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GEORGE M. MARDIKIAN ENTERPRISES

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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN...

November 10, 1976

Handwritten signature:
[unclear]

Honorable Gerald R. Ford
c/o Firestone Estate
Palm Springs, Ca.

My dear Mr. President:

The enclosed article indicates that we have never lost faith in you, that you are still our champion. In spite of my wife's illness, we were glued to the television until the final blow.

It was heartbreaking, but perhaps it was an act of God that saved you more problems. This will give you a chance to enjoy your wonderful family.

We were so proud of the First Lady when she read your message to President-elect Carter.

So whoever voted for him, in all my letters I write I tell them to prepare to eat nothing but "Carter sandwiches" - peanut butter and baloney. One place that will never be served will be Omar Khayyam's, you can be sure of that!

I just want you to know that every time I give a talk - one of which was just yesterday to a local Sons in Retirement branch - I have an even greater understanding of people's respect and admiration for you, which will never cease. As time goes on people will recognize what a tragedy it was to not have you as our leader for another four years. But maybe this will be a lesson for all those who are concerned about the future of our great country, that we should go out of our way to do everything humanly possible to retain this wonderful privilege left to us on a silver platter.

My whole family joins me in wishing you, Mrs. Ford and the children all that is best in this world - happiness, health and all the joys of life. May God bless you always. With great admiration, I remain,

Always affectionately,

George M. Mardikian

GMM:lc
Enclosure

GEORGE M. MARDIKIAN ENTERPRISES

THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN ...

November 10, 1976

Honorable Gerald R. Ford
c/o Pineshome Estate
Fairview, California

My dear Mr. President:

The enclosed article indicates that we have never lost faith in you, that you are still our champion. In spite of my wife's illness, we were given the television until the final blow.

It was heart-breaking, but perhaps it was an act of God that saved our problems. This will give you a chance to enjoy your wonderful family. We were so proud of the First Lady when she read your message to President Carter.

WHITE HOUSE
MAIL ROOM

1976 NOV 23 AM 9 54

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My whole family joins me in wishing Mrs. Ford and the children all that is best in this world - happiness, health and all the joys of life. May God bless you always. With great affection, I remain,

Always affectionately,

George M. Mardikian

GM:Jo
Enclosure

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1976



Patriot Boosts American Spirit

By **KAREN GREENE**
Staff Reporter

Great Americans aren't born, they're grown, contends George Mardikian, an Armenian import and superpatriot whose flag-waving faith in his adopted country has never waned.

Since taking root in San Francisco in 1922, Mardikian has become one of America's classic success stories. Never one to forget his gratitude to the "land of opportunity", he spends much of his time traveling cross-country, singing his song of America. The noted author and philanthropist is in Charleston this weekend to speak at the annual convention of the South Carolina Home Economists Assn.

A self-proclaimed troublemaker, Mardikian explains his surname means "son of a warrior". "My war is against poverty and disloyalty. My main objective in life is to go around the country and disavow the bearers of malcontent and peddlers of gloom. That's why I'm still holding 30 pounds of extra weight," he says with a wink. "When I step on them, I want them to feel it."

A veteran of his native country's battles with the Turks, Mardikian became a guerilla at the age of 15. After a capture and subsequent escape, he left Constantinople for America only hours before the Turks came to re-arrest him.

Nearly penniless, he got a job in Coffee Dan's, a San Francisco basement restaurant, and took home \$12 a week for his dishwashing labors. Other jobs followed until Mardikian and his wife, Naz, opened a small place called Omar Khayyam's where they served Armenian dishes.

After several other restaurant ventures, Mardikian walked into the old Coffee Dan's in 1938 and 15 minutes later he owned it. This sentimental location is presently the base of the entrepreneur's operations.

"There is, what I call, one sacred table in the place," he says, with a sly grin. "Even when the restaurant is full, that table is empty. It marks the exact location where I washed dishes."

Besides managing his restaurant, Mardikian has served as a food consultant to the U.S. Army from 1942 through 1954 and continues his active work with food-relief programs in needy countries. For his service, he is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor.

