

A WARM WIND THROUGH YETTEM

An Eighty-year Anthology

By **CHARLES DAVIDIAN**
(1901-2006)

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Chapter 1

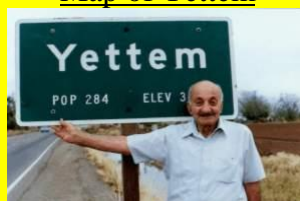
The train stopped just long enough for us to get off and for someone to heave our baggage onto the graveled platform, then took off with black smoke pouring out of its stack. White steam belched right and left, leaving us in what appeared to be an endless expanse of hay fields. It was 1905, and the only signs of civilization were the railroad tracks, sagging telegraph wires and a 12-by-12 shack with a sign reading "Lovell," and in smaller letters, "Wells Fargo and Co."

The thoughtful Santa Fe Railroad people had furnished the setting with a wooden bench onto which my mother collapsed in hopeless resignation while my father gathered up our scattered bags. My two older sisters, Mabel and Nellie, joined our mother with matching resignation while my kid sister Rosie and I enjoyed ourselves teetering on the steel railroad tracks.

My father, meanwhile, had walked onto a nearby knoll to scan the horizon, and announced that he could see a cloud of dust approaching.

This turned out to be a "spring wagon" drawn by a single horse, urged by a figure in overalls and straw hat. This was my father's older brother,

[Map of Yettem](#)



[Click for big picture of Charles at Yettem sign](#)



Click [here](#) to view the full size photo of Charles' family at his 100th birthday party. He turned 100 on Oct. 1, 2001. (He's wearing the white shirt in the center)

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Thadeus, who had preceded us by three years to this dismal angle in the foothills on the eastern edge of the San Joaquin Valley to prepare our farm for cultivation.

What were we doing in this vast expanse of emptiness?

Let me tell you.

Dad, who was a cook in a missionary college in Talas, Turkey, took his employers' advice and placed his family in the care of his elderly brother and left hurriedly to escape service in the Turkish Army.

It was well known that Armenians in the Turkish Army seldom returned home. Dad was the youngest of five brothers and three sisters.

His oldest brother, Thadeus, and his wife Mary, who were childless, had adopted Dad as a son. So all through Dad's marriage and the arrival of his children the family had remained a unit.

After a few years, Dad's family arrived in New York along with Uncle Thadeus and Aunt Mary. I was born in their living quarters at the Psi Upsilon fraternity house at City College, where Dad was employed as a cook. My sister Rosie was born a couple of years later.

My earliest recollections are of a period at the Westchester Golf Club, where Dad some time later had charge of the dining facilities.



Photo, c. 1905, from left to right:
Sister Mabel, Dad, Mother, Charles
(the author), Aunt Mary, Baby Rose,
Uncle Thadeus, Sister Nellie

However, Aunt Mary's health was failing. Her doctor prescribed a warmer climate. So, acting upon the advice of some nobly inspired earlier-arrived Armenians who had in mind a new Armenia in this country, Dad purchased a tract of 40 acres in the San Joaquin Valley of California, smack up against the Sierra Nevada mountains at the east, and sent Uncle and Aunt to prepare this purchase for human habitation.



Charles Davidian, the author,
left, with his wife of 65 years, Bee

So after about three years, during which Uncle Thadeus had brought some 10 acres to production, he urgently appealed to Dad for guidance. So here we were!

More about Bee

This settlement owed its conception to the efforts of the Jenanyan brothers, Haritune and Moses, from Marash, Turkey, and Krikor Aslanian, from Adana, also in Turkey. These men, being deeply concerned about the future of their people, looked toward the United States for a new homeland to halt their dispersion. California seemed the right place.

Uncle Thadeus' spring wagon was what could be called an earlier version of the present day pickup truck, drawn by one or two horses. However, in this case, only one.

Our farm was at a distance of three miles from the railroad. An irrigation canal ran on one side of the road and a rank growth of sunflowers lined the other. My older sisters begged to be allowed to pick some of the colorful blooms but found by the sticky substance they exuded and the unpleasant odor that surrounded them that admiring them from a distance was preferable.

Our home turned out to be a three-room affair with exposed rafters but boasted a water pump inside the kitchen. Thus, we were spared any inconvenience should, on rare occasions, the temperature gets cold enough to cover the horse trough under the poplar trees in the barnyard with a layer of ice.

I don't remember it getting that cold, but if it ever did, we were prepared.

The kitchen floor was of 1-by-12 boards, somewhat warped and with little open knot holes, and served on Saturdays as the bathroom. The water was disposed of by simply upending the galvanized wash tub we used for bathing.

In the front yard was what we called a "home orchard" with oranges, peaches, apricots and an apple tree, which though laden with fruit in season offered little eating pleasure because of worm infestations.

The barn accommodated two horses, one mule and one cow. The mule was used as a "saddle horse" for occasional trips to the small store about a mile away. The cow was an important part of the household. She supplied milk, butter and cheese. Uncle Thadeus and Aunt Mary had given their cow a nickname of "Bessie" or "Bossy," but I don't recall ever naming ours.

A two-holes, demure but always convenient, was readily found even on the darkest night by its gaunt silhouette against the starlit sky.

My father proceeded immediately toward enlarging our home. A carpenter from Orosi, who bunked under our mulberry tree all summer, was able to complete our six-room addition before the fall rains.

One day, Dad drove to Visalia in the spring wagon and returned with a beautiful reed organ, operated by foot power. However, in time, because of an air leak somewhere, the organ emitted a continuous monotonous moan when pedaled. Of course, Mabel and Nellie were no longer interested in the instrument, but Rosie took over and learned to play numerous hymns in total disregard of the moaning accompaniment.



[Click thumbnail](#) for photo of Charles and Rose.

Aunt Mary had become an experienced farm wife by this time and began teaching my mother the skills needed in the preservation of peaches and apricots, and for drying okra and sliced eggplant in the sun. In the winter, when fresh fruit and vegetables were no more, the two women would sit with their aprons full of the stuff and painstakingly examine each piece between thumb and forefinger for any evidence of entomological activity. These were the ingredients in many a hearty stew, but the points of the okra never softened and always scratched as they went down.

Chapter 2

The people who had preceded us were scattered on farms separated by areas of virgin fields so that some families were isolated by distances of half a mile or so except for a small area near the one-room school where one of the early arrivals had established a general store handling food, clothing, kerosene and harnesses, as well as serving as the local post office.

Hagop Effendi Hamalian, our storekeeper and postmaster, along with Ezekiel Kendigian and Devlat Agha Moorsalian, were instrumental in changing the name of "Lovell" to its present name, "Yettem," Armenian for "Garden of Eden." They had submitted three names to the Post Office Department: *Armenia*, *Ararat*, and *Yettem*. The last name was decided upon. Consequently, the Churchill District Grammar School became Yettem School.

This store extended credit to all the villagers until harvest time, when all accounts were settled. This was what we kids looked forward to. I was usually the one to take the check to Hagop Effendi, and through experience I knew that he was always good for a small bag of rock candy. Rosie always accompanied me.

Hagop Effendi had a daughter Alice, and a son, Albert, who was about my age. He was of a gentler breed. He never came to school barefooted. He was handsome. He wore a necktie to church and was much admired by all the little girls and by Rosie to the point where she tried to bribe me into emulating him by offering me her solitary dime. I did not take her up on it.

The former arrivals to Yettem welcomed us with open arms. They were mostly from Marash and Adana and were Turkish-speaking Armenians, as we were. Some of them were educated college people of genteel background, but in these primitive surroundings of wood stove cooking, hand pumped water and kerosene lamps, we were all at a general social level. Our storekeeper, Hagop, the only operating businessman, carried the title of "Effendi."

The rest of the mature males were either "Baron" or "Agha."

Those men with the vision of a new Armenia in this country made their first mistake when they settled so far from the railroad. The price factor might have been one reason. Another was that the soil resembled the rich, heavy loam of their homeland. This dark soil proved to be heavy adobe and very difficult to cultivate. When wet, it was extremely sticky. When

dry, it formed an impenetrable crust. However, these inexperienced newcomers rose formidably to the task. Little by little the dry fields gave way to vineyards and orchards watered by the Sierra snows and guided there by the Kings River and irrigation canals. A small village soon sprouted in the vicinity of Hagop Effendi's store and the little school.

The Adana people were the Adalians, Kaloustians, and Aslanians. They settled close to the foothills at an angle formed by Stokes Mountain, a solitary out-cropping from the main Sierra chain. A Sunday morning worship was organized, and Presbyterian services were held in the little school-house. My Uncle Thadeus conducted the services although he was not an ordained clergyman.

Among our new arrivals was Yenovk, a nephew of Hagop Effendi, and his wife, who became a Sunday School teacher for the children. Most of her teachings were familiar to me, since my mother often called us in from our play and narrated to us the numerous Biblical parables and commandments, but basically the need to be honest and good, because good people went to heaven, but bad people went elsewhere.

Aside from our weekly Sunday services, a mid-week evening service was organized that we faithfully attended throughout the year, even through rainy seasons. During the winter months our road was a quagmire of churned mud, hardly negotiable by horse-drawn vehicles. Our faithful parishioners preferred to go on foot along the elevated banks of the small private irrigation ditches.

The untimely death in 1910 of Uncle Thadeus, in an accident while transporting a load of loose hay, was a loss to the community. He was one of the early arrivals and was a patriarch among the villagers. His grave reposed, undisturbed, in a distant corner of our 40 acres until 1921 when his remains were relocated in the Visalia cemetery.

Members of St. Mary Apostolic Church held their services in the afternoon after the Presbyterians had vacated. The Presbyterians began building their church in 1912, but it was not completed until two years later because of financial difficulties. The sanctuary was on the upper floor. The basement was used for social events and Christian Endeavor meetings. The windows on the south side of the sanctuary had colored panes and those worshipers within range changed color from red to blue to orange to yellow as the sun progressed.

Reverend Melon Jenanyan was the first ordained minister in our church. He brought his family, consisting of his wife and four children, and conducted services in the Turkish language. In time, as newcomers became more numerous, the Armenian speakers predominated. This

caused discord among the parishioners and would have exploded into violence except for the timely miracle of divine intervention.

For a few months an attempt was made with a pastor who divided his ministry into the two languages, but this did not prove satisfactory. A date was set for a general meeting after a Sunday service to arrive at a solution to mutual satisfaction. Since feelings began to heat up as the meeting date neared, some violence was feared.

On this Sunday a crowd had gathered, including some from the apostolic church, in front of the pool hall and small hotel across the road. Someone had notified Constable Brooks from Orosi to accompany our peace officer, Mike Tashjian, in case the violence should prove too much for one man.

The meeting was to be held in the basement social hall of the church, but a clamoring began among some of the hotheads as they emerged from the upper sanctuary. This caused Constable Brooks to collapse with a heart attack, which necessitated the services of our pastor's brother-in-law who had studied medicine back in Marash.

Constable Brooks' seizure did not prove to be very serious, but it brought our two factions to their senses and the matter was settled by the two parties. The Armenian speakers were to use the sanctuary, while the Turkish speakers, who were in the minority, were to use the basement social hall. However, this arrangement did not work out for either group, since neither could support a full-time pastor. An attempt was made with the services of visiting unattached clergymen (of which there were many). This, too, was not a happy solution. The worshipers were seeking greener pastures elsewhere -- both spiritually and financially. So, in the early 1960s, the doors finally closed.

Chapter 3

We were joined in about 1910 by a nephew of Dad's who had followed the usual procedure of leaving his family with relatives while settling here. He was Cousin Boghos Simonian, an able carpenter who soon earned the enviable title of "Oosta" (Master). Cousin Boghos was well able to read the Armenian script, but he was not so hot about writing home. He came over and had Mother do his letter writing.

He was soon joined by his wife and three children: a 15-year-old daughter, a son, Humayak (whom we called Mike) and a younger daughter. Boghos was active in the construction of the new apostolic church. He had no tolerance for Protestants, whom he considered traitors, even though his

wife was one. He often cautioned his wife, "Do not attend Protestant services. In this country that is reason for divorce."

His wife was in poor health and soon passed away. Since they lived on a 10-acre farm adjoining ours, Mother took the kids under her wing.

Cousin Boghos was joined a year later by his brother Armenag, Armenag's wife, Myrani, a 10-year-old son named Sam, and a baby in arms. Also in the party was 16-year-old Gusina, a new wife for cousin Boghos. She also joined my mother's brood. In the years that followed, she presented Cousin Boghos with three daughters and a son, Simon, to join his family.

Boghos and Armenag took active hold in Sunday services in their church. Boghos took part in the rituals while Armenag operated the aromatic censers up and down the side aisles.

Since Armenag lived in a small rented house within calling distance of the church, his wife was helpful at baptismal services. Cousin Armenag would step out of the rear church door and call, "Myrani! Hot water!" She would hurriedly build a quick fire of dried grapevine clippings and within a few minutes appear at the rear door of the church with a kettle in one hand and her child on the free arm.

Myrani was a timid creature and relied on Nellie to visit her every afternoon after school between the hours of four and five because a sheep herder -- a very uncouth person known as "Old Stony Hitchcock" -- made his daily visit to the store and cut through her yard to get to the bridge over the canal. Old Stony was said to be a Civil War veteran. We kids viewed him with respectful awe.

The church was surrounded by a ring of young shade trees. Cousin Boghos' son Mike was given the job of watering these once a week with buckets filled from a nearby ditch, for which he was paid 50 cents per month. I helped him occasionally and was rewarded each payday with a bottle of pop. Mike loved to shake his bottle with his thumb over the top and spray me with the fizz, but I drank all of mine.

We were later joined by another of Dad's brothers, Uncle Krikor, his wife Esther and son Ohan, who soon became Owen. Uncle Krikor always kept one eye closed and squinted with the other, giving cause to the whispered assumption that the two eyes did not match in color. However, no one could say for sure and of course no one asked.

I dreaded Uncle Krikor's visits. He showed his love for me by cruelly pinching my cheek or pulling my ear, while enjoying a lusty guffaw.

Aunt Esther was a true farmer's wife. She tended the garden with hand pumped water and a mean hoe. She carried many a weakling chick in the bosom of her blouse until it became strong enough to follow her about thinking she was its mother, or so the story went.

My mother was a Protestant through her long association with the American missionaries in Talas. So were Dad and his brother Thadeus, although all the rest of the brothers and sisters were of the apostolic order.

Another of Dads brothers, Vartan, joined us with his young motherless son. Uncle Vartan had studied for the priesthood and conducted services for a couple of years before retiring on his 40-acre farm. He and his brother Krikor often made snide, whispered remarks as to how their young brother's desertion was due to "Eve's wiles."

Chapter 4

My sister Mabel, being more sophisticated than the rest of us, escaped menial chores. Nellie and I were always the goats. We were the ones to pump water for the horses and to keep supplied the dripping tub on top of the burlap covered crate under the mulberry tree. This was our cooler. After Nellie had milked the cow, I would tether it out on the canal bank. In the evening I would bring her back for Nellie to milk again.

Rosie's job was to polish the lamp chimneys daily and to fill the cans under the table legs with water to outwit the ants. These were tiny black creatures that did not bite, but they were very numerous and emitted an unpleasant flavor when embroiled in food. There were other ants, too. The tiny red ones were the most vicious. They made their nests in the ground and came boiling out at the slightest disturbance. As soon as they climbed on a person, they would curl up into a small speck and let go with a fiery sting that itched for hours.

The large black ants kept to themselves and attended to their business of foraging for food. They traveled long distances in their quest, along well-beaten paths in double columns, one going and one coming. Several pairs of their trails radiated from central nests, going out in different directions. The ones returning came dragging such delicacies as seeds, bugs and other treasures, often uniting in transporting an especially heavy find, such as a beetle or seed pod. Industrious as they were, they were not intelligent enough to go around an obstruction, but laboriously clambered over it by pulling and pushing.

Our cat kept the mouse population under control. Our dog did likewise with jack rabbits and squirrels. This dog, although loveable and friendly, was subject to occasional fits during which it foamed at the mouth and bit

any stranger in the vicinity. No one had ever heard of rabies or lockjaw, so no one was concerned. Those problems came later with civilization.

There were snakes, too, but fortunately they were of the harmless variety. On one occasion my mother, upon putting on her straw hat to go out to hang clothes, sensed an unusual weight, which turned out to be a water snake coiled in the lining.

My favorite pets were frogs. Their facial features and hands so resembled those of humans as to fascinate me. I kept my polliwogs in the horse trough in constant danger of being swallowed and watched how they developed into frogs. First the front legs appeared. Then the rear legs. Lastly, the tail dropped off and I had frogs. In spite of unheeded warnings by my parents, I never developed warts.

I added some minnows to the trough to keep the polliwogs company, but the horses refused to drink the water. I then stashed the fish in a can and put it behind the sofa in the parlor and promptly forgot it. The empty can, discovered during the annual spring housecleaning remained an unsolved mystery.

I was introduced to "colostrum," an awful fluid given off by cows for a few days after calving. There was a certain significant belief that this stuff would cause a beneficial effect on anyone partaking of it, so it was distributed around the neighborhood. I puked then and I still gag when I think of it.

As loyal as I am in upholding and extolling the quality and tastiness of our home-cooked food, I must confess to one sour note. This concerns a concoction of grape leaves and some miscellaneous ingredients (no meat) that tasted as awful as its name sounded -- *Kurtum purt*. However, this was served only in times of dire penury. We had to eat it -- or else.

Our mail was brought in daily from the railroad by "Uncle Harry," the older brother of Hagop Effendi, our storekeeper and postmaster. He rode a white horse and transported the canvas mail bag that was flung unceremoniously off the afternoon train as it flew past. He was accompanied by two dogs that vied for the horse's shade. There was always a small group waiting hopefully for word from somewhere.

Uncle Harry had one daughter, Sadie, who often stayed home from school to take care of her ailing mother who soon died. Sadie quit school and married Manoog Peloyan.

Uncle Harry then married a widow with three sons who helped with the farm work. Uncle Harry died shortly. His widow married one of the

Aslanians from the Stone Corral area. His Hudson Super Six caused the death of a mother and her infant in the front of our church one Sunday and he served a year in San Quentin.

Chapter 5

I began attending school when I was five years old. Our teacher, Mr. Kern, was a pompous gent who lived in a shack on a small plot of ground among the salt grass flats toward the south. He drove to school daily with his horse and buggy. There were only two kids in school who were not of Armenian parentage. They were the Leavens boys, Gordon and Bert. Bert was my pal and about my age. Gordon was 15 years old and gave Bert a hard time. He gave Mr. Kern a hard time too, in subtle ways. One morning after Halloween, Mr. Kern was late to school because a buggy wheel was missing and he had to walk. On another occasion, Gordon came running to Mr. Kern. "Mr. Kern, there's a snake in the girls' toilet." Mr. Kern, poker in hand, ran out to the girls' outhouse in the southeast corner of the schoolyard, but found no snake. No one thought of asking Gordon how he knew there was a snake away out there in the isolated girls' sanctuary.

