

He remembers horror of Armenian massacre

By Diane Gale
staff writer

AS AVEDIS Khatntian sits in his comfortable home in Bloomfield Township, it's difficult to imagine him 69 years ago in Turkey as a young boy witnessing thousands of deaths during the 1918 Armenian genocide. But his stories seem to come alive as the otherwise composed man punctuates his anecdotes with bursts of tears.

"I have to warn you when I talk about this I break down," Khatntian, 75, explained. "It's funny, because when I was young my intellect could control my emotions more."

Khatntian lists his aunts and cousins among the 1.5 million Armenians that are said to have died from the direct orders given by the Turkish government. On April 24, Armenians around the world observe the day to recall memories of their relatives and ancestors who died during that time.

"One of the reasons that I was saved was because my paternal aunt made shoes, and she hid them so she could make them for their (government officials) wives," Khatntian said. They gave her a piece of paper to be kept back, and they said she could take her immediate family."

Khatntian, a noted artist and sculptor, paused for a moment, swallowed hard, wiped his eyes and said: "She made me her son . . . and my mother her sister."

Khatntian's father was in the United States at the time. While relating his story, Khatntian erupted with emotion as the suppressed tears seemed to escape his small frame. They went away as quickly as they came. Then he'd continue his story trying to pick up where he stopped.

He recalls the dead bodies in the streets that were baked by the sun.

They weren't buried, he said, because a small minority of "select people" — less than 50 Armenians in his town of about 10,000 — were left, he said. "It was a mixture that could not be handled by those remaining, Khatntian said."

"One aunt went with her baby looking for her in-laws, and we don't know what happened to her," he said. "My cousin escaped from the (army) massacre, and he came to our house in the night. We were scared, but we took him in. Then we decided it was too dangerous, and he hid in another home. My mother snuck food to him in the night."

That cousin was later arrested by the Turks. Khatntian said he often went to check up on him by peeking through a key hole in the cell. But, as in other cases, Khatntian ended his story by saying, "We never heard from him again."

Meanwhile, Khatntian and his family moved from their home to find safer shelter.

"My grandmother knew a friendly Turk, and we lived with them," Khatntian said. "During that period, I tell you this was horrible."

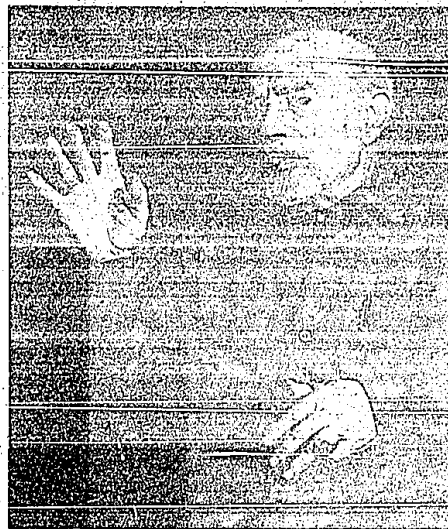
DESPITE HIS "grievous" stories, Khatntian doesn't blame the "slaughter" on the Turkish people. He attributes the blame to government policies.

"The Turks in general are very nice people, and not the terrible people like some of the stories tell you," Khatntian said. "A lot of Armenians were saved by the Turks, who took them in their homes."

Khatntian stopped his discourse to take a long drink of water, dry his cheeks and try to relate a painful memory.

"One day I was playing on the street and I saw a lady coming down the street. She was hysterical. I recognized her and said to my mother that my

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Gary Caskey/Staff photographer

Avedis Khatntian cannot control his emotions when he recalls what happened to him and his family 69 years ago in Turkey.

Armenian's 'forgotten genocide' ceremony Sunday in Beverly Hills

By Diane Gale
staff writer

OLDER ARMENIAN men and women relate first-hand accounts of nightmarish sights.

The younger generations talk about aunts, uncles and grandparents they were never able to meet. Each year on April 24 Armenians of all ages meet to commemorate the deaths of 1.5 million Armenians in 1915.

"Scholars often call our (Armenian) genocide the forgotten genocide, but it will never be forgotten by any Armenian," said Nerses Serkalian, a vocal figure in the Armenian community.

