

NARRATIVE OF MY /



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KazCom, Publisher

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ISBN 978-0-9947588-0-4

Publisher's Note

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are a product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously. As such, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is purely coincidental.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our genocide survivor grandparents and parents and all the people and nation-states that since 1915 and to the present have been championing and will continue to champion a culture of peace by advocating the recognition of denied genocides, advancing transitional justice, and supporting criminalization of the denial of genocides.

Authors' Note

Several sources and translated excerpts from these sources have been used as fictionalized material for the chapters of the book including:

H.B. Boghossian. The Armenian Race and Its Persecutions: A Psychological Perspective.

Hrand Pasdermajian. The History of Armenia.

Hagop Oshagan. Armenian Literature.

H.H. Tchakmakjian. History of Armenia.

J.O. Peters. Test and Triumphs of Armenians.

Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America. The Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Vahakn Dadrian. The Armenian Genocide. Lecture at Harvard.

S.H. Varjabedian. Armenians in Lebanon.

Various Internet sites

Chapter 1

Welcome to Canada*Eternity*

There is and there is not, there is an eagle-nosed soul named Vartanig. Vartanig knew the entire tale in this narrative but he had not recited it for such a long time that he had forgotten a good deal of it. Vartanig was a fractious character. I finally located him in his fruit garden in Melitine in the company of his best friend, the tarboushed, tusbahli, and argileji Aga (the one who wears the Ottoman red fez, carries his blue worry beads and smokes his orange water-pipe). Vartanig had Gadoo, his Armenian Van cat, on his lap, and Aralez, his Armenian Gampr dog next to his feet, a ripe apricot in his mouth and a boiled egg in his hand. I looked after Vartanig and his companions for seven days, entertaining them with the dudug (Armenian woodwind instrument) and nourishing them with shish kebab, sarma (stuffed grape leaves), dolma (stuffed vegetables), soujoukh (Armenian sausage), basterma (air-dried beef), boereg (filo cheese triangles), tchikufta (steak tartar), lahmajoun (Armenian pizza), and pilaf; and topping these with apricot, grapes pomegranate, Armenian Bakhlava and Kadayif (filo pastry) for dessert. The first day, I begged Vartanig. The second day, I cajoled him. The third day, I honored him. The fourth day, I rewarded him. The fifth day, he was better and more inclined to recite the Armenogenic narrative of my I. The sixth and seventh days, he recited the book in his language and I wrote it all down in his own words.

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There was and there was not, there was my journey to a migration land famous for its king of the forest maple leaf, three million sacred lakes, the enchanting Niagara Falls, and the apologetically hilarious people. The flight to my new adopted settlement was more than the proverbial Lebanese *fashkha* (just a footstep away). It was more like the tale of Alf Layla Wa Layla (One Thousand and One Arabian Nights). By the time I left Beirut, the Mediterranean city of the Wells, and reached Toronto, the Meeting Place of North America via Athens, Stuttgart, Copenhagen, New York, and Montreal, I longed for the Lebanese *fashkha* and my appetite for food became of anorexic proportions!

I did not publicize my departure to my third adopted country Canada (Kanata), the second largest village in the seductive globe after collapse of the Soviet Union; nor did I have a chance to say goodbye to all the people in our second adopted homeland, the Laban (white, yogurt) country, famous for the holy cedars of God, the Paris of the Orient capital city of Beirut, and the Roman City of Sun, Baalbek. In Lebanon, the Switzerland of the Middle East, a Pandora's box of dizzying paradoxes and a land of sweet talks of honey, money and habiby (darling or lover), things happened either too fast or too slow. In my case, my less than orchestral exit was exceedingly swift. The people addicted charming men and women of the city of the Roman baths loved you or hated you; otherwise they did not remember you. The few people who loved me and knew the painful meaning of the broken mirror accompanied me to the airport: my mother, my two older brothers, a relative on my mother's side and my best friend, Garo the chemist. The communal dogs and cats did love me but not enough to risk venturing to foreign territory. Saying goodbye to everyone was tough but it was a ritual that had to be exercised

gracefully and painlessly.

Let my readers know that this was the first time I was flying on a plane. I took a sigh of relief when I cleared airport security and successfully navigated the maze to the monstrous craft. The night before, I had nightmares involving mean-spirited, corruption-nourished and vile-faced security officers apprehending me for yet another youth abandoning family and country. My nightmares were nothing but reflections of my own anxiety and ambivalence concerning my reality.

The purple wait to get on the plane was a thorn in the butt. I was tense, and on my guard, unable to bring myself to a state of tranquil relaxation. Air service in this part of the world was very unpredictable, to put it mildly. I felt a little bit relaxed when I climbed the stairs of the airplane and after stumbling few steps, found my place and surrendered to my seat. The smoke on the plane made matters worse for me. I covered my nose with my hands, closed my eyes and conjured a smoke-free dune. There was an ambience of joy when the wheels of the craft moved and finally went off the ground.

Soon a different kind of anxiety crept up in the cabin. Preoccupied with fear of dying, my bold next seat neighbor Habib disenchanted and burdened by his country's neglect of its youth began succumbing to horrific images of the plane falling apart, plunging into the depths of the Mediterranean sea, and sacrificing all its passengers and crew to a receptive Arabian monster. While he had taken a dose of Valium before landing on the plane to calm his nerves down, his irrational thoughts continued to take hold of his tortured mind. I nourished my fellow passenger Habib with doses of reality (e.g., we were flying with a most reputable airline), encouragement not to lose control or surrender to a panic attack, and relaxation skills-taking deep breaths and exhaling

NARRATIVE OF MY I

slowly. Every time a bad thought popped into his head, I instructed him to catch it, throw it out of the airplane and replace it with a rational thought. Finally, I had him fantasize a lot and picture serene oceans and beaches with bikinis, to convince himself that it was foolish to be afraid of a plane crash or of dying, and in fact, to entertain the thought that dying in a plane crash was not such a bad way to go; it would be quick and painless!

I was reading Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* when we were forced to leave the airplane soon after reaching the airport in Athens, the city that is conquered but never destroyed. Heavy weight security was rear-end tight and army personnel with machine guns were everywhere in a cockfight mood. The attack on the Olympic athletes in Munich was on everybody's mind. We were forced to submit to a thorough personal search before we were allowed on the airplane again. I knew deep down the value of vigilance in the ugly face of terrorism.

I was exhausted when I arrived at the pregnant J.F.K after two stops in Stuttgart the city of the Porsche and the Mercedes-Benz, and Copenhagen, the land of Tivoli and musical clogs. My efforts to contact my sister from the airport to tell her about my whereabouts proved to be a mission impossible. The black telephone was too hurried to my pace and in the habit of swallowing lots of cash that I did not have. The telephone and I had never been friends, anyway. Telephone to me was synonymous to bad news. I also preferred to talk to people face-to-face. Live discourse had the advantage of the senses of sight, smell and touch. The humongous airport in New York made matters between the telephone and me worse. In addition to disliking the black machine, it gave me a sense of inferiority. "You can't even make a phone call, you stupid immigrant" flashed in my mind and for about half an hour my self-effacing thoughts reached

obsessive proportions!

My feet touched Canadian soil on September 27. Newcomers never forget their date of entry to their adopted country. All the customs and immigration officers were male, a scene not at all foreign to me. I must admit the men officers were very polite and kind to me. The first thing they wanted to see after my documents was my head-tax. Almost all immigrants had head-taxes levied one way or the other on them. Once they were satisfied with my legitimacy and authenticity, they smiled, gave me the necessary landed immigrant documentation and said, "Welcome to Canada."

Welcome to Canada!

These were sweet words. I had not heard government officials welcoming me to their country before. The telephone in Toronto Airport was even more welcoming. "We will be there in half-an-hour," said my brother-in-law to be in a half-asleep-half-awake arousal state.

My sister Simé's beautiful eyes were full of tears, and my handsome brother-in-law-to-be was obviously moved by the familial hugs and tears. There was much to say and much to talk about. The meticulous person that our Tan was, he gently geared us toward his parked car to do first things first.

Toronto was truly magnificent at night. The god-blessed city assumed a special significance to me, a newcomer with honeymoon mania of a pomegranate future resonating in his anxious mind. The first night I slept at my sister's, like all faithful Armenians, I put Nareg's Book of Lamentation, a tragic monologue of 95 chapters, under my pillow as a protection against all harm. Of course, my ritual was more of a reflection of secular rather than a metaphysical quest for protection from evil spirits and eyes. All Armenians, at a very young age, knew that

NARRATIVE OF MY I

Saint Gregory of Nareg's spiritual ecstasies venerated a little short of the veneration reserved to the Holy Bible itself. People were even believed cured from their illnesses after certain lamentations were read over them.

After placing Nareg under my pillow, I recited a nightly Armenian prayer that I had learned since childhood at a Sunday school:

Most benevolent Father
Bless us with inner tranquility
Grant us health
Peace and happiness
A worldly space free of disease, pain, and suffering
A life of zest and vitality
Amen.

I repeated my nightly prayer few times to dampen my overactive mind. For many years, I had given up on counting animals, sheep, chickens and cows, in my imaginary zoo. My compulsive prayer finally gave way to a childhood mind-set that took a life of its own. On my first night in Toronto, my brain clutter fired around the ambushed lives of my paternal grandparents.

Chapter 2

Grandfather Stepan

Circa 700-600 BC

I, Moses Khorenatzi accept humbly your bestowing on me the Armenian Herodotus title. Reconstructing Armenian oral history to a written narrative was a tough job but I did it with diligence and great pride. All people need to know their ancestral roots and I was honored to be part of the arduous process of inscribing Armenian oral tradition as much as I could. Permit me to say that my zeal for saving our history from oblivion was not motivated by megalomania or greed. It was the battle of enlightenment against superstition. While the forces of darkness dubbed my colleagues and I the label aghantavorner-heretics, to solidify their prejudice against intellectuals and to justify our persecution, we never lost faith in the eternality of the rational mind and the illuminating power of open-mindedness and independent thinking. Those who wished 'krogheh daneh nrank' (let the scribe take them away) are in oblivion while we are still very much alive. All Armenians feel proud in knowing that their homeland entered world history seven centuries before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, a period in humanity when the oldest people of the classical era were just making their debut and the nations of modern Europe were not even in existence. Permit me to say that Hayg, the legendary nahabed-patriarch of the Indo-European Armenians, and the mighty founder of the Armenian fatherland, was the grandson of Japheth, and as written in Genesis 10:1, the son of Noah whose Ark rested on Mount Ararat (Genesis 8:4) the traditional site of the Garden of Eden in Armenia [not Turkey], and who was inspired by

the intoxicating spirit of the Armenian wine. Permit me also to say that Pel, a war-lord and a despot, could not stomach dissension and tried to force Hayg, a peace-lord into submission but his efforts were frustrated. After the birth of his son, Hayg gathered his tribe of 300 peace-loving people, and headed towards the enchanting Araratian plateau. However, a warlord, Pel was obsessed with Hayg's subjugation. He sent one of his sons to Hayg with the following message: "You left to live in a cold and icy land. My friend, shed your proud but cold ego, submit to me, and I shall grant you peace and prosperity anywhere you like in my territory." In learning of Hayg's unyielding position, the 'peace-making' despot marched with his army to break the spirit of the incorrigible Armenian hero.

At the outskirts of the spirited Lake Van, the birthplace of Armenians, Hayg addressed his brave men: "Proud men, soon we will meet Pel and his army. We are a proud and freedom-loving people. We are for peace, our enemy for war. We are for co-existence, our enemy for subjugation. We are for civilization, our enemy for stagnation. We are for life, our enemy for death. We have no choice but to prevail, and prevail we will. All we need to do is show Pel and his brave bodyguards the zoroutyoun (strength) of our hearts, the oushimoutyoun (intelligence) of our minds, and the jarbigoutyoun (cleverness) of our hands." The battle of civilizations was fierce. The jarbig hands of the Armenian men worked in unison like Abraham's blessed kavazan (cane) and yielded a biblical passage through the sea of Pel's armed men. At the opportune moment, Hayg's freedom arrow pierced Pel's armored heart and merged out from his pained back.

Whereas almost all other peoples in the early days of the history of mankind disappeared, the Indo-European Hayg founded a proud homeland whose soul throbbed like a vibrant heart. As

his honorable sons and daughters, and as heirs to a culture of life, continue to reject the culture of death and propagate the culture of peace, the same way your immortal nahabed championed social-justice informed peaceful co-existence and happiness.

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Actually, I had and I had not a paternal granddaddy and a paternal grand mommy. Other than their physical existence, I had very little encounter with them of the childhood kind. As a consequence, my developmental narratives long for fantasies of my grandparents loving me, spoiling me, protecting me, guiding me, defending me, and letting me get away with murder, as grandparents typically do to their grandchildren.

My grandparents' life overlapped little with mine. My grandmother's name is Vartouhi, the Armenian equivalent of Rose (or Rosa). She was born in the Western Armenian town of Melitine (Malatya) in 1888. She was a Monday child, fair of face. She married my grandfather; she survived the Armenian Genocide after being uprooted from her hometown; she mothered three children; she limped as a result of a vicious attack by a neighborly dog; she treated my mother like the proverbial mother-in-law; and she died of natural causes in 1955 in the Lebanese blue space. My grandmother's favorite expressions were 'let me bear your pain,' 'let me take away your pain,' and 'let me be the sacrifice to your soul.'

My grandfather's name is not really Stepan. In the tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church, he was christened Papaz Stepan when he was ordained a priest. When he arrived at our place, I saw a tall frail man with dark-hair and trimmed beard haloing his aging long face and penetrating brown eyes. Grandfather Stepan,

NARRATIVE OF MY I

the loyal servant of Melitine was the son of the ancient city with its infamous fruit gardens and the best apricot-producing orchards in the region. On ministering to the fatherless Armenians and widows in Melitine in 1906, the Danish Jensine Oerts Peters described Melitine as presenting a beautiful picture, stretching itself on a narrow, highly fertile tongue of land between the biblical Euphrates River and the Taurus mountains, each house surrounded by every variety of fruit trees, and a wall encircling the whole public space, making the city resemble a huge apricot orchard.

My grandfather was born into a religious *tashji* (mason) family in 1880, the year in which the word "Armenia" was prohibited from use in official documents by a special order of the ruling Ottoman government. I am not sure why he was named after the first Christian martyr. My childlike imagination would have bestowed on him the Armenian Biblical name Ararat because I visualized him as a proud, majestic, and invincible giant baby who grew at a fast pace and amazed townspeople with his gallantry and the indisputable Armenian dispositions of *khelatzi* (smart) and *shinarar* (a builder).

My grandfather's *tashji* occupation saved him from hammering nails in his own coffin on at least two tragic occasions. My infidel grandfather survived the molestations of October 23, 1895 in which 3,000 Malatiatsi Armenians were killed, and 1,000 Malatiatsi Armenian houses were burned. He also escaped the July 10, 1915 deportation of the Armenian population of Melitine because he was the only local skilled craftsman to build ovens and hammams for the consumption of the Ottoman army, in addition to carving on commission the headstones of the cemeteries of the military elite.

Grandfather Stepan married grandmother Vartouhi, the

daughter of an affluent Armenian family, before she became chunky and lame. His position in the national army, the reputation of the Tashji clan, and his handsome looks made him an ideal suitor. While modesty dictated repression and restraint in the traditional patriarchal culture, Grandma Vartouhi evidently melted when she finally was alone with her new amour.

My grandfather's call to religion was fortuitous. He came to the mind of the leaders of the town as the most suitable successor for the priest who had suddenly died, presumably from overindulgence in *lahmajun* (the infamous Armenian pizza) and *ayran* (yogurt thinned with water). Answering the call of duty, grandfather Stepan was ordained in the Armenian Apostolic Church in 1920 in the patriarchal Armenian community of Kharpert (Harput) and was bestowed the name Der Stepan or Papaz Stepan.

Papaz Stepan was dubbed the father of the orphans for devoting his body and soul to the disempowered children of his millet. In the aftermath of the Armenian genocide, he telegraphed the Ottoman central government and requested permission to open a school for the Armenian orphans who were "adopted" by local non-Armenian families. He was granted permission provided that the school was under the supervision of an Ottoman civil servant and that Armenian history was not part of the curriculum. Without a real choice, Papaz Stepan accepted the set conditions, and hired two able Armenian educators, Yervant Atashian and Sempat Apkarian to do the teaching. Father Stepan became a substitute parent for the orphan pupils. He reminded orphans who were subjected to forced assimilation through religious conversion that they were the sons and daughters of cultured Armenians, and taught them the Armenian language and its importance for preserving their ethnic identity, and the ethics of Christianity for

serving humanity.

Life became intolerable for grandfather Stepan and his people, particularly with the withdrawal of the French troops from Cilicia in 1923. A commander in the Army, who my grandfather had saved from drowning, told him “the pogroms are blessed by the central government” and advised him “to pack it and leave for better fortunes because there is no future for Armenians here.” Grandfather Stepan was too attached to his fruit trees and house that he called *hayrenik* (homeland) to easily pack and leave. After his military friend’s warning, Grandfather Stepan was visited by a group of local vigilantes. They pulled his black *pilon* (religious gown) down, beat him severely, and then humiliated him by shaving his beard. “Papaz, your time to leave has come,” they told him. “If you don’t leave, none of the others will leave,” they added. My grandfather and many of his parishioners were forced to leave behind their homes and properties, ‘sold’ their properties to their ‘loyal’ neighbors, took whatever they could carry on their limited number of donkeys, and headed to the closest neighboring country. The only sin of these model citizens was that they were *gee-yower* (infidel), the demonized other.

My grandfather’s courage and faith in his Creator brought him and his parishioners to the safe haven of the ancient city of Aleppo, home to the monumental medieval Citadel, and the mountain on which Abraham pastured or milked (halab) his sheep and distributed their milk (halav) to the poor. My grandfather and his family were part of the more than 40,000 second flow refugees swelled in Aleppo between 1923 and 1925. He served as the principal of a school for a short while. The Armenian church authorities took advantage of his exceptional people skills and organizational and management aptitude, and entrusted him with the task of assisting in the structural development of the various

NARRATIVE OF MY I

Armenian parishes in the host country, and overseeing the activities of the newly formed church boards in a number of rural parishes including Hama, Homs, Kessab, Jarablous, and Raka.

My grandfather also served his people by meeting their spiritual needs. He was minister to the church in several communities such as the Village of Kessab for one year, the Village of Azaz for two years, 1927-1930, and the Village of Ain al Arab (Spring of the Arab) for 24 years, 1930 to 1954. He also became representative of the Armenian Church, and a visiting priest for the rural communities of Jarablous, Ain al Arous (Spring of the Bride), and Raka. My grandfather came to life as an Armenian, lived as an Armenian, and died as an Armenian. It was the somber month of November; November 7 to be exact when all the leaves of the trees fell off and my grandfather passed away at the saintly age of 74.

Everyone who knew Papaz Stepan described him as tall, handsome, humble, sharp-minded, tolerant, and peaceful. All those who knew him said that he was a genuine Armenian saint, true to his religious calling. The Armenian literary circle portrayed my grandfather as the Bernard Shaw of an insignificant Armenian community in a village in the Diaspora. He seemed to have the innate capacity for love and the God-sent gift of the saint. Grandmother Vartouhi was never a complainer. She did apparently observe in a private moment that Der Stepan was married more to his religion than to her.

My grandfather was born on the day of the sun, the 'sun of justice,' the 'true light.' He died in Lebanon not too long after retirement from his religious call. As was customary, the priest came to the house of my dying grandfather for communion. Shortly after communion, my grandfather surrendered himself to his Creator. The men abstained from shaving their beards for at

NARRATIVE OF MY I

least three days and the women wore black attire. My uncle's wife assumed responsibility for cleaning my grandfather's body and dressing him up into clean clothes. It was said that my grandfather's eyes remained open when he died. A person who died with his eyes open meant that he or she had a *bantoukht* (migrant) son or a daughter. My grandfather's elder son was in *bantoukhtoutyoun* when my grandfather's eternal smile extinguished.

My grandfather's dormant body was evidently not as rigid as expected. My uncle cut the *Okhlaghie* (a two-foot rod used to spread dough thin) in half and put the two pieces in the box next to the body so it becomes rigid. The priest offered his prayers and final blessings before my grandfather's body was put in a wooden box and taken to the cemetery by all the men. A service was conducted in the cemetery chapel as well, and then the body was taken for burial.

It was customary not to allow the immediate family of the deceased to cook for three or five days. Relatives, neighbors and friends brought food to the grieving family for forty days, at which date the *hokéhankist* memorial service took place. *Hokéhankist* literally means soul-rest. On that day, the men shaved clean and wore black ties. The memorial service was conducted in church, and was attended by family, relatives and friends as well as dignitaries and Armenian right- and left-wing political leaders. After the service, relatives and friends came to the home of the deceased for the *hokéjash* (food for the soul), a feast attended and blessed by the priest.

