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THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

Dec. 8, 1971
Arlington, Mass

Dear Dr. Kerr,

Story of Chorbajian Family

[Compliments Det of Joseph Chorbajian]

Your note of Nov. 23 and the questions posed therein gave me a chance to tell you the tragic story of one Armenian girl, which is the story of all the Armenians, often more tragic than mine. I did not intend to make it as long as it turned out to be. Nor it is, or any part of it, intended for publication. I tried to write it as legible as I could for you to be able to read it without fatigue and discouragement. I hope that you will find the time to go through it.

It was a pleasure to see you at the banquet in Boston. It brought back a lot of sad memories, I had heard about the mysterious letter, but I did not know the ^{name of the} person responsible for the tragic act. What a shame! Maybe the turn of affairs would have been much more favorable but for the sad situation.

As the saying goes the Armenians might have been hidden behind locked doors when the Creator was distributing "Luck". We have always been betrayed, sometimes by our own, due to ignorance, but by others more so to serve their political purposes. The English, the French, the Russian, you name it. We have had it. The world would have been a better place for us all had it not been for inhuman and power hungry governments run by just as much inhuman personalities. History is full of such incidents, full of mistakes but we never learn from the past to design the future. Had the Turk been punished for the first genocide on Armenians Hitler would not have exterminated millions



of Jews stating "Who remembers The Armenianian genocide?" Had it not been for one Lodge and ~~the~~ President Wilson given some of the things he so ardently asked for, The League of Nations would not have died, may be Pres. Wilson himself would not have died, in which case Armenia and its people would have been luckier, any way "what will be done will be done" as the Greek song goes. Let us hope things turn for the better.

To answer one other question: - Joseph Chorbajian is my first cousin. He is still in jewelry business in n.y. "Hollywood Jewelry Mfg. Co."

My best to you and to Mrs Kerr. I am hoping next time I shall have the pleasure of seeing her with you.

Very Sincerely
Araxi

January 8, 1972

Dear Dr Koor,

Thank you for your letter of Jan. the 2nd.
 At the time I wrote the "Ten page story" of many, many
 Armenian girls and boys, not mine or my family alone,
 I knew it was late ^{for you} to insert ^{it} in your book as new material.
 That is why I made the statement "Nor is it, or any
 part of it intended for publication", so as not to put you
 in a tight spot. However, if you wish to make use of some
 parts of it (without any reference to its source) please
 do so. All I am hoping for is that your book will
 reflect the truth as far as what we went through
 and the real Turk as it has been, as it is and as
 it always will be.

I left Beirut in August of 1934. Took a job
 with the "Hairenik Publications", an Armenian Daily Paper,
 "Hairenik" ^{which} means Fatherland. They put out an English
 Weekly for the American-born - most of the second gener-
 ation does not or cannot read Armenian. I met
 my husband there and then, but for personal
 reasons he waited too long to make up his mind, while
 I waited. He was an electrical engineer, now retired.
 He had come to U.S. from Aintab in 1910 as a young boy.
 The furniture manufacturers in Beirut are his cousins,
 I hope that we can get together sometime to review the
 past as there is so much to talk about. . . .

Thank you for your interest, personal & otherwise,

 Sincerely
 Anayi



March 15, 1972

Dear Dr Kerr,

Thank you for your letters. It is nice to know that we may have another chance to meet if and when you visit your son at Harvard next summer. There is a "Holiday Inn" at walking distance from The University, on Mass. Avenue. Another motel on Rt. 2, also in Cambridge, but about two miles from The Univ.

To answer your questions: - in the order given-

1. Please feel free to use any portion of my story to combine it with my Cousin Joseph's story and give him the credit in any manner you wish.
2. No, Joseph did not go to Maara with us. The bigger family group was split up once we arrived in Aleppo, and smaller groups departed in different directions.
3. The Chorbajians were lucky (I think I explained the reason in my other letter, "Friends" and "cash" "Bribes") Two thirds survived. I believe.
4. My mother gave birth to her baby girl under a tent at Meskénié. The baby was named Takouhi (which means Queen) after my paternal grand mother, (a real queen in beauty and otherwise) whom the Turks separated from our group. Later we learned she ^{had} died of disease and starvation in Aleppo.
5. Stephan must have gotten his degree prior to the deportations, because he was in the service of the government for a while and had fled later.
6. The entire family belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church (The Mother Church). We belonged



To The St. Stephens Church right across from the "fortress"
"Kale" in Marash.

7. My own father's name was Vartevan Chorbajian.
8. I was the eldest of the five children my parents had, four girls and one boy, all survived - except that Takouhi died later - (I told you her ~~the~~ tragic story in my first letter) Takouhi's death was too much for my parents as she was left behind while we all tried to escape during the Marash fights in 1920. So my mother had another baby girl in Marash in 1922, she also was named Takouhi and is living in Belmont now with her ~~to~~ second husband and a 14 year old daughter from her first husband, whom she lost three years after they were married.

