

MY FATHER

Ahmet Veli  
Ibrahim  
MENGER

SAFIYE IMRE



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## FOREWORD

"My Father with his unknown sides"

It is probably not one of the easiest things to accomplish to narrate a person's character, especially if this person is a very colourful man of outstanding talent who had lived through a very turbulent period of history.

This venture, I, his only living decent, am taking on to write could only be one sided and no more than an imperfect sketch, since I have only bits and pieces from his own memoirs that are hand written partially with old Turkish in which he has portrayed his own era mostly through commercial and political accounts and that the people that have known him have passed on one by one. Let it be bestowed.

My father Ahmet Veli Ibrahim Menger was born in 1891 according to his own statement but according to his birth certificate he was born in 1892 in the city of Petropavlovsk, very close to the northern border of today's Kazakhstan. His father's side is from the "Menger" Village which is a district of Kazan, the centre of the autonomous Republic of Tatarstan, and his mother's side is from the "Sababaşı" Village also tied to the Kazan Province. Tatarstan is a region that is between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains and according to the renowned Hungarian turcologist Rásonyi, its people were a peace loving community who had made their living with farming, hunting, fishing and bee keeping.

After Kazan, the centre of Tatarstan, was laid to waste in 1552 by "Ivan the Terrible" the people were forced to accept Christianity. Their ancestors, the Finno-Ugric peoples had mixed with the early Volga Bulgari who had settled here before them. The people who had accepted Christianity were rewarded with commission, position, title and land by the government. (Among them were for instance were, the renowned composers "Rahmaninov", "Rimski

Korsakov" and the famous authors "Aksakov", "Turgenyev", "Gogol" and ancestors of "Prince Yusupov" who had murdered "Rasputin".

There is even a plaintive book who had the names of the people who had accepted Christianity in alphabetical order: N.A. Baskokov: "Russian Families of Turkic origin"). Tatars use to call these people "Kryashens". They were stuck between being alienated by the Tatars and rejected by the Russians. Their lands were taken from them, their elite grew poor and turned to trade and industry. The ones who had refused to accept Christianity were drowned in the Volga, impaled or had their eyes scratched out. (Look: M. Engin/F. Agi – N. Devlet/ A. Akış: "Kazak ve Tatar Türkleri")

The title "Terrible" was given to the potential Tsar Ivan because of all these cruelties and even though the people had submitted, at heart they bared resentment and hatred towards the Russians and they still do today. Bosnian incidents of current day are a proof to the Slavic people's cruelty and brutality and can also be read in the Russian Classics. (Russian authors from Leo and Alexis Tolstoy to the contemporary author Soljenitsin speak of the Turkic people with contempt and hatred).

As a matter of fact, after the Orthodox Byzantine Empire was invaded by the Turks, the Russians had considered themselves to be the successors of Byzantium and wanted to be leaders of the Orthodox world. Tranny politics were continued by the following tsars especially during the times of "Crazy Petro" and in Kazan alone 453 mosques and madrasahs (Muslim educational institution) were burnt down and instead monasteries and churches were built. The Tatars weren't permitted to come 30km near Kazan and were even prohibited to carry any metal on them. While the Russian peasants were being worked like slaves bound to the land (serfdom) by the landlords, this practice wasn't exercised on the Turkic peoples. (Look: M. Engin/F. Agi – N. Devlet/ A. Akış: "Kazak ve Tatar Türkleri")

Even though there were numerous riots by the Turkic descendent tribes they didn't have an organized military organization, the riots were territorial and failed to have an impact. (Look: Andreas Kappeler "Russland als Vielvölkerreich" chronology)

At the end of the bloody Pugachev's Rebellion which started in 1773 and lasted for 5 years with much bloodshed, during a meeting between the "Anhalt" princes of Germanic decent Catherine II and Salavat Yulayev who had led the Bashkirs and the Tatars, when Catherine II had asked (relayed from my father's memoirs): "Pugachev's army are brigands, why are you allying with them?" Salavat had said: "We will always partake in any movement that is against the Russian government. We are 16 people here and we will all be put to death. But millions of Tatars and Bashkirs will live on and keep up the resistance. You have undermined our national and civil livelihood, destroyed our religious books and burnt down our mosques, schools and madrasahs. However, we have secretly acquired the books, thousands of us rewrote them by hand, and gave them out to our people. We will continue on in the same way".

Catherine II, recognising that tyranny wasn't going end with good results, had not only built a mosque in Kazan but also had the Quran printed and distributed. These people who had lost their freedom had found the salvation at fleeing towards the inlands of the neighbouring Bashkiria on the skirts of the Ural Mountains. (See: Andreas Kappeler "Russland als Vielvölkerreich" chronology). The habitants that made up the Volga tribes were minority groups, the Tatars were Muslim, the Mari, the Chuvashes and the Cheremiss (these tribes are actually from the Finno-Ugric ethnic group hence they are related to the Turkic peoples) had partially adopted Christianity and partially kept believing in the natural forces.

