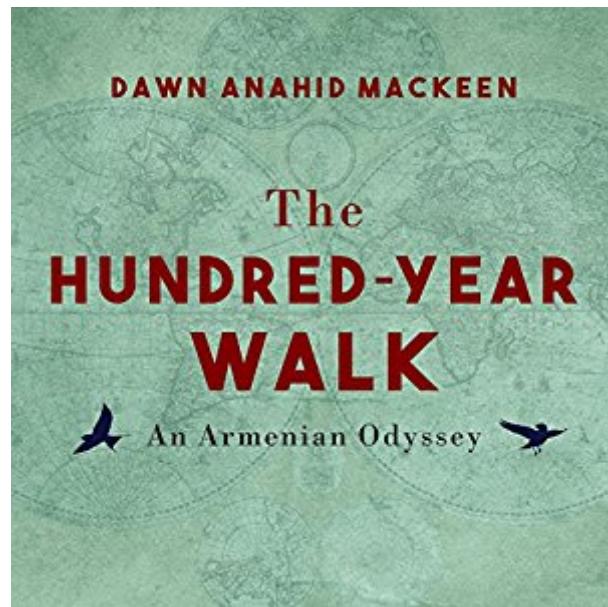


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# The Hundred-Year Walk: An Armenian Odyssey



## **Synopsis**

In the heart of the Ottoman Empire as World War I rages, Stepan Miskjian's world becomes undone. He is separated from his family as they are swept up in the government's mass deportation of Armenians into internment camps. Gradually realizing the unthinkable - that they are all being driven to their deaths - he fights, through starvation and thirst, not to lose hope. Just before killing squads slaughter his caravan during a forced desert march, Stepan manages to escape, making a perilous six-day trek to the Euphrates River. In his desperate bid for survival, Stepan dons disguises, outmaneuvers gendarmes, and, when he least expects it, encounters the miraculous kindness of strangers. The Hundred-Year Walk alternates between Stepan's saga and another journey that takes place a century later, after his family discovers his long-lost journals. Reading this rare firsthand account, his granddaughter, Dawn MacKeen, finds herself first drawn into the colorful bazaars before the war and then into the horrors Stepan later endured. Inspired to retrace his steps, she sets out alone to Turkey and Syria, shadowing her resourceful, resilient grandfather across a landscape still rife with tension.

## **Book Information**

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours and 17 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: March 8, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01CD3XZGW

Best Sellers Rank: #199 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Middle East #431 in Books > History > Middle East > Turkey #692 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Middle East

## **Customer Reviews**

The "Hundred Year Walk" is really two stories in one. The first is a memoir of Dawn Anahid MacKeen's grandfather, Sepan, who survived the Armenian-Turk genocide in World War I, a brutal period of illness, hard labor, torture and imprisonment, in which he was homeless and separated from the rest of his family. The second is the pilgrimage the author made to re-trace some of the

places her grandfather went, including Turkey and Syria, along the Euphrates River, where she found mixed reactions to when she would tell someone of her heritage. Her grandfather thankfully survived, avoiding the fate of millions of his countrymen, but he also left behind several accounts of his travails, which the author uses in this book. MacKeen's mother was the one who originally began work on the translation, and it was her daughter who completed the task at her request. In 1911, Stepan Miskjian was in his mid-twenties, working as an emanetji (or someone who picks up and delivers merchants' orders) when he was conscripted into the military. His job there mainly consisted of breaking rocks and other hard labor. Eventually, he was separated from his family when his mother and two sisters were forced to leave their home in Adabazar. After that, he struggled to stay alive, while being shunted from place to place, sometimes "arrested" for being in the wrong spot at the wrong time. At one point, he crossed a desert with only a small water bottle to sustain him. Later in his journey, he met Sheikh al-Akleh, who gave him shelter and protected him. Years later, his granddaughter would meet descendants of this man and visit his grave to thank him for his sacrifice.

MacKEEN, Dawn Anahid. *The Hundred Year Walk: An Armenian Odyssey*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 352p, 21 bxw photos, map, index. As German troops prepared to invade Poland in 1939, Hitler instructed them to "kill [the Poles] without pity or mercy." • He added this afterthought: "Who still talks nowadays of the extermination of the Armenians?" • He was right. In 1914, Ottoman Turkey included 2 million Armenians in its population of 20-some million. Four years later, 1.2 million of them were dead, deliberately massacred by the Turks. A century later, the Turkish government still refuses to admit its crime, claiming instead simply to have quelled dissidence. In 2007, the Turkish prime minister issued a circular that called on government agencies to refer to "the Events of 1915" • rather than the "so-called Armenian genocide." • This is the background to this wrenching story: the systematic abuse and murder of a whole people and one man, Stepan Miskjian, and his arduous journey away from death. It's told by the man's granddaughter, Dawn "Armenian mother, American father of Scotch-English descent. Dawn never knew her grandfather, who died in his late eighties when she was a baby. But her mother Anahid talked about her father and his home town, Adabazar, constantly. Though she had never lived there herself, she saw herself more as a native of Adabazar than of Los Angeles where she had lived all of Dawn's thirty-some-year life. A telling figure: in 1914, half of Adabazar's 30,000 inhabitants were Armenian; today only a handful are.

The Hundred-Year Walk: An Armenian Odyssey(Spoiler alert) The number of times reporter and writer Dawn Anahid MacKeenâ™s maternal grandfather Stepan Miskjian escaped death during World War I at the hands of the Ottoman Turks is mind boggling. This is a graphic, disturbing, but ultimately redemptive account of one very resourceful manâ™s survival during the first genocide of the 20th centuryâ "when the ruling pashas set out to exterminate Turkeyâ™s large ethnic Armenian population. MacKeen alternates Stepanâ™s story with her own experiences in 2007 retracing his steps. His diaries in hand, she traveled from his hometown of Adabazar outside Constantinople, all the way to the killing fields of Deir El Zor in present-day Syria, where the surviving Armenians were mercilessly slaughtered. Ironically, this region is now in the hands of the so-called Islamic State. The author manages to turn an unbearable subject into a page-turner. With each chapter you wonder how the 5-foot 4-inch Stepan will slip away from his captorsâ "armed, saber-wielding gendarmes on horsebackâ "and evade being swept back into the massive deportation of Turkeyâ™s Armenian population. MacKeenâ™s clean, spare reporting style is dispassionate but descriptive. We are transported to that place and time. We see what Stepan saw and survive the horrors alongside him. He is resourceful, intelligent, generous and scrupulously honest throughout his ordeal, while many around him are not. We root for the diminutive hero throughout.

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