After the Genocides

After the Genocides:

Immigration, Education, and the Prevention of Nuclear War, a Memoir

By

Henry David Abraham

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

After the Genocides: Immigration, Education, and the Prevention of Nuclear War, a Memoir

By Henry David Abraham

This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-1293-7
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-1294-4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE

MALATIA AND KERESTZUR

CHAPTER ONE

MANUSHAG

My Armenian relatives were cool customers. Few spoke English. My grandfather Aaron, a tailor, read a daily newspaper in Armenian script. Yet no one talked of the old country. If I wanted to get their story I would need to dig into silent hidden caverns of photos in closets, travel papers, ship manifests and the faulty lines of memory. My mother Claire had always histrionically claimed she was "an orphan" because her biological mother died, and Manushag, her father Aaron's second wife, raised her. She depended on Manushag for many things (childcare, wheelchair rides in the airport, yogurt cultures for madzoon), but rarely had a good word for her. The only stock answer as to where Manushag had come from was that "She crossed Europe in a covered wagon." Manushag herself could have been a soldier for the mob. Her lips were sealed. For one, she was busy caring for a household of two adults and six children, crammed on two floors over a tailor shop on 52nd Street in West Philadelphia. For another her English was minimal, and if Armenian was the language at home, Turkish was the one she reserved for secrets. I had some Armenian, but no Turkish. If the Devil was in the details, they were also enshrouded in a code of silence.

Freud said that a person's analysis begins with the death of his father. The same felt true for the deaths of my grandparents. There would be no pain from pulling off the band aid from a dead person, even ones that you loved. So after Manushag's death I traced her story. The crisis in the Levant today resonates with what I found in my Armenians. Like today's Syrians of the last century the Armenians were victims of mass murder and flight from war. Like Syrians fleeing into Europe and the West, my forbears fled to Europe, Russia, Egypt, and the Americas. My grandparents, uncles and aunts were a rag tag bunch of deportees, refugees, and immigrants. They rarely showed up on Ancestry.com. But through their courage, tenacity, and guile, I was born an American. Not the least of them was Manushag.

In 1895, when the Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid II begins to massacre Armenians, a baby girl is born in the prosperous city of Malatia in eastern Turkey. Her name, Manushag (pronounced MAH-nu-shagh), comes from the Persian word for "violet." Botanists, in turn, classify the violet as

chasmogamous, one that must open itself to the environment to flower. No name would be more apt for my grandmother, a survivor of the looming destruction of Turkey's Armenians.

My memories of Manushag are stereotypical- wife, mother, housekeeper, cook- what other role for an Armenian grandmother? Etched into my consciousness are her round face; drooping eyes; tired frame; pendulous breasts; hands wet from rolling pilaf in grape leaves. Having no vacuum cleaner, she picks up the crumbs from the Persian rug with her fingertips. Her smile when it comes on occasion always seems framed by loss.

Fig. 1-1 A postcard photo of Manushag as a child taken around 1907 is vibrantly different. It shows a poised, pretty girl of seven or so. The photo has been taken in a studio. It is embossed with the photographer's business in the cursive font that signifies that the photo is intended as the work of an artist. She is positioned with folded hands and crossed legs. Her gaze at the camera seems steady and relaxed, as if she has done this before. The little girl's hair is done to fin de siècle European perfection. She wears a lovely white dress with ruffles, white socks, and shiny patent leather shoes. Her parents are surely proud to have paid for such luxuries in a country where most are hard scrabble peasants. To be able to pay this photographer they are likely successful businesspeople or local town administrators. In a sea of ancient hostilities, the family has found an island that sustains a good life. On the back of the photo in Armenian script is written, "This little girl is my granddaughter and says she kisses her auntie's hands." Family photo courtesy of Dr. Edward Tufankjian.

At the age of 18 Manushag marries and takes the surname of her husband, Siranian. A year later she bears him a son, Haratoun, his name Americanized years later as Harry. There are more questions one can ask at this point in the story than I will ever be able to answer. Who was Manushag's husband? How did they meet? Did they possibly feel happy and secure in Malatia following the massacres two decades before? How did the young husband support his new family? What was their social status in the community among Armenians, or among their Turkish neighbors? Years later, when she was living in America in the home of her prosperous doctor son, she gestured around sadly at her refrigerator and wash machine as if to say what she had now did not equal what she had lost. It was my chance to learn more, but I was a child, not yet a psychiatrist, and lacked the courage or even intuition to invite her into sharing the darker memories of her life. Years later I will make partial amends for my child's indifference as I piece her story together from other family members, documents, photographs, and historical records.

Overshadowing Manushag's young family is the First World War which Turkey has entered in 1915 on the side of Germany and the Central Powers, placing their bet on the Kaiser beating Lord Kitchener. The country is ruled by three radicals, the Young Turks, who see the presence of a small number of Armenian nationalists in the country as a chance to justify the purging of Turkey of its two million Armenians. One of the Young Turks says, "The work must be done now, after the war it will be too late." What follows adds a new word to the lexicon of the twentieth century called "genocide."

In the first wave of killings by the Young Turks disarmed Armenian men are chained together in groups of four and marched to the outskirts of the city where they are shot.

