

Mother's Instinct



Still in the early stages of marriage the happy couple was parted once and forever...

Flora – the young widow of soldier Edvard Sukoyan killed in Karabakh war, was left alone with two daughters. In the dark and cold years, overcoming her grief and physical hardships, every day she had to walk 4 km to get to work and earn a living for her family. Numerous difficulties would repeatedly reduce her to despair, but the mother's instinct invigorated her to stand up again and keep fighting to raise her daughters... Today both of them have received higher education...

The Cost of Mother's Self-Sacrifice

...Every day my father used to beat my mother, and every morning she left home with tears in her eyes. I hope there will come a time when alcohol disappears from the face of the earth once and for all... While writing each line it seems to me there will never be enough words to express my mother's suffering... The pain in my soul will never ease, but I am proud that my mother has been both a mother and a father for us. She worked day and night, raised us, educated and married us off...

Today she has seven grandchildren, with more on the way. I think she must be happy having her family beside her, who loves and appreciates her. All of us recognize that we have achieved happiness at the cost of my mother's self-sacrifice.

As for my father, he passed away. Now my heart cries and aches for him, too, because he chose alcohol over everything and over all of us and never realized that there are more important things in life...

Grandmother Seda



When my son finished his military service, it was my dream to see him married. I wanted to have lots of grandchildren... Our flat was small. Seven of us, my son and daughters, lived in one room. In order not to trouble my future daughter-in-law, I tried to marry my daughters off quickly without weighing up the pros and cons too much. None of them found family happiness. My luck turned against me. I had a very strained relationship with my daughter-in-law. When the war broke out, my son, not being able to stand our conflicts, volunteered for service. One whole year I was waiting for him with fear in my heart... My son did not miss any chance to come home, but... He was killed in war without getting to see his son, who was born just two months later – my grandson Yura. My daughter-in law could not bear the loss and fell ill. Now she suffers from serious mental problems... I take care of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren...

Stories documented by "Reliable hands" group members, Yjevan city

Woman & politics

April, 2011

I won't be surprised if one day my daughter says: "Mom, I'm going to Nairobi to help children in hunger..."



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"A real woman has three ages: youth, which is the beginning of her own life, the second youth - the birth of her daughter, and the eternal youth - the grandchild, who will certainly inherit characters from granny", she says while turning over the last page of the family album...

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"One Must Search for the Destiny of Nations in Mothers' Palms..."

The underlying theme of this issue is the competition entitled "Three Generations of Women" launched by Oxfam GB, which gave the opportunity to rediscover the idea that unifies the two women-related holidays - March 8th, International Women's day and April 7th, the Motherhood and Beauty Day. The idea is that while "mothers are the inner walls of the home" (famous Armenian proverb), they can be just as helpful in "supporting the outer walls" - that is participating in political and social life of their country, in decision making affecting the welfare of their families. Perhaps then, by the joint efforts of men and women, our life will finally undergo a qualitative change...

The competition entitled "Three Generations of Women" was announced by Oxfam GB Armenia through the website of the Civil Society Partnership Network (www.cspn.am) from March 8th till April 7th and was aimed at presenting the strength and bravery of the Armenian women... Women who have always preserved family and national values at the cost of incredible efforts... Women who have saved their sons and daughters from cold and hunger and have taught them to endure, struggle with and overcome all difficulties...

All the stories included in this issue are about

ordinary, perhaps little-known, but exceptionally strong women. The majority of these women were empowered through Oxfam GB's undertakings in Armenia. They are beneficiaries and participants of "Sustainable Livelihoods and Agricultural Support", "Women's Role and Voice in Governance", "Disaster Risk Reduction" and other programs.

Some of them have taken advantage of the micro lending which was provided to farmers and socially vulnerable families in remote villages and tried to develop their small agricultural businesses or to market their hand-made products. Some families have received planting stock, seeds or domestic animals to make a living. Some have been able "to get up on their feet" through the opportunity to get professional education. Many of them have also learned to fight for their rights, to raise and solve their problems at the local government level. They have become members of civic centers and women rights advocacy groups. It is worth mentioning that on the frontline of all these programs are mothers concerned about the future of their children.

Unfortunately, even nowadays, in the 21st century, the problem of hunger and poverty still threatens the world, and numerous international organizations, including Oxfam, seek ways to help people

survive in the conditions of hunger, climate change and lack of drinking water. Armenia, in this respect, is also vulnerable, since it is not in the ranks of the prosperous countries not subject to extreme poverty and hunger. This is evidenced by the official statistical data according to which today each third adult and almost each second child in Armenia live in poverty. Almost all large families live on the verge of poverty. Sadly, nowadays poor and large families have become synonyms in our country.