My grandmother wore black and died in black six months after my grandfather.

I did not have the opportunity to attend my grandparents' funerals or *hokehankists*, nor did my parents talk about their

NARRATIVE OF MY I

pained genocidal lives. After the death of my grandfather, the black necktie became a permanent fixture of my father's daily attire, and a symbol of his hanging on to a dad he so much loved. As for me, I always detested the worldview that grandparents were appropriate fixtures for old age homes. I knew they were blessings in every home that had them. I wished they were alive in old age in my home so I could take care of them and they could hug me, kiss me, tell me tales, guide me, teach me, defend me, and above all, spoil me.

I have no idea what happened to Grandpa Stepan's biography in which he evidently narrated his life history and perhaps unknowingly used it for healing his genocidal wounds and the collective indignation of the genocide trauma. The veilers of the genocide sold themselves to the belief that my grandfather, the Very Reverend Stepan, a genocide survivor servant of humanity died in dignity and peace. God has His doubts, and so do I!

Chapter 3

Newcomer Settlement

Circa 301 Anno Domini

I, Agatankeghos, suggest to you that history is a must subject to the budding souls of youth. Love of the world nourishes history as much as history nourishes love of the world. My preoccupation with history weaves the lives of two great Armenian kings, King Abgar and King Tiridates. King Abgar corresponded with our Lord Jesus and invited him to Armenia because Jerusalemites were not only complaining about Him but also giving Him a hard time. He informed Jesus that our ancestral land is ‘a small but a beautiful land...enough for the two of us.’ Moved by King Abgar’s faith (blessed is he who believes in me without seeing me) Lord Jesus inspired Thomas to commission the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew to spread his teachings in the sacred Armenian landscape.

I must admit that our people, descendants of the Prophet Noah (our ancestor who enjoyed inebriation on Armenian wine soon after exiting his Ark) were a bit slow in denouncing their pagan gods. King Tiridates initially was even cruel to the early Christian believers. We trust that Our Lord has forgiven the handsome and polygamous Tiridates for confining the Christian Gregory in a dungeon for thirteen years because of his refusal to place a floral wreath in the Temple of the goddess Anahid in Eres as well as for executing the angelic Rhipsimé and her virgin companions because of her reluctance to marry him.

As a lover of psychohistory, I can tell you that my beloved King had some psychological baggage from his tragic childhood

that he had to work-through. He grew up fatherless because his dad, King Chosreos was assassinated when Tiridates was an infant. Educated in the language and culture of the mighty Rome, the bicultural Tiridates became irritated when the Christian Gregory defied his order and he became even enraged when he found out that Gregory was the son of Anag Barteve, killer of his father Chosreos, and that he had converted to Christianity in Caesarea, Cappadocia. Little did he know or mattered to him that Chosreos loyalists had avenged the death of his father and that the only survivor of the Anag Barteve clan was the infant Gregory, who lived in exile in Cappadocia fatherless and motherless, and received Christian and Hellenic education. Little did King Tiridates care that Gregory was a guardian angel, a decent man who had served him loyally in his exile, and was accompanying him from Cappadocia to his kingdom without divulging his real identity.

Compassionate world, I was overwhelmed when I saw King Tiridates succumb to a savage state of melancholia soon after the murder of the angelic Rhipsimé and her virgin companions. The women martyrs had a special place in our collective memory because they were the first Christian refugees in our beloved country. We were proud that they embraced their escape from persecution in mighty Rome and chose to seek refuge in our safe and civilized country to live a peaceful life among our cultured people. We regret that angelic Rhipsimé's refusal to wed King Tiridates and as such wounded his pride because she had no intention of humiliating him or hurting his oceanic eastern pride. I was pained to see King Tiridates in deep depression, the hopeless efforts of loyalists to amuse him and help him snap out of his melancholia, and the futile treatments of his physicians and magicians to pull him out of the darkest tunnels of his negative emotion. I was devastated, as were his people and the whole

NARRATIVE OF MY I

country to learn that he was psychologically ill. It would seem that he was afflicted with a form of violent lycanthropy, turning into a wild boar. I was pained to witness the beloved King and few of his royal companions lose it completely in the aftermath of a hunting trip and roam in the wilderness believing he was a pig!

Praise thee austerity, Healer and Visionary, for sending your Archangel Gabriel to Chosreotoukht (or Khosrovidukht), the beloved sister of King Tiridates, to relay your message and convince the skeptics that Gregory was the only person who could cure the king from his lycanthropic madness. Praise thee Life Giver, for allowing a charitable widow provide him food in his dungeon and keep the otherwise neglected Gregory alive in his khor virab (deep pit). Praise thee Reason, for inspiring King Tiridates to become the first king in the world to decree Christianity as the official religion of the independent state of Armenia.

I say to you with all due respect, the two leaders of our nation, King Tiridates and Catholicos Gregory transformed the tragic loss of their fathers into a deep concern for the welfare of their people because deep down they knew the importance of fathering for the wellbeing of the people and their national identity. King Tiridates and Catholicos Gregory embraced an attitude of relatedness with the other to rise above their personal enmity. As their honorable sons and daughters, learn from history, relish resilience, and strive for self-transcendence to actualize humanity, much the same way that the founders of your nation actualized their own world.

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When I woke up in the morning, I tried to remember the specific thoughts I had about my grandfather, but to no avail. I attributed my failure to poor memory even though I considered the possibility of repression or unconscious forgetting as alternative explanations. Nevertheless, I had no time, nor the inclination to psychologize my narratives at this time. All I could do was acknowledge the pain of missing the grandfather I never knew and go on with my restricted life. As Abraham Maslow theorized a safety preoccupied motivational state precluded pursuit of self-exploration, let alone self-realization or self-transcendence.

Soon after my arrival to Canada, I settled in a room and board situation in downtown Toronto, on 670 Huron, not far from Bloor. My landlord was a round-faced baroness with a heavy frame and a thick Eastern European accent. Even though the only pretty thing in her visible body were her blue eyes, I liked her and I think she liked me. She could tell I was not a problem child. She gave me a room on the second floor with a window overlooking the south side of the fourplex. She also smiled every time I happened to figuratively bump into her.

My brother-in-law Tan assisted me with the job-hunting script. The first place he took me was the Canada Manpower Center. My encounter with Manpower was a cultural encounter of the third kind. I never knew in a concrete fashion that there was such a thing as an employment center, let alone visiting one. I never in reality knew that governments helped its citizens find work. Back 'home' my generation of youth saw government as a corrupt political octopus with greedy tentacles. The only safety nets for the satisfaction of our basic needs for food, safety and security were the clans and their wasta (patronage) prone

patrons.

While sitting alone in the waiting room, I wished I were invisible. I felt *amot* (shame prone) and did not want anyone to know that I was seeking government counseling to secure a job for myself. My internal dialogue was as absurd as losing hope for the future. My self-consciousness took its own life and I admitted defeat.

After waiting for about ten minutes, a young woman in her thirties walked in my direction with hips moving like Shakira and introduced herself as Mrs. Lovelace. She then escorted me to her office, a cubicle with a desk and cold seats. Both of us sat on our respective chairs and faced each other. Mrs. Lovelace with her curly long hair and medium-sized brown eyes was extremely polite. She asked me if I spoke English. Having heard of the immigrant ploy, I was tempted to declare, "No speak English," but I restrained my impulse. She inquired about my educational background and asked me few more biographical questions. She seemed rushed but not that rushed. I found myself almost reliving my telephone experience in New York. I could imagine her muttering "Come on donkey, be quick. We're not here to socialize. Besides, it is time for my break!" She surprised me. She told me that she knew that in my culture, we do take our time, that the first encounter with a total stranger is not a time for business but a pleasant opportunity for acquaintance, for nourishment of a meaningful relationship, for the development of trust. She informed that it was time well spent. She said she regretted the immigration and manpower reality that she could not as an officer of the state do what my culture dictated but that I had no reason not to trust her right away because she wanted what was best for me. Then she dropped a few unexpected bombshells. "In your culture, you beat around the bush, in my culture we go straight to

the point. Finding a job in your case may take anywhere between six months to a year. Don't despair. Go fill out as many applications as you can. Sooner or later something will come up. Good luck," she related in a reassuring voice. She then handed me her business card for future reference, and bid me goodbye.

After I left my counselor's cozy cubicle, I wondered about Mrs. Lovelace. She sure knew quite a bit about eastern culture. I was not sure if that made me feel good or bad. I certainly debated the value of the cultural practices of telling it like it is and of beating around the bush. I was too depressed and indecisive to reach a conclusion. It took me few hours to reconfirm what Albert Bandura had described as self-efficacy, my belief in my ability to find work in this case. Nevertheless, I decided to remain faithful to the application neurosis inspired in me by the fair-haired Mrs. Lovelace. In my search for security in my adopted country, I lost count of the number of applications I did in fact submit here and there and everywhere.

I did give my newly acquired compulsion neurosis as much occasional rest as I could by spending a great deal of time at the nearby library. I have always been an ardent reader anyway. In fact, my day would have been incomplete if I didn't read something before I surrendered myself to the royal road to sleep, as Father Freud would have said. I was surprised that nobody bothered me at the library. In a collectivist country like Lebanon, I would have had to hide from people to be able to do any work in the library like read or study. In the downtown Toronto public library, everything seemed formal, and everybody was quiet and well behaved. The women were attractive, reserved, studious, and altruistic. They were not the wild or loose bunch, as newcomers from other countries believed them to be.

I was dazed like a baby out of his mother's womb when I

NARRATIVE OF MY I

was called for my first job interview. I must admit my psychology background betrayed me at this time, and the interview started and ended in disaster. While as easterners we tend to externalize all our failures by our conspiracy theories or blame of the other for our misfortunes, in all honesty I could do neither under the circumstances. It was all my doing and I deserve seclusion in the maternal womb. By the time I arrived for the interview, I had smoked all the cigarettes in my possession. I was desperate for the ciggy mermaid. So what did I do? I asked the fellow escorting me to the interview room if there was a place where I could purchase a pack of cigarettes. He reminded me that we were in a children's social welfare center but promised to locate a smoker in the building who could lend me a cigarette or two. Foolishly, I did not object. My second foolishness was that when I met my interviewer, a man of average height, protruding frogeyes and horse thick eyebrows, I squarely profiled his personality as a hard-boiled authoritarian egg and allowed a black cat pass between us. Having endured political dictatorship, I took an immediate aversion to his military outfit and lost total interest in the prospect of employment. In fact, I kept on obsessing that I had chosen Canada for its international reputation as a peacekeeper over the hawkish United States. My first job interview concluded with mutual admiration and separation. We both hoped for a better dawn.

My efforts to hunt for a job were not running smoothly or materializing. Needless to say I was getting more anxious by the day but not to the point of despair. I was living on my daily ration of a can of beans, and minimal extra-curricular spending. My predisposition to social comparison was also augmenting my survival instinct. In my spare time, which was plenty, I developed the habit of drinking coffee in the communal kitchen, frequently in

NARRATIVE OF MY I

the company of George, a 23-year-old youngster suffering from incorrigible allergy for work. His everyday routine was refreshingly simple. He would usually wake up about ten in the morning and descend to the communal kitchen to make a cup of instant coffee and drink it while slowly smoking his Players. You could tell he thoroughly enjoyed his daily routine. After coffee, he would retire to his desolate room for some more protracted naps. About noon, he would fix himself lunch, usually canned tuna. In the afternoon, he would be out either for a walk or on some self-indulgent errands. His evening rituals were less systemized or public.

The single telephone in the hallway on the first-floor was also communal. Like moi, George had an aversion if not a phobia for the telephone but for different reasons. On few occasions, I happened to take messages for him from the Canada Manpower Center. To my amazement, George would never respond to these messages. He was quite content with his income from the welfare department. His monthly loonies and toonies were providing for the few pleasures of life he had cultivated in the past few years which included attending the occasional hockey game at the Maple Leaf Gardens.

By nature, I was not a judgmental person, and I liked George even though he was what Armenians would call *tetoum kloukh* (pumpkin head). While I felt some reassurance by the fact that George was unemployed as I was, I must admit that the realization that he was institutionalized in the welfare system at such a young age was one of a number of shocking experiences I had in the country of the mighty maple leaf. Immigrant infidels like me genuinely believed that money did not grow on trees, that you should pick up a \$20 bill lying on the ground if you saw one rather than anticipate seeing a \$100 dollar bill later, and that hard-work is the heavenly road to happiness.

My pursuit of security had its leisurely overtones. Dave, another of my roommates one day stopped me on my way out and asked me if I would go with him to see a hockey game. He happened to have seasonal tickets for the games in the magical Gardens. "My girlfriend can't come; she's tied-up," he explained. I was delighted to accept his invitation despite my strong sensitivity to imposition on others.

My introduction to Dave and Cat Stevens were almost simultaneous. Dave was a fan of the Greek-father Swedish-mother folk singer and songwriter. I could always tell that Dave had come to his room from work. His first ritual was listening to the Father and Son song, which I could also hear through the artificial wall that separated us. I must admit that the first time I heard the Father and Son lyrics, my heart ached and my mind regressed to a childhood state of dependency in which I wished I dialogued with my father about his love, guidance, and advice akin to Father dialoguing with Son. Dave cheered for the Toronto Maple Leafs, I for the Montreal Canadiens.

The second job interview I had was drastically different from the first. Diego, a paella loving Spanish friend I was introduced to by my sister Simé and brother-in-law Tan, drove me all the way to my interview destination. First I met Mr. Rich, a serious-natured ex-minister turned into social work. He was a decent chap and so tall that you had to climb on a ladder to be at his level. After being checked with a fine toothcomb for social history, I met a Welsh psychiatrist whose introversion and low-key approach was fine-tuned with mine. Dr. Argall seemed more interested in a pleasant chat circling around my person rather than my knowledge or experience in clinical psychology. I made sure to tell him that I was not a racist in hating the people who wronged my people. I was quite open in sharing familial narratives such as my father's

NARRATIVE OF MY I

vocation as an educator and writer. I did not have to tell him much about my culture. Being Welsh, he seemed to know a great deal about the proud people. In fact, he seemed enormously empathic towards “the starving Armenians” and quite apologetic for the Western betrayal of the Armenian cause.

Two days later, I received a graceful call from the tall social worker Mr. Rich offering me the job. That call will always have a special place in my memory. “I accept the offer,” I replied softly without hesitation. Later that day, I smiled to myself as I walked proudly on Yonge Street to treat my senses to a sandwich of apricot cheeked falafel and a cold bottle of ayran (yogurt drink). Yes I enjoyed strolling through the mythically longest street in the world to pass by Simpson’s, Eaton’s, Woolworth’s and thousands of petite stores, and to bump to thousands of smiling kings and queens serenading love or celebrating life on its sidewalks. I came to my room very tired, and went straight to bed. I did want to sleep but my active mind circled around my celebrated father.

Chapter 4

Father Absence

Circa 351 Anno Domini

I, Pavsdos Puzant have been silent for a long time and have some things on my chest that I need to ventilate. Armenian culture is a closed culture in its amot or shame-proneness. We Armenians tend to keep our personal and national problems within our circles because we consider talking about them out in the open a betrayal of the collective, family, kin, community and nation, thus compromising our personal and national livelihood. While internal locus of control, control of our destiny is a better belief than external locus of control, no control over what happens to us, it has the drawback of conditioning us to attributing in a self-effacing fashion all our ills to our personal and national shortcomings rather than recognize the jungle-nature and predator-world in which we exist.

Our locus of control philosophy is rooted in the tension between the ideal of a religious state and the ideal of a secular state. The institution of a Christian informed socialist government in the Kingdom of Armenia for the first time in the history of mankind was not an idiotic paper exercise. Championed by Nerses the Great, it was a true transformation of a secular nation into a Medz Vank (Grande Monastery) with governmental machinery of the people and for the people. Over 2000 individual vanks (monasteries) and numerous social welfare agencies all over the country were constructed to attend to the spiritual and earthly needs of the poor and the destitute, the unemployed, the sick, the needy elderly, and the orphan.

However, the Christian Socialist Armenian Kingdom, in spite of its unprecedented achievements was short-lived. Our King Bab was a secularist fox if not a bigot. He got a kick out of melting his people in a secular state pot as much as Nerses the Great wanted them melted in a religious pot. As a Christian lamb in disguise, he subscribed to the sociology that social welfare states produce nothing but the institutionalization of a welfare mind.

As the honorable sons and daughters of open mindedness, future generations need to weigh the merits of religion and secular informed forms of government with a view to the good life and international harmony.

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I had and I had not a father. My father's name was Sevag. I do not know why his parents gave him this particular name. My father whose blue eyes were inherited from the times of the Crusaders was neither saintly nor did he fit the infamous Armenian merchant stereotype. The familial environment he grew after survival of the genocide and resettlement in the Kurdish populated village of Ain al Arab shaped his disposition more to unearthly preoccupations and pedagogy. Everybody knew that Sevag, the son of Father Stepan was the only known Armenian who went bankrupt in business. He possessed neither the shark nor the snake of the mercantile. Some described his business style as too trusting, others called it gullibility. His next natural calling was priesthood.

My father entered the seminary of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias, on the outskirts of the capital of Lebanon to become a celibate priest. Those who remembered his tenure in the monastery spoke of a young man with a mixture of

the jocular and the serious, and the stubbornness of the true Malatiatsi, a personality trait immortalized in the expression *Malatiatsi damar*, the infamous nerve of the one born in Malatia.

As a cultured people, Armenians believed in predestination or destiny as in it is *Asdoudzo gamk* (God's will). Priesthood was the unfulfilled destiny of my father. Even after getting married and having a family, several Armenian communities in the United States offered my dad a parish and all the fringe benefits associated with ministering a church—a house, a good salary, free education for the children, a comfortable life, and a modest retirement fund. My father was in a perpetual state of ambivalence with respect to loading on his shoulders the burden of emigration to the West, the United States in particular. He knew he had the calling for priesthood, like his father. He knew that he and his family would have a better quality of life in the developed Western countries. His major drive against his destiny was the possible assimilation of his children to the host culture, what Armenians dub as the white genocide. The possibility that his children may follow the acculturative mode of integration rather than assimilation or melting in the host country pot was not in his thinking repertoire.

On his way to the alleged capital of smuggling, the village of Ain al Arab, for a home visit on a hot summer, Sevag met his former business partner, the One Eyed Avo, in the ancient city of Aleppo, and the two went to One Eyed Avo's dwelling on Rue el Azme in Azizieh 16293. Lyone, a 16 year-old Christian girl, with mixed Greek and Armenian blood, and her mother, Set (Madam) Mariam happened to be visiting One Eyed Avo's family. Evidently, Lyone was combing her hair when Sevag walked in, saw her in her self-grooming ritual, and fell instantly in love with her.

It was February, a time of celebration of St. Sarkis, the

beloved Armenian saint when Sevag spotted Lyone. At the eve of St. Sarkis, tradition dictated that flour be placed in a *sini* (large flat plate) to see if the saint on his legendary horse would pass by and leave a mark on it. Sometimes a family member woke up at night, and drew horse marks on the flour so as to convince the rest of the family members that they were indeed visited by the beloved Armenian saint.

Father Stepan and *yerezgin* (wife of the priest) Vartouhi traveled a considerable distance by bus and then rented a *hantour araba* (horse-ridden carriage) to get to Set Mariam's house to ask for Lyone's hand. As was customary at the time, Father Stepan and *yerezgin* Vartouhi took salt and bread with them, and after preliminaries, Father Stepan addressed his hosts by describing the virtues of his son and then said with a smile on his face, "We came here because in your garden there is a rose and we want to pick this rose. With God's will, we ask for the hand of your daughter."

The two families visited each other one final time after the *khosk gab* (tying of the spoken agreement knot ceremony). The day before the big day, a Saturday, the relatives of Sevag and Lyone had separate feasts. At noon, Sevag's relatives came to the house of Set Mariam. They brought with them a tray holding a candle surrounded by wedding candy and apples; a symbol that the groom's family was about to take into possession a good bride. Lyone was brought to the middle of the family room amid singing, and her little finger was decorated with *henné*. In the afternoon of the same day, the side of the bride-to-be brought her *ojid* (bridal property) to One Eyed Avo's house, where the groom-to-be and his parents were residing for the duration of the wedding so Lyone's eight-layered belongings could be displayed for all to see.

