenian women, which is why his mother always covered her face with a veil and spread soot over her features.

"The road was terrible; we understood later what deprivations our mother suffered to keep us alive," says Baghdasar. "For three years she passed broken hearted and exhausted through the Turk's fire, against starvation and illness, with my two brothers by her side and me in a bag.

"Those were horrifying times. We walked slowly at the back of someone's carriage; we were hungry and homeless."

Eventually, Baghdasar arrived on foot in Armenia with his mother and one of his brothers.

"On the road a terrible illness hit the refugees and it took my other brother's life," he says.

Baghdasar's mother also died soon after reaching Armenia, totally worn down by hardship and illness during the journey.

"I remember very well it was spring when we came to Armenia, but there was snow. Since we were orphans, we were immediately taken to the Gyumri orphanage where there were many children like us," he recalls.

> ***"Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"***
> *Adolph Hitler August 22, 1939*

Baghdasar grew at the orphanage and at age 10 he began tending cattle in the village of Getashen in Hoktemberyan region to be able to earn his keep.

"I had nobody to care for me, to send to school to get educated. There was nobody to look after me so I tried to somehow look after myself."

Later, as an adult, Baghdasar began working in construction. In the 1930s, he built his house in Yerevan with his own hands and in 1937 he married Satenik.

"Then the Patriotic War began and I lost my last kin, my only brother who had survived. I was badly wounded in the battlefield and sent back to Armenia."

At home, Baghdasar and Satenik raised six children. Baghdasar became a respected specialist at an oil and soap factory, tended his garden and enjoyed his children, grandchildren and now great-grandchildren. He has 29 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"Only I remained from our family," he says.

Baghdasar has grown apricots, apples, and grapes for many years. Glancing over to one corner of his garden, he smiles and says: "The crop in my garden seems good this year. It's a pity I don't see well any more and my health has worsened. Otherwise I would cultivate the garden again, and see the trees bloom every spring."

GEGHUHI:

From strangling, to surviving, to knitting

On a night in 1913, when it is no longer safe to be Armenian in the town of Tekirdagh, a young couple seek refuge with others hiding from Turkish soldiers.

They reach a safe house and ask entry . . .

"Who is it," comes the voice from inside.

"Suqias," answers the man with his wife and infant.

From the other side a voice says: "Don't let him in, he has a child."

"She'll be silent" says the father.

"Will you strangle her if she is not?"

"Yes."

And so begins Geghuhi Kivrikyan's story of survival.

The town of Tekirdagh is on the cost of Marmara Sea in western Turkey. It is the capital of Tekirdagh province, with a population of around 100,000.

At the end of the Ottoman Empire period the population of the city was not more than 40,000. Mostly Greeks and Armenians lived there.

In 1913 Turkey was in battles with the Bulgarians. They began deporting the Armenians and Greeks from the city, leaving only families where the husband served the Turkish Army.

One of the families to be forced out was that of Geghuhi Kivrikyan. She was born in 1913. The deportation began when Geghuhi was six months old and was the reason for that night when her parents sought safety in a basement near the river.

Others also hiding, let the family in, after Geghuhi's father made his awful promise to silence his daughter if necessary.

After an hour the baby began to cry. The father kept his word, and began to strangle her.

"My mother grabbed me and ran to the street," Geghuhi says. At this point baby Geghuhi had fainted. "She had to jump over some fences, but I was too heavy. So she would throw me over the fence and then jump. Because of the pain from hitting the ground, I recovered."

"Public recognition of those events (the Armenian Genocide) is essential in order that they do not continue to engender violent acts of retribution, and that through remembering the history of the Armenian people other peoples might be spared a similar fate."
World Council of Churches, August 10, 1983

Geghuhi's mother, Aghavni, fled with her daughter.

"We never heard from my father after that," Geghuhi says.

Geghuhi and her mother stayed in Bigha until 1922.

"One day in 1922 several groups of Turks came to town and began shooting Armenians and Greeks," Geghuhi says, "They shot people for 24 hours.

"There was 25 or 30 of us women hiding in a house when they began shooting. We jumped from the windows. Mother was the last one left. When running out a vase hit her. She held her head and cried. The Turks thought they shot her and stopped shooting. "

At the end of the day there was around 50 Armenians left in the town.

"A Turkish general came to us and said that he would let us go if Anitsa, a beautiful Armenian girl he had seen around, would marry him. He gave us three days."

The girl didn't agree in the beginning because her two brothers had been killed by Turks. But the imploring of all the people made her accept.

The next day Greek ships came and took the remaining Greeks and Armenians to Greece.

"We lived in Greece until 1947, my mother, her sister, and I. There was no male relative left…"

Life in Greece was very poor.

Geghuhi recalls using powdered milk cans as drinking glasses, and that Aghavni wove carpets in order to make a living.

"They sent me to learn tailoring, and I made my own dowry later," Geghuhi says.

Geghuhi got married in Greece to a man who was also from Tekirdagh.

"My husband's family wasn't forced out or hurt. But his grandparents died in deportation, and his 17-year-old aunt was raped, and died soon."

Geghuhi and her husband, Harutyun, moved to Soviet Armenia in 1947.

"This year is the 20th year of Harutyun's death," she recalled. "He died on April 24…" The girl who knitted her dowry, is the old woman who knits away pain.

"I'm lucky that I can see and hear well," Geghuhi says, "I get up at night because of the pain in my body. And I knit…"

GEVORG:

A professor's facts

The steps are slow but firm; clothes are tidy, manners polite.

It is the 57th spring the eldest and the most respected professor Gevorg Melikyan walks in the corridors of the Agricultural Academy where the faculty treats him with reverence, the students with interest.

In Gevorg's memories swirl a carefree childhood with caring parents, a big house and a comfortable living that disappeared in a moment bringing deprivation and suffering.

Gevorg is among those few remaining who have survived the Genocide, who has witnessed refuge and violence.

The professor is not only an instructor in matters of agriculture, but a walking history.

Gevorg Melikyan was born in 1913 in Igdir. These years later while telling about the Genocide and the events of those years he stares into the distance and returns to the past with every word.

"When we took the hard path of refuge together with our relatives and neighbors I was five years old," remembers the professor. "Several episodes have left unforgettable imprints in my childhood memories that wind in my mind like a film. My grandfather was a priest, my grandma didn't want to talk about leaving, and the day we were to prepare for refuge my grandma had a heart attack.

"We had a big house, my parents used to run a shop in Igdir. We learned we must run away in the night. Our house had two doors. My father carefully locked the back door and approached the main one closing it with such movements as if we planned to return there in two days."

Sharing the burden of years one after another, the elderly man puts his hands together and reminds that the Genocide was the detailed plan of the Turkish authorities to annihilate Armenians.

"Several episodes have remained unforgettable in my memories," he says. "A street was full of passing people – with carts, horses, camels. People had taken with them whatever they managed to take, mainly small bundles, people had little time and were trying to escape. It was a true mess; many lost their relatives, their children on the road. I can vividly remember we passed kilometers of people walking. Part of them came to Eastern Armenia, another part tried to find refuge in the Arab world or fled to Europe. People said we would be safe as soon as we crossed the river Arax, but few succeeded."

Getting over the river was not a guarantee of things getting easier.

Despite the hardships Gevorg's and hundreds of other families managed to reach Yerevan. Here, though, they found hunger and terrible illnesses in that time.

According to him although the time was very difficult, the Armenians were strong enough to continue their lives, create families and tried to succeed. The professor, who has been awarded with "Anania Shirakatsi" and National Academy of Sciences Golden Medals, has two sons and four grandchildren.

"We had numerous relatives who lived in villages, all of them were massacred, we found none alive," he says. "Many children were lost, the majority of families suffered loss. The people were doomed to sufferings, persecutions and extermination. Those are facts we can never forget."