It's not clear whether Manushag's husband was killed by Turkish troops or a mob, but his death is likely to be one of the first in 1915 since the Siranians are prosperous and the mass murder of a million people will begin with the executions of Armenian leaders, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and political leaders. Attacks on Armenian civilians will spread across Turkey like a fulminant cancer- at the hands of troops, felons released from prison for the killing, Kurdish thieves, and fanatical Muslims.

Armenians flee south to Malatia in the hope of safety in a city but are met by mobs in the streets. One witness reports seeing the bodies of sixteen girls crucified on wooden crosses. Another find wells stuffed with the bodies of murdered women. Turkish hatred is so great they will poison their own water to exterminate the Armenians.

Fig. 1-2 Ottoman military forces march Armenian men from Harput, my grandfather's home, to an execution site outside the city. Kharput, Ottoman Empire, March 1915-June 1915. Courtesy of Rafik Sarkissian M.D. and the Armenian National Institute.

A more efficient way to kill occurs to the Young Turks. On June 1 the minister, Talaat Pasha, issues the Tehcir Law calling for the mass deportation of all Armenians out of the country. The women and children of Malatia are not immune. They are forced into hastily assembled caravans and ordered to march towards the mountains south and then to the desert. When a German diplomat asks Talaat about “the Armenian question,” Talaat answers airily, “The Armenian question does not exist.”

In large measure, he is right. The death marches across the Syrian deserts kill three out of every four who begin them. Guards withhold food and water. A boy from Harput, my grandfather's home, tries to get water from a well but when he is found out is thrown into the well to die. Roving bands of convicts and Kurdish nomads strip the victims of their clothing and possessions, raping and killing at will. Women walk naked for days with children in their arms or on their backs. Death will come from dehydration, starvation, typhus, dysentery and exposure to the cold of the mountains and the heat of the desert. Among the innovations in the state-sponsored extermination is the cattle car in which deportees are packed ninety to a car, locked in, and deprived of food and water for days. One person in seven will survive. The genius of Manushag is that when the Turks post an order for

women and children to amass for such a "caravan," she intuits what is being planned for her and her newborn is not a deportation but a death march. As if adapting the dictum of English writer Samuel Johnson Manushag realizes that nothing focuses the mind as much as the murder of a husband.

Reports of the slaughter creep into the Western press. The sultan calls them “gross exaggerations.” But there is no sense of exaggeration to family stories I get from witnesses seeing a pregnant woman disemboweled and her fetus bayoneted. People will see kinsmen trapped in a barn and burnt to death. One relative as a boy will hide in a haystack and when the gendarmes have left will run for his life. An uncle as an infant will escape with his parents who take with them jewelry hidden on their persons. He tells the story to my cousin when she is eleven. When he is done, as if to protect her from a future horror, gives her the bracelets shown below and a $20 gold piece.

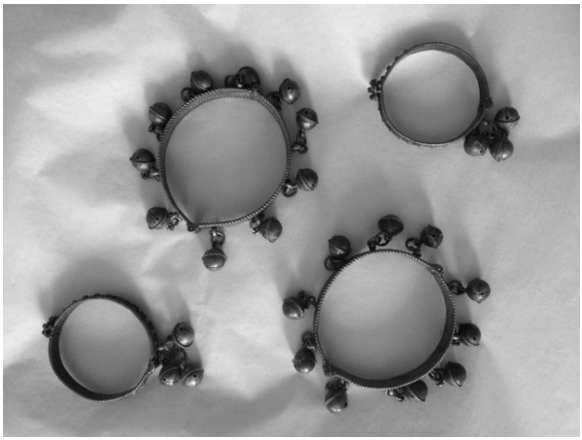

Fig. 1-3 These four pieces of hand-crafted jewelry were part of valuables, along with Turkish lira, gold coins and other specie, used for bribing soldiers and mollifying highwaymen. They survived the flight from Turkey of family members to the United States in 1915. Photo courtesy of Susan Siranian Wallowitch.

I never learn if Manushag escapes with the help of jewelry or gold. Her flight from Malatia is quick and chaotic. Gathering family treasures seems unlikely. I do know that through her grief, and perhaps because of it, she keeps a clear head. Even as Turkish gendarmes post notices of the deportation that will begin in twenty-four hours, Manushag resolves that she will disobey and not join the masses of women and children in the streets. She will resist the dictates of the government. She will break the law to survive.

But how? It's fatal for an Armenian woman to be seen on the streets. Civil society has disappeared in a flash of hate. Roving mobs and soldiers are scouring the streets for any Armenians they want to rob, rape, and kill. Manushag has family living across the Turkish border in Syria. Perhaps she can flee to Aleppo. Her aunt and her daughters are there and would take her in if she and the baby can survive the journey. Alone it would not be easy under any circumstances; with a baby it will surely be impossible. But Manushag sees no other choice. She will have to cross the Taurus Mountains to the south, and then make it across the Syrian Desert to Aleppo. One critical piece of luck is that the young Turk Talaat has called for the genocide in the spring. The season is right for crossing the mountains since in winter snow covers every peak and fills every valley making passage impossible.