Gordon occasionally gave in to the temptation of bouncing an adobe clod off the shake roof of the girls' outhouse when it was occupied, evoking anguished squeals from its occupants.

Mr. Kern gave up his teaching job. It was taken up by Mrs. Godfrey, an elderly retired missionary widow from San Jose who had once served in Persia. She took up her job with sincere interest. The first rule she established was that only the English language was to be spoken on the school grounds. She backed up this ruling with a willow switch beside her desk, which she actually used a few times. Our parents approved of this and supported her wholeheartedly with, "This is now our new home and country. Do as she says."

We had weekly singing periods, mostly of a spiritual nature:

*Do you slumber in your tent, Christian Soldiers
While the foe is spreading woe through the land?
Do you slumber and debate
Do you council and you wait
While you jeopardize your fate as you stand?
Let us arise! All unite!
Let us arise! In our might!
Let us arise, speak for God and the right.*

All we kids, except for a few, had hair of dark brown or black. A very few had hair of lighter shades. One of my female cousins had golden hair.

Cousin Boghos' eyes were an intense blue. So were his son Mike's. The Crusaders or Romans, when they were not building aqueducts or fighting, must have found time for occasional dalliance.

Through the persuasion of the school trustees, who were Hagop Effendi, Ezekiel Kendigian and Devlat Agha, my folks agreed to take on Mrs. Godfrey as our boarder, although that would cramp us considerably. Since she was familiar with Near-Eastern cuisine, and since my father, having served as a cook in an American mission school in Turkey, was quite proficient in both Armenian and American cookery, feeding Mrs. Godfrey presented no problem.

A chore that came my way was to prepare for Mrs. Godfrey's weekly bath. Although the rest of us bathed in the kitchen, I had to carry the large galvanized tub from its storage area into her quarters, such as they were, set off from our living room by a curtain. Then, I would lug in pails of hot water in which she immersed herself, and later, I emptied her tub, pail by pail, off the front porch.

Our bath soap was what was called "Castile." It came in cubes, about a foot long, three by three inches, somewhat irregular, warped and twisted. We cut them with a kitchen knife that cut only part way and then broke, leaving chunks with ragged edges that, until smoothed by usage, were hard on the body.

Mrs. Godfrey walked with a purposeful, masculine stride and an erect back. But in spite of her militant bearing, the daily one-mile walk proved too arduous so she sent to San Jose for her bicycle. This turned out to be an ancient affair that groaned with each push of the pedals. She attempted to ride it to school a few times, but always got pooped about half way there and left the bicycle on a ditch bank for me to take home after school. She decided that walking was less strenuous.

Being very languid in physical motion, to call us in after recess Mrs. Godfrey would hang a hand bell out of the window and gently continue swinging even though we often crept up underneath and silenced the clapper with our fingers.

Mrs. Godfrey was truly a dedicated teacher. Under her tutelage, I learned of nouns, adverbs, adjectives and verbs, but never the difference between split infinitives and dangling participles. I must confess I still don't know. She was exceedingly patient with us, but when her dander was up her speech was as sharp as marbles falling into a tin bucket.

During the final week of my second year, when the members of the graduating class were working at their final examinations, we kids were

excused in order to permit the three members of the class to concentrate undisturbed. These three were Gordon, Nellie and Jake Saroyan.

Sarah Kaloustian, one of our older students, organized us into an army equipped with swords, guns of tree limbs and banners, and marched us in single file around and around the school house singing "Marching Through Georgia" and "Maryland, My Maryland." Mrs. Godfrey, becoming animated for once, appeared on the front stoop with a sharp, "March to school, all of you!"

During the winter months, when climatic conditions permitted their absence from farm duties, our school was attended by mature residents who were anxious to improve their grammar. One of these was Mr. Kamalian, who, with his wife and son, was a recent arrival from New York. His son, Edward, deserted our school and joined the Navy in 1917. He returned after the war, and with my cousin Owen, went to San Francisco to work for the Standard Fence Company, digging post holes. Ed later started his own fence company while Owen became star salesman for the company with the whole San Joaquin Valley from Bakersfield to Sacramento as his territory.

Mrs. Godfrey flunked me in our fifth-grade final exams. However, she presented us with a five-pound box of candy which she probably had gotten on her last visit to San Jose. Mother stashed it away in the bottom drawer of the bureau under miscellaneous articles of bedding. They were not relinquished to us until they were well marinated by mothballs. They were of the "policeman hat" variety of coarse sugar, and chocolate coated, which when surrendered to us were flaky and crumbly.

As I said, Mrs. Godfrey flunked me through no fault of mine. She thought I was dumb. She asked me, "What is ocean navigation?" I didn't know. She kept me after school to read up on our last assignment. I found a passage that said "Ocean navigation is therefore a great international business" There! I had it! I told her, "Ocean navigation is an international business."

"But, what *is* it?" she persisted. I repeated, "A great international business." Still no good. She had Eddie Phillips coach me the next day, but the damage was done. I was dumb.

Chapter 6

Aunt Mary, now long past middle age, married a widower with two teen-aged children and came to live in a house they built on the 10 acres that Dad had given her. This was part of our original 40.

Her new husband appeared to be ever undecided, uncertain and hesitant. There could not have been a more mismatched pair, but there was harmony and Aunt Mary's two motherless stepchildren undoubtedly filled a vacancy in their new mother's bosom.

Their home was in close proximity to our pastor's, whose wife was a perky, outspoken woman who, upon finding Aunt Mary digging a hole to accommodate an apricot tree, asked her, "Mary Hanum, do you expect to live to eat the fruit of that tree?" Well, that tree thrived, gave fruit, grew old and died while Aunt Mary kept looking for new worlds to conquer.

It was in the fall of 1911 and I was nearing my 10th birthday when Dad loaded us into our one-horse surrey to drive to Visalia to have our family photographed. Our older girls were nearing maturity, and the idea was to have our picture taken while the family was still a unit. As for me, I was in anticipation of a store-bought gift for my coming birthday.

The best speed of our elderly sway-backed work horse was an occasional, heavy-footed trot. The trip was a three-hour drive across 11 miles of alkali flats where the only break in the monotony was the rare sight of a jack rabbit or squirrel. Nellie wanted to look for rabbit eggs, despite mother's attempts to convince her that jacks were not the egg-laying variety.

Mabel and Nellie wanted silk stockings for their photograph, but Mother silenced them, causing them to pout throughout the picture-taking. As for me, Mother doctored my shoes with a damp cloth to give them a temporary sheen.

After our photography, father parked us at the City Hall park lawn where we had use of the drinking fountain, benches and other facilities to contribute to our personal comfort. He then went on an exploratory tour with an Armenian sandwich (cheese rolled in dampened cracker bread).

Mother and the two older girls went to the Sweet Co. department store, while Rosie and I enjoyed walking on the cement walk and viewing the sights of decorated windows. Our horse meanwhile munched its bucket of rolled barley.

Mother and the girls returned to the park with numerous packages that I eyed with hopeful anticipation.

Dad had discovered a very promising lunchroom for sale that had awakened in him an itch that had been lying dormant since he had left New York. He actually gave in to that yen, and operated the Red Front

Restaurant for a couple of years until he was evicted by the new, big Hotel Johnson. During that period we saw him only on weekends.

The next morning, Mother smiled as she handed me a colorfully wrapped package. Upon opening it I found some yards of printed cotton material. She said, "I will make some nice shirts for you with this."

I tried valiantly to hide my disappointment, and hope to this day that I had succeeded.

Chapter 7

The Adalian family, as I have said, lived in the Seville area and kept mostly to itself. There were 12 children in the family and, aside from their vineyard, they operated a hay baling machine. I never got to know the family intimately, except for a few of the boys who came to our school when the Stone Corral School in their area closed down from time to time for lack of attendants.

Harry was the oldest. One year he went to Fresno to sell his crop and returned with a beautiful German wife who became a loyal member of the family and learned to speak the Turkish language fluently. John was next and came to our school for a year or so and then became a prize fighter and did quite well under the name of John Adali.

The other kids were Aslan, Nazaret, Steve, George, Joe, Mike, William and the two girls, Mary and Annie. I think I've forgotten one, but maybe it'll come back to me later. (That is what happens when you try to overload your head's capacity. The overflow is what we call "forgetting." Later, when room develops, the forgotten creeps in and that is "remembering.") Joe, who wasn't much older than I, worked on the hay baler with his brothers. He drove the horses round and round to wind up the plunger, which whacked into the hopper at each revolution of the circuit. The family worked as a team. One man hauled the hay to the site; another forked it into the hopper; another two did the wiring. I was fascinated as I watched the bales as they emerged and swelled, drawing the wires taut. They operated in a perpetual cloud of dust.

At home, the women prepared food for the workers. Every day was bread-baking day. The thin sheets of dough were rolled out on the table inside the house and carried to the cast iron flat-topped stove that was always out under a tree during the heat of summer. As fast as the women baked each sheet and laid it aside, one of the urchins would do away with it, to much motherly exasperation.

Some of the boys later came to Los Angeles. George settled in the West Adams area, and ran a barber shop. I visited him faithfully. Mike went into gardening. Joe, who drove the horses around the hay baler, operated a garage.

The Kaloustian kids were Sarah and Eddie. Sarah was about 13 years old and Eddie about my age. They had two older brothers who did not attend school.

The Aslanians were two families headed by Krikor and a man known as "Professor," but no one knew why. Their children were too young to attend school.

Sarah Kaloustian's father was mysteriously shot and killed one summer night as he was sleeping outdoors. There were no suspects and no inquiries were made. It was just one of those things.

Sarah quit school and word went about that she was mentally unwell and was placed in a hospital up north. That was a delicate subject and no one wished to follow it up. However, some 50 years later, when in the company of boyhood friends, I referred to Sarah's mysterious affliction and one of the Adalian boys said, "Don't you know? One of her older brothers shot the old man over some property deal and the shooting was witnessed by her." Sarah never recovered from the shock.

After graduation from high school, Ed registered at U.C. Berkeley. He inherited the farm but did not continue farming. He deserted our area and disappeared. Word came later that he was at the oil fields in Bakersfield. I never saw him again. He would be over 90 by now. He was one of my earliest friends; I missed him.

Chapter 8

One day Bert told me that his mother had deserted the family and gone to join relatives in Lemoore. Apparently, the lonely existence of Yetttem life with only foreign speaking neighbors was too much for her. Bert's father was away from home for several days at a time. His work was leveling land. He went with horses and equipment and bunked wherever night found him, leaving his two sons home to take care of themselves.

Gordon was able to shift for himself with his haphazard cooking, but poor Bert was always hungry. He occasionally went to Hagop Effendi's store with two eggs he had found in the barn, and traded them for a five-cent carton of soda crackers. My mother took Bert under her wing and fed him many an okra stew, but Bert retained his sallow complexion, with blue

veins visible through the pallid skin of his feet and ankles. His dog, a faithful, nondescript animal, fared better on its own, with ground squirrels.

Bert and I often went on excursions up on Stokes Mountain. At times, when a question arose as to which course to pursue, Bert had his favorite method for deciding issues. He used the "Choodabacca-Spidabacca" method. He would put the decision up to a captured grasshopper that he held in his fist under gentle pressure. By prearrangement, a dry palm meant one course, but if the captured orthopterous creature presented any sign of regurgitation, the other course was "it." I always suspected Bert of using his influence on our captives. Bert's persuasive, repetitious droning of "Choodabacca-Spidabacca" never failed to give satisfactory decisions.

Often, while futilely searching for a lost ball in the weeds, Bert used his favorite method for discovery. He would spit a gob into the palm of one hand, and slap it with the forefinger of the other. The direction of the spurt led us to the discovery of the vagrant ball -- but only sometimes.

I envied Bert. The sturdy blue jeans he wore permitted him to run through the cockle burrs and thistles that surrounded our play area. Our home-made pants would not. Bert informed me that the shrill continuous whistling that came from the holes in the hard packed earth were caused by "cicadas," but we were never able to find one. However, we silenced many with our erratic pees.

The malodorous fog that enveloped the Leavens' home followed Bert and came to school with him, causing him to be exiled for long periods at the blackboard, from where he maliciously caused Mrs. Godfrey to cringe by scratching the blackboard with his fingernails. We all cringed for that matter, but our sympathies leaned toward Bert.

As time went on, our school attendance increased, making it necessary to have additional seating in our classroom. The job of fastening these desks and seats to the floor fell to Yenovk, the nephew of Hagop Effendi.

The arrival of new seating caused much excitement among us boys, as whoever claimed a desk was allowed to occupy it throughout the next term. On one occasion, Bert, because of his absence in Lemoore, was unable to claim a desk and was much disappointed. His mother had given him a few coins for spending money, some of which he had spent on a package of chewing gum and, with boyish lack of self-restraint, was laboriously chomping away en toto with bulging eyes and dripping chin. He offered this wad to me in exchange for my new desk and seat.

I'm sure it wasn't his chewing gum that tempted me, but nevertheless we made the trade. I liked Bert as a friend and might have given him my seat

without an exchange, but here I was with a wad of gum which I knew was of no use to me, but was too valuable to abandon. I carried that sticky mass in the seat pocket of my homemade pants where it became embedded with boyish collectibles, was sat on daily, but was too valuable to be discarded -- I had paid too much for it. My mother unknowingly came to my rescue. She washed my pants, gum and all, and ran it through the hand wringer. I was free again!

We eagerly looked forward to the rainy season. I knew just where to find the volunteer mushrooms after the rain. They appeared only on virgin fields and never on cultivated land, but on top of the undulating mounds that gave evidence of a one-time sea bottom. With an early morning start, I could get back home for a mushroom omelet before school.

In our home, baking day came once a week. The thin Armenian cracker bread was our favorite because it did not mold with age. My mother's favorite tool was a three-quarter inch wooden dowel, about 30 inches long, with which the dough was rolled out to paper thinness and flopped onto the flat stove top. One of the cast-iron lids had a burnt out hole where the "lifter-outer" hooked, through which a tongue of flame burned a hole in the same location of each bread sheet.

Our popular homemade school lunches were of cheese rolled in dampened cracker bread. This caused the Armenian children embarrassment to the point where we isolated ourselves from our "odar" friends, even though we outnumbered them about 20 to one.

Although the Armenians were in the majority in school we were very sensitive about our homemade clothes and foreign food. Once, we were asked what tribe of Indians we belonged to. I answered, "Fresno branch."

"Do they eat grape leaves like you?"

I answered, "Why not? Don't you eat watercress and mustard greens and dandelions?" As they turned away, one of them flung the ultimate insult: "I bet you pee sitting down."

Bert introduced me to the experience of horse manure cigarette smoking. We inhaled more sulfur match fumes than "cigarette" smoke, but we enjoyed the ecstatic thrill of forbidden fruit.

I visited Bert at his home only occasionally because of the unpleasant odor that enveloped the area. The aroma of stale bacon grease and a pile of tin cans that gave evidence of a diet of mostly beans. The double row of narcissus that his mother had planted along the path to the two-holer and bloomed faithfully each winter were unable to overcome the heavy

atmosphere. Bert's mother had evidently tried to bring some beauty, as well as fragrance, to the environment.

In the spring, when John and Ralph Hamalian (Hagop Effendi's nephews) appeared in school barefooted, all the boys did likewise. In the fall, when they came shod, we did the same. Bert appeared in his older brother's cast-off shoes. But one year, after his return from Lemoore, where he had gone to visit his mother, he appeared with a new pair on his feet. They did something to Bert. They put a lift to his chin. He joined us wholeheartedly in hide and seek, mumblety-peg, marble shooting and kite flying. But one day he appeared with one foot in a new shoe and the other in an old misfit. His explanation was, "I bet old Gordon done it. He's plumb mean."

A sad note in passing. Bert never found out the cause of his shoe's disappearance. When the mystery was solved 50 years had passed, and so had Bert. Another sad note: bare feet passed out in the 1930s as a result of the appearance of the "puncture vine," a creeping growth that carpeted even the driest areas with pea-sized burrs.

Chapter 9

On hot summer evenings when the heat within the house was intolerable, we customarily sat outdoors under our mulberry tree amid several pans of smoldering cow dung that were effective in keeping the mosquitoes away. Members of several households gathered each evening at various homes in response to invitations offered at previous gatherings. Thus, the chore of cow-dung smudges was not a too-frequent duty for each family.

Conversational topics varied. The women were concerned with food preparations or child care. The food, though lacking in variety, was plentiful. The main item was the rice or wheat pilaf, which varied from day to day with the addition of tomato paste or ground mutton, if the meat wagon had been around. Occasionally, the conversation became whispered with heads together, as often happens with women.

Our common refreshment was diluted yoghurt, which was a popular drink resembling buttermilk.

The men were concerned with their seasonal problems: cut worms, mildew, vine hoppers, frost and market prices, while the Bull Durham smoke spiraled to join the cow dung smudge in combating the clouds of mosquitoes. Incidentally, cow-dung was preferable to horse dung (or road apples, for the genteel). The chips made a fire of hot coals and lasted longer, but the "apples" crumbled and smothered themselves.

Despite my father's frequent attempts at wine making, he never succeeded, although he made many a barrel of vinegar in the process. You could call him a master of serendipity. We needed the vinegar to pickle tomatoes and cucumbers.

Our wine-making attempts involved women who were called on to do the tromping of grapes. Somehow feminine feet were less objectionable than men's in that function. A young weighty one was preferable. If she had a baby in arms, all the better. It afforded added weight.

I was about 11 years old when Mr. Nazaretian, who later became my cousin Mike's father-in-law, took it upon himself to conduct a series of lessons in the study of Armenian reading and writing. So for a period of several months we faithfully attended Mr. Nazaretian's Saturday morning classes in the schoolhouse. He was a dedicated teacher, not only in the writing and reading of Armenian script, but in our history as well.

He dwelt at length on our loyalty to our Christian faith in spite of persecutions under Romans, Persians and Turks. He refused to acknowledge the existence of any language other than Armenian. The response to our "Good mornings" came in his native tongue. Years later when hard times necessitated our moving to greener pastures, my wife ran into Mr. Nazaretian in Visalia and saluted him with a warm, "Good morning." His response of "Good morning" nearly floored her. He had finally acknowledged the existence of the English tongue.

It was about the year 1913 when rumor went about that the world was to end shortly. Even the very day was picked. Some people are always starting such rumors and some people are always believing them, causing themselves considerable concern, bordering on panic. Some of these were our very close relatives who begged us to permit them to pass the night in our home so that we could all die together.