ON SUNDAY, April 29, Armenians from around the state will attend a commemoration at 2 p.m. in Wylie Groves High School in Beverly Hills. It is the first time that the various Armenian groups will be meeting together to remember the "massacre," Serkalian said.

Each Armenian church and various organizations have historically conducted individual commemorations on April 24. Serkalian, the broadcaster on the Armenian radio hour heard Sunday mornings on WCAR, organized the collaborative event. It is sponsored by the Armenian Commemorative Committee

of Greater Detroit. Serkalian is the chairman.

"The purpose is to honor with dignity the memory of the 1.5 million Armenians — innocent men, women and children — who were massacred by the Turkish government in the genocide, and to pay tribute to the Armenians who survived," he said.

A commemorative booklet is being printed to list the dead.

"We asked the community to provide names of people in their family that were massacred and for the first time ever we're enshrining the names of our ancestral past," Serkalian said.

The booklet will show pictures and documents and list 35 pages of names, "a small percentage" of the people that died.

Serkalian relates the mass killings to the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people. The Turkish government, however, denies the accusations as being "myths," according to Avedis Khatntian, a survivor who lives in Bloomfield Township.

"Researchers say any time a power resorts to genocide is when they feel insecure and want to bring by a state of their own people," Khatntian said. They wanted Turkey for the Turkish only."

THE THREE MEN who came to power after a civil revolt in 1909 "de-

cided to get rid of the Armenians," Khatntian said. Five years later the government drafted all the able bodied Armenian men in the army.

"After they worked on the labor battalion, they were slaughtered," Khatntian said. "In one year they were wiped out."

On April 24, 1915, the Turks arrested close to 600 religious figures, political leaders, teachers, doctors, "the brains of the Armenians," Serkalian said.

The women, children and older people were allowed to leave the country, "but they were like sheep without a shepherd," Serkalian said.

"The town crier announced they (the Turks) were coming and everyone had to be out of their homes," Khatntian said. "The Turkish prisoners were let loose to do the dirty work. They were in charge of the marches out of the city."

"Everything dirty happened," he continued.

Serkalian tells horror stories about women who were raped, pregnant women who had their stomachs sliced open, how Turks "threw rocks on" old people who had fallen and axes that were used on children. He also tells of people who committed suicide to escape a gruesome fate.

"I have pictures, but I don't want to get too gory here," he said. SERKALIAN'S parents met and were

married in the United States. His mother's parents were killed before she was two years old, and she has no memory of her other relatives.

"As a kid I asked why I don't have aunts, uncles, grandpas or grandmothers," Serkalian said. "I was fortunate to have a mother and father who were survivors."

The minute our homes were vacated they brought in Turks to live in them," Serkalian said. "It is estimated that the Armenians lost billions of dollars."

The Turkish government took Armenian lives, land and personal property, he said.

"You can't blame the people of today for what happened," Serkalian said. "But we want the civilized world to know that the Turkish government denies their guilt," he continued. "We have documentation that the world can't deny that there was a genocide."

A military trial was held (and the government) was found guilty, but that government was overruled and new leaders came in," Serkalian said.

The commemoration on April 29 will include a proclamation from Gov. James Blanchard asking all citizens to remember on April 24 the Armenian people who died. Sen. Carl Levin and other guests are also scheduled to speak during the event.

Police plan arrests

Farmington Hills police have obtained a warrant for a suspect in connection with the burglary of Harrison High School during the last weekend of March.

"Nobody is in custody at this time," said Detective Craig Summers.

Although only one warrant has been obtained, police say they eventually plan to seek warrants for more suspects.

Burglars made off with more than \$40,000 in equipment and caused an additional \$1,500 damage in two visits to Harrison March 30 and 31.

LAST WEEK, Sgt. Al Haver of the Hills police said the suspects are not students or former students at Harrison High "as far as we know."

The break-ins, which resulted in a day off for the 1,200 Harrison students, while the police combed the scene for clues, were accomplished when thieves removed a window next to the main entrance of the school on 12 Mile west of Middlebelt.

Items stolen included seven Apple II computers, three word processors, four computerized typewriters, five electric typewriters and two microscopes.

In addition to the equipment, thieves broke into a safe containing approximately \$25, and sprayed the contents of a fire extinguisher down a hallway.

Other damage included broken classroom windows and locks. Thieves concentrated on the building's third floor where the main office and classrooms are.