"The Armenian Genocide was conceived and carried out by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, resulting in the deportation of nearly 2,000,000 Armenians, of whom 1,500,000 men, women, and children were killed, 500,000 survivors were expelled from their homes, and which succeeded in the elimination of the over 2,500-year presence of Armenians in their historic homeland."

House Resolution 316, 109th US Congress (pending).

GYULENA:

A night of 30 weddings

"We would go, knowing no date or time through the desert without water, or bread or anything," tells Gyulena Musoyan. In 1915 she was 12, and destined to become a survivor of the Armenian Genocide.

The village of Kesab Ottoman Turkey where Gyulena was born had a school and a church until 1915. "We would go to the church every day after the classes. We used to play in the yard of the church," she says, her glance clear as her memories. "We lived peacefully, until one day I heard the men of our family talking in the yard."

So many years later, she still remembers the distinct warning: "Slaughterers are coming."

The Turkish military units came to the village in the night. The men in the village were forced out of the village to be killed. Only the youngest of Gyulena's six uncles who was sent to Cyprus for studies escaped the mobilization. "We piled our stuff on a donkey and left the village – there were only women, children and my old grandpa."

"The sun was burning, but we were going farther and farther. We would go in the daytime and would sleep in the night – we slept in the desert – wherever we managed. Then one morning a rider approached us and began beating my grandpa."

"My mother spoke good Turkish, so she approached the rider, took him by his arms and shook him asking: 'Why did you beat him? What is his guilt?' My grandpa died on the way. We buried him there – under a big stone."

The family ended up in the village of Hamma.

"Turks placed women and children in a house where a middle-aged man looked after us," says Gyulena, rumpling a small handkerchief in her wrinkled tidy hands.

"Can you imagine the Father of the Kesab church wedded 30 couples in a single night? Do you know why?" asks Gyulena looking strait into her guest's eyes. "We were afraid the Turks would come and take our beautiful girls away. There was little distinction between relatives and others. Families agreed with each other and the girls and the boys were married."

Her uncles escaped, but in the coming days Gyulena saw one uncle die, then his son, then many of her neighbors.

"In 1918 we went to Jerusalem," she says, showing a tattoo on her arm that now resembles a deep blue bruise rather than the mark of the Christian cross. "This is made in Jerusalem, where my mother went ill and was taken to a hospital. The children were taken to Port Said to an asylum where we ate twice a day. We could also gather biscuits that were spread on the ground, distributed as humanitarian aid by planes."

After four years the family reunited in Kesab. There they found only destruction and ruin; no school, no church. But: "With the help of the foreign countries we reconstructed all of them. I went to school again. I was an excellent pupil but my father didn't allow me to continue studies at a benevolent school preferring me to stay at home. Instead my brother studied in that school in Cyprus. In a while I began working in the local school. Then in 1939 I got married. I have two daughters. I have no son."

"The massacre of over 1.5 million Armenians beginning in 1915 by the Ottoman Turks and the subsequent exile of an additional 500,000 Armenians is one of the most shameful chapters of modern history."
Union of American Hebrew Congregations, November 7, 1989

In the 1940s during the second wave of repatriation more than 89,000 Armenians spread around the world came to Soviet Armenia. Among them was Gyulena Musoyan's family. "A priest in the village was preaching resettlement to Armenia," she says. "We reached Batumi. The picture became clear to us. People in the railway station were gathering bread crumbs from under the trains. But we stayed. Thank God we have seen both good and bad. The state gives me pension and I am glad."

The man in the corner who was silently listening while his grandmother was telling the story of her life smiled: "Now sing a sharakan (hymn)," he asked. The old woman, 102 during this interview, said in a while: "Excuse me for my bad voice today. What do you want me to sing? Narekatsi? Nalbandyan . . ."

These pages hold 24 faces and memories.

History holds 1.5 million.

Since our interviews, only 17 of these are still living . . .

. . . Shouldn’t there be an apology while even one can hear it?

MARGO:

Seven happy years

Margo Hakobyan was born on April 24, 1911, four years before her people became an endangered species in Igdir, part of what is now Turkey.

A passing link to a horrible history, and honored, if that's the right word, with the title "survivor", Margo said that the first seven years of her life were the happiest. That life ended last year, not long after this interview.

Margo was born into the large family of the wealthy Igdir trader Arshak agha (a title of prestige), where a child was supposed only to enjoy all the good things in life.

And that was the way life went on – happy, peaceful and carefree. Arshak agha was trading in textile in his shop and also operated a watermill, and her mother was a housewife.

"We had a one-storied stone house in Igdir. I remember our large orchard – with pear trees, and the furnished house. Every Sunday my dad's friends gathered for kef parties at our house," said Margo, falling into the lap of her memories.

"Eh, what tables we laid on Easter! We lived very well before deportation. After that we were hungry. We didn't live a good life."

The bloody wave that swept Turkey from 1915, exterminating and displacing Armenians on its way, reached Igdir, one of the remote populated areas in the east of the country, in 1918.

"I was playing in the yard with my sisters when suddenly my dad came breathing hard and declared that war had broken out," remembered Margo. "He said: 'Children, hurry up, get into the carriage, we have to flee.' Before we got into the carriage, my dad went after my mum."

With her eyes in tears and a bundle in her hand, Margo's mother also got into the carriage and the Hakobyans went off along the road of deportation.

"We left all of our belongings behind. My mother had time only to take her valuables and money in a bundle. While on the road we heard a bomb. The Turks had launched their attack. The Turks poured into Igdir after we had left. There were deportees all over the road, they were in confusion, crying," said Margo.

The Hakobyans reached Etchmiadzin and the following day moved to Tiflis (now Tbilisi), to Margo's uncle's house where the Hakobyans were expected by their two girls and one son who studied there.

After a year spent in Tiflis the Hakobyans relocated to Yerevan in search of good living conditions in Armenia. Margo and her younger sisters, having said goodbye to their happy childhood, were now struggling to earn their living.

"It was 1920, the worst times. Emigrants were dying of hunger and diseases in the streets; they even didn't have time to bring coffins to bury them all . . ."

Margo's marriage to a military man that promised her a happy future proved to be another delusion. In the seventh year of marriage, in 1939, her husband was arrested as a traitor of the homeland and a year later he was exiled to a corrective labor camp in Siberia. There followed 17 years of hardship when Margo was alone raising her three children – two daughters and one son.

"Those who knew that my husband had been exiled were afraid even to approach us. When my husband was exiled I was fired from my job but reinstated a year later, and for 17 years I worked as a kindergarten manager. During those years I was able to bring up my children so that all three received higher education."

"Today we, as the human rights defenders, would like to address all Armenians in Turkey and elsewhere in the world and tell them "we want to share the pain in your hearts and bow down before the memory of your lost ones. They are also our losses. Our struggle for human rights in Turkey, is at the same time our mourning for our common losses and a homage paid to the genocide victims".
Human Rights Association of Turkey, Istanbul branch. April 24, 2006

Margo's husband, who was acquitted and returned home from exile in 1956, died three years later.

"He didn't see a normal life either," said Margo.

She took out a family photograph dated 1912. In the picture Margo is the youngest – a serene-looking chubby one-year-old sitting in the first row next to other children and protected by a whole family from the back. She admired the dress of her grandmother. "No one dresses like this nowadays," she said.

At her death, the daughter of an "agha" lived off a 10,000 dram (about $25) pension each month, plus about $12 a month the Armenian government pays to Genocide survivors.

She was born on a day that became linked to Armenia's greatest tragedy. Her grandchildren tried even to make April 24 less mournful and more joyful for Margo – a hard task, for someone born into the prestige of Arshak agha, and forced into survival.