I don't know how much slumbering they were able to do on the floor in their makeshift bedding, but we were awakened in the early dawn by the welcome boom of my father's .12 gauge shotgun. That was the second time that gun was fired. The first was in 1911 to salute Halley's comet.

In the early years, the highlights of our vacations were the Fourth of July picnics at Woodlake, where we boys bathed in our underwear, while the older folks sat sedately and listened to the ministers' discourses on the meaning of the Fourth and enlightening events in connection with U.S. history.

Our means of transportation to the picnic site were two flat-bed hay wagons drawn by work horses. We gathered at the church at four o'clock

in the morning and settled down among pillows and blankets for the three-hour drive into the foothills.

On one occasion the men decided to join us boys in bathing, using their everyday overalls. But Mr. Melidonian, who was never known to do any farm work and consequently had no overalls, had found a burlap sack that he used as an apron held up with a string belt fastened at the rear with a bow knot.

Mr. Philibosian, our photographer, was the only man in Yettem who owned a camera. He also had a darkroom in his barn with a mysterious red window. He lined up the men for the photography. Just as Mr. Philibosian finished counting, "One, two, three," someone pulled the string, causing much commotion and shocked embarrassment.

On later Fourth of July, when we became automobile owners, we drove to Visalia to witness the auto races round and round a few city blocks. The four corners of the course were piled high with hay bales -- just in case. Some years there were motorcycle races.

I usually had a quarter to spend. A nickel went for firecrackers, and a nickel for a balloon. The rest for root beer. We always prepared ourselves with cattails that we gathered at the river, but we were not allowed to use the dry ones because they scattered in the wind and would cause deafness if they entered our ears. The unripe ones would not stay lit. But Dad always had some sulfur matches in his pocket to fall back on.

On my 11th birthday I was presented with a BB air rifle and felt that I could join my cousin Mike in duck hunting. He had a shotgun and although he often went out to the ponds in the salt grass areas where ducks landed after the rains, he was never able to crawl near enough without being observed. However, I eagerly joined him one day. There were several ponds out in the salt grass. We crawled from pond to pond wherever the ducks led us, until we finally gave up, drenched to the skin. That ended my duck hunting.

This was not my only unhappy experience with the animal world. A scorpion stung me as I was lifting some boards. It didn't kill me, but the sting itched like blazes for several days. On another occasion I reached into a squirrel hole to recover a marble, and felt something furry. Thinking we had a squirrel nest, we dug it open and found a nest of enormous black, furry tarantulas. Yuk!

Chapter 10

Up until about 1909 all of our relatives in Yettem were my father's kin. But about that time we were joined by my mother's niece and family. She and her husband had had a somewhat turbulent romance prior to their marriage in New York. They were cousin Nuemzar and her husband, Peter Yeremian.

The story goes back to Turkey. My mother's sister, Rebecca, was married to an independent sort of person by the name of "Haji Baba" Terzian. He was a tailor and his wife was head matron of a school for Armenian girls in Kayseri. Haji Baba made plans to move his family to the United States, but Rebecca had to remain behind until a suitable woman could be found to replace her. However, Haji Baba and his two older children left for the U.S., leaving the baby with its mother. Those he took with him were Nuemzar, the daughter, and Hagop, his son. Parsekh, the baby, was left behind with Rebecca.

Haji Baba was able to support his family by working at his trade, but fell victim to what most lonely men succumb: the addiction to visiting coffee houses where card games flourished and the fiery *raki* flowed. Soon, Haji Baba became indebted to a man who was casting amorous eyes toward Nuemzar, who already had a suitor whom she preferred. Her father, for selfish reasons, favored his debtor.

When disturbances in Turkey began to mount, Haji Baba went back to move his family to safety. During his absence, my mother took a hand in the hurried marriage of Nuemzar to her favored suitor, Peter Yeremian, in the social hall of the Westchester County Golf Club, where Dad had charge of the dining room. I hazily remember, as a five-year-old, a jubilant celebration.

Word later came from Turkey of the appearance of a disorganized band of Turkish soldiers who offered Rebecca her safety if she would surrender the school to them. Upon her refusal, she and Haji Baba were killed and the school fell to the mob. As for the baby, he was presumed lost. As I said, Nuemzar and her husband, Peter, their three children and Hagop followed us to Yettem, bringing with them Peter's younger brother, Paul, who became a prominent rancher in Strathmore. He was the first automobilist of our people in Yettem.

As for Nuemzar's brother, he assumed the English interpretation of "Terzi," which is "tailor," but he spelled it "Taylor." Hagop then changed his first name to James (or Jim). He was an ardent motorcycle enthusiast

and drove around on a noisy Harley-Davidson. He joined the army in 1917 and served in France as dispatch bearer among the trenches.

He became a local real estate agent for a number of years in Yetttem and later married Hagop Effendi's daughter, Alice, and moved to Oakland to become a dealer in plumbing supplies.

A similar fate befell some of my father's family. His cousin, Harry Kachigian, came to the United States with the rosy anticipation of a secure life here by following the common procedure of leaving his dependents with relatives. Word came later that his brother had been killed, his wife had died in exile, and that there was no knowledge of the whereabouts of his son and daughter. He endured the privations of a lonely bachelor here for some years, and then married a Fresno widow with two daughters and settled on an 80-acre farm on the western outskirts of Visalia. It was about 1921 that word came through the Near East Relief that the two children had been found and that they were soon to be reunited with their father.

The girl was of marriageable age and very soon was married, but the son, John, being much younger, lived with the family and helped his father on the farm. Harry Kachigian's two step-daughters, Juliet and Beatrice, after being graduated from high school and desiring furthering education, went to business college in Long Beach, a suburb of Los Angeles. There they lived with an aunt and uncle who had two children, Ellenore and Paul Bogigian.

Our meetings were only occasional until 1931 when Beatrice became my wife. As for Bee's step-brother, John, he married a cute Fresno girl who in time presented him with four sons, the youngest of whom, Kenneth, became a speech writer for Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Bee's cousin Ellenore, while still in high school, was actively meddling in politics and taking part in backing one candidate or another with her high school journalism. We were to hear of her later.

My sister Nellie sang in the Yetttem Presbyterian Church choir along with the brothers Paul and Steve Jenanyan and their sister Aznive, who were the children of our pastor's brother. The two Hamalian boys, John and Ralph, the sons of Hagop Effendi's older brother George, also took part.

On Friday evenings, when Nellie walked the mile to the church for choir practice, she took me along as her protector. I usually fell asleep on one of the benches and Nellie had to practically drag me home.

On one occasion I was a chaperone. Paul Yeremian (cousin Nuemzar's brother-in-law) asked our folks if he would be permitted to take Nellie to the coming circus in Visalia. Such a problem had never before come up.

Nellie was hardly 16, while Paul was much older. This was a delicate situation. A refusal would have strained family relations. So, rather than refuse his request, I was elected to accompany the couple.

Paul drove an enormous National straight eight with three spare tires mounted on a special rack in the rear, and drove with an open exhaust. His brilliant gold tooth made frequent appearances.

The arrival of the Barnum & Bailey circus was a great annual event. This time there was an extra attraction of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

I must admit that Paul made that trip a very memorable one for me. He bought me cone after cone of ice cream, the last one I was unable to eat. I sat there in the big tent with the soggy cone growing softer by the minute, yet unable to discard it. Who had ever heard of discarding ice cream? Besides, it had cost the man a nickel. Finally, during the whooping and shooting of the cowboys and Indians I was able to ditch it under the bleachers.

Incidentally, Nellie did not marry Paul. Some years later I asked her if she had ever been attracted to any of the Yette boys. Nellie said, "I was an obedient daughter. I was willing to leave that to my parents."

Although Paul did not live in Yette, he took a heartfelt interest in local affairs. He usually furnished a non-productive orange tree for our Christmas activities.

Nellie once confided to me that Aznive, who with her two brothers had also been choir members, once said, "Nellie, I love you like a sister. I hope you will marry one of my brothers." Nellie, very naive and innocent, asked, unthinkingly, "Which one?" Aznive, thinking that Nellie preferred one in particular, said, "Either one." However, nothing happened.

We often attempted making ice cream on Sundays when company was expected. The "two-bit" block of ice that we had buried in the hay the previous evening would have diminished considerably by Sunday after church, and all the frantic churning of the freezer by Nellie and me gave us no more than a vanilla-flavored fluid mixture.

I was about 13 years old when I was presented with a .22 rifle. I started out shooting at cans and bottles. Then I imagined how exciting life would be in the wild, depending on my gun for my sustenance, like Kit Carson and Daniel Boone.

One day I actually shot a dove. It was in the act of opening its mouth to coo. I picked it up still warm. Its gizzard had burst. The seeds it had

gathered spilled out on my hand. I almost cried. I have never again, to this day, taken a life unnecessarily.

Chapter 11

Occasionally, on long winter evenings when our shirt-tail relatives would come on one of their frequent visits, and conversation lagged, and while the Bull Durham smoke ceiling crept lower and lower, someone would venture, "Hydeh! Let's make 'teltelly.' "

"Teltelly" was a confection made of sugar, shortening and flour and needed the efforts of several men to pull, pummel and knead it into something which, when freshly made, was quite a delicacy, but on the following day would settle down into a heavy sodden mass.

After one such evening, my cousin Mike was so enamored of the outcome that on the following morning he carried some of the stuff to school and presented it to our teacher, whom he waylaid at the yard entrance. She delicately picked up a pinch with a thumb and forefinger, with her pinkie held aloft, put it into her mouth, assumed a pensive air, with eyes turned heavenward, and when no one seemed to notice, spit it into the weeds.

Each of my sisters responded differently to my various moods, desires and shortcomings. Mabel sided with Mother in keeping me on the straight and narrow. Nellie, ever sympathetic, was ever saying "Hush-hush! Don't let on!" But Rosie would let her hair down and side with me come hell or high water, with dubious alibis, if necessary.

Mabel married a rancher, Dan Azhderian, from the Seville area, where he and some Greeks were raising 80 acres of tobacco against the foothills. Dan, my new brother-in-law, offered us kids a job of plucking worms off the tobacco leaves. There were no insecticides or dusting equipment then, so we went up and down each row, tin bucket in hand, examining each plant, each leaf, not only for the horned caterpillars but for larvae that we were told to crush with our fingers. For this we were paid one dollar for a 10-hour day. The boys rode their bikes, but I bunked at the ranch. After his tobacco-raising experience, Dan joined Dad in many of his restauranting ventures in San Francisco.

Even though my father was no farmer, he had the shrewdness and intelligence to not depend on only one variety of fruit. I remember the arrival of a wagon-load of tiny orange trees wrapped in burlap. They were stored in the barn while he prepared for the planting. As he dynamited each hole (to bust up the "hardpan" -- a clay-like layer that appeared about two feet below the surface) I would carry out one of the trees. This was quite a strenuous job for an 11-year-old. When I visited the farm 60 years

later, most of the trees were still thriving although there was evidence of some replacements.

Our local peace officer was Mike Tashjian, a formidable six-footer. He was offered the job because of his heroism while on his way from the East. The train was held up by robbers, and during the ensuing gun battle Mike managed to subdue one of them. Upon his arrival in Tulare County he was awarded the job as constable and given a gun for which he never found occasion to use. He was able to keep the peace without it.

Often, when we boys happened to wander into the local poolroom and grocery combination across the canal, run by Hygas Yenovkian, we'd feel his heavy hand on our shoulders and hear his booming voice: "Ha vold are you?"

Officer Tashjian was never engaged in common farm work although he owned considerable acreage in the salt grass areas, on which he raised cattle, making an imposing figure on horseback. Once a week he made his rounds in the neighborhood with his meat wagon that he kept refrigerated with ice that he got in Cutler, a village six miles north of Yettem.

Rumor went about that Mrs. Godfrey was to return for another term. Who wanted her kind of learning? "How many feet in a cord of wood?"

"How many feet in a mile?"

Phooey!

Muscle was what counted. Good hard work! I remembered a story I had read about Pat, an Irish laborer, who could neither read nor write, but worked as a janitor in a little local school. It so happened that one of the little kids found out about Pat's illiteracy and notified the principal, who immediately caused Pat's discharge.

He was no dumbbell, however. Pat got a job pushing a wheelbarrow on cement jobs. He learned how to mix his sand and cement in proper proportion whether for a foundation or for laying brick, and in time became a cement contractor and was well known for the quality of his work as well as his honesty.

Then appeared a job that required the need of a considerable amount of money, so Pat went to the local bank and applied for a loan. The manager said, "Pat, we know of your good record and are happy to make this loan, and please feel free to call on us anytime you need help. Now, if you will sign this proposition, you will have your loan."

But Pat said, "Faith, Sir, I can neither read nor write." The manager stared at Pat for a moment and then said, "Pat, I was thinking how much greater a man you would have become if you had learned to read and write!"

Pat replied, "Faith, Sir, if I could read and write I'd still be janitor of that little local school." Do you see what I mean?

Mrs. Godfrey returned for a second term to take up where she had left off. The first question she asked us was what we had read during the vacation months. Who had time to read during summer when the brimming canal beckoned us? However, I casually mentioned *Pilgrim's Progress*, which I had observed kicking around the house, and the *Christian Herald*, which came periodically and met with her approval. But Mike came up with *Jesse James' Midnight Raid* and *Nick Carter, Master Detective*, that shocked her out of her lethargy.

Aside from the three Rs, we studied hygiene and learned of the duties of the human mechanism. One day the subject turned to gizzards. Mrs. Godfrey asked us in turn whether we had gizzards. Some said "yes" and some said "no," but Mike came up with "two."

Chapter 12

My introduction to the art of bleaching raisins was about 1915 when Dad set up a couple of 200-gallon tanks. One tank was filled with cold water, the other with water and some kind of caustic lye with fire underneath to keep it boiling. The whole procedure was operated manually. The filling of the grapes in baskets and the handling of the boxes were done by the men. The women handled the lighter tasks such as spreading the grapes on wooden trays with gloved hands or picking out discolored berries. There were always kids around sweeping floors or carrying water to replenish the tanks.

One day pandemonium broke loose among the girls, who ran screaming about the yard with Antranik in hot pursuit. Our peace officer, Mike Tashjian, caught Antranik and demanded the reason for the disturbance, but Antranik kept yelling, "I'm going t do it! I'm going to do it!"

"You gonna do what?"

"I'm gonna do it. She asked for it! I'm gonna do it."

"She asked fir what?"

"She thumbed her nose at me!"

Antranik was a new arrival in Yetteem. He had grown up in the East and was more sophisticated and worldly wise than we were. Although we were familiar with the tune of the "Hoochy-Koochy" song -- we went only as far as "she can hula hula dance" -- Antranik's rendition had to do with feminine underwear -- or the lack of it.

There was the usual undercurrent of murmurings among the women and the occasional lowering of voice at the nearing of unsanctified ears. However, some of the narratives were open to all who cared to listen while they sorted the raisins. One woman in particular had interesting stories to tell.

One, for example:

"When I was a child in Everek," she began, (and I moved closer) "my father came home from his work and, somewhat disturbed, began telling my mother how a strange dog had followed him at a short distance and persisted in following him even though he had shooed it and heaved stones at it.

"When I crossed the little stream below Punar Bashir, I looked back and noted that the dog would not cross the shallow stream. I realized then that the dog was actually a *djin*. You know that *djins* are evil spirits and will not cross running streams."

The women were familiar with such stories that had been handed down since pagan days, and they would nod understandingly. After a few moments, another woman would add her contribution.

"My mother told me that if you dreamed that you found buried treasure, you would actually find it, provided you were by yourself and did not tell anyone, because if you did, you would find only ashes."

One of the young moderns would burst out with, "That's a lot of boloney!"

But heads would nod and many voices in unison would say, "It's true. My mother told me the same."

Among the men, Misak's favorite complaint was concerning his wife's mysterious affliction, which heralded the end of her child-bearing years, and upon which he dwelt daily. One bachelor, somewhat innocent and naive, and who lived with his widowed sister, said to her, "Myrani, don't associate with Misak's wife. Her difficult, mysterious condition might be catching."

There were occasional catty remarks about newcomers from the East.

"Yeah! She acts so genteel. What's she got that we haven't got?"

"What you mean, 'genteel?' "

"You know, high brow. Gentle birth."

"What's so gentle aboouut birth? I ought to know, I been four times."

"I mean -- to the manor -- gentle birth."

"Only one manner to be born, Honey, and believe me it ain't gentle!"

Chapter 13

When I recall my early youth I often wonder what my father must have thought of me. I was his only son. He undoubtedly had high hopes toward my potential, for which, I fear, I showed little promise.

There was one incident I often recall, not without a twinge of embarrassment. I was sent to the blacksmith, an "odar" (non-Armenian) who had set up a shop across the road from the depot. I had in my hand a plowshare for him to sharpen. The road to the station followed the main irrigation canal, which was very fortunate for me as the day was hot and my bare feet needed frequent cooling.

"When Old Man Edgington, the blacksmith, saw me through the smoky gloom of his shop, he sang his usual salutation:

*Oh, the Frenchman has his lily,
The Englishman has his rose.
The Irishman has his shamrock,
But the Armenian has his nose.*

Armenian noses are somewhat prominent, as you undoubtedly know.

Mr. Edgington was shoeing a horse. He picked up a red-hot shoe out of his forge with a pair of tongs and held it against a hoof to check for size, then laid its tip on an upturned chisel on the anvil. With a couple of hammer blows, he cut off the two tips.

He told of an occasion when he had done this and a turkey instinctively had gobbled up and swallowed the red hot tip.

"That was the surprisest turkey I ever seen!" Mr. Edgington said, and nearly laughed his head off.

"Do you know? That hot bit of iron burned a hole in that turkeys gizzard and fell out on the ground."

I asked, "What about the turkey?"

"I put a band around the hole and we ate him for Thanksgiving."

He always put a live coal in his pipe to keep it going. The far end of the bowl of the pipe was burnt down to near the bottom.

I waited until he had cooled the plowshare in a bath of fish oil. I paid him his 35 cents and started home. By that time the midday sun was beating down unmercifully on the dirt road and necessitated many frequent stops to cool my feet and to rest my arms. The plowshare was heavy. I laid it on the grassy banks while I studied the hair snakes and polliwogs. Those hair snakes fascinated me. They had no head or tail. They were of uniform thickness throughout their 12-inch lengths, and when tied into knots immediately untied themselves.

I finally reached the turn-off that led home. There was no cooling water there, but I had sunflower shade. My father, on seeing me approaching from a distance and stumbling over the furrows, had stopped his team and removed his plowshare. He reached out to take the doctored one from me. I looked down at my hands

Again, I looked at my hands. They were empty!

