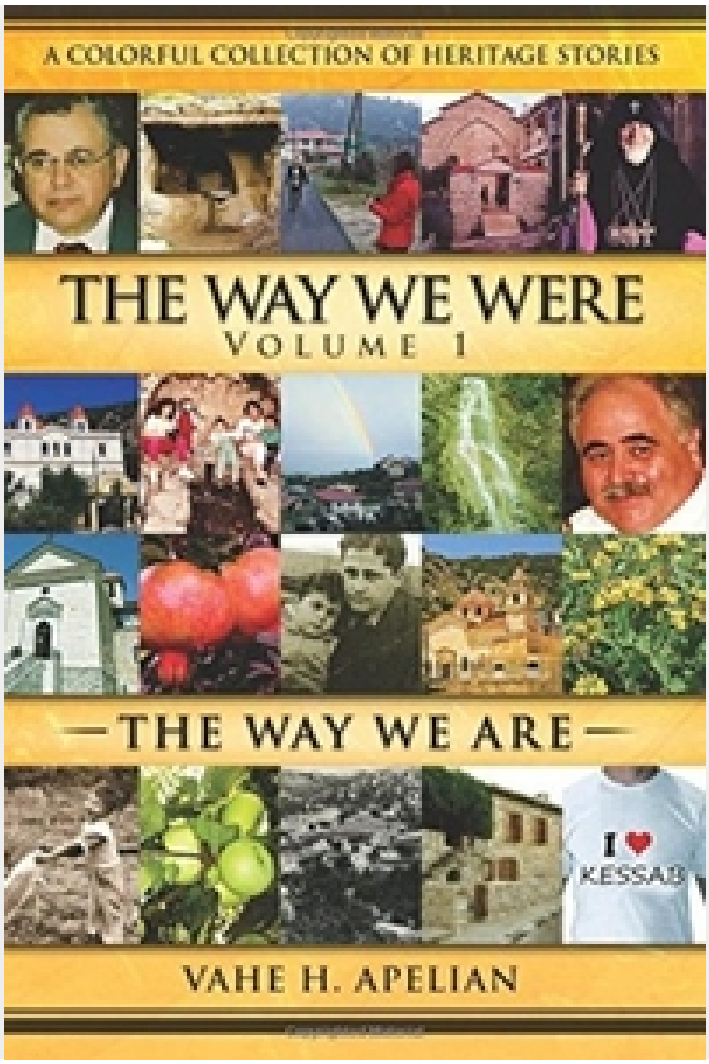
ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER

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Category: Opinions



Vahe H. Apelian, Ohio, 4 November 2014

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Keghart.com's appearance in the cyber world coincided with the winding down of my own career. At that junction of my life, I found myself drawn to things that had shaped me in my formative years in the close-knit Armenian communities of Beirut and Kessab. My first attempt to pen my remembrances and impressions happened some six years ago. To weather the mid-western winter blues I searched the Internet for a topic that had stirred my childhood imagination. The result was an article that I deemed worth publishing in the Armenian press.

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I forwarded the article to the English language editor of an Armenian newspaper in Los Angeles. My submission fell on deaf ears even after I emailed a personal letter to the editor asking him for a courtesy of a reply. That courtesy never came.

The incident reminded me of the following event: In the early '80s Sero Khanzatian (Khanzadyan), the eminent Armenian author had visited the United States. "Hairenik" reported that he had visited its offices and during his conversation it had become seemingly apparent to the editorial board that Mr. Khanzatian was offering lip service to his Soviet 'handlers'.

My late maternal uncle, Dr. Antranig Chalabian, wrote a rebuttal pointing out that Mr. Khanzatian was, in fact, heralding the benefits the Soviet order brought to the nascent, poverty-stricken and vulnerable state that was Armenia at the time. I became aware of my uncle's writing because he had sent a copy of the article to me voicing his disappointment that "Hairenik" had not offered him the courtesy of an acknowledgment, let alone publish his comment.

That was the first time that I became aware that the Armenian press not only could be biased, but it could be discourteous as well.

Now I seemed to be caught in the same unnerving situation, although my article had no ideological bearing and was in English. Years ago, in my elective sociology class, I had read a Japanese study which expanded on the situation I was facing now. When a questionnaire was posted in Japanese, the responses indicated a conservative leaning society. However, when the same questionnaire was posted in English, the responses indicated a more liberal attitude. The study suggested that language has a bearing on social perception and attitude. That may have been the reason that I had instinctively expected a more cordial attitude from the English-language editor and at the very least a response that essentially meant dismissal but was worded politely as: "Thank you for your article. We appreciate you sending it to us for publication in our newspaper. We will retain your article in our files for consideration at a future date. Yours sincerely, Armen, the editor." Even that, however, turned out not to be the case.