In daylight her first job is to hide. Her home has likely been looted and burned. Servants most likely have fled. Trying to hide in an Armenian home is foolhardy since those are the first targets of mobs and military. Neither will she take refuge in one of the three Armenian churches in Malatia since they are targets of troops given to trapping the Armenians inside them, nailing the doors shut, setting them on fire, and shooting the ones who try to escape.

Besides a temporary sanctuary she will need supplies and a means of escape. A strong and surefooted horse will be best. In the streets of Malatia a horse is nearly impossible to come by. And yet she will try to find a one, a good one for the mountains.

Central to Manushag's survival is help from an unlikely source. As mobs murder Armenians in the streets a Turkish woman opens her door and yanks Manushag and her baby inside. Her name is lost in the family narrative but the memory is encoded that at enormous personal risk some righteous Turks acted to save Armenian women and children, not to kill them. It is likely the woman is a family friend. Manushag speaks fluent Turkish as well as Armenian. In Malatia her family has had Turkish as well as Armenian connections.

Manushag's rescuer is a Muslim, Manushag a Christian. It is likely that both women are terrified. The Turkish woman is acting out of courage and compassion, not political conviction. In my story she deserves a name. I will call her Sevgi, Turkish for love. I infer that this is her character by what happens next. It's obvious that she cannot hide Manushag indefinitely, but she, too, is a woman of means. She will provide her with a cart, but she does not have a horse. There is a solid draft mule and it will have to do. There will also be a few provisions for the coming trek through the mountains.

The mule is a good choice because he will be slow but surefooted on mountain trails.

But what makes Manushag's escape harder becomes clear when the Turkish woman leaves the room briefly and comes back holding a one-year-old boy, Kevork, in her arms, a survivor of murdered parents. Both women know that if the soldiers find him, they will kill him too. Sevgi begs Manushag to takes him with her. But the women also know that there will be no easier signal for gendarmes hunting Armenians in a forest than the sound of a crying baby. Reluctantly Manushag agrees to take the second baby but with no greater plan perhaps than abandoning Kevork behind the first boulder she comes to in the mountains. When night comes and a cart is readied, the women separate tearfully. I imagine Manushag parts by saying what she said to her auntie on her photograph, “I kiss your hands. God bless you!” Perhaps the Turkish woman responds, “May Allah protect you!” It is not unlikely. Religion here is the context of Sevgi's love, not the pretext for murder.

The moon must be bright enough for Manushag to escape after sunset. The journey with two infant boys must not have been easy. Breast milk for one must now be shared by two. Manushag's breasts will be what helps all of them survive. If a baby crying will draw the attention of bayonets, breastfeeding will keep the babies quiet when their silence is most needed. Manushag will need to steer her mule across south through the Malatia Mountains seeking the trails through the lowest lying valleys towards Syria, wide enough for a cart, but not so wide as to be used by the death caravans or the gangs of nomadic Kurds or criminals who prey on them. She travels along the western plateau along the edge of the Syrian Desert and then towards Aleppo, then a crumbling city and prize between the warring French, English and Ottomans, to the family she hopes will give her sanctuary. As was common among other family members in flight, Manushag may have hidden gold or jewelry in her hair or in the babies’ swaddlings to bribe gendarmes or villagers along the way. She will speak Turkish to everyone, Armenian to no one. Her Turkish will be flawless and imperious bespeaking membership in an elite social class; she will likely threaten highwaymen with the wrath of an imaginary husband, a sadistic Turkish officer she is traveling to join.

In her escape we know that she does not have the coldness in her heart to leave Kevork behind a boulder, but on the contrary tells the villagers, bandits, soldiers, and bureaucrats she meets in her flight that Kevork is her son. On forged papers she brandishes like a weapon at the rare gendarme who dares to stop her she declares her rank as a Turkish citizen with an altered birthday for Harry making him Kevork’s “little brother.” Once

through the mountain passes and into the Syrian desert Manushag skirts the searing heat by traveling along its edge towards Aleppo. As she approaches the outskirts of her promised sanctuary, she is met by the horror of the caravans along the sides of the road, the path before her lined with the sick, starved, dying, and dead. Her mule is long since dead as well, and so she makes her way on foot with the two babies through the charnel of the streets to the home of the Azadian women.

Manushag has saved Kevork, but he is not her son. Crossing the mountains and desert has depleted her. Adopting him is out of the question, and she places him in an American orphanage, ironically so, because only he will have an easy passage to America. Even though the Red Cross whisks him away to America Kevork's tie to Manushag will last a lifetime. After Manushag rescues him from bleeding Malatia Kevork will keep the surname Manushag gave him when they crossed the mountains and desert together. He will forever be known as Kevork Siranian for the rest of his life even in the mom and apple pie community of Strafford, New Hampshire, where he will grow up and live, raising chickens. Manushag's path will be different. Despite her courage and strength she cannot possibly be prepared for what lies ahead.