MARIAM:

Too young to understand, too old to forget

"I can vividly remember the Turk; his name was Chle.
"He came, went up on our roof. My uncle was sitting there with his child.
"My uncle's name was Mkrtich. He said, 'Mkrtich take the child inside, come let us talk a bit.'
"The child was of my age. He brought her inside, and he was just going outside when the Turk shot him to death. My uncle was naïve, and the Turk was prepared."
Mariam Avoyan, who lives in the village of Nerqin Bazmaberd near Talin, remembers 1915, when she was six. It is when she learned the words "slaughtering and looting".
She was in Sasoon, in what is now Turkey, until her family was chased out.
Murder leaves a lasting impression, so Mariam says: "I will never forget the massacre".
Calm and quiet, the thin woman is moved when she talks; her blue eyes go wet.
"I can vividly remember the massacring. It began in the time I was already maturing," Mariam says. "In those times Armenians and Turks used to live in peace."
But not anymore. Not since six-year olds became witness to genocide.
"They gathered Armenians in one place – men, women, children and began. The Turkish soldiers surrounded the Armenians. They brought the gazaghi (kerosene in Sasoon dialect), poured all over the people and set them afire. As they set the fire they let loose those who would run, to shoot them.
"Where could they run? The smell of smoke and blood covered the earth, the sky went dark, and people could not see each other. The people including children, women, men, would make thousands. They set the fire…When they saw them fall, they went away," says Mariam, with more suffering than hatred in her aged face. She is mindful to also talk about the Turks who were kind to the Armenians.
But it is not they for whom the history of these days is written and disputed . . .
"The next morning they came for looting. They turned the corpses and took away the gold ware. My uncle's wife, Margarit, held her child in her arms. She was not killed, but the child was dead.
"When the Turk turned her over to take away her jewelry he recognized her and said 'Margarit, get up. I have eaten bread from your hand. Get up, let me take you home'."
Mariam's family – father, mother and seven children – escaped Sasoon toward their eventual refuge.
"The slaughtering then started. Whoever was killed was killed. Those who remained ran away to the mountains, gorges, and forests. We ran to Mush."
And to Mush, Mariam remembers, came Armenia's hero from Russia, General Andranik who fought the Turks and helped the Armenians on their way to safety.
But many did not survive the journey, including Mariam's father, Grigor Avoyan, a man well known in Sassoon.
"On the road in snow, in gorges we suffered hunger and thirst. My father along with others went to gather herbs for us to eat. The Turks appeared and took my father, three other men and two women…"
Besides taking them away the Turkish soldiers made one of the Armenian men write a list of others' names. After finishing the assignment they called him.
"When he approached the Turk cut off both his ears, put them into his pocket and went away. The man remained in the field. We stayed there a day in the mountains, then we saw the man again. He said the Turks had taken my father Grigor and killed him."
The journey for Mariam's family began with seven children. It ended with only two. The rest died of starvation and illnesses.

> ***"It is generally not known in the world that, in the years preceding 1916, there was a concerted effort made to eliminate all the Armenian people, probably one of the greatest tragedies that ever befell any group. And there weren't any Nuremberg trials."***
> *US President Jimmy Carter, May 16, 1978.*

"My sister Soseh was older than me - 12 years old. In those times the 10-12 year old girls were getting married. A Turk used to say to my father: 'Grigor, give Soseh to my son and I will protect you till the end of your life'. My father said: 'I will not disgrace Armenia and the Armenian name'. He didn't give her, saying 'I will not betray Armenians; Armenians should remain Armenian'."
Reaching Armenia the remaining family moved from place to place until they settled in the Talin region, where the majority were also from Sasoon.
"We grew up suffering and weeping," Mariam says. "I neither ate fully, nor slept, nor dressed, nor laughed . . .
"If there were justice on earth, the Armenian Genocide would be recognized."


MARY:

"The call of the blood"

The eyes glimmering with tears behind the big spectacles gaze into the past. Mary Davtyan pats her father's picture and remembers the bitter days of her childhood.

"My father and I were all alone in the world; my poor father had lost his three sisters, two brothers and my beautiful young mother," remembers Mary.

For Mary the Genocide of 1915 began with her mother's death: "I was five, my mother was young, eighteen or nineteen, and very beautiful. She went in the night to say goodbye to her parents, because we were going to flee in the morning. Just in front of the door the Turks caught her, assaulted her, my grandparents went out to save her: everybody was put to the sword."

So the mother of the family stayed forever in her native Sebastia, and Mary and her father took the way of refuge.

"I can recall it like a dream. I was terribly hungry, my feet were bleeding, and I was tired and would cry all the time asking for my mother."

In the memories of childhood the mother remains like a dream – beautiful and unreachable –as if she will come out of the mob of the fleeing refugees soon, approach and save her baby.

"When I cried too much my father would say 'mother will soon come, she will soon reach us', and I would believe," her kind sad eyes staring frozen into the distance, where the memories of childhood have been lost.

"Young girls in those times did everything to seem ugly to Turks. The Turks would light the women's faces one by one and would take away the beautiful ones. The grandmother of my son's wife remembers how the Turks wanted to take away her sister. They had ground her three-year-old child with a wheat mill; she hanged herself on her own long hair to escape being taken by Turks."

Her voice trembles, and Mary is silent before continuing: "We were saved; we got onboard a ship and reached Greece."

The refugees who went through the struggle between life and death set new life in Greece. Mary's father got married and the child who lost her mother regained a mother's warmth.

"We had just healed the wounds of the Genocide when the new war – World War Two – began. Bombardments, hunger, spending days in hiding. But I got married during those terrible days: we celebrated the wedding secretly, in the dark room with windows covered with cloths. If we had light we would have been shelled," she laughs, remembering the heroism of her youth.

The family that had escaped the Genocide returned to its homeland in 1947, built its home here, raised children and grandchildren.

Nevertheless for Mary the miracle was not the escape from the Genocide but the fact that she managed to find her aunts. "My father thought a lot about his sisters and brothers. He didn't know if they survived or if they had been slaughtered."

"We had a neighbor who knew our story. Once on a business trip to France the neighbor met Armenians who gathered in the house he was hosted in. They would talk about the Genocide. One of them told about his lost brother Onik. They did not know whether Onik was alive or not. Learning the family name helped them understand they had found their elder brother lost in childhood."

"I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915."
US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau (1913-16)

The meeting of the sisters and the brother took place in 1960 in Yerevan after 45 years.

"When people came down the plane, my Grandpa said: 'Over there, she is my sister.' He ran across the barriers and ran to the plane," tells Hovhannes Davtyan, Mary's son. "The people in the airport were crying. He couldn't remember her face, but it was the call of the blood, he said, 'I knew she is my sister'."

Mary strokes the picture of her father and her regained aunt and says happily: "I am glad they found each other, at least they died in peace."

Mary still waits for her peace. And believes. "Turkey will recognize what it did. How can they say there has been no Genocide? Was it a dream to us? Who then killed my mother?"

SHMAVON:

The song survives

He sings in a low voice, almost whispering, a song about Yaghluja mountain. Tears fall from his aged eyes and wash away the present and take Shmavon Sahakyan back to Zrchi, the foothill village of his distant youth.

Shmavon stops singing, and collects his thoughts, to tell his story without confusion.

"I cannot forget our house, our yard, our orchards. I am thinking of them day and night. It may happen that I see them again one day, but I don't think I will. I wish at least my son Samvel could go there to see it. I don't know, the whole world is making efforts today for these lands to be returned," he says.

Samvel is Shmavon's youngest son. He spreads on the table the map of Zrchi drawn by Shmavon and says: "Everything is drawn in detail. Here was our ancestral house, here was the watermill of the village that again belonged to them. I think that one day I will certainly visit the village to see my father's birthplace."

Zrchi was one of the 859 villages of the Kars province (according to data from 1913). It was situated between the cities of Kars and Kaghzvan and home to about 1,500.

Shmavon, the grandson of Mkrtich and Maro, says with pride that theirs was one of the richest families in the village. He remembers his father, Sahak, and mother, Noyem.

