"STILL DOCUMENTING THE 1915 GENOCIDE" PART II

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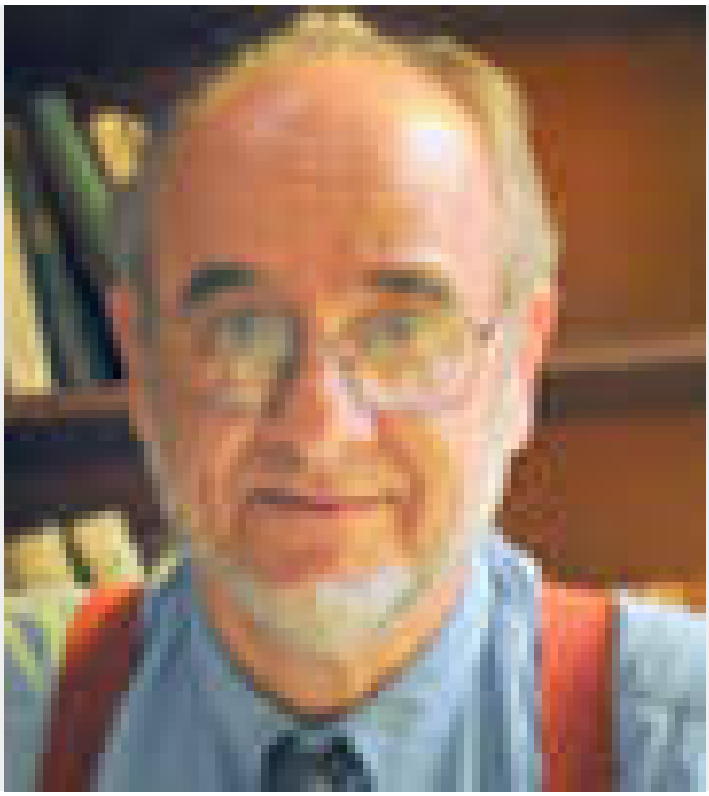

Category: Opinions

Politics, Prose and Poetry
Alan Whitehorn, Kingston, 2 February 2012
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When Armenians learn of my ongoing academic work on genocide, it is not uncommon to be taken aside and told of a deeply personal account of the terrible plight of a parent, grandparent or even a great grandparent. It is often a metzmama's searing tale of survival. One person whom I got to know well in Yerevan told me about her great grandmother. It is a powerful story that most of her colleagues at work never knew. Her family story had not previously been published. From her account and that of her family, I faithfully penned the following poem. It is an attempt to document at a personal level the 1915 Genocide; this time, through a literary voice.

The Woman With No Mirror
Born in Van
and only five years old
when the terrible slaughter commenced
Her parents and brothers were killed.
Her sisters abducted.

Yet, amidst the horror,
her neighbours,
Muslim Kurds,
took in the young Christian child
and hid her for several days.
Her kind and brave neighbours,
were fearful of being caught defying the draconian state decrees,
which forbade any humanitarian assistance to the Armenians.
And so,
during the dark hours of the night,
the neighbours sent the child
up into the mountains,
to be hidden by a shepherd amongst his sheep.
Once there,
she was cared for by others,
until she could be safely brought to Yerevan.
She alone of her family made the final journey.

For the rest of her life,
in remembrance,
she only wore black.
She mourned the loss of her extended family.
She also vowed never again to look into a mirror.
For to do so, she feared
she would see
not herself,
but her beloved lost sisters.
For the remainder of her life
she lived
with no mirror in her house.
This way she would not see
whom she could not bear to have lost.

Mariam's family was profoundly grateful that I had recorded their family saga. After so many years of the family suffering in private, now they shared the family chapter with friends, colleagues, and others. It is a very dark page in history. This is a poem of great loss, but also offers some hope. As best we can, we continue to try to document the 1915 Genocide, but it is a very, very difficult account to write. Sometimes, we have only fragments left, like a shattered mirror.
Alan Whitehorn is author of a number of books on the Armenian Genocide, including Just Poems: **Reflections on the Armenian Genocide.**