Fig. 1-4 Manushag and Harry in Aleppo, Syria, 1918. Manushag stands on the right, with Harry seated in front of her. Also seen are her Syrian protector and her two daughters. The matriarch's expression suggests a world-weary toughness in the face of adversity. Manushag has a tough look, too, with tired, sleep-deprived eyes. Her left eye droops slightly, as if from facial trauma—she has no such droop in her childhood photo. Unlike the two sisters, Manushag wears no brocade or ornamental buttons. Instead, a black crepe stole covers her shoulders that signifies recent widowhood. Harry looks well cared for despite his privations, dressed in a broad-brimmed hat, beat up shoes, and two full-length overcoats one on top of the other. Photo courtesy of Dr. Edward Tufankjian.

A photo of Manushag and the Azadians in Syria coincides with the end of the Great War, the unwinding of the Ottoman Empire and its surrender of Syria to France. The French bring a halt to the massacre of Armenians. Manushag's goal is to move to America where she can live in a safe and welcoming Armenian community. Armenian-Americans who have rushed through America's Golden Door extol the new world beyond it. But fate is against Manushag once more as the Golden Door is slammed shut in 1921 by a law which now favors, like Donald Trump's dream a hundred years later, Norwegians over people with darker skins. In 1922 the immigrant yearly quota shifts downward for Turkey is 2,400, for Armenia 230, and for all of Africa 122. For Norway the quota is 12,200.

But Manushag is no bureaucrat's fool. She has suffered too long and hard to give up the fight. Living in Syria she can legitimately call herself a French citizen and benefit from France's higher quota. For 25 francs on June 25, 1923, she purchases a French passport in Aleppo that optimistically declares, "allant a Chicago Ill." Really, Manushag? Does she even know where Chicago is? Does she plan to go to Illinois overland, or across the Great Lakes? I never know what is in her mind, but I know by now that she is a woman to be reckoned with.

Harry is now eight. The mother and son walk from Aleppo to Beirut, sail from Beirut to Marseilles, and from Marseilles walk for the next month 400 miles across France to the Armenian enclave in St. Chamond along the Loire River valley, past Saint-Étienne, Bouthéon, Roanne, Nevers, Orleans, Paris, Amiens, and onto her final destination, the seaport Boulogne-sur-Mer. At long last they board a ship bound for the United States and eventually a passage to Chicago. As they steam across the English Channel, they pass within twenty miles from the city of Dover. If the air is clear on the first day of her passage, they may have their first glimpse of an English speaking country. The joy they feel at this moment must be unmeasurable even crossing the Atlantic in steerage. Their dreams are big. In America they will not be persecuted because of their language, custom, or God, that the government will be fair, that the sweat of their labor will earn them a sustainable wage. Manushag dreams at night as her ship rolls up and down over the vast Atlantic waves of her dead Armenian husband and the new husband she will find in America. Her new husband will be taller than many Armenian men but Armenian to the core. He will not so dark complected, but his hair will be jet black, straight and well cut. He will be a gentleman, perhaps he will own a factory. Everyone in America owns a factory. He may be a doctor or engineer. But most important he will be a good father to Harry who will grow up free and safe and go to school to become a doctor like his new father. The joy aboard is like a drug that lasts for a month on their

crossing to Ellis Island, the Golden Door to America. And then like any drug high, there is the emotional crash of a slamming Golden Door. If Manushag had taken the Titanic and been rescued at sea, her chances of coming to America would have been better, because in matters of immigration timing is everything.

The steamship line transporting immigrants to America is a good business, but with quotas in place each captain needs to be clever about getting their passengers into harbor before the quota is filled. A quota often maxes out within minutes of being opened on the first of each month. Any immigrant arriving after that moment is in theory required to return to her country of origin, which in Manushag's case is the killing field of Turkey. This gives rise to a transoceanic scramble of steamships racing through the dark to arrive at port at precisely one minute after midnight on the first day of each month to dump their passengers. Manushag's quota as "French" at 5700 is larger than the pitiful allotment of 230 for Armenians, but her ship is too slow. The French quota is quickly filled by other boats before hers can dock, and Armenians are being told that entry to the US is now closed. Quiet panic sweeps through the Armenians on board. In every quarter of the ship Armenians stop speaking their native language and take to signaling their nationality to one another by a soft cough. To Manushag's relief she hears that the ship will take them to a temporary port until the captain can resolve this mere snag in paperwork. The lie will prevent the quiet panic on board from erupting into pandemonium.

The ship turns south, down the coast of America to the warm waters of the Caribbean and into the port of Havana. The Armenians are thrilled by the warming climate and all the more so when they hear Cubans on the shoreline shaking fists and shouting, "Malo! Malo!" to the immigrants on board. How did they know we're from Malatia? Manushag wonders in amazement. The captain unloads his human cargo onto the dock and promptly sails away. He will not return. She is in a strange land, a new language, and hostile natives. "Malo" is the first word in Spanish she will learn. It means bad. For better or worse, to Manushag's inventory of homes of Armenia, Turkey, Syria, and France she now adds Cuba. How will she ever explain all this to an American immigration officer in the English she doesn't speak? In Havana she and Haratoun, now Harry, move into a single room with four other Armenian families. To support Manushag and himself nine-year-old Harry learns the ways of the Cuban streets. He learns Spanish. He shines shoes. Manushag finds work as a housekeeper.