"My mother was very beautiful. They say that when my father brought my mother to the village as a bride on horseback, his fellow-villagers said: 'Hey, man, what a marvelous woman you have brought!' To preserve her beauty they even bathed her in milk," says grandfather Shmavon and continues: "We had a van, carts, many hectares of grain and barley fields."

Color turns to black and white when the old man's memory turns to "the stampede".

The Kars province of Western Armenia was near Eastern Armenia. Its location made it more secure, or so it was supposed. The few such as Shmavon, left to tell of villages like Zrchi, know terribly well that no Armenian territory was safe against Ottoman Turk aggression.

"The massacres had begun long before 1918. News about brutalities was reaching us. Like others my grandfather decided to take his family towards Alexandrapol (today's Gyumri), which was 50-60 kilometers away from where we lived," he remembers.

The family of seven emigrated in April 1918, when Shmavon was six. In conditions of famine and poverty in Armenia the grandfather, grandmother, and uncle died.

Poverty became so severe that the father decided to take the family back to Zrchi. There, they found only ruins.

"The Armenians were subjected to a genocidal campaign that defies comprehension and commands all decent people to remember and acknowledge the facts and lessons of an awful crime in a century of bloody crimes against humanity."
US Vice President George Bush, February 19, 2000.

"They plundered everything. We didn't have anything for our living. I remember how we took the logs of our house, hewed them and put them on our backs. This is 1919. We were taking them to the mountain, to the Kurds who had their yaylas (tents) and exchanging them for firewood and tan (the popular Armenian drink made of yoghurt, water and salt) to have something to drink. We were so hungry that we ate grass," he remembers.

Shmavon's father saw the only salvation for his children in an orphanage.

"I feel as if it was yesterday," says Shmavon.

For 10 years, Shmavon lived in the Gyumri orphanage.

In 1935, Shmavon married Anechka Sahakyan, from the village of Azatan, near Gyumri.

Six years later, like thousands of other Armenians, Shmavon went to war. After fighting for five years, he returned to Gyumri, where he and his wife Anechka raised 4 children. His wife died in 1996. Today Shmavon has 10 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren.

With such a vital connection to the present, Shmavon lives more by the past. His memories never betray him: "All of us in the orphanage had the same fate. All of us had pain in our hearts. Many had lost all of their family. We became more courageous as we gave hope to each other."

The hand-drawn map is Shmavon's inseparable companion. With shaking hands he shows the school, the steep bank, the church, their house.

"My brightest memory is connected with my grandmother. Every morning she got up, stoked the tonir and prepared a tan soup. Then, she baked lavash. We ate and ran up the Yaghluja hill to play there."

And again the sounds of a song are on his lips: "Yaghluja is high… Yaghluja was our mountain."

SHNORIK:

“We are a people of peace”

Shnorik Galstyan remembers the “gold oranges”.

She was 10 years old when her family and others were marked for deportation or extermination at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in their Aegean sea-port town of Izmir, in 1915.

But Shnorik’s family employed a well-tested regional custom that, to this day, is the surest way of common folk getting on with authorities: They bribed officials.

“We emptied oranges and stuffed them with gold. There were a lot of those gold oranges. And we sent them all to the local pasha,” remembers Shnorik.

According to Shnorik, they also sent a letter along with oranges, which read: “We are people of peace, please don’t remove us from here.”

Along with other families, her father Gevorg Chakhmakhchyan, a dentist by profession, mother Mariam, her two brothers and three sisters were allowed to continue their peaceful life in Izmir, but only temporarily.

Shnorik remembers how Turks caught her father and tried to make him betray other fellow-Christians by giving their names and addresses. “My father was a man of peace but also was a man of honor, he didn’t betray others,” she says.

Instead, Gevorg Chakhmakhchyan instructed his daughter Shnorik to run to the houses of the people the Turks were looking for and warn them of danger.

Shnorik remembers too well how the years of horror began in their lives. All Armenian male population were put into trains and taken in an unknown direction. Many of them were later said to have been executed or died from unbearable suffering and diseases.

All women and children were rounded up, put on ships and exiled. Turkish soldiers were on their guard not to let any male on board the ships. Shnorik remembers that some men disguised themselves as women to get on board. Her father was one of the few for whom the trick worked.

“When the last ships were sailing off people would swim after those ships asking to be taken on board, but the Turks would stop them in every way, pouring boiling water on them,” remembers Shnorik.

One of Shnorik’s sisters, Beatrice, was wounded when Turks threw bombs in Surb Stepanos Church in Izmir where Armenians were hiding and trying to summon help from the English and Italians, by ringing the church bells. “But there was no help,” says Shnorik. “A great many people went down during those attacks and my sister went missing and for some time was presumed dead.”

For two years Shnorik and her parents were the only members of the family who managed to escape to a Greek island. “We lived in a school for two years without any news from my brothers and sisters.”

“The Ottoman Empire should be cleaned up of the Armenians and the Lebanese. We have destroyed the former by the sword, we shall destroy the latter through starvation.”
Enver Pasha, May 19, 1916

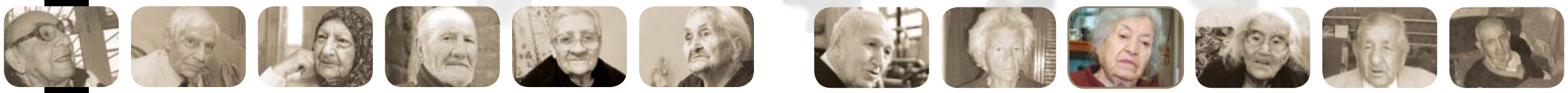
Eventually, by a twist of fate, there was a family reunion in Athens, but it was not a happy one, as they had to mourn the death of one brother and the loss of one sister. The other sister was already far away from them, overseas. They only learned that she was alive and that was enough for them to rejoice, although they never saw her again.

In 1947, Shnorik and her husband Ghazaros, another deported Armenian who found his second home in Athens, decided to repatriate to Armenia. But more troubles were waiting for the repatriates in their home country. The carpet-weaver Shnorik and the metalworker Ghazaros were to face numerous problems at home. “Cheka officials would not allow us to live and work the way we wanted. At gunpoint they made my husband give up all his tools he had brought with him from Greece,” she remembers.

Shnorik, who was unable to bear children, says it is God who takes care of her.

Spending a lot of time alone Shnorik every now and then goes back to the years of her adolescence, looking through her old photo albums and other memos of her distant past. But she says she doesn’t want to remember her life in Izmir, where they were in constant fear for their lives as they heard the news coming from other parts of Turkey where Armenians were suffering. Rather she remembers with a tender feeling her life in Athens.

“I long for Greece, and not so much for Izmir,” she says.



SIRAK:

In honor of Musa Ler

Sirak Matosyan lives in the world of old photographs and memories, which virtually take him back to the Musa Ler of his childhood, which he saw flourishing the last time at age nine, in 1915. That's when he left with other Musalertsis, in a French rescue ship.

Sirak is one of the few living Musalertsis in whose eyes the story that became myth and legend was first a true tale of survival.

Against impossible odds the Musa Ler Armenians held off Turkish troops in a series of battles that secured their survival until ships off the Mediterranean Sea coast took them to safety in Egypt.

Sirak's eyes, as blue as the waters that became his rescue, catch fire recalling those battles that were a lesson that the nine-year old took into life: Surviving with dignity is more important than mere survival.

"The adults decided not to surrender: 'We will fight, defend ourselves till the last bullet. We will take the women and children to the sea to drown them there. Better they be drowned, than be shot by the enemy'," Sirak recalls.

While telling about the heroic battle, he avoids recalling the sufferings of his fellow-villagers, as he considers it uncharacteristic of a Musalerstsi to cry and he tells only about their heroisms.

He remembers that when the French rescue ships came, the Armenian fighters did not want to leave the front line.

"The fighters said: 'We won't leave'," the old man recalls with excitement.