Sevag left the monastery to live his matrimonial life in an insignificant village in an agricultural landscape. Village life seemed boring to an intellectually endowed person like Sevag. He was not really interested in the business of buying and selling but there was not much else to do. Father Stepan opened a store for him. Most if not all of Sevag's customers were Kurds from the neighboring villages. They would buy the merchandise from Sevag on credit and promise him to pay their debt in monthly installments. Sevag did not keep proper records nor did he pursue systematically and aggressively his indebted customers.

After folding the business permanently, the only excitement that seemed available for Sevag was indulgence in Arak, the legendary Middle Eastern lion-milk. And indulging he did. Fortunately, a fortuitous event emancipated him from the Arak curse. One night he came home drunk. He was exceedingly unsteady on his feet and there was no one around to help him go to the Arabic toilet—a hole in the ground, in the house. He managed to get there on his own, and as he pulled down his pants, he slipped and his right foot went right into the cesspool. My father cursed the Arak when rescued few hours later, and rarely touched the viral substance again.

I have little childhood recollection of my father before and after my survival in the conflicted and dissonant Middle East. I was my mother's last pregnancy. She was so sick that my father was advised to move her and the rest of the children permanently to the city. My father had to invoke not only physical separation but also emotional divorce. We lived in the city, he in villages. After going bankrupt in his business in the Village of Ain al Arab, he devoted a dozen years of his life (1950-1962) to rural teaching, the first half-dozen years in the Village of Ain al Arab where my paternal grandparents lived and the remaining six years in the

Village of Azaz, another famous center for smuggling.

Our economic livelihood marred our life and ate away from its hedonism. My provider father's financial status was somewhere in between the rich and famous and the inescapable failure and buffoon. He never lived the moment nor for the moment. He was destined to a rural teacher career with a meager salary. My father did try to secure a position in the city. He was interviewed for a teaching position in one of the more prestigious schools in town. The interview went well, and he was offered the position and a start date was set. However, the deal fell through as fast as it was made. As my father was leaving the principal's office, Mr. Aramian, the principal who offered him the job asked half-jokingly and half-seriously if my father would mind wearing white shirts when he started to teach rather than the usual khaki shirts that my father was very fond of wearing. Evidently, my father gave the principal a stern look and told him softly, "If you are going to give me orders before I have even started the job, then you might as well shove the job up your lower cavity."

The peace of violence that targeted minority groups and his deep desire to be close to his only brother on earth finally drove my father to carry the cursed migration cane a second time in his life. The politically informed forced migration cost my father dearly. There were three strikes against him. First, he was not young. Second, he was not a university graduate. Third, he was in the wrong job market. From being a highly respected school principal, my father was among the unemployed. My father did not give up. His command of the Armenian language was exceptional. He was finally hired as a copy editor for an Armenian weekly magazine, *Diaspora*. The pay was meager but the job was self-esteem enhancing. His newly acquired position, however, did not last long. The political instability in the country and dismal

NARRATIVE OF MY I

economic climate necessitated job cuts and he was one of the first to get a pink slip.

My father gave up looking for work and busied himself with volunteer work for a bookstore owner not far from where we lived. He went to the house of knowledge faithfully every morning five days a week. He sold the odd book for the owner, the likes of *Crime and Punishment*, *War and Peace*, *Khente* (The Fool), and the *Book of Mirdad*, and spent the remaining time writing. He brought his writing home and it was not unusual for him to stay late at night smoking and writing. He followed this routine faithfully for nine un-zestful years.

My father was a Wednesday child, smart, wise and mature in thought. My mother complained frequently that her husband was married to his books rather than her. My father's poetry, novelettes, memoirs, and ethnographies of Armenian communities in the diaspora of the Middle East were preoccupied with social identity. His literary mind was fuelled by his fear of assimilation or *djermag tchart* (white genocide), which he considered a reenactment of the Armenian Red Genocide, the very outcome that the perpetrators and deniers of the genocide hoped. My mother perhaps did not consider the possibility that my father's obsession with his literary work did to him what priesthood did to my grandfather: cope with the traumas of the genocide and its denial. Robbed of his childhood, my father was sublimating his psychic pain and reconstructing his genocidal life through his personal narratives rather than living life fully.

The deterioration of my father's health was slow and invisible. Part of the problem was that he was not a hypochondriac. A second major problem was that he was a smoker. He smoked old-fashioned cigarettes, Tatli Sert the cheapest without filter brand in the market. I guess he somehow

knew his time was near even though he was only in his fifth illusive decade of an unfulfilled life. For the past nine years, he had worked very hard in an effort to publish as many of his literary work as possible. Like many other Armenian authors who had died with only a dry piece of bread and an onion in their possession, he knew that what he was doing was going to bring limited financial rewards. That realization did not deter him from spending endless nights writing and smoking. He was a man of principle and determination. Some Armenians would say *tchor kloukh* (a dry headed man), meaning bull-headed. His health progressively became worse. Our family physician, a devout Protestant Brother, told us not to waste any money on our father. "Medicine is business here," he muttered. On his last visit to him, he recommended that we take father to see a cardiologist. When we took him to hospital in the afternoon on the advice of the cardiologist, my father somehow knew that his end had come. As I was leaving his hospital bed, he requested that I finish publishing his unfinished book.

June in the city of life Beirut felt as if winter was about to begin, the young roses about to die, and married couples about to divorce. We instructed the hospital staff to call our neighbors if need be because they had a telephone of their own but not us. The next morning at five o'clock, our neighbors received a call from the hospital. Our neighbor, Mr. Avedis knocked at our door and I went to talk to the caller. One of the Sisters from the hospital briefly broke the news to me. We rushed to the hospital. The duty doctor explained that it had happened about two thirty in the morning and that by the time he had responded to the emergency call it had been too late.

The Mediterranean along Beirut's Corniche (seaside promenade) was choleric as was the rest of the town. About eight

NARRATIVE OF MY I

thirty in the same humid-struck morning, we broke the news to the specialist who had granted my father admission to the hospital as he walked in to check-up on him. He had granted my father's admission to hospital but had not seen him since his hospitalization. Our neighbor advised that we arrange the immediate burial of my father's body not to incur unnecessary cost.

Father Sevag's 57 year old genocidal body lay in the Fern el Shebbak (Bakery of the Window) cemetery, a gloomy space far away from Armenia; a body that was conceived in holy matrimony by two God-loving parents. My father's restless soul departed from a shivered hospital in a lonely planet. My father's tortured soul went beyond freedom but not dignity. Amid a cold cemetery hovered a heart-broken widow and three broken-winged sons menaced by violation of their human rights for justice and burdened by its crippling effects on their personal livelihood.

There was so much anger and hostility towards the world at the time of my father's painful loss that I did not and could not grieve his death. I sat at one of the cliff-side cafes in the Al Rouche neighborhood listening to the water caressing the arches of the Pigeon Rocks. In my childhood mindset, the world was an austere orphanage without walls and my soul in an eternal hunger for a father's sacred anointment.

I walked out of the cemetery feeling a breeze of hope in my craned face. I preoccupied myself with finishing my father's unfinished book before embracing a shimmering swallow in the global orphanage.

Chapter 5

Doggy Bag*367 Anno Domini*

I, Pavsdos Puzant, aka the Homer of Armenian literature recounted to my people the tragic life of King Arshag. It is true that King Arshag was a suspicious and a cruel despot but he was not deserving of the betrayal of his nobility. I must admit I could not get into the hearts of the traitors when they witnessed King Shabouh of Persia mutilate King Arshag's royal eyes and banish him to the infamous Castle of the Unmentionable. I do know for certain that one Armenian heart ached endlessly and dared to seek the permission of the King of Kings to visit his former patron for even just a day.

The King of Kings pondered the request of Trasdamad, the former Chief Guardian of King Arshag's harem. "Dearest Trasdamad, my loyal braveheart, how can I forget your immense courage when we were in battle at the shores of the Caspian Sea, and the manner in which you endangered your life to save my life? Your wish is granted, go in peace," commanded the King of Kings.

Trasdamad was joyous and tearful as was King Arshag when they met. It took a bit of time for King Arshag to warm up to the nostalgia and reminisce about the good old days. He talked endlessly about hayrenik-the fatherland, Armenian national identity, and the value of hayabahbanoum. He lamented the coveted fate of his country as a battleground for the Eastern and Western powers, and the forced migration of his people to foreign lands.

I, Pavsdos Puzant, say to you with all due respect, the Armenian self, like the self of other ancient people, included good and evil, as well as light and dark forces but strived primarily for growth and completion. The self of the Armenian nobility had the courage to face their shadow, the dark side of their personality, to see the ugliness and evil it contained, and to muster enough courage to seek psychological rebirth. On a national level, they saw no shame in dialogue and reconciliation and dreaming of Armenian unity. On a personal level, they saw no amot (shame) in parents and their children being transparent and talking about their problems to deal with their painful inner preoccupations. As the honorable heirs of the wise old person, I ask each one of you to strive to realize your independent self by tuning to your inner resources and being true to yourself, by strengthening your individuality rather than being society's puppets, by coming to grips with your shadows, the darkness within yourselves rather than projecting it onto others, and by nurturing the masculine and feminine sides of your personality rather than crushing one to invoke the other. Realize the collective self by loving others and empathizing with their lot while they are alive, fuel the creativity in you, and nurture positive reasons for living rather than negative reasons for dying. And in particular, do not feel shame to seek sound professional help, yes even for mdayin daknabner (mental disturbances).

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When I woke up in the morning, my mouth was acrid, my throat dry and my thoughts disturbed and disturbing. It was the easy way to attribute my discomfort to the food I had eaten before retiring to bed rather than consider the possibility of a

psychological explanation for my inner turmoil. However, I had no time for self-reflection. The propensity for conquering uncertainty precluded exploration of the deep secrets of personality and its emancipation from the baggage of the checkered past.

Moving away from Toronto was not as traumatic as I thought it would be even though I have always hated the prospect of displacement. I liked small towns and the placid town up North was a suitable choice. I liked the North from the first moment I saw it. The Northern town was not a large space as Toronto. While it was not the enchanting Mediterranean Sea, the fresh water of the lake in the Northern town embraced the divine blueness of the sky, and nurtured the immortal freshness of its fish.

While people of the Northern town were friendly, I could not say the same about their dogs. The first day I was there looking for a place to live I was attacked by a well-washed and brushed German shepherd that appeared out of nowhere. The unfriendly high-energy animal bit me in the ankle ripping the pants of my suit. The well proportioned and intelligent beast prepared for another round of vicious attack as I stood gazing at the shadow of my own terrified soul. Fortunately for me, a brave couple that happened to be around the neighborhood covered my body in protection and used acrobatic kicks to dissuade the courageous animal from its exquisite hunt of the innocent bystander. Soon the baffled owner of the dog with a new purpose-in-life appeared out of nowhere. After restraining Rex her loyal beast, she introduced herself as Mrs. Lenore and apologized for Rex's conduct explaining that he was a guard dog protecting the motel she owned. The middle-aged brunette instructed me to go to the local hospital, receive a rabies shot, and at some point inform her how I was doing. Few days after surviving the tsunami of the German

shepherd, I went to Mrs. Lenore's motel with trepidation. The head-banging Mrs. Lenore was happy to see me safe and sound. She offered me compensation in the amount of \$50 for my trauma on the unspoken condition that I hush-up the whole German shepherd narrative. I was too naive to squabble and even hint at the possibility of suing her for negligence informed psychological damage. My collectivist eastern upbringing was antagonistic to cold diminishment of humanity.

I rented a basement apartment on the northern side of town. Even though temporarily it rekindled in me the unfading images and memories of the Aleppine flooding many years ago, I decided the flood memories a developmental source of resilience rather than spirit breaker. Besides, I could afford the rental. My landlady was a scarred single woman with a toddler. She could not have been more that 35 years old. I learned from other neighbors that she had escaped an abusive relationship and that her brother had killed her mother for having an extramarital affair. I called the apartment I rented Napier Ark. Napier Ark was a walking distance from the lake, and I quickly got into the habit of visiting its shores for long therapeutic walks that benefited one's physical, psychological, and social well-being, if not spiritual health.

The King Hope Hospital I worked at was a royal institution dating from 1891. It started as a small 4-bed cottage and expanded to a regional health care center. My job in the mental health section of the hospital was very challenging and I felt I was making an important contribution to the lake community rather than sponging-off on others or extending my feet more than my comforter can cover. From a very young age, and with little tutoring, I had committed myself to a moral imperative to giving back your community for all that your community has given you. The prevailing stereotype of the immigrant as a dead-beat

parasite was not in my DNA. At the conclusion of the first month of work, I received my first check. I mailed part of what I had made to my mother, and I cherished the pay stub.

While all Christians until the 4th century celebrated Christmas in early January, the Roman Catholic Church changed the date to December 25 to coincide with the pagan birthday of the Sun. Tradition obsessed Armenians remained faithful to January, exchanging gifts on New Year's Eve and opening them on New Year's Day. After church service on Christmas Day, the males visited relatives and friends, and the women stayed home and received the visiting gentlemen. Every house served liqueur and chocolate followed by Armenian coffee. It was a divine miracle that none of the men were inebriated from drinking so-much liqueur in one day!

Christmas was getting nearer, and I was making preparations to go to Toronto to my sister's to celebrate the holiday season. I did not have a car then. I called for a taxi to take me to the bus station. The taxi was late and I was becoming worried that I may miss the bus to my desired destination. This was one time in my life that I was grateful to the taxi driver for being late. As I was waiting at the entrance of the apartment a middle-aged gentleman came down of his car and inquired if I knew a particular tenant. I volunteered that I was the person he was seeking. He showed an expression of relief on his mustached face as he handed me a telegram. It was from back home. My partner was confirming her arrival at Toronto Airport on the coming Saturday. In violation of behavioral principles and the possible dismay of B. F. Skinner I handed the taxi driver a generous tip and thanked him for being late!

My fiancé arrived safely in the middle of winter. Inspired by the festive season, and in order to impress her with the hospitality

of her new environment I decided to take her to a romantic restaurant and treat her her favorite hedonic food-fresh fish. I also resolved to follow in Canada as closely as possible the traditional Lebanese culinary formule pathway: *mezze* (appetizers), an assortment of cold and hot dishes such as tabbouleh, hummos, fattoosh, moutabbal, goat cheese, and grape-leaves, sambousek (filo with meat), and kebbe (cracked wheat meat balls); followed by the main course mashawi (barbecued meat), a perfectly charming symphony of hamburger kebab, shish kebab, chicken kebab, or fish; and topped by seasonal fresh fruits and sensuous dessert.

The restaurant was a cozy cottage on the lake with flowing cotton curtains, dim lighting, table candles, rustic décor and a mosaic bar. We were joyed when we were warmly welcomed and our table for two was set nearby the bonfire. The menu offered small plates, larger entrees, and authentic desserts. I ordered a bottle of Chardonnay and a selection of what I considered equivalent to the Lebanese formule, a feast of salads, poultry dishes, lamb and seafood that would surely make a loved one happy. Eileen, our friendly waitress wondered if more people were joining us as she decorated the dining table with orchestral plates of seductive salads such as the Caesar, and sexy dishes such as the lamb chop, the ‘bang-bang shrimp’ and the ‘seabass in banana leaf.’ While we indulged in the sinful food and orgasmic desserts we reminisced naughty childhood narratives. I remembered the salty steaks and French fries Set Mariam prepared for me behind my mother’s back when I did not like the food sacrificed for that day.

After our sumptuous dinner, hot and delicious coffee, and the mosaic background music of Anne Murray, Oscar Peterson and Julio Iglesias, we felt we needed a couch on which to lie down

and just relax or enjoy a stroll along the lake. Waitress Eileen was on a different pathway. Noticing the amount of food still left on the table, she looked at us with her multitasked hazelnut eyes and asked if we wanted a “doggy bag.” My partner and I looked at each other because we had not heard the expression “doggy bag” before and we did not understand what it really meant. Surmising that waitress Eileen thought that we own a dog at home and therefore wanted us to take the left-over food for the beast, I looked at her hesitantly and said: “We don’t have a dog, but we’ll take it for the kids.” The bemused Eileen donated me a polite “Of course, Sir” and went on with the business of reengineering our leftovers. Meanwhile, my indignant fiancé went into a mini panic attack as she pondered the possibility of our friendly Eileen showing up at church and finding out we were just getting married.

The weather up North was hostile to our wedding plans. The first time my future wife ventured to the downtown for shopping, she met a snowstorm of the like not seen up North for a long time. The gusty wind and heavy snow had all the roads conquered. Her efforts to secure a taxi were to no avail. She called my office, which was not very far from the downtown area. I advised her to walk to my office and wait for me to finish work. Julia one of the most competent nurses with forty different allergies offered to drive us home after work. When we arrived home, it looked so dark and depressing. The window of our apartment, an only child connecting us to the outside world was covered with snow vivisecting the visibility of the external life. My wife-to-be was traumatized by the snowstorm. She had never seen the likes of the weather we had in the North that week. She had the feeling that she had come to Canada to be buried rather than married.

The weather trauma had the potential of turning an

agoraphobic out of my partner. Fortunately, the weather did clear and even though there was plenty of snow everywhere, she managed to proceed with our wedding plans. She organized everything within a week. We arranged to get married in an Anglican Church, as there was not an Armenian church in the Canadian rural town. My colleagues and few friends we had made attended the wedding service. My sister and her husband were our best man and maid of honor. A close artistic friend gave my wife away. Kai, the man with a middle-aged eyeglasses and a resilient soul drove her from Toronto in the cold morning of the big day. Midway on the highway, the wipers of his car stopped functioning so he used one hand as a wiper and the second to steer the wheel. Kai was determined to unite the bride to the groom.

Outside the church, after the wedding service the cool white-flowered January caressed the senses of the intimate reception at our candle and poinsettia-decorated basement apartment. We treated our honorable guests graciously with food, drinks and our love. January was a cold day to marry. Then again it was the only month with two faces, one that looked at the past and one that looked at the future.

My wife's application to stay in Canada was approved. When she and I picked up her papers from the regional Immigration Office, the immigration officer smiled at her and said affectionately, 'Welcome to Canada, Love.' The power of self-humility invokes a special meaning to sacrifice in the other. My wife and I celebrated humility and sacrifice before darkness marred the beauty of the night. When we sank into our bed, clouds of insomnia penetrated my inner most mind aimlessly. My sacrificial thoughts took a life of their own circling around my mother.

Chapter 6

Food Overprotection Love

3rd to 1st Centuries BC

I, Asdghik, the bashful Armenian Venus, goddess of love, beauty and poetry, have fond memories of my life and my people in the majestic Acesilene shrine in the region of Taron. How beautiful was the temple dedicated to me, to Anahid, the patron goddess of Armenians, and to Vahagn, the god of valor. Immense parks with roaming golden collared deer tended by countless priests and servants surrounded our shrine. How refreshing and relaxing was bathing in the sacred waters of the Aradzani. I had to shroud the Moush Valley with eternal mist to hide my modesty from the peeping eyes of Armenian budding youth.

I, Asdghik, the lover of poetry, tell you how inspiring were the national celebrations of the Armenian New Year Festival in the month of Navasard. In marking the new life on August 24, the king offered us one hundred bulls with gilded horns and the people showed us their bravery, ingenuity and skills in contests, jousts and tournaments as well as duels, and races. I particularly enjoyed the fair of Vardavar (Festival of the Roses) as I had the opportunity to reward victors with rose wreaths that adorned my temple.

I, Asdghik, the bashful goddess, remind you that the New Year marked the passing of the old year, a time for the atonement of sins and rejuvenation. The Armenian people entered into the zone of a new life. Millions of sacred doves were released as the Great Priest sprinkled our people with the holy Aradzani water.

As the goddess of love, I am moved by the evolving rich

culture of our people. What better way to symbolize the holy mystery of reconciliation, atonement and love than the sacrifice, the water, and the dove!

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In her developmental years, my mother lived in one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Her neighborhood was not far from a vibrant but socially menaced Jewish community that chiseled immense numbers of old limestone dwellings and hosted the chatter of multiple tongues and the intermingling of rainbow cultures. Jewish neighbors reputed for their love of music and singing asked my mother to burn their candles on the Sabbath. She recalls entering their homes with trepidation as numerous myths about Jews prevailed; the most outrageous fable being the narrative that they kidnapped neighborhood boys for ritual sacrifices.