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Russia, the existing land was failing to feed its people due to the population explosion, and a migration movement to Siberia's very fertile inlands was initiated by the tsars at the head of Russia. Domestic animal herds and the wild animals' reserve, especially the abundance of sables had whet the Russians' appetite. However because the endless steppes had always quailed the Russians, the Tatars, who were relatively more civilised than the Kazaks, were sent forth to start the colonization process.

I don't know which of my father's grandfathers had migrated to Siberia, yet it is known to me that Muhammed Can Ibrahim had been settled in Petropavlovsk. My father was the thirteenth and the last child of Muhammed Can Ibrahim and

Aden Banu. I had heard from my father that one of our grandfathers had managed to live together with his seven daughter-in-laws and they all took turns in doing the laundry, the cooking, taking care of the children and once a week visiting their own families. Was this grandfather of ours Muhammed Can Ibrahim's father? And also, I don't know but, could it be that Uzun Şahin, (Tall Şahin) who was 2.06 meters tall and was said to have had caravans on the Silk Road between Turkistan and China, was his father? Had all thirteen of the children survive? Or had some of them die at a young age? I have no knowledge on this matter either. Heaven knows why, but I've never known my father to name all of his sisters either. He had two brothers. My Uncle Halil and Uncle Sabircan. When his eldest sister, Aunt Şeher Banu was pregnant to her first child, my grandmother was pregnant to my father. Among his elder sisters who were closer to his age, one's name is Hatice and the other's name is Ayni.

As much as my father had loved Uncle Halil who was his fourteen years senior, he had disliked and disregarded Uncle Sabircan. He was held in contempt by my father for the reasons that, Uncle Sabircan was a bigoted and narrow minded man who had married into a rich family and chose to live with his wife's parents. One of my father's remarks which he had always repeated was: "I am not squandering away no inheritance, alas instead of wasting away my father's assets I have worked for my own". According to what I have learned from my father's memoirs, my grandfather Muhammed Can Ibrahim was an educated man with wealth, who was exporting goods that he picked up from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to certain western countries like England, Italy and Germany, generally through Jewish brokers. However when father had turned twelve, with grandfather's death due to a severe rheumatism illness and the family's financial situation deteriorating seriously, the family affairs were taken up partly by his mother Mrs. Aden Banu and partly by Uncle Halil. Uncle Halil had done timber transportation from the forest and Adnen Banu had tried to educate the crowd of children with quite the authority. In the worst of times she would skim the grease off the cooked food, store them in a barrel outside and sell it to the soap maker to make soap with, who used to come once a year.



*His brother Halil Ibrahim*



*His brother Sabircan Ibrahim*

She had also, from time to time, earned one polushka (one-quarter kopeck) per bottle from the vinegar she would make. My father used to tell these incidents about Mrs. Aden Banu's authoritarian ways:

When Uncle Halil's eldest daughter Eşref was seven years old, she was leaning over the upstairs window, she lost her balance and fell. Her long skirts had tangled up in the tree and she was left suspended in mid-air. As she was falling, she had knocked over her grandmother's geraniums on the window seal and cried out: "Oh No... Grandma's geraniums!"

As I will keep telling in due course, if my father was to return after the hour that was allowed by grandmother from his fellowship activities that he would undertake, he would find the front door locked and would have had to sleep the night in the barn.

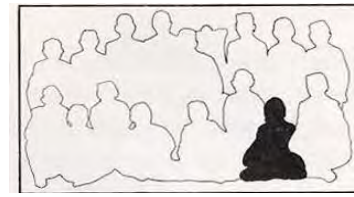
My father hadn't known Russian in his childhood but with the help of the students who were fellowship members and were attending the Russian Gymnasium, he had learnt Russian and read all the Russian Classics in bed, with candle light, under the covers. My grandmother would get terribly upset at this and reprimand: "You will end up an infidel".



*His teacher and friends at Usul Kadim School*



They had sent my father to a "Usul Kadim" school. Because he was a clever child he had learnt the lessons of Islamic Law and the Quran, which he was studying with boys who were 7-8 years his senior, very fast. Realizing that these lessons were neither informative enough nor contemporarily adequate, he had run away from home to attend Mektebi Sultani of the day, today's Galatasaray High school, in Istanbul with two of his friends. He was taken in at Odessa and returned to Petropavlovsk and after that his family thought that it would be better for him not to continue school and put him to work at his brother's store as an apprentice. (It is possible that his brother had strongly influenced this decision). There is a story from his school memories of the teacher explaining what puberty is, which he used to always tell with laugh: He had asked "So Sir, can I get married when I reach puberty?" The teacher had given out a laugh, spanked him on the head with his glasses and said "You obviously must have *taz*" (Taz was a hair sickness, and among the people it was said that kids with *taz* would be smart).