In three years the First World War was over, Turkey was defeated, and the Musalerstis got an opportunity to go back to their villages. Many came back and found their once thriving villages in ashes and ruins. Still, they stayed another 20 years.

"We stayed there until 1939," the old man tells with a trembling voice, "Eh, Armenian fate… in 1939 that land was severed and handed over to Turkey. We were 35 thousand Armenians living there. What remained? Some 500-600. We all got out of there…"

Sirak remembers the referendum of the days, when the fate of Musa Ler was to be decided: Would it belong to Syria, or to Turkey? Sirak tried to vote several times, by changing his clothes after each vote.

"When I changed my clothes for the third time and entered," Sirak says, "a Turk called me: 'Sirak, come here', he told me: 'Sirak, why are you coming and going with your clothes changed? Everything has already been decided'."

The Matosyans came to the seashore of Syria and from there to Lebanon. The French helped them to settle homes. His parents, brother and sister died there. In 1946, when the doors of Soviet Armenia opened, the 40-year-old Sirak, taking his wife and daughter with him, left Lebanese land, and came to the "free country of Armenia" on the first caravan.

"Of the Armenian people as a whole, we may put an estimate that three-fourths are gone, and that this three-fourths include leaders in every walk of life."
New York Times, October 7, 1915

"It was me who came first and opened the doors of immigration," jokes Sirak. In general, Sirak considers himself a happy man. And when he talks about Musa Ler, he speaks in present tense still.

"We – Musalertsis have a tradition: When the child turns six, his father puts a gun in his hands. Place the bullet here. Take out the bullet. Shoot like this."

His room is decorated with two photos of fidayis (Armenian warriors). In one of them is his father during the Musa Ler battle. The other one is himself. It was shot about 30 years ago, when he took part in a performance about the Musa Ler battle, playing the part of a fighting Musalertsi.

Musa Ler is alive for him as long as there are deserved children who keep the reputation of their fathers and forefathers high, and as long as people learn and speak about the heroic battle of Musa Ler. Sirak was among Musalertsis who successfully petitioned the Government of Armenia to name one of its settlements Musaler (near Zvartnots Airport).

On the road from Yerevan to Etchmiadzin is a monument in honor of the Musa Ler battles. It is Sirak's pride.

"All the tourists who come to Armenia will head for Etchmiadzin," says Sirak, "On their way they will see the monument and ask: 'What is this?' And they will learn everything there…

"The monument is standing like we are – the Musalertsis".

TIGRANUHI:

Deported from childhood

Tigranuhi's childhood ended when she was four.

And that was a long time ago, 1914, when her family was deported for the first time. For the next 21 years, she would hardly know a "home", but would merely have places to live.

Trouble began after the start of the First World War when the parents of Tigranuhi Asatryan (then Kostanyan) with their four children first had to leave the town of Kaghzvan (near Kars, Western Armenia) in anticipation of persecutions against the local Armenian population. First they moved to Alexandropol (now Gyumri), then to Tiflis (Georgia) and then farther to the north – to the town of Armavir in the southern Russian province of Kuban.

Tigranuhi's elder brother, Artashes, had been called up for military duty in the Ottoman army fighting the Russians on the eastern front and her younger brother, Artavazd, who was not of call-up age yet, had to hide, as Turks did not look at potential recruits' ages.

Tigranuhi vaguely remembers their first exodus from Kaghzvan. But she clearly remembers their second deportation in 1918.

She says they stayed in Kuban for several years, but then her father's nostalgia for his birthplace brought them back to Kaghzvan in 1918. Their stay in the hometown, however, was a short one, lasting for only 15 days, and then their path home was much more complicated. By then, Armenians had already been widely persecuted, killed or deported throughout the Ottoman Empire.

"We hid in the house of a Molokan family (a Russian religious sect, similar to Quakers). I and my two sisters, Armine and Liza, saw terrible scenes peeping through a hole in the fence," Tigranuhi remembers. "Turks with their women, all dressed smartly, wearing gold ornaments and expensive clothes they had looted from murdered or deported Armenians came to town and more plunder followed. They broke into people's homes looking for Armenians and their gold."

She remembers that hundreds of people then were killed, raped, or died unable to bear the suffering.

"We lost many of our relatives during those years – my three cousins, uncle and aunt were first tortured and then killed in Turkish jail," remembers Tigranuhi. "We were all stricken with terror when we heard about thousands of people murdered, raped and humiliated. Armenians were suffering everywhere."

Brother Artavazd was red-haired and he hid in the house of a Molokan family (many of whom are fair haired) pretending to be their son.

When the first opportunity arose to leave the town on a train, all members of Tigranuhi's family dressed in Molokan clothes and set off on a journey again, casting their last glance at their sweet hometown rapidly disappearing behind the train.

A decade of peaceful life began for the Kostanyans in southern Russia. Tigranuhi married a fellow Kaghzvantsi, Mikael Asatryan, in 1928, but more trouble awaited them. Tigranuhi's father, a successful food store owner, considered a kulak (a peasant land owner who would not submit to a collective farm) by the Bolsheviks, was accused by the soviets, and his property was confiscated this time by the communist state.

"It was not war. It was most certainly massacre and genocide, something the world must remember. . ."
Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, April 27, 1994

Tigranuhi and her husband left for Samarkand (Uzbekistan) in 1931 and after four years spent in Central Asia they finally made up their mind to move to Yerevan and settle down here.

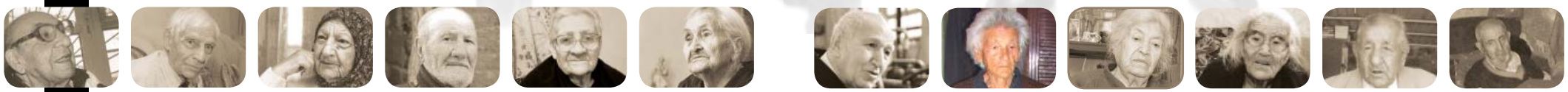
"My husband began to work at a rubber production plant in Yerevan, everybody knew him well. Our life more or less became normal," says Tigranuhi.

Here they had five children – sons Simon and Albert and daughters Tamara, Anna and Liza. Today, Tigranuhi, whose husband died in the 1980s, boasts of 14 grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

She says her husband worked a lot and provided for the family well and so she didn't have to work or have a specialty. She was always a housewife, caring for children and domestic needs.

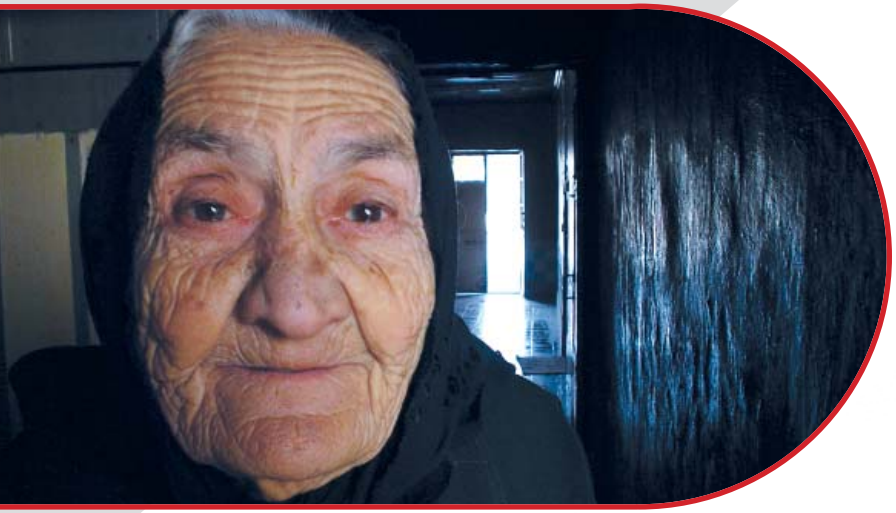
Now she lives in a one-room apartment in Yerevan's working-class district and gets a pension of about $40 a month.