My mother was half Greek on her father's side. Elias, her tall and heavy father had light brown skin, dark brown hair, and unusually large dark brown eyes nested in thick eyelashes. He was a good Greek birth, beauty in body, hedonic in soul. He came to the ancient city of Aleppo from the unrivalled Greek Island Paros, and made lots of gold (tanks of it) serving all day the hearty ancient Aleppine 'dish of the poor' Ful Halabi (Fava or broad beans soup simmered in large copper jars overnight and garnished with lemon juice, garlic, cumin or cumin, paprika, and olive oil). Elias's restaurant in the old quarters outside the walls of the ancient city was the best-known fast food establishment in town, if not the country. People who savored his addictive Ful Halabi felt high and satisfied. My wild maternal grandfather Elias did not know how to deal with his affluence and fame in the city of

scorching babs (gates), covered souqs (markets), spacious khans (inns), exotic hammams (baths), sacred masjids (mosques), biblical kanaes (churches), and vibrant oriental belly-dancing nightlife. He lost his God-given wealth and health in his mid forties. It was not his work that killed him; his killers were smoking, drinking, gambling, and womanizing. When he left earth to go to hell, heaven or the purgatory he also released the high drama of a Greek tragedy in which a widow and six orphaned children were the main actors.

My mother left her impoverished city life after the death of her affluent Greek father Elias to live her matrimonial life in the midst of rural Armenian folkways. My mother did not speak a word of Armenian when adopted by the Tashji clan. Grandfather Stepan described the rural household as the Tower of Babylon for the fact that members of the Tashji family were using different languages to communicate with each other and with the outside world.

In the eyes of *yerezgin* Vartouhi, the beloved Armenian goddess gave Lyone a blessed womb. Lyone mothered five children. I was the last child she expelled from her womb at the conclusion of the Second World War. Mother Lyone was terribly sick when I was vegetating in her tummy. The village doctor told my dad that his wife had to be cared for at a city hospital if he wanted the baby to survive. My father followed the advice of the physician and settled his family in the city. He stayed in the village of Ain al Arab near his parents and visited his wife and children once or twice a year at the utmost. Like many post genocide Armenian families, our family was transformed into a matriarchal nest because of the patriarch's preoccupation with a wage earner role rather than the domestic life of fathering and husbanding.

The move to the city was transformational in that within a

span of ten years we moved at least three times within the limits of a feverish city of numerous hammams. I felt I was thrown out with the bathwater to flounder around in an ancient city that radiated contradictions. Our first move was close to the main train station and around where my maternal grandparent, Madame Mariam lived. Our apartment was on the first floor across the flat of a loud Greek family with four sons all studying medicine or pharmacy overseas. The mother of the Greek family Adonia was a lover of George Dalaras, Rembetika and a heroine of a rat-infested neighborhood. While she did not fight dragons, she had expertise in responding to women terrified by the appearance of predator rats in their dwellings. With a broom in her hand, she was a Greek goddess fantastic at cornering the poor beasts and sacrificing them to mother nature.

Our second move in December was to a basement apartment close to a river known for a grumbling temper. A year after moving to the dungy basement, the whole neighborhood was caught with the flooded wrath of the urban stream. I recall our elderly neighbor Vahan (shield) waking us up in the middle of the night and warning us of the danger we all faced. I also remember the poor old man, out of the goodness of his heart carrying the heavy bags of our winter munitions to his flat on the third floor for safe-keeping, and allowing us to sleep there until mobility in the neighborhood was restored. Others were less fortunate: terrified parents and children waking up to the mercy of floating beds and household furniture; men falling deep into broken sewages, and frantic families attempting to rescue perishable belongings.

My mother was a fan of the vivacious Sabah (morning), the shahrura (songbird) of Lebanon, listening to her mawals (folk music) such as Zay el-assal (Your love is like honey on my heart) and Akhadou el-reeh (they took the wind) at every opportunity to

unburden from the trauma of the flood. She also organized singlehandedly our move in March to a rental on the fourth floor of a five story building in a Christian neighborhood, a mile or so away from the unfriendly riverbanks. Of all the homes we lived in, this apartment was the most spacious. It had one large bedroom, a den, a dining room, a living room, a guest room, a commodious kitchen, and a two-piece bathroom. Soon after moving to our new sanctuary, we finally managed to turn off our somber hibernation from the trauma of the riverine flood.

My mother was fortunate in that Armenian culture, according to a guest lecturer we listened to was transforming itself in line with the thinking and literary writings of the likes of Srpoohi Dusap, the 19th century women's rights activist in the region and a founder of the Armenian feminist movement. I distinctly remember our lecturer's family name, Professor Sarafian but do not recall his first name. I recall taking copious notes as he talked and wanting to implant his brain in mine. 'Generations of Armenian youth,' he said 'were raised under the menacing social shadows of rigid gender informed roles and a worldview that linked the honor of men with female modesty.' 'The breakaway from the psychology of *amot* allows Armenian youth to dream humanity rather than dream modesty,' he surmised. Professor Sarafian also maintained that the traditional Armenian psychology that was sympathetic to living one's life for others was loosening so that the idea of living merely for one's self as well was becoming more acceptable. 'The feminine side of the macho Armenian man is also being rediscovered,' he observed. 'This is a positive development,' he added 'because it allows Armenian men to display positive emotions such as warmth, love and caring privately and publicly and commit to verbal expression of terms of endearment such as darling, dear, and my love.'

We were absorbed in Professor Sarafian's prophetic wisdom the rainbow night that he spoke to us collectively. We were Armenian youth not only starved for food but also for intellectual nourishment. Our stimulant guest made us even more intrigued when he touched on the subject of parenting, telling it like it is. 'Your generation is fortunate,' he said 'because the bull-headed authoritarian style of disciplining children is downgraded in our culture.' 'But all is not well in this front,' he cautioned. He was referring to the overprotective style of Armenian mothering. Even my mother whose name translated into lioness could not bring herself to stop hovering over us and overly sheltering us from what she construed as a predator world. 'Your mothers are not mean spirited mommies like the lioness or the black eagle,' he commented. 'Our traumatic collective past nevertheless has made your mommies bubble wrap around you to spare you life's physical and psychological pains and sufferings,' he continued. 'While they mean well, we all need to recognize the gulf between parental protection and parental overprotection. Protection of off springs is an evolutionary and natural approach to parenting while overprotection is an unnatural and counter-evolutionary pathway to children's independence and individuality. Overly sheltered children grow up biologically to be adults but remain children psychologically and socially. Overprotection leads to lack of a sense of competence, which generates feelings of poor self-esteem, which in turn also contributes to difficulties in harmonious social relations such as delinquency, dependence on others, and diminished leadership qualities,' he concluded before offering his prescription to put a halt to the intergenerational transmission of overprotection. 'Parents have to change the fear culture of the family to a family culture of courage and hope. Parents need to verbally condition their children to *katchoutyoun* (fearlessness)

rather than *vakhgodoutyoun* (fearfulness). They also need to positively reinforce their little people to think and act with confidence if not *chutzpah*. Finally, parents need to be positive models for their children. A parent telling a child to be courageous but acting cowardly is dissonant. Children emulate their parents' deeds rather than words. A family culture of courage and hope will inspire in our sons and daughters positive rather than negative emotions and invoke positive attributes such as optimism, self-esteem, self-efficacy, courage, assertiveness, and happiness,' he explained. 'Above all, we need to bubble unwrap our little people and avoid controlling them through corporal punishment, shaming or withdrawal of love. Indeed, we ought to encourage democratic parenting practices to allow our children to think independently, motivate themselves internally and enjoy a healthy individuality. These include being nurturing and responsive to children, encouraging them to voice their opinions, taking into consideration their preferences when making family decisions and plans and explaining reasons for family expectations and rules,' he concluded optimistically.

My mother was the loving and giving Friday child, the day of doomsday and crucifixion. Like many of her contemporaries, she felt dazzled listening to the introverted Fayrouz (turquoise), the crown voice of Lebanon sing such nostalgic classics as *Itab* (Blame) and *Take Me and Plant Me in the Land of Lebanon*. She ensured that we were properly fed if not overfed, and worried the small stuff, the big stuff, and the stuff in between to imprint in our collective unconscious a psychic equation that twitted 'food plus overprotection equals love.'

My mother was modest, virtuous and sacrificial. When her neighbors were sick, she was there for them. When her sister was in discord with her husband, she was there for her. When her

younger brother needed a drink of the lion's milk in the morning before going to work, she offered him a drink. When her older brother had an extramarital affair and asked for her help to break them up, she arranged for the mistress to meet him at our place. When her mother died in her eighties, she was also there for her. As was customary, she washed her mother's body, dressed her in fresh clothing, and orchestrated everything else that was necessary for her burial. My mother was the ideal clan girl. Her true self was a true extension of the hybrid culture that shaped her personality. She expected misery as her earthly reward and paradise as her divine prize. When she felt anguish and misery, she attributed them to her fate of emotional generosity.

My mother lived in two ancient cities in the Levant under the menacing shadow of her eternal complaint that her husband was married to his books, not her. She saw her husband's destiny spirited in the monastery rather than the bullish secular sanctuary of ancient gates, baths, trade-centers, religious sites (mosques, churches and synagogues) and intoxicating nightlife. When my father died in the joyous or rainy June depending on where you lived, my mother had her D-Day of wailing and beating her chest with her contemptuous fists.

Chapter 7

Boy or Girl*3rd to 1st Centuries BC*

I, Anahit, am the golden mother of wisdom, the vast ocean of fertility and the patron goddess of the Armenian nation. When Mark Anthony occupied our country, I blinded instantly the first soldier who laid hands on me. The mighty Romans should have known that I am the Vosgedzin-the One Born of Gold and Vosgemayr-the Golden Mother. As the beloved daughter of Jupiter, and one of the seven esteemed gods of the Armenians, I enshrined seven as a sacred number in the Armenian culture. I also allowed in my shrine the initiation of virgins in the rites of love so they turn into fertile wives and model mothers. I purified the seeds of males, helped females get pregnant. I, Anahit, the patron goddess of a proud and fertile nation, demand nothing less than the arts. I beseech Armenian couples to honor me by propagating the race by quality parenting, enrichment of the world with model citizenry.

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When I woke up in the morning, I was tired and all my reflections about my mother were confused and confusing, if not depressing. However, I had no time, nor the inclination to psychologize my negative emotions at the time. All I could do is acknowledge my burdened psyche and go on with my drive for functioning normally in society. When the past dominates your thinking, feeling, and actions, it drains the vitality and zest of your life.

Adjustment to a new life and a new culture was a natural and a necessary process. It was by no means a smooth ride. Life was not easy when you are defined as an intruder. Life was especially not easy without grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts and uncles and childhood friends. Confiding in a relative is different from confiding in a neighbor. Neighbors are blood; relatives are more blood. Making friends in adulthood is different from making friends in childhood. Adulthood friends are sidekicks; childhood friends are buddies.

We soon found out that my wife was pregnant and we were going to be blessed with a child. We thought it would be best if my mother came to Canada and lived with us. The arrangement would be good for her, good for us, and good for our child. I wanted grandparents in the social landscape of my child.

My wife's pregnancy was not an easy *khnjouyk* (feast). The main difficulty was the constant nausea that she was experiencing. One day, she was feeling so ill that I called work and told the secretary that I was not coming because of my wife's condition. This proved not to be kosher with administration. I was called back and advised to show up to work immediately. "In Canada," I was told, "people miss work if they are sick, not when their spouses are ill."

Our family doctor kept reassuring us that the difficult pregnancy was not unusual considering the fact that it was a first. As part of his routine assessment, he questioned if there were twins in our families. On first thought my wife indicated to him that there were no twins in our families. Reflecting on his question again after leaving his office, my wife later realized that she was the third generation of twins on her side of the family. We were reassured again that there was nothing to worry about and that he could only hear one heart beat.

It was a rough winter up North. It was as rough hearing from my mother telling us that she was not coming. She said her sister was taking the death of her mother badly and she was needed at her side. The accumulation of stress told us perhaps we needed a break. The opportunity for escape came when an old classmate of mine, Jacob, told me on the telephone that he and his blonde Texan wife Lara were contemplating a trip to Montreal to visit his parents, and that they were happy if we joined them. Our family doctor allowed the travel provided my wife did not do any of the driving.

It was a hot early August, the month that celebrates the national smile week as well as the days of watermelon and lemon meringue pie. The European feel of Quebec was quite obvious for us when we encountered the cultured city of Montreal and an Armenian community scarred by the Armenian Genocide. We spent three unforgettable days visiting various places including the tranquil gardens and greenhouses of Jardin Botanique and Mont Royale, the 200-hectare diamond park of Montreal. That evening, my wife started having some abdominal pains. Jacob's mother, whom we were visiting, was an ardent believer in traditional medicine. She had the bright idea that what my wife needed the most was a shot of whiskey, so she kindly offered. Following the old remedy, we excused ourselves and took a cab to retire to our hotel. My wife's abdominal pains took a spiral turn to the worse. Worried sick and not knowing what to do in a foreign land, I contacted Jacob's father for advice. 'The fastest way to getting your wife into the nearest hospital in Montreal is calling the police,' he said plainly. When I phoned the concierge to ask him to fetch the police for us the panic-stricken fellow parroted if I had committed a murder. With my broken Parisian French I tried to reassure him that there was no crime,

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that my wife was sick and that I needed to take her to the nearest hospital.

The police officers were the best that we had ever encountered. They made every effort to engage my wife and reassure her that everything will be fine, and that she was going to get what she wanted. They asked my wife periodically if she wanted a boy or a girl and agreed with her un-committal wishes. The ten minutes trip to the emergency department only felt like ten seconds.

None of the hospital staff we were taken to spoke any English. After painfully completing all the necessary paperwork for admission, we were taken to the first floor where Paradie, my wife's assigned nurse began preparing my 'protestant' partner for labor. My wife kept on reminding the diligent Paradie that she was not having a baby yet. Paradie insisted otherwise and started getting more and more frustrated with my wife. 'Look at this chart. You see you will be going through 10 stages. It is 130 in the morning now and you are at stage 2. By 930 am you will be at stage 10 and have your baby,' she explained with a mixture of Quebecois sympathy and annoyance. At one point, the overconfident Paradie scolded my wife telling her that she was reacting as if she was at stage 9 when in fact she was at stage 2, and that she should compose herself and act like a good patient. She seemed to think she was in my wife's belly and knew exactly what was happening inside.

The hospital finally managed to get an English-speaking physician who arrived around 0140 hours. As soon as Dr. Micho saw my wife's protruded belly, he told her: "Lady, you are either nine months pregnant or you have twins."

"I cannot be nine months pregnant," my modesty stricken wife emphatically declared, "because I have not been in Canada

for that long."

"Well lady, you are too big then. We better send you for an x-ray to see why your belly is so bulged," Dr. Micho declared.

The medical doctor looking after my wife was in his early forties carrying a pumpkin like face. He was short and chubby. A friendly chap, I must say even though somewhat crude in his manners. I cannot say that I developed much liking for him. But I knew he was all I had. I asked if I could be with my wife during delivery. He said he was not agreeable to my suggestion because one time when he allowed it the husband fainted and he had to attend to him rather than the wife and baby.

After sending my wife for an x-ray, Dr. Micho invited me to the basement where the cafeteria was located for some coffee. We passed through several halls that housed replicas of the Group of Seven such as the West Wind, Red Maple, and the Tangled Garden. As we were chatting about various things, he suddenly heard himself paged. Without any conversational cramming, Dr. Micho jumped out of his seat and started running in a direction unknown to me. I tried to run after him but in no time he was out of my sight. The whole experience felt like a roadrunner show in which the doctor was the roadrunner and I was the coyote. As I reflect at this incident in my life, I can honestly say that chasing the doctor that early morning and losing him invoked in me deep empathy to the Coyote.

I decided to take the elevator to the first floor. As I abandoned it, the doors of another nearby elevator opened widely and I saw my wife on a stretcher. I turned ashen. When she saw me, she tried to convey something to me to no avail while two orderlies were randomly banging her stretcher left and right in the process of escorting her away. I started having a queasy feeling in my stomach. Something was definitely wrong. All sorts of

stupidities went through my head. Something happened to her. Something happened to the baby. I am in a different provincial planet.

There was throbbing in my temples when a chubby nurse suddenly occupied my visual field and offered, "Congratulations monsieur, madam had a girl." By the time I recognized some relief in my tortured thoughts and readied myself to thank her, she had already disappeared. "My God, I am a father, the father of a little girl," I congratulated myself and began to embrace a turtle paced feelings of relaxation and ease. As I started feeling even more reassured that all has gone well, I noticed that 15 minutes had passed by. Time was moving faster now, the reality of a beautiful baby daughter sinking deeper into my conscious mind. As adaptation to fatherhood was kicking in, my visual field encountered a foreign chubby nurse approaching me with a huge smile. She looked at me straight in the eyes and in no uncertain terms offered a soft, " Congratulations monsieur, madam had a boy."

In a cognitively dissonant state of mind, my racing mind registered the heavenly thought that in this god-forsaken hospital they cannot even tell the sex of a newborn child! I pondered the confused maternity in the matter of the creation of my child and relived the pathetic "why me" syndrome. As my flooded head ached, I noticed the magical reappearance of the magically disappeared English-conversing Dr. Micho. In his characteristic awkward manner, he congratulated me on having twins: a boy and a girl! He informed me in a shorthand format that my daughter was born in the x-ray room when he was paged and that he ran up to the first floor in response to the emergency message he received from the X-ray nurse that a second baby was on the way. He ordered the nurse to call the orderlies to rush my wife to

the delivery room as he headed there himself. When I accidentally saw my wife on the stretcher being banged left and right, she was being taken to the delivery room for a second delivery.

We never saw Paradie, the nurse who used the educational chart to give my wife a stern lecture on the stages of labor. After seeking reassurance that I had enough money to cover his expenses, the doctor took a deep breath to inform me that both babies are premature, that our son is having breathing problems and that both babies are going to be transferred to St. Justine hospital because of the special care they need. He then escorted me to the maternity bed that was housing my wife. "I have never seen such a pressure cooker delivery in my career, you are the first," he related to my wife when he saw her in her semi-private room. "You deserve a medal for being faster than Speedy Gonzalez," he added before ordering her to speedy recovery.

Nelly, my wife's favorite Quebecois nurse asked us for the names of our twins. We recognized that naming a newborn baby is a responsible task, not to be taken lightly because it can have a lasting effect on the shaping of their personality and their adjustment to society. We did not want our precious babies to experience the daily aversion to a disliked name or the traumas of name-molestation. We have learned from experience. My wife invariably invokes praise when people hear her name. Every time she mentions her name, she elicits a "What a beautiful name" response. In mentioning my name, all hell breaks loose. Some react by saying, "What kind of a name is that?" or "Oh no, that's too difficult for me;" others say, "Now that's different," or "Can you repeat that again," or "Let me repeat that few times until I get it right," or "I'll never remember that one."

I was convinced that the locals had their share of trouble with names as well. Consider the adventures of a female child being

born on Halloween and given the name Robin Hood. People figure that Robin's parents either have a sick sense of humor or they dislike her enough to give her the mythical name. An alternative explanation is her parents' genuine belief that names are fountains of resilience. A child given the name Asad-lion will grow to a lion character. In the case of Robin Hood, there was high likelihood that her name would boost her ego, as everyone would expect her to be a natural leader and know the answers to everything. She would also be inspired by her name should she confront an adversity. There was also the possibility that the use of humor to cope with such a name-curse would be character building. On the downside, Robin Hood could be blamed for everything that would and could go wrong. She could also be asked whether on Halloween she planned to ride her horse or her broom!

If the locals have troubles with names, you can imagine the social troubles newcomers have with their names. If you had a foreign accent and a difficult name, host-culture people were more likely to shy away from you because of your name. All you had to do was to look at their faces and you would recognize the discomfort and the aversion they would experience at the mention of your name. All you had to do is observe how different names in the same social setting evoke different life dramas. People greet Sam with a "Hi Sam, how are you?" while poor Artashes stands feeling as if he did not even exist. Neighbors befriend the next-door John rather than the neighborly Ardavast.

Names destine newcomers to second-class citizenship. Name-change was known to occur with all immigrants with strange sounding names. Immigration officers in Ellis Island and other immigration ports of entry were notorious with the liberty they took to change names of newcomers as they saw fit or

bestow on them names they liked or preferred. One immigration officer bestowed the name of Wanes on the 40-year old Armenian immigrant Hovannes. The immigration officer in effect made Hovannes die and brought Wanes to life. The name-change may have had the positive affect of preventing name-abuse but it also had the immediate affect of invalidating the baptismal name of the Armenian, and shattering 40 years of his personal identity and history.

To be truthful, name-abuse occurred within ethnic groups. Consider the Armenian surname Goetebeuyougian, an ingenious combination of two foreign words the name literally translating into "the one with the big ass."

