

Roots Remembered

Memoirs of the Armenian Genocide

April 24, 1915 is a day that Armenians hold close to their heart. It is day to remember... to remember loved ones and to remember the past. This day is known as the Genocide Remembrance Day. It is a national holiday in Armenia that is held to commemorate the tragedy that took place almost 100 years ago.

Between 1915 and 1923, it is said that somewhere around 1.5 million Armenians were systematically killed by the orders of the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

Many survivors have passed on but there are some who remain alive and well, living in Fresno. One such resident is Anahid Eleazarian. She was born in Turkey in 1912. Her father was a professor and she had six siblings -- three brothers and three sisters. Aleazarian was only three years old when she was put in a Turkish prison.

"It was so bad," she said. "My father was tortured and killed when we were in prison."

Luckily, Aleazarian and her siblings were given diplomatic immunity because of her uncle's ties. After being released from prison, she moved to Beirut with her family and

stayed there until she was 25 years old. She then moved to the United States.

Area resident Sarkis Kalfayan was born in Turkey in 1911. Kalfayan and his mother fled to Cairo after his family heard news of the massacres. His dad was killed and his sister escaped to Cairo years later with one of her daughters and her son. Sarkis' 13-year-old niece was taken from his sister by a man who told her she could let him have her for a wife and, in return, the rest of the family would have their lives spared. If she refused then they would all die. She made a tough decision for the good of the entire family and never saw her daughter again.


After living a life of poverty in Cairo, Kalfayan's mother decided to marry again, to a man who lived in Milwaukee who lost his wife and son in the

genocide. In 1926, Kalfayan moved to California. Kalfayan was a farmer, served in WWII and worked as a city planner for the city of Fresno. When it comes to the Armenian genocide he said, "None of us will ever see the Turks accept the genocide."



Even though this day is not nationally recognized, Armenians are still fighting to keep the memories alive. In 2005, 15 Armenians walked from Fresno to Sacramento where there were 1,200 more citizens gathered to thank the Legislature for supporting bill SB 424 by Sen. Chuck Poochigian. This bill marked April 24 as the remembrance date. And last year, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proclaimed the week of April 22 through April 29 as "Days of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide".

Each year on this day, thousands of people travel to the Genocide Memorial at the Tsitsernakaberd Hill in Yerevan, Armenia to lay flowers for those who have passed.

To help with the cause, go to www.petition1915.org, to sign the Armenian Genocide Recognition Petition. 

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