"I have seen a lot in my life and I spent my childhood and adolescence moving from one place to another," says Tigranuhi. "Sometimes I close my eyes and remember my cousins. I see them young and beautiful, as they were when they lost their lives at the hands of the Turks. Often in my dreams I see them talking to me, but I know they were all gone a long time ago."



TIRUHI:

Blood and death on all sides



Tiruhi Khorozyan lived to be 96. Lived nearly all those years as a witness to genocide, before finding her personal peace soon after recording her memories for a visiting journalist.

She was only six years old, but already perceived the words 'enemy' and 'Turk' as synonymous. She was too little to understand why it was so, but big enough to remember those bloody episodes and atrocities for the rest of her life.

Ninety years after 1915, Tiruhi spoke about the events in her native town of Adabazar as if it were only yesterday when she miraculously escaped an enemy's sword.

"We were escaping for two days through rocks and gorges and were so thirsty that our mouths had dried, we gasped for breath. My mother went downhill to fetch water from the gorge and came back terrified. The river had become red from the blood of the dead bodies thrown into it," Tiruhi remembers.

Adabazar is a town situated in the northwest of Turkey. In 1915 it still had a population of about 30,000, more than half of whom were Armenians. They were mainly engaged in trade, crafts, husbandry and fruit-growing. There were four churches there with preparatory schools and gymnasiums attached to each of them.

Tiruhi remembers that they had a large orchard of mainly chestnut and walnut trees. "We had plenty of sacks of them in the yard," she says.

Beginning in 1915 the Armenian population was displaced and killed on the road. Tiruhi's father, Andranik Arzumanyan, was a fidayi, a guerilla as Tiruhi calls him, who helped people escape Turkish yataghans (swords).

"One day two Turkish soldiers caught my father who had me with him. He was seized and taken away, I was a little kid, and I lost my way," says Tiruhi.

"The soldiers showed me the direction to get to home. I took that way and what I saw was murdered people, blood and death on all four sides. I didn't know what to do, where to run. I was lucky that an elderly woman was passing by with two children, she took me and said she would take me to my mom."

On a way seemingly leading to home three Turkish soldiers caught them, and one of them wanted to kill them. "Happily, one of them said: 'Since they have survived after all this, let them live'."

The Turkish soldiers took Tiruhi to a place where there were 15 children.

"I became the sixteenth. When one of the Turkish officers saw me, he said he would take me with him as his daughter."

"500,000 Armenians said to have perished"
New York Times headline, September 24, 1915

After long searches, Tiruhi's mother found her daughter the same day and was able to rescue her.

Then the mother took Tiruhi and her younger sister and brother to Izmir and later to Greece.

A year later they were joined by their father who had managed to escape.

During the short period of peace in 1918, about 4,000 Armenians returned to Adabazar, but not the Arzumanyans. And it proved they did the right thing, as the armistice was of a formal nature and three years later Armenians again had to leave the town for Greece and other countries through the familiar emigration routes.

"We lived in Greece for about 18 years, until 1932. We worked at a tobacco plant. When Soviet Armenia began to receive repatriates, we came to Yerevan," Tiruhi says.

She saw five generations follow.

Near the end of her life Tiruhi had a brain hemorrhage that caused her to speak with difficulty. But the limitation did not stop her from speaking with conviction, when she said there was no room in her heart for forgiveness.

"Perhaps the young people will forgive the Turks, because they didn't see all that. But not me. I cannot forgive them ever," she says and repeats: "I can't."

Then, looking to some unseen place that all these survivors seem to visit as if still tying to make sense, she added:: "Eh, we lived that life, good or bad it was ours. We will perhaps have a better life in the other world."

TRFANDA:

“Ah, Armenia”

Every spring Trfanda Adajyan looks at the blossoming white flowers of the apricot tree in her yard and remembers the trees of the orchard left in Musa Ler’s Yoghunoluk village.

“We had vast orchards of orange, fig and olive trees,” the old woman recalls.

Sorrow comes to her eyes recalling Musa Ler (her village on the Turkish-Syrian border).

Trfanda still remembers the oath that her father, brothers and relatives took on the top of the hill made famous in the novel *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*: “I will die here with a weapon in my hands, but I will not become an emigrant.”

On July 26, 1915, the Turkish government issued a special order to force Armenians to emigrate to the Syrian deserts within seven days. Instead the Musa Ler Armenians took to a hill and held out against overwhelming odds.

Trfanda, who spent those mythologized 40 days in Musa Ler, often confuses the events. Her daughter, Shake Adajyan and granddaughter Azniv Khachatryan help her.

“Everyone – young or old – from six Armenian villages climbed the mountain. The male population of the village, anticipating the massacre, armed themselves and resorted to self-defense,” says Azniv.

On July 29, 1915, a council of representatives of six Armenian villages took place in Yoghunoluk where the majority decided to fight.

Trfanda continues: “I remember there was no water. Men would go and steal it from Turkish positions. There was little food and we boiled harisa (soup) in big bowls not to die from hunger.”

Shake tries to remind Trfanda of those years and the mother, heaving a sigh, says that there are plenty of those stories. Her thought immediately brightens and she begins to tell the way as if at that moment she saw the French “Joanna d’Arc” and “Kichen” ships rushing to the mountain by the Mediterranean Sea.

“The French ships saw that we spread a sheet on the mountain asking for help. The captain of the ships told us to wait for three days after which he’d come and take us. I remember it well. We were eight children – five sisters and three brothers. My father’s name was Yesayi, my mother’s name was Zaruhi,” she says.

The French battleships, noticed the white sheets spread on the top of the mountain that had red crosses painted on them and the inscription: “Christians are in Danger”. On September 13-15, the French transported 400 people to Port Said where they got help from the Armenian community of Egypt. They lived there for four years in tents, earning their livelihood in different trades.

Trfanda suddenly remembers with pride that the parents of the first president of independent Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, were from their village. “His mother is my cousin. She was born at the time when the French ships appeared in the sea, and that’s why she was given the name of Azatuhi (Free),” she says.

“. . . the Turk has undertaken a war of extermination on the Armenians.”
New York Times, September 24, 1915

In July 1919, the Musa Ler people returned. But they found only ruins where homes once stood. However, 20 years later British diplomacy granted to Turkey the province of Alexandrette, also including Musa Ler. The Armenians left for good. They were transferred to Syria, then to Ainjar, in Lebanon.

Azniv says: “It took hard labor and iron will to build a school and a church in Ainjar, to cultivate those desert territories to turn them into an area full of fruit trees. The Armenian village of Ainjar exists even today.”

Trfanda moved from Musa Ler to Beirut where she got married. Her five children were born in Beirut. In 1946-47, during the years of mass repatriation, 70 percent of Musa Ler people – nearly 700 families including Trfanda’s – returned to Soviet Armenia.

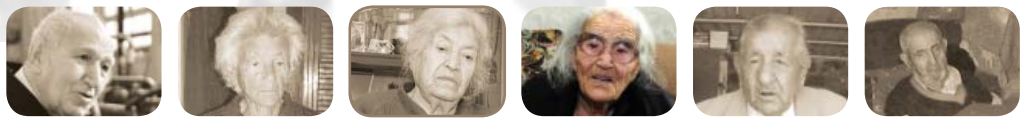
Trfanda says she read Franz Werfel’s novel about her home.

Shake describes the people of Musa Ler in a special way: “For them conscience and honor come before all.”

Trfanda interrupts her daughter: “We are really highlanders. If we say that matsun is black, then it is black, it is impossible to change that. We are very smart.”