Besides, today over 1/3 of families in Armenia are headed by women, however this is not a product of the emancipation of women or their career success at all. This phenomenon is the result of poverty and men's migration. Needless to say that the income per capita in these families is twice less when compared to two-parent families.

...In this issue, giving the priority to the articles written by the Oxfam GB Armenia program participants or about their beneficiaries, we have also included extraordinary stories about three generations of women, whose destinies were affected by genocide, migration, starvation, repressions, wars... These stories mirror the entire Armenian history, not the one in the textbooks, but the one the Armenian women carefully keep in family albums...

Beauty, Motherhood - and equality

An event dedicated to the Day of Motherhood and Beauty entitled "Women are the Heart and Soul of Our Programs" took place at Lovers' Park in Yerevan on April 7. The event was organized by Oxfam GB Armenia.

The event featured an exhibition of handmade works by representatives of Oxfam GB Armenia's beneficiary communities and a photo exhibition showcasing photos by residents of rural communities entitled "Three Generations of Women". The event ended with a performance by a dance group from Vayk city.

Following the event, UK Ambassador to Armenia Mr. Charles Lonsdale, shared his impressions on the blog dedicated to his work in Armenia.

"I had the chance to join Oxfam in marking this day with an event that focused on their work with women in rural communities and in helping women to assert and protect their rights. Oxfam is close to my heart anyway; we were both born in Oxford. They do great work here but, because most of it is in the regions, and in particularly poor communities, it doesn't get the coverage it deserves. So this was a great opportunity to draw attention to their work... It was really encouraging to meet women from communities around the country who are active and busy changing the reality on the ground. I wish them all health, strength and success in continuing their work", - wrote the Ambassador in his post titled "Beauty, Motherhood - and equality".



Raising Her Voice

I believe I can



I am 29 and live in the town of Sissian. I am a happy and a beloved wife, as well as a careful mother. Everything would be perfect if there was not the mass unemployment and the current economic hardships. I would really like to be able to help my husband: "one hand washes the other". I'm an artist-designer and have studied floristry, embroidery, bead making and fruit carving. I have collaborated with the schools and nursery schools of our town at no cost and I have also participated in two exhibitions. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide financial support to my family with these activities. However, I don't get discouraged and keep on creating and waiting for the day when my efforts will be rewarded and will bring me recognition. I hope to get in contact with women artists from different countries through Oxfam programs and perhaps start receiving work orders from abroad.

A Step towards My Dream

I live in the town of Sissian. I grew up in a big traditional family. I got married very young as the fate willed, and became a member of the Khachatryans' family who were repatriates and passed through all the bustle of migration. I couldn't get a higher education since it was a time of war, hard financial situations, cold and dark years... We had two children and grew them up overcoming hard economic conditions as most Armenian families did. Unfortunately, due to the common unemployment, none of my family members could get a job. I started to learn baking cakes, and later they turned out to be so tasty that a lot of people preferred only them. I wish I could have my small business but I don't have the minimum necessary conditions for it. On the other hand, taxes and credits are too expensive. I am much enthusiastic about the activities of Oxfam organization in our town. Hopefully, in the scopes of these projects I can get loans, which will enable me to have my small business.

By Gayane Simonyan,
Member of the Women's Initiative Group
in Sissian

Community Voices

The Trustworthy Woman



She never sought fame, but rather she shared her warmth with people around her like sunlight, people who trust her and whom she has always supported when they were in

need. When it was time to sacrifice, she was among the first to join the army in order to protect the motherland.

The head of Voskepar ("Golden Dance") border community Hrush Aghbalyan is well known all over the country. You'll always find her thoughtful, sober, just like a commander. It couldn't be otherwise because she is the main protector of the nearest village to the border. "This is our border, so, first of all we should keep it steadfastly through our efforts", she says.

It is due to her strong work ethics and unceasing efforts that her words are realized into actions. "Our main issue with irrigation water will be resolved soon, and people will turn back to agriculture again. Then I will be happy." - says the head of the community.

There is another thing that makes Hrush Aghbalyan happy: compared with last several years the birth rate in the village has increased with 16 births being registered; and this is a reassuring record!

By Tatevik Nazinyan

Family Album

Real Woman Has Three Ages

In the memories of Margo Atomyan time seems to go on forever. We look through our family album together...

The pretty and luxurious woman in the photo is Margo's mother Nvard. In 1915 when their family picked their goods up to escape, a horseman in a Turkish national uniform attacked them. Turning to a side rapidly on the horse he caught beautiful Nvard's hand. Everybody thought that was the end. But all of a sudden the diamond ring on the woman's hand attracted his attention. Rudely taking it out from her finger he disappeared...