Round about the same times when Uncle Halil was going to ask for a girl's hand in marriage, my father had taken the horses reins. They had let my Uncle Halil see my aunt-in-law to be, through the mirror of the dressing table while she was brushing her hair. My father had cared greatly for Rabia. In those days they used to shave children's heads with a straight razor just like they do nowadays in Anatolia. My father's head, having caught a disease from the open razor, would always be covered with scars and pus and his hair wouldn't grow. Tatars had called this sickness "taz". A German doctor from the city had advised for my father's head to be washed with soft soap every day and to cut any hair that would grow with scissors also daily. While none of his sisters were willing to take up this treatment, his aunt-in-law Rabia would wash the child's head every day and cut his hair. My grandmother, behaving just like a mother-in-law, would give only one bar of soap to Rabia to wash the heap of laundry of the crowded family and my father would secretly go and buy soap with the money that Rabia would stealthily force into his hand.

My father was one of the atypical men who loved children. Indeed, my father had spoiled rotten the five daughters and the one son that Uncle Halil and Rabia had, and there are photographs of them looking like a bunch of grapes

with one child on my father's head, another over his shoulder and yet another one on his lap. Just as their sister Eşref was learning to talk for the first time they had starting calling my father by the nickname "Big Brother Aput". He favoured and loved Emine and the youngest of them Şamil more among the children because they resembled their mother most. Eşref was a mischief-maker who enjoyed making fun of her younger sisters and brothers. One day when she had infuriated Emine, Emine had said "you are a pig".

Upon this, my father had gathered all the children up and took them to a Russian pig farm showed the pigs dwelling in mud and had said: " How can you call you sister a pig, this is what a pig is". On another day, when Eşref was driving Emine mad, she had said: "Big Brother Aput doesn't permit it but even though he doesn't, I am saying it again: you're the pig of a pig of a pig..." Rabia had nine children altogether, of whom three had died and six had lived. When she was pregnant to her seventh child, she had tried to have a miscarriage in a nonclinical manner and had paid for this attempt with her own life. On her death bed she had called on my father and had said: "Veli, I entrust my children to your care". And so, father had taken them all under his wing, sent them all to study at foreign colleges (English), and Şamil was sent to California Berkeley University for his education.



While he was in school he used to sell pencils, notebooks, erasers and things alike to his friends and hand his earnings over to his mother. In the time he had left over from school he would go around houses and sell needles, thread, elastic bands and buttons to women and again he would bring his earnings to his mother. So, when my father had started his apprenticeship at the shop, his mother had given the 400 gold roubles that was saved this way to his brothers and had said: "here is the money for Veli's share". My father used to sleep on a blanket that was laid under the counters. While the Ibrahimoff brother's shop was at "Mevlut"

village about 40 km from Kızılyar, later the shop was moved to the station to cater to the people who were migrating to Siberia by the wagons. A bakery was also built just for the emigrants. In 1909, after his older brother Sabircan had gotten married, Uncle Halil and my father had spilt up from the shop and devoted themselves only to providing goods to foreign companies. The goods collected were fur, leather, fleece wool and tea. In any case, in Russia all store of grain, fur, leather, wool and egg trade was solely in the hands of the Turks, Bashkirs and Kazaks. In those days foreigners (meaning Russians) couldn't enter into Kazakhstan especially to Chinese Turkistan (East Turkistan). However, Bank Managers were partially foreigners.



*While working Stucken&Co*

In the fall of 1938, I had met Signor Rizzi in the city of "Innsbruck" of Austria who was staying at Milano and an employee at the fur manufacturing firm "Pachetti". It turns out that he was the man whom my father had worked with in those day, they had even gone swimming together with their bicycles to the Ishim River.

Even though my father had generated a satisfactory benefit from his comings and goings to buy goods from fairs organized at various regions, he had seen that these activities weren't going to get him far. Contrary to all his elder's advises, my father had started to work with the "Stucken & Co." firm located at the city of Bremen of Central Germany who were gathering wool and had a wide spread organization in Russia and even in Mongolia. When he was yet twenty two he was given a general power of attorney from Stucken and sent to Mongolia to buy goods, and he had learned how to work systematically, through planning and with discipline from the Germans. It is written in his

memoirs that he had received a hefty success bonus besides his salary. Today, Stucken firm supplies fleece wool from South Africa and works with Altinyıldız / Boynerler in Turkey. Interestingly enough, two years ago, a member of this family had called on us to see if there was any venture that we could work together on.

Tatars couldn't get married with Russians as to protect their sole identity and religion. If one was to marry a Russian, he/she would be banned from the community and all communication would be forbidden. In some families even the only son of the family was dismissed from the family for marrying a Russian girl. The aforementioned Prof. Dr. Laszlo Raşonyi's work "Tarihte Türklük" (Turks in history) praises the Tatar women's chastity and their loyalty to their families. On the other hand, it is known that the Russian peoples' procreative ethics, who had come to our country with intent to do suitcase trading that we observe in the Black Sea Region, are not nearly as austere.

From the 1860s on, but especially in 1905, after the proclamation of Constitutionalism in Russia it is known that Tatars got organized in youth groups and unions, and held theatrical plays, folk dances, concerts, political discussions, conferences and propaganda activities in secrecy with the hope of retrieving their own independence. Despite the fact that the Moscow Administration had recommended against heavy oppression on the Tatars in those days, local administrations had continued on with the tyranny. The pecuniary resource for the bribes that were necessary for the unions to continue with their activities and for the local administrators to keep quiet were provided by the Tatar, Bashkir and Kazak merchants. I know that my father had also been active in these organizations probably since he was sixteen years old. For that matter, in those days even the girls who were attending the Gymnasiums used to work at these unions. Among those girls was a young girl by the name Safiye whom my father had admired. After my father's death, I found an enlarged photograph of this girl when I was going through his records. However, my father having had a madrassa education had not deemed her worthy because she was attending the Gymnasium. It could be possible that he named me as a dedication to her.

