

# ANTRANIG, THE FIRST BORN, IS NO MORE

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Dr. Vahe H. Apelian, 14 April 2011

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**Ed.**

On the evening of Tuesday, April 12 my cousin broke the news of the passing away of her father and my elder maternal uncle, Dr. Antranig Chalabian. The Good Lord had bestowed upon him unusual talents, which he put in good use as an accomplished medical illustrator, calligrapher, cartographer and historian. He leaves behind a void and a legacy of extraordinary accomplishments. He exemplified the indomitable spirit of the first post Genocide generation who were born to parents who were orphaned during the Genocide.

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Dr. Antranig Chalabian was born in Keurkune, Kessab on March 11, 1922. He was the first born son of Khatcher Chelebian and Karoun Apelian who were married in late 1910 in their make shift camp in Deir Attiyeh, Syria on their way to their ancestral village having survived the horrid ordeals of the 1915 Armenian Genocide.

Antranig and his siblings, Zvart, Hovhannes and Anna were orphaned at their tender ages having lost

their father on February 2, 1930 at the age of 38. Antranig was a brilliant student and remained so until the twilight of his later years. After graduating from the Armenian Evangelical School of Keurkune he was awarded scholarship to continue his education at Aleppo College. He graduated with distinction and won the coveted Altounian Prize. After graduation he taught in his former school in Kessab for one year then returned to Aleppo College where he taught English and mathematics to the middle school classes from 1945 to 1949.

In 1949 Antranig moved to Beirut where his family had settled four years earlier. He taught English for one year at the AGBU Hovagimian-Manouginan High School. He then took a position in the Physiology Department of the American University of Beirut (AUB), where he remained for twenty-seven years as a research assistant and physiology laboratory instructor to the medicine, pharmacy and nursing students. During the last fourteen years at AUB he worked as a free-lance medical illustrator and calligrapher. He single handedly illustrated three medical textbooks, countless research papers and theses and calligraphed many diplomas. Meanwhile he contributed articles to the city's *Djanaser*, *Spurk* and *Nayiri* papers.

In 1977 Antranig immigrated to the United States with his family and settled in Detroit where his paternal uncle Garabed (Charlie) had settled in early 1920's having survived the Genocide. He assumed the position of Public Relations Director of the AGBU Alex Manouginan School and continued to contribute articles to various Armenian periodicals. In 1984 he published his first bi-lingual book *General Antranik and the Armenian Revolutionary Movement*. The book became an instant best seller and was printed in more than 75,000 copies in Armenia. He donated the proceeds from that print to the Karabagh freedom fighters. In 1989 the History Department of the University of Armenia invited him to defend his exhaustive historical study. Upon successful defense he was awarded a doctorate degree in history. The book was later translated into Turkish and Spanish.

In 1991 Dr. Antranig Chalabian published his second book in Armenian titled, *Revolutionary Figures*. Dr. Ara Avakian translated the book in English. In 1999 he published his third book, *Armenia After the Coming of Islam* in English. The book became a very popular reading and had two printings. In 2003 he published his fourth book in Armenian titled *Tro*. The book traces the feats of the legendary Armenian freedom fighter, Trasdamat Ganayan. His son, Jack Chelebian, M.D, translated the book into English. In 2009 Indo-European Publishers printed the book. Dr. Antranig Chalabian was also an invited contributor to the internationally acclaimed *Military History* magazine where he published articles dealing with Armenian history. Without any assistance, he prepared the print ready formats of his books and articles by typing them both in Armenian and in English, proof read them without resorting to spell check, painstakingly prepared the indices and drew the maps that appear in his books.

Before writing and publishing his books, Dr. Antranig Chalabian collaborated with Dr. Stanley Kerr

after discovering Dr. Kerr's personal notes in the attic of the Physiology Department. Dr. Stanley Kerr had moved to New Jersey after retiring in 1965 from his distinguished career as the Chairman of the Biochemistry Department of the American University of Beirut. However, he had left his notes behind assuming that the notes were long lost through the years. Stanley Kerr had kept his notes and taken hitherto unpublished pictures while serving in Near East Relief. In 1919 Stanley was transferred to Marash, in central Anatolia, where he headed the American relief operations. The outcome of their collaborative work was the publication of Dr. Stanley Kerr's *The Lions of Marash* in 1973. The Kerrs hosted the Chalabians as their overnight houseguests during the latter visiting America in 1971.

While collaborating with Dr. Kerr, Henry Wilfrid Glockler, a one-time controller at AUB and a neighbor of the Kerrs in Princenton, entrusted Antranig Chalabian his personal memoirs. Chalabian edited the memoirs and had it published in Beirut in 1969 by Sevan Press. The book is titled *Interned in Ourfa*. In private conversation Antranig Chalabian noted that he heeded to Kersam Aharonian's call in 1965 urging Armenians to encourage non-Armenian authors to publish about the Armenian Genocide. Kersam Aharonian is the late eminent editor of Zartonak Daily in Beirut. In 1976 by sheer coincidence my first job interview in America was at the American Cyanamid Corporation where the personal director in charge of college relations happened to be to a handsome young man named Robert who turned out to be Henry Glockler's son. We made the connection during the interview that will always remain the most memorable interview of my career, especially for a first job interview in the New Land. Interest in Armenian history indeed has its own unexpected collateral benefits!

Dr. Chalabian received numerous accolades and recognition. Armenian organizations in various states invited him to lecture. The mayor of Southfield designated in 2005 a day as Dr. Antranig Chelebian Day in recognition of his goodwill ambassadorship of the city through his readers worldwide. He continued to live in Southfield, MI with his wife Seran (Tootikian) who preceded him in death in 2010. In 1995, his compatriots, the Kessabtsis, honored him as a noted professional and dedicated the 2003 Edition of the Kessab Educational Association's yearbook and directory in his honor.

My earliest childhood impression of my maternal uncle Antranig is vividly embedded in me when he interrupted an ongoing traditional kessab circle dance during a festivity in Keurkune and took the guns away from two dancers who had joined the dance with their hunting guns dangling from their shoulders. I realize now that my very first childhood recollection of him was a reflection of his innate total aversion of guns and anything remotely violent and by the same token his instinctive appreciation of those who, as a last resort, resorted to gun as Armenian freedom fighters. He made the preservation of their legacy his cause. Years later he prepared the graphical presentation of my first Master of Science thesis.

Immaculate, driven to precision and perfection to any task at hand, fastidious to personal hygiene, tireless researcher and scholar; his is a legacy of extraordinary accomplishments. Few years ago his son - Jack Chelebian, MD - presented his father and his father's work in Rochester, NY where Jack practiced psychiatry. One of the attendants of the presentation summed up his assessment and emailed Jack noting that Dr. Antranig Chalabian is a " true renaissance man". He was indeed a talented man. He leaves behind his daughter Garine' and her husband Hovsep Koundakjian, Annie and her husband Tom Hoglind, Jack and his wife Gail and eight grandchildren: Lara and Garo Koundakjian; Anthony, Anneli and Anika Hoglind; Alex, Simon and Charlie Chelebian. He will be sorely missed.