After passing a large expanse of territory, suffering from privations and hunger, Nvard's family settled in Leningrad city. But during all those years she dreamed of returning to her homeland. Nvard met Gevorg and married him. Soon, the young couple returned to Armenia.

Here, in Yerevan, they had their first child, Margo. She was hardly 12 years old when the World War II broke out and Gevorg went to the front. He went forever... Intuitively being afraid of Turks' possibly attacking, Nvard decided to move to Leningrad. She could hardly imagine at the time the danger she had put herself and her daughter in by this move...

Besides the images of common starvation and ravage Margo mostly remembers the day when their school was bombed. Dead bodies were everywhere... Her mother with frightened eyes and untied hairs madly runs to the school from which only ruins remained.

Margo hugged her exhausted mother and kept on saying: "Mother I'm alive, I'm alive..."

In the next photo Margo is a student in the department of philology at the University of Leningrad. Here she met famous sculptor Derenik Danielyan's son Aram. A year later they got married and decided to come back to Armenia. Margo did her best to persuade her mother to return with them to Yerevan, but the survived sufferings "tied" Nvard to Leningrad forever...

Margo found a job in Yerevan quite easily. Having fluency both in Armenian and Russian she decided to do translations. She translated Kouprin, Dostoevkiy into Armenian, and then she translated Teryan's, Isahakyan's works into Russian. She herself started to compose poems. "When I am sad I compose. It helps to relax..." confesses Margo.

Her life at husband's place was easy if not taking into consideration her sick mother-in-law. She took care of her day and night. When having some spare time she used to go to Derenik's (her father-in-law) studio to see how he worked. Once everybody noticed that Derenik's sculpture of the Virgin Mary resembled Margo's features. The lovely child in the hands of the Virgin Mary had almond-shaped eyes, just like Margo's. "You will have a son", announced her father-in-law after finishing the sculpture. Margo didn't care whether she would have a girl or a boy. One thing she was sure about was that her child would have an artistic talent.

Margo had a girl. They fondly named her Anushik. The latter's grandfather Derenik adored



her too much though he made a "prophecy" of a boy.

It seemed that everything was going well in Margo's life, but her husband Aram was undergoing a creative crisis and as a result started drinking. One day he left home leaving an absurd note: "I am depleted. Please, don't bother me." Later Margo learnt that Aram was somewhere in the USA and even had a new family...

Anushik grew more beautiful every day. Given her father's absence she became close to her grandfather. She was accepted to the department of sculpture at the Art Academy where she wanted to find her own way in art. In 80's, together with other young professionals from the Academy she participated in the restoration of valuable manuscripts of Matenadaran. She realized that this was her calling, something she had been searching for a long time. Vahe was one of the students working alongside her. And, as it usually happens, common interests led to love.

Armenia's blockade in the early 90's was the second one for Margo's family. "We are strong, we can endure anything", encouraged Margo her mother who had been through Leningrad's blockade. While living in a cold flat, without heat and having electricity for only two hours a day, Anushik seemed to be glowing from within... she was pregnant. The day when her daughter Nare was born, grandmother Nvard died...

When the child was eight, Anushik and her husband were offered professional training opportunities and left for Leningrad, by then Saint Petersburg. Margo stayed in Yerevan with her granddaughter.

Little Nare paints very well and loves to explain her paintings. Now, while painting a swan swimming in a blue lake, she looks at me and asks: "It looks like a fairy-tale swan, doesn't it?" "Yes, very much", - I answer and realize that I've seen her eyes somewhere. Oh, sure... The sculpture of the Virgin Mary, the child in her hands...

By Kari Amirkhanyan

Mothers and Daughters

Three Generations, Three Women, Three Points of Views

The Haroutyunyans' family consists of three women: the eldest is grandmother Sonya, her daughter Hasmik and the youngest one is the 18-year-old Ani. Ani's grandfather died years ago, and her father left their family when Ani was only 10 years old. "I could say I have never been too troubled about the fact that there are no men in our family as I have learnt to live in their absence. My mother and grandmother love and help me so much that I feel strong", - says Ani.

They are a united family and mostly spend their days in a peaceful atmosphere, yet being representatives of different generations, they have divergence of opinions about many issues.

Sonya, 64 years old: "I often argue with my granddaughter about coming home late. It is not good; she is still so young, still a student... When she grows up and gets married she may go wherever she wants with her husband and stay out as late as she wants."

Ani, 18 years old: "I want to get so many things done during the day, that I run out of time. When I get home it's almost 10 p.m. My grandmother always says: "What will our neighbors think about you?" Why must the neighbors think anything about me? Don't they have something else to do? Let everyone live his/her own life."

Hasmik, 42 years old: "When my mother and daughter argue with each other, I always end up being the victim. I try to pacify them because I understand both of them, and there is something true in what they both say. However as a result they both feel hurt because each of them wants me to take their side."