There was the "Tercümai Hakikat" newspaper that Kırımlı İsmail Gaspıralı had started in those days, which addressed the Turkic tribes with the slogan "Unity in speech, in thought and in principle" written with a Turkish dialect that was



understandable by all and he had assisted in the paper to be read at the Russian unions and for the suggested ideals within to spread. And even so, with the thought that the Muslim religious scholars were teaching a false Islam to the simple minded folks, I have heard that he had the imams (Muslim priests) memorize the sermons and preachings written by Manastırlı İsmail Hakkı, who was known to be an intellectual with progressive thoughts in the Ottoman Empire, and explain them in Tatar after the Friday prayers.

In 1917 with the collapse of tsardom and Lenin's promise of liberty to all people, hope of freedom was born for the Turkic tribes who had suffered under Russian subjugation for hundreds of years. So, it really shouldn't be surprising to see that there were Tatars who had helped the communists. Subsequently after Stalin had banished all his rivals, in this case Trotsky and Lenin, and sent millions of people (According to Western Historians 25 million) to forced labour camps as if to their deaths, people had woken up but the iron curtain descending on Russia had cut all communications with foreign countries (Works of Solzhenitsyn).

In 1917, with the break out of Communism in Russia and the Red Guard being out of the White Guard's (Kolchak) way, we know that my father had mediated in the transport of the food help from the Americans to the White Guard.



*Engagement Photo*

When he had gone for duty to Mongolia's neighbour Manchuria in 1923, he had met my mother Ayşe Satılgan and they had gotten engaged. When my mother's younger brother Hasancan Satılgan was in the final year of the Russian Gymnasium, he was directly taken into the army and the family had moved to the Far East along with the withdrawing White Russian Army. At that time, my mother was nineteen and her youngest sibling was around three years old. My mother Ayşe Satılgan was the second child of the six children that İmülhan Satılgan and his wife Mahperver had. Her father was in the grain and egg trade business with his two brothers Kahir and Cihangir at "Bırsk" which is situated about 70km from "Ufa" which is the centre of Bashkortostan.

The ancestors of this family must have been from among the people who had fled from Kazan to Bashkortostan during the times of "Ivan the Terrible". My mother's mom had grown up on a farm along one of Volga's tributaries, the Aq İtil? Belaya? Akidil?. When my grandfather was looking to choose a wife for himself, at the farm, sitting as though a stableman at the head of a phaeton, he had admired my grandmother and asked for her hand in marriage. My grandfather's house was the most impressing house in Bırsk with its electricity and a modern toilet. It was a luxurious house decorated with furnishings from Vienna.



*The house my mother grew up in*





*The first staff at the Tientsin office*



*Ali Ibrahim*

*Interns*

*Ishak Arslan*

Later on when my father had returned to Russia for business, because of the help he had given to the White Russians, he was imprisoned by the communists. He did run away on horseback with the help he had received from a Tatar guard and even though there was an organised chase after him he had managed to escape. When he was in the business of purchasing goods at Mongolia and Eastern Turkistan he had become a very good rider having travelled these lands thoroughly on horseback. As the uprising in Russia had hindered all types of commercial activity, it had also cut off my father's ties with Stucken.

When he had arrived at the city of Vladivostok, as he was playing with the single dollar that he had in his pocket he had seen a shoe polisher and had said to himself: "a merchant is as much as the money he possesses and all you can be with this single dollar in your pocket is a shoe polisher like his one".

With that thought in his mind, he had made himself a promise that if he was ever to get married and have children, he would make certain to provide a higher education for both his daughters and sons to be, and that he would commit himself to make this happen regardless of the sacrifices it would take.

In the meantime my mother had waited for her betrothed with no news for two years. Finally on April 27<sup>th</sup> 1925, my father and my mother had gotten married in front of a crowd of Tatar guests in Manchuria. During the marriage ceremony my grandfather had said: "My daughter; you be compliant, and son; you be compassionate". My father had really liked this statement and used it later in the ceremonies he had performed.

On May 26<sup>th</sup> when they had arrived at the city of Tientsin in China my father had 200 dollars on him (1 Chinese dollar = 25 US cents). He had started doing business with the money left over after depositing 120 dollars to the motel. In those days there were only five or six Tatar families all together in Tientsin. Tientsin was a city on flat lands by a river reaching the sea, with a population of a million. The city districts were governed as concession zones by countries like England, France and Belgium. There were many Jewish merchants who had fled Russia, and English who generally had the control of the banks. The language spoken in the city besides the Russian of the Russian refugees was English. In 1927, when I was born, we were living in a house on "Rue de Pasteur" in the French concession territory. As far as I remember our house was a part of an



attached building which was made up of shapeless bricks. Our house was a dormitory for teenagers from ages 15 to 20 with the ground floor used as storage-rooms, the upstairs for living and office space, and the attic was used to train fleece wool and fur experts. One of these was Ishak Arslan, the other one's names that I can still remember are Abbas and Vaiz Suleymanoff, Ali and Hasan Ibrahimoff and Alimcan.

