KARABAKH DIARY

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Category: Opinions

By Prof. Emeritus Alan Whitehorn, Kingston, December 2022

Author's Introduction

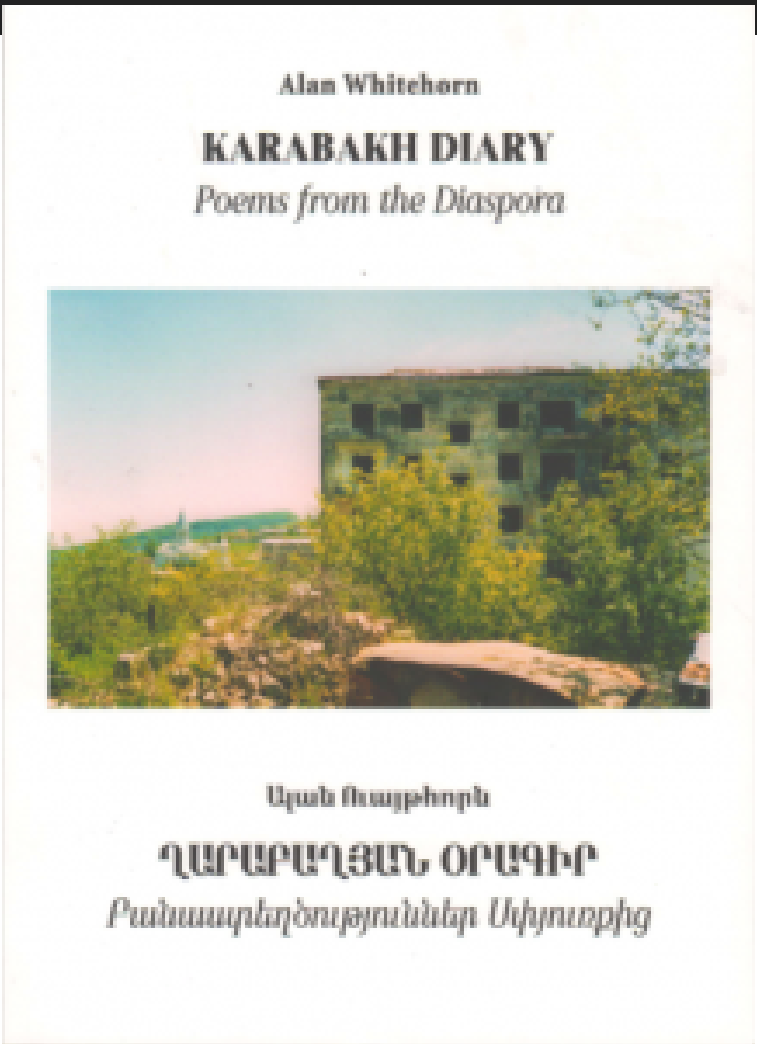
As a Diaspora Armenian, I have been profoundly influenced by the Armenian Genocide and the Armenian nation's ongoing struggle for survival. My metzmama (grandmother) was an orphan of the 1915 Young Turk dictatorship's mass deportation and killings of Christian Armenians residing in the Ottoman Empire.

My ongoing work on contemporary Armenia and the South Caucasus range from academic articles, books and conference presentations to newspaper journalism and political poetry. I have found the different modes and styles of presentation are helpful in offering multidimensional insights. Academic accounts tend to focus on the detached analytical overview in the search for cause and effect, while poetry reflects the more emotionally engaged personal and subjective reactions to historical upheaval. The academic writings draw upon the analytical mind, while poetry the passionate heart. Each format explores where the other does not, but together the two forms of communication can fill in the gaps and jointly become quite effective. In recent decades, I have found a combination of political science and poetry fosters both explanatory insight and empathetic connections. Scientific knowledge without humanist engagement can be quite inadequate and even destructive.

Over the past several years, I have shifted my focus from the 1915 Genocide to writing academic and journalistic articles on Karabakh and the South Caucasus and participating in a number of international workshops. Relatedly, many of my poems on these topics have appeared in the Yerevan newspaper *168 Hours* (online *168.am*) and several Diaspora newspapers. Almost all of the recent poems were penned in the two years spanning the lead up to, during, and just after the 2020 Karabakh War. While they reflect my views based further afield in the overseas Diaspora, they do reflect my ongoing frank discussions and correspondence with my compatriots, both Armenian citizens and government officials, who were in direct harm's way.

Several colleagues and readers suggested that the poems be gathered together as a book to help foster further dialogue amongst Armenians, in the Republic, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Diaspora. My dear friend, long-time fellow member of the Writers' Union of Armenia Hermine Navarsdayan,

who served as my faithful interpreter in my agreed translation of my poems into Armenian. This has offered the possibility of a bilingual volume that is more widely readable to all Armenians. In that regard, it echoes an earlier bilingual volume I authored *Return to Armenia/Veradardz depi Hayastan* which was published with the generous collaboration of my earlier translator Aram Arsenyan. I am very pleased to have his son Vahe Arsen, a fellow poet and academic, edit this volume, as he had previously done with *Return to Armenia*. I am much appreciative of the Atken Armenian Foundation's co-sponsorship of this book project in providing funds for its translation, editing and printing.



Since the poems reflect the shifting conditions and moods relating to the events of the 2020 Karabakh War and its aftermath, I have chosen to adhere to the chronological order of when the poems were written. It thus reflects the poetic diary of a Diaspora Armenian. Sadly, there is, as of August 2022, no final resolution or happy ending to the Karabakh conundrum. Peace and security remain as elusive as ever. Hopefully, this volume will help to serve as a catalyst to further discussion and analysis and a much hoped for happier and safer future for all.

Translator's Introduction

By Hermine Navasardyan, Yerevan

I read Alan Whitehorn's poems right after they were written or when they were first published individually. I have witnessed the book being written page by page. And when he asked me to work with him on the book, I was glad that I could translate what I had read in English into Armenian.

This bilingual book is a true reflection of Whitehorn's Armenian and English heritage as a person,

poet and social scientist. This poetic diary reflects the difficult history of Artsakh in recent times. As a shrewd scholar and wise political scientist, he was able to transmute each of his poems into a unique message for everyone.

In the book, the words often sound like a response to the heart of an Armenian who died before living, who lived after the death, and has the mystery of perseverance in his soul. The value of these poems radiates in several directions. First, chronological: the events are presented daily as a diary. Second, from its oceanic distance, the author can see with an overview what happened. Third, our words were silenced in Armenia because of the pain of the Karabakh war, but he was able to express the pain. "For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow": it is said in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 1-18). But poems that were born of pain proclaim the truth in front of the world.

As a poet, Whitehorn tries to evoke a feeling in the stone with ordinary sentences. As a political scientist, he examines all possible and impossible ways of the Karabakh problem, war and peace; moreover, extending his gaze beyond the closed doors. Maybe the world's war-mongers' ears that are deaf and their eyes that are blinded will be opened and the light of freedom and peace will finally shine on the Armenians living in Artsakh.

I would like to express my gratitude to Alan Whitehorn, from those living in Armenia, especially in Artsakh, whose words are shattered, souls are closed, hearts are bloodied, churches are captured, houses are destroyed and looted, to raise the long-suffering Karabakh issue poetically.

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Alan Whitehorn Biography & Books
https://www.writersunion.ca/member/alan-whitehorn

There are no comments yet.