I am quite sure I have answered all the questions. I only hope that I have not bored you and that some of the information may be useful to you along the line.

Looking forward to meeting you
again,
Sincerely,
Araxi

P.S. My very best to Mrs Kerr



THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

Chorbajian Family

Arax Ayvazjan Dec. 8, 1971 (Chorbajian's) story
also interview

In 1914 my maternal grand father, Garabed Malchajian, was appointed to serve, as representative from Marash, in The Turkish Congress in Aleppo, the seat of The Governor of The State. In The winter of 1915 he was called back and requested to go to Zeytoun with Rev. Shirajion and Rev. Ghevont Nahabedian to persuade The "Zeytounlis" to surrender all arms + munitions in return for full security + comfort of their lives - meaning, of course, massacre-deportations. Men of honor and repute all refused such treason against a brave group of people. Within 24 hours they were ordered to leave ^{Marash} - the very first ones to go. Others did go to Zeytoun out of fear. No sooner their "mission" accomplished, the brave Zeytounlis - young + old were being herded down "Inje' Bel" the mountain path north of The American College. I watched The Tragedy with my classmates of The Prep School from the windows of The College upstairs, weeping silently, even though ^{all of us} children of 11-12, yet feeling the beginnings of a bitter end.

Our turn was to come soon. On Aug 10, 1915, The well to do families were ordered to leave (for security reasons) on Aug 15. The Chorbajians, four gr. uncles, five uncles, my maternal gr. mother, with entire families, numbering over sixty, took to road, on foot, on donkeys (all mules + horses owned were confiscated by The government) intact horses and all else left behind. After ¹⁰⁻¹² days + nights of fear, horrors and fatigue (Arka Chorbajian was beheaded the first night) The group arrived in Rayak, ^{a refugee camp} on the outskirts of Aleppo - a Refugee Camp, where Armenians were stationed in The Thousands - -- ~~for~~ a base for further deportation thru The Syrian desert along The Euphrates to Meskene, Racca - Deir-el-Zor,

The very night we arrived in Rayak couple of Turkish



Vartovats

guards ordered my father, to get his family and gr. mother's family and follow them - on foot of course - I don't remember how long but at noon the next day we were herded in to an old house where grand father was waiting for us. Until then his whereabouts had been unknown to us, Thus we were saved from being deported ^{the next day} from Rayah with the rest of the group, who went to all places, ... families separated - $3/4$ ~~of~~ having perished by 1918.

As fugitives in that horde, we had to change from place to place, but finally the Turks caught up with us. But by some miracle, instead of being deported to Tur-el-Zor we were given horses to ride to a village, about 18 hours ride from Aleppo. Later on we learned that all this exceptional help was being given to us by an Arab friend of my grand father, who had served with him in Congress, who had saved my gr. father in the first place and given him refuge in his own home and now he was helping us to go to the village called Maiara, which he owned from end to end. We settled here and were doing comparatively well for about seven months, when once again we were ordered to move - This time our benefactor was unable to save us - after days of a miserable ^{thru the desert,} journey - dreaming of even muddy water - we were stopped at Meskene - Half the family was sick by this time, my mother ^{a child} expecting and running high fever. We were permitted to stay here for a while - glory to the power of gold - (my father had been able to save - The five brothers had three stores ^{selling} of Silk, woolen and other dry goods - Real estate, orchards Rice paddies) --

Here my father bought a cart and served ~~at~~ the government (building a certain road with other refugees who were ^{employed})



for one loaf of bread a day). Now that my father was in service we were sort of sure to stay here - for a while, any way. When the Road was finished we were ordered to take ^{down} the Tent, our home for 15, and move on... When gr. father heard the order and saw ~~the~~ the Tent come down on my mother who had been sick after child birth for quite a while, he fell to the ground right there and then - had a shock, got paralyzed and could not speak. The guards permitted us to pitch our Tent back until further notice. We lost gr. father three days later, he was buried at the bank of the Euphrates river which we watched from a distance day and night.

The day of reckoning had come. My father decided to ~~to~~ get around the guards for help - They were paid well for their suggestion that he buy two horses and a cart that they will help register him as a transportation man for the government between Aleppo - Ourfa + Meskene. So, concealed and covered among + in between Sacs of flour, Rice, grain etc. etc my father took us all one by one to Aleppo in his cart dropping us off before we reached the "check point" to be on our own, walk thru the fields and back alleys to get to a ^{certain} address, where we would meet some one to take care of us. These trips cost him not only whippings until he bled, when discovered but almost his life - But within four months our Tent was vacated to their ^{false} surprise of the guards and our family, ~~was~~ once again, was reunited, around winter of 1917. Another sad chapter in our lives was closed for a brighter and hopeful one to open. ~~Nov. 11, 1918~~, Armistice! Turkish armies defeated, German armies stationed in Aleppo leaving



gone home by the thousands, natives hungry and naked robbing the leftovers and parading all over - acting like made in the hope of freedom from fear, hunger but ~~and~~ especially the Turk... Arabs also took a lot of abuse + suffered.