When my father used to go to Moscow frequently for business in his younger years, he would never miss the opera and ballet performances. He used to also love Western music. He would hum "The Gypsy Baron" and "Princess Czardas" when he used to swing the hammock that was set up at the door of my nursery.

Because he had worked for the freedom of Tatars and it was known that he had made a name for himself with these endeavours, he was chosen as the spiritual leader and the head of the General Assembly of the Tartars who were living as refugees in the Far East (Only in Japan, there were 25.000 to 30.000). Unfortunately the Assembly was able to meet only once in the Mukden city of Manchuria. China, Manchuria, Japan and even Mongolia had all sent representatives to the Assembly and they had taken decisions on matters of schooling, youth education and many more political matters that I don't know about. In this respect I know that it was also published in the "Milli Bayrak" newspaper in the Tatar language. On another note, I also remember that a big package was sent to my father by Reşit Rahmeti Arat, Professor of the Turkology Department of Istanbul University, containing the Turkish Alphabet.

Prof. Reşit Rahmeti had graduated from the Turkology Department of Berlin University and he was one of the most renowned turkologists of his time. We owe the translation of "Kudadgu Bilig" (Wisdom of Royal Glory) to him. He was also a relative



*Prof. Dr. Reşit Rahmeti Arat*

of my father's brother's wife and he was from the village of "Eski Ucum" which neighbours Menger village.

Because my father had attended a madrasah (Muslim theological school), his knowledge of theology and the Quran were strong. I know that he had performed marriages, divorces and funeral prayers as well as Friday and Religious days' prayers.

My father's business which was just beginning to grow also got hit during the Great Depression of 1930-1932 and he went bankrupt. In those days we were living again in a French concession territory, on "Rue de Vedun". Same as before, there were storage rooms in the courtyard and living quarters and work areas were all in the same building. When father used to come home for lunch, he would put a gold coin shaped chocolate over his eye like a monocle and of course because there was no way I could reach it, he would pick me up in the air, let me get my chocolate and then sit on an armchair and say: "come on, come here" and sit me on his lap. When he used to go to the barbers shop he would take me along as well. Going to the barbers shop with the pull trolley and getting my hair cut and shampooed was a real change for me. We would go to the second story of the shop that we know as "Kaufhaus" today. There, at the toy section when he'd say: "choose which ever you like", having known how to read and write since the age of four, I would first look at all the prices on the dolls and I wouldn't choose any that was priced over 6 dollars (6 Chinese dollars in those days was 1.50 US dollar) and my father used to like this habit of mine. When I had started school and would bring home a good grade he used say: "You have made me an inch taller today" with pride.

In 1932, because the times were hard we hadn't been able to go to the summer house but instead we had gone to my aunt's house at the city of "Hailar" near the Mongolian border with my mother. Because I had caught chronic dysentery when I was a child I wasn't allowed to eat many things. During a country side outing, after having eaten some wild berries that my friends were eating I had gotten a severe diarrhoea and had almost died. My father wasn't able to get any news from us because of a big flood disaster near Hailar which had cut all communications (telephone, telegraph, railways). Finally, at the end of my sickness which lasted for about a month, when we met again in the city of Harbin, I remember my father had said: "Eat my daughter, eat anything your little heart desires", and that I had eaten a peach.

Because our financial situation was shook up, my mother used to use my father's old striped shirts to make dresses for me. While I would wear them with pride and tell everyone that the dress I was wearing was actually my father's shirt, my mother would blush from colour to colour.

My father was working with the American "Chase Manhattan Bank" and "First National City Bank of New York" and because he had been able to create a good standing with them, he managed to recuperate with their help. My father used to work export oriented. He was selling fleece wool to "Karagözyanlar" who were carpet manufacturers of Armenian origin who had gone to America from Turkey, and he was sending camel hair, and natural silver fox and goat skins that he would procure from Mongolia to the "Liddle Brothers" firm in England.

Behind every war, there lays the real economic motives. The German industry had become much stronger even though they had lost in the World War I and had lost all of its colonies in Africa. England and France had had fully exploited their colonies and had gotten so used to lording and living in languor that they could no longer compete with the Germans. When Hitler came to power, having seen that the world was on the verge of yet another war, my father had enrolled me in a German school in 1935, even though he had been preparing me for a French school. Because he thought that only the Germans could deal with the Russians (Russians had always been timid against and even afraid of the Germans) and with the hope that Russia would disband in the hands of the Germans, this time he had started collaborating with the "Melchers & Co." firm which was centred in Bremen and had a wide organization in China. At that time my father had 43 purchasing offices in China, Manchuria, Mongolia and Chinese Turkistan and 3 of these were fleece wool washing plants.