Within a year of their arrival in Cuba, another Armenian family living 1233 miles as the crow flies to the north is struck with its own misfortune. Makruhi Tufankjian, my biological grandmother and a healthy 33-year-old

mother of three married happily in Philadelphia, delivers a fourth healthy baby who bears her name. But obstetrics in 1924 has yet to widely adopt sterile technique in the delivery room. Within days of delivery Makruhi develops a fulminant illness, possibly puerperal fever, and dies. The cost of her death to her family is profound. She leaves behind my grandfather and four children: 15-year-old Taqueen; 14-year-old Dearon; ten-year-old Clara; and baby Margaret, named with the American form of her mother's name, Makruhi. This choice both Americanizes Margie as she comes to be called and memorializes her mother, forever tying innocent Margaret to a cruel outcome of her birth.

The death of Makruhi strikes the children differently. Taqueen is aptly named by this English-Armenian hybrid. She is the queenly sib who goes through this crisis, and the rest of her life as well, with the gentility and calm of a Downton Abbey aristocrat. Dearon the 14-year-old is pulled between loyalty to his family and a longing for a life in the theatre. Clara, who will become my mother fifteen years later, is the most affected. She will see catastrophe in every turn in life. Her response will be to meet it with humor and rage. At the age of ten she drops out of school ostensibly to help care for infant Margie, but her loud, willful personality is certain not to have warmed the heart of her fifth-grade teacher.

My grandfather Aaron Tufankjian was born in Harput, Turkey. When he is 15 Sultan Abdul Hamid II decimates his city for the first time with a brief but brutal campaign of torture, deportation, and mass killings in the year of Manushag's birth, 1895. It is not known how Aaron survives. Any young Armenian male over the age of 10 is high on the Sultan's target lists. Putting Aaron at even higher risk is his family's likely connection to the arms business. Armenian names are often trade names. *Tüfek* is the Turkish the word for "rifle." The family name Tufankjian, literally means "son of the rifle." It comes as no surprise that the World War I draft census that a kinsman, Harry Tufankjian, records his profession as "gun reparing (sic) old country." But in Turkey in 1895 by order of the sultan any connection between an Armenian and a weapon of any sort is punishable by death. Soldiers are sent into villages and towns in search of weapons. The finding of a single hidden weapon means death for the family or village. Often villagers are tortured, imprisoned and killed because no hidden weapon had been found in the first place, leading to the Orwellian situation that Armenians fearing torture or death will buy a gun in order to turn it into the Turkish military. If you are an Armenian gunmaker any government policy that calls for the killing of your customers is surely not a growth industry.

The third strike against Aaron surviving the year is his family's politics. The gunsmiths belong to the Dashnak party in Eastern Turkey. In the eyes

of Abdul Hamid separatists are by definition insurrectionists and so enemies of the state. Worse, the Dashnaks have arisen from Russia, Turkey's bitter enemy, who long to unite Armenians in a single state. The Ottomans are not separatist socialists and decidedly the sultan is not a man of the people.

If there is a fourth strike against my grandfather's survival, it's that the Dashnaks do not sit by and passively allow themselves to be annihilated without a fight. The pretext for rounding up and killing Armenian intellectuals, priests and leaders was that they were “revolutionaries.” The claims are bogus, but the Dashnaks were just that, credited with forcing the sultan to end his massacres by threatening to blow up the Ottoman Bank. As a newspaper reports it, one of the 25 Dashnaks who captures the bank shouts, “We are Armenians come here to defend our people’s cause.” An employee of the bank responds, “I am an Irishman, sir, and I understand you very well. How can I help you?” With the Armenians as enemies, what's a sultan to do but demand the extermination of every Armenian male above the age of ten?

The killing does not end with the seizure of the bank, but the genocide pot is moved to the back of stove where the boiling falls to a simmer. The world's attention shifts elsewhere from the plight of "starving Armenians," but in the next ten years the Tufankjian family has no such luxury. In the next decade their blood will be splattered on the walls of Harput again and again. Like Aaron, his brothers and sisters attempt to escape Turkey through the Golden Door. Successful in their efforts will be Sarkis, Nartouhy, Haiganosh, Yesnig, and Avghani. Brother Moses will be killed. Sister Miriam will disappear. Avghani and her daughter Grace will escape but only after Avghani’s husband is killed. Of the genocide of 1915 the American ambassador will write that my grandfather's home, Harput, has become “the cemetery of the Armenians.” Aaron is sixteen when he comes down the gangplank to the New World in 1896 with five dollars in his pocket and two photographs in his suitcase. One is a colorized picture of the people he left behind. The other is below. It shows 27 Dashnak Armenian fighters posing with their weapons.

