

## Black Dog of Fate Peter Balakian

### About the book

*Black Dog of Fate* is the memoir of Armenian-American poet Peter Balakian. Through recollections of the many upheavals of sub-urban America in the 1950s and 60s, Balakian reveals how he came to understand his family's experiences in the Armenian atrocities of 1915-1918.

Peter Balakian was born in 1951 to an Armenian-American family living in New Jersey. He recounts how he enjoyed a privileged childhood dominated by a vibrant family, friendships and sports. Although Peter enjoys a youth mostly free from material want, he is aware that his family harbours a past wracked with pain and despair. These past horrors are predominantly evoked by his Grandmother's tormented dreams and her unwillingness to describe what happened to her so many years before. As Peter grows up, he finds that uncovering this hidden past will come to dominate his own life.

*Black Dog of Fate* is an engrossing journey of self-discovery that demonstrates how events of the past can direct our lives today. As Peter grows, he engages with sports, romance and the political radicalism of the times, but ultimately it is his family's past sufferings that most impact his adult life.

### About the author

Peter Balakian is an academic, poet and historian who lives in America. As well as his extensive publications in a number of fields, he has also worked with Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

### Discussion Questions

Please note that some of these questions will act as spoilers for the book.

1. how does Peter's understanding of his identity change throughout the book?
2. is the adolescent tension of Peter's relationship with his father usual amongst children of his age? Or do you think that other factors exacerbated the situation?
3. why do you think Peter's Aunt Nona vehemently opposes the inclusion of the atrocities in Armenia within Peter's poems?

4. why do you think the author pursued poetry as a career, and then moved toward writing historical accounts of the Ottoman destruction of Armenians?

You can use HMD resources to find out more about the atrocities against the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in <http://www.hmd.org.uk/genocides>.

You can also watch the testimony of Astrid Aghajanian, who like Peter's grandmother also survived the atrocities in Armenia. <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/films/untold-stories-astrid-aghajianian>.