Grandmother Sonya says that during her youth women had only one worry: do everything to get married. "In my time the most important thing was to have a successful marriage. By a successful marriage I mean marrying a man who was a hard-worker, didn't drink, didn't beat his wife, and having a kind mother-in-law who wouldn't beat her daughter-in-law", says grandmother Sonya.

Her daughter Hasmik points out other problems: "Women of my generation have to work both at home and outside to be able to help their family to survive. After long day at work men never do laundry, cook or do any other housework, but women do. My mother and daughter help me at home, so I don't do much housework, but I know a lot of women who are so active in both fields."

Meanwhile, Ani has realized that she can rely only on herself: "I know that I have to work hard, study well in order to achieve any kind of success. It is easier for boys to have a successful career, whereas a girl has to be the best to get a good job offer."

Grandmother Sonya complains that her granddaughter spends too much time on social networking websites: "Sometimes I nag at her trying to explain that she will fall behind in her studies. Every day she is on "Odnoklassniki" ("Classmates" - a social networking website, similar to "Facebook" - ca. Ed.). She has signed up her mother too, so now they both spend their time in front of the computer."

"A childhood friend of mine lives in

Belgium. I only talk to her. I don't have any other reason to use the internet", - says Hasmik to her "defense".

While in Ani's opinion it's almost impossible to live without computers: "I talk to my friends from the university, we share information about the lessons and help each other to study. We live in the computer era; it is impossible to live without these communication channels."

Opinions on happiness also differ among these representatives of three generations. "A woman's happiness is to have a good family, healthy children, nice husband, and to live in a peaceful home. I consider myself a happy woman from this point of view, even though my husband died when he was 55." - this is a 64-year-old woman's "key to happiness".

Love and respect - this is what happiness looks like in Hasmik's eyes: "I divorced my husband because he didn't respect me. He did love me, but he didn't have a slightest idea of what respect is."

18 years old Ani doesn't like the expression "a woman's happiness": "Happiness is for human beings, it doesn't depend on gender. As for me, happiness has several components - career, good friends, a good husband and financial stability. I'm only 18 years old, but my grandmother has already started to warn me that I need to find a good husband. I am not in a hurry. There are so many things I need to do." - thinks Ani.

By Arman Gharibyan
P.S. Actual names of women
have been changed.

Be Humankind

Mom, I'm Going to Nairobi to Help Children in Hunger

- In the morning my sister and I left home, as usual. The driver had come to take us to school. We uttered almost no word in the car, only arranged to meet during the break, but...

That day Naira and Zaruhi did not meet each other as they used to do. Naira died in the earthquake (1988 Spitak Earthquake, also called Leninakan Earthquake - ca. Ed.) under the rubble of their school together with her classmates and teacher...

Many years have passed, but Zaruhi Tonoyan still remembers that day with a deep horror.

- After getting out of the building I was looking for my sister. Then I saw some soldiers taking out children from the school and putting them on the ground. They were all in blood and did not move... It seems that your mind stops working at that moment: buildings fall down in front of you...not like stone buildings, but like boxes or toy buildings... It was a real chaos around the school. I only remember that my face was covered in white dust and I had the taste of the soil in my mouth...

Zaruhi finds it a lucky chance that both she and her younger brother and grandmother survived. Her family were at home at the time of the earthquake, while the other part of that building collapsed.

- The school had two entries. I just went out from the one which was closer to me, otherwise....

Zaruhi's mother, Anahit Ghazaryan, was a doctor and was the chief of the medical consultation department in the local hospital in those years. Her father, Martin Tonoyan, was the head of the district committee in Akhuryan (Earthquake district - ca. Ed.).

- They never moved away from Leninakan city (now Gyumri). They were continuously working, helping people and finding purpose in that. There were even times when we felt ignored. It seemed Naira's death had numbed their emotions... Zaruhi moved to her aunt's place in Yerevan with her brother and grandmother, but in several months moved back to Leninakan and lived

through all the difficulties - living in poor housing conditions (trailers), cold, lack of food and fuel resources...

In those years Zaruhi entered a University. She started to work when studying in her second year. She worked in the Care international humanitarian organization in Leninakan city visiting areas affected by the disaster and helping distribute humanitarian aid.

Later, she gets accepted into the American University and continues her education in the USA within the scopes of Masky program. On returning to Armenia Zaruhi went on working in international organizations engaged in humanitarian activities in Armenia, such as the Red Cross, Catholic Relief Service, Eurasia, World Vision, etc.