Fig. 1-5 There are twenty-seven Dashnak militants dressed in caftans and turbans armed with a hodgepodge of rifles. Their hair is short, long, cropped, or braided. Some are bearded. Most are mustached. Draped over their shoulders and across their chests are bandoliers of bullets, each bullet the length of a man's finger. A blood red flag bears the dates 1890 to 1896, the years of Armenian massacres by Hamid II. Above a sword there is written "Azatut'yun gam mah," Liberty or Death. These are men, not boys, but this is no standing army. These are desperate volunteers, not conscripts. They would make the heroes of Bunker Hill proud.
Photo courtesy of Wikipedia,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armenian_Fedayees_1890-1896.jpg

In the early twentieth century militant immigrants were anathema in America. So were immigrants who knew about guns but were ignorant of the English language, laws, or business practices. It would not have been easy for an immigrant to be involved in any business that had shooting as its purpose. I offer what follows as a psychological theory. Blocked from the gun trades, a number of Tufankjians appear to have turned to another form of shooting- photography. Yesnig and Sarkis became photographers, and as did subsequent generations, including Scout Tufankjian (President Obama's photographer), Rosemary Tufankjian, my brother Russell, my cousin Armand, and in television, my son Jonathan, uncle Dearon, and for a time, this writer as well. This is only a psychological theory. Rosemary, for example, reported that her interest in photography grew out of a school project and had nothing to do with guns. Freud would simply refute that assertion by invoking the unconscious. I'm with Freud on this one.

Philadelphia in the 1920s is the home of a vibrant Armenian community the heart of which is the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic

Church. Part of the Church is an under the radar network of Armenian women who track the plights of Armenians in Europe connected largely by mail. The entire community in Philadelphia has grieved the death of Makruhi Tufankjian and felt the pain of the bereft widower and children. Aaron Tufankjian is seen as an Armenian man whom life has dealt a cruel blow and needs all the help and guile the good church women can muster. He needs a wife, and his children need a mother. When the women learn about Manushag and Harry in alien Cuba their hearts must sing. What?! An Armenian widow who needs a husband? An Armenian man who needs a wife? This is a church woman's dream come true: a mission sent by God Himself that must not fail. Phone calls begin to fly over the wires between Philadelphia and Havana. Letters go out. The shifting immigration laws are studied and restudied. The plot is hatched. Manushag can come into the US if she is a US citizen or if she is married to a US citizen. Aaron is already a citizen. It's simple. Aaron will travel to Cuba and marry Manushag, present the marriage certificate to the immigration authorities, and bingo, a new Armenian family will blossom in Philadelphia. It's a small problem that Aaron and Manushag have never met, but Cupid is an equal opportunity employer. At least that's the plan the church ladies come up with.

Aaron arranges for childcare for two days. He will take a train to Key West and a boat to Havana. Manushag is anxious, excited, hopeful. A little bald man with wire rim glasses walks down the gangplank of the ship fifteen years older than she. He is looking for no one but her, and she him. They stare at each other. Aaron speaks first.

"Du hayeren yes khosum?" (Do you speak Armenian?)

Hesitantly Manushag answers. "Ayo- yes khosum yem hayeren." (Yes, I speak Armenian.)

"Du Manushag Siranian yes?" (Are you Manushag Siranian?)

Not wanting to play her cards so quickly, she asks, "Du Aaron Tufankjian yes?" (Are you Aaron Tufankjian?)

"Ayo yes yem. K'vo hayereny shat lavn e." (Yes, I am. Your Armenian is very good.)

"Dzer hayn el e," she answers. (So is yours.) They both laugh.

There is no doubt Manushag has found the right Aaron on the dock. If all relationships begin in fantasy, Manushag's fantasy is done for. It is obvious that this is not the man of her dreams. He is not dressed like a man who owns a factory. Yes, he is wearing a nice fitting suit, but he made it himself, no matter how well it fits. Her Aaron shows her the pictures of his children. Manushag shows him one of Harry. Each of them nods respectfully. Aaron gets to the point. He explains how he agreed to the plan

of the women of St. Gregory's, that he needs a wife and the children a mother, and she needs a father for her boy.

"Kamusnana's indz het, khndrum yem?" he asks sweetly. (Will you please marry me?)

She pauses looking at the little man in the wire rim glasses. He is bald, fifteen years older, with four children. They have known each other for less than an hour.

"Yes derr vstah ch'em," she answers. (I'm not sure yet.) My unspoken professional thought as a psychiatrist at this point in the story is, MANUSHAG! ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND? SAY YES FOR GOD'S SAKE!) Manushag's demurral is clearly not part of the church ladies' plan.

The little tailor has a narrow window for courtship. "Yes karogh yem mnal yndameny yerku or im yerekhanern unen im karik'y." (I can only stay here until tomorrow. My children need me.)

Manushag still has her dignity. She is no one's green card floozie. "Yes petk' e mtatsem dra masin." (I need to think about it.) And during what is certainly a sleepless night, she does. When they meet again the next morning Manushag says, "Ayo, yes kamusnanam k'ez het." (Yes, I will marry you.)

On March 24, 1926 before the USS Governor Cobb leaves for Miami that evening they must find an Armenian priest to marry them, produce a marriage certificate, have it translated from Armenian into English and notarized, and have an immigration officer approve the paperwork by stamping visas into their passports. All this is done in record time as the tiny Armenian enclave in Havana rolls into action. At the port they meet immigration officer Wayne Olan who with half-glazed eyes reads the marriage certificate and stamps Manushag's passport with the precious visa. Officer Olan's eyes open a bit more as he flips through twelve-year-old Harry's passport. The newly betrothed couple look on with hearts in their mouths.

