

The Krakirian Story

(The story of Hagop and Hasmig and us three boys - how we came to the US)

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Hagop & Hasmig Krakirian - Glendale, April 1995

How it Started

Our parents Hagop and Hasmig Krakirian got married in Beirut Lebanon on June 2, 1960. Hagop was born in 1929, the fourth and last child of Khatchadour and Zabel Krakirian, in the Armenian quarters of the old city of Jerusalem in Palestine. In 1948, at age 18, he had to flee to Damascus, Syria during the Palestinian-Israeli war which established the state of Israel and forced many Palestinians into exile. He lived in Damascus for 9 years (from 1948-1957). Our father was a very outgoing and social person. He was very active in the Armenian community where he first met our mom Hasmig Melekian (born 1933). Hasmig was one of five siblings from a well to do Armenian family in Damascus. Their father was a physician who was highly respected in the Syrian and Armenian community. Hagop was friends with Hasmig's older siblings, and they frequently went out to functions and gatherings, sometimes dragging Hasmig (who was four years younger) with them to these outings.



Hagop and Hasmig and her sisters, Damascus 1955

In 1957, Hagop had to flee the country again, this time to escape the mandatory military enlistment in the Syrian army. He moved to Beirut, Lebanon and started working as an office manager at a leather manufacturing plant.

In 1960, Hasmig was visiting Beirut as part of the Syrian delegation attending an Armenian regional sporting event. Hagop was also attending the event, so they connected and went out a few times, and very soon Hagop proposed to her. They got married in a few months (June 2, 1960) and quickly started a family.



Hagop & Hasmig, Beirut 1961

They had us three boys: Shahe was born in Feb 1961, Haig in June 1962 and Alain in August 1965 (accidentally:-). Hagop started attending accounting and management school at nights while still working during the day and providing for the family. Hasmig stayed home and had her hands full raising her 3 boys. When Hagop got his management degree in 1966, he decided to start his own business importing raw materials from Europe for the shoe and leather industry in Lebanon and the Middle East. He set up an office in downtown Beirut, and his business grew slowly and steadily, allowing the family to move to a nice 3 bedroom condo in a 10 story building with a view of the Mediterranean Sea. We attended private Armenian schools, where most of the subjects were taught in English.



*At our house in Beirut on our cousin's wedding day, 1972
Left to right: Haig, Alain, Shahe*

The Family Adventure Starts

Life in Beirut was very good in the 60s and early 70s. Beirut was a metropolitan hub (the Paris of the Middle East). It had a bustling social life, with nice restaurants, movie theaters, night clubs, and many beach and mountain resorts. Unfortunately, the regional conflicts in the Middle East spilled over into Lebanon and spiraled into a sectarian civil war in the summer of 1975. As the war intensified, our family had to find shelter in the subterranean parking lot of their condominium building. As this dragged on for days, our dad decided to escape the war, and take our family to Paris and wait out for the war to subside. We initially stayed with relatives - our uncle (our mom's brother) and his family, and our older cousin (our dad's niece) and her family, hoping to return back to Beirut in a few weeks. Unfortunately, the situation in Lebanon was getting worse, so my parents started planning on staying and living in Paris for a while and eventually find a permanent place to build a future. France was not a country that offered an easy path allowing permanent residency to foreigners, so our father applied for immigration visas to the US and Canada. US rejected our application, but Canada accepted and in a few months we were granted

immigration visas for the whole family. While staying in Paris, we attended a boarding school outside Paris (it was an Armenian Catholic school), and once our parents found an apartment to rent, we all moved into the apartment and started attending an international school that was next to the apartment. After 9 months in Paris, in June 1976, we boarded our flights and emigrated to Montreal, Canada.

Montreal was a beautiful city, clean and safe. We loved it, even with its cold and snowy winters. Language was not an issue for any of us. Dad had a very good command of the English language (he had actually taught English to high school kids when he lived in Damascus). Mom was primarily French educated (she had attended Sorbonne University in Paris in 1954 for a year studying Psychology, before she had to leave and go back to Damascus when her father passed away), but she also knew English quite well.

In the fall, we enrolled in the public school system, and we quickly blended into the American/Canadian lifestyle. Dad also took university courses to learn Canadian law and accounting so he could have better qualifications to apply for a financial or a management position. He had a hard time finding a job, because he was in his mid 40s, and most employers were looking for Canadian job experience. In the spring of 1977, the civil war in Lebanon had subsided, so he decided to go back and liquidate our assets and ship all our goods to Canada. But when he got to Beirut, he found out that life was getting back to normal and businesses and factories were opening up. In fact, his business clients started giving him orders for new materials, and he quickly realized that he could earn a much better living in Beirut than he could in Canada. So after careful consideration, he decided to take the family back to Beirut.

In the summer of 1977, we returned back to Beirut and reintegrated into the Lebanese life. We all attended high school there, and then Shahe and Haig attended college at the American University of Beirut.