INSIDE ANGLES

Know someone doing something notable? Let us know. Write: Inside Angles, Farmington Observer, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

KEVIN J. MARTIN, son of Donald and Doris Martin of Farmington Hills, has entered the U.S. Air Force's Delayed Enlistment Program (DEP). Kevin's entry into the DEP allows the Air Force to schedule an opening for him to attend basic training and be assigned to a job or skill area. He is a 1979 graduate of Harrison High School. Kevin will enter the Air Force on August 28.

THE BEST JUMP Ropers title goes to the six-member team composed of Lisa Burton, Marcy Hall, Jennifer Misrao, Heather Pullian, Linda Williams and Jennifer Wick. The seniors at Power Middle School raised \$406 for the American Heart Association's Jump Rope For Heart fund-raiser last month. It was the highest amount raised by any of the teams formed from the 320 students who participated. Power students contributed more than \$8,000 to the association.

IF YOU'RE A LOW INCOME, Oakland County resident aged 14-21, Southeastern Community Placement can help you obtain summer work experience. There is no charge. Call now at 354-9167.

DIANE GOULETTE, daughter of Dennis and Nancy Goulette of Farmington Hills, has been elected second vice president of the Administrative Management Society at Ferris State College. Diane is a junior in the School of Business, majoring in personnel and labor relations and has earned her degree as a legal secretary. She is the immediate past president of Tau Beta Sigma, national music sorority, participating in symphony and marching band. She was awarded the Outstanding Student Award for outstanding leadership. During her freshman year, she was awarded "Rookie of the Year" by the marching band. Diane is a 1981 Harrison High School graduate.

MICHAEL VICTOR MENDELSON, son of Mr. and Mrs. M. Mendelson of Farmington Hills and a graduate of Harrison High School, is appearing in "Micro Steps in Time," a musical theatre revue and the final show of the 1983-84 Boostell Theatre at Wayne State University. Performances are 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, April 27-28 and May 4-5, and 2 p.m. Sundays, April 29 and May 6. Micro Steps is one of 25 actors and actresses featured in a look at glittering Las Vegas and a special glimpse into the speakeasy life of the Roaring Twenties. Tickets and information are avail-

able from the Wayne State University Theatre box office, Cass and Hancock, Detroit 48202. The telephone number is 377-2980.

FARMINGTON AREA JAYCEES present a seminar "Financial Planning For Retirement and Estate Planning" at 7 p.m. Thursday in Farmington Community Library, 32737 12 Mile. For more information, call 477-JOCS.

DAVID J. WEIGEL, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Weigel of Farmington, has earned academic honors for the fall semester at Evangel College, Springfield, Mo. He is a 1981 graduate of Farmington High School.

CATHERINE HOCHSTEIN, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ted Hochstein of Farmington Hills, was awarded a Regents Scholarship from Eastern Michigan University's Office of Financial Aid. Eastern's Regents Scholarship is a \$1,000 award, the most prestigious offered by the university. Recipients must have a minimum of a 3.75 grade point average and test scores of at least 24 on the American College Test or 1050 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Catherine is a senior at Our Lady of Mercy High School who holds a 4.0 grade point average. She is a member of the National Honor Society, the GSA Club, chess and serves as vice president of the Spanish Honor Society.

A QUILTING FUN GROUP will begin at the Farmington Community Center, 24705 Farmington Road, from 11 noon to 3 p.m. Wednesday, May 2. This group is open to all who are interested in meeting new friends and sharing creative ideas. The group may choose to work on a joint project or on individual ones. For further information, contact Linda Cole at 477-8404.

PATTY BOLEN, of Farmington Hills and a 1981 graduate of North Farmington High School, is a junior and a member of the Beta Pi chapter of the Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority at Michigan State University. She was recently selected by her chapter to compete in their district for a National Founder's scholarship which she won and received \$100 and a certificate. This now makes her eligible to compete nationally with 17 other selectees from 17 other districts in the U.S. and Canada for the L. Perle Green Founder's Memorial Scholarship of \$2,000 or for one of the four Founder's Memorial Scholarships of \$1,000 each. Patty was a member of the National Honor Society and the French Honor Society at North Farmington High School. She was recently inducted into the Golden Key national honor society at Michigan State University, where she is in the communications department working toward a degree in business management.

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