

Survival Story of Hamazasb Arslanian

My name is Hamazasb Arslanian. My address is 13560 Farley, Redford, Michigan. I am one of the very few who have survived the barbaric and vicious massacre of the 1.5 million Armenians in Der el Zor [in the Syrian desert] by the Turks in 1915.

I am born in Erzeroum, Turkish Armenia, County of Keghi, Sergaville village. I came from a family of 100 members, peace-loving and free, religious people. In Keghi we were known as a very prosperous, educated, and wealthy family. My father and my uncle went to Europe to receive their education. Our grandfather and [great-]uncle were merchants coming back home on one of their trips. They were attacked by the Turks, robbed, and killed in 1896. The Turks, whenever they could, always killed the Armenians for years because we were Christian and Armenian. For years, in the Turks' eyes, we were second-class citizens.



Hamazasb, Mariam (grandmother), Araksi, Diran, and Serma Arslanian – ca.

1912



Sergavil, as it looks today (courtesy of Mehmet Emin Oktan)

In 1915, they the Turks received the order to exile and massacre all Armenians. They exiled 40,000 of us from Keghi County only toward the desert of Arabia. We were taken from our homes – men, women, and children – walked the treacherous journey for three days until we reached Palu. All the homes there that were Armenian were set on fire. As we went crossing the Mourad River, one of the largest in Turkey, on the bridge they had stationed Turkish soldiers, many of them. They separated the men and elders, started to slaughter and kill them in front of our eyes and threw them in the river. The women and children were driven on foot to Tigranakert [Diyarbakir]. Many of them could not take the harsh and vicious treatment by the soldiers and died on the way. As we continued, my grandmother Mariam died. My mother Serma, my sister Araksi, and my brother Diran kept going. To this day, I cannot forget his [Diran's] beautiful smile even when he was crying. He had a smile on his face.

We reached Der el Zor, which took two weeks without food, sleeping any place we found to put our heads down. The command came that the remaining Armenians were to be massacred. My mother, hearing this news, had a hemorrhage for two days and died. My sister, who was five years old, my brother eight years old, myself 10 years old, were put in a Turkish orphanage for them to murder us as their command came. My sister was separated from us to the girls portion. My brother and I were together. At night I heard my sister calling me. I went to assist her. She had become ill and inside of three days we were told she had died. My brother Diran, who was small for his age, would climb down from the window and would beg food for us. We were given a large bowl of soup for the boys with a spoon. We were not able to even have a spoonful each. Two days later, they were going to take all the orphans, drop them in the well, and burn them with the gasoline. Three of us boys decided to jump from the third floor and run away to try to save our lives. In the meantime, my brother had not come back. To this day, I don't know if he is alive or not.

While I was walking, trying to survive, one Arab gun repairman approached me and said he would take care of me, food and shelter. I can help him in the shop. I went with him. His two sisters taught me the Arabic language in one week. Every month he was going to the desert to replace the guns on the bridge. The Turkish soldier found me and, as an Armenian, I was told to go where there were 600,000 Armenians to be tortured and slaughtered. One of the Arabs saved me by raising his sword and had me pretend that I was dead. . . . Lay still. He would come back at night to take me away with him. I waited, petrified, under all those bodies. At nightfall, he kept his word and came, delivered me to the sheik that had wanted me.

At this Arab sheik's home, there were 30 girls and boys, Armenian, which they had saved. They took care of us like their own. I have every respect and love for the Arabs that lived under the tent. I stayed with my adopted family for five years. The Armenians had succeeded to establish a free, independent Armenia. After three years, the scouts going to the deserts and towns looking for our survivors after the massacre collected them and returned them to their families who had gone to America before 1915. Levon Begajamian was the scout that came to me and asked me if I would want to go unite with my father and uncles in America. My sheik begged me to stay, saying he would give me all the wealth and comfort that he would give his son, not to leave them, but I thought the news of my kinfolks was a happy one. . . .

So, I left with tears in my eyes, went back with the scout (there were 159 of us) to Der el Zor where the Armenian Red Cross supplied us with clothing. From there, they sent us to Aleppo, Syria, reunited there from other regions, other friends and family members. I stayed there six months. My relatives would knit garments I would take to wealthy homes and sell them. This way, we survived until, at this time, I heard from my uncle [Marouke Arslanian] in Liverpool, England. I went there and stayed eight months. My father [Mamigon Arslanian], from America, was contacted and sent the funds for me to come to the country that had been heaven and home to the Armenians.



Hamazasb Arslanian – 7 December 1920



Mamigon Arslanian – ca. 1920



Marouke Arslanian – ca. 1920