I later found it on the ditch bank where I had tied knots in hair snakes, and I never forgot walking back empty-handed to face my father.

Yes, I often wonder what he must have thought of me. I was his only son. I knew he loved me, and yet . . . ?

We had our favorite fishing and swimming hole at the stone headgate that provided us with a good diving height. We had no diving board, but didn't need one. We competed with underwater swimming, racing and finally, standing on the gate to determine who could pee farthest downstream.

In the early fall, the water was usually shut off at the river because of the diminishing snow in the High Sierras. Then started our fishing in earnest. We would check every sump upstream and down for a mile or so in each direction for marooned carp. Where the new railroad crossed the canal at the Dervishian ranch we were always sure of a few under the bridge. Our

method was to wade in the water to roil it, and when the fish came to the surface we would creep up and scoop them out.

Sam Tatilian did not stoop to such primitive fishing. He came armed with a hay fork that he used as a spear. He didn't catch many fish but he did spear his kid brother's foot. That was no great problem. We often cut our feet on tin cans and rusty nails. Our only disinfectant was pee. We told the boy to pee on his foot, but he couldn't get it into proper range, so we all took turns peeing on his foot. We had no fear of tetanus or lockjaw. They, too, came with civilization along with the aforementioned rabies. However, when some mishap occurred at home, Mother had a handy bottle of liquid that she called "acid phenique." She always dripped a few drops into a wash pan for washing our wounds. She was ever faithful in that observance.

Whistling was an art that I was never able to master. All I could blow through my pursed lips was a windy "who." Mike, on the other hand, was a master in that category. He could blow a blast with his fingers under his tongue that would cause pandemonium in the barnyard.

I was about one year younger than Mike, but because of his late start in school we were in the same grade. One of the books he enjoyed reading was *Fifty Famous Stories Retold*. His favorite story was *Horatius at the Bridge*, in which the valiant Horatius held off the enemy single handed. Another one of his favorite battles was the Alamo, which he likened to an ancient battle in which a small force of Armenians had faced a superior army of Persians. The Armenians, like the Texans, lost the battle but their strong defense so disheartened the Persians that they were willing to leave well enough alone.

There was always much commiseration, even though the past was ever "glorious." The Armenians seemed to be stuck with the dirty end of the stick, but they were "glorious" even in defeat.

A picture somewhat contradictory to this glorious past often hung on the walls of various parlors. There was one in the home of my cousin Boghos. This was not a painting, but a woven depiction of a dejected woman sitting in a vast expanse of desert with Mt. Ararat in the distance and a scattering of human bones at her feet. This woman, Mike told me, was Mother Armenia weeping for her homeland.

"Back in the old country," Mike told us, "we always commemorated that battle on its anniversary."

Bert couldn't understand the fuss over a battle that was lost. Mike was patient with his answer.

"Don't we remember the Alamo?"

"Yes."

"Don't we remember Little Big Horn?"

"Yes."

"Did we win those battles?"

"No, but we won the war."

"Ah! Our war isn't over yet. Armenia will be free again."

Mike was right!

On rare occasions when either Mike or I got possession of a nickel, we would conserve it until Sunday afternoon, and go to the railroad for the arrival of the six o'clock train from the north. If the train should stop for any arrival or departure, there would emerge a newsman with an armload of the *San Francisco Examiner*, in hope of a chance customer. We eagerly followed the antics of the *Katzenjammer Kids*, the pitiful bumbling of the hapless Happy Hooligan, Little Jimmie's escapades and Buster Brown's shenanigans. Occasionally we would pack these comics in fruit jars and bury them in a well-marked spot behind the house, so that in future years we would enjoy them anew. However, within a few weeks we would miss them and unearth our pictorial treasures.

The three Kachigian brothers, who also were distantly related to my father, lived on their 80 acres directly across the road from our pastor, Rev. Jenanyan. They were Setrak, Krikor and Hagop. Being shirt-tail relatives, they assumed the right to make frequent evening visits to our home and sat around smoking their Bull Durham while my father usually ignored them and settled himself on a homemade settee and dozed off. We were always glad to welcome them, yet when they occasionally overstayed their visits we were equally glad to see their departure. From time to time, Dad would arouse himself and mumble, "Has the 10 o'clock train gone by yet?" Even the most calloused visitors usually took the hint.

These three, known as the "Kachies," had left their home, as my father had done, but had left their two younger brothers with their elderly parents in Chomaklou. With the coming of World War I they lost contact with their

people. In the meantime, they worked industriously on their 80 and soon became owners of a six-cylindered Kissel Kar.

The older brother, Setrak, was a self-important, cocky fellow. He wore his hat at an angle, tipped forward over one eye, which was slightly crossed. It was disconcerting to converse with him because he never faced the person to whom he was talking.

On Sundays they all wore brilliantly colored silk shirts and drove to church with open exhaust. As to driving the car, they took turns amicably enough, although Krikor, the shortest of the three, had to sit on a cushion to see over the steering wheel.

One day, upon preparing to go on a special outing, a discussion arose as to who was to do the driving, since that gave the driver prestige. The discussion grew into an argument between the two older boys, and then erupted into violence. Hagop, the youngest, in his panicked frustration, relieved himself by breaking the house windows with a Thompson grape stake. That evening Rev. Jenanyan, deeming it his Christian duty to visit the boys, found them peacefully amicable among themselves, as though nothing had happened. Such outbursts were frequent in the brotherly environment.

There were many homeless, unattached bachelors in the village, refugees after the war, feeling more secure among people of their own kind and happy to work for their daily dollars. Often, on Sundays, these men, with some of the liberated married males of the village, would congregate on the benches in front of the bunkhouse in anticipation of Martha Melidonian's Sunday stroll along the opposite bank of the canal, dressed in flowing pink and audacious picture hat, and twirling a gay parasol for the benefit of the spectators who enjoyed studying the dimensions of her curvaceous contours. Eliciting from them occasional deliberate remarks, dainty Martha, with uplifted nose, responded with an elegant, "Aw, shut up you guys."

Martha was the youngest of six sisters, and the prettiest. Myra, the oldest, was married to James Erganian who operated a small store and lunchroom for the village bachelors. Then came Takouhi ("Tok" for short) who married Mushekh, the older brother of Jake Saroyan, Nellie's classmate. Nunya came next and married Peter Besoyan. Elizabeth married an Abrahamian who died and left a baby daughter. Liz then married Nick Copus, a Greek rancher who became a loving stepfather to little Victoria. Tok became a beautician in San Francisco. Martha married our local railroad station agent and went to live in a side-tracked caboose and carried her nose even higher for having married a "white man." She dumped him after a few years in favor of his brother. Dove married

George Stanley, a Fresno entertainer, and later worked as executive secretary for Hal Roach, of *'Lil Rascals* fame.

Jake left Yette m after some years and moved to Tulare where the soil was more productive. He married Susie, a beautiful Fresno girl. However, he kept in close touch with his boyhood friends, who would often visit them in Tulare.

In later years Susie musingly recalled how, after a day of harsh farm work and after she and Jake had retired, Jake would awaken her with his elbow and grunt, "Susie, they're coming!" They would hold their breath. If the rattling car slowed down at the turnpike, Jake would elbow her again with "Light the stove, Susie." So, Susie would put on the coffee pot over a fire of grapevine trimmings and listen to a narrative of the latest presentation at the Bijou in Tulare.

Chapter 14

We re all in San Francisco one summer while Dad was having one of his restauranting sprees. A letter arrived from Troy, New York, forwarded through Yette m. It was from a family friend whom the folks had known back in Turkey. It said that a young man in Troy was contemplating marriage and preferred a wife of his own people. These friends had recommended Nellie, whom they had not seen since her childhood in New York, but had assured the young man, "If the girl is anything like her mother whom we knew in Kaisari, wait no longer. You can do no better."

Nellie was 18 years old and it was about time she was looking around, so the folks wrote and invited the young man to come and enjoy the World's Fair of 1915. This would act as a face-saving play if no romance developed.

To put on a good front, Dad rented a piano for the occasion, but it was delivered after the young man had arrived, causing an embarrassing situation. The young man pitched in and helped move the piano upstairs.

Nellie and Ezra Tellalian fell for each other and preparations got under way for the wedding. As for Rosie and me, our big concern was who would inherit Nellie's room. It had a window, whereas our pantry and closet bedrooms had none. Rosie won, as she always did.

So, Nellie accompanied her husband to Troy and we went back to Yette m for the grape harvest.

Rosie was able to coax Dad to replace her leaky organ with an upright piano and to take occasional lessons from our minister's wife. We

relegated our old organ to the backyard where it was soon taken apart by neighborhood kids who went about, each blowing a different note through the salvaged reeds.

About two years later, Nellie and her husband, with their year-old daughter and two elderly in-laws, joined us in Yetteem.

During the Victorian Era, the British influence was so strong in Turkey that baby girls were named *Takouhi*, which means "queen" in the Armenian language. My mother's name was *Takouhi*. Nellie's mother-in-law's name was *Takouhi*. Mabel's mother-in-law also was *Takouhi*. Thus we had three of them in the family.

Mabel had become the mother of a daughter a few years earlier, and wishing to name her after her own mother, named her Victoria which answered the purpose. Nellie did the same with her daughter, who in time was joined by two brothers, Edward and Hrant (Harry).

Mabel died at the age of 28 after a long illness, leaving a eight-year-old daughter, Vickie, who practically became a younger sister to us. After her death, her husband, Dan, joined Dad in many of his restauranting ventures in San Francisco, before returning to farming and raising grapes a couple of years later.

Of the three Takouhis, my mother was the only non-smoker. The two smokers were not content with Camels or Luckies. They ordered *Izmir* tobacco which they rolled themselves, not with the brown *Bull Durham* paper, but the white *Riz La Croix*. When out calling, they carried with them a supply of pre-rolled cigarettes. These three conversed among themselves in whispers, whatever the subject was, because there was always the possibility that "someone might hear!"

One of our horses became ill. It was our most valued one, even though it took the efforts of two men to get it to accept the bit. It would arch its neck beyond our reach so that we required a box to reach its clamped jaws.

Well, the horse died despite the efforts of an Orosi horse doctor. Then a problem arose: What to do with the body? Digging a hole for only a mere two-holer was a Herculean job. A hole to accommodate a horse was out of the question. So, one night after dark we fastened the two hind legs to a double-tree. With our two remaining animals, a mule and a sway-backed mare who never pulled in unison and kept see-sawing and lurching, we dragged the poor beast all the way to an outlying salt grass and alkali field, a full mile out of town.

All was well for a few days until a wind came up. Then we were visited by Mike Tashjian, our peace officer, who by gentle yet definite persuasion advised us to do something about the disposition of the body. We gathered a pile of dead trees and lumber and with several five-gallon cans of kerosene nursed the fire all night long until all that remained was the arched neck nobly held high as if still in defiance of the bit.

During the hot summer months there was always a shortage of irrigation water. Those who farmed downstream felt the shortage most. It was common practice for them to go upstream at night and lift a few gate boards here and there to increase the flow to give them some relief until morning when the theft would be discovered. This caused some hard feelings, but no amount of appeals to the ditch tender seemed to help. My father often passed the night at the head of our little supply ditch with a stout stick nearby.

One day when Antranik was helping me clear our little ditch of its growth of Bermuda, the ditch tender stopped by to tell us we wouldn't be needing the ditch anymore because the water had been cut off at the river due to the previous winter's light snowfall.

Upon hearing this, Antranik dropped his hoe and so did I. As pre-arranged, we were to go to Dervishian's railroad bridge for carp. We met Digin Maryam heading our way. "Antranik! Listen to me! Get ready for me the horse and buggy so I go see Talita Hanum."

Antranik wailed, "What's so hot about Talita Hanum, Mama?"

"I have message."

"What about, Mama?"

"I want tell her our church meeting will be Wednesday and not Thursday."

"Mama, Charlie and I will go by Talita Hanum's house on our way to Dervishian's railroad bridge and we will give her your message."

His mother exploded with, "Hah! With two words you do my whole afternoon visit?"

We did not go after carp that day.

Cousin Boghos, being well-read and very much interested in world news, was a regular subscriber to several New York publications, one of which carried tales of daring-do that ran in monthly installments. The neighbors

were notified of the papers' arrival each month and were invited to the endless unfolding of the tales. One story I recall somewhat:

The king had a beautiful daughter who became ill. Poultices and herbs and incantations gave no relief. So the king called a seer who went into a trance. After emerging from his trance, he advised a diet of lion's milk.

Thereupon the King announced far and wide that whoever could furnish lion's milk and cure his daughter might claim her as his bride. Thus the story ran from month to month as we were launched on an endless series of darings by successive aspirants.

Oosta Boghos' young wife usually fell asleep on the oilcloth-covered table with her head encircled by her arms.

Chapter 15

Susie Philibosian was the daughter of our town photographer. She was one of our early graduates who awoke us to the fact that further education awaited us. She registered at the Visalia High School and became known as Susie "Phillips."

It was quite an ordeal for the 15-year-old girl to pedal her bicycle two miles to the railroad, board the morning train and then walk from the Visalia depot to the school, another mile or so away.

She was also subjected to embarrassment because of her Armenian lunches. At a reunion years later, while reminiscing on those long past days, she said, "How I hated those lunches! I couldn't sit with my friends at lunchtime. One day as I was pedaling my bike to the depot, I impulsively heaved my lunch bag across the canal. Then remorse struck me. My poor mother had risen at five o'clock to prepare my lunch, and here, I had ungratefully discarded it."

Visalia was our seat of higher learning. Our high school was there. It opened to us a window to a new world, to horizons beyond the confines of our muscat acres. Although we were subjected to the indignity of being referred to as "wops" (and sometimes very indiscriminately) we nevertheless tried to overcome that stigma and hoped that someday we would become as American as Visalia or Fresno -- or even Kansas, maybe!

One of our enterprising young men was John Ohanessian, who was what you might call a shrewd operator. He was always involved in some real estate or legal transaction that kept him well supplied with funds. Although he did not finish grammar school, he enrolled at the Visalia

High School, and drove the 11 miles in a new Grant Six all by himself. He did not like the original color of his car, so he had it painted cream colored with bright red under the fenders.

John was always sartorially elegant in his blue serge suit, white socks and brown shoes. He was no thing of beauty, being of short stature and with a large nose, but the "odar" girls were fond of him, calling him "Johnny." His name soon became "O'Hansen." He did not remain long in school. He did not think that a liberal arts education would help him in his chosen field.

High school created a new sophistication among our young. Mary, Devlat Agha's daughter, became Marie; his younger daughter Ruth kept her name as it was but Helen became Helene. Susie became Susan. Our Rosie did with a simple Rose. Much as I hoped for "Chuck" I had to do with Charles.

The girls became conscious of latest hat and dress styles, but by the time they were able to afford them, they were passé. All the girls were properly dressed young ladies. We boys all wore neckties.

My cousin Ohan, who had become "Owen" when he began going to high school, was a senior when I started. He had bought a new 1916 Ford for \$411 and used it as a bus to transport six of us to school.

The next year Al Keklikian (whose name became "Keck") took over in an ancient "490" Chevy touring car with no protection from the wintry winds that blew across the alkali flats at times.

After his graduation Al registered at S.B.U.C. (Southern Branch University of California) as a law student. In his later years, he went into date farming in Indio while continuing his law practice.

After his death, while in his sixties, his son continued his date-packing operations.

My sister Rosie, a freshman, prepared our lunches of sandwiches. Our mother had begun baking bread in loaf form, but it was of very coarse texture and very porous. The sandwiches were one of homemade cheese, one with bologna, and one of a syrup made of mulberry that was no more than liquid. All this was wrapped in pages of the *Christian Herald* and wound with string that would loosen in the wind and tear and allow the thin syrup to come percolating through. One day I blew up and, as Susie had done, I heaved it out of the car. Rosie laughed, "I knew someday that would happen."

The next year Dad bought a used Model T from Reverend Michaelian, a retired minister who filled in at our church on occasions. His deliveries were at a high pitch, and when he became excited they became uncontrolled and flowed out across the canal and road and bounced against the bunkhouse wall where lounged some local bachelors absorbing his messages in the comfort of their work clothes.

This Ford had been modernized with a self starter and patent generator that did not always work. I found the crank to be more dependable. Dad let me drive it to high school. I had four paying riders whom I charged seven dollars per month. Of course, Rosie rode free. She rode on the front seat with me, and Helene (once Helen) on her right. On the rear seat were my cousin Mike, Antranik and Eddie Phillips (Susie's brother). Helene's proximity gave my soul an awakening and at the same time humility. She could have rivaled the pre-historic Helen in ocean navigation. We were together in high school the whole four years.

Rose took up a course in domestic science and became adept in the art of preparing macaroni and cheese. Being proud of her talent, she plied us daily with repeated servings until it ran out of our ears.

I found that \$28 per month was not enough to buy gas at 20 cents per gallon, so I resorted to using "distillate," a cheaper form of fuel that we used in our engine for pumping irrigation water.

On cold mornings I had to squirt gasoline into each spark plug hole to get the Ford started. Hot water on the intake manifold helped, too.

We had no spare tire. The tires were the clincher type that had to be pried off the rim for repairs. Needless to say, we were often late and found it necessary to make frequent visits to the principal's office, and although he advised me to get out of the transportation business, our problem was not solved until a bus system was organized a few years later.

Albert, the "nice" boy whom the girls admired, took up a course in horticulture at University of California at Davis after leaving high school and was very much interested in the popular pistachio nut, which was an imported product at that time. He came home after college and actually started a small grove of thriving trees on his father's farm. Upon the death of Hagop Agha, the farm passed into the hands of my brother-in-law Ezra (Nellie's husband). There was a stipulation in the transfer of ownership that the pistachio trees were not to be destroyed. However, the effort was disappointing, as the shells would not release the dried hulls.

Rose was about 17 years old when she began to be conscious of boys. One day it became apparent that she had set her mind on -- whom else? --

Hagop, the youngest of the Kachies, the one who had broken the windows in his panicky frustration.

Despite the efforts of our parents and various village dignitaries to have the lovelorn couple wait until Rose's graduation, plans got under way for the wedding by the posting of a general invitation on the post office bulletin board. The wedding was to take place at the Kachy farm, on an outdoor platform of up-turned sweat boxes, since our new home was still unfinished.

As was the age-old custom in the old country, the bride-to-be was placed in supposed security behind barricaded doors in her parents' home, awaiting the onslaught of her swain and his entourage, who came tramping down the dusty road, with much tootling and castanet beating, and battered and beat in the door that offered only token resistance, and carried off the bride, who went willingly enough.