"Where are the boy's papers?" says Olan.

"His passport..." says Aaron pointing to the document. Manushag's thoughts race. Papers? What kind of papers? We had them- they were lost- in a fire- words fail her.

"The US needs proof you are his mother. Do you have a birth certificate or baptismal papers?"

Images of Manushag's of her ransacked life dance through her head. "Not here," Aaron says softly.

"He can't come into the United States without them," Olan says.

Harry is starting to look anxious. It is a moment of excruciating pain. With little English Manushag reads the situation desperately. She tries to think fast. They are so close to America.

Aaron is the voice of reason. He speaks calmly to Manushag. "Ari indz het Filadelfia. Menk' yekeghets'uts' ktank' Harrii t'ght'ery." (Come with me to Philadelphia. We will get your son's papers from the church.) And so Manushag leaves her only son with the four Armenian families they have lived with for three years. It will take Aaron, Manushag and the clever ladies of the church nine months to "get the papers" but Manushag will come back to Cuba clutching baptismal papers in an envelope written in Armenian and English proving that Harry is her son. At this point, and for census takers years later, Manushag takes the name of Aaron's deceased wife, Makruhi, and holds her breath as Officer Olan looks over the documents. Olan does not ask how the boy could have been baptized in Philadelphia without ever setting foot in the United States. The cheerful shoeshine boy from the streets of Havana will suffer no great harm in his time apart from Manushag other than a stray bullet in his leg. Manushag and Aaron will be together for the next 27 years and have a child themselves, Edward. Manushag will give the family of seven structure. Nurturant Aaron will give it love.

Fig. 1-6 My grandfather Aaron Tufankjian and me in a photo taken in 1945 on a Sunday afternoon in front of a garage. The war is over, and my father has returned to his family safe from the Navy. Aaron folds his left hand comfortably over me as if he has done this before. I am trying to smile the way I am being told to for the camera, but Aaron's face is lit up with the joys of his grandson and life in America. Photo courtesy of Arthur Abraham.

I am eleven when Aaron dies. My father tells me the news and goes back to his shop. I go into the coal bin and cry.

CHAPTER TWO

SEARCHING FOR JEWS IN THE RUBBLE

Raised without a Jewish identity I vaguely felt cut off from a part of myself I barely knew existed. My Jewish family and I were disconnected. They shared no memories of the Second World War or the Holocaust. When I visited my Jewish grandmother, Matilda Bartok, there were no family pictures on the wall, no photographs in albums. One picture tucked away in a closet was a full length shot of her as a young woman dressed in a gypsy costume.

Fig. 2-1 Matilda Berger Abraham Bartok in a photo taken in Hungary when she was about eighteen. She is dressed in a costume suggesting that of a gypsy girl. After her death I found a business card in her Philadelphia apartment that read, "Madame Matilda, Fortune Teller," suggesting a vocation she may have had during the 1920s and Great Depression.

Had she told fortunes during the Depression? In English? Even the connector of language was missing. Each Jewish grandparent, a possibly deep source of family lore, avoided speaking English for the most part. For me to speak with them it was Hungarian or Yiddish. I had neither. They remained linked silently to the old country tongue and seemingly never able to join the new, sworn to secrecy by some force greater than they, a karmic non-disclosure agreement with the family's history. If they had memories, they were unspoken, locked away, buried in dark, unreachable places. My Jewish grandparents never once looked back in my presence.

My brother and I called Matilda Little Grandmom to differentiate her from Big Grandmom, Manushag, the Armenian rock. When we visited Matilda in her Philadelphia row house on Sundays, her Hungarian kitchen overflowed with the dubious odor of over-boiled cabbage. Hers was not the cuisine of cherry soup and chicken paprikash, but robust peasant stuff of cabbage and potatoes. My father always brought her a loaf of Jewish rye. Occasionally she brought home a live chicken from the market. If the chicken was too fast for her to kill in the basement, my father came and did the deed. When I went along for the ride he spared me the sight.

The little house was always dark, a bit spooky, littered with Hungarian newspapers and religious pamphlets. I could see having your fortune told there. But in her later years she was lonely and grateful for any ring of her doorbell. When two Jehovah's Witnesses appeared one day, she signed up. I couldn't for the life of me figure out why, since I had always known her to be Jewish. When I learned that the Hungarian Jews had been decimated at Auschwitz, I realized what better way did Matilda have to spite the Nazis than to join the Christian sect the Nazis hated the most?

Matilda came from eastern Hungary bordering Romania and Ukraine. She spoke Hungarian, Yiddish, and German, but she was embarrassed by her English. When as a kid I tried to read Hungarian in front of her hoping she would teach me some, she just said defensively, "You can read the words, but you don't know what they mean." Hungarian for her was a language of weakness with no place in the new world. Born in 1891 she had only rudimentary schooling, despite the fact that her father, David Berger, was an engineer and an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army.

