

100 Years...
True Stories



1915
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100 Years... True Stories

Among Armenians survivors of the Genocide there are people whose lives were saved by a Turkish neighbor, friend, a common witness Turk. This book shares 47 such stories. These are real stories presented as they were actually narrated, without any editing in the content. The stories were narrated by the descendants, relatives, close people of the survivors of the Great Genocide based on what the witnesses of the events had told. Some stories have been restored based on the recordings or written memoirs made while the witnesses were still alive.

The stories have been collated by joint efforts of "European Integration" Non-Governmental Organization and "Armedia" Information, Analytical Agency with the support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom within the project "The Turk Who Saved Me". The partner in Turkey is "tursu.tv production".

The project aims to contribute to the development of dialogue and trust building between the Armenian and Turkish peoples.

The stories have been published in Armenian on the electronic web-page of "Armedia" Information, Analytical Agency and in Turkish in Taraf, Zaman, Radikal, Demokrat haber, Evrensel, Bianet, Yurt, T24 media.

The book is published in the Armenian, Turkish and English languages and is delivered free within this project.

The materials, opinions and conclusions presented in the book introduce the views of the people witnessing the events and narrating the stories and do not reflect the position of the United Kingdom Government.

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Opening Word

100 years... One could argue, try to imagine, understand and perceive whether 100 years is much or little. But there are cases when even time is powerless. I believe the topic of both this project and the book could be among them.

These stories, this book comprise the history of my family and families like mine. On the whole the idea of such a project, of collating such stories perhaps can be explained, first of all, by the state of mind that one has and lives with during a lifetime trying to get that subject to some logical end.

My paternal grandparents – my Father's both mother and father – are among the heroes of these stories. Turks saved them from Turks. If it hadn't been for those Turks, they wouldn't have survived; if they hadn't survived my Father wouldn't have been born; if my Father hadn't been born, I wouldn't exist. I believe these same expressions or words could be pronounced by many of the heroes of these stories. Thus, most of all, this book and these stories are to pay tribute to those Turks, those people. Many of them perhaps are no longer alive, but one thing is definite: we curtsy before their tombs as I and people like me owe our lives to them as well.

Today much is spoken about fair memory but there is a fear that these two words are deteriorated and subjected to certain interests. However, both fairness and memory are words and concepts that create and maintain values. I think they should be treated with care. And what is fair memory?

First of all, since Turks, their ancestors arrived in this region we have had quite rich experience of common life, collaboration, interaction, relation, giving and taking from each other. Haven't there been bright moments, periods that could be called friendship? Definitely, there have been. Weren't there any moments before 1915 when there were problems? Definitely, there were. All that time, including the last centennial, needs to be reassessed so that tribute is paid to justice and nothing is forgotten.

Second, the Genocide... Conducted with inexplicable violence and organized meticulously to the least detail. An attempt, a desire to eradicate ultimately a whole nation from its own cradle, its native land. Thanks God, that didn't succeed. It failed also thanks to those, including Turks, who opposed that very program, that violence at least with their disagreement and actions. Can there be fair memory without accepting the fact of the Genocide and dispossession of homeland? Another part of fair memory, definitely, is the fact that there were nations, states, families, individuals, among whom there were Turks, who were Humans and that saved lives. No element or factor of this can be forsworn.

I have already noted that if it hadn't been for those individuals I wouldn't exist. If it hadn't been for the organizers of the Genocide my Father, his parents would have had all their dynasty alive and creative and wouldn't have been the only shred of the whole family. Can that phenomenon called fair memory bypass any of these elements? Certainly, not. In that case it would cease being fair; in that case it would not be memory.

Perhaps a few words should be said about our present. There is much talk about the necessity to build confidence measures, to give our two nations an opportunity to reach out hands to each other and to implement that opportunity. Certainly I agree. Consequently, through remembering the positive, through not forswearing a single element an effort should be exerted to fulfill all that. These stories, this book and this very idea aim at that. They aim to show that we cannot forswear and, surely, we expect our interlocutor not to forswear either. We expect to see the generations of those Turks who saved and their generations can proudly loudly say, "We are proud to be Turks as our grandparents saved lives." We desire to face humanness, acceptance of values and not a situation when if somebody wants to voice all that they have to think about dangers, can feel fear for themselves and for members of their families or their children. This is one of the steps directed at trust, or at least it could be.

Our present also has its problems. We want to overcome them together, without denial by any party. But we have a present where demonstrations of enmity never stop. Human logic, reason and feeling should have noted perhaps that for both nations to overcome, to reassess and to look at the future the Armenian-Turkish border should ultimately be open and most active. But the enmity hasn't stopped, that border is close up to now. Closed by Turkey.

I want also to express gratitude to all those individuals, organizations that made it possible for this idea, this project and this book to become reality. Among them is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom. This is tribute or an attempt to pay tribute to the innocent victims of the Genocide, to all those who gave a hand and, of course, to those Turks who, despite the danger for their own lives and lives of their family members, were unable to keep aside and gave a hand. This is also a project of hope to realize that denial can in no case defeat justice. Hope that in the end, 100 years after the Genocide we can try to look at our future together without denying anything and trying to trust each other...