In 1931 the Japanese had landed soldiers in Manchuria and in the summer of 1937 they had started to invade China. Upon our untimely return from our summer home we had found that the neighbourhood around the Tientsin rail station was destroyed from the bombings. Meanwhile we had moved to a larger estate in "Falkland Villas" which was an English concession territory and because the office was in a separate building my father ended up having a car and a driver. We also had new furniture ordered and a new carpet made for the living room.

My father had become a member at the "Race Course-Club" with the intention of getting in touch and keeping good relations with bank Managers and kept up

with the horse races, he even owned a horse. On the other hand he kept going to the "Bridge Club" which brought together the merchants.

In 1936, when Stalin was reviving the old traditional Russian politics, closing down all mosques, schools and exercising policies of mass annihilation on people who were of different ethnicities, I remember my father sitting up all night by the radio listening to hear the names of the people who were sentenced to death or to exile (Among these were also two Mio Tatars).

Were the Japanese planning on state monopolizing all foreign trade when they were annexing Manchuria and China? I don't know. However, while it was becoming more and more difficult to do trade, we were also hearing that everyday some merchant or another was been taken in by the Japanese for questioning. Thereupon my father had liquidated all his work in a very short time and with the "Nansen" (United Nations high commissioner for refugees) passport which Melcher's had provided for him, on Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> 1938 had left China with mother and I.



*The photograph on the passport*

The Republic of Turkey was the single Turkic state in all of history that was able to protect its independence. Father, being afraid of us wasting away and disappearing in multitudes of foreigners, thinking especially of my future, had us travel over Japan and Amerika to Germany and had applied for our visas at the Turkish Embassy in Berlin.

Our application was left impeded. As there was no positive or negative answer, I was enrolled in an all-girls school in Berlin. Right before the war, all food in Germany was rationed, you couldn't purchase any fruits, vegetables or even bread without a rations card. Furthermore because Germany was blockaded by the allies they were deprived of all raw materials as well. As an alternative to China, Melchers had proposed to my father to start up a business in Baghdad with the purpose of providing fleece wool for the German army. In the fall of 1938, Ishak Arslan who was one of the young man that my father had trained as an expert on fleece wool, married my uncle's youngest daughter Reşide and in the beginning on 1939 was sent to Baghdad.

The application that we've had at the Turkish Embassy had finally gone through towards the end of 1938 and we arrived at Sirkeci, Turkey on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1939. The business in Baghdad hadn't had the expected outcome due to the breaking out the World War II in September of 1939. The English and the Americans had put an embargo on All German capital funds and my father's existing funds were also blocked off and he was put on the black list. Melchers used to have a brother company in the city of "Luzern" in Switzerland called "Ulrich Meyer & Söhne". To compensate for some of the damage he had taken on from working with the Germans in Baghdad and because they knew him to be trustworthy, Melcher had appointed my father as the general manager and a shareholder of the Ulrich Meyer Company.

It was extremely difficult to conduct business in a Europe that was under bombardment. My father was trying to sell anything from cigarette rolling papers to lemons to countries that were going through privation. Many a times my mother and I would be left alone in Istanbul for seven-eight months at a time and these long breaks with no news from my father were very sorrowful times for my sensitive mother since we had no relatives or close friends. We



managed to live on the money that my father was able to retrieve from China and the sporadic business he had with Ulrich Meyer for about nine years.

In those days my father had a two room office in the Assikurazioni General Building (today, Umum Sigorta) on Bankalar Road. I know that in those days he used to dispatch sheep skin to Signor Rizzo on behalf of the Pachetti firm in Milano and he had also imported "TKD" brand radios, I think from Czechoslovakia.

During the war, when my father was the general manager at Ulrich Meyer in Switzerland, he used to send relief-packages containing food to his friends working at Melchers through the Red Cross. Mr Karl Lindemann who was the head of the Executive Board of Melchers and also a member to some of the leading businesses of that time; "Norddeutscher Lloyd", "Faber-Castelle", "SKF" and "Otto Wolf" had great respect for my father.

Previously, at the beginning of the war when the German armies were advancing in Russia, we used to follow the line of troops with flags on a map at home like it was done in many other homes. Everyone had believed that the Russians would fall. In the meantime, there were meetings held at our house to gather together the Turkic origin soldiers who had fallen prisoner to Germans, from Germany's "Mittenwald" town - there were other centres as well - with the hope of liberty and to drive them as an army against the Russians, and my father was personally engaged in the organization of this. Meetings would be organised at our house with the participations of Cafer Seydahmet, Ayaz Ishaki, Zeki Velidi Togan, Reşit Rahmeti Arat and Fuat Kazak who were at the head of the anti-communist organizations on the outside and names like Mustafa Çokayoğlu, Sayit Şamil, Resulzade, Haydar Bamat, Alimcan Idrisi ve Edige Kırimal would be mentioned at those meetings. I know that Crimean "Emel", Tatar "Yeni Milli Yol", Turkmen



*Cafer Seyd Ahmet Kirimer*

"Genç Turkistan" "Şimali Kafkasya" and "Kurtuluş" journals were printed and read (See: Patrick von Zur Mühlen "Zwischen Hakenkreuz und Sovietstern")

With the Germans having lost the war, all dreams were gone and the daily struggles and the obligations of making a living had risen. My father who had freely gone in to the German Foreign Affairs Ministry for the organization of the soldiers of Turkic origin who had fallen prisoner to the Germans in the past, this time had gained the friendship of Woodrow Wilson who was the General of the American Expeditionary Forces. According to my father, Wilson used to say that the only way to beat the Germans was through getting them used to luxury consumption and fast living. Indeed, after World War II, a moral decline had begun in Germany.

