

We called her Big Grandma not because she was big. In fact before too long we were bigger than she. We called her Big Grandma because she was older than Grandma Grace (in fact she was Grandma Grace's mother) and they lived in the same house at 161 Church Street across from the church whose bell rang at noon and at six everyday. Big Grandma would always make the sign of the cross when she heard it toll.

Big Grandma didn't always live at 161 Church Street in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. At one time she resided far across the earth in Armenia. And when she was only 8 years old she embarked on an incredible journey that brought her to Whitinsville. Here is the story of her journey as she, in her 80s, told it to Grandma Grace.

### *In Big Grandma's Words*

*My father had come to America in 1910 and had sent for us to come to join him after he had worked and saved enough money for our passage. My mother, my younger sister Eva and I were born in Ancient Armenia in Asia Minor which is now part of Turkey. There were eleven of us who left our village of Pazmashen. The women were my mother, Koohar (Claire, age 26), my sister Eva (age 4), and I age 8, and we were accompanied by a woman named Varvar (Eva) about 28 years old who was an aunt of a relative by marriage. There were 5 young men between the ages of 17 and 20 including Enoch Gamoian (who would eventually become Big Grandma's brother-in-law). My Uncle Enoch (Hagopian) who escorted us was with another older friend to help him with the passage of our group.*

*We traveled with about a dozen horses and donkeys. One of the donkeys had saddle bags – one side held provisions (bread, cheese, dried fruits, nuts, etc.) and the other bag held my sister Eva. My Uncle Enoch and his friend escorted us to the seaport of Giresun, which translated means cherry as that's where the trees grew.*

*I can remember how very sad my grandfather was about our leaving. He was holding my sister and I on his knees and crying while telling us that he was never going to see us anymore. We left our village early one morning and our group traveled over land for about a week before reaching the seacoast. At the port of Giresun, we boarded a cargo ship on the Black Sea and traveled through the straits of Bosphorus en route to Constantinople (now Istanbul). The vessel stopped and picked up a cargo of sheep. It was very, very uncomfortable traveling with the poor animals, and we had constant sea sickness. Uncle was so involved with saying his reluctant*

*goodbye and getting us settled that he didn't leave the ship in time and ended up sailing with us to the next port – it was a very sad parting. We stayed at an island before reaching Marseilles, France and were taken by a smaller boat into Marseilles. We saw huge work horses at the port and ate rice pudding at the hotel there. After reaching Marseilles, we stayed approximately two weeks waiting for medical clearance. One young man, a newly wed, who traveled with our group returned to Pazmashen as he was too homesick to continue on.*

*We then went by rail north through France. I remember seeing the lights of the city of Paris en route to the port of Le Havre. From Le Havre our party consisted only of mother, my sister, Eva, a male villager, and myself. Others in our original party were separated to travel other routes. I remember that the long benches on board the train were deep red velvet covered and that we were traveling very fast. We were in awe when we first saw the steamship SS Rochambeau which was the largest we had ever seen. The next weeks were a blur of sea sickness. Our quarters were bunks down in the hold near the engines which we heard constantly and the blankets were infested with bed bugs. Our food mainly consisted of French loaves of bread and water. The other travelers were mainly women and children.*

*Finally, on December 9<sup>th</sup> (8th according to Ellis Island documents), we arrived at Ellis Island. Unfortunately, we did not see the Statue of Liberty. We had box lunches which consisted of a loaf of bread, stick of bologna, cheese and fruit. We were familiar with the apples and oranges but had never seen a banana before. Mama watched until the others started peeling the bananas and then did the same for us. We also had never seen a black person before and Mama explained that this must be an Arab that she had read about.*

*From Ellis Island we were escorted going by rail to the ferry dock where we boarded a smaller vessel to Providence, Rhode Island. We wore name tags that also had our destination on them. After arriving in Providence, we slept at the railroad station overnight, and I remember the janitor sweeping the station area. The janitor gave us our first chocolate bars which Enoch tasted first before mother allowed us to. The next morning we were directed to the train to Linwood, Massachusetts. From Linwood, we boarded a trolley car to Whitinsville, Massachusetts. On the trolley Mama met an acquaintance from the old country who told us to get off at Memorial Square. While walking in search of the address we were befriended by a local dentist who escorted us to a relative's home where my dad had arranged we stay until he could meet us after work.*

And that is the story of how Big Grandma came to Whitinsville, Massachusetts from Pazmashen, Armenia. She traveled across the world by foot and donkey and by horse, in ships and smaller vessels, by train and by trolley for over fifty days to come to the United States of America! And so here we are, and we shall never forget.