Psychologists have pointed out the effect of people's names on liking but they have not paid enough attention to the influence of names on other areas of social and personality development. I was always intrigued with the cultural significance of names. Armenians tended to name their children after the moon and the sea. In the blue country of Lebanon, children were named after fruits, vegetables and animals. Consider these names: Mary Parsley, Joseph Zucchini, and Ahmad Steak Tartar. Names beg serious thought. I always remember the day when I overheard a conversation between two humble porters, near the airport where I worked in the summer during my university years. They were discussing the topic of naming children. These two were not educated people, but they were decent chaps. One of them was advocating that people should not be given names until their looks or personalities were well formed so that the names given them would match their looks and personalities. To support his argument, the senior porter cited the example of a neighbor who had named his daughter Jamileh (pretty). He pointed out that jamileh was befitting any girl but Jamileh.

Our babies were not old enough for us to consult them on what names they wanted, and we were intent on making sure that they were not subjected to name-abuse in their lives. What use is history if it does not serve an educational purpose? After much deliberation and consistent with Armenian tradition of naming children after inspiring relatives, we named the twins partially following the familial cultural imperative.

My wife recuperated very quickly. On her third day the hospital was prepared to discharge her. The twins were cared for in incubators. Our daughter weighed three pounds and thirteen ounces whereas our son was three pounds and eleven ounces. Both had the risk of developing jaundice and other health issues related to prematurity. They had to stay in Montreal and they had to be transferred to another hospital where they could receive specialized care. They would be discharged to our care when they were five pounds each. Our efforts to convince the physician to transfer our children to Toronto were futile. "Anything can happen in the transfer process. I can not risk it," he convulsed.

We did not hold our babies at birth, like all normal parents do. Three days after their miraculous birth and clarity of gender, they were transferred to the infamous St. Justin Hospital. We took the train from Montreal, the second largest French-speaking city in the world to Toronto, and then the comfy bus to head up north full-hearted and empty handed.

Chapter 8

Bury Me You Smell Nice*404 Anno Domini*

I, Mesrob Mashtoz, a humble intellectual servant need to get off my chest some issues that are of serious concern to me. Forgive me for being bold and suggesting against the backdrop of our achievements that as an Armenian people, and in our zeal to evangelizing our indigenous compatriots perhaps we were haste in erasing with the stroke of a holy cross our ancient history, a cultural narrative that spanned over 3500 years. Forgive me to suggest that our greatest failing was destroying our heritage informed identity, temples, libraries, art, and language. A people who deny their heritage invoke a fluid national identity. A people without a solid identity eventually melt.

The loss of culture and religion and failure to fill the cultural gap is so painful psychologically that terrorism and even civil war is invoked. It is still fresh in our memory the vicious attack and barbaric murder of Father Bab and Father Athanakines (the father of Nerses the Great), in the Artashir Monastery. Both holy fathers were at the dinner table in the sacred monastery when the religiously anhedoniac murderers suddenly appeared out of nowhere like bedeviled angels, and slit their throats with their cursed daggers. As for civil war, our neighboring foreign powers take advantage of the cultural void pitting majority and minority groups against each other to their political advantage. Our Eastern neighbors are supporting the Children of Sun financially and militarily so they create disruption and unrest in our country. We are unlikely to win our indigenous people back when we have

been instrumental in the loss of their culture and religion. As a dominant culture, we have obligations towards our indigenous people and our other minorities. Not having respect for human rights and freedoms, we are doomed to division rather than national unity.

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There were lots of things I did not know about my parents' creation of me. Were my father and mother intent on conceiving me? Or was I an accident? Was my mother happy or miserable during her pregnancy? Why was she sick and how did her sickness affect my physical and emotional wellbeing? Did I go through the psychosexual stages conceived by the authoritarian Freud (oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital) or even the psychosocial stages of man described by the father of identity crisis Erik Erikson? My parents and I never talked about these personal matters, regrettably. I had not had the courage to ask them basic questions about my creation nor did they divulge any such information voluntarily. All I knew was that I came to the world hastily and with little friction. I had no idea who I encountered when I saw the light. Was my dad there? Were there any relatives? I imagined that the *tayag* (midwife) was involved in my homely birth. She must have washed me with heated water before her earthly pronouncement of my presence. I was ashamed imagining that the socially gathered were overjoyed when the jolly midwife announced joyfully that it was a *dgha* (a male child) and not an *aghtchig* (girl). I was also ashamed imagining that an amulet was hung around boys' necks as soon as they were born to protect them from evil eyes or spirits, and that they are later dressed to give them the appearance of girls

because evil eyes did not see females worthy of their attention.

I gathered that as a baby I was colicky and sickly, two strikes against enjoyment of the customary two to three year suckling paradise for boys. When I was about one year old I was struck by a stinking diarrhea. My condition baffled the hakims (wise gentlemen), and the not-so-wise men, women and little people in the neighborhood. It was a retired hair-cutter hakim that discovered the culprit, and identified lactation as the source of my diarrhea. He told my mother that she must have drunk the milk of a pregnant cow, and breastfed me the poisoned liquid. I was not certain about the fate of the pregnant cow, but I could imagine that neither she nor her owner were in the good books of my mother.

My stinking diarrhea during my oral stage made me an unhappy camper. My mother wanted to nurse me for three or four years so she could avoid another pregnancy. However, she had to stop breast-feeding me immediately. Of course, I had no say in the matter. The weaning trauma was a reality. I no longer had access to a soothing breast on demand. I must have felt like all the little girls who were weaned early in life-unloved, unimportant, and undeserving.

Identifying the culprit and treating the malady were two different things. My diarrhea was so bad, smelly, unrelenting and exhausting that the hope for my survival became dimmer by the day. After expelling me from her breastly paradise, my mother made the *oukhd* (covenant) of dressing me in the outfit of a monk for five years if I survived, and then called on Set Mariam, her mother to do the rest. Set Mariam was entrusted the divine mission of rescuing me in a paradise lost.

Set Mariam was born in 1897 with a blessed womb. She suffered a lot from her womanizing and abusive husband to whom

she mothered seven children, five boys and two girls. One of her sons died at the age of 26 from an unfortunate car accident, another at the age of 40 in an alcohol provoked drowning incident, and yet another at the age of 46 from cancer. She also lost two daughters. Matilda died of unknown reasons when she was one year old; and Linda died when she was two years old.

Set Mariam found me lost in paradise and became my private Virgin. Set Mariam was of the type who firmly believed in the proverb that asked, "What is there sweeter than one's child?" and answered, "The child of your child." Set Mariam was not a *Malatiatsi* but she was determined to keep me alive and not lose me as she did Matilda and Linda. She stuck with me for almost a year before my *Malatiatsi damar* affliction finally gave way. She used everything she had imprinted in her small head and all the special herbal drinks she knew about. She boiled and smashed potato and had me eat it three times a day. She had me drink the water of boiled rice for three times a day. When I got tired of both, she fed me three times a day boiled rice mixed with sour cream.

Set Mariam endured my violent rear-end expulsions and bathed me as many times as was necessary. Her customary grandmotherly expression of te'berny (bury me), and her practice of fondling, caressing and playing with my male organ, soothed and comforted me, in addition to evoking healthy smiles from me. The emotional attachment Set Mariam and I had, was special and unsurpassed. Set Mariam was one person with whom I bonded physically and emotionally. I wish the psychological attachment I had to Set Mariam on all the children of the world.

Set Mariam used numerous *shors* (diapers) to keep me clean and unstinking. The traditional *shor* consisted of three layers: a piece of cloth, a plastic sheet, and a layer of fine earth. Bags of fine earth were made readily available by sifting earth

regularly. She allowed me to void on the fine earth, which she threw away when soiled, and replaced with fresh fine earth. She changed my *shors* twice a day. Set Mariam stopped using *shors* on me when my stinking diarrhea stopped.

Set Mariam used the *ghoundakh* (wrapping sheet) to ensure that my bone structure grew straight and healthy. She wrapped the white sheet tightly around both of my hands and feet, and allowed my hands to move freely only after five months. Set Mariam hanged my cradle in the living room so that when I cried, anyone in the household could swing it. She also attached pieces of Turkish delight wrapped in cheesecloth to a string so I could suck the cloth to stop me from crying, to soothe me, or to help me fall asleep. When I suffered bouts of coughing, she either put a piece of paper on my chest after she spread and rubbed my chest with a mixture of warm olive oil and black pepper or she applied the oil-soaked sheet of paper used to cover *halwa or halvah* (addictively delicious confection based on crushed sesame seeds) on my chest. Set Mariam used vinegar to treat me when I was feverish. She soaked a piece of cloth in the vinegar and then rubbed it over my forehead, feet, hands, tummy and back. If vinegar was not available, she substituted it with the magical Arak.

After my prolonged infliction with diarrhea, I was bound to constipation. Set Mariam had a cure for anal retention as well. She rolled a piece of paper into the shape of a cone, dipped it in oil and then inserted it in my anus. When I grew a little older, she inserted a wedding almond candy dipped in oil in my rear end.

My maternal grandmother's efforts of saving me from the rear end stinking malady did not have an effect on my lower-front stinking habit. This time my grandmother and mother accepted defeat. At first my shaming enuresis was attributed to lack of

maturity and nothing was done about it. When it persisted to school age, all hell broke loose. My mother, maternal grandmother Mariam, neighbors and even distant relatives all got into the action. Their collective approach relied heavily on all known Armenian and non-Armenian medicinal and superstitious health-related beliefs and practices. I did not understand what the fuss was all about but it seemed clear that my enuresis was of the *Malatiatsi* kind. It seemed that all the afflictions I was having as a child were of *Malatiatsi* inheritance.

Watermelon became the proverbial forbidden fruit, particularly before bedtime. I was forced to sleep every night on a soft black plastic sheet that covered my bed and prevented the urine from soaking into the cotton sheet. I was forced to wake up several times at night to do my thing in the Arabic toilet, a simple hole in the ground. I was checked for dryness every morning and given a painful injection of a burning cigarette on my rear end. When these strategies were to no avail, shaming therapy was applied, the climax of which was being sent to school in shorts in a freezing wintry morning.

Stinking is a miserable malady. I found out accidentally that I was not the only eneuretic child in the city. I was not sure if being part of a collective made me feel better. I also discovered that lots of moms and dads were going to the clergy for advice on ways to get rid of the yellow curse. In one case, the clergy was reported to have stopped a child from bed-wetting by holding a lantern used to stop trains and waving it at the child's lower front. The logic was that if a lantern could stop a huge train, it surely could stop the flow of a tiny organ. In another case, a clergy had blessed and made the child wear an amulet around her neck. The amulet contained a folded paper with the president's name written on it. The clergy's logic was that the president had managed to

bring about a severe drought in the country since his presidency and that he surely was able to dry a small child.

My bull-spirited habit of irrigating my bed lasted for some time. One day, I woke up and found my lower front dry. My mother went to church that evening, lit a candle, and thanked Virgin Mary for her miracle.

My mother believed in the old Armenian saying that “Only he who can read is a man.” She translated the he in the proverb as meaning both him and her. My mother also wanted us and insisted on us going to Armenian schools and having an Armenian education. Like all Armenian mothers, she inculcated in us a high need for achievement and expected exceptional academic outcomes. My oldest brother did not have in his genes any academic interest. In fact, he seemed to have an innate aversion to anybody involved in pedagogy. He developed the nickname teacher-beater. After school, he felt compelled to terrorize his elementary school teachers by stoning them on their way home. Eventually, he was caught and showered by the blessings of the *falakha* (corporal punishment). The fountain of childhood hosts frogs, dragons, and lotus blossoms; the eyes of the spring spew beauty and wisdom; and the four rivers nourish the cosmos of life.

My childhood ailments were inundated by the voyeuristic world of *vishaps*, *nhags* and *devs*. Evil spirits and dragons abounded in Armenian tradition, as did the *3afrit* (as in Aladdin’s lamp) in Arab culture. *Vishaps* were serpent monsters that inspired dread in people. They were ascribed a sinister role. They were able to enter into human beings, and their breath was poisonous. They could ride and hunt on horseback, or fly in the air. They liked sucking milk from cows and carrying grain from the threshing floor. *Nhags* were the allies of *vishaps*. *Nhags* were akin

to alligators and crocodiles. They lurked in rivers, and looked the shape of seals or of mermaids. They caught swimmers by their feet and dragged them to the bottom, and then they used their victims to satisfy their sexual lust, and suck their blood. Once they were done with their victims, they left them on the riverbanks.

Devs were potent tyrants and possessed seven heads. Lava poured from their mouths and they could hurl enormous rocks a great distance. They lived in deep caverns or thick forests. Female *devs* were about the size of a hill. They went around with their left breast thrown over their right shoulder, and their right breasts thrown over their left shoulders; otherwise their bosoms would make deep holes in the ground. The *devs* were very rich. They owned horses of fire on which they traveled vast distances at the speed of light. As the female *devs* had a forbidding appearance, the male *devs* preferred girls of the human kind, to whom they granted anything they wished in return for enjoyment of the pleasures of physical intimacy.

My grandmother's age did not cow her into docility. She loved walking long distances to visit Hotel Baron; a space once resided by Agatha Christie or stroll around the narrow cobblestoned Armenian district of Al Jdeida. Before my resettlement in Lebanon, Set Mariam allowed me to give her my last treatment of *shisheh kashel* (cupping), as she was suffering from a bout of the flue or pneumonia. Cupping was her favorite therapy next to Saridone (equivalent to Tylenol or Advil) and the potato remedy. Set Mariam suffered from chronic headaches. She consumed more than twenty Saridone tablets a day, and supplemented the medication treatment with the potato remedy. She would cut two or three potatoes into small pieces, arrange them on a piece of cloth and wrap the cloth over her forehead. Despite her frailty, she remained faithful to her favorite movie-

theatre and made a point of not missing any new film on the showing.

I must admit I enjoyed administering the *shisheh kashel* treatment to Set Mariam. It was my way of taking care of her the way she took care of my stinking diarrhea and saved my life. She would watch me burn a small piece of paper or a cotton ball soaked in alcohol, insert it in an individual cup, wait for a second or two, and then stick the cup on her back, being careful not to burn her skin. She would watch me repeat the process on five or more *shishehs*, depending on the intensity of her pain and suffering, and then place a towel to cover the stuck cups on her back for about 15 to 20 minutes. She would watch me remove the cups gently, one by one, and then rub her back with alcohol or Arak. Temporarily relieved from her aches and pains, Set Mariam would hold my head, bring my face close to her lips, and kiss me on the forehead. Then she would whisper in my ear, “Te’berny-bury me, you smell nice.”

Chapter 9

Memory Hope Freedom*nd*

Legend had it that a bunch of inebriated Europeans saw Europe as the center of civilization, the parts of the East (Asia) closest to Europe as the Near East, those at the farthest the Far East, and the landscape in between as the Middle East. The East and the West seemingly have long known each other but they have rarely found strength in standing together shoulder to shoulder and to talk, heart to heart.

God had ordered the Pen to write that people predestined for birth in the Middle East, a cultural oasis that stretched from Morocco to Iran, were to be home to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. God had also chosen for those who live part of their life in Lebanon, a petite feminine landscape on the Mediterranean coast fertile with Laban (White Mountains) to endure fragmented mosaics, citrus fruits, olives, grapes, hashish, saints, oily neighbors, magical boys and girls, and a mercantile mentality preoccupied with flattery and narcissism rather than honest character and positive self-esteem. Truth sets wise people free.

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Lebanese are the warmest people on earth. They talk with their hearts rather than their minds. Lebanese love to socialize and go mad without social gatherings. I cannot say the same about my personality. I was the son of a displaced ethnic Armenian, compelled to an appendage that was Apostolic and Catholic in

religious denomination, two of the 18 constitutionally recognized religious groups in Lebanon, the rest being Alawi, Ashouris, Chaldean, Copts, Druzes, Jews, Injili-Evangelical, Ismaili, Latini, Maronite, Rourm Catholic, Rourm Orthodox, Shiite, Sunni, Serian, and Serian Catholic. One admired the plurality of places of worship-churches, mosques, and synagogues, and the intense immersions in divine and earthly paradises and infernos. One also feared religious vintages that fermented dizzying within-group cohesion and intoxicating out-group revulsion.

Lebanon was absorbed in its tourism mission since its foundation as a national space. The tourism soul of the people allowed an extroverted personality that loved fun, that parroted abundantly terms of endearment such as habibi (my dear or my love), khalilna yak (may you be kept for us forever) and Allah ye taouel 3omrak (may God prolong your precious life) for affiliative ends; that thrived on passing laws to bypass them; that was aversive to cultural melting and antagonistic to cutting their umbilical cord from the patronage of foreign powers.

Armenian presence in the Cedar country dated to the fourteenth century, if not before. However, major waves of Armenian settlers occurred in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. These Armenian settlers and refugees-Apostolic, Catholic and Protestant, transformed into a vibrant bunch spiritually and intellectually, and played a distinguished role in the cultural, economic, and spiritual growth and development of the blue country. Armenians gifted the small Mediterranean country the Our Lady Bzommar (player of the flute) Convent overlooking the stunning Bay of Jounieh and the Antelias Catholicosate See, in addition to clubs, schools and art centers as well as the Haigazian University.

As a religious minority, ethnic Armenians subscribed to a

kordzogh (doer) culture, in contrast to the *khosogh* (talker) dominant culture. Armenians in the country felt and lived their linguistically and religiously distinctive Armenian soul in a plethora of evolving collectivism, high moral standards, aversion to assimilation, disposition to cultural integration, and indisputable patriotism and loyalty to the country of honey, money and *habibty* (my darling or my lover). Armenians in the Diaspora were not, however, infallible saints. If they were not busy inventing, trading or making jewelry, rugs, and shoes, or if they were not preparing the culinary delicacies of *soujoukh* (Armenian sausage), and *basterma* (air-dried cured beef), they sure were busy, like all normal bees in the world, chasing the ghosts of their past, gossiping on neighbors, quarreling over politics, listening to the father of Armenian pop singer Adiss Harmandian, defending their cause for justice, and itching to migrate to America.

The neighborhood in which I lived was a kaleidoscope of people with infinite Eastern and Western variations and deviations. Most striking was the awesome cultural dissonance and contradictions, the coexistence of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, and the western and the eastern. Men with Cuban cigars in their mouths wore three-piece outfits to walk alongside traditional men in sherwals (baggy trousers) and *labbade* (headdress) costumes masturbating mosaic worry beads (*masbahas* or *tusbahs*) in their rugged hands. Women dressed to kill flirted with those veiled top down or in between.

I was fortunate to somehow survive the eternal contradictions and the local economic, social and psychological challenges of the time. Most salient in mind was closing the hellish gate of illiteracy and opening the door to academic paradise. My entry into university was not sheer *pakht* (luck). I worked my butt off, as the expression goes, to do well in high

school, and I had the moral and financial support of my *Malatiatsi* community.

As a hybrid ethnic of Armenian and Greek blood, I liked the academic landscape that was founded by the American Protestant missionaries in the mid 1800s. What was remarkable was that the American university they founded in the capital city was paradoxically seeded in a black hole, an area in the West of town no one considered worth anything. More remarkable was its ideal of multiculturalism in that students were welcome without regard to their 'color, nationality, race or religion to shape young minds into believing in one God, in many gods, or in no god.'

I spent six precious years of my life in the intoxicating academic village of 'make love not war.' In the mini-United Nations space on Bliss Street students felt like kings and queens when they stepped on campus. Everyone practically knew everyone else. As a student, I was a passive rather an active participant in matters of political science and public administration. I was more preoccupied with romancing the Armenian intellectual landscape in the country in an effort to shatter the prevailing destructive myths associated with the Armenian community such as the facetious dubbing of the Armenian district of Bourj Hammood a human ghetto.

I was for a peace culture informed by human rights and freedoms. I was particularly interested in the intellectual contribution of persecuted minority cultures to majority host cultures. I discovered many names, the likes of the Armenian Bishops Hagop Boloutzi and Hagop Lousdratzi (also known as Akshehertzi). Bishop Boloutzi's secular name was Krikor Wartabet or Vartabet as the Americans pronounced it. He was a founding member of the Armenian and Arab Protestantism in Lebanon and Syria. Ironically, Boloutzi gave up his intellectual

and spiritual calling because of a painful disease in his eyes, settled in the South as a bakhal (bagalin in Arabic, grocery storekeeper) to support himself financially, and died in poverty at the unfulfilled age of about 39. His son, Dr. John Wortabet became a founding members of the American University of Beirut while his other son, Krikor Vartabed proved a prophet, poet, and champion of democracy and women's rights.

Similarly, Bishop Lousdratzi fathered two prominent sons- Iskander Apcarius (Apkarian) and Youhanna (John) Apcarius. Iskander Apcarius established his fame as a poet-historian, philosopher, diplomat and a literary giant in modern Arab literature alongside Yaziji and Boustani, while Youhanna authored in 1887 two Arabic dictionaries, Kamous Inglizi and Arabi (English-Arabic Dictionary) and Kamous Inglizi and Arabi Moukhtasar (Abridged English-Arabic Dictionary).

