



## Armenian survivor story: Satenig Hoonanian

Satenig Eهرانjian was born around 1897 in Erzurum to Armenian parents. She grew up in the Armenian community of around 20,000 men, women and children. Armenian life was very much centred round the church and the family. Armenia was the very first country to adopt Christianity as a national creed in around 301 AD. Community life was vibrant with schools, hospitals and churches forming the town centres. Citizens spoke Armenian, a distinct Indo-European language with 38 characters to its alphabet. One of the key characteristics of Armenia lay in education. Education was and is still regarded the most important gift an Armenian parent could give to their children and Satenig's early life was dominated by school.

As the First World War broke out, Satenig had just completed her secondary education and wanted to become a teacher. In 1915, she was engaged to be married to a fellow Armenian when he, alongside almost all of the Armenian adult male population were conscripted by the Turkish authorities and sent to fight in the war against the Russian army. Armenian soldiers were disarmed and disappeared, and her fiancé never returned.

In June 1915, along with those Armenians who remained in Erzurum – predominantly the elderly, women and children – Satenig was forced to leave her home as the Turkish government required the removal of all Armenians across the Ottoman Empire, and were prepared to commit mass murder in order to get their wish. Conditions on the journeys out of Erzurum, like those faced by Armenians across the Ottoman Empire, were atrocious. Given little to no warning, people like Satenig were forced out of their homes with little or no possessions or food. Forced to walk many miles under armed guards, violence and abductions became the norm. After a few days walking south west toward the deserts of Syria, Satenig was separated from her sister and her mother. Her mother was too ill to continue on the torturous journey and her sister was abducted. Satenig never saw her sister again.

During the trip, Satenig was wounded after resisting the advances of one of the Turkish soldiers who was escorting the fleeing refugees. Her left arm was struck by a bayonet and a deep wound was opened. In some ways, this terrible injury was a blessing. On arrival in Diyarbakir, her wound needed medical attention and she was treated by a Danish Charity who, after administering to her wounds sent her to Aleppo in Syria ahead of the convoy she had been a part of. She never saw anyone from that convoy arrive and she assumed that they were killed crossing the Tigris river.

In Aleppo, Satenig joined a Danish refugee camp and worked as an assistant and later as an administrator for them. Still living in Syria, at 21 years of age Satenig married an Armenian refugee and they had a daughter. A time for celebration was turned to one of sorrow when her husband died suddenly. She remarried in 1924 and built her family with Khatchik Hoonanian, also a refugee from Erzurum.

Khatchik and Satenig had three children; their first child died aged two. Her two sons Diran and Rostom were born in 1931 and 1933. Today, Satenig's son says 'I felt I must tell this tragic tale for the sake of my grandchildren so that they in turn learn and know their own background.' He recalls that her parents did not speak about their experience very often, as, particularly for his mother, they would become understandably emotional when reminiscing. It was only when World War Two erupted that she would hear her parents discuss the events which happened as they were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands within present-day Turkey. They would speak about the suffering of those in Europe and reminisce in their home in Iran about what had taken place only 24 years beforehand.

It is important to know that the atrocities in Armenia did not begin nor end in 1915 to 1918 and the impact of the massacre and deportation of Armenians from their home lands are still felt today. The Turkish government were so intent on destroying Armenian presence they not only forcibly deported and murdered Armenians but they sought to destroy any evidence of their residence there. Building stones with Armenian markings were defaced or destroyed, and all the towns and villages with Armenian names were re-named with Turkish names. Even today, the many remaining Armenian churches are left to decay with a small handful converted into secular museums.

To find out more about the atrocities in Armenia, we recommend watching *The Betrayed* (<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7833166317264817428>)

You can also watch our film of Armenian survivor Astrid Aghajanian (<http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/films/untold-stories-astrid-aghajanian>) who shared her Untold Story for HMD 2011.

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