After waiting long enough, I gave up on the West Coast newspaper and forwarded the article to another on the East Coast. I again attached a letter asking the courtesy of a reply. I also let the editor know that I would look elsewhere to have the article published should he deem it not relevant to their newspaper. The same thing happened. The editor did not offer me the courtesy of a response.

In both cases my asking was also followed by an email. I understand that it is an editor's prerogative to post an article or not; but do we ever grow old enough and wise enough to accept with ease the lack of even a cordial response to a personal letter? There also I gave up after waiting long enough for a reply. By then almost four seasons had come and gone and I had become concerned that my article might not see the light of day.

It then occurred to me to explore the possibility of sending it to Keghart.com. Having been rejected twice, I forwarded the article to its editor with trepidation. I again attached a personal letter to the editor asking him for the courtesy of a response. Dr. Dikran Abrahamian not only responded, he even offered editorial comments and let me know that he would publish the article and asked me for relevant pictures to bolster the article. His response to my personal letter meant more to me than his decision to publish the article.

"Miss Chambers–the Beloved Missionary of Kessab" was published on Nov. 4, 2009. It has had well over 6,300 reads. Someone translated it into French. It also served me as a platform for applying to have Miss Effie Chambers inducted to the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame. The selection committee did not vote in her favor. In a letter addressed to me, the secretary of the committee informed me that the vote was very close and that the committee members had shown much interest to the article and asked me to submit--for further consideration--more verifiable data regarding Miss Chambers' efforts to elevate the status of women.

The article was well received by the descendants of Miss Chamber's family. They continue to reside in Iowa and uphold her memory. They sent me a picture of her tombstone with an Armenian flag planted in front of it. It turned out that the family safeguard an embroidery sewn in Armenian and English that the Kessabtsis gave to their beloved missionary as remembrance when she decided to return home in 1912. The embroidered inscription turned out out to be an Armenian historical find lovingly cared for over a century in Iowa by the Chambers' family. In English the delicate embroidery on silk carried the following inscription in blue thread "TO E.M. CHAMBERS A MEMORY OF GRATITUDE WE WILL NEVER FORGET'. The Armenian embroidered inscription again in blue thread was even more poignant. It read "ԵՐԱԽՏԱՊԱՐՏ ՔԵՍԱՊԻ ՀՅ ԴԱՇՆԱԿՑՈՒԹԻՒՆԷՆ" ("IN GRATITUDE FROM KESSAB A.R. FEDERATION.")

The editor suggested a more appropriate title to the article that followed. It appeared in the November 16, 2009 issue titled "A Century-Old Relic Comes to Light–Embroidery of Gratitude". The title was captioned with the following note from the editor: "*This is part II of a remarkable, yet unknown story, about an American aid worker's selfless work and dedication to Armenians during the Kessab massacres of April 1909."* I hope that the family will make the decision to donate that historic relic to an Armenian institution at the centennial of the Armenian Genocide.

One thing led to another and I ended up sharing with the readers many other articles, translations and book reviews, enough to have a three-volume book published. The first volume is already published. The second is with the editor for publication. The third is assembled for publishing it at a future date.

Most of the articles have been well received. To my surprise some of the articles have had well over 12,000 readers. Ironically, the one that I submitted with apprehension has had over 15,000 readers. I have received many positive comments from readers from Armenia to Australia.

To top it all, out of the blue, I received an email from the very same individual who more than three decades earlier had conducted my first interview in the United States. I had penned my memories of the interview in an article titled "Memorable Interview" that was published in Keghart.com on January

4, 2013. Little did I imagine that my interviewer would happen to read it. Robert Glockler, who had conducted the interview, happened to come across the article and thus one thing led to another and we connected after more that three decades.

Writing in Keghart.com became also a learning experience to me thanks to its English-language editor, Jirair Tutunjian, who always was an email away to review, correct and suggest. All in all, posting my writing in Keghart.com became a cherished, and an enriching memorable experience for me. It all began thanks to the farsighted and a courteous gentleman, Dikran Abrahamian, M.D.

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Vahe Apelian's ***"The Way We Were, the Way We Are"*** is available at Amazon.com