Despite the charm of the country that was founded solely for the tourism service, employment outside government or family-business was an almost impossibility. After the defeat of the Arabs in the June 1967 war, economic survival for the disenchanted and rebellious youth took a Darwinian turn. New graduates with economic disadvantage flooded the political calamity with the creative powers of violence and fast moneymaking schemes. The less adventurous relied for survival not only on family or friends but also on financial aid, low-paying summer jobs, or giving private lessons to the children of affluent families.

Most disenchanted youth resorted to immigration because they lost hope in their country. Brain drain informed by chain migration seemed inevitable in a tribal landscape with primordial loyalties to the other rather than the nation-state. The villages of Ar'oun and Terza were good examples of the practice of chain

migration. To the dismay of the Armenian religious and civic leadership, some of us adopted the hard road to *bantoukhdoutyoun* (migration) as an alternative to *boyadjioutyoun* (shoe polishing career). After much deliberation, several of my classmates and I decided to go to one of three foreign embassies—Australian, Canadian and American to fill-out application forms for immigration purposes. My classmates and I had no option but to go where the opportunities arose.

I was anxious to hear about the fate of my application to immigrate to Canada. I was relieved when I was invited for an interview in downtown Beirut. The Canadian Embassy was in the Wadi Abu Jamil (Valley of the Father of Handsome) neighborhood, near the Bank of Montreal, and not too far from where I lived. I was taken to a spacious air-conditioned office for the interview. After the preliminary introductory rituals, the Canadian official asked me what I considered to be the most important question of the interview: my reasons for wanting to immigrate to Canada. I informed the middle-aged Immigration Officer that immigration would afford me the opportunity to continue my Ph.D. in my chosen profession, a program that was not available in Lebanon. However, I had the intuitive feeling that the reason I offered was lacking in substance. There had to be a more compelling rationale for my wanting to go to Canada, perhaps something like connecting to the earth and breathing its intoxicating air. ‘I want to live in a safe space, a land where I can feel like a person with deep roots, and a country where I can have the opportunity to give it my best,’ I uttered. ‘It seems to me Canada fits the bill,’ I added.

When I uttered these words I felt strange warmth overcoming my whole body. It was a mixture of genuine wish for a land I had yet to see and *amot* (shame) for entertaining the notion of a

homeland other than the homeland of my grandparents. The immigration officer thanked me for availing myself to the interview, and explained that I would hear about a final decision in due time.

I felt exhausted after the interview, and I did not feel like walking the half-hour distance home. I headed to Arlequin the beacon pastry shop in Wadi Abu Jamil and ordered a Chocolat Mou, the best in town in my humble opinion. With Marc Aryan (a blossoming *Malatiatsi* artist) and Charles Aznavour (a blossomed Armenian-French singer songwriter) as background music, I replayed the interview in my mind numerous times, liking some of the things I had said and feeling anxious for not doing so well on other questions. After having enough of the torturous replays, I strolled around Hamra (Red) Street before I headed home. The culturally diverse Rue Hamra, the Champs Elysees of the Ras Beirut (Head of Beirut) neighborhood was bustling with its never sleeping cosmopolitan cafes, restaurants, shops, and theatres. Like everyone else, I also hoped that one day I could afford to live in the Hamra Street neighborhood.

Three months after my interview, I heard that my application had been accepted and that I was being invited to undergo a routine but a compulsory medical examination as part of the process. Even though I was physically fit I was anxious when I took bodily specimens and saw the immigration doctor. He performed a thorough physical examination including the unwelcome finger insertion test. After collecting his thoughts, he told me he was satisfied with everything but he could not issue a clean bill of health to the Canadian Embassy because in his opinion I was an exceptional adult with visual impairment. I wanted to convince myself that he was joking even though I knew deep down that something had to be done to my eyesight. I told him I was prepared to do whatever he wanted me to do. He

asked me to see an ophthalmologist immediately, and secure myself a pair of eyeglasses. “With the way your eyesight is now, you won’t be able to see or read any of the traffic signs in Canada,” he muttered almost apologetically.

I was ambivalent about moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar but not indecisive. Lebanon had been a hospitable country and good to our refugee grandparents. Our Armenian collective was part of its checkered history and cedar-carved destiny. It was not easy to leave behind childhood memories running in your blood, and childhood friends with whom you had shared bread and salt as well as innocent confessions of love and loyalty. Nevertheless, the suffocation of Arabism in the aftermath of the 1967 June naksa (calamity) and the disoriented ghost of a looming clash of cultures undermined the region’s sensibilities. Even the cedar trees, symbols of memory, hope and freedom took ill with a vengeful disease, and were treated by Japanese experts. Similarly, the young bees in the Lebanese academic paradise infiltrated the smug political landscape of the region to transform the black college holes into a horny kaleidoscope of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism muddled violently with mosaic ideals of democracy, self-determination and peaceful co-existence. The schism did not reconcile the worldviews of tribal, national, and borderless cultural ideals.

The forecast in Lebanon is partly cloudy partly sunny. My lovemaps are with the cedar of memory, freedom and hope; the biblical tree whose people opened their arms and welcomed my people, the survivors of the yeghern (genocide) of 1915. Violet is my favorite flower. The forecast is changed but my love of violet is still the same. Earth is flooded with a mad Mediterranean lightening and rain. Aqua de vida, the fountain of youth with its soothing waters is a dream, a desire. The mighty cedar is

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threatened by fundamentalism, division and a looming civil war, at a time I am contemplating embracing the maple tree of tolerance, unity, and peace.

Chapter 10

Homecoming

451 Anno Domini

I, Yeghishe, suggest to you that what lies in front of our own eyes is the cascade of the Armenian General Vartan, a national inspiration, the embodiment of the protest of humanity against oppression, tyranny, injustice, and violation of human rights and freedoms. A Trojan horse housing a culture of war lured our culture of peace to viral conquest, subjugation, economic deprivation, closure of houses of worship, and prohibition of foreign language.

A dominant culture mindset replaced a mosaic worldview. Dictatorship overturned democracy. Violence overtook dialogue, freedom of speech savagely crushed. Persecution and poverty replaced peace and prosperity.

I suggest to the world that societies need to transform to peace-loving fixtures, lovers of democracy, hotbeds for freedom. As Armenians, we propagate the values of equality, liberty and fraternity, partly because we know what it means to live under servitude, unemployment, poverty, inequality, persecution and egoism. The preoccupation of Armenians with a culture of peace and altruism is vividly reflected in our prayers. The psychology of Armenian culture is best reflected in the people's deep yearning for khaghaghoutyoun (peace), and parik (good deeds) not only for their people but also for the world. Armenians were never in the habit of shutting the doors of their homes down so neighbors or destitute strangers could always have the food and the shelter they needed. It is no wonder that Armenians were dubbed the

people of altruism.

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My wife and I passed summer-smitten streets of oaks and lush green lawns before sensing the medical smell of the clinic. Our family doctor was stunned when his occipital lobe serenaded with my wife's flat belly. His ark of healing absorbed more shock when he found out that she had not a single baby but a girl and a boy.

We announced the birth of the twins in the local newspaper, and kept calling Montreal practically every day to find out how they were doing. Our greatest concern was attachment or parental bonding. Psychologists had talked about three types of bonding: secure, anxious, and avoidant. My wife and I were prepared for all three possibilities but we never considered the possibility of a fourth option: no bonding. It was painful that neither of us held our babies in our longing arms after their birth. It was painful that we only saw them in incubators and could not touch them, feel their warmth. It was painful that we were distanced from them for a whole month!

We worried considerably about the effect our separation from the twins was going to have on our attachment. Will they ever bond to us like normal kids bond to normal parents? Will they eventually attach to us emotionally and show feelings of warmth and caring? Will they be emotionally distant from us for the rest of their lives because of the lack of opportunity to bond to us from birth? The unknown ate us from inside. Even though we felt the occasional bout of shame for their desertion, we also tried to remind ourselves that the twins were under the best medical care in a reputable hospital, not a crummy orphanage. We dealt with our worries partially by calling long distance practically every day

to find out how our babies were doing. We were being reassured that the twins were doing fine, that as soon as they were five pounds each that we would be able to fetch them and bring them home, and that we should rest as much as possible because there would be no rest once the little people were brought home!

We were also able to cope with our emotional turmoil partly by busying ourselves with the necessities of life. We were lucky that we did have a lot to do. We had to move from our old one-bedroom apartment into a new two-bedroom apartment. We had to prepare their room. As we had to buy everything on the double, we sometimes wished that we were Quebecois residents because we would have qualified for the “buy-one get one free” policy of the La Belle Province.

Fortunately, nights and days did pass quickly and by the time we received the long awaited news that we could pick the twins up and bring them home, we were ready for our journey by train to the Montreal shorelines.

Our trip to the cultural capital of Canada was the longest felt journey in our lives. We checked into a hotel nearby the hospital and stayed there for three days. Every morning, we went to the hospital to practice on parenting the twins: holding them in our arms, feeding them, changing their diapers, etc. We were relieved when we finally signed their discharge papers and carried them to the multimodal transportation hub, Gare Centrale.

It would have been customary to slaughter and asado (roast) a lamb in a fire pit on the occasion of the home welcoming of the twins. We suppressed our urge to pursue such a universal tradition fearing that neighbors would call the police on us as it happened with few Arab, Greek, and Latin American families who practiced the imported Flintstones’ barbecue customs from their countries-of-origin.

Our infants were on a six-times a day feeding schedule. My wife and I had to wake up two o'clock in the morning to change them, feed them and sing them lullabies to put them back to sleep. Our daughter was 'easy baby' and our son a 'difficult baby' wanting everything on a silver platter. By the time they were both satisfied and asleep, and we were about ready to dose off, it was six o'clock, time for their next feeding. I would then have to go to work and come home about five o'clock to relieve my exhausted spouse from her maternal blessings. We went through this routine for about four months at which time we could change the six-times a day feeding schedule to a five-times a day routine.

Looking after two premature little people very quickly taught us what parental stress really meant. We also became acutely aware of the meaning of social support and the need and importance of neighbors and extended family for the physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of not only caregiver parents but also the cared for infants. We wished our babies had neighbors and relatives (grandparents, aunts and uncles) around to help us look after them and to stimulate them intellectually and socially above and beyond what we were doing, and to give them the love and attention they deserved. There may have been a sense of neighborhood or a collective community spirit among the tenants in our building but we did not benefit from it. As for extended family, we had asked my mother to come to Canada. She did not. We learned that her mother, Set Mariam, my archangel, had died and that in her estimate her sister needed her as much, if not more than we did. My mother was visiting her mother and sister, when news came that Set Mariam had extinguished the spark of her last breath. When my mother saw her mother lying in bed dead she broke down and wailed: "Your wish came true. You always wanted me to be near you when you

died and look after your funeral. God granted you your wish.”

We gradually adjusted to our routine with the twins. The public health nurse of our community, Pat, the dear wife of Mr. Rich, the tall social worker friend, was of significant help to us filling the void of neighbors and relatives. Not only did she pay us periodic home visits, she also offered us telephone advice and counsel on a prn basis.

Things were moving along at the home front but not in the vast landscape of life. I was itching for higher education and my desire to scratch was being buttressed by the great deal of tension at work. Interpersonal rivalry and politics were the main culprits. Some of my colleagues and I were hassled over our loyalties and pressured to take sides even though we preferred to remain neutral. Second, I was dissatisfied with my level of formal education and I wanted to go all the way to the top, as I had mentioned to the Canadian immigration officer who interviewed me in the blue country. Even though I grew-up in a relationship culture in which people worked to live, and work was seen both as a job and a social space, I was an ugly duckling in this regard. I seemed to flock the achievement culture in which people lived to work rather than worked to live. My spouse was very supportive of my ambition and was preparing us financially for the eventuality of quitting my job and committing to graduate work. I applied to several universities in Ontario and British Columbia and settled on the university that spoke more to my heart.

Moving to the Maple City was not an easy job especially when you had two youngsters and you had no Canadian experience for relocation. The first thing that we discovered was that the van we had rented was too small to fit in all our furniture. I had to rush all the places that were recommended to arrange for another van. I was lucky to find a mini-van that I could hook to the

back of my blue Chevy. I was able to rent it with the understanding that I had to bring it back the same day. We spent the night at a friend's place with plans to drive to the Maple City early in the morning. Needless to say, we had little sleep that night. As someone has said, moving is only slightly less stressful than getting married. Early in the morning we were on the north-south Highway 400 on our way to our new destination. I was leading the way with the mini-van behind while my friend Bob and his wife Ruth were following us with the big van.

It was a flirtingly radiant August morning. I am not sure how we lost our bearded friend Bob when we changed highways. I suddenly realized that Bob was not behind me anymore. Anxiously, we waited for about half an hour on the shoulder of the busy Highway 401 hoping that Bob will show up. There was no sight of the fun to hang out with Bob. We resumed our journey to the Maple City realizing also that Bob did not have the exact address of our new apartment. All he knew was that we were moving into an apartment on the West side of the city not too far from the University campus. In desperation we contacted the police department and informed them of our predicament. After unloading, I headed up North to return the rented mini-van. There was still no sight of Bob and Ruth when I left.

At eleven o'clock at night when I knocked at the door of our apartment and my wife opened it, I was pleasantly surprised to see Bob and Ruth greeting me with warm smiles on their faces. They did not make a cow out of a fly. 'We had engine trouble,' said Bob in a matter of fact manner as he looked at his wife for validation. 'The mechanical problem would have taken a day or longer to fix, so Ruth and I thought it best to unload the furniture into another van and drive it here,' he added. 'It was sheer luck or a divine miracle that we landed exactly in the parking lot of your

NARRATIVE OF MY *I*

apartment,' the witty Ruth explained. It was your stubborn smarts I blurted!

We had positive vibes about the charmed Maple City from the very first day. The Maple City was a clean, attractive and friendly town, a sought after goddess, and a wonderful space to raise a smiley family.

Chapter 11

Psychic Healing

928-1020 Anno Domini

We, the six Bagratid Kings, Abas I, Ashod III, Sumbat II, Gaghik I, Roupen and Leon (Levon) are proud to remind you that we gave Armenia its second Golden Age, a period historians describe as unprecedented in splendor. As Armenian kings we do not wish to be seen as self-aggrandizers, blowers of our own horn. The reality is that the Armenia of our reign attained a high degree of civilization, and carved a unique calling that represented a synthesis of east and west, much the same way that France carved her unique character of the Germanic North and the Mediterranean Latin.

In addition to engineering the main commercial highway linking the West with Central Asia and the Far East pass through Armenia, we built the City of Kars and laid the foundation of the forty-gated City of Ani and its thousand and one churches as well as the magnificent Cathedral of Ani, a prototype of the transition of Romanesque art to Gothic art and a representation of the genius and creative power of Armenian art, a cradle of culture and Christian art.

Yes, let the world know that the Armenian people are a hardy lot. The West and the East may crack our body but they will never break our spirit. After our ruthless fate, our people migrated in two directions, one group went to Crimea and Moldavia, whereas another group headed for one of the richest provinces of the Byzantine Empire, Cilicia, and gave the Armenian people a new independent Armenian Kingdom, a state with its magnificent

capital Sis and one of the most glorious pages of our history during the Middle Ages. Besides embracing the Eagle, the symbol of power of our ancient Armenian Kingdom, we adopted the lion on the coat of arms of our free, independent and sovereign new kingdom. We integrated to our indigenous culture the best of the prevailing European worldview and its institutions (schools, orphanages, hospitals, and monasteries). We attempted to establish a harmonious relationship with our eastern and western neighbors, striving to bring about a rapprochement between the Church of Armenia and the Roman Catholic Church.

We regret to inform you that our Sis had to surrender to our eastern adversaries in 1375, thus ending our Kingdom, the state of Cilicia. Our King Leon VI was taken prisoner, and exiled to France where he died and was buried at Saint Denys. We also regret to inform you that our Armenian people continued to live as the majority of the population in our rich country of Cilicia under the domination of the Sultan of Egypt until the 16th century and then under the millet rule of the Ottomans.

As the noble heirs of a glorious past, celebrate the legacy of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and its commercial highways, great exchange centers and emporiums, and industrial centers. As their honorable sons and daughters, rejoice the cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Cilicia and its role as a civilizing liaison between the east and the west.

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It was my history teacher, affectionately known as Baron Paruyr who sat face to face, talked and shared so much of the physical pain and mental anguish associated with our collective life. The six feet tall educator had curly brown hair, a long face decorated

with high forehead, and deep brown eyes penetrating in a troubled ocean of victimhood. Baron Paruyr was Adanatzi, from Adana of the Cilician Plain, a most fertile agricultural space, and home to the infamously juicy Adana ground lamb *kebab*. His Zodiac sign was Aquarius and Saturdays and Sundays were considered his lucky days. Like many Armenians, he was easily mistaken for a Jew, consistent with the theory that the Armenian race is a descendent of a tribe of Israel lost in the Lake Van region. Baron Paruyr was an Armenian who knew how to squeeze bread out of stone, optimism out of pessimism, and forgiveness out of vengefulness. As an impressionistic young mind, I saw in Baron Paruyr a personality that radiated a nuanced mixture of an individuality that was eccentric and a collective persona that inspired a sense of community. I had Baron Paruyr as a history teacher for four consecutive years and cherished his soothing demeanor. He was a cultured middle-aged man who exuded happiness with his patience and eternal smile. He was gentle, considerate, kind and kind looking. He treated us males and females with respect and fairness. I do not remember him ever resort to *tzez* (corporal punishment) to discipline any of us, or wounding our tender feelings. He in fact abhorred the use of punishment, the fatherland of which the Armenian novelist Raffi considered ancient Persia. Baron Paruyr was an educator instinctive in his love of his pupils, a human being who had profound understanding and feelings of empathy, and a humanist attempting to reconcile the dissonance between the psychology of the genocide and the psychology of the denial of the genocide.

Baron Paruyr was a staunch advocate for a school system with well-designed, spacious and bright classrooms, opportunities for athletic and artistic expressions, faculty that valued collegiality and involvement of the community such as parents in the welfare

NARRATIVE OF MY I

of the institution. He strived for a classroom climate that was replete with interest, fun and fairness rather than fear, terror and hate, and discrimination. To this end, he advocated the production and dissemination of children's books with particular regard to their linguistic needs, and the use of textbooks and subject matters that were not exclusively focused on Armenians but also included humor, merry topics, and international content that inspired world heroics, valor, morals, and enlightenment.

The bushy mustached Baron Paruyr had the gift of painting and sculpture. He was a walking encyclopedia, and a university of his own. I had a special relationship with him, partly because of my father's vocation and partly due to the special bonding that sometimes develops between teachers and pupils. I remember him citing qualitative studies and anecdotal narratives that touched on the human side of the immediate- and long-term effects of the genocidal experience, particularly the unwieldy psychic pain. I remember him bringing to our attention the following excerpts from a book written by a Harvard graduate in 1919 based on his interviews of Armenian genocide survivors:

“... the horrific scenes haunted me when they happened and I expect they will continue to haunt me for the rest of my life both when I am awake and when I am asleep...
... I feel mental anguish, fear, shock...I experience difficulty to think or sequence my thoughts in a meaningful way... I feel confused, dissonant, in despair, melancholic, and hopeless...the recurring horrific images I see, turn me physically and psychologically into the mythical stone...”

In his narratives, our teacher brought to our attention such authorities on the genocide as Richard Hovannessian, Israel

Charney, Leo Kuper, and Donald and Lorna Miller, among others. He observed that the psychological pain and genocidal scars were profound among the survivors of the Armenian *yeghern*, a combination of confusion, anxiety, depression, and helplessness. He talked about the immediate physical, psychological, social, economic and spiritual sequelae of the collective trauma, its long-term impact on the immediate survivors of the genocide and its contagion effect on the generations that followed, what is known as intergenerational transmission of the genocide trauma.

Baron Paruyr lamented that genocide survivors were not engaged in psychological interventions immediately after the trauma or even decades later to help them work-through their *hokegan daknabner* (emotional turmoil) and deep suffering in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, hyper-arousal, anxiety, depression and grief and heal from their collective shame and survivor guilt. The suffering was more poignant for clergy, particularly priests serving their parishes and having to reconcile on religious grounds anger for the massive human loss and forgiveness. 'Other than meager shelter and snail food, formal mental health services were not known let alone offered to Armenian genocide survivors,' he argued. 'They were left to fend on their own and rely on their own inner resources to cope with their collective and individual traumas, to struggle with the pain of their individual losses and those of friends and relatives,' he surmised. 'In many cases Armenian survivors for decades coped with their psychological pain through silence, somatization of their psychic turmoil, self-blame and guilt, self-doubt, resignation, and yes, God bashing,' he maintained.

