

people in a deep dry well in the backyard of a mosque. They stayed two weeks in the dark, tiny area deep down, almost 15 meters deep; during the night they received their food in a basket connected to rope to avoid people noticing them. They couldn't make noise, and they had to eat, sleep and do their business within this less than 2 by 2 meters well, that received no sunlight or fresh air. They stayed till they were told to climb their way out.

They went home believing that it was all over!

Only two days after their release, a Muslim man wanted to marry Sitto, dad's older sister, the most beautiful girl in town. She rejected him and out of anger he went to see Hussam Agha, questioning him about dad and his family in front of the police commander (Janderma), and how they were spared, and demanded that they be killed.

Hussam told the commander that dad was too young to be killed and, he is one of the best tradesmen in town and to prove it, he asked one of his servants to bring dad back so they could decide themselves.

The commander saw my dad (Yaackoub), he recognized him as one of the best tradesmen and told the people that he and his brother were relied on in the textile industry and either way he was far too young (being only in his early teens) to be killed and he'd be a fine Muslim, so they let him go.

On his way out, the man yelled, "No! He has a brother, and he's a fighter. He goes with others supporting the infidels against our people!" This left both Hussam and the commander, with no choice but to send soldiers to dad's house. At the time Putros wasn't home, so they waited; when he arrived home, they arrested him and took him to the commander who ordered his killing! So they took Putros outside and tied him up to a tree in

testicles off callously, then continued by cutting off his ears, yelling "Where's Jesus now? Where is your Savior now?", while torturing him, after cutting off his nose and ears, they ripped his fingernails out as well! After all this, the Kurdish men held him down as they cut his arms off in pieces followed by cutting up his chest to send a message to others.

Dad and a couple of other boys from the school, put the pieces of his body together and got a rug to cover him and then proceeded to bury him next to the street.

Thank God this particular massacre did not last long. It was in 1914 when the real genocide began, when dad had witnessed the most inhumane mass murder which started with Armenians and spread to whoever believed in Jesus (Armenians, Syrians, Assyrians & Chaldeans).

Every time dad told us the story, we could see how much pain he endured and how it had deeply scarred him.

Some people of the 1914 SYFO (Genocide), involved people being skinned alive, others had their limbs amputated while alive and then they were left for the birds to peck on and other animals to sink their teeth into. Some were even thrown into barrels of boiling hot oil; they even carved out the womb of pregnant women.

Dad and his family were protected at the start of the genocide by the two Aghas of the town, Hussam and his brother Omar (Aghas were the town leaders that represented the Ottoman government), they were considered non-extremist Muslims, both brothers protected some Christian citizens that specialized in unique trades like that of my father's. Therefore my dad and his older brother Putros, were hidden from the Kurdish



## The genocide by the Ottoman Empire

### The story of my father, Yaackoub Yousef Abdo

Yaackoub (my father), was born in 1898 in Bassa, Zevenge. He lived with his family in a city within the Findik province, which is in the south-east of modern day Turkey. He learnt the trade of "Shaal oo Shapek" with his older brother, which is suit-tailoring in English. At the time it was very exclusive and very expensive. They became known for dressing up the rich and powerful people of Bassa and surrounding areas.

Dad was at an Armenian School in 1909, even though he was Syrian Orthodox, when there was another awful massacre of the Syrian/Armenian people and his school was a target as well.

I remember when dad used to tell us about what he and his family had gone through and what they witnessed of the brutality of the Ottoman Empire's Military and some of Kurdish mobs.

One of these stories was about the neighborhood Christian boys who were ordered to watch the mutilation of their priest:

A group of the Kurdish neighbors, began by pulling his eyes out, because he would not deny his Christianity. They proceeded by cutting his

Omar, on the other side of Ain-Dywar  
In Jazeera, dad started his business again, with his wife Sara, and children: Youssef, Abdey, Morad and Mariam. They stayed there till they heard that the French had arrived in Ain-Dywar, so they packed their things once again and moved across. After they had settled and had 2 more kids Salim (died @ the age of 7), baby Sherrin died (Two month old), dad started his trade business and became a merchant by travelling to Aleppo, bringing back such things as textiles, groceries and more, and would sell the products to others. Because of his wealth he could afford to send people to Turkey and **bring almost Thirty(30) Christian families** who had converted to Islam against their will, to Ain-Dywar so they could become free Christians again (Re- Baptized by Father Yousef Al Kass), and he provided them with everything they needed such as food and accommodation.

In Ain-Dywar, his wife, Sarah died. He remarried to my mother Laila Younan, and had four daughters Heloue (Sharon), and then later to Malkiya to have Setta then Maqboula & myself “Adibeh” both born in kamishly, where we lived for years until we migrated to Melbourne, Australia on the 13/01/1977, and dad passed away on 27/01/1995.

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***P.S: We have no intention to foster hostility or hatred against Turkey or the Turkish people.***

*\*Today's Ain-Dywar's police station was our house surrounded by Big Orchid*

At that point dad decided to take whatever they had left, which wasn't much, and get as far away from the town he grew up in and served. Although it was very difficult, due to his mother being very close to giving birth and her daughter Sitto being taken away, her husband & another son, Issa, missing, she still agreed to begin their journey at night.

When night approached, dad helped his pregnant mother and his toddler sister Horeh on a donkey, they hid in caves during the day, travelling only at night through the dark, bushy and steep mountains full of dangerous creatures like bears, snakes and foxes. It became harder when the donkey ran away.

During this journey, dad had to walk for miles in search of water and would also hunt for food, like deer, birds and whatever he could get to survive, it was in these mountains he stumbled across the bodies of many dead people, bodies with no heads, kids laid down next to their mothers with blood smeared everywhere.

During this ordeal and under the terrible circumstances, he had helped his mother give birth to his newborn brother, named Putros after his Martyr brother.

One night, while approaching a village known to have extremist Kurdish militants who killed all the Christians in that region, Putros was crying very loud, they tried everything, but he wouldn't keep quiet. After a long argument, they realized they had no option but to leave Putros and come back for him later. They covered him up with cloths and hesitantly walked away, suddenly he stopped crying and dad ran back to collect him. They continued their dangerous, scary and long journey to a town called Carboran where they stayed with Issa Hakim, dad's uncle for a while, before they went and settled in Zevenge to continue their journey later to the town at the border of Turkey and Syria called Jazeera- Eben-

front of their house after taking his clothes off, saying that they were too good to be wasted, then dragged his pregnant mother outside to watch the torture of her oldest son. She begged them to take her life and spare his; they pushed her to the ground and threatened her that if she wouldn't remain silent, they'd kill all her children in front of her eyes.

The poor mother struggled watching her son being tortured, covering up her face as three men simultaneously fired shotguns all over his body. When they were finished shooting him, one man grabbed an axe and split his head open, then they cut the rope off and threw him down to the swamp in front of their home. They did it in front of the neighbourhood to send a message to all the Christians in Bassa and surrounding villages. Afterwards, when everyone left, my father, still only in his early teens, had to be exposed to the brutal and inhumane treatment of his older brother, friend and father-like figure to him, he went to Putros, dressed him again and covered his body in dirt, as it was the best thing he could do under the circumstances.

The next day things got even worse, and Hussam and Omar had lost credibility and couldn't control the people's hunger for killing Christians and ridding the town of infidels. That day, a couple of men intrusively entered dad's house and took whatever food was there, like a large tin of cheese, preserved cooked meat (Kaworma-Kalyah), and other things, when my grandmother begged the men to leave some food for her kids, as it was all she had in the house and she couldn't leave the house to buy more, they told her if they hadn't taken it someone else would and they deserved it because they came first and were their neighbours. Worst of all is they took Sitto who was later given to Hussam after he requested her.