

# Connections I and II

Aram Kabodian

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## **Connections I and II**

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## **A Hope Unspoken**

Dedicated to my grandparents:  
Mardiros and Kagazig Godoshian and Giragos and Annig Kabodian

Sometimes I forget

they lived with the pain of their parents' murders  
no safety net, no example, no peace  
life was of their making  
with a daily pain remembered

Sometimes I forget

they were so young and came so far  
it could have been any place  
but they settled here  
led to this more perfect place

Sometimes I forget

they spoke from their hearts  
but were not understood  
for their words were foreign  
this new land distrustful

Sometimes I forget

they coped with little  
provided for many  
complained minimally  
praised the Lord

They laughed, sang, danced, hugged  
life  
with a hope unspoken:  
my life.

## Baboo Godoshian

Arms of steel  
Pushing the mower  
At 5 mph,  
Baboo finishes  
Mrs. Geveshian's lawn  
As promised on Saturday  
Albeit at 10 pm.

From behind the bushes,  
I catch sight of Baboo's  
Fierce eyes  
As he zooms  
The mower to his truck.  
Trimming my last bush,  
I'm quick to get in the truck  
Lest he 'forget' me.  
Baboo the joker.

Baboo's ancient, yet sturdy  
GM truck knows it's way home,  
I hope.  
He says something in Armenian,  
Was it about food?  
I answer him, "Iyo" (yes).  
He gives me the sidelong glance  
And switches over to broken English.

"What 'yes'?" he quizzes me.  
"Grandma's food will taste good."  
"True, 'cept I said 'truck eats gas'."  
"Iyo."  
"Why you not speak Armenian?"  
"I speak some, but all my friends speak English."  
"When I come to this country, I have no job. No food. No friends. Hkgent (crazy) this  
country...and great."

Silently,  
Baboo runs a stop sign

Until he's in the middle of the intersection.  
What I detect as him slowing to stop is actually  
A gear change.

We fly into darkness again.

## More Than a Handshake

In the old country  
Your handshake  
Was your identity.

Men shook hands  
With strength and conviction,  
A bond and a test.

Our grandfathers squeezed  
With a death grip  
And a wink.

That first handshake  
Is hard to forget,  
More difficult to repeat.

Firm grips were earned.  
Long, back-breaking days  
Out there doin' what had to be done.

More than a mere greeting,  
That hand extended  
Was a challenge;

Look your grandfather's grandfather's grandfather  
In the eye  
And wink.

## Love Lessons

Dedicated to the memory of Michael Neuman Godoshian

Being a family is about unconditionally loving.

It's not about liking everything about each other every minute.  
It's an absolute outpouring of caring without conditions.

Without petty fighting  
Without pious judgment  
Without Pride's footprint on our foreheads.

Unconditional love is an elusive bugger.

We don't see it modeled too often.

Jesus calls us to love.

To a boundless love.  
To a pure, genuine place that you don't find on TV much  
or at the mall  
or in the halls at school.

Oh, Life is difficult.

All by itself.  
But that doesn't mean we need to make it any more difficult  
By going to work everyday at  
Anger Inc.,  
Pride International Corp., or  
Grudges Are Us.

Sometimes the world seems learning disabled.

We are slow to learn from our teachers.

Our family includes great minds and spirits

Of peace and unity.

They surround us...if we'll look and learn.

Jesus, the carpenter, is re-born each year,  
Martin Luther King Jr. preaches his healing words,  
Michael, the florist, brings beauty to a stern world,  
The Unknown Soldier gives his life for a peaceful, free America.

We are the most blest people on the face of the Earth.

And we are a family.

May we let the great expectation of the season enter our hearts.



However, may we leave at the door

The great expectations we have of each other.  
Instead, let's enter each other's lives with great love.

## Joy

For Diane Piligian

What would it have been like to hug Jesus?  
...Grasp his body with my two arms and hold tight.  
...Feel the strength of his back against my palms.  
His arms completely around me.  
Stay there  
for a time.

To hug Diane was to touch Joy:  
Her positive life-force emitted beams  
Of penetrating, genuine love in all directions.  
Her arms completely around me  
Like it was  
yesterday.

When Jesus laughed,  
An unbridled, unabashed Joy  
Beamed from his face, his hair, his pores.  
Mortal fear, sadness, and death  
Disappeared, sounding  
Instead as a steady rain  
Of Eternal  
Love.

Diane's laugh was loud;  
Always both barrels,  
Close range.  
Welcomed  
and warming.  
Infectious smile,  
Contagious  
Love.

Our hugs, our laughter, our lives,  
Echo loved ones  
Never forgotten.

## First Teacher

I am the oldest child  
of our mostly Armenian-speaking household

By the time I was four  
My Mother  
Also had a newborn,  
    a one-year old,  
        and a three-year old  
                to parent.

Day after day  
Mom sat me down  
On the second step  
Of the stairs going to the second floor

She read  
“One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish”  
I’d read  
“Black fish, blue fish, old fish, new fish.”