A favorite medal, he points out, is the Boy Scouts' "Silver Buffalo" award. "It's usually given to Presidents or those who are about to kick the buck-



On a recent visit of President Ford to San Francisco, both Mr. and Mrs. George Mardikian were invited to a reception as friends. Mr. Mardikian (second from right) asked President Ford to meet his "other President", Mr. Arch Monson, the National President of the Boy Scouts of America. This was a great meeting because all three gentlemen are Eagle Scouts, the highest rank in Scouting; and, all three are also wearers of the Silver Buffalo, Scouting's highest award. Mrs. Mardikian looks on, wearing her Nefertiti pin.

Page 2, The Armenian Observer, March 3, 1976

et," he jokes. "And, I've been fooling them for 15 years."

A scout for more than 60 years, Mardikian stresses his faith in the youth of America and extols the virtues of vocational training, as well as literary know-how.

"Not all youngsters are born to become doctors, lawyers or engineers," he observes. "Some want to work with their hands. Americans, I believe, are natural mechanics."

As a contributor to several national publications, Mardiki-

an makes his opinions known. He is also author of "Dinner at Omar Khayyam's" and "Song of America", his autobiography.

His recipe for success lists hard work as the main ingredient. "First, have faith in yourself. Put your utmost trust in America, the hope of the world and all freedom-loving peoples. Add to this a faith in God. Combine everything and back it all with hard work -- you can't miss."

Mon., Aug. 16, 1976

"It is unbelievable what the first sight of that lady with the torch means to those who come searching, not so much for security as for something beautiful that hardly exists any place—human dignity. I can tell you that I fell in love with her then and have been carrying on an unashamed love affair with her for 54 years."

Mardikian is a multi-millionaire now, owner of several working ranches, a string of radio stations, large parcels of metropolitan real estate, a

By
Joan
McKinney



valuable art collection and a whole collection of awards for humanitarianism.

But he never wants to forget the days when it was not like that—the World War I years in Armenia, when he saw his father killed before his eyes and his people decimated by the Turks. And the post-war years when, after working for Herbert Hoover's food relief program in the Caucasus region, he finally escaped further attacks on Armenians and boarded a Greek refugee ship bound for New York.

A bowl of American pennies sits on the coffee table in front of a sofa in his office overlooking Union Square. It shares pride of place with an American flag and signed pictures of five Presidents (Hoover, Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, Ford), the Shah of Iran and the late King Faisal of Saudi Arabia.

"Let me tell you the story behind those pennies," says Mardikian, a nattily-dressed septuagenarian in black suit violet shirt and handkerchief wearing the Bicentennial symbol and a Boy Scout tenderfoot pin in his lapel, a silver buffalo (highest Boy Scout order) tie clip.

**'It isn't
enough to
dream, you
have to
work'**



Tribune photo by ROBERT STINNETT

George Mardikian stands in front of the restaurant where he once washed dishes and which he has owned now for nearly 40 years

Mardikian Has Made His Mark

To most Bay Area residents, George Mardikian is known as the genial host of Omar Khayyam's, the restaurant that has been dispensing the cuisine of his native country, Armenia, since 1938.

To ex-servicemen of World War II and the Korean conflict, he is fondly remembered as the man who made the difference in Army cooking, in his capacity as food consultant.

And to the many thousands who have read his books ("Dinner at Omar Khayyam's," "Song of America,") and heard him speak, he is the super-patriot personified, the tireless booster of the United States of America, which he first saw as an immigrant in 1922. He still likes to talk about it.

**'I am the only immigrant who cannot say I came here without a penny,'
laughs George Mardikian, who keeps some around to remind himself**

"There was a Greek repatriot on that ship who gambled with everybody . . . he approached me, but I had only \$5 in my pocket and I was not going to gamble that away. The last night before we arrived in New York—that was July 24, which I henceforth made my birthday—he came back and said he admired me for not gambling, but he thought I would have problems in America because I didn't speak English and would not understand the difference between the coins. So, he offered to exchange my \$5 for 500 pennies, so I wouldn't have any difficulty.

"I took it with gratitude, thinking there was some kindness in the man, even though he was a gambler. Then, when I was on the train to San Francisco, where I joined my older sister and brother, I had to buy food from the vendors. I would point to what I wanted, and they were so nice and happy to help me choose things, but when I gave them the pennies they got very upset. I couldn't think what was the matter with these people that they got mad when you paid them!

"I asked my sister when I arrived, and she explained that they don't like carrying all those pennies around. For the next 20 years I looked for that Greek to punch him in the nose, but for the 34 after that, I didn't want to punch him. You know why? We have 41 million immigrants to this country, and I must have talked to at least a million, and almost every one says 'I came without a penny.' I am the only one who cannot say that—I had 500 pennies!"