***Karen Bekaryan,
Chairman, "European Integration" NGO***



I was a second-year student when I realized history is written by victors. Since I was seven I had been learning what heroic, right people my ancestors were who had suffered so much injustice but had never given way. When I began to make out things, all those stories sounded more and more like exaggerations, however, in those years almost no "state" source written correctly was accessible.

In the huge mosaic of the so-called history, filtered government archives are as truthful as distorted memories of individuals are. And the main reason for distortion was the inexplicable fear of confronting.

The idea of confronting was so oppressed that, looking back at the events of the past, I could realize that we existed behind dirty glass distorted with prejudices and covered in stains. To confront, it was necessary, first, to get rid of all those prejudices and to jointly clean that glass. This project, into which I have had the honour to bring at least some input, fulfills this very function.

When publishing some stories of the project "The Turk Who Saved Me" I faced a kind of odd situation. After having read the stories a reader accused us of a change in the approach to the Armenian Genocide.

This criticism made me again weigh the stories we had already published in Turkey and think about the interview I had made with Aris Nalci.

To make it short, our reader was trying to explain that, with these stories we had directed Turks towards brain wash and were implementing a revisionist mechanism or were trying to alleviate the violence committed towards Armenians. The reader's judgments sounded like this as we were the first to evaluate the events of 1915 as the Armenian Genocide. And, if I am not mistaken, that reader was a Turk.

That was a reader who had overcome the revisionist phase and had confronted history. This was gratifying.

But was there any problem or mistake in this approach...

Perhaps he had overcome denial but wasn't he too much drifted in another direction now? Could he have achieved another biased and criticized view? Or, maybe, I, who had grown up hearing stories about our hero ancestors, had again become the prisoner of the old prejudices and was conducting propaganda of "there are good Turks as well" without realizing that.

I mused over all that again and again. I believe confronting works correctly as a mechanism as long as we follow the route of reality. Each of these reminiscences is an oral account, without any ulterior motive and is ultimately spotless. That is why the project "The Turk Who Saved Me" is a core initiative valuable especially because

it makes one of these mechanisms work.

After coming across the reaction of the above mentioned reader, a statement made by Aris Nalci in the interview made by us became even more influential for me. Aris said, "If this project hadn't been initiated by an Armenian organization, no one, including me would believe this. Most people would think this is just another propaganda act carried out by Turkey. But the stories demonstrate how people survived the Genocide and don't reprove Turks."

In the end I came to the following conclusion: the positive steps of recent years directed at confronting constitute a gratifying fact. Nevertheless, we shouldn't forget we still have a long way to pass.

***Haluk Kalafat ,
Editor-in-chief, Bianet***



This work presents to You the stories of the Armenian Genocide survivors recollected by their relatives.

These stories are unique as they tell how the hero/heroes survived the Armenian Genocide thanks to direct or indirect help of Turks.

Ahead of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in 2015, this book encourages viewing the events of 1915 in a way different from what has existed up to now.

On the one hand, the families saved by Turks speak about what they went through and what their relatives told, on the other hand, they speak about having no problem with the "Turkish" identity.

This life stories come to serve as an example that the problems between Turks and Armenians are not solely of ethnic character and that Armenians are able to break stereotypes in this matter. This should make us think and ask: is it possible to do the same in Turkey as the stories of Turkish families that saved Armenians from the massacres have not been collected yet?

Today those who believe collation of such stories is a threat to identity constitute a majority because most of the saved children were made to convert into Turks, Kurds or assimilated and vanished in families of some other ethnicity.

Each of these stories is true and reveals several topics worth of research.

Most of the Genocide survivors are no longer alive today but their grandchildren keep their reminiscences bright...

This book puts forward one more question: what do the Turks that saved Armenians feel... Let's hope there will be some non-governmental organization in Turkey in near future that will work in pursuit of this question and will share its results with the public.

Aris Nalci,
IMC TV editor, T24 columnist



We were walking along the streets of Diarbekir with a friend of mine for comfort of whose soul I pray now. As it was my first visit, he wanted to show and tell me everything. And I also wanted to see and learn everything. An old woman sitting in front of her house said something in Kurdish, my friend answered her. The elderly woman got up and walked up to me. First she took my hands into hers and held tight: she was speaking in Kurdish and I could understand nothing but she clenched my hands so hard, there was so much pain on her face, so much sorrow in her look and tears in her eyes that everything got mixed in my head. I was impatiently waiting for my friend to translate; his face had also gone pale. Then the elderly lady let my hands free and hugged me. She kissed my cheeks, eyes and then hugged again. She was unable to let me go. Then she took us into her house. When we entered she put her best mattress and seated me. She sat next to me, looked at me for some time and her eyes filled with tears. She moved aside and tried to dry her tears silently, without showing that to us. After the elderly woman and her husband had calmed down and she had gone to the kitchen as she intended to serve us tea by all means, my friend told what had been said.