She read  
“Are you my mother?”  
I’d read  
“You are not my mother! You are a SNORT!”

She introduced me to The Cat in the Hat  
Like she knew him herself

“I sat there with Sally”  
    (my Mom’s other name)  
“We sat there, we two.  
And I said, ‘How I wish  
We had something to do!’

Too wet to go out  
And too cold to play ball.  
So we sat in the house.  
We did nothing at all.”

Except read.

I'm not really sure  
What my three younger siblings  
Were doing,

But we read  
And read.

In my mind,  
We read for hours.

I would have spoken only Armenian  
As I entered Kindergarten  
But I knew my English ABC's  
And how to read and write  
My numbers up to 20.

She sounded out  
"Do you like green eggs and ham?"  
So I sounded out  
"I do not like them Sam-I-Am."

She never said  
"What do you want to be when you grow up?"  
It would have taken me  
20 years to figure out my answer

"I want to be a teacher,  
Like you, Mom."

## Berube

His afro was bigger than mine

And he had a mustache where I had only a couple hairs.

His room was a sanctuary for me in '78

And his cheesy, wide smile always made me laugh.

As teachers go, he was on the lenient side.

His class was more like a slumber party than

Yearbook

As the report card listed it.

He held nothing back.

Laughs, yells, questions, criticisms

Volume turned up to 10, laid out there for everyone to take in.

He's the only teacher that ever threw an eraser at me.

I needed that eraser.

With a full-blown case of 'senioritis,'

I saw it streaking my way out of the corner of my eye.

Behind on my copy and reading a magazine instead,

Berube (seldom "Mr.")

Missed me by a good two inches.

Probably on purpose.

At that moment, I felt part of the group.

Most everyone had the eraser whiz by his or her head months earlier.

That small, fairly soft, black rectangle

Showed me he knew I was there,

Knew what was going on with me

And expected more.

Today, when Kabodian (seldom "Mr.")

Throws an occasional eraser

Berube comes to mind.

And that student wakes up, smiles, and gets to work.

## Clara was a Tiger

Dedicated to Judy's grandmother, Clara Spear

When her boys won their first World Series, she was 29 years old.  
She heard every strike, every ball, and every game  
She possibly could.  
She'd grown up with Ty Cobb's brash ways,  
But he couldn't bring her the Championship.  
Mickey Cochrane did it for her in 1935, though.  
She had labored long that October day  
And after cleaning the mess in that fine Lansing kitchen...she listened.

There's a giddy feeling in first times.

The Cubs didn't stand a chance in 1945 either.  
After making ice cream all day at Miller's,  
She sent in Hal Newhouser as he hit toward his  
.319 lifetime batting average.  
What a Hall of Fame Tiger  
She was, too.

Before her 60th birthday, Clara's Tigers trounced St. Louis  
For a third Championship.  
Stormin' Norman was on first,  
Mickey Stanley was in center, Mickey Lolich was on the mound, and  
She was behind the plate in '68 growling at Mayo Smith's decisions.  
She wanted what she wanted  
Especially for those she cared strongly for  
Like her kids.

George Kell and Al Kaline were family to Clara, also.  
She trusted them, respected them, and gave them an ear-full  
When they were off base, so to speak.  
She was 78 when she climbed the ramp  
To the right field stands at Tiger Stadium  
For the first time.  
Home again, finally.  
They lost the battle that day, but won the war of '84.  
For the fourth time in her life, they made Mom proud.  
Yes, Clara was a Tiger.



and contemplate another day  
(knowing that new rainbows  
must be concocted  
for sanity's sake).



## Pace

I've been struck lately by pace.  
People want answers now.  
Conversation speeds by me.  
As I'm getting more contemplative  
    or as it's taking me longer  
    to organize  
    my thoughts  
Other jabber away as if  
Reading from some elaborate script.

Meetings bug me.  
Again, jabbering people  
Sometimes reeling off competent stuff even.  
I can't get my thoughts together that fast  
Much less find an opening in the flow of words  
In front of me.

So I'm more of a listener.  
Nothing wrong with that.  
Less is more.  
Sometimes brevity can be wise.

Or not.  
When I get my chance  
It's usually about something  
Mentioned minutes ago  
    doesn't fit now  
    makes people wonder  
    doubt me.

Do I care?  
    maybe a little

Sometimes, I want to jump into the raging river of words, expertly navigate around rocks of resistance to my point, quickly reacting to needed directional changes, feeling swept away and comfortable in the current, surrounded by my fellow conversationalists-of-the-river.

But it takes too much work.  
People should slow to my pace.  
It's not too much to ask.  
At meetings, we go around the table  
one  
    at  
        a  
            time

Each  
    getting  
        his or her  
            moment.

As long as each person needs

Not equal time

But fair time  
Fair pace  
A sort of special ed pace of conversation

I need accommodations.

I deserve them.

I might have something important to say.