Chapter 16

Although we considered Fresno our metropolis, we enjoyed Visalia as a very elite town. We did our main shopping there for clothes and equipment. We usually assumed a leisurely air and strolled along Main Street. I say "strolled." That sounds more elite than sauntering or lolling and definitely more than loafing. We were men of the world at the Big Barrel with our mugs of five-cent root beer. There were groves of trees at Mooney's Grove, as well as a lake with rowboats for free usage.

Many single oak trees appeared indiscriminately around town, causing the streets to curve gracefully to spare them. They owed their origin to acorns that were brought by the frequent flooding of the St. John's River, which was actually the runoff of Bravo Lake at Woodlake. It followed an old cattle trail until the town fathers took it upon themselves to build up its banks to guide the flow in the general direction of Goshen and Traver.

At the Visalia Theater we were presented with stage productions such as *Robin Hood* and *Maytime*, but for ordinary Westerns we drove to Dinuba, a little north of Orosi, where we enjoyed movies that were more within our means, being of a humbler nature.

This theater, aside from the main feature, ran a comedy of 20 minutes and occasionally presented a visiting comedian who offered a narrative such as:

"This city I drove through by the name of Yette . . .," which never failed to excite the local yokels to hilarious, derisive laughter, while we slumped in our seats to escape notice.

The serving of Turkish coffee was an important ritual, and all girls approaching marriage age were expected to master it. When a young man considered matrimony, and decided on a certain prospect, he sent a go-between, usually an elderly woman who had earned the reputation of matchmaker. A meeting was arranged between the two families, as well as the young people involved, who were usually in accord with the proceedings.

While toe dancing about the issue, the young woman involved observed the traditional custom of brewing and serving Turkish coffee. The coffee was to measure up to certain standards. First of all, it had to be hot, and carry a bubbly foam on the surface. This was mandatory in rating the homemaking qualifications of the prospective wife. After the young man and his parents departed, the go-between took over.

The serving of coffee meant hospitality. Even casual acquaintances were invited in for coffee. The weekly meetings of the apostolic church ladies always ended with the serving, after which there was a cup reading.

On one occasion, when no one offered to undertake that obligation, the ladies, carefully balancing their cups, boarded two autos to visit one of their gifted friends who was known for her ingenious art.

There was a considerable belief in omens. If anyone dropped a spoon or any article while at the table, a visitor would be expected. If any food fell, that was a sign of coming rain. Eating burnt bread meant finding money, thus overdone toast was frequent and welcome.

On an adjacent 40 acres to the north of us lived the Saroyan family, with old Melik Agha at the head. His son Jake and my sister Nellie had been classmates during Mr. Kern's tenure at our school.

Old Melik Agha, who kept himself in seclusion most of the time, was a staunch and devout member of the apostolic church, with no use or tolerance for Protestants. He was seldom away from home except on Sundays when he attended church services, and once a week when he made a trip to the post office for his Armenian newspaper from New York. He wore a large straw hat resembling a sombrero, and walked in the middle of the road with stooped shoulders and hands clasped behind.

Two urchins, Sam (son of recently arrived cousin Armenag) and Antranik's kid brother, John, were eating figs up in one of the trees that

usually bordered vineyards for a little additional income. The two boys planned some innocent mischief on old Melik Agha. While plodding purposefully along, Old Melik Agha heard a weird voice from above: "Melik Agha! Melik Agha!"

Melik Agha stopped, looking around in befuddlement, then proceeded, still puzzled. Again came the voice from above: "Melik Agha! Melik Agha!"

This convinced Melik Agha that he was hearing a divine calling from above. "Speak, Lord. Anything you order, I will obey."

The voice came again: "You must become Protestant."

This was too much for the old boy. He slammed his hat on the ground and trampled it, calling, "A dog I will be before I will become a deserter!"

The boys escaped discovery by fleeing through the vineyard, but not for weeks did they disclose their part in the incident.

Just a few words in passing:

Sam was born with a gift of verbal articulation that served him well in high school. He was remembered as a faithful contributor to the school's monthly newspaper and for his frequent trips to the *Visalia Delta* office with his shirt tail out and with a sheaf of papers clutched in his hand. He married a Fresno girl and became a rancher in Fresno.

Antranik and his brother John forsook the farm and went to L.A. and began dealing in avocados. In time they became important figures in the avocado business, as well as owners of two cold storage plants in East L.A. They both married "odar" girls and were faithful members of the apostolic church in Los Angeles and well-remembered as the popular Gogian brothers

One Sunday, my Uncle John (my mother's brother) drove over in his new 1916 Model T Ford and offered to take us for a ride to the river. This was a treat for us because we were still dependent upon our old car, which was on its last legs. He had his wife and mother (my grandmother) in the car, so, with me, my dad and mother, there were six of us, making a formidable load. By the time we reached the river, the Ford was quite hot and erupting clouds of steam.

While the women remained in the car, I scrounged around in a heap of discarded junk where I found a rubber boot with which I filled the radiator

with river water while the men went behind some bushes to relieve themselves.

When they approached the car, Uncle John pointed under the car and exclaimed, "Something is leaking in the rear of the car!"

Dad said, "Maybe it's gasoline."

Uncle said, "No, the gas tank is under the front seat. What can it be?"

My father said, "Let me smell it."

An angry voice came from one of the women, "Never mind what it is. Get in and let's go!"

Chapter 17

There was much rejoicing among the Kachies when word came from the Near East Relief that their two younger brothers had turned up in Syria and that they were on their way to Yetem. They fitted very nicely into the brotherly environment. They were as cocky and headstrong as their elders. The younger one was Vahram; the older was called Charlie (no credit to me.)

They usually accompanied their brothers on their visits to Devlat Agha's store. On one occasion their presence provoked a near tragedy. Let me elaborate.

Although the Yetemites did quite well until the mid-1920s, the oversupply of raisins lowered the price until we were dependent on the bank for further loans, or time extensions on our old ones. Each morning a common sight was a group of Yetemites waiting for the National Bank of Visalia to open its doors.

The Sun Maid Raisin Association came up with a plan whereby they would control the market if the growers would all sign up with them. This seemed like a good idea and the majority went along with the plan except for some holdouts who assumed that the independent packers would be pressed to offer better prices than the association if the plan created a shortage on the market.

As the association's agents scoured the county signing up the growers, they were joined by followers who made a formidable appearance as they approached Yetem. It happened that the villagers had congregated at

Devlat Agha's store, which had become the popular spot for local gatherings on Saturday afternoons.

When the Kachies saw the dust cloud approaching from the west preceded by a string of cars, they realized what was up and discretely evacuated via the back door, leaving the two innocent youngsters.

The association agents were after the Kachies, who were the only holdouts in our area. The agents had been joined by a member of the Fresno County Sheriff's Department, although his authority in Tulare County was questionable. The agents got no satisfaction from the gathered gentry, but one of the followers recognized the two lads. When the officer, assuming authority, grabbed the younger lad, the panicked youngster screamed "Aga!" ("brother.")

Chapter 18

Nellie and my brother-in-law Ezra had, in time, become active members of Yetttem society. They operated the main store in Yetttem and were the center of local activities. The humble store they had begun with had grown and become the "Yetttem Economy Store" and catered to a wide area.

There were the usual groups of Mexican laborers following the ripening fruit from Bakersfield to Sacramento. To those families camping in the Yetttem area, Nellie was an angel, delivering fresh milk for the children and furnishing many a pillow or blanket to children sleeping under burlap covers.

She relieved Mother of many a washday's drudgery with her electric washer. One day she discovered that my gold pocket watch that she and Ezra had given me on my high school graduation had gone in with the washing. Without my knowledge she had a jeweler work it over and got it running, but it never kept time thereafter.

Hard times came with the end of World War I. The struggling farmers were unable to meet the banks demands for payments. Some simply abandoned their acres and sought employment in San Francisco or Los Angeles. Others remained as sharecroppers on land they had once owned.

The National Bank of Visalia, the holder of the local mortgages, sent a Mr. Anderson to Yetttem as a sort of supervisor. Mr. Anderson, a war veteran who walked with a limp, made his headquarters in the Yetttem Economy Store where he kept a desk in one corner and where Nellie fed him a daily lunch.

Eventually, Ezra became a big shot in the area, taking over a lot of Anderson's duties. He thus was able to come into possession of considerable acreage abandoned to the bank. He became known as E.H.T.

On these farms he located desperate Okies, who had lost their land and who were happy to have roofs over their heads. These dust bowl refugees settled for work at the going rate of \$1 per day. Their source of food supply was Ezra's store. It was a modern feudal system of sorts.

Chapter 19

Then happened a sudden disturbance in the serenity of the Kachy brotherhood. Word came from the War Department that one of their new arrivals, Charlie, who had reached the age of 18, was to report for Army service.

Setrak became cockier than ever. The exhaust on the Kissel remained open at all times. Yes sir! Their brother was to be a soldier in the United States Army! The bulletin board at the Post Office invited the town to a going-away party at the Kachy ranch. A procession accompanied Charlie to the depot and saw the lad take off on the Santa Fe to the north.

A few weeks later there appeared a dejected figure toiling along the dusty road from the direction of the depot. It turned out to be Charlie. The Army had rejected him.

Nellie's daughter Victoria (we called her Vic, Mabel's daughter was Vicky) married Jack Peloyan, a rancher and a prominent man in local church affairs. Vicky, Mabel's daughter, was a quiet and serious child, but Vic was outspoken, independent and could hold her own in any argument. An incident in 1944 illustrates her spunk:

During the war, when her two brothers Ed and Harry were in the service, Vic was sitting in the kitchen in Cutler with her husband and several local farmers, discussing some problem that had arisen. As usual, Vic had to put in her two cents worth. Jack tried to stop her with, "Vic, you stay out of this!"

Vic came back with, "I've got two brothers fighting for my freedom of speech! Don't tell me to shut up!"

Her brother Ed was stationed on Guam. He wrote to Nellie complaining of the monotony, the tasteless food and loneliness to the point where Nellie was concerned about his health. Then another letter arrived! Ed was happy! Whom did he meet on Guam? His cousin Sark, who was in the Construction Battalion and had access to all the food and kitchen facilities.

(Sark was the baby whom the mother carried on one arm when she delivered hot water for the baptismal services at the church.)

Ed's younger brother Harry served in the U.S. Air Force in North Africa. A double wedding followed shortly after their return.

Yettem's one war casualty was cousin Arshavir's son Charlie who died in Germany. His body was never recovered. His heartbroken mother went to New York to interview one of his buddies, but to no avail. She wept, "I have not even his grave to weep over."

Mr. Kendigian was a bachelor of about middle age, an elder in our church and one of our school trustees. He was one of the first to own an automobile. In fact, he owned three Fords. Two of them were in a constant state of cannibalization to keep the third one going. There was usually a deflated tube hanging on one of the open doors. He owned two farms, but was not able to handle both. He prevailed on Dad to take over the 40 next to the Saroyan farm.

Dad proceeded at once to have a new house built. We moved into it while the new bathroom items were still crated and stored in the barn. So was Rosie's piano.

This neglected farm was being choked with a healthy growth of Bermuda grass. Behind the farm was Krikor Saroyan's home. He was a son of old Melik Agha. Krikor was short tempered and did not associate much with the locals, so we were not too well acquainted. However, while Dad and I were struggling with our mismatched team to plow up a section of our Bermuda choked farm, Krikor drove up and stopped his car. "Nahabed Agha! What's this you are doing?"

"As you see, we are plowing up this Bermuda."

"With those poor animals? Come and take my team."

Dad sent me off with Krikor, and I returned with a pair of beautiful horses with new harnesses, with which we plowed up the place in a couple of days. When Dad offered to pay Krikor, he was extremely hurt. He said, "What are neighbors for?" He had been keeping his nobler nature well hidden.

Sad to say, Krikor died before we could return the favor. His farm was one of the few with electric pumping equipment, but he made a fatal mistake of throwing a defective switch while standing on wet ground

I might have inherited my occasional absentmindedness from my mother. I remember an incident that gives me that feeling.

I have mentioned that our pastor and his family lived a half mile or so down the road to the north. The arrival of twin boys did not make it any easier on the wife, since she already had four children on her hands. So my mother, deeming it her Christian duty, would go periodically to help the woman with her housework.

One exceptionally hot afternoon, Mother walked, carrying an umbrella for a sunshade. After several hours of housework, she started for home in the early twilight. On the way she met a laborer plodding his weary way homeward, who wished her, "Good evening," but appeared to be puzzled, judging from the queer look he gave her.

My mother wondered about that until she got home and discovered that she had walked in the moonlight with an open umbrella over her head.

The Yette ladies wore homemade dresses. On Sundays, the dressy garb was an affair of black material, shapeless, resembling a shroud, with maybe a belt or tuck to break the lines.

Although my mother was an excellent seamstress, and was one of the very few owners of a sewing machine (foot treadled) her dresses were all of the same pattern, hanging tent-like, which caused my father much unhappiness. One day he gave her a check and said, "Woman, for once go and buy yourself a ready-made dress." Mother took the check to the S. Sweet Co., the largest store in Tulare County, but after comparing the price of a ready-made dress with that of the homemade, she returned home with the usual black yardage.

All the women past 40 looked old because it was expected of them. Age meant dignity, maturity, gentility. Weight meant health. Plump women were healthy. My mother admired heavy women. They were fat and beautiful.

One woman who attended our church was generously over proportioned. She was extremely bulky of bosom and broad of beam, and was always perspiring and carrying her arms away from her ample body on hot days, as done by hens of the poultry variety. She must have tried to keep her bulk under some control as evidenced by escaping "whale bones" that had poked through her shirt waist one Sunday.

During Sunday services all heads turned in unison as latecomers entered the sanctuary, but that was hardly necessary. A whiff of shoe polish announced the arrival of Dick Iskenderian, our shoe repair man. The smell

of cleaning fluid meant Misak Poloukian, the dry cleaner. The two came in together from Visalia, their seats of operation. The rustle of freshly starched dresses announced the Donian girls. A whiff of Sen-Sen meant a stranger, worthy of subtle, side-long glances. But, the overpowering fragrance of Bull Durham cigarettes proclaimed any of the bachelors from the hotel, as well as the Kachy brothers.

The sermons were not as the 20-minute ones we have today. They ran a full hour, during which, when mature eyes were piously closed during the frequent prayers, I amused myself with my amateurish cartooning on the fly leaves of the hymnals. My sketches were crude exaggerations of prominent features, such as Mr. Kendigian's walrus mustache, Setrak's walleye, Hartunian's prominent Adam's apple. These were popular with my contemporary sufferers.

Hagop Chavokian, the man who took over the management of the post office in Hagop Effendi's store, was a comical fellow with his ever-smiling face, but, sad to say, his wife was unwell. Although she regularly attended church on Sundays, she was always pale and ailing. When in church, she would have spells of coughing that would cause meaningful glances between people and the sad, sad shaking of heads. After awhile she was absent from church services for a few weeks.

One morning my father called Mother out on the porch and pointed to a column of smoke in the distance. He said in a low voice, "They're burning her bedding." We assumed she died of tuberculosis.

However, it was not our living conditions, harsh as they were, that caused her illness. She had been ailing prior to their coming to Yette. I am happy to state (and there are others who remember the flu epidemic of 1917) that there was not a single case of the sickness in Yette, although the seriousness of the situation caused the closing of schools for a couple of months.

Mother had her own way of practicing medicine on us kids. She would buy a quantity of loose quinine at the Visalia Drug Store. She'd roll out dough to the required thinness, cut it into 2-inch squares, fold them over a pinch of quinine and roll them into pellets. She would do the same with red pepper. These were very effective preventative doses.

Chapter 20

With a short crop one fall, we began having trouble with the bank, as well as Mr. Kendigian.

To top it all, we were persistently annoyed by an old-time ministerial acquaintance of Dad's who had gone into selling life insurance for the New York Life Insurance Co., as most unattached one-time clergymen did. This gentleman, with his persistence, eventually wore Dad down. Realizing that we were going to lose the ranch anyway and would have no use for the still-crated bathroom accessories in the barn, Dad gave them to the man as a down payment. We then moved to another 40 acres where Dad had a sharecropping toehold. He held on to Rose's piano, still stored in the barn.

Our Ford was becoming rickety with age. Its wheels creaked, its fenders rattled. Some of these I was able to remedy somewhat with baling wire, of which there was plenty. Dad couldn't understand that wire was my last resort.

"With a high school education you have to use wire?"

One day the gas line leaked where it joined the carburetor bowl. As every Ford owner knew, the popular remedy was to unscrew the packing nut where the gas line entered the bowl, wind string around the tube, and then screw the nut back on.

"It's fixed, Pop," I announced with pride.

"How did you fix it so quick?"

"With string, Pop."

"String? String? What's wrong with wire?"

Occasionally, Dad sent me to Fresno to pick up a check from the E.Y. Foley Packing Co. for our latest shipment of raisins. The drive to Fresno was a 40-mile ordeal, but the old Ford made it although undecided whether to fire on three or four.

I had no trouble getting the check, as Foley's pay mistress was Miss George, whose brother Ara was courting my cousin Abe's daughter, and the Davidian name was familiar to her.

I started back late in the afternoon, making successive spurts from town to town -- Fresno to Fowler to Selma to Kingsburg -- to service the radiator and a leaking tire, then turning at the Kingsburg winery for the 18 miles of dark country road to home with only one headlight. It was none too bright because it depended on the generator, which in turn depended on engine speed, which was far from fast.

My cousin, Jim Terzian, our local real estate agent (who had assumed the name of Taylor) arranged to bring a hand-operated motion picture projector to Yetteam each Saturday. The wild west films proved quite popular with the locals, many of whom were illiterate. Action rather than plot was more to their liking.

Our auditorium was the one-room "Yetteam Hall." Jim often called on me to turn the crank. When the program proved to be too long, Jim would poke me and whisper, "Turn faster, Charlie."

I frequently used my amateur cartoons to help entertain our viewers. I would sketch these on glass plates and flash them on the screen. They were caricatures of our local citizens and of a somewhat personal nature, and did not sit so well with the thin-skinned ones. Old Man Masoyan, the father of six kids, chased me in his fury and I had to splash across the canal to escape.

Through Cousin Jim's efforts and the cooperation of the Near East Relief Society, Jim's young brother, Parsekh, who had been presumed lost, arrived in Yetteam. He was a six-foot 20-year-old in shabby clothes and worn-out shoes that made him practically barefooted. Jim took him to Visalia to outfit him properly, but was unable to get shoes large enough. He had to order them made to size.

Parsekh did not remain in Yetteam, but went to Philadelphia to join some cousins there, and did pretty well marketing a dish-washing mop he developed.

