

Ahiska Turkish Movements

I would like to tell you a little about my grandparents. In 1941, World War II broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union. I don't know for sure what caused the war to begin. After three years, the war still continued. I just know that my grandmother and her father were forced to move from their homes by the Soviet Union soldiers. At first when the soldiers came to the Turkish homes, they were friendly to the people. The people had animals, corn, and other food. The soldiers lived in their homes for several months.

Then the soldiers asked the people to give them something to eat. Some people didn't give them anything, but some other people did. For example, my grandmother's father gave them lamb, bread, and other food that they had at that time. My grandmother was fifteen or sixteen years old at that time.

However, on November 23, 1944, an order came from Stalin and Beriya. The soldiers had to force out the Turkish people from Mesketia, Georgia. The Turkish people had lived there before Turkey and Georgia put up a border. After putting up the border, the Turkish people in Mesketian Georgia still remained there. Until the war broke out, they lived there and had their own religion and culture.

Then on that day, November 23, the soldiers forced the Mesketian Turkish to move. The people wanted to take food, corn, and clothes, but the soldiers didn't permit them. Because my grandmother's father had helped them, they permitted him to take what he wanted.

Moreover, on Stalin's order, the soldiers were supposed to kill all of them. The people were sitting in cold train cars. On the way, no one knew where, a lot of the people didn't survive. They died of hardships – hunger, exposure, and disease. They didn't have enough clothes, blankets, or food to survive. My grandmother's father died too. The people who died were buried together on the way. My grandmother said that they wanted us to be thrown into the Black Sea and drown all of us. Then some of the Muslim countries heard about the plight of our people and accepted them. They gave them a warm welcome, a cordial reception. My grandmother got to Uzbekistan. The war ended in 1945.

After that, my grandmother got married and had seven children. They lived happily in Uzbekistan. My father, the third of the seven children, got married when he was 24. He had six children. I was born in Uzbekistan and lived there

until I was six or seven years old. But my grandmother lived there for 45 years. Then some of the bad groups started to force out our people again. And we were forced to move to Russia in 1989. My aunts and uncles were separated. Some of them wanted to go to other regions. Some of them stayed with us. They were all married. My mother's parents still live in Kazakstan. She hasn't seen them for twelve years.

In Russia, we lived for sixteen years. During that time, I went to school. After nine years of going to school, I went nowhere. The government of Krasnodar, Russia did not permit us to go anywhere because they didn't want us to live there from the beginning. So they did give us some documents, so that we could go or travel somewhere. We were afraid to go outside. The militia could catch you and drive you to the station and charge you with "You don't have documents to live here."

For example, in 2003, we were preparing for my wedding. My parents and I went shopping. While we were driving to the shop, the militia and some Kazaks stopped us and asked for our documents. My father had his, but we didn't have ours. My father showed them his documents. Then they asked for ours. We said that we had forgotten them home. At first, they didn't want to let us go, but after a while, they did. We went to the shop and were walking there. After two or three hours, some of our friends came and said to my father, "The militia and Kazaks came to your home and took your son." So we had to go back home. Then my father went to the station to bring my brother back home. And the militia said he had to pay a fine, which was a lot of money. They could also come and count what you have. For example, they could count how many people lived in the house, how many animals we had, and what we had in our garden. They could do this whenever they wanted to.

That was at the beginning. From 1989 until 2005, we didn't truly "live" there. We just struggled for survival. In 2000, the United States heard about us. People from the immigration service came and saw how we were working the soil. We planted vegetables and sold them. We lived from the money that we had in a season. It was just enough for clothes, food and for buying land for plants. Yet, we had to pay fines that the militia imposed on us. There were a lot of things that I don't want to remember.

Finally, in 2004, the United States began to accept us Mesketian Turkish. When the Russian people heard this, they started to say that it cannot be possible. They thought that we were like things, not people. They didn't want to believe that America could accept us as people accept people. It was unbelievable to them. They thought that we had to be lower than they were. But it is not so!!! On June 17, my husband and I arrived in the United States. At first, I didn't want to live

here because I didn't have any relatives here and also because we didn't know any English when we came. At the beginning, whenever we saw the police, we were afraid because of everything that we had experienced in Russia.

Now I am glad that I am here. I want to say "Thank you, America" that I am here and I can go forward in my life. I am married, and I have a husband and also a beautiful son. I am a student at STCC. Now you know just a little bit about us. That is all that I wanted to tell you.