

“What the Legacy of Genocide Means to Me”
By Yetvard Edward Majian

All of us, everywhere, are waiting for the sky to open and for the light of truth to shine, through a dark cloud of denial. Historically subject to immeasurable loss, today, with every passing moment, a wound continues to fester at the heart of the Armenian people. For ninety years, we have mourned our lost relatives. I remember every April twenty-fourth as a child. At approximately eleven o'clock in the morning, my grandmother would wake, light a candle and place it on our oven, atop an upside down pot. One year it was a large funeral candle, another year it was a smaller candle in an aluminum dish. Every year, however, there was a candle lit and left to melt away. “Mereen-neroon hamar-e,” she would say. “It’s for our people.”

The somber nature of this ritual is beyond words and with every passing year, its significance becomes clearer. Indeed, I did not ponder then that my grandmother had learned to cook from a generation of survivors. I did not fathom then that for her, this candle was lit in remembrance of her own grandparents, the ones who were forced to march and starve, the ones she never knew. For my grandfather, this candle was lit to remember his massacred uncles and aunt. For me, this flame flickered as a beacon of all the lessons to come. Throughout my childhood, I was told of our rich history, culture, and, of course, I knew of the genocide: I had heard of the death marches, the starvation, the loss of life, rapes, and attempted extermination. It was only natural for me to raise my hand in high school, “World History.” During our discussion of the Holocaust, I asked if we were also going to discuss the genocide of the Armenians. My teacher shook his head, “No.” Upon my asking why, I was told that it “wasn’t in the book.” We just weren’t going to speak of it and if I persisted, I could discuss it in detention. I did.

To date, I cannot count how many times I have told our story. Beyond enumeration is the amount of times I have explained the geographic location of Armenia or why still, so many do not know of the first modern genocide of the twentieth century. It is in this capacity then, that I say we, Armenians, have become walking vessels of untold world history. This April will mark the ninety-first year of official denial on the part of the Turkish government and the seventy-third candle of my grandmother’s life. Turkey, in part, claims that the Armenian Genocide of 1915 was nothing more than the result of “civil unrest,” continues to lobby against the education of genocide and has gone as far as banning Swartzenegger films from Turkey because the governor of California signed legislation, establishing a day of remembrance. The United States, for its part, also contributes to this denial. The nation whose New York Times, in 1915 alone, published over 145 headlines about the Armenian Genocide, now advantageously utilizes a pending congressional resolution to score political points, and ensure U.S. military interests in Turkey.

This tragedy of denial, for my grandfather, is proof of the world’s inherent evil and for my grandmother, an astonishing and painful reality. Many today, both cynical and hopeful but together robbed of historical dignity, wonder why we continue to mourn in oppressed solitude. Imprisoned by history, we walk this Earth as the final flickers of a

forgotten fire. Our healing delayed by denial, the flame sears inside our hearts as we listen and hear: "I strongly urge opposition to these resolutions and suggest that floor deliberation of them would be counter-productive to the interest of the United States."

And our poets whisper:

Suffering is recalled but their memory could shine brighter

If political tongues did not work to kill them once more,

Disturbing a troubled sleep.