Her village, Sarkos, was in the Szatmár district, the home of a mystical Hassidic dynasty of Orthodox Judaism. A generation later it would become a base camp for Hungarian Jews being shipped to Poland and extinction. Depending on which Eastern European flag waved over the village square, the village was called "Sárközújlak," "Livada Mica," or "Szollos." A few miles away was the town of Szatmár in the district of the same name, the birthplace of my grandfather.

It must have been easy for my grandparents to meet, living as they were a few miles from one another and possibly attending the same temple. Meyer was tall, elegant, and funny, a man's man. He smoked cigars and loved horses. He was Jewish, Hungarian, and personable. He had every prospect of becoming a good provider. To a peasant girl in a small village he was a dream come true. They became engaged. They gave themselves over to passion. They married the same year that baby Sarah was born.

Matilda and Meyer came to America before the First World War, no doubt with dreams of lives better than the ones they had left behind in rural Szatmár. Perhaps Meyer had been motivated by Trotsky at the time who said, "You may not be interested in war, but sooner or later war will be interested in you." Meyer took the warning to heart. In 1912 the Hungarian Army increased the size of its annual draft for the first time in decades. Serbia and Bulgaria had just joined together in an alliance against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Few could see world war on the horizon, but Meyer knew that he was at risk for being called up, and unlike Matilda's father, a Talmudist was not likely to become an officer in the service of the Emperor. America beckoned.

There was a strong Orthodox Jewish community in Detroit. He would emigrate with Matilda and Sarah. Matilda, always quick to decide matters, did not think twice about leaving the backwater of Hungary. Detroit was where the dream of America would come true. They steamed across the Atlantic and settled in the neighborhood of Little Hungary, a piece of Eastern Europe as if invented by Disney executives and called Shtetland. The streets were narrow, dress was dark, the butcher shops Kosher. The couple spoke Hungarian and Yiddish with their neighbors who were Jews from Russia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Meyer prayed with the strictest Hasidim. Matilda found work in a sweater factory. Meyer painted motor cars as they rolled down the miracle called an assembly line. Caring for an infant daughter was a problem but Matilda worked part-time.

Meyer began to find factory work unappealing. Factories were loud. He was sensitive. Co-workers came from the roughest cuts of Detroit. He had little defense against anti-Semitic slurs and sharp elbows. He quit. He tried a leather factory, but factory work was not for him. He found a third job, a fourth. He didn't seem able to keep one very long. After living eight years in the American dream he told a U.S. Census taker that he was a "laborer" but "unemployed." The couple was productive in other ways. Following Sarah they had three more children in six years.

Matilda's father, David, also had a dream of life in America, but quite different from Meyer's. Berger planned to come to America, invent wonderful things like Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, and live off his

patents. Once he had enough money he would send for his wife, Davidné. In the meantime, he would find work in one of the many factories of Philadelphia until his inventions caught on. And so in March of 1914 he left his wife in Hungary and sailed on the Dutch ship Rijndam for New York. He would return to Hungary rich, and when he brought his wife to their home in the New World, they would sail across the Atlantic in first class.

David never saw his wife again. Three months after Berger sailed for America, Europe exploded into the First World War and after four years of carnage, 40 million who survived were swept away by influenza. His wife never left Hungary and David Berger never went back to Europe. In 1920 a Census taker reported that my great grandfather Berger was "a widower."

In the following years Berger did file successful patents for inventions such as the collapsible basket. But the inventions did not put food on his table, so he opened a shop and repaired boots.

Fig. 2-2 David Berger in his boot shop on the right, an apprentice on the left. Photo courtesy of Arthur Abraham.

In Detroit, however, the young Abrahams were not doing well. Meyer remained underemployed even though his family was growing. The family was slipping into poverty. Matilda called her father from Detroit for help. Yes, Berger said, there was good work to be had in Philadelphia. Yes, the family could stay with him until she and Meyer got their feet on the ground.

Yes, he would make room. Perhaps Meyer could work in his shop, he likely suggested. And so the family left the Orthodox Jewish haven in Detroit and moved in with Berger in his rented home in Philadelphia's Fishtown neighborhood, decidedly not Shtetland.

Miraculously Meyer found a job. Hope rose that the family would be able to take care of itself. Matilda tried to work with a child care plan where the four year old would care for the two year old, the six year old would care for the four year old, and eight year old Sarah would supervise the lot. But Sarah had school, and although six year old Morris was willing to give it a try with four year old Sam, Morris was supposed to be in school, too, and four year old Sam was clueless about what to do about two year old Henry. In fact, Matilda herself was not clear on the Matilda stratagem for defeating the demons of child care. She clung to the theory that three adults bringing in salaries would save the day. The children would flow around them freely like minnows in the sea. The *Lord of the Flies* was waiting to be written. But hope was in the air. The family photo below sought to memorialize the good life in America.

Fig. 2-3 In an undated photo taken about 1921, pictured from left to right are my uncle Morris; grandfather Meyer; grandmother Matilda; uncle Sam; my father Henry; Matilda's father David Berger; and aunt Sarah. Matilda has a Mona Lisa smile proud of her brood, while Meyer sits stiffly with a serious, thin, angular face looking not quite at home in the starched collar and tie of the day, hands resting on