Reports from big cities in Cilicia (Marash, Aintab, Adana) were so great and ^{"homeland"} being portrayed in such colors under the allies occupation that the survivors from the holocaust very naturally were ready to go "Home". The Armenians cherish a three century ~~of~~ ancestral greatness of educational, military and cultural history in Cilicia, and all of us have a warm and soft spot in our hearts for the land that lost all its glory ^{in the hands of} the beast that is called Turk.

Therefore, on Aug. 15 of 1919, the same day and the same month we had left home four years ago, we left Aleppo, with others home bound. We were happy and thankful to arrive in one piece. ~~but~~ Even though not recovered from the shock of what we had been through we were joyous for "The resurrection" - everyone was busy, schools, seminars, churches - physical and cultural activities in all communities. All of us doing our best not only for the "daily bread" but for spiritual and intellectual nourishment as well.

Soon was to be the "Black Christmas". I am sure you know the rest as well as I do, but I lived through it all and that makes the difference. The Chorbajians had three large homes in one big compound adjacent to the Franciscan Fathers Church, only a low thin wall separating the two. My three uncles (two of ~~whom~~ we had lost) and their families

(4 out of 6 survived)

named

were living there. My father had gone to see Stepan and his father to make arrangements for us to move there as we were living in a compound with a group of armenians near the Turkish government building, which he did not deem safe. He did not get a chance to return. As the first shot came off in the afternoon my mother with her five children stayed behind bolted doors for several days. Then walls were broken through for communication with neighbors during the night. Our house was on the street side corner; on the seventh day of the shooting kerosene soaked burning Rags were thrown in, after breaking the windows (The house was of brick). No sooner the house caught fire inside, before the outside was lit, we rushed to the next door neighbors through the hole in their wall, woke up everyone sleeping there, continued three eight more holes to the other end of the street. A big crowd gathered together and soon it was decided to flee before the fire reached us, ~~we~~ take a chance to get to the Franciscan Fathers Church, which was the nearest - rather than ~~get~~ burnt to get shot on the streets. It was lots and lots of stairs from the top of the hill ^(from the place where we were gathered) to reach to the streets from one house down to the other in the dark. "no lights no children" were the order of the evening. (Old people & children were left behind with hopes that they will not be harmed should turks move in to plunder before fire destroyed it all). About twenty minutes later hundreds of us poured out on the street from the last house. Snow and ice on the ground made it a treacherous flight with instant shooting from the fortress, Many fell but many more made it to the church, where we joined my father and the rest of the Chorbajians.

(The three year old sister who had an unfortunate birth under the tent, had to be left behind with others. The sting of it all made us ~~so~~ miserable until after we located her at the orphanage ~~where~~ where she had been brought from the "Seray" by Americans after the firing stopped - though she died a few months later from meningitis.)

The Church was crowded to the brim. No room but only to sit. Hunger, death, child birth, illness and fear ^{were} all there. My cousin Stepan was going around to treat the sick with whatever medicine he could get from the French military office. His knowledge of the language helped him to get to know some officers. The evening of evacuation by the French he had somehow discovered that ~~the~~ the French would leave without any plans for the protection of the people. Soon a fight broke up between the French and the Armenian guards who were insisting that all those who were willing and able should be allowed to follow the French otherwise there would be some shooting. After threats and counter threats the gates opened. The followers, young, old, girls boys, poured out without good-bys to their loved ones, some never to see each other again. Soon the gates closed behind the last Frenchman and his horse and an ominous silence fell over the entire compound as everyone seemed ^{to be} living in the shadow of imminent death.

After 36 hours of this nightmare, on a sunny beautiful morning, the people in the Church were ordered out to hear what Mustafa Kemal's representatives had to say. "Peace had come for us all to live together as brothers, that there was no reason for fear any more. Those who had homes



could return there, others, with no homes to go to, would be taken care of ^{etc. etc.} a new Chapter opened for all ⁱⁿ search for loved ones at the other two locations, ~~at~~ the first Evangelical church and the Karasoun Marash Apostolic Church. This new experience revealed even more horror. The kind of death people were subjected ^{to} were beyond comprehension. One of my uncles, who lived in a Turkish "Mahalle" (Section) with his wife, four girls and four boys were ^{all} wiped out - we found no trace of them, not one survived. Later on ~~a~~ a neighbor told us that all were put to death with axes and knives. The 22-year old boy was beheaded and his head nailed on a pole was leaning against his own house gate as if to guard it for days.