What if it's lost forever  
In the gale force wind of words flowing  
From your mouth?

Patience  
    doesn't help one express one's thoughts  
    in a gale.

Patience  
    is not exercised by committee members  
    who jabber and blather at breakneck speeds.

Patience

is my friend.

We don't always get along, but I like Patience.

Not male or female, but more like God, Patience is love,

is kindness

is reasonable

is missing too often from conversations.

Where is the wait time?

Didn't everybody take Communications 100?

Maybe not.

I ask too much.

Never mind.

## **Journal entry, 2-8-1983**

Good night, Judy.  
I pray God keeps you safe,  
healthy, and happy  
when we are apart.

I love you deeply dear  
and need your warm body  
close to me,  
holding me,  
and I holding you.

Here's to a beautiful,  
healthy, safe, eventful,  
unpredictable, happy,  
crazy life  
together.

>clink<

## **This World**

for Rachel

We  
will welcome you  
as no others can,  
for this  
is a world  
of love.

Friends  
will embrace you  
warm, tight, secure,  
for this  
is a world  
of caring.

Someone  
someday  
                  will hurt you  
in what ways we can not be sure,  
                  for this  
is a world  
                  of uncaring  
and  
                  uncertainty.

And then,  
We  
will welcome you  
as no others can  
for this  
is a world  
of love.

## A Few People

A few people  
Remind us that  
There is a God.

They surprise us like the smell of a spring day  
Renew us like the bloom of our first flower  
Nudge us when we're almost there  
Kick our butts up and over the quicksand  
Call us on our mistakes  
And hug us when they're not even around.

They are gentle when we expect might,  
And grateful in the midst of our gratefulness.

They teach unexpectedly,  
Learn humbly,  
Care instinctively,  
Intuit intuitively,  
And laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh.

A few people  
Remind us to aim higher,  
And care more for us,  
And ours,  
And all.

Those are the people  
We want to be  
When we grow up  
And want to spend every minute with  
And wonder what they're like when  
No one else is around.

But we can't be them  
Or be with them always  
Or really know them.

They're the rainbow  
We're the pot of gold.  
They share their colors  
So that we might share ours.

## A Realization

I am not here to fish

I am here to be  
Here

I am here to allow others  
To teach  
Me about fishing

I am here to watch  
The struggle  
Of a moth  
Between the tent  
And  
Rain fly  
    constant movement  
    constant hopeful  
    movement  
With very little accomplished

I am here  
So that I can appreciate  
My Temper-Pedic  
So much more

I am here  
For the shrill wake-up call  
Of the Incognito Bird

I am gratefully here  
For mornings that chill  
Breakfasts that fill  
Jokes that never end  
Friends that befriend  
Tents that protect  
Canoes that deflect

There's  
"Something in the Way"  
I am not  
Anywhere else  
That makes me fully  
Here.

## Open Sky

You free me.  
I look to you  
For flight from this place,  
Release from.

You are Big Sky Country  
Expansive  
And embracing  
Me  
At my  
Point  
Of need.

Sometimes star-filled  
With clusters of unknown  
Worlds hiding quietly  
Behind friends.

You allow  
For speedy travelers of the night  
To streak  
Quite naked  
And fleeting ---  
Wisps of adventures  
Not seen.

I long for you  
In the grey times.

Even the thought  
Of you  
Frees me.



## Do all things with love

That's what it says on the inside  
of my Dove chocolate wrapper  
And while it's a fairly popular notion  
it can be tricky on a day to day basis

You see,  
I'm a middle school teacher

I wake up thinking about my lesson for the day  
is it too much listening, not enough doing?  
have they had enough time practicing paraphrasing  
so that I will see it in their research papers?  
have I given them enough choice on their writing topic  
or so much choice that some won't be able to get started?  
what was that magic ingredient I thought of just before I went to  
sleep?

I get to my building an hour before my 7th graders and  
usually leave at least an hour after they've gone

Those minutes are spent tweaking my already perfect lessons  
so that their time is well spent  
so that they are inspired the way Mr. Berube inspired me  
so that they are ready for 8th grade and their uncertain futures and  
so that they might actually have fun and  
be challenged  
at the same time

Every day  
I have to be ready for the  
"What's this have to do with anything?" guy and the  
"Can I go to the bathroom? It's personal" girl and the  
"Do you have a pencil I can borrow?" kid  
coming in late to class and the gabby  
"What am I supposed to be doing now?" student

Each student matters to me  
I'm a middle school teacher  
And, I do love eating chocolate,  
but even more so, I do all things with love

**rjr**

Dedicated to Bob Rentschler

Bob's life was a poem.

A sweet smile  
of transformation,  
A sparkle  
that touched souls.

Noticing relationships,  
subtle and strong.  
Observations: simple,  
sparse, mind-bending, and  
beautiful.

Reminding us of our  
political nature,  
our power unrealized.

Challenging us  
to be the poet of our lives.

To be an army  
of playful, loving,  
thinking,  
phoenixes.