Mr Lindemann, who was put on trial in Nurnberg but set free after five years when found innocent of the charges, had mediated the representations of industrial corporations of the depressed German Industry such as Bosch, Mercedes, VDO, Rud Kettentabrik, Kaelble and Gmeinder to my father for gratitude for the help that he had given to Melchers during the years of war and because he knew my father as an honest merchant from his enterprises in China.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> 1948, which was my twenty-first birthday, I had acted as interpreter at my father's dinner meeting with Mercedes-Benz representative Mr Becker and Robert Bosch representative Mr Karl Zehender, even though that evening I had plans to go to an entertainment at the community centre with my betrothed Izzet. When my father had said "Stay where you are", I had no choice but to stay.

By the summer of the same year we had gained the representation of both companies. This time the office



*Karl Lindemann*

was moved to Kalmis Apartment Building on the Taksim Square. However my father's capital funds were still blocked by the Americans and funds were especially needed to get the Mercedes Agency organized. My father had left what was owed to him to Melchers employee Mr Clause's discretion whom he had known in China and had great respect for, and having taken some money



*Taksim, the office at the Kalmis Apt. Building*

from Melchers he left Ulrich Meyer in 1951 to fulfil Mercedes's ever present excessive demands. (I have learned after my father's death that Melchers still owed him some money from China). Furthermore, he had made Engineer Dr. Fuat Kazak partner, who was originally a wealthy Kazan who had fallen a refugee.



*Dr. Fuat Kazak*

Around this time the aforementioned Prof. Reşit Rahmeti, whom my father had great love and respect for, had asked for financial support from my father for the establishing of "Research Centre of Turkish Culture" and the "Kazan" journal. However my father was having a hard time making both ends meet while he was trying to meet the German's excessive demands and he wasn't able fulfil Rahmeti's request. Rahmeti had died unexpectedly and my father had always regretted not being able help him. "Research Centre of Turkish Culture" was being aided



with presidential funds but during Bülent Ecevit's time this fund was cut off. Thereafter, for the continuation of the institute's activities and to aid the Tatar associations both in Istanbul and Ankara my father had wanted to establish a foundation, but he hadn't been able to get the foundation excepted as a tax free establishment because it wasn't considered to be in the interest of the public welfare. Our company's income wasn't sufficient enough to supply the physical resources needed hence his wish wasn't fulfilled.



*Ishak Arslan*

At the end of World War II, after Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill's Yalta Conference, the Balkans and Turkey was left to the Russians as zones of occupation. Because my father was sure that foreigners would not give up Turkey to protect their own interests, he tried to convince the Germans to make substantial investments in Turkey. This effort that had started in 1958 gave positive results with the help of my husband Dr Izzet Emre, Dr Fuat Kazak who died in 1984 and Ishak Arslan whom we have lost in 1991 and "Otomarsan Bus and Motorized Vehicles" was established in 1967 and "Robert Bosh Motorized Vehicles Sub-Industry" was established in 1970.

The piece of land that Mercedes-Benz Turk is still situated on, was bought by my father for a factory to manufacture Bosh appliances. Bosh was hesitant in making final decisions and for the sake of not losing time, without a signed agreement with Mercedes, Otomarsan's core building was built on this land by Dr Fuat Kazak and two German engineers were assigned to construct the bus to be manufactured. Having brought in the largest turnover after the war my father had gained great respectability from the Germans, but as they got more and more spoiled my father had lost some of this respect and got very disappointed and vexed with them.

In 1950, when the communist movement and mass executions, as in Russia, had started in China under the leadership of Mao Tse Tung, the Tatar refugees

in Manchuria and China had started to migrate to Turkey. In 1956, my father had bought a farm in a Silivri district of Thrace with the purpose of helping these refugees with shelter and jobs. His thought was to establish a refugee camp here with the support of the World Council of Churches Migrant Protection Association. However he wasn't able to convince the Council to build a refugee camp here, most probably because there were Muslim refugees in question. (My personal view on this matter is that the money that was put in this farm was an ill-judged investment. Because, my father who wasn't knowledgeable on agriculture and husbandry had lost a great deal of money because of the ill advises and wrong implementations of veterinarians and agriculturalist wannabees). Especially, the workers move to unionise after Bülent Ecevit's slogan: "Water is yours if you'd use, earth is yours if you'd cultivate it" had brought some trouble on us.

At the farm, the intent was to breed milking cows with the breeding cows brought at first from Europe then subsequently from the United States and success was achieved at the Thrace and Adapazarı regions with these cows and if you ask me, at least with this aspect the realization of an ideal was aided.