In about 1920 there appeared in Yetteam an elderly couple, Serop and his wife, along with a pair of comely wives for their two sons, Kemal and Harout. The sons, who farmed beyond the Santa Fe railroad tracks, were early arrivals from their former homeland that had become Turkey.

These two brothers, with true filial concern and devotion, had provided generously for their parents who were well satisfied to remain in their ancestral homeland enjoying the generous allowance. However, when the two boys began to consider the advantages of family life over the inconveniences of bachelorhood, they asked their parents, in the popular Armenian custom, to find two healthy prospects as brides and send them over. The parents did better. They not only sent the two women, but accompanied them to Yetteam, grinning from ear to ear to better flash their gold-capped dentures. Golden dentures provided a popular way to bring surplus funds out of Turkey.

The two young women took immediate charge of running the house, but the whole family was under the iron thumb of Serop, the father. He was

referred to by the Yettemites as "The General." He made his periodic appearances in Yette riding a great black horse, wearing on his head a Cossack-type fur head piece. A gaunt hound followed at the horse's heels. I can't recall ever hearing Serop utter a single word in public, but he, it was said, ruled the roost.

Chapter 21

One fall, because of an unexpected early rainfall, the Kachy boys had on their hands a large supply of wet raisins that soon reached a happy state of fermentation.

They set up an arrangement of tubing and tubs in the middle of their vineyard, with a careful eye on wind direction. Fortunately, there was no wind, so the proximity of Rev. Jenanyan's home and the home of our peace officer was of no concern.

Their operations produced a jug of moonshine that they buried in a spot well charted by the number of grapevines in two directions.

A week later, word leaked out that their cached treasure had disappeared. Of course, no outcry was made, but the word got around, nevertheless. The mystery was never solved, and the boys were polite to one another for some time, causing a rupture in the brotherly unit.

We had no doctor in Yette, but about 1920, a relative of Rev. Jenanyan arrived from Boston and took up residence. Although he had no California license to practice his medical profession, he kept busy at midwifery and treating minor ills. He discreetly kept his window shades down.

He sewed up my head on two occasions. Once, when I dived against a boulder at the river, and another time when a horse kicked me as I worked at untangling its foot from a harness trace. He used no anesthetic but gave me generous swabs of iodine as a disinfectant. This, though painful, was preferable to the aforementioned popular alternative -- pee.

The "doctor" bought a secondhand King 8 touring car and thrilled at the thunderous rhythm of its cylinders. He took it to Visalia one day for a tune-up, but was disappointed with the result. The car had lost its powerful throbbing, and emitted only a meek purr. He was told, to his embarrassment, that the throbbing was caused by a misfiring plug that he mistook for the sound of power.

The flies in our kitchen did not trouble us at breakfast because they were still asleep on the ceiling, but when Dad and I came in at lunchtime, we each took anything -- towel, garment, broom -- and with the screen door

propped open, shooed the flies outward. The cat and dog usually slunk in, the cat finding refuge behind the stove while the dog scampered about avoiding our kicks.

The screen door took a heavy toll of the flies, as was evident by the flattened unfortunates on its slamming edge.

Our cat had learned how to open the screen door with one paw and to sneak in with its tail held upright to avoid the door's slamming. It was not always lucky, as was evident by its numerous knobs.

This was our female cat that was faithfully keeping up the feline population in our area despite our repeated attempts to dispose of it in various distant areas. She always managed to return, sometimes even before we did, by taking short cuts. We left her behind with the farm when we were again foreclosed.

One of our Yettemites was known as "Zeitoun-tsi" (meaning "native of Zeitoun," a village high in the mountains of Turkey where sometime in the past the heroic Armenians had held off the marauding Turks while their families fled to safety.) This Zeitoun-tsi was a six-footer, and although he never spoke of the past it was hinted that it had been a violent one, and violent he still was, when aroused. He farmed a 10-acre piece adjoining my cousin Abe's farm.

He frequently went to Fresno to hob-nob with some of his Zeitoun-tsi countrymen.

One day he returned with a wife who, like himself, was totally lacking in aestheticism, and as short-tempered, and therefore not very popular with the local ladies who deemed it wise to handle her carefully or, better yet, to avoid her altogether."

One day, my cousin Abraham appeared at our home in agitation, his composure not only ruffled but practically extinguished. Drawing Dad aside, he unburdened himself with disjointed continuity that Dad later relayed to us while, with effort, maintaining a straight face.

"Ammie (Uncle), I'm in trouble."

"Why, Abraham?"

"I went to the Zeitoun-tsis house to tell him his water was flooding my muscats, but found his Ford gone, so I decided to tell his wife."

"O.K., so what?"

"I knocked at the door. His wife answered, 'Come in. The door is unlocked.' I entered. What do you think I saw?"

"What?"

"She was sitting in the tub, naked."

"Of course, you apologized and retreated?"

"I turned to go, but she said, 'Come in, come in and scrub my back. My husband had to go just when I needed him.' "

"So?"

"What could I do? I scrubbed her back and fled as fast as I could, forgetting what I had intended to tell her."

"Well, what are you afraid of?"

"If she would tell her husband, he will suspect the worst. He will kill me."

"Do nothing. Leave it to her. Apparently, that sort of thing is not unusual among some of our mountain people. If she should mention it to her husband, he might even thank you for helping her out of her predicament."

However, Abe held his breath for a few weeks and avoided the mountaineer.

After his daughter's marriage, cousin Abe moved his wife and two boys, Charlie and Johnny, to Fresno, where he joined the cooking staff of the Fresno Hotel with the culinary skill he had mastered through his long association with Dad. His son Charlie served in France during the war. Johnny, a merchant marine, was able to break away long enough to visit Charlie in Europe.

Devlat Agha was a philosopher of sorts. He usually sat under the umbrella tree beside his store and, without any provocation, would begin a monologue for the benefit of whoever would listen.

"Today is the threshold of tomorrow. Life is a fragile thing and must be handled carefully. The path is narrow and has tempting diversions."

He bore his title of "agha" with dignity and pride. Even on Sundays he appeared in freshly ironed overalls.

He looked with pained forbearance on any of the locals entering the poolroom on the corner. Upon noticing a new garment or any flashy jewelry on churchgoers, his usual comment was, "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity."

When in church, he always had his Ingersol watch in the bib pocket of his overalls, handy in case of need. The watch was very loud to wind and he did it very slowly for the pastor's benefit.

When noting anyone in a new car, he would begin a soliloquy to suit the occasion:

"Civilization has two faces. We enjoy its benefits, but succumb to its temptations and pitfalls to which it lures us. We overeat its rich foods. Our young fall to the temptations to which the freedom of the automobile attracts us. A kite that is not restrained will fall to ruin."

On sunny days, Devlat Agha's favorite spot was on a chair in front of his store with a supply of salted pumpkin, sunflower and watermelon seeds. He would toss a few into his mouth, crack them, remove the kernel with his tongue and then flip out the empty shells. He always attracted a flock of chickens that scratched among the discarded hulls with their garrulous grumbling, but ever hopeful.

When alone, he sat in silent contemplation. If interrupted, he would put a mental hold on his cogitation and take it up again where he had left off. As a local entertainer, adviser and simple warm-hearted being, he definitely added up to more than the sum of his parts. He was an institution.

He sold the store to my brother-in-law in 1920 and moved his family to a tract he purchased on the north side of Visalia where the road to Yettem takes off, and built a new store. He proceeded to subdivide the property into residential lots. One street sign prominently displayed its name, "Harold," in honor of his only son. The sign is still there.

The arrival of Cousin Giragos by way of the Argentina quota about the summer of 1921 was a welcome relief to us.

He moved in with us and practically became a member of our family. He entertained us with his narratives of the way of life he had experienced in Turkey after the departure of my parents. Nostalgically, he told of sheep grazing on the slopes of Mt. Argeas and of gathering what they called *peos*, a sap exudation of a wild shrub that they collected and sold to buyers

who came from England. They never learned what *peos* was used for, although they had gathered it year after year, but, upon my mentioning and describing *peosto* my friend Melkes, who worked in a pottery plant in Los Angeles, he told me that it was used for pottery glazing and came in sacks marked "Armenian Glue."

Similar occurrences come to mind. I've known those who have worked in the Ford plant in Detroit for years on one particular Ford part, yet they never knew what that part was used for. Another fellow worked in a Jell-O plant among barrels of the stuff, and although he had tasted many a pinch of it, he never knew what it was until he got married and was enlightened by his wife.

Chapter 22

As much as I loved the farm, the open spaces, the lush growth about us of vineyards and orchards, when I was about 20 I began to feel the futility in our struggles.

There was the late frost that killed the unopened buds of early spring, the early rain that ruined the fruit drying in the sun, the uncertain fluctuating prices offered for our hard-earned crops. I saw the wisdom of further education.

Eddie Phillips was at Cal; Al Keck was at Southern Branch of Cal in L.A.; Cousin Owen was in San Francisco digging post holes with Ed Kamalian; Sam Tatilian was taking a correspondence course in post office work. My future looked bleak.

So, with Giragos moving in with us and taking over my work, I was able to continue my education, which had been interrupted for a year. In the meantime, Devlat Agha's son, Harold, had caught up with me.

He was an embryonic Devlat. His smiles were as rare as a third sneeze. Smiling, to him, was a lowering of barriers. He controlled that impulse with an effort that his distorted features gave away. You could have described him with one word: profound! He could really hit a nail on its head and put it into a nutshell, while I'd still be groping around in my quandaries.

We registered together at Occidental College in Los Angeles. Harold always had numerous fountain pens in the breast pocket of his jacket. An assortment of keys jingled at his belt. I never knew why he carried so many. All he needed was one for his dorm room and one for his mailbox.

Harold's sister, Marie, had gone to work at Woolworth's in Visalia. She was a pert and attractive girl and excited one's emotions to a delicious level. True, she was not as well assembled as Bertha, being as flat as a shingle, but the potential was there! I was sure that in time she would attain the required attributes.

Our transportation to Los Angeles was by the Southern Pacific Railroad, which left Visalia at midnight. Devlat's family invited me to join them in the evening while waiting for the train, since my dad could not undertake driving our old Ford in the dark from Yetttem to Visalia.

Marie drove us to the depot to take the midnight train. I asked her once, as we were boarding the train, "Would you slap my face if I kissed you?"

She said, "Don't ever dare!"

I said, "I'd rather be slapped by you than not slapped by anyone else."

I recall that she used to sit in a pew in church with her parents directly in front of us with her long hair hanging before me. I would impishly tug at one single hair just to see her irritably scratch. Only, of course, when devout eyes were piously closed.

At Oxy, one of the requirements was for all students to sign up for some sort of athletics. I picked football although I did not know a football from a basketball. I became left guard on "Timberwolf" Joe Pipal's Fighting Tigers.

I shall never forget climbing daily into my football jersey, ice cold with the sweat of the previous day's workout, or the dressing room fragrance of liniment and sour sweat.

The highlight of my football career was a trip to Reno with only 12 men for the game against the University of Nevada. We played both offense and defense -- all 60 minutes.

We did not win.

Another one we did not win was against U.S.C. at home but we did quite well, allowing them only five touchdowns to our 0.

By working around in the neighborhood at odd jobs of gardening, I was able to nourish myself on a diet of hotcakes and coffee at breakfast, and at lunch and dinner on a scoop of Chef Oster's hash and mashed potatoes.

My correspondence with the home folks was by the makeshift Armenian script I had mastered in our Saturday Armenian School sessions. Mother responded with individually lettered script for my benefit. In later years, Cousin Mike's kid brother in reminiscing, told how Mother would address her letters to me by walking over to the neighbor's home to copy the lettering "Occidental" off the Occidental Stove Co. name plate.

Harold fared better with Woolworth cash sent him by Marie. He and I occupied adjoining rooms in the dormitory. He had developed a cough that came on in spasms at night and for which the college doctor recommended athletic field workout. He went out for the cross-country run, and did pretty well considering the condition he was in. When out with a group of 30 runners he usually came in about fifth.

I left college at the end of my second year through my inability to raise the \$78 fee for the next semester, and returned home with my escutcheon somewhat clouded. Harold continued for another year, and came home a thin wraith. He passed on a month later.

Marie's cute younger sister Ruth tearfully asked me if I would act as pallbearer. I was happy to be of service. That was the least I could do for Harold. Ruth continued running the store after her parents passed on.

Marie quit her job at the five- and 10-cent store and married some fellow from Fresno a few months later. After all, there were no prospects for her in Yetem. No one, myself included, owned even a pot, let alone a window to throw it out of. I never saw Marie again.

The next time I saw Ruth was about 40 years later when my wife and I were on our way to Yetem. As we left Visalia and got on the highway, we found the weather-beaten store still there. We had heard that Ruth was operating the business. Bee said, "If Ruth is in, I'd like to talk to her. After all, we were classmates at Visalia High. You go and see if she is in."

Yes, she was in. She was with a customer (I presumed) with whom she was busy discussing his overdue account. So I moved around reading the labels on the cans on the shelves until she finished her business.

Then, without looking up and while closing her books, she asked, "What can I do for you, Charlie?"

I said, "Just a can of Union Leader pipe tobacco, Ruth."

"I was painfully let down. I had expected a "hello" at least. But, maybe my presence had brought up memories of her dead brother who had been the pride and hope of her old dad.

I paid her the 15 cents and left.

I was mad, and Bee never went in.

Chapter 23

Mike and I held communion frequently at the little pool hall adjoining Hygas' grocery store. We were there one evening when an itinerant band of several gypsy families came in with their numerous progeny, from infants in arms upward, and went about handling this and that off the shelves.

Hygas, suspecting some light fingering, sent his son to fetch Constable Mike Tashjian, who began pompously questioning the motley group.

One obese woman with an infant on one arm took umbrage and faced Tashjian with, "Who you, mister?" Our Constable officiously pulled back the lapels of his jacket to expose his badge. The woman thrust her child into her husband's arms, pulled open the front of her blouse, and with her ample bosom cupped in her two hands blasted Tashjian with a double jet. Constable Tashjian fled in confusion.

Mike and I broke away from farming that winter and went to Los Angeles. There, I worked as a checker in a lumber yard, putting to use my grammar school arithmetic, while Mike worked on a construction project. We shared a one-room apartment on Pico Boulevard, a few blocks west of Main Street. Our usual entertainment was a 10-cent movie within walking distance on Main Street.

One Sunday we made our way to Venice for a dip in the briny and also to bring ourselves up to date on the latest styles of feminine beach wear. We fell into the hands of a lady fortune teller who examined our grimy, calloused hands and informed us that we had "lived a hard life of toil." Her heartfelt commiseration made us feel sorry for ourselves.

Mike's job took him to Lake Elsinore, leaving me alone. However, Melkes, who had quit his job at the pottery plant and was now a pie salesman for the L.A. Pie Company, often dropped in at my room to do his bookkeeping. Our association developed into a close friendship.

I lost my job during a slump in the building industry and went home in a 1915 Buick roadster that I bought for \$45. I arrived in Yetttem with \$145 in my pocket that Dad immediately borrowed.

The next fall, when our harvesting work was done, Melkes showed up in Yetttem with a plan. With hard times continuing, farms changing hands and share-cropping going on, there was a good opportunity for a trucking business. Truck driving seemed adventurous. I was all for it!

I recovered my \$145 from Dad, and Melkes and I bought a used Reo Speedwagon. This was only a two-ton truck, but by renting my brother-in-law's trailer at \$2 a day we could haul four tons to Fresno at \$6 a ton. So we did pretty well.

One evening as we were sitting at a table in the poolroom over our second steins of beer that had lulled our sensitivities to a delicious, adventurous degree, we considered the advisability of transporting a load of chickens and turkeys to San Francisco for the Thanksgiving market. The longer we discussed it, the more feasible it seemed. We erected a chicken wire enclosure behind our barn and scoured a radius of 10 miles for any type of fowl at 20 cents per pound. Thanksgiving came none too soon, as the cost of chicken feed for the pent-up creatures was beginning to tell on us. We built a double deck enclosure on the truck, loaded up our non-descript cargo and took off on the Monday before Thanksgiving so as to get into an early market. Our one casualty was in Turlock when one duck escaped and we lost it down a dark alley. We unloaded our load at the Public Market in Oakland at 40 cents per pound and thought we had done pretty well, but our birds had lost so much weight by their confinement that we broke even. This ended our interest in ornithology. We learned that although two heads can be twice as smart, they can also be twice the opposite.

Our frequent hauling trips to Fresno entailed certain obligations to which we were expected to submit.

One was to gather empty "sweat" boxes from various fruit packers and return them to their owners, to whom we owed the bulk of our business. I recall one instance which caused me some embarrassment.

My mother had cooked up a large mess of "Monti," which is a sort of Armenian ravioli, and I had put away an unwise amount that settled solidly in my stomach and which necessitated my taking a large dose of sulfur and honey to get things moving.

I was called by Mr. Aposhian to haul a load of golden bleach to the Guggenheim Packing Co., in Fresno. Mr. Aposhian helped me load the truck, since Melkes was laid up with a chest cold.

Then, his wife Sirpuhi appeared and asked if she could ride with me to do some shopping in Fresno. Of course, I couldn't refuse although I wasn't very happy. She was a continuous talker, and with an open exhaust I wouldn't be able to hear what she was talking about. We got the truck and trailer unloaded about one o'clock. Then, Mrs. A. insisted on treating me to lunch, so I drove to Hart's Cafeteria, which was always our favorite since it had a spigot that emitted free carbonated water.

After lunch I drove her to Gottschalk's Department Store, where she indulged in the usual feminine procedure of pricing and fingering various articles of apparel. About this time I began to feel somewhat uncomfortable. The sulfur and honey had started things moving.

But then she had to go to Radin and Kamp for more shopping, disregarding my entreaties to please hurry. Then, she decided to have her purchases gift wrapped.

Finally, I was able to bundle her into the truck and took off for home, not bothering to pick up the empties. I kept my foot down pretty heavy through Fowler, Selma, and when we made the turn at the Kingsburg winery and reached the first Thompson vineyard, I stopped and disappeared into the lush greenery, leaving Mrs. Aposhian to figure out as best she could. When ya gotta go, ya gotta go!

Chapter 24

Hard times had caught up with the Kachy boys. Their farm could not support five brothers, one with a wife and new child. (I was "Uncle" again.)

They traded off their farm for a 40-acre Thompson vineyard in Visalia, bought out Hagop's share with enough cash to enable him to move his family to San Francisco, where Dad was planning to go eventually.

Rose had her piano shipped to San Francisco where it served her for a good many years, occasionally emitting bits of straw and chicken feathers. Hagop became a roofer and learned to wield a mean tar mop. However, the Depression of '29 brought him unemployment from time to time, so that he started looking around.

