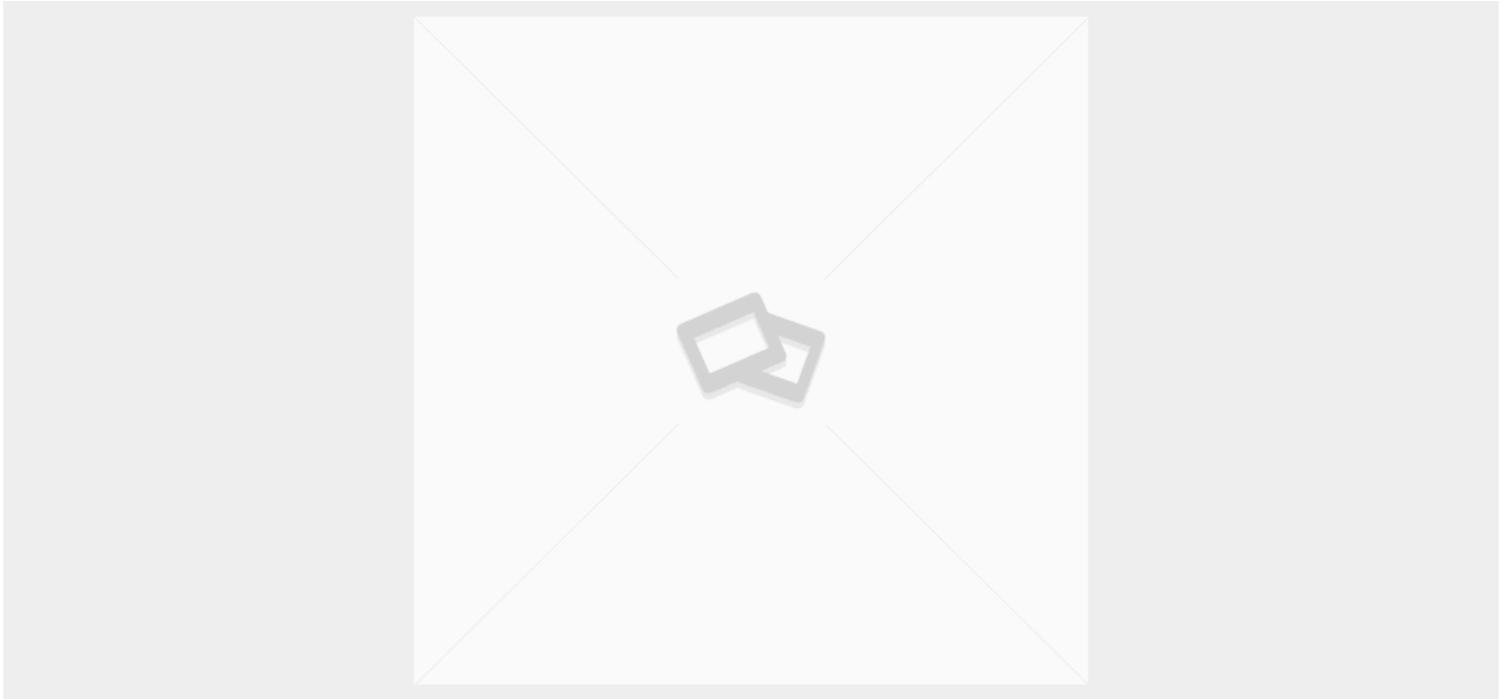


YES, WE FORGOT PAIN, THAT STUBBORN PAIN OF HOPE!

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By Antoine S. Terjanian, Yeghegnadzor, Armenia

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Onnik is the man in his seventies who lives on 5 Khachatryan St., the other end of our street. He welcomed us so kindly when we first moved in that I thought I would ask him for advice on where to acquire the goods and services we needed locally. I called several times the number he had given us; no one answered. Then I saw him on the street and asked if I had taken-down his number wrong. He said no, you have the correct number; it is just that they have cut my phone line (for non-payment - 900 drams). So I asked him if perhaps his wife would be willing to wash our laundry, since city water rarely reached our house at the time (because of our altitude). He checked with her and we started taking our laundry there and his phone line started working.

Onnik is an agricultural economist who had a relatively important position in Soviet times. His family came from Karagloukh, a village on the Silk Road, up in the mountains just before you reach the Selim caravanserail which was built in the 13th century by the Orbelyan princes. "Kara Gloukh" means "Stone Head", not because these villagers are stubborn, I am told, but because of a big rock in the form of a head marking the entrance to the village. If they were all like Onnik, they should have called the village "Voske Sirt", for Onnik has a heart of gold.

He used to visit me regularly when he knew I was alone and he recited Parouyr Sevak poetry for me, he explained to me the nuances and the different versions of the same poems published in Soviet times, some by the underground press.

He liked to indulge in a bit of oghi and used to smoke. When he noticed our non-smoking sign, he stopped smoking all-together. He ran to our house whenever it looked like we might be needing help or some vegetables from their garden. I always slipped him a banknote or two; then when he noticed that we liked our privacy, he always called first. Onnik complained about his eyes, so I helped him establish contact with some generous Americans who had come to visit us (the Eyecare Project and VOSH). They offered him free eye care and surgery.

Whenever we had visitors, we suggested they have a family meal at Onnik's instead of going to a restaurant, it helped the local economy and it gave our visitors an opportunity to visit an Armenian village home and experience their hospitality. It is a win/win deal.

On their living room wall they used to have a framed photo of his older brother who died in 1944, in the "Hayrenakan Paterazm" (Patriotic War), just before his battalion reached Berlin. When I came to Yeghegnadzor last March, the photo inside the frame had

been replaced by Onnik's son, the one who lived and worked in Leningrad and used to send him some \$ 100 per month. He had died in January in a car accident there and Onnik borrowed the money to go and burry him, in Leningrad; yes, they still call it by the old name here.

Last week he called me late at night. He wanted to borrow some money in a hurry to get his second son out of the morgue so he could bury him. They had not seen him for a couple of days; they found him after breaking down the door of his house, where he lived alone.

I had seen Azat a few times at Onnik's house, on the street, and even once lying on the sidewalk, dead-drunk (a sight you rarely find in Armenia). For some reason I never felt any sympathy for him. I thought there are enough people looking for work here, why would I encourage a drunken tramp. I never offered him work, nor did I ever invite him to our house. But I felt sorry for him this spring when I saw him limping badly. I was told his foot had frozen this winter and they had to amputate his toes. What a difference I thought between Onnik and him, how could they be related?

At the funeral I learned who Azad was. He was a brilliant child and student who graduated with honours from Yerevan's Polytechnik Institute. He got married, built a beautiful house and had three daughters. Then came independence, the Karabagh war and unemployment. He went to Moscow and worked at anything he could find to send money for his wife and kids. He was one of those Armenians who were badly beaten in the Moscow metro by neo-fascist skinheads. He was lucky he did not die, although in retrospect, perhaps Azat died then. When he returned home, his wife was having an affair. He took to the bottle.

Yes, we forgot pain, that stubborn pain of hope!

To read all Antoine S. Terjanian letters from Armenia, click on <http://lettersfromarmenia.blogspot.com/>

