

BURIED ARMENIAN TREASURE

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Mark Gavoor , Glenview IL, 22 November 2010 Ayse Gunaysu wrote a piece published in the Armenian Weekly on October 2, 2010 titled "Akhtamar: A Paradise Lost." It was a touching piece well worth reading. Like many articles about the Genocide it was bittersweet, both heart warming and heavy hearted at the same time. 

Mark Gavoor , Glenview IL, 22 November 2010 Ayse Gunaysu wrote a piece published in the Armenian Weekly on October 2, 2010 titled "Akhtamar: A Paradise Lost." It was a touching piece well worth reading. Like many articles about the Genocide it was bittersweet, both heart warming and heavy hearted at the same time. 

A part that was a heavy hearted and irksome to me was when Ayse related an encounter where a "Turkish gentlemen" wanted to hear the story of an older Armenian lady visiting Van. The man presented himself as an academic and seemed genuinely interested in the story of the lady's grandmother and the village she was from around Van. It was emotional for the lady to relate the story. At the very end, the man asked if the lady knew if her family had buried any gold and offered to help find it and they would split the bounty.

I am kind of amazed that Turks and Kurds today still harbor the belief that there is Armenian gold in "them thar hills." Really? WTF, as the kids would say.

I know that the Gavoor side of my family buried treasures. My Great-Uncle Rouben related the story to me. He was just a young boy, maybe five but less than ten years old. His mother, Maryam, told him one day they had to go into their fields and bury treasure to keep it from the Turks. Great-grandma Maryam knew bad times were coming. Uncle Rouben said they did just that.

What was this treasure? What was the value? Could I be rich? Should I set out on a quest, buy Indiana Jones clothes and set out to Kharpert to find that field in the village of Keserig?

The treasure was books. They buried my Grandfather Aram's school books. He had gone to Yeprad College and studying a program of liberal arts: French, mathematics, history, science, and philosophy. Why did they bury his school books? Maryam knew these books would have identified her son as an educated man and thus would have made him a marked man and put the family in jeopardy. She was unaware as to the extent of what was being planned.

This treasure of ours can stay buried. The legacy has been transmitted to us all. My Mother, Aram's daughter in-law, made sure that I knew the value of books and education. She evoked the living example of Uncle Rouben and the memory of my Grandfather is her steadfast encouragement to value education. I, along with my wife Judy, did the same to our children Aram and Armené to the point where we are at a point where we all teach. Armené teaches second grade at the Hovsepien School in Pasadena, Aram teaches at George Washington Law School in DC, Judy teaches at the School of St. Mary here in Chicagoland, and I teach at the College of Lake County. The books, their

treasure, were indeed buried but Rouben and Aram brought the seeds with them in their hearts and souls, planted them, and they bloom anew.

Yet, this tale of Asye's got me thinking. I once had a plan involving this belief of hidden gold. I shelved the plan simply because I thought no one would actually take the plan seriously. The Turkish government got the real bulk of Armenian gold and some used it to found the Republic and seed the businesses that are now the conglomerates that drive the economy of Turkey. So, who really is out there looking for buried treasure, pieces of eight, yarrrr?

Apparently, there are still people that believe it. We, as Armenians, should take advantage of this and have some fun with it. Advantage? Fun?

Let me explain.

We spend time writing congressmen, senators, and Presidents letters to get the US to recognize the genocide. It is good, necessary, and serious work. We should never ever stop until we get the truth recognized. It is a noble cause.

But, on the other hand, why can't we have a little fun and play havoc with the Turks. We should take advantage of their belief that Armenian gold, jewelry, and who knows what else is buried all over our historic homeland. Let's play into that. Let's start writing letters to mayors, imams, school principals, and chambers of commerce in the municipalities that are now where our villages were.

Let's state in our letters that our grandparents told us where their family had buried their family treasure. We could say that while our parents and grandparents were leery of dealing with Turks, our generation is more open and modern. We believe that the people of the Republic of Turkey are the same and, really, want to be friends with Armenians in Diaspora. Turkey, after all, is an ally of the United States. Would they help us find our gold? Our treasures? I believe that is all we have to do. Enough greedy people would act on such information.

We could provide hand drawn maps of the village labeling the homes: One Kor Zaven's, another Gevorg Bey, etc. We have to play it up. Many families did not have last names in the late Ottoman empire but rather went by trade, profession, or the name of a significant family member. The maps only have to look old because we will only be sending photo copies of the maps or even pdfs. I can see this being an email campaign. We can do it all from the confines of our homes half way around the world.

We would have to involve the whole community. We need our historians to help us with the fake maps. Speaking of taking advantage of technology, we could use Google Earth to pinpoint the location of villages. We then, and here is the sly and clever part, create our fictitious maps to lead folks to locations where schools, municipal buildings, and even mosques built after they unceremoniously kicked us out of what is now their country. If we do this right, we could have them digging holes in school floors and maybe toppling over a minaret or two looking for gold. It is a deliciously intriguing idea. Who says all Hai Tahd has to be serious? Why can't some of it be fun?

Why can't it be fun, devilish, and educational?

How could this in any way be educational? I am glad you asked. We could have Armenian School children draw the maps. It could be a political activism, geography, history, and art project all rolled into one. It would force families to study where their ancestors came from, what the villages looked like then, and create believable hand drawn maps of those places. We could have a contest. Whoever's map create the most damage to a Turkish municipal building would receive a prize! Imagine if we make the front page of Hurriyet with showing a photo of a toppled statue of Ataturk in some village because one of our maps. What a great image and a bit of revenge.

Basically, we use the greed of a few to create a little havoc and destruction in Turkey. All we did was supply some realistic maps and some rough valuation of the treasure. Oops. Our bad. Their greed and stupidity.

My original plan was to have every Armenian we know write letters to various newspapers, mayors, etc. as a April 24th commemoration.

Maybe if all of Turkey is flooded with emails, they might catch on. Perhaps we have to consider doing this face to face. Maybe we have to send a tourist or two. I believe like in Ayse Gunaysu's article we use little old ladies. The Turks who prey on such would easily believe they are duping the poor old ladies out of their fortunes and begin to dig up the countryside, doing damage to schools, banks, what the heck maybe even a dam!

Could you imagine if we could convince the unscrupulous that the famous family of Balyan architects actually buried a portion of their wealth under the minarets of the Sultan's mosque at Dolmabahce Palace? Could you imagine the furor having a gang of Turkish criminals digging under the minarets maybe to the point of toppling looking for gold that isn't there? How can we pass on such a delicious idea?

Maybe this is just the project that could unite all our varied and disparate parties and clubs? Maybe this is what we need to make us one?

OK... now I am really dreaming.