Among the friends that my father had made in Turkey were Feridun Cemal Erkin and Kazım Taşkent who had spent some time at the embassies in Berlin, Moscow and Tokyo. In those days Kazım Taşkent was busy with the establishing of a bank that would serve the whole Turkish world of trade with the slogan; "There are no limits to service". With this cognizance he had established Yapı Kredi Bank and my father had joined the founding partners. The type of bank that Mr. Kazım had envisioned had continued until the days of Muzaffer Özsoy and Oğuz Karahan, subsequently had come under the domination of one family and we had sold our shares.



*Together with Mr Hans and Dr Izzet Imre on his 80th birthday*

When my father was around 65 years old, he was a broad built man with a height of 1.79m. weighing about 100kg., he had dark brown hair, leaden eyes and quite fair skin. Regardless of the amount of time he'd spend in the sun, there would be no trace of any sun burn the next day, he wouldn't get the slightest bit darker.

During World War I, he was exempted from the Tsarist Army because he did not comply with their norms (he was too heavy) and because he was performing a duty with strategic importance.

He had loved my mother dearly. When I was eight years old, mother was taken to the hospital with a heavy bleeding and had to go through surgery and half of my father's hair had gone white within that week.

My father was a humble man in his private life, he was restrained with his eating and drinking. He would always say a prayer to God for the food received (Allah'u ekber elhamdüllillah, çok şükür) and then thank his wife for the cooking, and he never complained about the food even if it was tasteless.

However he did prefer meat dishes and used to say: "I am not a cow, cows eat green stuff".

He would never forget his own and my mother's birthdays or their wedding anniversary and had always celebrated them at home. He would sing the Tatar national songs with his quite good voice and my mother would accompany him on the piano. When the clock would show 12 he would chant a song: "We ate, we drank, we had fun, we laughed and now time has come to leave". My father who hadn't had a sip of alcohol until he was twenty nine years old, would never get drunk despite the amount of alcohol he would have and with a series of sneezes the remnants of alcohol would diminish altogether.

He smoked cigars, the living rooms of the house and the office were, as in a coffee house, always covered with a veil smoke.

My father would never keep his troubles all to himself, he would share them with mother and get her support. He used to say: "You'll die from hiding your troubles, you'll go bankrupt from denying your debt" as well as: "love and respect start with family, strangers will come and go but family members are bound together".

But when he used to travel abroad, in accordance with his position he would stay at the most luxurious hotels, eat at the best restaurants and without fail he would request Mercedes to assign a car and driver for him.

He loved entertaining guests. He would generally entertain acquaintances outside and his friends at home with nothing missing from the table. He was a man of moral character who was generous when giving gifts and always helpful to people in their times of trouble. He also had helped with the schooling of many students.

He was a man of great authority and he had always been proud of his gleaming fame and clean reputation. He couldn't stand unprofessionalism at work and in the office, he'd say a thing once and it would drive him mad if he'd have to say it a second time. He had no patience for talking loud, especially yelling in the office and there have had been times he had reproved our partner Engineer Dr Fuat Kazak who had high blood pressure and could be hot blooded at times.

Even though he'd had a religious education, he'd never been narrow minded or bigoted, above all he was hostile towards religious orders because they were

deceiving people for their own benefits and because he believed that there could be no broker between God and man in the Muslim religion.

He hadn't been a member to any club, nor had he given support to any party in Turkey. In his last days, he had been very homesick, he had hoped to go back to Russia one day and when his head was starting to get foggy he had taken many trips to the Russian Embassy and Consulate to acquire Tatar folklore films and books.

German doctors had found him to be overweight and because they were attributing his heart spasms to this, they had prepared a radical diet. My father had lost 10kg with this diet but it was discovered that he had diabetes.

His endeavours were limited from one chair to the next between the house and the office. He had ended up with arthritis of the knee due to his immobility and walking had become a torment for him. He had a pacemaker put in three times in Germany for his heart spasms. Because he couldn't move around much he had given himself to reading and had put great efforts into acquiring all books or at least photocopies on Turkishness from all world libraries. (After my father's death, I have sent this collection of books to the "Research Institute of Turkish Culture")

Unfortunately, the cataract that he had in his eyes had gotten worse with his diabetes and when the cataract operation done in Germany had failed, he had also been deprived of his beloved books. In his last two years, it was as if he'd closed all shutters to the world, showing no interest towards neither music nor the news, not recognizing even the dearest of his friends. Having seen and known my father as a magnificent character, to witness his helplessness was very a heart breaking time for me.

My father died with peace and tranquillity on the eve of the Muslim festival of sacrifices on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1978, one month before he would have turned 87.

But sadly, he hadn't been able to witness the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. If he'd lived to see this incident he would have gone to the place where he was born and homesick for and having taken his dear doctor Mahmut Alukay with him.

Anyone who has read this booklet should have understood that, my father wasn't a man who had made his trading profit for his own or for his family's

welfare but foremost he had strived for the recognition of the culture of his people so that they wouldn't be lost in history, and even though it was a far possibility for their freedom.

Safiye Imre

Istanbul, May 1993