- There was a time I tried working in the business world, in company BeeLine. I quickly realized it was not for me, and that I just could not do a job without direct communication and impact on people... Perhaps the sense of powerlessness I felt during the earthquake shaped a strong desire inside me to help people, but truthfully I've always wanted to be like my parents.

- As far as I remember my grandmother took care of us. My parents have always been busy helping people. Mother provided medical consultations. It was not unusual for people to come late at night and take her to assist in childbirth... I remember my

father coming home late one night and asking my mother to prepare clothes for some emigrants in need. My mother picked up some of our clothes and since I knew she wouldn't put too much thought into the selection process, I said "Don't give them those trousers" (she smiles).

It can hardly be a coincidence that Zaruhi Tonoyan now works with Oxfam GB Armenia international organization as Disaster Risk Reduction Coordinator. It is a program the importance of which Zaruhi knows perhaps more than anyone. Unfortunately, Armenia is increasingly vulnerable to earthquakes, landslides and other natural disasters caused by climate change. In this respect the program has created rapid response community groups, which, as Zaruhi ensures, will help people withstand natural disasters, if needed.

Zaruhi is a mother of two children: Ani and Nare go to school. According to their mother, both of them are very active, full of initiative. Besides the lessons, they have hobbies...

- One thing is clear to me: one should not bring up his/her children by teaching them right from wrong, but by a personal example, as my parents did and I try to do. So, I won't be surprised if one day my daughter comes up to me saying: "Mom, I'm going to Nairobi to help children in hunger".

By Lilit Kochinyan

Armenia is increasingly vulnerable to climate shocks and natural disasters. Currently Oxfam works in ten identified disaster prone communities of Vayots Dzor region of Armenia. Oxfam have established voluntary Community Emergency groups, providing them with necessary techniques and knowledge, and raising the awareness of school children and teachers, as well as farmers to more adequately respond to natural disasters and climate shocks.



Peace formula

Her Name is Sosse...



Sosse with Mother Zamira

The name Sosse symbolizes the endurance and willpower of Armenian mothers... 20-year-old Sosse Balassanyan is a judo champion of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) and Armenia, as well as a triple sambo champion of Armenia. This modest and sympathetic girl from Karabakh, however, considers sambo not to be that serious of an activity to speak about. She considers judo the only type of martial art... Since it's a type of art, it should be beautiful, insures Sosse, who has proven on her personal example that judo does not have to be dominated by men.

Sosse has been participating in judo international championships and to date her best achievement has been the 5th place in the world. Though for an ordinary girl from the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, who was born during the years of war and witnessed all the difficulties of post-war, being the fifth in the world is not that bad. Today Sosse is fearless and brave, and the word "fear" simply does not exist for her any longer. But in wartime, when her mother was finally able to take 2-year-old Sosse out from the cellar where they had been sheltering from the bombings, she was screaming out of control. Sosse was truly scared seeing the bright sun for the first time in her life...

It's hard to say how this girl who looks so fragile found that much strength and courage in her. The family has never had any athletes, but according to Sosse, she has taken after her grandmothers. Her 82-

years-old paternal grandmother was still climbing trees to gather walnuts for her grandchildren, while her maternal grandmother is to date considered to be the bravest one in Berdadzor village in Shushi district, NKR. "In short", Sosse's mother says "this is just the Karabakhi character"...

Grandmother, Mother and Daughter - three women, three different destinies, all of them, however, having the same Karabakhi characters- tenacity and faith in victory. Only each of them has had her own victory...

Sosse's granny Rosa Sargsyan was born in 1924 and witnessed two wars in her life - The World War II and the Artsakh (Karabakh) war. In 1941 there were no men left in her native

village, all had gone to war. Rosa was working in the collective farm with her fellow villagers facing all the difficulties and privations of the war - hunger, cold, destruction... Perhaps that robustness helped her in the Karabakh liberation struggle. Who else could have provided food for soldiers in the forest ignoring the danger, of course Rosa herself. Two of her sons were fighting for their native land - Karabakh. One of them had his arm amputated; the other one suffered a contusion and was wounded in the leg. Meanwhile Rosa was an optimist. She used to say, "No one gives out gatas in war" Today, if someone starts complaining about some shortages, granny Rosa chides them saying, "You have your daily bread, the country is in peace, it's enough, what else do we need? We can have the rest if we work hard".