The elderly lady likened me with her granddaughter. My eyes, face, hands looked just like hers. Her granddaughter was hardly 19 when she went to fight as a guerilla and was killed. The woman told, "We would have reconciled with her death if not for that." In Diyarbekir her granddaughter was tied to the back of a car and dragged until her body was wrangled. They had been unable even to organize a funeral for her.

She was that woman's beloved granddaughter, the only child of her son and daughter-in-law who had died young in a car accident and whom the grandmother had brought up. That is why when she saw me she thought it was her granddaughter so she hugged and smelled me. The detail added by the old woman's husband was even more tragic. Her husband said, "Well, suppose you killed her and dragged her body;" Then he went on with the most awful part, "They dragged her so that all parts of my granddaughter's body thrust open, her legs, her breasts. As if they were showing to Diyarbekir. They took away her soul, what did they want from her honor?" "We wish you never have that destiny, but you look so much alike and you are so beautiful," this is what they said. That is why she was crying about her granddaughter before a stranger. I was stone frozen. No words could matter or heal her wound. The lady brought our tea but I was unable to drink even a drop. She brought the tea to my lips and said, "Drink, drink so that I think my Gyulay was drinking; as if I were giving a drop to my Gyulay. I didn't serve her even her last water."

It was 1999, my second year in journalism. It was my first business visit to Diyarbekir. Coming from Edirne, I had received "national" education in an environment of highest level of "sterility" in Tekirdağ and my introduction into the matter of Kurds and the Kurdish issue had started with my arrival in Istanbul intending to enter university. I mean I was one hundred percent sure I was aware of Kurds and the issue and

that it was merely a legal matter. But everything changed that day. All my theoretical ideas vanished. From Gyulay's grandparents' story I understood that it was a matter of being human: this is the essence of the case. My soul was stabbed. That story had more impact on me than any propaganda by a structure or a speech "instilling consciousness". One soul had embraced another. Gyulay's grandparents' souls had embraced mine and united: I was to view everything from that perspective from now on. Everything I said and all my approaches would be made not to cause pain to Gyulay. If I caused her soul pain I also felt pain.

A real story comes from a real person. Just like you and me. Even if your faces, eyes, hair or ideas are not similar, their joy, sadness, tears, smile will touch you to be like you. And if it is the soul then it will definitely embrace your soul; it will remind you of humanity, of being a human. Whatever you can believe and understand reading thousands of pages, the soul can summarize in five minutes. That is why when you hear a true story you think what you would do in that case, how you would behave. Would you imagine yourself a human? Would you be a human? When your heart and consciousness start to work, the soul comes closer to the soul. From that moment on, no matter what is done, they cannot part. Just like the case when one of my family members faced the Armenian Genocide.

After having read Fethiye Çetin's "My Grandmother" I gave the book to a family member who used to deny the Armenian Genocide saying that "well, something happened then..." Although that person didn't at first want to read it, when she started she read it in a wink. Then she said, "I was crying the whole night for Aunt Seher," then she corrected herself, "Aunt Heranush. What stories and lives did those people live? I don't know what I would do in their place. Let God forgive us all..."

So many years she had refused to believe but she realized that 90-year-old Aunt Heranush had no reason to lie. Moreover, she added her mother-in-law's words, who came from Erzincan-Egin, "My mother-in-law often said: My girl, the waters of the Euphrates were constantly red; we witnessed the Armenians' slaughter but could do nothing..."

This is the actually true story you know. No matter how hard you try to forget it, one day your sub-consciousness will find it, slap into your face and make you admit it. But that can by no means be admitted by force. That is possible only with your consent. Perhaps this is the genuine human admittance.

Nazan Özcan,
Editor, Yurt newspaper



Just a few months later Armenians throughout the world will pay tribute to the victims of the Great Genocide...

100 years, undoubtedly, is a merely symbolic anniversary; it is clear that extermination of us – Armenians from our own cradle didn't begin and end in 1915. The sufferings of the Armenian nation were much harder than a calendar year could bear. Despite that even the lasting massacres meticulously elaborated at the highest level didn't allow to fulfill that outrageous idea at full scale. The reasons varied; however, one is the most crucial: help...

The names of individuals, charity organizations and states reaching a hand of assistance to our compatriot Armenians are constantly mentioned with gratitude in any evidence recollecting the horrors of the Genocide. Nevertheless, there is yet another speck of truth that has so far been doomed to silence or has merely been voiced in most innocent friendly circles: this regards the Turks who exerted help to us among all that horror.

The stories introduced in the series "100 Years... True Stories" come to witness this very fact that makes the following truth undeniable: compassion, conscious are values that recognize neither nationality, nor religion, nor any actual or virtual border.

This compilation of stories is an attempt to pay tribute to those who didn't eschew and helped us Armenians even at the cost of endangering their own lives. This is also an attempt to pay tribute to the actuality and to present reality as it is because that reality involves both those who initiated and conducted the crime, as well as those sons and daughters of Turkey whose efforts made it possible for some Armenians and their families to get protection and have a narrow escape from that great disaster.

***Anna Mkrtchyan,
Editor-in-chief, "Armedia" Information, Analytical Agency***