Another bad year on the farm was enough for Dad. He decided to give up farming and take up his old restauranting hobby. "People have to eat," he said, "depression or no depression."

At the request of the Bank of Italy, he agreed to stay on the farm until a caretaker could be found.

As for our trucking business, we found out that our seasonal employment could not support both of us, so I sold my share to Melkes and planned to join the folks in San Francisco.

My Uncle John (owner of the "leaky" Ford) who operated a tin shop in Reedley and catered to the farmers in their need for irrigation pipe and water tanks, etc., opened a door for me. He suggested

that I look into the sheet metal field in San Francisco, where there would undoubtedly be much need for sheet metal work on new construction as well as air conditioning. I had some misgivings at first about taking his advice seriously because although he was a very loveable uncle, he didn't have much "git up and go."



[Click thumbnail for big picture](#)

He spent his idle hours in his little shop in Reedley and read back copies of War Cry, the monthly publication of the Salvation Army.

At home, his wife was boss. She tolerated no drinking, which was no hardship on Uncle because he didn't drink. She soon started on his pipe smoking, but won only a partial victory. He was to smoke only out of doors. As a safety measure, his wife carried his smoking stand eight blocks to the bridge and dropped it into the King's River.

I decided to take Uncle John's advice and do sheet metal work. After helping Dad settle his affairs and accounts in Yettam, and after buying a couple of tires for my Buick, I was ready to take off for the big city, where I planned to park on my brother-in-law who was then expecting another addition to his family. I found my capital reduced to \$35, but I had a 20-gallon tank full of gas and with youthful optimism I took off one early dawn in 1925.

The sun was just peeping over the snow-topped Sierras as I made the turn at the Kingsburg winery and got on the highway going north. I opened the old girl to full speed of 40 m.p.h., but not for long. The universal joint gave way and there I was, 25 miles from home and 180 to go.

Fortunately, a gas station owner came to my salvation and towed me to his one-man repair shop. Between waiting on customers and working on my car he finally had the break repaired, and then stuck it into a bucket of lime to give it a "slow cool."

When the job was done, at a cost of \$27, the sun was just setting as I sat there and moodily contemplated the situation. With only \$8 remaining of my original \$35 and with 180 miles to go, should I continue, or go back? If I went back, when would I ever be able to leave again? With the rash ebullience of youth, I took off into the rosy sunset.

I reached San Francisco with my \$8 reduced to \$5 by the cost of two quarts of Zerolene and the ferry crossing, and stumbled in on my sleepy sister Rose and her family, whose first question was, "Did you bring any money?"

I'm sure they needed it. They already had an addition in the family and were anticipating another. Then, two years later a son joined the family. Thus, they were blessed with two daughters and a son. They were Mildred, Bernice and young Allan, who in time, followed me (his uncle) in air-conditioning and ventilation work.

I registered with the International Association of Sheet Metal Workers as an apprentice and almost immediately I was put on a job of pasting asbestos on warm air ducts.

I wish to state without boasting that within two years I was able to call myself an experienced air conditioning expert.

Chapter 25

The coming of the Great Depression made it tough on all of us. Hagop and I were periodically unemployed. Hagop then forsook his roofing job and took over a bootblack stand at Third and Howard. As the Depression continued and conditions worsened, people were not concerned about the appearance of their shoes. So, Hagop transformed his shoe stand into a shelved fruit stand with overripe fruit that he supposedly "purchased" from the Crystal Palace Market.

He had a good thing going and managed to feed his family pretty well. He never went back to roofing and eventually became owner of considerable pieces of property along the Peninsula.

I had a good thing going, too, staying with them, in spite of Rose's occasional hints that I should marry and have a home of my own. Thick skinned as I was, I was able to sense an innuendo, but pretended not to.

I had frequent weekend drop-in visitors from Yetem who would "persuade" me to accompany them to a speakeasy in one of the alleys near Market Street. The Cairo Cafe was a frequent haunt where a pint of their favorite alcoholic beverage could be savored more for the excitement it evoked through its prohibitive than for its delicious light-headed irresponsibility. On these occasions, I was generally assumed to play the host, but our Market Street movies and dinners were dutch.

Harry Tashjian (no relative of our Yetem peace officer) lived in Cutler and was a law student working his way through Stanford by playing poker. He periodically came into San Francisco on Saturdays by railroad to the Townsend Station, walked over to our Harrison Street abode with the request, "Charlie, drive me over to Daly City." Like a good boy I would drive him to his favorite joint on Mission Street from where he would emerge later with several wrist watches and enough cash to tide him over until his next visit.

Upon his graduation he became Public Defender in Visalia, but suffered a fatal heart attack while in office.

I recall some of his narratives, which were somewhat far-fetched, but interesting nevertheless because they involved Armenians. The following is one of them:

Mr. Arakelian was considered the watermelon king of California and shipped watermelons far and wide. On one occasion he had prepared several truckloads to go to San Francisco, and planned to accompany his drivers. After a satisfactory disposition of his loads, he took his perspiring and grimy men and himself likewise to a ritzy restaurant on Ellis Street. As they sat at a table waiting for a waiter, the manager came up to him and haughtily questioned him as to his wherewithal. Mr. Arakelian quietly reached into his shirt pocket with grimy fingers and pulled out some \$1,000 bills and tendered one to the pop-eyed manager.

Another story was of an Armenian restaurateur whose specialty was the favorite of all Armenians: lamb shish-kabob, skewered with onions, peppers and eggplant. The cook, very proud of his culinary prowess, made it a practice to serve his shish-kabob in person. On one occasion, he returned to the kitchen and collapsed into tears. Upon being questioned on his lachrymal condition, his answer was, "He asked for ketchup."

But, to get back to Rose's subtle campaign to get me married off

When Rose finally convinced me that two could live as cheaply as one, I began to seriously look further afield. Among our acquaintances on Harrison Street there was no one I could consider as a wife. There was one Armenian family with an attractive daughter but she already had an "odar"

boyfriend. Then I remembered Cousin Harry's two stepdaughters. When last I had seen them, as teenagers, they were a cute pair of girls. Rose had kept in touch with them. I learned that they, upon being graduated from high school, had gone to Los Angeles to business college and were staying with an uncle and aunt, and their daughter Ellenore.

With the Depression still on, but with Rose's prodding, I made a long-distance date by mail with Beatrice to attend a football game, to be followed by dinner and an evening at a theater.

My old Buick had been replaced with a 1922 Rickenbacker that appeared more presentable than my previous car, but needed occasional tinkering.

I got into my blue serge double-breasted Foreman and Clark suit ("Walk upstairs and save \$10") and with providence tempering the wind to the shorn lamb by starting a gasoline war, and the price of gas plummeting to five cents a gallon, I lit out for L.A. through the San Joaquin Valley. The coast route would have been about 40 miles shorter, but by going through Yettum I could visit and stay with Nellie overnight and thus save the cost of a night's lodging.

My nephew Ed, Nellie's son, often asked me, "How can you drive so far without sleep?" I always gave him the same story, which he enjoyed hearing:

"I have trained myself to sleep with one eye closed, and drive with the other eye. Then after awhile I rotate."

At times, I would have to tinker with the motor or change a tire, so I reached L.A. with baggy pants and grimy hands and scuffed shoes.

I must admit that I was floored by the transformation I found in Beatrice. One who had been a skinny first baseman on the boys' baseball team at Oak Grove School in Goshen Junction and who used to drive her stepfather's tractor, had been transformed into a sophisticated young woman who was too much a lady to notice my pitiful condition and surely not because of my irresistible personality or charm. Yes, she was a real lady! Of course, I fell for her at once!

I pursued my courtship at two-week intervals by making long weekend round trips. It was in the fall and the 440 miles had their inconveniences. The Pacheco Pass fog rolled down into the Valley, and joined the mist of the San Joaquin River that meandered across the road a few times with no bridges, but fortunately was shallow enough to be fordable between the double rows of stakes that the road department had erected for my guidance.

In the spring, the hills were a riot of colors with fields of lupine, bluebell, snowdrop and poppy forming an artistic pattern of indiscriminate groupings set in an expanse of fresh green. These, together with the clear sunlight reflecting off the fresh Sierra snows, enveloped me in a rapture of buoyant ecstasy,

But, with the gradual rising of gasoline prices, I found it necessary to step up my courtship somewhat.

Our simple wedding in the company of only parents and nearby relatives was followed by an unforgettable \$30 honeymoon on Santa Catalina Island for three days in the beautiful Saint Catherine Hotel, including all meals and steamer fare.

Chapter 26

Then, back to earth and reality. The Depression was still on.

My folks had moved to San Francisco, where Dad was serving the stevedores and dock workers along the waterfront. Although Dad was a past master of the culinary arts, he found no need to exert himself in that respect. His Hungarian goulash was the favorite of the dungaree-clad patrons. All the slow movers in the icebox ended up as kin in hash, topped with fried egg.

On my off days, which were frequent, I helped Dad behind the counter. I became quite adept at simple preparation of short orders and could actually flip eggs quite adroitly.

A job that came my way was dishwashing, although plenty of help was available at a dollar a day with lunch thrown in. Another of my duties was to clean out the grease trap under the sink periodically. This operation interrupted the serenity of a colony of cockroaches that scurried about frantically, upsetting my equilibrium in no small degree.

One of Dad's instructions in the art of table serving was: "When you place a cup of coffee before a customer, place it to his right with the handle to his right." In that neighborhood, mind you!

Truth to say, our condition was in no way an Elysium.

As to whether two could live as cheaply as one, we found out that we had to.

Bee longed for the fresh breezes of Long Beach and the sunny beaches of Southern California. San Francisco didn't measure up. Half Moon Bay and Pescadero didn't either. Santa Cruz came close. But Long Beach was different, even though I pointed out that it was all the same ocean. No. Long Beach was different!

Chapter 27

In our desperation we decided to sit out the Depression as share croppers on a 60-acre vineyard in Ivanhoe, and yet be near enough to Yetttem to associate conveniently with our old friends.

Our closest neighbors in Ivanhoe were the Atkissons, an elderly couple, very friendly, making us feel at home among "white folks" as they termed themselves. Mr. Atkisson was a retired minister who often referred to his youth back in Tennessee where he had attended a seminary. He frequently recounted incidents of his boyhood and boyish backslidings.

"We were miles from home, with Thanksgiving coming on, and no funds for train fare home, and very desirous of a turkey dinner.

"Adjacent to our seminary was a small farm with several turkey toms among the flock of mixed fowl. Of course, we would never think of stealing one. The very idea was no-no. However, we thought up a clever idea.

"We crept into the backyard one night where the turkeys were roosting in a tree and tied a red ribbon to the leg of one of them. The next day we visited the farmer with a sorrowful tale of our runaway turkey with a ribbon on its leg. He offered to check his flock on the chance that our turkey might have joined his birds. Sure enough. There it was! He caught the runaway and gave it to us."

Our old Yetttem friends, who remembered us from way back, each brought us a dozen eggs and a hen with maternal ambitions, and before the year had passed the place was running over with chickens that were eating our crops, and we were eating them. But, I couldn't kill a chicken that I had raised from the egg. They were all pets. We knew them all by name. Bee would prod me into going out at night and climbing the tree where they were sleeping with supposed security and groping around for a chicken leg in the dark.

Although we had lived within 60 miles of the High Sierras and giant redwoods most of our lives, we had never visited them. One Saturday, with a hamper of sandwiches and two bottles of root beer, we took off in

our old car. After we passed Woodlake and crossed the river and started the long climb, our troubles began.

Our vacuum tank, a contrivance that drew fuel from the rear tank from whence it fed the carburetor, failed to perform its intended function and needed successive priming to get us going. With a pair of pliers in one hand and a pop bottle in the other (after I had drunk its contents), I crawled under the rear tank, removed the drain plug and filled the bottle, with which I supplied the vacuum tank. This didn't take us very far, but after successive operations we made it to the top.

We ate our sandwiches sitting on a bench under the General Sherman tree, then climbed to the top of Moro Rock from where we looked down on the precipitous climb that we had traversed.

Bee hungrily eyed the deadwood lying in the ravines and along the trails. What a relief it would be if she were allowed to gather some to feed our little wood stove to relieve her of the daily scrounging for fuel.

We had been warned to observe carefully the strict rules in the park. We had heard of an incident when one of our Yettmites had uprooted a young redwood to take home, but was caught and made to re-plant it and to make successive pilgrimages to service it.

We learned that there were two families of redwoods, and that they differ. The coast redwoods of northern California reproduce themselves by sending up new growths from their roots, but those of the high Sierra propagate from seed.

Bee's parents still lived in the Goshen area on their 80-acre farm of grapes and walnuts. My father-in-law believed in owning the latest and most efficient working equipment. While most of the farmers used gasoline engines with which to pump irrigation water, he had electricity wired in and operated with motor driven deep-well pumps.

He had the latest electric refrigerator and the best of tractors for his plows and harrows. He drove a new DeSoto with which every Saturday evening he conveyed my mother-in-law and some neighbors to the shopping metropolis of Visalia for the week's supply of needs, as well as for an outing.

The road from Goshen entered Visalia by way of Main Street, past the very imposing home of Mr. Burke, an authority on valley water and electricity, as well as an important voice on water rights, etc.

On one occasion, as our folks were driving by the Burke mansion in the early evening, they observed the Burke family through the window seated at the dinner table, elegantly lit by a beautiful candelabra. Cousin Harry smote his brow with a clenched fist and burst out with, "Look at Burke! The champion of growth and advancements, still dining by candlelight!"

Once Cousin Harry was involved in some kind of share-cropping skullduggery and was a guest in the local klink for a few days until he was subsequently acquitted. However, he was there long enough to master the intricacies of poker, but not well enough to make it lucrative.

Chapter 28

Arsen Iskenderian, who owned an ancient Mack truck with solid tires, occasionally called on me for some driving after dark on some hush-hush jobs. The local residents were familiar with the ponderous booming of the Mack's bucket sized cylinders, but turned deaf ears to its nocturnal operations. Arsen was looking forward to the day when he could afford a new truck. His usual advice to me at every start was:

"Charlie, if it wants to go into a ditch, let it go. It's insured. Don't try to save it."

Arsen owned one of the first Fordson tractors that appeared with rubber tires. His regular driver was "Gadik," who was dependable enough when sober. But one day he fell asleep from over-indulgence and fell off the seat and under a wheel and consequently lost one leg. Thereafter, Arsen called on me for odd jobs of cultivation.

Gadik was a single man about 40 years old, who was courteous and spoke softly. He lived in a small room in the rear of the Yetem Hall. He was reduced to doing odd jobs in the area within walking distance of his abode. His arrivals and departures were announced by his tin lunch pail clanking against his wooden leg.

His bachelor diet of canned legumes and liquid sustenance had him continuously belching forth and blasting aft, causing him to exist in a state of isolation. After an absence of several days his lifeless body was found in his bed.

Arsen sent me out one day to level a 10-acre plot on the Woodlake highway with tractor and scraper. The owner of the property, Kacher Agha, hung around keeping an eye on my operations as well as on his son-in-law, Hagop Boudakian, who was in an adjacent area pruning muscats.

Every hour or so Old Kacher Agha would lie flat on the ground, belly down, close one eye and squint with the other eye across the ground surface. He was his own surveyor with no need of transit or tripod.

One day we had a visitor. A car stopped beside our field and let out an officious looking fellow who walked to the fence and beckoned to me. I stopped the tractor and walked up to him. He introduced himself as a deputy from the sheriff's department. Of course, the presence of a law enforcement officer would not be conducive to anyone's mental tranquility and it wasn't to mine, either.

The man was looking for Mr. Boudakian. I had heard of some of Boudakian's occasional skirmishes with the law, but could not very well point out the man to the officer. I decided to let Kacher Agha use his judgment. I went to him and said:

"Kacher Agha, this man from the sheriff's office is looking for your son-in-law. What shall I tell him?"

Unwilling to help, he answered, "Tell him, 'go look' "

I said, "Do you understand? He is from the sheriff's department. What can we do?"

Again, rolling a cigarette, "Tell him, 'go look.' "

With resignation I resolved to go and tell the man we had no idea of Boudakian's whereabouts, but Kacher Agha, his better judgment prevailing, held a quiet conversation with the man who, apparently mollified, left.

I had another visitor one day. My cousin Myron, son of my Uncle Vartan, stopped his Ford and walked to the fence. I could see he was calling me. I stopped the tractor and held my hand to my ear.

He yelled again. I stopped the engine. Again he called, ineffectively. In resignation I walked to the fence.

"Myron, what are you saying?"

"Only 'good morning,' Charlie." He regretted the inconvenience he had caused. But he couldn't pass by without a morning salute. He was very loveable and warm hearted with a lovely wife and two children. His wife passed away after a long illness. He followed while still in his fifties.

My cousin Mike had returned to Yettem some years previously and had married Clara, the daughter of our one-time Armenian schoolteacher. In time she presented Mike with two daughters and gained considerable weight in doing so. One day a bed slat broke. Clara, who usually confided to Bee of her husband's oddities and shortcomings, and exchanged commiserations, said to her, "Kid, you know what? With all that lumber in the barn, he shoved a crate under the bed."

Mike's untimely death at the age of 42 was a severe loss to me. He was an only son, as I also was. He and I were as brothers. We had grown up together. He enters into every part of my memories of Yettem.

*In some fair land, by some fair sea,
When dusty time has set us free*

Who knows?

Our old car's vacuum tank continued to give us trouble. I taught Bee, step by step, how to handle the situation should she happen to have trouble when I was not about. I had a tool box equipped with pliers, can, funnel and even a burlap sheet to lie on while under the gas tank. I showed her how to drain gas into the can, then to replace the plug, open the hood, remove the plug on top of the vacuum tank and with the small funnel, replenish it. Somehow the idea of keeping a supply of gasoline in the car for such emergencies never occurred to us.

I had her do it once under my supervision and she did it very well, except that while under the car she got most of the gas up her sleeve.

With the continuing of hard times, some of our Yettemites had resorted to various additional means to supplement their incomes.

Bob Vartanian, after his graduation from Stanford, began operating an auto repair shop in the barn on the family farm. He was very efficient at most motor repairs. At times, when he found opportunity, he would go to Orosi and always find someone to join him in a game of poker behind the local pool hall.

As for myself, I had become quite proficient at keeping our old car going, by maintaining the spark plugs and replacing wiring, etc. However, one day when Bee had driven to the Orosi library, she was unable to start the car to return home, even after following my instructions.

In desperation she appealed to the local gas station operator who took one look at the engine and said, "Lady, only the man who wired this can figure

it out. But if you will go up the street to the poolroom where Bob Vartanian is playing poker in the back, maybe he can help you."