Perhaps her daughter Zamira (Sosse's mother) has inherited that strength from her mother Rosa, who never despaired when facing difficulties in life. This strength helped her bring her four children up despite the war and her personal tragedy... During the funeral of her younger son who died from blood cancer at the age of 3, Zamira went to the maternity home to give birth to her other son. Today she tells about her and her beloved husband Grigor's great devotion and the arduous work in building their house with their own hands for the happiness of their family. They thought it was enough. They have had a son, built a house and planted a tree. Then was the 1988 earthquake and Grigor said: 'We shall have a

baby. These days, every Armenian should have at least 10 children". In 1989 Zamira gave birth to Gohar and later, in 1990, to Sosse. Then, the war shattered all their plans... Grigor plunged into the war to defend his motherland Karabakh, from the very first day of military operations he took the gun and left... He was wounded several times. Zamira says: "I have to be honest, I was happy when he would get wounded, because it meant he would stay at home... Though next morning he would get up and head for the battle again". He would say: "I already have four children. There are young people there, and it's not their turn to die." Was Zamira afraid during the wartime? "What should I be afraid of? I knew we would win", ensures Zamira ...That's why she's Rosa's daughter.

Victory... This word has gained a new and peaceful meaning today for Zamira's youngest daughter Sosse. "One should know how to lose, to be able to appreciate the victory", Sosse says. While being the first female judoist in the NKR, she does not consider strength to be the most important thing in life. Her mother says that everybody is a little afraid of her youngest daughter, though this fear comes from her inner rather than physical strength; everywhere and at all times she fights for justice.

Today, Sosse, who is as brave as Rosa, as lively as Zamira, and is of the same age as the independent Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, dreams about the 2012 Olympic Games and more sporting triumphs. And, of course, no one doubts that those will come! Since rings and bracelets are dowry for other girls, her inheritance are her character and her victories...

By Karine Ohanyan

« When I went to the village, Granny Roza was really happy to see me, but it used to last only two days: the days of my arrival and departure. I was as playful as a wild cat... »

End poverty

I was Begging for My Children-not to Starve

Goght Village in Kotayk region is one of the poorest settlements of the republic. There are almost no rich people in the village with 570 households. The villagers describe themselves not just poor, but extremely poor. Men have migrated to Russia to find work. They appear in Goght twice a year, either on New Year's Eve or in August.

Tilling the soil, watering the garden and cutting the trees are now long considered to be a woman's job. The majority of women dry fruits, bake gata and sell them by the church in the neighbouring Geghard village. To earn some 4-5 thousand drams a week the women stand here from 8 in the morning till 9 o'clock at night.

Nune, like the other women in Goght, earns her living by selling dried fruit. Though being under the age of 40, she herself states as well that she looks much older than she is. "It is being in dire straits that caused me to look older", she says.

Nune, her mother-in-law and daughters live in an earthen hut, a part of which has collapsed. Its walls have cracks, the roof is leaking. They eat, sleep, and children do lessons in the same room. Nune's husband Gegham was killed in Artsakh (Karabakh) war.

"My life hasn't been easy. My husband died when I was 20. All alone without any support I've brought my two children up. Sometimes I wanted to commit a suicide just because I couldn't bear it any longer, but, meanwhile, I realized I should live for my daughters' sake. I was knocking around houses, crying and begging for half litre of milk and a bag of flour so that my children didn't starve", she says recalling the horror of the dark and cold days of early 1990s. 70-year-old Alvard tells there were days when she and her daughter-in-law ate nothing at all for the girls to have something to eat. "My life has no meaning. My only son was killed, my husband followed my son and didn't come back. What am I to do with my life? My only concern is for these poor children. They have no one to help them. They are without parental guardian", the old woman says in a sobbing voice.

Soon Nune realized that crying will not help. Children need food and clothes. "I realized no one was going to help me, but my children needed my help".

At first Nune used to come to the city and clean houses, cook and do laundry for the rich. "Often they made me work and then didn't pay. They beat me a few times and put me out of the house. The money I had with me I had to use for transportation", she says. She didn't know how to do anything else, since she was only 16 when got married. "I didn't even have time to finish school. How could I find any work without proper education at times when people were being laid off?"

In recent years Nune has found a "permanent job". In summer she cultivates the garden with grandma Alvard, waters the trees, tills the soil and dries fruits and sells them in autumn. "Girls bake gata (Armenian cake-ca. Ed.), my mother and I dry fruits. It is an arduous toil. It's hard to stay outdoors all day long in the rain, wind and sun and sell dried fruits, but there's no way out", she tells.

Nune has become such a professional in her work that even people from neighbouring villages came to buy dried fruits and "anali" (Armenian sweet-ca. Ed.) from her. "Anyway, I thank God that I can take care of my children. My life has passed this way and I didn't enjoy it at all. Now I want to live and rejoice in my daughters' happiness. That's why I make them study well, get an education so that they can have a better life and not have to stand all day by the wall and sell dried fruits like I do..."

By Hasmik Harutyunyan

New Life for the Refugees

Granny Noem had been a refugee three times but never lost hope



Every time hearing the sorrowful sounds of "Die Yaman", Laura Harutyunyan remembers her mother Noem, whose fate seems to be reflected in the lyrics of this song. During her long lifetime (it's worth mentioning that despite all the misfortunes she lived until the age of 89) she had to leave her homeland several times and had been a refugee three times...