But Lebanon's political situation was not settled. There were always skirmishes and battles among the different political and military factions. It was part of life, and we just lived with it. But we also endured the big battles, including the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. We had to live through the blockade of West Beirut for a few months and hide in the shelter for close to a week when Israeli forces decided to move in and battle it out with the Palestinian forces. But we survived that war, and we rejoiced when the US sent in its troops for a peace keeping mission. We thought that peace would be brokered by the US and things would settle down.



*At our house in Beirut, 1981
Left to right: Alain, Hasmig, Hagop, Haig, Shahe*

But in the spring of 1983, the US embassy was bombed and the situation started getting bad again. We barely finished the school year. Shahe graduated from electrical engineering school at AUB and was accepted for graduate school at Stanford University for fall of '83. My dad decided to get tourist visas for the rest of the family and planned to travel with Shahe to the US and tour some of the cities. But the situation got worse in Lebanon and fighting broke out in the west part of town where we lived. And the airport shut down. We barely managed to get out. We were able to secure a military escort to get us to the Beirut sea port and board a ferry boat to go to Cyprus (a 12 hour trek). From there, Shahe had to fly directly to San Francisco, since his semester was about to start. The rest of us flew to Paris where our dad attended a leather industry convention before flying out to the US to go on a two week, four city tour, starting in New York, and then Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington.

More adventures in and out of America

When we got to LA, we stayed at our dad's childhood friend's house in Pasadena. As the situation in Lebanon was deteriorating, and the airport was still closed, we decided to stay put in LA and cancel the rest of our US tour. At this point, we had no intention of staying in the U.S. But we thought it would be good idea to continue our college education instead of sitting around and waiting, not knowing when things will settle down in Beirut. Haig had one more year of college to get his Engineering degree, and Alain had just graduated high school and ready to start college. Even though it was late in September, we applied and enrolled at La Verne University and started taking courses three weeks into the semester. Again, as we had done 8 years ago in Paris, we started to plan a longer stay in a foreign country. We were allowed to stay in the country for 6 months with our tourist visas. We found a small 2 bedroom apartment in San Dimas that was very close to the college. We rented furniture and we all moved in there.

We slowly started settling in. We applied for drivers licenses and social security cards to open bank accounts. Dad rented a car to get around town, to shop and bank, and also start looking for possible business or employment opportunities. Haig and Alain would take the bus to college. Shahe had already settled in at Stanford living in their graduate school housing, and attending his full year graduate program in Electrical Engineering. In a few months, we started accepting the fact that we would be staying in Southern California for a while, and we should start planning our future in the U.S. Haig applied to CalPoly, Pomona Engineering school and got accepted for the Winter '84 quarter to finish his final year in Civil Engineering program. Alain stayed at La Verne and enrolled in their Business Administration program.

But soon, in March of '84, our 6 month tourist visas expired, and we had to apply for student visas to continue to stay legally in the US. Unfortunately, the government would not grant foreign student visas from within the US. We had to go back and apply through the US embassy back home. Soon Alain received a deportation notice (but somehow Haig did not get one). And of course, our parents could not stay in the U.S. either, with no chance of getting any work permits or residency status - we did not have any immediate family who were US citizens to sponsor us. The situation in Lebanon was improving, so our parents



*New Years Eve 1984 in San Dimas, CA
Left to right: Shahe, Haig, Hasmig, Hagop, Alain*

decided to return to Beirut but waited for Alain to finish his spring semester. In the meantime, Shahe graduated from Stanford, so we drove up to Palo Alto to attend his graduation, and we got to visit and tour San Francisco for a few days (we never made it to SF before when we canceled our originally planned 4 city tour and stayed in LA). In June of 84, our parents and Alain flew back to Beirut. Haig stayed and attended summer quarter at CalPoly, and then he also flew back to apply and get his student visa. Our parents stayed in Beirut, and Haig and Alain returned to LA in September to started their fall classes in college. They rented a new place with another roommate and got back to college life.

Immediately out of Sanford, Shahe got a job offer at a tech company in Silicon Valley, so he was able to get a work permit visa and start working in the U.S. In a few years, his employer sponsored him for a green card, and soon he was granted full permanent residency. Five years later, he applied and received his US citizenship.

Haig and Alain lived one more year in LaVerne while attending college. They both graduated in spring of '85. Haig received his Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from

CalPoly, and Alain got his Bachelor's degree in Finance from LaVerne University. Haig immediately applied and was accepted at USC graduate school for a Master's degree in Computer Science, starting in fall of '85. Alain applied to Pepperdine University and was enrolled in their MBA program in winter of '86. They moved to downtown LA (Korea town) to be closer to USC. Our hope was that once we had graduate degrees, we would be able to find employment and gain permanent residency in the US. There was no future for us in Lebanon, and we had no intention of going back.