Bee had to wait until Bob had played his hand. He came out, looked over my handiwork, smiled, and said, "I think I know how Charlie thinks."

Bee said the trouble was with "that octopus thing with all the crazy wires." At times she'd start an excited narrative and in her earnestness skip ahead and then review backward and forward and sometimes in the middle, from one phase to another, leaving me glassy eyed. Then she'd wail, "Write on my headstone: 'she tried!' "

Bee had some memories of her childhood before her mother was widowed. She often referred to family trips by horse and surrey to visit relatives in neighboring towns.

These trips usually entailed long two-hour drives and how she and her sister hoped they would be invited to stay overnight, rather than undertake the trip back in the dark.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, the lady of the house would excuse herself, and soon the frantic squawk of a chicken in distress would signify an upcoming invitation to dinner and an overnight stay.

Bee recalled how one evening, while grace was being said at the dinner table, a mischievous boy crawled under the table and jabbed her knee with a pin. Bee's side-swipe of a foot against his face evoked an anguished howl, for which he was somehow unable to account.

Mussa was a melancholy sort of fellow who didn't associate much with the locals, probably because his wife was not Armenian. It was said that she was Indian, but no one knew whether she was of the Asiatic or American variety. And no one asked.

Mussa was a day laborer, keeping mostly to himself, living out in the suburbs in what had once been a sheepherder's cabin.

Our acquaintanceship was only a nod on chance meetings in the village. However, when I was one day re-stringing some sagging barbed wire fences for our peace officer, I found myself in Mussa's neighborhood at noon. With customary hospitality, Mussa invited me to break bread with him in his cabin.

His wife seemed to be a meek sort of woman, with a baby riding on one hip, supported by a motherly arm. She did her meal preparation with the other hand. She sloshed dishes in a wooden sink and dried them on her

belly, and to close a drawer when her hand was busy, she used her free hip, which caused the child to slide off its perch on the other side and hang by its armpits and chin until hitched up again to its former anchorage.

The tasty lunch of boiled tripe, strongly spiked with garlic and various other spices and aromatic herbs, hinted that she was not of our native American tribes.

Chapter 29

In the fall of our second year of marriage Bee announced that we were to have a new member in our family. I felt it imperative that we procure additional income. Our raisins had been boxed and disposed of, so I looked around.

I thought I had found a job in Kingsburg lining vegetable bins for a Mr. Christensen, who was supplying the Purity and Piggly Wiggly stores. But Mr. Christensen was having trouble with undependable local help. They were small farmers who had to leave work at times to go home and pick berries or milk their cows.

He decided to move his operations to Los Angeles where help was more dependable, and asked me to go with him and handle the metal work. Bee was more than willing to give up farming and return to Southern California.

Mr. Christensen was paying me the princely sum of \$6 per day, which, compared to the \$1 going rate for farm labor, was something I couldn't pass up.

We returned our farm to the bank and Bee moved in with her parents while I went to Los Angeles to get settled in what was to be our new environment.

Unfortunately, our plans didn't work out so well. Mr. Christensen decided that he could not pay me the \$6 he had promised, but offered me five, so I quit, and after running around L.A. for a week I was glad to take a job at \$4 in a small one-man shop in which I was immediately called "foreman," with an occasional Latino helper.

Bee joined me in our \$25-a-month half of a duplex for a few months until we deemed it safer if she went back to her folks for the big event.

My boss, Mr. Chernik, was having family troubles and was involved in court proceedings that caused him to erupt occasionally in violent fits of

temper, but at heart he was appreciative of our services. He raised my pay to \$5 before three months had passed.

Word came on a Thursday that I was the father of a daughter. I still don't know how that stork got past the wolf that was still hanging around.

The next day, Friday, was the longest day of my life. Immediately upon quitting work, I cashed my check at the neighborhood grocery and lit out over the torturous Ridge Route across the Coast Range mountains.

I arrived in Visalia at about one o'clock in the morning and rather than disturb the folks at that hour, checked in at a flop joint across the Southern Pacific tracks for \$1. I lost no time in crawling into my cot in my underwear and was hardly settled when there came a knock at the door. I opened it a couple of inches and found a lady in a robe with one hand clutching the front together and the other rubbing the blear out of her eyes. She asked me, "Anything I can do for you before you retire?"

I said, "Thank you, I just had coffee and doughnuts in Bakersfield."

I had always thought that Visalia was a very friendly town; now I knew it.

I stayed with Mr. Chernik for three years and had worked up to \$6 a day. We had, in the meantime, moved to our own home in the West Adams district. Then I broke away from Mr. Chernik and Bee and I started a small tin shop of our own on South Main Street.

Bee's stepfather passed on following a sudden heart attack. Her mother, after a satisfactory financial settlement with the family, joined us in Los Angeles and became an efficient baby sitter for our little Judy. Bee was indispensable to me. She made deliveries, picked up material and kept books at night.

Chapter 30

The following several years brought us many changes. We moved into our own shop on the west side in 1947 and into our modest home in Beverly Hills in 1951

As I mentioned earlier, Antranik and his brother had become important figures in the avocado business in Los Angeles and began construction on their cold-storage building on the east side. He announced to me that I was to handle his air conditioning and sheet metal work. He said, "I told those guys, 'You S.O.B.s, no one but Davidian is going to do the tin work.' "

When Bee, on one occasion, thanked him for the boost he had given us, his remark was, 'Honey, we are all one.' Sadly, he passed on before the building was completed. His brother John took over and in time built his second plant.

Bee had been promoted to paymaster while still doing the bookkeeping and office work. Then she announced that she was "that way" again. If a boy, she wanted to name him some uncommon name, like "Joel," but her uncle said, "The poor kid will go through life hearing "Hello Joe, waddy know?" " So Bee picked "Jeff," but spelled it "Geoff." And eight-year-old Judy became a little mother to her kid brother.

Bee's cousin, Ellenore, who had left her teen years behind, finally hit the jackpot when Olson became governor and Sheridan Downey became senator. That landed her in an impressive job that necessitated considerable traveling between L.A., Sacramento and San Francisco.

On one of these statewide trips, she was involved in an accident that hospitalized her and got her in contact with a young intern who had left Austria in a hurry when Hitler took over, and had left his medical studies unfinished. With the help of Senator Downey, Ellenore managed to get his credits and whatever else was needed into this country, and in the ensuing romantic developments we got a fine doctor into the family.

Ellenore had kept in touch with one of her high school friends who had the impressive name of Florabella Montayne. She and her mother were stage people. These two, from time to time were assigned parts in stage presentations that ran only for short periods. The two ladies then were unemployed until their next assignment. In the meantime, they would throw a party that would reduce them to a diet of crackers and milk until further openings.

Florabella conceived a bright idea. She made the rounds of the hospitals, offering blood donations for a price. At one hospital, she was requested to give a blood sample, and then told to telephone back in a couple of days to check if they could use her.

However, they did not wait for Florabella's call. They called her instead with, "Honey, if you don't eat some red meat soon, you'll be the one needing blood."

Chapter 31

In one of Nellie's newsy letters she wrote that Cousin Soukias, who had managed our farm during our absences in San Francisco, had received

word from his brother Elijah in New York that he was coming to Yetteem to live, along with his new wife.

In due time, the couple arrived, bringing with them the bride's mother. The two women were new arrivals from Turkey and an interesting story soon came to light. The bride, Nunya, young and attractive, had an unhappy past to disclose. During one of the periodic "incidents" in their part of the old country, during which much violence and deportations occurred, the young woman's mother was advised by some Turkish friends to marry her daughter to one of their Turkish lads for their own safety. This was arranged and carried out according to Turkish custom and ritual.

This brought security for the family. The young husband, to do him justice, turned out to be a loving and devoted husband and a good provider, although the young wife never accepted their union as a "holy" marriage. In time the young couple became parents of a baby boy, who brought them much joy.

But they had the scheming mother to bargain with. She decided to migrate to the United States to join her relatives, from whom she had been separated for so long, and arranged for her passage from a Mediterranean port.

When the time for departure arrived, the old lady's baggage went on board. She bade farewell to her daughter, grandson and son-in-law (whom she had never accepted) and went on board minutes before the ship's departure.

She was no sooner on board when the daughter thrust the child into her husband's arms and cried, "I must see my mother once more!" and dashed on board, leaving husband and child behind.

This ruse had been engineered by the crafty mother who had previously arranged for her passage. Nunya undoubtedly missed the child she had forsaken, but being sure it was in good hands opted to live her life as a free woman in a free land. So, in good time, she married my cousin Elijah, and came to Yetteem with him to join his brother Soukias.

The two brothers, unable to find suitable land in Yetteem, where all the arable land was already taken up, bought 40 acres of virgin land in the Visalia outskirts and worked it into a profitable venture.

However, Elijah died, and some time later his widow remarried. A few years later she was widowed again. As a result of these marriages, she

accumulated several sons who, in the ensuing years, established several new households in the area.

One day, Nunya noticed an inquiry in an Armenian publication by a Turk concerning his Armenian mother whom he had not seen since his childhood.

Perhaps something awoke in Nunya's breast. Who knows? Remorse, regret, longing, love? Whatever it was, Nunya went to Turkey and not only found her son but brought him back to Visalia.

Of course, the news spread like wildfire in Tulare County, and on to L.A., thanks to Nellie's letters.

Bee had never before seen a Turk. Neither had I. So that summer, when we had gone to Yettem where a Presbyterian ministerial convention was in progress, Bee persuaded one of the local ladies to accompany her to Nunya's home under the pretext of a social visit. The two women had been quite chummy during our stay in Yettem.

Of course, Bee did not mention the purpose behind her visit, but Nunya voluntarily brought up the subject herself. She walked out into the vineyard and hailed a tractor driver who was laboring under the hot sun without a sunshade, and brought him and presented him proudly. Nunya had not only imported her son, but had him working for her.

Bee described him as a tall, handsome man who was not happy with the arduous labors in the United States and was anxious to return home, which he did shortly afterward. I'm sure he left his mother with a more peaceful mind for having once more met her son.

Chapter 32

Some years went by and Judy developed into a beautiful young lady. Although she had her own car, she was unhappy seeing us in our old "Chevy." She thought it was degrading. I suggested to Bee that we might look for a good used car. She became angry. "I will not ride again in an old car," she insisted. "We'll buy a new car."

I knew she was right, but I didn't want to give in too readily. That would have been too submissive. Some discussion pro and con, even rising to some degree of heat, is preferable to a ready surrender.

So we bought a new 1955 Buick with the four impressive four-inch round vent holes on each side of the hood, and took off for San Francisco.

Although the folks were happy and away from the Third Street neighborhood, those old memories were distasteful to me. However, I submitted to a relentless attraction that drew me down the length of Third Street beginning at Market, and down to Harrison past our old flat.

What a change I found!

The Third Street of my younger days had become completely transformed! Gone were the cobblestoned streets on which the Clydesdale teams drew the rumbling beer wagons.

The shops with grimy windows had been replaced with handsome structures neatly snuggling in their snappy, beautifully landscaped surroundings.

The Third Street of my youth had found respectability!

That night as I looked out of the window of the Saint Francis I felt that something was missing.

It burst on me suddenly!

There were no mournful moanings of fog horns on the Bay! The bridges had eliminated them.

There went another part of San Francisco!

When we got back home, Bee said, "Wasn't that a wonderful trip? A nice, peaceful drive there and back." I answered, "What's so wonderful? No engine trouble, no flats. Just a long monotonous ordeal."

Bee started working on the house. She had the rear patio tiled, the iron grille painted, the bathroom and shower floors tiled green to match the walls. Then of course, we had to have green soap to match.

You go into the shower stall, see? You soap your head and then, with eyes shut, you feel the wall for the soap receptacle, and drop the soap. With one eye shut and the other half open, you squint around. Floor is green, soap is green. You squat and feel around on the floor with one hand and then the other, then your feet slip from under and you sit down -- on the soap!

Along about 1968 we figured that we were finally able to visit Europe. I had majored in English at Oxy and was interested in the Lake Country of England that had produced most of the poets. It appeared to me that most

English poets were poor, from the way they seemed to sympathize with the underprivileged.

"Aye! Let the rich deride, the proud disdain the simple blessings of that lovely train."

"The cottage leaves the palace far behind."

"A man he was to all the country dear and passing rich with forty pounds a year."

"Let not ambition mock their useful toil"

At Stokes Poges where Grey wrote his well-known elegy, we paused to take a few camera snaps, while attempting to disregard the covert glances of two gardeners who knelt in the wet grass yanking on the cord of an intransigent lawn mower, and a man on the roof who was replacing tiles.

The memory of those two fellows struggling in the wet grass was instrumental in a chain of events after our return home.

Our hedge was overgrown, so when Bee asked our gardener to trim it, he became peeved and quit. Since gardeners were scarce in our neighborhood, Bee was in a sweat until I opened my big mouth with, "Phooey! I'll do it myself!"

I went to Sears and looked over the different varieties of gas and electric types of mowers.

I remembered the two poor fellows under the yew tree, kneeling in the wet grass with their balky mower. No Sir! None of that for me. I would buy an electric mower and just plug it in and get going. I took the mower home and into the backyard to become acquainted, away from public eyes.

I made one round, but my feet became entangled in the cord. The mower got away, mowed a path through Bee's narcissus patch, ran over the cord with a brilliant flash and died.

Bee came out to tell me that the television had quit. Then she saw her narcissus and threw a fit (The rhyme is unintentional).

All the following week she was very polite until I suggested going to visit our old friends in Yette. This was a sedative. Bee always enjoyed hobnobbing with Nellie and Clara.

I left Bee with Nellie and drove to the village in a nostalgic and reminiscent mood. The school had been replaced by a two-room building with electricity and a drinking fountain in the yard.

The Presbyterian church seemed neglected, but St. Mary was magnificent in its glory as a Mecca for its faithful worshipers from most of Tulare County.

Our original home was replaced by a mobile home sort of shack, housing a caretaker, but the orange trees that my father had set out a half-century previously were still thriving, although with evidence of some replacements.

Our other house that we had relinquished to Mr. Kendigian was still in a respectable condition, and occupied by later owners. The vineyards had given way to orange orchards, but here and there were evidences of truck farming, mostly tomatoes, although no activity was present since this was off season.

Then I remembered Bert!

Whether it was curiosity, whimsy or nostalgia, it prompted me to visit the site of Bert's tank-house home.

The tank house was gone. An indiscriminate growth of cottonwoods had taken over. The only evidence of there having been habitation was a rank growth of a double row of narcissus that led to where an outhouse had stood, as evidenced by a depression at the end of the path. I gathered a handful of the fragrant blooms to take to Bee in a mood for penance, which worked well, but she sent me back with a borrowed shovel to uproot some of the plants to take home.

I dug up a few clumps of the plants. Under one, I found a cache of old chicken and rabbit bones. Also an old, decomposed shoe I presumed was the one Bert had lost when we were kids.

Ah Bert!

Chapter 33

My cousin Mike (the boy who had two gizzards) had passed away in his early forties. He had often expressed a hope that some day we would hold a reunion and once more gather together all who remained of one-time Yettemites, now scattered. But, it was not until he was long gone that any

serious thought was given to the idea. After all, we were all uprooted and had found, or were seeking new occupations elsewhere.

So, a few of us in Los Angeles got together to give some thought to the plan. One important matter was the thought of a monument in commemoration of the early arrivals to Yetem. This was to be erected in front of the new two-room schoolhouse.

The old cracked bronze bell, which had long laid in the woodshed, was to be mounted on top. I was in favor of a structure of native stones from our neighboring foothills, but was outvoted in favor of more easily obtained flagstone.

We held our first meeting in Los Angeles with local former Yetemites in attendance. Sam Simonian, one of the boys in the fig tree, drove all the way from Fresno, where he had moved since his marriage to land that was more productive. He was happy to organize the Fresno area. Our local committee was composed of Hazel Yetemian, sister of the boys with the hay fork, John Gogian, younger brother of Antranik, Vic Terzian, whose father had taken over Devlat Agha's store after my brother-in-law's retirement, Sirak Nazaretian (son of our one-time Armenian school teacher) and my wife, Bee.

These, through contacts with Yetemites in other localities cooperated wholeheartedly. Aram Iskenderian, cousin of Arsen (who was still farming in the area) took charge of Tulare County.

My cousin, Ohan, who had become Owen Davidson, now an executive in the fence company for which he had once worked as a post hole digger, handled San Francisco. The two Yenoukian boys, whose father, Hygas, once operated the Yetem pool hall, took care of Sacramento, where they were in the grocery business.

The date of the first Yetem reunion was chosen to coincide with Memorial Day. Many of those attending would take advantage of the opportunity of visiting the Visalia cemetery, which in itself was a reunion.

Our planned affair took place on Saturday afternoon in Mooney's Grove in the Visalia outskirts with the usual pilaf and barbecue. The following day an overflowing attendance crowded the two Yetem churches.

At the written request by Bee to the former pastor of the Presbyterian church, Rev. Vartanian, we all joined in the hymn, Faith Of Our Fathers. We then adjourned to the school.

Of course, the old outhouses were gone. There was running water now, supplied by well water with an electric pump. There were no mud yellow jacket nests on the ceiling.

Jake Saroyan, who had been one of Nellie's classmates, went around murmuring, "What if I hadn't come? What I would have missed!"

The unveiling of the monument was done by Grace Hamalian, the first Armenian graduate of the Churchill District School, which was how the Yetttem School was once known.

Our soulful meeting ended with a rendering of Taps by a bugler from Orosi High School.

Epilogue

Stoke's Mountain still keeps its watch over the village, with its sheltering back to the north wind.

The sun, rising each dawn over the snowy Sierras, sheds its healing rays through the Bakersfield and Fresno smog, holding communion over the green expanse that once was a sunny flowered meadow.

With some imagination and flight of fancy, one can hear the excited shrieking of children's voices.

Jack Elmassian, our Los Angeles insurance man, did his summing up in a very few words: "If only I had attended that school for one day -- only one day -- so I could share those memories!"

On our occasional trips from our home in Beverly Hills to the Bay Area to visit my sister Rosie (who is not a kid anymore) we take the Valley route although it is longer than the coast route or Interstate 5.

We relive the relief we enjoyed after traversing the tortuous Ridge Route, making the turn at the Bakersfield clock tower and hitting the straightaway north at 45 per.

Visalia had been our nearest metropolis. Our old high school was there as were our library and movie palace.

Many friends and relatives of various degrees of kinship are spread through Visalia, Yetttem, Cutler, Orosi, Dinuba and Fresno, some of them reposing in cemeteries.

But to me, Yetttem was the seat of my early years where I enjoyed the warmth, love and security of childhood.

Our visits, short as they are, create a feeling of fulfillment.

The End