The evacuation of the people at the churches began soon after. Nine Chorbaian young men and my 14 year old only brother had left with the French. The rest, Stepan, his father, ^{my uncle} and my father with all the women folks and children moved to Stepan's house, next door. A few days later uncle was picked up from the house and sent to prison where he was beaten daily until he was sick and near death when he was released by some miracle. By this time we were all moved to rooming houses near the College + The German Hospital, where Stepan was working as pharmacist. As you may remember, ^{after some months} people were allowed to leave Marash (to be robbed and killed, ^{at this time on the roads}) Stepan also wished to leave with his family and parents. Fortunately the family got to Aleppo safely although stripped of the last stitch. Stepan was not allowed to leave, as the hospital needed him at the



pharmacy. After a while plans were made for him to flee secretly. ~~Two~~ two Turkish soldiers ^{were} to take him to a certain point where others would take over and take him to Aleppo. Unfortunately he was caught and brought back two days later, imprisoned for several days, but ^{then} released to the hospital - He was needed there. Later on after a second try he joined his family in Aleppo, from there they moved to Cairo. In 1948 he ~~was~~ moved to Armenia with his family and sisters' families. Years later we heard that he had ~~passed~~ passed away. (until after the de-Stalinization it was not possible to get any news from Soviet Armenia). One of his sons, we understand, is a pianist in entertainment. The second a physician, has been sent to serve in one of the other republics in the Soviet Union - whereabouts unknown to us - The third working in the Museum - Library in Erevan, his wife was in an institution. Thus Stepan is no more.

Now about my immediate family. With the help of the American friends we were moved to Badveli Simons' house ^(Kireci Khan) and allowed one corner of one room, with two other families in the other two corners, 14 people in one room. After a year in this room we changed to another room by ourselves. All the while I was going to college. Mrs Kerr, as Miss Reckman has been my history teacher, Miss ^{Reider} Reider ^(later on Mrs Woodman) taught us literature. Miss Cold, my Bible teacher, took special interest in me and my family. God bless all, I owe everyone something for being able to continue my schooling. At the end of my junior year in June of 1922 of my father decided that ~~the~~ the time had come for us to move on. By this time



he had persuaded an old Turkish acquaintance to take possession of all his real estate, land, vineyards, orchards etc. in return for protection & transportation means out of Marash to Aleppo. As soon as deeds etc. were signed the man kept his side of the bargain and within ten days we saw the light in Aleppo. This was in the summer of 1922. I had a teaching position in 1923. In 1924 Miss Cold arrived from Marash and with a special arrangement with Miss Foreman of the ~~Aintab~~ Girls' American School of Aintab, which had been transferred from Aintab and established in Aleppo, gathered us, the 6 member junior class of Marash College. Our senior year under Miss Cold in this school was a valuable experience. After graduation I went to Beirut in 1925 and took shorthand & typing at the YWCA. Then took a job with the Near East Relief with the Child Placement Dept. When the place closed I was able to get a job at ALB to work with Mr. Archie S. Crawford. Two years with him then transferred to Dr. Miller's office, where I met and worked with a number of medical men, Drs. Moore, Turner, Cruickshank and yourself. In 1935 I left Beirut to join my parents in Medford, who had, two years before, had come to join my "14 year only brother" ^{who} after ^{leaving} Marash with the French to Islahiyeh, then to Adana, then to Smyrna, - had, by some miracle, been able to escape the Smyrna tragedy and shipped to U.S. by an old merchantman friend of my father (while they did business with each other prior to 1915) where he joined relatives.

After I arrived in Boston ¹⁹³⁵ I was hired by the



 Hairenik Publishing Co. where I worked until 1956.
 After a long romantic courtship of 18 years, I ~~in~~¹⁹⁵⁷ married
~~the~~ The first and The last man I had fallen in love with,
 We have been very happy since. Active in Church and com-
 munity affairs. No children naturally, a sad note,

I hope that I have not bored you too much, but if
 I have been able to pass on any new information for
 your book it will make the time I put in worthwhile.

I feel very happy anytime a new book is pub-
 lished with the truth about the Turkish-Armenian
 problems and how the Armenians or other minorities
 were treated ~~in~~ in Turkey. There were a great
 number of Americans in Turkey long before the de-
 portations when Armenians were being suppressed
 and massacred since 1895. These should all stand
 up and ^{be} counted. They should all write and picture
 the true image of the Turk for the world to see.

The delay in answering your letter has been
 due to the illness of my husband. After I brought him
 back home ^{from the hospital} he developed a post operation infection,
 I took him back a week ago. He is coming along now.

Araxi

p.s. please forgive the writing
 in loughand, also the erasures.
 It is a first draft.