The story has been written many times of how the young immigrant got a job washing dishes in a restaurant called Coffee Dan's, and how he later bought that same restaurant and turned it into the highly successful Omar Khayyam's.

"I want to tell you that people who say sentimentality doesn't pay dividends," he says, "you just tell them where to head in. I'm a very sentimental person, and I came and bought that place for no other reason than so I could tell everybody that this is still a land of opportunity—

that if a man washes dishes for \$12 a week, 12 hours a day with every other Sunday off, without knowing the language, and he can make it, anybody can."

It was not, of course, an overnight rags-to-riches story. Mardikian, realizing that he would never learn English washing dishes in a basement, moved on to Compton's cafeteria chain, took time out to serve as a steward aboard a ship on a round-the-world cruise, and came back with plans for his own restaurant in his mind.

He had, two years after his arrival, met Naz Ruzvanian at a choral concert in the YMCA. "I was very much taken with her," he says, but they weren't married until 1930. Partly, says George now, "because I was a stubborn Armenian. Although they tell me that in this country the girl's family pays for the wedding, in Armenia it is the reverse."

The Mardikians have been happily married ever since, and the only cloud on the horizon now is Naz Mardikian's health—she recently underwent surgery for lung cancer.

"The worst thing is," says George, "that she has been putting up with me for 46 years, and making me believe I am the rooster in the house, and now I realize that I am just a chicken alongside her outlook on life . . . she is one of the greatest girls in the world."

Their first home was near Lake Merritt in Oakland, where George opened the Compton's on Broadway at 13th. And, he recalls, "Joseph R. Knowland was one of my first customers.

"I have always had a very warm spot in my heart for Oakland, but I have always been concerned over the philosophy of Oakland people. They don't realize they have so much over us—weather-wise, and now you've got the port and you always had the railroads. There is room to expand, which we don't have in San Francisco.

"Between you and me, I have quite a considerable in-

vestment in Oakland, in property. People don't realize, they think this guy must be a nut, but I feel that some day there is going to be development there.

"You know, the fortunate part of my business is that I am never hungry for money and I have more patience than anybody else. I had a building over on Market Street for 37 years—hardly get enough from it to pay the taxes. Now the city has decided to build the UN park there, they brought BART right in front of my building, so everyone will come there. No, I didn't know anything about it, but just common sense will tell you.

"The only thing I am upset about is, they are paying over a million for that horrible monstrosity of a fountain—I am very conservative where art is concerned.

"But you see, the problem with many people, they invest their money in property and they want to become rich overnight. You don't do that. The reason I have been able to accumulate wealth is my faith in the future of my country, my city and the city next door.

"You know recently in your own paper was a story that they found the house where Herbert Hoover lived in Oakland? If nobody buys it, I want to buy it and restore it and give it to the city."

Herbert Hoover, because of his food relief work in the Near East, was quite naturally Mardikian's hero long before he came to the U.S. And he was, he says, "a Republican long before I became a citizen" because of this tie. It was Hoover, too, who proposed Mardikian for membership in the prestigious Bohemian Club and his own Grove encampment, Cave Man's. George's son, Haig, has now joined him in membership of the camp, which has to be among the best-fed at the Grove.

His interest in art has been, perhaps by osmosis, transmitted to his daughter, Anita, who is now building her own sculpture studio on Nob Hill. Her father's collection is an amalgam of old master's and modern Armenian painters,

whom he supports as he does any Armenian who is willing to work.

After World War II, he was responsible, through the American National Committee for Homeless Armenians, for bringing 21,000 displaced persons to this country and, he says proudly, "I bet you don't find 21 of them on the dole. Because I told them 'if you like to work, this is your country. If you don't, better stay where you are.' It isn't enough to dream, you know, you have to work in order to succeed."

Mardikian has worked hard for most of his 54 years in America. Now he takes it a little easier—though his table is always kept waiting at Omar Khayyam's, and he is often there to see how things are going, to meet old friends and to point out to children that he once washed dishes there, many years ago.

"When people tell me there is no more opportunity," he says, "I think they must be out of their minds."

**Mardikian is fondly remembered
by GI's as the man who tried to improve on army food during World War II and the Korean conflict**



GEORGE M. MARDIKIAN ENTERPRISES
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Honorable Gerald R. Ford
President of the United States
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