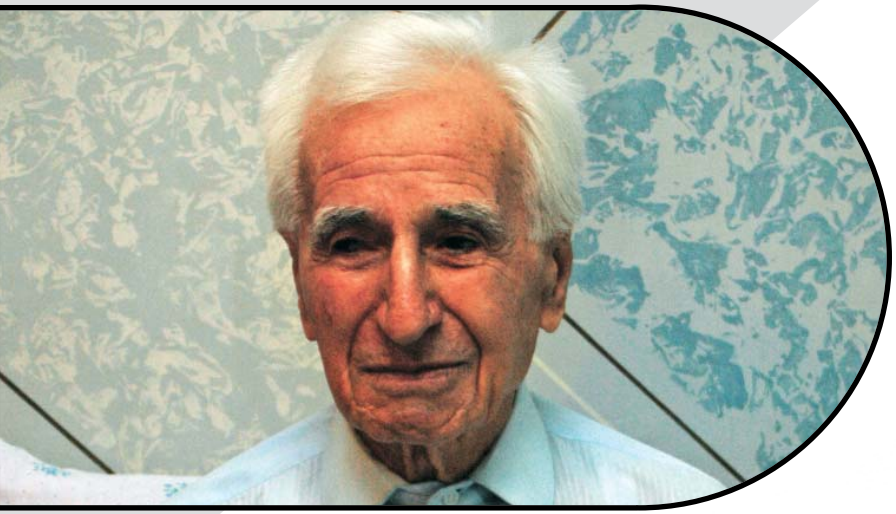
Even today the descendants of those six villages are like relatives. They marry their children among themselves: “Let the bride bring no dowry with her,” Trfanda says. “We don’t need any dowry, her being a pure child is enough for us.”

Mother Trfanda slowly begins to sing one of the songs from her native village: “…They’ll take me to the gallows and from the gallows I will cry in a subdued voice – ah Armenia…”



VARDAN:

Twice terrorized



Vardan Jumshudyan died last year, burying a history no one should wish for.

In 1915, at the age of three, Vardan's family was among those chased from their homes during the Armenian Genocide. In 1942, as a soldier fighting the German invasion of Russia, Vardan was wounded, captured, and held for three years in a prison camp. He survived a pasha's genocide to suffer a dictator's terror.

His journey fighting hatred began in Surmalu – some 40 kilometers from where his family eventually settled, in Yerevan.

"I remember clearly" Vardan said, not long before his death. "My father rushed in and told my mother, 'Mariam, get ready we are running away. The Turks are coming.' My mother was cooking lavash with other women. She left everything and quickly began packing."

Mariam had prepared only the most important items for their six children and hid all the gold they had in her belt. Suddenly, she felt bad, as she was pregnant. Vardan's father Smbat decided they could leave later that day but sent the smallest children – Vardan and Yeranuhi, six years older than Vardan, with his brother Tigran's family to Shariar (now Nalbandian village near the Turkish-Armenian border).

All the members of the family luckily escaped the Turkish sword and found a shelter in Shariar, a village near Etchmiadzin. There Smbat found Tigran and his family. But Vardan and Yeranuhi were not with them. Tigran explained that they lost the children on their way to Shariar. Smbat rushed back to look for the children.

"My father found us in one of the villages. We did not eat for several days and were very weak," Vardan remembers, "When we heard father's voice we wanted to shout back to him, but our voices were very weak. And we hardly recognized his voice, because it was hoarse from shouting through the way from Shariar to the place we were. He gave us food and took us away…"

In Etchmiadzin, the family of eight made a new home. At first Smbat sold his family's valuables, until he found a job on a farm. The father sent Vardan to Yerevan when the boy was 12, to get an education. Vardan studied to be a veterinarian. After graduating college in 1940 Vardan was sent to Azizbekov (now Vayk), where he worked as a vet for two years.

Then he went into the Soviet Army, to help stop the Jewish nightmare.

After six months on a front line, he was wounded, and awoke in a German prison. He was held in Munich until WWII ended in 1945.

"The conditions in the camp were very severe," Vardan said. "Food was scarce, no warm clothes, no medicine, and hard work from early morning until late at night." It was, in other words, familiar to his childhood experience as a Genocide survivor.

"Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it,... the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten."
US President Ronald Reagan, April 22, 1981.

In the camp with Vardan was another Armenian - Yervand. Vardan remembers that during a transfer by train they managed to put a pot out of the carriage and begged for bread in different languages whenever the train stopped. They got a little bread and potatoes from the passers-by and ate in secret.

"A Russian prisoner noticed us and said 'How smart you Armenians, are'. He tried to repeat our trick but got nothing. We had a piece of bread left and shared it with the Russian."

In prison Vardan developed typhoid fever, and was put in a special barrack to die. "Once I woke up in the morning and it was severely cold. Suddenly I realized that the two guys lying next to me had died at night. Soon I found out that I was the only one alive in the barrack…" But he escaped death. Again.

In 1948 Vardan married his wife, Parzik, and resumed a veterinary career in Vayk. He and Parzik had three children and eight grandchildren. Vardan worked until he was 90.

Till the end, Vardan said his fate was a mission from God: An Armenian exile who had gone through another nightmare in a fascist concentration camp, could explain better why the Armenian Genocide should concern not only Armenians, but the whole world.

"During my captivity I was thinking why the Germans were so cruel towards other nationalities, why they wanted to annihilate a whole nation – the Jews. Later, I learned Adolph Hitler's words 'Who now remembers the Armenian Genocide?'…" Vardan took a long breath. "No state can call itself a democracy until it puts truth above politics..."

VARDAN:

From a burning house, to a basement

He clung to his father's lap. His four sisters hung to their mother's skirt.

Houses were burning on the right. On the left was the sea, where the Turks threw the Armenians.

From Adana to Izmir, from Izmir to Greece by sea: the images of "the road of escaping" from native Adana were imprinted in three-year-old Vardan's memory forever.

The old man remembers he wished to reach one of the ships on the shore that saved the Vardanyan family of seven from death and brought them to Greece.

"I was small. I could not keep much in mind, but I have remembered several things very well," says Vardan. "I remember the burning buildings and the fire, the shouting of the people and my parents' horrified eyes. My father would grip me to him as strong as he could to protect me from everything. I was the youngest in the family – the only son."

It was 1917 when the first page of refuge history in the Vardanyan family opened.

Wandering in the past of his life Vardan remembers how the parents were doing their best to escape danger, how they left the living they had, and took the way of refuge to save the children.

"This is the only paper that has remained of my husband's past," says Vardan's wife Gyul, taking a document with a photo out of an old sack from a small suitcase. The photo is that of Vardan's family and the document certifies they lived in Adana. It contains notes about the family members and their confession of religious faith.

"Everything was in a mess, my father would watch here and there, and my sisters Orzhine, Angel, Verzhineh and Josephine were holding my mother Elisabeth's hand not to be lost on the road."

In the wet and dark room in the basement accompanied by the sound of the clock on the wall, bed-ridden Vardan Vardanyan turns time back in his mind, remembers his past, his mother, father, the hardships and details of deprivations of childhood that he left behind.

"I don't remember what our house in Adana looked like, but I remember my father was an esteemed man, famous for making basturma and sujukh. I can vividly recall his instruments and the gestures – he would let me watch him when I was small," says the survivor.

Narrowly escaping from Adana, Vardan discloses from the mist and memories of the history of his past the first time they lost their home, and "reached Greece passing through fire and death".

"My ancestors were not very rich, but they were industrious and tried to make something from anything and live," he says in a low voice pointing his forefinger. "This is typical to Armenians. That is why they have been able to overcome all the hardships."

The Vardanyans took asylum in Greece, where they spent seven years. Later their father Hambartsum decided to take the way to the homeland.

Moving to Armenia the Vardanyans lived in Artik for a while.

> ***"As one walks through the camp, mothers offer their children and beg you to take them. In fact the Turks have been taking their choice of these children and girls for slaves or worse."***
> *New York Times, November 1, 1915*

"Our language differed from the one the locals spoke. My mother mainly spoke Turkish and the people in Artik did not treat us very friendly because of that," remembers Vardan. "That is why we decided to move to Yerevan."