Baron Paruyr lamented the fact that the genocide and its denial restrained the Armenian potential from fully actualizing itself. How could a collective heal its genocidal wounds and

physical and mental anguish and mend its many invisible scars when the perpetrator invalidated the very experience of the genocide. 'The memory of the genocide is a fountain that flows through our veins. This is one nostalgic reason why there are no Armenians on the list of Nobel Prize winners,' he acknowledged sadly.

Baron Paruyr lamented equally the fact that the perpetrating nation failed to engage in its own psychic healing and redemption by confronting its evil past, by insisting on facing its unconscionable history, and admitting guilt. Instead it dealt with its red past with denial, persecution, and even revisionist reversal of events. Had the perpetrator nation brought its past to the surface, discussed it and accepted it, it would have been freed to a new beginning and a new life.

Baron Paruyr was fond of the fall season. He spent considerable time watching trees transform to yellow, gold and red and sensing the irony of death in beauty. In his youth, Baron Paruyr was a hostile person, carrying an Armenian chip on his shoulder, an acidic combination of feeling diminished, marginalized and disrespected, and a motivation propelled by anger, resentment and an eternal desire for revenge. At some point in his life, he even was of the opinion that anger and grudge were not at all bad. He argued that without anger injustice went unpunished, and motivation to protect one's self and loved ones diminished.

Over time, Baron Paruyr recognized that one became enslaved by the chip in a manner similar to slavery to a drug. It was this realization one morning when he rose with the sun that changed his outlook to his past and guided his future life. He did not allow as Freud observed his anger to lead to fear, his fear to lead to hate, and his hate to lead to the dark side of his

personality. His *tzoug* (midget) father Monte, an official assessor by profession, self-medicated himself to battle the chaos (starvation, thirst and barefoot world) brought by the Adana massacres in 1909, and the genocide of 1915. The alcohol numbed his emotions and the frightening nightmares of the killing fields. It also disinhibited him enough to displace his pent up anger against the world by acting crazy such as beating his wife under the influence and urinating publically at the statues of corrupt autocrats. It took our teacher sometime to uncover the source of the chip on his shoulder affliction and to acknowledge the futility of his hostile personality. In addition to working through the baggage of his personal and collective past, Baron Paruyr fell in love with his avid storyteller wife and formed his own harmoniously peaceful family.

While Baron Paruyr did not pretend to have definitive answers to the complexities of life, he wanted the act of forgiveness, as a psychological pathway to emotional freedom adopted because his thoughts on psychic healing excluded anger, outrage, hate of the perpetrator, or revenge. While there were subscribers to the psychology of hate and revenge, Baron Paruyr did not espouse those views. He believed justice could be served without anger, hate or violence. He well knew innumerable aging Armenians of the post genocide generation still haunted by the story of the genocide, awaiting a type of treatment or solution that would bring relief to their felt rage and anger. He believed in the value of forgiveness to the prevailing chronic state of psychic turmoil of the survivor victims. "Forgiveness means releasing the soul from self-blame and the perpetrator from punishment," he ascertained. 'Forgiveness is not equal to forgetting nor does it diminish our collective experience of victimization,' he clarified. "Cultivation of the psychology of forgiveness helps with psychic

healing for the benefit of our individual wellbeing, both mental and physical and our collective welfare and efficacy. Forgiveness reduces stress, eliminates distress such as depression and anxiety, and diminishes the toxicity of anger, bitterness and resentment to our hearts and our minds,” he posited. “To thrive individually and as a collective we need to forgive to free ourselves from the psychology of victimhood,” he surmised.

Baron Paruyr’s person and philosophy of life unknowingly served as a daily dose of eclectic therapy for our trying times—memories of the collective trauma, struggles with our daily routines of life, inner conflicts, relationship issues, and fear of the unknown. The school for him was not a Dickensonian warehouse of seeds of facts but a humane space for intellectual and psychic growth if not healing. He believed the school a beacon of critical thinking and the classroom a fountain of shared experiences of love for one another and one’s righteous enemy, of ‘in-group and out-group ethics;’ and of respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms. Human rights and freedoms for him comprised the right to honor and reputation, safety, freedom of expression, rest, and participation in the arts, leisure, and play.

The landscape Armenians found refuge in the wake of the genocide was a hotbed for sowing religious conflicts, wars, civil unrest and autocrats intolerant of free thought and expression. Hearts hardened, crying considered ‘emotional incontinence.’ In the middle of a rainbow night, civilian dressed internal security vigilantes knocked on Baron Paruyr’s door and apprehended him as an enemy of the state. After dragging him to the screams of his devastated wife and sleepy daughters, Knarig and Shoghig, he was housed in a Nobel Prize worthy torture chamber on the outskirts of the capital. Three Marquis de Sade days later, a half-cloudy Saturday he was released to a widow and orphan maker

NARRATIVE OF MY *I*

heart attack.

In the half-sunny Saturdays of life, Baron Paruyr inflames his pupils with poetic dances of love, tolerance, and hope.

Chapter 12

Salt Bread Friendship*1872 Anno Domini*

I, Raffi, am a modest Armenian historical novelist even though I have been dubbed the Armenian Victor Hugo and even father of modern Armenian psychology. We Armenians are a modest people, and I am not deserving of these honors. Please allow me to observe that history seems preoccupied with anything and everything excepting the people-their dreams, tribulations, and aspirations. I suggest to you that history is not about rulers and their battles and conquests; it is about the evolution of humanitarian ideals. History is not about secular rulers and their executions; it is about invisible wives, daughters and sons, who stand behind the oppressed, pray for them, heal their wounds, and empathize their losses. History is not about the triumphs of conquerors and despots but about human rights and freedoms and the restoration of justice. History is not about religious rulers, their dogmas, and their jihadist battles; it is about the moral imperatives of love, hope, tolerance, forgiveness, and peace.

These ideals are ingrained in us because we were the Armenian people who gave the international community its first convention for human rights and freedoms, the inalienable right to life and liberty, and the pursuit of peace and happiness when we defended our Christian faith in 484 AD, thus predating the Magna Carta by 731 years.

My affluent father's bankruptcy was a turning point in my life. I suddenly was thrown into the role of feeding the mouths of nine family members. For the first time in my life, I appreciated the real

meaning of poverty and the devastating role it played in the physical, psychological, social and spiritual livelihood of my people and all humanity. I deliberated for long the question of how we as an Armenian collective could free ourselves from our mental slumber. It seemed to me that the ideals of freedom and intellectual liberation could only materialize through enlightenment. Enlightenment to me meant an Armenian mind that was free and daring. A freethinking mind was independent and questioning. A freethinking mind was thinking that was liberated from dogmatism and the Pen, the notions of fate, luck, and predestination. We had to shake the Armenian mind from the crippling thinking that as a people, we were predestined to slavery, or even extermination. We had to challenge our ingrained belief that we deserved our miserable lot because it was what the Pen had written. The divine is not anti-people. The divine gamk (will) is not destruction of the world.

I was preoccupied with the Armenian mind since my childhood. I struggled for a long time with such questions as who I am, why I am in this world, what is my role in life, and what contribution could I make to my people and humanity. These were tough questions and the road to self-discovery, a mixed process. I had to go too deep into the Armenian psyche, the collective unconscious, and question everything I had been taught as a child by my parents, teachers, the clergy, and our political leaders. I had to uncover the black and white spots of our secular culture and culture of religion so I could discover the truth about my authentic self myself. In narrating my observations and analyses on our secular and religious cultures, many were shocked and considered my writings blasphemous. I did nevertheless draw the painful conclusion that the wild animals enjoyed a more decent life than our colonized people, particularly

our women, and called for institution of human rights and freedoms.

I have no regrets. My own critical thinking on our secular culture and culture of religion, and those of other Armenian enlighteners resulted, if nothing in our collective separation of state and religion without compromise to our morals. As a people, we should feel proud that we collectively reached such a fundamental understanding, an understanding that is emulated by the Western communities and will be emulated by the rest of the world.

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The twins were cooking cognitively, emotional and behaviorally. They were a little bit tinier than kids of their own age; however, they were as smart and as naughty as other children. In view of the importance of language in the development of our children, we had to decide what tongue to speak with the twins. We opted for English first, Armenian second, perhaps to the dismay of a group of Armenians who subscribed to the Armenian first, English second approach. We left a third language out to use to our advantage when we wanted to say something to each other but did not want the twins to know what we were saying. We were confident that the bilingual home environment would have a positive effect on the social identity of our children in conveying pride in their Canadian and Armenian heritage.

We lived in an apartment; it was the only physical space we could afford as a student father and a homemaker mother. I was earning some money as a graduate assistant but not enough to live a life of abundance. My wife applied for a job to help support the family financially. She found a job very easily but she had to

quit because we, as other young couples, had chronic problems with baby-sitters.

I do not believe we did anything wrong in choosing caretakers for our children; we even made sure we checked their references. Cindy, one of our chosen baby sitter was a university student. We really liked her and she similarly liked us. On one occasion, however, she took the twins out for fresh air but on her return from the outing failed to tell us that our daughter somehow had hurt her finger. After she left, we noticed that our smiley daughter was not her usual smiley self. After a little bit of physical searching, we discovered that her finger was infected and took her to the hospital emergency department immediately.

Our second baby-sitter was Mrs. Woodland, the sacrificial wife of a Canadian military officer who was away from home quite a bit. She was pleased at the prospect of baby-sitting her children and our twins because for her baby-sitting twins was such a feast. Our experience with Mrs. Woodland proved problematic and short-lived. When we dropped the twins to her every morning we supplied plenty of lunch, dinner and snacks for the oral bunch. To our amazement, the twins demanded food as soon as we arrived home and acted as if they had nothing to eat all day. When we discussed the issue with her openly she admitted that she was having a hard time performing the job and putting less than the required effort to look after her own children and ours because of what we surmised as clinical depression under treatment. We were determined not to discriminate on the basis of psychological disorder nor to compromise our children's well being.

My wife had to make a final choice between her career and her children. The imperative of the family as the universe has been such a compelling cultural value orientation and so circular in her blood that she chose family over career. My wife did not get

NARRATIVE OF MY I

paid for staying home for quality parenting. She spent much of her time stimulating the twins intellectually and socially as well as attending to their healthy if not enriched growth and development. There were no known standards for perfect parenting, and we never pretended that we were super parents even though like all decent mothers and fathers we strived for Adlerian perfection, actively seeking to improve ourselves. While we felt amused by slapstick humor (a poor soul tripping on a banana peel), we vowed not to be party to the generational transmission of child rearing beliefs and practices that we experienced or witnessed as children and construed as maladaptive. We considered a combination of humanistic, behavioristic and social learning assumptions to our child rearing practices with full emphasis on the empirically supported dictum that action speaks louder than words.

University became my academic mistress for a couple of years. I sold my soul to my scholarly seductress, making sure to please her with hard work, and did not hear any complaints. My wife was accepting of my deep attachment to my intellectual mistress and was a great help in allowing me to meet her expectations. She typed and retyped several versions of my dissertation, and made the required changes for final approval. The two academic years passed quickly, and it was time for convocation. Naturally, my wife tried to take as many pictures as possible at the graduation ceremonies. To our later dismay, the film failed to role. We had to re-rent a gown and a hood for a day, so we could reenact a few commemorative shots on campus.

The post-graduation blues was a well-known reality in the academia-a feeling of loss and apprehension after graduation coupled with the emptiness of the friendship nest. In our case, a graduate friend left for Saskatchewan, another to Sault St. Marie,

and yet another to Bellville. Close friends going where the opportunities arose that I experienced in Canada was a nuanced *deja vu* of my experience in Lebanon some years earlier. Friendship relationships among university students in Canada involved an adaptive element of 'some distance' because they were based on the premise of temporariness rather than permanence, the inevitable reality of 'going where the opportunities arose.' The inevitable separation, nevertheless, did not preclude the indisputable genuine caring that all of us had for each other.

I could not allow my post-graduation depression get the better of me. Life sends no more than three doves of opportunity to every person in this world. Some people recognize life's gifts and accept them. These people are the fortuitous ones. Others fail to recognize any of life's three doves. These people are the unwise ones. I had no difficulty in recognizing life's doves and lucked out in terms of a position in my field, becoming a Canadian citizen, and purchasing a house. Securing a job was a pressing matter that required diligence. I turned down a job offer in a western city because I did not like the drug scene at the time. I accepted a position in the Maple City, and made the conservative community our home, a safe sanctuary for the family.

At the conclusion of our five-year stay in the country, we applied for our Canadian citizenship. The judge who interviewed us was a retired military officer who turned to be a gentleman with the true sense of the word. We talked about the Middle East, the Armenian people, the psychology profession, particularly the crippling human emotions of anxiety and depression, and life in Canada. Judge Sherbuk knew the Middle East well, as he had served in the army and was stationed in that part of the world for a number of years. His Honor recalled reminding his children of

the starving Armenians, as did other Canadian parents, when their young ones did not eat everything served on their plates. He also shared with us his experience few years back with an elderly Armenian lady applicant for citizenship. Mrs. Anoushian expected her interview to last no longer than fifteen minutes. When she entered Judge Sherbuk's chamber and realized that he was giving her the third degree, and exceeding the fifteen minutes she had allotted for the interview, she looked straight at him and said in a scolding tone, "Judge, you ask too many questions. I am an old woman and I forget things like these." His Honor looked at her with an empathic smile and acquiesced, "So do I Mrs. Anoushian; we're done."

One lingering issue in our life was the confining affect of the apartment in which two adults and two children were living. We decided to quickly free ourselves from the spell of the confinement and get into the business of searching for a family house. While my grandfather had more than a hut in his fatherland before his expulsion, I had never owned a land, let alone a land with a house on it. We settled on a three-bedroom house in the East side of town on the advice of a friend who failed to inform us the industrial nature of the eastern sections of towns in North America.

Soon after our induction, my wife and I reflected on our lives even though we were not in Erikson's late adulthood (age 65 to death) psychosocial stage of development. The outcome of our reflection was integrity rather than despair, a feeling of a sense of gratification that we had in Armenian tradition made 'something' of ourselves. The twins were now of school age. We enrolled them in the local neighborhood school and they seemed happy with teachers, friends and neighbors. Neither of them showed any signs or symptoms of separation anxiety or school phobia. We ourselves were happy with the neighbors in our street, in

particular with our next-door neighbors who coincidentally were from a well-known town in the Bekaa Valley. They and their grown-up children became our close friends, and indispensable part of our social space in Canada. Aisha and Najib turned surrogate parents to us, sharing our triumphs and tribulations in life. On one of our morning get-togethers, my wife offered Armenian (aka Turkish) coffee to Mr. Najib. Our kind and gentle neighbor took a sip of the coffee, and we sensed discoloration on his face. He composed himself quickly, looked at my wife with an exposed golden tooth and informed her with an apologetic neighborly smile that he thought that she had put salt in the coffee instead of sugar! My mother had visited us and in the process of help with clean up had rearranged the kitchen shelves, including the canisters. Few years later, our neighbor and dear friend died of a heart attack because of heavy smoking. Having married her three sons and two daughters, and having lost her inseparable husband, Aisha moved back to her village in the southern end of the fertile Bekaa valley to live among farming kin.

Within few years, we decided to leave our east end neighborhood and move to the north end because of its proximity to the university and availability of an academically stronger high school. We were not happy that we did not make a profit from the sale of our house but reckoned this is life; some do some do not. Our two-story four-bedroom house was in a well-established affluent community though a difficult neighborhood to penetrate socially. Neighbors were important for us; as an Armenian proverb orchestrated, "A near neighbor is better than a distant kinsman." Puccini's *O Mio Babbino Caro* and De Curtis's *Torna a Surriento* helped the stiff neighbors gradually resolve the neighborhood complex.

While I liked my children's school and their faculty and staff

as they did, I was not sure that the touchy-feely experiential learning was the ideal for the self-actualization of pupils, the notion 'what students can be, must be.' My intuitive sense was that the prevailing humanistic philosophy to education was best suited for internally motivated students, those with the natural desire to learn and that those motivated externally floundered in the humanist ocean of transcendence.

We were content that our children were indulged in extracurricular activities that made their characters count. We did enjoy our children's band concerts with the music teacher conducting. One of our favorite concerts was a piece of music performed by the school band. Armenian Dances Part I was written by one of America's most prolific composer, arranger, conductor and editor, Alfred Reed in which as the music teacher explained the Manhattan Island born Reed 'captured many of the styles, tempos and subtleties of the Armenian folk songs and dances.' Our kids of course left this a surprise, and a pleasant surprise it was. The four-movement suite comprised five authentic folk songs from the collection of the Armenian ethnomusicologist, Komitas Vartabed: *Tzirani Tzar* (The Apricot Tree), *Gakavi Yerk* (The Partridge's Song), *Hoy, Nazan Eem* (Hoy, My Nazan), *Alagyaz* (a mountain in Armenia), and *Gna, Gna* (Go, Go). My wife and I felt ecstatic listening to our childhood songs and the exciting conclusion of the piece. We could not help but show our ethnocentrism by talking to the teacher after the concert and thanking him for his special selection.

In addition to the theatrics of video music through the MTV cable network, the prevailing youth culture witnessed the challenge of fashion and the life of such brand names as Polo, Canadian Beaver, Benetton, Lacoste, and so on. The worth of kids in schools and in neighborhoods seemed primarily measured

not by their character but by the brand name garbs they wore to school and on the streets. Even in the individualist cultures in which the I and the pursuit of personal goals, self-reliance, non-conformity and competition assumed primacy, the materialistic collective—identification with, loyalty to and dependence on the in-group prevailed. Brand-name attires, the superficial aura of cloth-grounded coolness rather than love served the artificial function of social identity and dilution of individuality. Many parents could afford supporting the brand-name attire culture. Kids whose parents could not afford the expensive brand-name garbs made their parents miserable, made themselves wretched thinking they were not cool kids, or resorted to deviant means such as stealing money to be cool.

You never know people until you eat a barrel of salt with them. Social isolation was more universal than anyone cared to admit, and many newcomers went back home or became paper citizens primarily because they were dissatisfied with the social gulf. Our next-door immigrant neighbors with whom we developed a friendship relationship had been living in the neighborhood for the past ten years and they still didn't know their next-door neighbors. Mrs. Yasmine related to us that one day she was in excruciating pain, and that her 7-year old son went out on the street, and started yelling "daddy, daddy" so as to attract the attention of neighbors. He came in crying for failing to attract the attention of any of the neighbors. Mrs. Yasmine reflected, "What kind of life is this? We are not happy here because of it. Back home we knew our neighbors and they knew us. We went to our neighbors for coffee, breakfast, advice, and help and they did the same. We love Canada but here you exist for your neighbors but your neighbors don't exist for you." Criticism was not taken well by a few insensitive locals who labeled any non-British or non-

NARRATIVE OF MY I

French newcomer with a negative comment about Canada as an ungrateful immigrant. If immigrants were cathartic of their negative experiences with employers and other workers, they were reminded to remind themselves how lucky they were to have a job, to quit whining, and to be grateful and thankful to Canada for availing them the opportunity for employment. The more hostile locals were not shy in telling you “if you don’t like it here, why don’t you go back to where you came from.”

I was equally preoccupied with Albert Camus’ inclusion of the ‘not’ in the injunction ‘To be happy, we must not be too concerned with others.’ The existence of differences in the personalities of cultures, and their conflicted worldviews inform or deform social relationships. Collectivist cultures define the ‘we’ of a person’s self-image whereas individualist cultures define the ‘I’ as an agent of the self; tight societies exercise more authoritarian rules and less civil liberty than loose ones; and masculine cultures smell more dominance, wealth and hedonism than the social caring and cooperation of feminine cultures. It is foolish to deny Canada being one of the top countries in the world offering quality of life and one of the happiest spaces in the world, a multicultural nation dreaming hybrid cultures of individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, and tightness and looseness. What really matters though is an earthly paradise in which friendships preclude denial of history and heritage.

Chapter 13

Apricots and Eggs

1915 AD

I am a politician. I am proud of our empire and its millet system because it recognized our minorities and gave them all sorts of rights and freedoms, though not to the extent of our own blood citizens. Certainly, the rights and freedoms they enjoyed under our rule were far superior to the rights and freedoms Westerners provided to their minorities. I take the liberty of speaking on behalf of my ruling party and the intellectuals of my time. Our nationalism superseded our multiconfessionalism ideals. Religious minorities such as Armenians, Greeks and Jews were cancerous to our nationalist aspirations. The truth cannot be silenced forever. Those who claim we were in a civil war and that we deported rather than massacred Armenians are dead wrong on both counts. It is a historic fact that the Armenian genocide was anything but alleged, and that as many of our nationals died in civil strife is irrelevant. I feel no shame in telling you that the annihilation of the Armenian millet was anything but an impulsive act on my part and those of my colleagues in power. As some scholars, Armenian and non-Armenian are proving, it was premeditated and represented a resmi (official) planning at the level of the central authorities to realize a decisive and final solution to the inherited Armenian question. What is more, we were guided by sociological theory, knew exactly what we were doing, and we used plenty of psychology to signal the coming storm to our own people and the rest of the world.

