

“Niagara Falls 1912”

2010. Mixed Media Painting. 40”w x 30”h.

David Feinberg and Beth Warner, granddaughter of Armenian genocide survivors, together with artists Bonnie Brabson, Chris Charbonneau, Joni Christenson, Sarah Hiatt, Tena Patterson, Rowan Pope, and Michael Zittlow.

Beth Warner’s grandmother, Anna Dardarian, was an 11-year-old girl in a Syrian refugee camp when she saw her mother for the last time. Surrounded by her sick children and ailing from disease herself, Anna’s mother had no choice but to accept what little money a Syrian family offered her in exchange for her daughter. After weeks of marching in the desert as part of the Armenian genocide, barely surviving and experiencing horrific atrocities, the family had little hope. For Anna, the exchange meant that she would live. Anna would go on to live a life marked by a strong dedication to family, her memories respectfully honoring those that were left behind in the camp in Syria, and those whom had already become casualties of the Armenian genocide.

In 1965, Anna shared some of her memories and experiences as a survivor of the Armenian genocide into a tape recorder at the urging of her family members. In this testimony, Anna speaks of her own grandmother, who explained to her grandchildren that although there are many kinds of people in the world, “they’re all human beings.” Beth Warner says that her grandmother came from this same place of tolerance when telling her grandchildren stories of the past. To Beth, Anna Dardarian is remembered as a woman who possessed a pervasive kindness and sense of humor, tremendous wisdom, and a fierce love for her family members and friends.

Before reaching Syria, Anna’s family had undergone unimaginable brutalities. They were driven from their peaceful home to a life of endless trekking through the desert, a time defined by loss. After days of marching, Anna’s mother asked her to carry her little sister on her back. As their passage progressed, Anna felt her sister become heavier and heavier. When they reached a place to stay for the night, Anna discovered that her sister had died.

In 1921, at the age of 17 and alone, Anna traveled to the United States. In her tape recording, she talks of her overwhelming feelings of hope upon first seeing the Statue of Liberty. As Niagara Falls 1912 communicates, the statue remains a symbol of light and hope to Beth’s family, a turning point that brought light to a dark journey. Illustrating the link from the past to the present is the image of the Armenian genocide monument* inserted into Lady Liberty’s crown. Growing up in Armenia, Anna’s family had a prominent last name, a name that put them at the top of the list for removal at the time of the genocide. Because of this, they temporarily changed their name to Balimian, meaning beekeeper. In the painting, a beehive signifying this family name history covers the torch’s flame and how although hidden, the family’s hope and spirit for survival burned strong. This theme is carried on in the circular links that lay on the upper left hand corner of the

painting, a drawing by Beth herself of the bracelet her grandmother Anna would frequently wear. To Beth, these shapes, similar to that of a honeycomb in a beehive, serve as metaphor for the interconnectedness of the Armenian people, culture, community and the journey of the Armenian genocide.

Anna made a life for herself in Niagara Falls, New York, marrying Leo Dardarian and owning and operating Louis Restaurant, a tourist favorite. Clippings from the menu of the restaurant can be found at the bottom of the painting. Beth Warner's piece at once represents a painful past, a loving present and honors the legacy of a family's journey.

*Tsitsernakaberd, the memorial for victims of the Armenian Genocide, began construction in 1965 and was completed in 1968. It is located on a hill overlooking Yerevan, Armenia. Every year on April 24th, hundreds of thousands of Armenians travel to the site to honor those who lost their lives in the genocide of 1915.