In Yerevan Vardan engaged in air-balloon sports. In 1939, he, a soldier of the Soviet Army, went to fight against Finland, and in 1941, he went to WWII.

During the war a shell wounded Vardan. However, the injuries did not hinder him from creating a family of four sons.

The greater part of the clothes hanging on the wet walls are covered with mould and the only link that could connect them with the outside life – the radio set of Soviet production – is broken.

In the room that is a collection of past and present, the past dominates. A soldier's cap that belongs to Vardan hangs on the wall. It is cold in the basement room and the only thing warming the hearts of the old people are their memories.

On the bed are the medals, and congratulations with a president's signature, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII.

"I was a strong man and thought my power would suffice for everything, but I was ridden to bed," says Vardan. "I learned in my elderly years again that life is a thing that prepares you for . . . you never know what."

VARSENIK:

“I remember everything”

In 1915, when she was seven, Varsenik Lagisyan heard voices that would never leave her: “Haaaalah, Haaalah. We have come to take the priest’s daughter.”

Turkish regulars mounted on their horses shouted the words for villagers of Yoghonoluk, in the region of Musa Dagh (Musa Ler, in Armenian) to hear. It is where Versenik lived with her family, and these were the words that marked the resettlement of Armenians from their homes.

Varsenik clearly remembers how the men and women, old and young, gathered and decided to fight the Turks. They thought “We will either kill, or be killed”. And they decided to climb up Musa Dagh. The mountain was rocky and hard to climb, but its thick forest made a good place for Armenians to hide and to defend themselves for 40 days, until help arrived.

Life on the mountain was difficult. Because of the rush and obstacles on the road, not much could be brought to the mountain. The villagers would just leave their doors open and climb the mountain, taking hardly anything with them. It was 40 days of hardship, but the alternative was death.

There were times when they had nothing to eat, except berries they could find in the forest. Fortunately it was fig and cornel (a type of berry) season.

“Mothers had nothing to feed their children. Nor could they light a fire, since the light would bring the Turks to our shelter and that would be the end of all our attempts to survive,” Versenik recalls.

Varsenik recollects her memories of the time spent on the mountain. She would help her mother and other women on the mountains to bake bread, do the washing, while the men were busy preventing the attempts of the Turks to climb.

Varsenik’s brightest memory of her childhood is the trip from Musa Dagh to Port Said, Egypt. After fighting 40 days, French ships came to the rescue.

For four years Varsenik and her family joined other Musa Ler residents in their Egyptian refuge.

“The priest said that those who have small children can not come. They will cry and the Turks will find us” Varsenik remembers the priest’s words.

She can remember very well the sight which they saw when their ship put ashore.

“Olive, mandarin and fig trees with their branches bent under the rich crop. All the children would run to gather the fruits. They would run from tree to tree, they would greedily gather the fruits with laughter and joy. I remember. I remember everything.”

“ . . . he said that there was no use, that they had already disposed of three quarters of them . . . and that the hatred was so intense now that they have to finish it.”
US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau’s report of his conversation with Talaat Pasha. August 8 1915.

Varsenik also remembers that on their way to Egypt a woman gave birth to a child, symbolizing a new beginning in the history of Musa Dagh villagers. But Varsenik’s family mourned. Their happiness of salvation was saddened by her uncle’s death. He was wounded on the mountain and died on board the ship. All in all, Varsenik says she was lucky to have all her immediate family members alive and together.

Varsenik had a big family. She was the eldest of the eight children. Her father was a shop keeper and had a lot of goats. Her mother was a housekeeper.

The family lived in Egypt for four years, during which time Varsenik – no more than 11 at the time – married a boy from her village, and would later have five children.

After living in the country that gave them bread to eat and a roof to have above their head they left for Soviet Armenia. They left for their motherland – even if it, too, had been over-run.

They settled in Alaverdi, but again found themselves short of money and food. Varsenik knitted socks and handkerchiefs to earn a living.

If her 40 days on Musa Dagh bring black thoughts, it seems that a lot of good memories connect Varsenik with her temporary shelter in Egypt. First the brightest memories of fruits, trees, laughter and happiness of her relatives and friends. Second, her marriage.

Varesenik’s children have their own children. And now Varsenik’s family is as big as it was in the times in Musa Dagh, before memories of Turks on horses, making threats and shaping a dark history . . .

ZARMANDUKHT:

95 years; 90 as a survivor

At age 95, Zarmandukht Khacahtryan laughed when telling a guest: "I don't drink coffee – only three cups a day. That's why I have lived so long."

Before her death last November, the good-humored Zarmandukht carried memories that could, themselves, kill a weaker spirit. But, typical of those involuntarily hardened early by too much death and too little understanding of its reason, Zarmandukht was strung of steel.

Her memories seemed inexhaustible.

"I remember everything as if it happened today, from my early childhood till today," she said. And from her childhood across the 95 years was a long way, over which collisions of light and darkness shaped resolve, if not acceptance.

Starting in 1914, as victims of the Armenian Genocide, Zarmandukht's family moved three times from their village of Panik, in the Surmalu province of historical Western Armenia (presently situated in Turkey).

Those were the darkest years of her life when a little five-year-old girl could not perceive the drastic changes brought about by extreme and horrible events. She had known a village in which everybody seemed to lead a peaceful life. She grew into a world in which she lost her father, elder sister and the families of her three uncles – leaving her alone with her mother.

"The village of Panik is about three kilometers away from Igdir. If I go there now, I will stand in my house. But my son says, 'Why would that house remain for you to go there and find it?'," Zarmandukht said. "I remember the house like a dream."

Using her hands she described it figuratively: "It was two houses like this with gates. Men yoked oxen with carts and went to the orchards. There were peaches, grapes, grains . . ."

In the autumn of 1920, during the Armenian-Turkish war, Igdir was seized by the troops of Karabekir pasha and was never returned. By the 1921 Kars Agreement between the soviets and the Turks, the province of Surmalu, including Igdir, was handed over to Turkey.

"We emigrated three times," Zarmandukht continued to tell of her bitter memories. "They sounded alarm three times that Turks were coming. We went out and ran. We crossed the Arax and stopped. Then they would say: 'The Turks retreated, come back'.

"With a meal on the fire, my mother put a lid on it, put out the fire and we would run away. My father drove a cart, my mother clutched me and wrapped me with a blanket so that I would not get frozen in the cart. That way we would go and come back until 1917. The last time we came to Etchmiadzin and didn't go back."

Many of her family members died on the deportation from Turkey. "My uncle's wife died in the middle of the road, with her baby in her arms," Zarmandukht said.

A new life-and-death struggle began in Etchmiadzin, where many of the thousands of deportees who had gathered in the monastery yard could not stand hunger, cold and diseases and died.

"It has been no secret that the plan was to destroy the Armenian race as a race..."
Consul Leslie Davis to US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, July 24 1915.

"Children would die under the walls of the monastery and remain there unburied, they didn't even have time to collect their dead bodies. There was a pregnant woman who had lost her husband, she came and sat on our bags and gave birth to a child."

Zarmandukht's 12-year-old sister and nephew died on the road trying to reach an orphanage in Gyumri.

Zarmandukht and her mother settled down in the village of Yonjlakh and later 17-year-old Zarmandukht married Aramayis Khachatryan, who was also a deportee from Igdir.

"The fate of my husband's family was even worse. He lost his father and three little children died in the orphanage. And his seven-year-old sister, Ovsanna, was secretly taken from the orphanage and transferred to an orphanage in America.

"My mother-in-law would tell her son every day: 'write an application to the monastery, let the monastery get information from America whether my daughter is alive or not'. But who had contacts with America then?" said the old woman.

Zarmandukht had four children, but in 2003 her 63-year-old and 73-year-old sons died within a space of half a year. After all, it was one cruelty too many.

"I believed in God, but lately I have lost my faith. How can God take my two sons from me during one year? And such clever boys," she said.

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Remember.

Recognize.

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