

# YEAR-END MUSING

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Vahe H. Apelian, Loveland, OH, 22 November 2010

A comedian I was watching being interviewed on television. He was asked about the source of his comedy materials. He said it is mostly from personal experiences and happenings. He then added, 'everything personal is universal'. I say this for a reason. Whenever I dwell on personal happening in a write-up, it is in an attempt to attract and retain the readers' attention.



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I spent all my formative years, into my teens and beyond, with organizations affiliated with Tashnagsoutium. I was hardly 10 years old when my Dad enrolled me in the local Papken Sunny Badanegan Meoutiun. We held our meetings in the dilapidated community center – Joghovrtayen Doun – in west Beirut. The community center was built over a hill for we entered at ground level but its balcony extended over the street below. However, we were not allowed to step on it because of the possibility of its imminent collapse.

The community center must have been a house at one-time, the middle-eastern type of a house meant for an extended family that typically consisted of many rooms around a large central hall. Although the building was old, the center was nonetheless was very impressive. A big framed picture of the A.R.F founders was hung on the center of one of the hall walls along with many pictures of the fedayees on the rest of the walls. The community center even had a permanent resident we knew as Shahbaz Hairig. It was said that he was a fedayee at one time. In his old age he had found refuge in one of the rooms. Young and older adults congregated behind closed doors of its many rooms or hurriedly went in and out of the rooms with an air of determination pursuing something very important. It was in the far end left hand side corner room of the central hall that we youngsters held our meetings on Saturday afternoons. More than once a year we held a debate whether the Association's namesake, Papken Sunny, was justified to capture the Ottoman Bank or if it was a reckless act. We knew of the outcome of the debate and how the audience would vote, so no one volunteered to be in the team that disapproved the act. But someone had to do it. That's when the overseer and the facilitator of our meetings from the Zavarian Student Association would step in and assign some of us, to our great chagrin, to the opposing team.

From Badanegan I stepped into Zavarian Ashagerdagan Meoutiun. Vicken Hovsepien, Ohan Armenian, who reside in Montreal and in Los Angeles respectively and I were elected to the committee along with the two others whose names I do not remember. We voted Ohan to be the

chair, Vicken the treasurer and I was elected as the secretary. It was an unprecedented election because the Nshan Palandjian Djemaran students always ran the Ashagerdagan Meoutium. Three of us as Armenian Evangelical High School classmates had campaigned for change! There was a lot of enthusiasm in those days.

From Ashagerdagan I stepped into Zavarian Oussanoghagan Meoutium. It was considered a privilege to be a member of the Zavarian Student Association for you had to be a college student. You were considered an associate member until you took your oath to become a member of the Tashnagsoutiun. I took my vows in 1966. Dr. Melkon Eblighatian acted as the godfather of the year's inductees

The Zavarian Association was found in 1904 by Simon Zavarian, one of the founders of the A.R.F., during his visit to Beirut, which was then considered to be part of the zone including the Armenian Cilicia. It is during my Zavarian years that one of the most memorable speeches of my life happened. We had organized a round table discussion about the ways and means of achieving a united, free and independent Armenia. The prevailing reality was grim and the prospect of achieving a united and free independent Armenia was even much grimmer for the round table participants. As the all day discussion came to its end, Dr. Papken Papazian concluded the meeting with a speech that has remained etched in my memory.

Dr. Papken Papazian was a Tashnag leader at the highest levels. He was also a lover of theater. I am not sure if he practiced medicine or if he in fact had any interest to practice medicine. He was a superb orator. His bespectacled demeanor on the podium, his gesticulation, tone of voice, eloquence of language captivated us all. He and Sarkis Zeitlian were the speakers most of us did not want to miss. That afternoon Dr. Papazian extolled our efforts and urged us to keep the dream alive and that we cannot predict how international relations will pan out in the future in our favor for us to achieve our ultimate goal. I bet most of us, at least I did, attributed his speech to pep talk to keep us going.

Fast forward. If my recollection serves me well, it was in November 1989 that James Baker declared, as the Berlin wall collapsed, that the Soviet Union we knew does not exist anymore. Traditionally November is the month when A.R.F celebrates its day. I was asked to be the master of the ceremony of the celebration in New Jersey and introduce the speaker. James Baker's declaration came to my mind and I noted in my opening remark about the likelihood of Soviet Armenia emerging as an independent country. I remembered Dr. Papken Papazian as I remember him to this day. Who would have guessed then that the mighty Soviet Union would implode and collapse just like that? At least, I did not.

1965 was a remarkable year for us in Beirut. The 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide was commemorated in ways that we had not experienced before. The year's commemoration coincided with my high school graduation. We were referred to as the Hisnagmiage Serount, the 50th

anniversary generation. To this day I believe that it was in 1965 that we came out of our shells. It was then that I attended a commemoration in the Hovagimian-Manougian School hall. The main speaker was Kersam Aharonian, the editor of Zartonk Daily and a Ramgavar leader. It is there that he introduced a slogan and asked the audience to repeat it year after year – Next Year in Van. The slogan was either short lived, or never caught up.

Fast forward. For the very first time since 1915 church service was held in Akhtamar Island's Saint Cross (Sourp Katch) Church this year. In spite of all the controversies it created, it was a historical moment, as far as I am concerned. Whenever I read about the preparation and then about the actual church service, Kersam Aharonian comes to my mind. Forty-five – 45 –years had passed by and here we were in Van, or could have been, at our choosing, albeit only as visitors.

Are Papken Papazian and Kersam Aharonin prophets in the making? I leave that up to the readers of Keghart to contemplate.

This past year Keghart became one of the Internet sites I frequented the most. Now that the year is coming to its end, I wish the editorial board, the contributors, commentators, readers of Keghart, their families and significant others spread around the globe, a happy and a healthy new year.

Shnorhavor Nor Dare Yev Sourp Tznount (Happy New Year and Merry Christmas)

Kristos Tznave Yev Haydnezav (Christ is Born and Revealed)

Ohrnial eh Haydnoutiune Kristossi (Blessed is the Revelation of Christ)

And oh yes, next year in Van!