The first time it was the 1915 tragedy that disrupted her life. Little Noem was only 2 at the time when the peaceful life of her large family came to an end in one of the villages in Kars state. To save the youngest ones from hunger their parents sent them to the newly-opened American orphanage. Her most vivid memory as a child was of Mr. Brown. Paron Bravon, as Noem used to call him, always gave them something tasty and tenderly patted the heads of the little ones.

When the situation in Kars became strained, and the Turkish Yenicheris entered the village, father had to escape with the children (Noem's mother had died). The most terrible thing was that they could not take their blind grandmother with them at the moment, and when the elder brother came back she was already lying lifeless... The Harutyunyan family started for nearby Alexandropol (present Gyumri). People were starving then, and Noem was once again sent to an orphanage. Unlike the American orphanage, the children of the orphanage in Alexandropol were almost always hungry. Her aunt's daughter and she

could hardly manage to hide a slice of brown bread wrapped in a cloth in the yard and then eat it later. More often, however, they gave the hidden bread to the aunt's sickly son Gegham. The girls knitted socks for him. They weaved the thread from the cotton secretly pulled out from the straw mattress. Later "weak" Gegham became the pride of the family: he grew up, studied, got into politics, moved up to a high position.

The Armenian-Turkish war started in 1918. Noem's family was forced to escape again fearing the Turkish army that had crossed the territory of Armenia's first Republic. After long wanderings fate brought them to industrial Baku, where they hoped to find jobs. Noem was only 15 years old when their compatriot, 23-year-old Hmayak from Bashgyugh, state of Kars, came to ask for her hand in marriage. Noem liked him at once. She didn't remember her wedding. Did she really have a wedding? At first the young couple lived in the suburbs, where Rafayel, Yevgenya, Jasmine and little Laura were born. Several years later they all moved to the centre of Baku. Laura Hmayakovna still has the keys to their three roomed large flat on Pervomayskaya Street 1. There she grew up with her brother and two sisters and got on their feet. They all received higher education.

People were starving in Baku, especially during the war. However, Noem made incredible efforts to protect her family from starvation. She baked bread and lavash together with her neighbour. The garden they had in the suburbs saved them in the summer-time, she would take the vegetables to the city to sell. During winter Father found some ways: he visited various regions through his work and would bring "vitamins" for the children from there. However, the fate stopped smiling at them again: they could not save 19 year-old Rafik from meningitis. "Mother was crying so much at that time" - remembers Laura Hmayakovna, - "but she didn't give up. At the age of 38 she granted her husband another son. They called him Rafayel, but we called him Roma." Unfortunately, father and son were unable to be together for a long time. Roma was only 11 years old when Father died in an accident.

Noem had been through a lot while living in Baku for 65 years, but she could never imagine that being an elderly woman she would have to become a refugee once again, now for the third time... In 1988 one of their neighbours, activist of People's Front, suddenly knocked at their door. He failed to intrude, as they managed to call the police in time...

"For a long time we could not take the events happening in Baku seriously. We were hoping that very soon life would get back to

normal: we would start having guests again and serving Mother's cookies and famous Baklava (Armenian Cake), - says Laura and her eyes fill up with tears from the memories; - None of us can make baklava like Mother. She was an exceptional master; she put her soul into everything she did. She was an extremely kind person and stayed true to herself till the end of her days, never embittered by the blows of the fate..."

Alas, life never got back to normal. At the end of 1989, just before the massacres in January, the Harutyunyan family, realizing it was dangerous to remain in Baku for much longer, dared to move once again. Laura was 44 years old then. Her mother Noem was 75. Laura's husband had left for Russia to search for new ways of existence for the family, but soon died being unable to bear the distress. Laura, together with her 15-year-old daughter Regina, mother, mother-in-law and her single sister started for Yerevan. Laura is to date grateful for her Azerbaijani colleagues who helped them leave Baku so quickly.

Noem's elder daughter, who had gotten married in Armenia, was bale to give shelter to the refugees in Yerevan. They managed to take the bank account books for their savings of many years, however after the collapse of the Soviet Union they were never able to cash these. Without the necessary amount of money they were unable to buy an apartment in Yerevan and had to stay in their temporary dwelling (as it seemed to them in the beginning), in a small room without basic living conditions located in one of the schools with special needs. The hardest years were ahead when granny Noem had completely lost her eyesight and had great difficulty getting to the construction outside which served as a lavatory.