In the summer of '86, the situation in Lebanon started deteriorating again. There were a string of random killings of Armenians in Beirut. Our parents started to worry about their safety again. They also wanted to be closer to their kids, and not live thousands of miles away. So in July of '86, they decided to come and stay with us in LA. They still had their tourist visas, so they flew out to LA, but this time, with the intention of staying permanently in the US. They figured with the little savings that they had, and by selling their condo, they could buy a place and maybe dad could start a small business to earn a living. This was a very tough decision for them, since they didn't know if financially they could afford to live on their savings or earn enough to afford the cost of living in LA. Cost of living was much cheaper in Lebanon. They owned their condo and their two cars, and all they needed to spend was on just essentials. Our dad would half jokingly say that if each one of his boys sent him \$100 a month, they could live like a king in Beirut. But our dad was willing to sacrifice everything to be closer to his kids.

At the time we (Haig and Alain) were renting a 2 bedroom apartment in Korea town. We had a roommate, a close friend who lived with us and shared the rent. But when our parents arrived, our roommate moved out and our parents moved in. Suddenly, our student life style ended and we were back to living a family life style.

Our dad quickly started exploring employment opportunities. He tried to leverage his experience in the shoe and leather manufacturing business, and see if he can work in that industry, primarily through contacts in the Armenian community. Unfortunately, there was not much opportunity for a 55 year old foreigner with zero experience in the US market. So he decided to start his own small business importing products and materials from Europe for the shoe repair industry, selling to distributors and shop owners. He initially rented a shared

office space on Wilshire blvd, but then he leased an office with a small warehouse in Glendale as he tried to grow his business.



Dad in his warehouse



Mom & Dad at a trade show

In July 87, our parents bought a condo in Glendale (1200 Valley View Rd) and lived there for the rest of their lives. Our dad continued his business until early 2000. Alain worked with him initially when he was in college until he graduated. Our mom would also go and help out at the office and warehouse and attend local trade shows with our dad. Even though he was barely breaking even, dad's work kept him busy and kept him on his feet. But unfortunately, he had to shut it down as he got older and he was not able to sustain the business.

Haig finished his graduate studies at USC in December of 86, and got a software development job in a small startup software company. The founder of the company was an Armenian gentleman. His wife was the bank manager at the BofA branch that was next to our apartment in downtown LA, where our dad had his bank account. Our dad, finding out that the manager was an Armenian, introduced himself and started chatting with her. When he mentioned that his son had just graduated with a Computer Science Master's degree, she mentioned that her husband was looking for a software engineer, and recommended that Haig interview with her husband. So with that referral, Haig interviewed and got a job. And with a job offer at hand, Haig applied and received a 2 year work permit visa, and within a year or so, he applied for his green card through the sponsorship of his employer. He received his green card in 1990, and became a US naturalized citizen in 1996.

Alain received his MBA in spring of '88. Unlike Shahe and Haig, who studied and worked in the booming high tech sector, where there was a shortage of engineers and scientist, and high demand for foreign applicants, Alain's field of Business Administration was not as hot for foreign applicants. Luckily for Alain, the federal government had enacted an amnesty program in the mid 80s for foreigners residing in the US. So Alain applied and his application was approved. He received his green card in the early 90s, and became a US citizen 5 years later.

In January 1990, Shahe got married to Leda Svadjian. and shortly after Haig got married to Nina Kalaidjian in Sept 1990. Alain met Nani Shirikjian in 1989, and they have been devoted partners in crime since then :-)



*At Haig & Nina's wedding, Glendale Sept 8, 1990
Left to Right: Leda, Shahe, Hagop, Nina, Haig, Hasmig, Alain*

When Shahe became a citizen in the early 90s, he applied for our parents to get their green cards through the family sponsorship program. In a few years they received their green cards, and 5 years later, in early 2000s, they became naturalized US citizens.

And Life Goes On

Hasmig and Hagop lived close to 30 years in Glendale, CA, which was longer than they had lived anywhere else in their near constant migratory life. They got to be close to their three boys and were able to see and enjoy their six grandkids. Shahan came first in June '91, then Lori and Natalie in Sept '93, Liana in Nov '95, Aram in Dec '97 and Armen in May '01.



With their first three baby grandkids, Lori, Shahan & Natalie, Nov 1993



The six grandkids in Dec 2014

Left to right: Shahan, Lori, Natalie, Liana, Aram, Armen

Hagop and Hasmig passed away in December 2015, five days apart from each other, and resting peacefully at Forrest Lawn cemetery in Hollywood Hills.



Haig, Alain and Shahe, at Forrest Lawn, Dec 2015

The Krakirian clan these days...



*Haig, Natalie, Aram, Nina, Shahan
Burbank, Dec 2017*



*Shahe, Leda
Oct 2019*



*Lori, Armen, Liana
Jan 2020*



Alain and Nani

Oct 2018



Two thirds of the Krakirian Clan

Aram, Haig, Nina, Natalie, Nani S., Alain, Shahan

Aug 2018