Allow me to describe few of the details. We engineered an inevitable permeation of psychological coldness between our people and the Armenian giavours in as many communities and neighborhoods as possible. This was not difficult to do. On different occasions, we used slips of the tongue to remind our faithful millet how our predecessors had failed to deal with the inferior minorities, how we had inherited the Armenian minority problem, and our readiness to forever remove the chronic thorn in our butt. We threatened the Patriarch that any revolt on the part of the Armenians would result in severe repercussions, fully knowing that the Armenians had no intention of revolting against us. We insulted an Armenian here and an Armenian there. We cursed an Armenian here and an Armenian there. We shut our ears to random arrests or killings of Armenians in one village here and one village there. We allowed mobs rob their Armenian neighbors or rape their women in one neighborhood here and one neighborhood there. We incited pogroms on Armenian neighborhoods and spread similar rumors in other Armenian communities.

I was gratified when I heard reports that the psychological precursor we strategically put in motion did in fact create the intended anguish and mental confusion among the Armenian collective. Their mental anguish gradually took the better of them. We saw them try every trick in the books to make sense of what was happening and alleviate their free-floating anxieties and incapacitating worries. Initially, they tried to reassure themselves that everything was kosher, that they had nothing to fear, and that they should continue their daily routines. The collective dissipation of anxieties and worries of course was temporary as they witnessed repeat performances of insults, curses, rapes and planted news about pogroms. We noticed a dramatic increase in

their need for affiliation and for prayer. We saw them visit each other more and share incessantly stories they had heard. We also noticed many started showing severe mental disturbances in the form of hallucinations, either auditory or visual.

Of course, we knew that the climate of confusion and anguish that we created was a catalyst. The mental world of our intended victims was so overwhelmed with confusion that they turned extra vigilant, and eventually succumbed to a sheep mentality. We considered the vast majority in whom we were successful in engendering the psychological state of sheepishness dead even before putting into motion the next step of our master plan, physical annihilation of the Armenian millet, meticulously documented by foreign and local eyewitnesses and the unfortunate survivors of the genocide.

On April 24, 1915, we gathered elite Armenian leaders (intellectuals, writers, teachers, lawyers, doctor and deputies) the likes of Krikor Zohrab, Gomidas Vartabed, and Arisdekes Kasparyan, detained and executed them, no need for details. We made the Armenian people in their own fatherland leaderless sheep not only mentally but also physically. Next we targeted the battle-age men, those between the ages of 20-45 in the six eastern provinces: Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Diyarbaekir, Sivas, and Kharpert. As I mentioned earlier, we had been demonizing the Armenian men as revolutionary traitors. We rounded-up all the battle-age men in masses, and under the pretense of exile, we neutralized them group by group. Our soldiers executed the men with axes, clubs, hammers, saws, scythes, and spades because these methods were more economical than powder and shell. What was also gratifying was that our gendarmes did use rifles with some of the cancerous Armenians after compelling them to dig their graves before shooting them.

We next targeted the women, children, and the old men, relying on different strategies to get rid of them permanently such as loading them into barges to be taken off to the high seas for drowning; crowding them in wooden houses to burn them alive; and ordering their expulsion in death caravans to the Arabian deserts.

I thank our luck that in our days there were no human rights agencies of the likes of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. My stomach churns every time they issue discourses on sexual violence as war crime, as crime against humanity, and as torture. We had our human rights watches in our days, the likes of Henry Morgenthau and Viscount Bryce, but these were lambs compared to the contemporary human rights watch wolves. I wonder what would have become of us leaders if a Paris Tribunal, akin to the Nuremberg Tribunal to hold us accountable.

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His name was Aram. As all children, Aram loved his grandmother share with him Armenian proverbial sayings, and folklore, and entertain him with her magical stories.

At story time, Aram's Mediterranean temperament would give to the Nordic. He would sit quietly and listen to his grandmother's fictional and real stories; stories that would raise gooseflesh on his arms and the hairs at the back of his neck. Digin Gulen would follow oral tradition in telling Aram her stories. As all traditional Armenian grandmothers, she had no books to read stories from, nor her grandchildren follow pictures as pages were turned. As someone has said before, her happiness was not at the expense of the misery of someone else.

Aram loved the magic of his grandmother's fictional stories

because they afforded him the time to be physically close to his grandmother, an aging woman who had nothing to offer him other than the generativity of old age. Digin Gulen's fictional narratives informed him that life was not simply a rose-garden, that life had its twists and turns as well as predicaments that had to be confronted and overcome.

Fictional stories were not the only oral dramas that nourished Aram's childhood memory. He also heard disturbing narratives of forced deportations and losses, human, material and cultural. Digin Gulen was an unusual victim survivor in the clarity of the terrors in her memory. The genocide did not render her mute for decades, as it did to many of her contemporaries. Somehow, she had the inner strength to face-up to the details of her trauma and cathart her tragic experiences, verbally express her deep-seated emotions without breaking down psychically. The genocide stories she told were the world she lived in and the horrific events she had no choice but to witness. In addition to expressing her feelings to other family members by offering them food, narration of her traumatic experiences afforded her the time to be physically and emotionally close to them, and to reconstruct the meaning of the genocide and her tormented life.

Aram listened to his grandmother Gulen's genocidal narratives with clouds of melancholy. While Digin Gulen related to inspiring "Armenian Schindlers," most of her narratives were traumatizing: starvation, dehydration, rapes, kidnappings, and 'soldiers' coming down from the hills and mountains to loot, to snatch older girls, and to look out for pregnant women for entertainment, betting on the sex of the child and piercing women's bellies with their swords to see if they won or lost the bet.

The genocide narratives Grandma Gulen shared were not

figments of her imagination, nor were they revisionist historical accounts constructed to seed intergenerational hate. People read Yervant Odian, an eminent Armenian genocide survivor and satirist; narratives on Sebil, the enormous field East of Aleppo, in which thousands of deported Armenians were stationed before their final destination to the fire caves of the mighty desert, Der Zor.

In her early eighties, Digin Gulen could still vividly see the scattered tents in which thousands of wretched souls were succumbing to death every day from typhoid and dysentery, and their bodies were being stripped naked for need of clothing and underwear and taken away in carriages in piles of 10-12 corpses. In her eight decade of life, she could still acutely feel the pain of the child trade that was going on in the tents. She could see the city locals coming with their carriages to the tents and asking if there were children for sale. They were offering a few silver coins as the price for their daily catch. She could hear the locals settling the trade of the girls with starving mothers so they could take them home and use them as slave maids. Digin Gulen could smell the starving children being lured with apricots and boiled eggs. She could still see the 10-year old Azad lured first with an apricot, and the promise that she could have the boiled egg in the carriage. Yes, poor Azad. How could a human being erase from memory the image of the starving Azad lounging on the apricot like a wild animal and gulping it down? How could humanity stay indifferent to the innocent Azad following the boiled egg to the carriage as sheep follow grass, while slipping the occasional tearful glance at her dazed mother and sister? Who is responsible for the life of the mother who traded her child for two silver coins and then committed suicide by throwing herself at the wheels of the moving carriage after realizing what she had done. Who was

responsible for Digin Gulen's desperate existence and revulsion for apricots and boiled eggs for the rest of her life?

Grandma Gulen turned particularly pale and half-dead when she narrated the Der Zor inferno-the cramming of herds of Armenians in the desert caves and burning them alive.

Digin Gulen never ate apricots or boiled eggs in her post-genocide life, nor did she have fun telling and retelling her genocide-survivor stories. While her episodic narrating of her genocidal stories served the purpose of ridding her of the survivor-guilt, they also made her physically and psychologically ill for days. Her genocidal nightmares were so disturbing and her bouts of hypertension and depression were so acute and life-threatening that she had to be hospitalized on a number of occasions and had to take different types of medications for the rest of her compromised life. Grandma Gulen could not get over the nightmare of the carriage taking away her sister and cracking her mother's skull open.

Digin Gulen was a real genocide survivor. She was not Aram's figment of imagination. As an unwilling witness to the oral history of the genocide, Aram's view of himself had immersed into a complex ocean of inferiority in which an immense need for the reason for the assault on the Armenian collective agitated. He remembered his grandmother's most distressing assertion-the propensity of the dominant culture mindset to wipe a state-protected religious minority. And his most innocent queries to his grandmother-why didn't the world stop this from happening and why are the perpetrators denying what they did or silencing those from their ranks who are daring to speak the truth?

Aram was well dressed when he showed up to my office. On the surface he seemed calm and at ease. On the inside he was hopelessly distressed. The fact that I was an Armenian was a

solace to his fragile and tormented mind. He spoke in a soft voice and processed information slowly. He avoided eye contact and seemed simultaneously apprehensive and at ease in my presence. A week earlier his oldest brother, Dikran had contacted me to know what they should do with Aram. The family and neighbors first, the leaders of the *agoump* (community center) second, and the church minister third had all talked, advised, cajoled and even threatened Aram to give up acting crazy to no avail. "We are at a loss. We no longer know what to do with him. Aram needs hospital help," his brother Dikran admitted on the telephone. "I'll do what I can," my stunned voice replied.

Aram did not want the community to know that he was in hospital, let alone in a *khentanotz* (mental hospital). He also did not want his family to know that he had told me that he had resented their beatings for the past six months. "They don't understand that I have *mdayin daknabner* (inner turmoil) and that their beatings will not help emancipate me from the tyranny of the genocide," he engineered in desperation.

The community's exasperation with Aram did not surprise me. Families may not understand the difference between a person with a problem and a problem person. Aram was a family member with a problem and needed empathic understanding and compassionate support. While Aram's problem could be attributed to intrapsychic factors such as emotional clashes of sexual if not violent nature within him, a result of bad parenting according to Western thinking, factors external to Aram and his family such as the trauma of intergenerational poverty, injustice, ethnic cleansing, and disillusionment are also possibilities.

It did not surprise me how quickly Aram opened up to me and shared his most inner thoughts. Somehow, he was able to remove the fig leaf for the pain of genocide. Since his

grandmother Gulen had died, he had been tormented with voices he had been hearing ordering him to go to the Middle East and join an Armenian liberation army led by Arnold Schwarzenegger to liberate the occupied western Armenian land. He had also developed the belief that the CIA, the Interpol and the RCMP in cahoots with enemy agents were on the look out for him, and that he had to hide from them lest they get hold of him and put him in jail for his ideals of justice and reparation. Since his grandmother Gulen had died, he had been reliving the nightmares he had heard from her and feeling distressed from the crying spells he had witnessed her having. "Myself, I can't any more live with the burden of the genocide survivor child," Aram told me and followed his shame with the rhetorical question, "How can I? Look, I even could not help my own grandmother live a tranquil life."

I retired to bed early that night with rekindled genocidal narratives of my own. At dawn, the disturbing telephone interrupted my disturbed soul. In spite of all precautions, Aram had managed to wrap the rope of his gown around his troubled agency.

Chapter 14

Zest for Life

2015 AD

We are the conscience of our country, the liberal intellectuals. We are the voice of our modern and democratic country. We are the unveiled voice of our just people. We genuinely believe that the Armenian genocide should have a sphere and a memory in our country. We regret that our intellectual brothers and sisters are hated, berated, and called traitor by some of our countrymen. We are distressed that countrymen calling for human justice are being charged with disloyalty to our nation-state because of breaking with tradition and daring to tell the truth. We regret that our nation-state and conservative segment of our society are persecuting our intellectual comrades for exercising their right for civil free speech, and accusing them of denigrating our country's reputation, and even threatening to put them in jail.

We are particularly disturbed that our government considers the Armenian genocide a state sanctioned taboo subject and is persecuting our liberal intellectuals who are daring to touch the soul of the topic. What is fundamental here is the recognition that the state prohibition of public discussion of our own history in our own country is a violation of freedom of expression. As the intellectual consciousness of our nation-state, we find it appalling that our state condones the burning of books that it deems threatening to its vision of history. What stain our country's history it seems to us are not our freethinkers; it is the "impossibility to speak freely."

We maintain that the black spots in our history need public airing. We have no doubt that our colleague a Nobel Laureate also believes that all countries in the world, and not just ours, need public airing of their black spots in history to purge their sins once and for all. The Germans did it, so did the Canadians, Americans, Australians, and French. Tagging courageous citizens as liberal intellectuals, demonizing them by calling them traitors and blowers of the nation's image, smacking them in the nose, punching them in the face, kicking them in the shin, and not denouncing fanatics who murder them will not silence the truth. Accusing those who exercise their democratic right to speak their mind and expressing their opinions with civility and prosecuting them, as criminals will not change the truth.

The prevailing psychology of denial of the wrong our ancestors did is self-defeating. Veiling our history will not free our country from its violation of human rights and freedoms and what is more important it will not combat existing prejudice and discrimination against minority citizens.

We are for criminalization of the denial of genocides, the same way that the act of Holocaust denial is criminalized.

In the case of Armenians, there are no perpetrators in our country prepared to look Armenian genocide survivors and their children in the eye because they are all dead. Nevertheless, the time has come for our state and in the name of the people to commit itself publicly to recognition of the Armenian genocide and the initiation of a genuine healing process to the lingering wounds of the Armenians and the guilt-ridden conscience of our own people. The Armenian genocide has been traumatic to Armenians, our people, and the international community. Our people have as many nightmares about the black spot of our history as the Armenian people do. Both God-fearing people need

to acknowledge the wrongs that were done and heal their wounds that span over a century. There is honor, not shame, in seeking forgiveness and there is honor, not shame, in bestowing forgiveness. Our people, the Armenian people, and the international community will welcome such a peace-building initiative and all will benefit from the humanity of reconciliation.

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The summers of the Maple City where I lived with my family ranged from warm to hot and the winters from cold to brutal cold. We lived in a neighborhood where people talked with their minds more so than their hearts. Our detached two-story house had a fair size backyard and a vegetable garden frequented by mosquitos and wild rabbits chased by Joey and Dusty, our sequential cats. Our rainbow neighbors did have a sense of community, as we did but we were all miserly when it came to get-togethers of the social kind. Other than the friendly ‘nice day’ or ‘nice weather’ routines, there were little visitations let alone invitations to each other’s nuclear sanctuaries. Safety is antithetical to the human need for affiliation.

My wife was not of the complaining type. One wintry evening when it was below 35 and the snow above her ears, she claimed that my preoccupation with the narrative of my I was my mistress; a mistress that was tough competition. She was right. History in my family was repeating itself, grandfather was seemingly married to his religion, father was seemingly married to his literary work, and now I am seemingly married to my narratives. I became obsessed with collective memories of identity, culture, and trauma, a state of mind above and beyond the psychological itch to dig shadows to know. My soma and psyche for a long time

were preoccupied with the effect of the collective trauma on the fountains of my childhood and my youth, the shaping of my personality. I was not looking for regression to the womb nor a physical upgrade through culinary, pharmaceutical or surgical cosmetics. It seemed that once the process was unleashed, it took a long and an uneven journey of its own and an uncertain outcome. My intent was not merely an intellectual paper pushing exercise but rather a psychological odyssey to deconstruct the hidden past and the possibility of re-constructing a new meaning to life, a liberation of the soul. At times I wished for a truth pill.

The collective trauma stole forever my intergenerational family's zest for life. In our family, our psychic fountains of childhood were so preoccupied with the eudaimonic of life to deal with the unhealed wounds of the collective trauma that the hedonic channels of our psyche were blocked if not shut down completely. Our open eudaimonic veins and shut down hedonic canals were to our detriment in that we realized our natural well being, happiness, quality of life, and collective ideals partially rather than fully. Our lives followed a top-down rather than a bottom up pathway. Despite our earlier developmental handicaps, we somehow succeeded in the virtue of love, building nests of intimacy, establishing careers for ourselves, and giving back to the community through our children, our work and our voluntarism. Yes our eudaimonic life style helped us make something of ourselves, hold the ideal of citizenry of 'giving, not just taking' and yet it also forced us to go through the motions of life rather than its pleasures.

There is always a price to trauma. Our fountains of childhood and youth all along were simply flat their flatulence being independent of our temperament and the hardships and adversities in our life. We were so preoccupied with the larger

NARRATIVE OF MY I

things in life such as meaning, human rights, justice, ethics, and self-transcendence that we failed to cultivate the zest of our life, missing out on the smaller pleasures of the mind and the body of the good life. We did not learn the pleasures to savor the chocolate ice cream one is eating; we learned to gobble it down.

Victimhood drains energy; empowerment vitalizes it. A black winter foreshadows a green spring. The narrative of my I invokes that the time is more than ripe to break the cycle of enslavement to the tragedy of the past, and invest what has remained of our aged memories and emotions on the dimension of renewal and rebirth, the hedonistic high of the fountain of life. The linguistic neurons of the brains of Armenian children for centuries are wired to negative emotions such as anxious, fearful, pained, panicky, worried, sad, inferior, humiliated, violated. I want the fountain of my life to spring positive emotions such as calm, tranquil, content, authentic, dignified, joyful, passionate, and fulfilled. I want to reclaim the zest of life. Zest was absent in my post genocidal intergenerational clan; it did not figure in the male and female role models in my family. Zest was absent in my life; it did not erode on my journey from childhood to adulthood. I want to consciously engage life. When I wake up each morning, I want to feel alive, not tired and depleted. I want to rise up full of energy and excitement, vitality and enthusiasm, vigorous mentally and physically, engaged and activated. I want current and future generations of parents to build vital and energetic personalities so they can shape a vital and energetic personality in their children. I want my fountain of aging zestful.

Autumn was my favorite season because I feared the winter season and the possibility of missing on Nelson Mandela's iconic lesson on forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. Many four seasons blessed our way. The twins grew physically,

NARRATIVE OF MY I

psychologically, socially, and spiritually, and were attending university. My full-time job came to a halt in June with forced early retirement ideologically driven by the motto, 'putting people first.' Forgiveness worked as a balm for my hurt and angry feelings. It healed me emotionally, psychologically and physically; helped me forget the wrong and move on with my life. On retrospect, the 'forced early retirement' earthly curse was a blessing in disguise, as the expression goes. The maple tree of tolerance, unity and peace had benefitted from our 'generativity' of thirty years. The opportunity now arose to share our wisdom in needy nations. And the cedar of memory, freedom and hope, the protector and nurturer of the survivors of the yeghern (calamity) of our people, my clan, fit the bill.

The twins were of the opinion that we should do what we felt was right. We dispensed of our house and all of our other material belongings, packed what was left in four large-size black suitcases, bade goodbye to our friends and depressed cat, and flew to the birthplace of Freud, the Czech Republic having the birthplace of Khalil Gibran as our final destination. Few days after we resolved to make a beginning of our life of zest in the City of Towers-Prague, we were confronted with the shocking 7/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia that exposed the axes of evil of the world. My wife and I were at the Happiness Table in the dining room of the restaurant of our hotel with a group of other tourists when our traumatized tears instinctively flooded to the horror of the infernos of the American Airlines Boeings slamming consecutively into the north and south towers of the World Trade Center and the west side of the Pentagon military headquarters to consume the innocence of over 3000 people.

The Vaclav Havel Airport was flooded with the military type,

NARRATIVE OF MY *I*

a rerun of *Ashkharorti's* (Child of the Universe) experience in Athens airport years ago. My wife and I were listening to the nostalgic 'I yearn for my Cilicia, the land where I first saw the light' as my narrative was heading to a safe haven where love, wisdom and vitality were harmonized for the good of life, and where people talked more with their hearts than their minds.

After the doors of hope opened wide and the hospitable Middle East Airlines took a steady take off, the peace pathway turned turbulent as it clashed with the cloud-stricken culture of war.



About the Authors

Dr. Shahé Sarkis Kazarian is a clinical psychologist by profession. He has published a number of books on the interface between culture and psychology and *Reflections of My I*, a volume of English poems. ***Narrative of My I*** represents his first novel.

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Narrative of My I is a touching novel that brings to life the dynamic and transformative culture and humanity of an ancient people, in parallel with the heartfelt story of the developmental years of the hero in the exotic Lebanon and multicultural Canada, and his psychological reconstruction of the intergenerational transmission of the Armenian Genocide that reconciles the collective trauma of the past and the ideal of a justice-informed zestful life of the future.