Today, two decades later, Laura Hmayakovna lives in the same school subsidiary building with her sister, daughter and grandchild. Although after her mother's death they were given a larger room, the women still dream of hot water and heating. They have reached out to and written to different authorities, but the problem of the apartment still remains unsolved.

Despite all the hardships at the age of 67, Laura Hmayakovna is energetic and is known as an activist among the neighbors of the "hostel". And although the recent nationwide inflation on the food products makes them tighten their belts once again and Granny's famous baklava has become a luxury for them, Laura's room is always full of guests. She receives everyone cordially serving what she has... just the same way as Granny Noem, who never lost hope...

By Asia Tsaturova

Woman's Mission

Believe in Yourself

I am Naira Hayrapetyan. I live in the city of Sisian, Syunik region. I am a lawyer and work for "Against Violation of Law" NGO in the civic center of Sisian.

When I started my employment in 2009 my husband was against me working. One of the reasons was my two children, who were young, 4 and 8 years old. Besides, it is against Armenian man's dignity for the wife to work. I on the other hand was getting frustrated, being unable to conform to the idea of wasting all the knowledge I had gained through my education and not being able to use it. It appeared I would have to give up all of my professional ambitions for the sake of strengthening my family, for the sake of my husband's traditional beliefs... Almost every day I quarreled with my husband about this.

Nevertheless, I kept on working. The topics of the seminars held by our organization were very intimate to me: human rights, women discrimination, gender stereotypes... After each course I was becoming bolder, more self-confident and armed with new information. It was this confidence that helped me to convince my husband, not to quit, not to give up on my dream. I was able to work a job that I was passionate about and earn money, meanwhile being a good housewife, caring mother and a beloved wife. I think a woman's mission is to successfully combine all these roles in life...

In course of my work I meet many different people who come to our center for free consultation. I pay great attention to women's problems, especially when it is related to discrimination against them. I feel sorrowful when I see how our women, most of whom have higher education and possess various talents, become enslaved by the stereotypes and lose real opportunities to work, create, have their place in the society and establish themselves as individuals.

I challenge them to believe in their strengths, know their true value and not to fall victims to destructive stereotypes.

By Lilil Yenokyan

Opinion

Expected and Loved

I have been loved since I was in my mother's womb. I am the eldest of four children in our family. My parents didn't care whether they would have a boy or a girl. They already loved me and eagerly anticipated my birth. My parents' love has accompanied me during all my life.

Since childhood I have heard many stories of people, being in socially unbearable conditions, killing their newborn or still unborn babies. I think there is no difference: either case is a murder of an infant. That's why all those stories were like nightmares to me. In the course of time I came to realize that our neighbor, one of our relatives and perhaps my grandmother had played their roles in similar stories.

My grandmother would hardly tell us anything about herself, but used to say that everybody has made that choice. Once she told me how she would carry heavy stones while pregnant in order to lose the baby; she already had three daughters at the time and the fourth would have served no purpose. However, fortunately, the baby was born healthy and to everybody's happiness it was a boy. That boy is my father. Nevertheless, I love my grandmother very much...

They said such was the reality and that reality compelled its rules. There was this subtle rebellion



within my grandmother. She did not agree with those rules, but what could she do? "Everybody

does this, everybody does that." Miserable self-justification!

Every woman must overcome this dilemma for herself. When the woman does not conform to the idea of killing an infant, when she realizes that being a mother means giving life, rather than taking it, then numerous means to avoid infant murder could be found within the same reality, especially given the modern state of affairs.

... My mother was expecting her third child. My grandmother was the first to find out that it would be their third girl. She hid the "fact" that the baby was not wanted from everyone. Sometime later my mother was given money to have another ultrasound and if it was in fact a girl, to get rid of the baby. My mother went to see the doctor. Fortunately, the doctor had not come to work that day, and she left the hospital feeling relieved. She was holding in her hand that sum of money which had been earned with difficulty. It felt like that tiny and miserable amount was burning her hand. She walked into the first shop and spent the whole amount on a beautiful small bag. Then she returned home with clear conscience. She knew that she no longer had that miserable money, and she was happy with it.

My youngest sister was born. She was very beautiful, more beautiful than the bag. I was six

years old then and wanted to have a brother very much. It was my greatest dream. Before seeing my sister I had cried so much, had uttered so many malicious words about her, that I cannot understand to date how all that wickedness got into me. I was only six years old, but was conditioned to think like adults: "We do not need a female baby." But when I saw my sister... she was truly so beautiful, the most beautiful one ever. Later I had a brother, too. What a pity that I don't have a fourth sister...

I have been expected and loved by my parents. I wish all the children in the world to be anticipated and loved, too.

I hope to have a lot of children. I have always wanted to have ten. I love them all even though they are not born yet. Even eleven...

By Ashkhen Petrosyan
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