

Name: Esther Bedeos Mugerditchian

Biographical Sketch:

As an author and teacher, Esther Mugerditchian was one of the early voices driven to alert the world of the untold horrors she witnessed during the Armenian Genocide. Esther Dombourajian was born on September 25, 1869 in Kharput. After graduating from Euphrates College in 1890, Esther married Reverend Thomas Mugerditchian and raised 7 children. Esther detailed accounts of torture and murder, and documented the names of individuals who should be held accountable. She saved her children in a daring escape to Russia and her book, "From Turkish Toils", was published by the George H. Doran Company before she reached America.

Focused Sketch:

Esther Bedeos Mugerditchian was a notable Armenian American during the Armenian Genocide because of her successful efforts to document the historic events that were purposefully and strategically kept quiet. Her original book, written in 1915-16, was republished by Cornell University Library in October of 2009. Scholars Select states, "This work has been selected by scholars as being culturally important and is part of the knowledge base of civilization as we know it".

Esther was an eyewitness and in the preface of her book "From Turkish Toils" she wrote "I write to you all that I have seen, all that I have felt, and all that the glance of the Armenian martyrs who were shot and who suffered, all that the last glance of your sisters who were violated, conveyed to me. Words fail me to describe adequately the barbarous means--burning and flaying-- by which they murdered the men of intellect, Armenians of Kharput and Diarbekir, and how they destroyed or profaned the holy places".

As the Turkish militia began to impose their power over the Armenian population and commit harsh actions against the Armenians, Esther wrote down names of professors, intellectuals, and leading members of Armenian society who had been arrested, tortured, and murdered by the Turks for fictitious crimes. She also documented the treatment of imprisoned individuals and experiences on death marches, as well as the various ways that the Turks lied and justified the Armenian Genocide, such as claiming that radical revolutionists armed with countless rifles inhabited her town and were planning to attack Turkish soldiers.

While Esther volunteered at the American missionary hospital in Kharput helping injured Armenian refugees, her sons hid in a hole during the day under the floorboards of the American

doctor's home. During this time, she oversaw 200 Armenian survivors from a death march. She recorded that a 15-year-old boy named Hrand Mughalian had five stab wounds in his hand and two bullet wounds in his thigh. Esther also attended a carpenter from Habusi, named Brother Marsub, who had 43 stab wounds from bayonets and dragged himself on the brink of death to the hospital door.

Just a number of years prior, the Mugerditchians had been hosting British diplomats and living a comfortable life. By the end of their journey, Esther and her children, dressed in rags as beggars, had crossed the Euphrates on three timbers strewn together and, with aching and bloody feet, limped across a 9,500- foot Russian mountain range. After arriving in America with no experience in farming, Esther lived on a small farm in Fresno and persevered, making a humble living to support her family. As an American citizen, she continued to advocate for the starving Armenians recuperating from the genocide. Esther died in Fresno at age 81 and was survived by her 7 children and 11 grandchildren.

Personal Connection:

Esther is my great, great grandmother. Like her, I strive to help others and plan to enter the medical field. A call to action in her book encouraged people living in America “to take an interest in the fate of the orphans and widows, and to do their best in helping charitable institutions to supply financial assistance to save those who have survived”. I hope to follow Esther's footsteps in assisting my community by becoming a physician in the future.

Take Away:

We are at a time in history where we are beginning to listen to voices that have been silenced. Could future genocides have been prevented if we had listened to voices like Esther's? What would the world be like if we had started listening to these voices earlier?

Miscellaneous:

