

Kevin S. "Kiki" Merigian - Brief Autobiography

Fall was almost over. The leaves had all turned their brilliant colors and now the trees were barren. It was a relatively warm day in November in Detroit as President Eisenhower was wrapping up his re-election campaign against Adlai Stevenson. Detroit was in its hey-day. An economic boom owing its great zenith of financial power to advances in the automotive industry.

During election week, a woman lay in labor to deliver her fourth child. I was that child and I had no name. As I was born, my mother's blood mixed with mine causing a severe Rh incompatibility reaction known as erythroblastosis fetalis. The pediatrician suggested delaying any personalization or bonding with me, for it was likely I would not survive the post-delivery immune battle raging within my body. I turned orange and yellow from the elevated bilirubin in my blood stream. I slept under ultraviolet light.

Treatment was simple: Whole Blood Transfusions. It took two separate whole exchanges of my entire blood volume to get a cease fire between the antibodies and antigens in my blood. The war within my body was over and I was given a name. Kevin Sam Merigian. President Eisenhower soundly defeated Stevenson at the same time. Life began for me; a small, embattled baby with a lame duck President.

I was given a nickname: Kiki. My older sister could not say Kevin, just Kiki. I grew up in a somewhat stressful household. I joined my sister, mother and father in a Spartan two bedroom flat on the second story of a duplex in Highland Park, Michigan. Henry Ford's first assembly plant was located about 2 miles from my crib. High wages in the auto industry brought my father's Armenian immigrant family to Highland Park from Chicago. My grandmother and grandfather journeyed to America in the early 1900's to escape the slaughter of Armenians by the Turkish military in the Ottoman Empire. Millions of Armenians were hacked to death by the militia using swords, spears and axes. My great-grandfather was taken away from my grandmother's home and beheaded. He was a shoe salesman. His crime was just being a Christian Armenian male.

I began my journey on the other side of life, but I cheated death. As I grew older, I was introduced to my younger brother 18 months later. My father was a first generation Armenian American. He had his own narcissistic demons to deal with. He had an MBA from Michigan State University and worked at Michigan Bell Telephone Company. His wife, my mother, was a blonde, blue-eyed beauty. She had a borderline personality disorder. Her failures in life were related to an interesting combination of her very high intellect and an absolute lack of self. Movie star beauty without an ounce of knowing who she was. Needless to say, their marriage crumbled in short order. I was awarded to my mother for custodial care.

As anyone would suspect, my mother could not handle the stresses of motherhood, dating, and working. She was a personal assistant to an executive at Massey Ferguson Tractor Company in Lansing, Michigan. Her solution: Place her children in foster care. She chose families who were primarily interested in the money side of the foster care arrangement. I experienced numerous childhood traumas at the hands of brutal and cruel foster keepers. My most vivid memory is associated with living with a family with six children. My brother and I lived in the basement

furnace room. We were not allowed upstairs to explore the home other than eating leftover food in the kitchen and going to school. In order to maintain a sense of self, I fantasized about the perfect world. I believe my creativity grew out of my isolation and physical abuse. I never blamed anyone for my situation. Eventually, my mother stopped paying for foster homes. She valued her personal apartment more than her children. She enrolled the three of us into the State operated orphanage. She gave away our toys, books, clothes, and any personal items. Fortunately the State, in an effort to save money, contacted my father and asked him to take custody of us instead of us becoming wards of the State. My 52-year old Armenian grandmother convinced my father to take custody. She unselfishly took us in and reared us. I remember that day of liberation, it was the most beautiful day of my life. Moving to an impoverished Highland Park neighborhood in 1963. I was seven years-old and advancing into the third grade.

My life had changed. My father was a belittling narcissist. However my grandmother was an amazingly brilliant force of love and wisdom. I was nurtured in a style of *old country* Armenia. I learned to speak, read, and write Armenian. My traditional education was taught at an all African-American elementary school: Francis E. Willard on Hamilton Avenue.

I grew up in a poverty-stricken inner-city neighborhood. Burglary, murder, rape, prostitution, and gang violence were the norm. My brother and I provided the Caucasoid element as we integrated our community sports teams. Initially it felt odd being the only white kid on our teams. But eventually it felt routine. At eight years-old, I was 120 pounds. My sister and brother made fun of my size, my grandmother worried about my health and made me diet. I ate grapefruit, cottage cheese and drank skim milk. It was what she thought would help me stay healthy. And the kids in my classrooms were afraid of me because I was withdrawn and big. Sports became my outlet for frustration. It also provided healthy relationships with male role models; my coaches. Mr. Dobson and Mr. Williams, both pentagenerian factory workers, volunteered their time each and every night after school to help me and my brother succeed in football. "School first, grades first, then we will play football". To this day, I remember them as two of the greatest men in my life. They believed in me, I trusted them.

As my childhood continued, my community's high school curriculum morphed to a vocational-technological orientation. Essentially, no college prep was offered due to the minute graduation rates. The school board believed it was necessary to prepare area students for the skilled trades associated with the auto industry. I was fortunate to be accepted into a suburban college preparatory school named Cranbrook High School on an inner-city scholarship program. My academic adventures commenced there and they have never stopped. I played football and track for the school. Cranbrook is best known for its Masters in Fine Arts graduate school. My love of art was fueled by the beauty and splendor of art in all forms, it permeated everywhere on the school's campus.

I graduated in the top 10 percent of the students academically, went on to attend a small liberal arts college named Kalamazoo College. I played football and decided that if I did not get into medical school, I was headed for the NFL. My coaches told me that they would help me get into the Detroit Lions training camp. But I got accepted into medical school in the late fall of my senior year of college. My destiny changed from sports and art to medicine and art.

My motivation to enter medical school was two-fold: First, to win the admiration of my father, and second; to win the admiration of my Chaldean girlfriend's father so I could eventually marry her. Neither my father nor her father ever recognized my achievements as being worthy. In fact, my father chastised me for attending Michigan State College of Human Medicine instead of the two other medical schools that accepted me. My girlfriend's parents were not remotely impressed, for they viewed a physician as merely a human service provider much like a plumber, gas station attendant, or bus driver.

My adventures in medical school, internships, residency, and fellowship training were filled with fascinating experiences in their own right. The scope of this bio could easily include them, but the essay would become a book. After my advanced training in toxicology and clinical pharmacology finished, I taught in medical school at the University of Cincinnati. I did art as a hobby, mostly cooking, drawing, carving and writing poetry. I began exploring alternate medical treatment systems such as East Indian and Chinese Medicine. My creative consciousness allowed me to expand and transcend each healing tradition's learning experience and include everything I had learned into a greater, more relevant medical care model. Art allowed me to explore the true nature of man and form opinions about man as a whole as well as part of a greater whole: mankind.

My current health theories and philosophical approach to patient care is based on complex constructs of holonistic hierarchy and fractal patterns related to human unfoldment. I examine responses to stress, map its effect on the body, cross match chemical, hormonal, immune, infectious and nutritional matrixes to identify intersections of disturbances. I have found that our bodies are emergent. Our bodies operate in schemas and with negative feedback loops. The female form is the most beautiful creation and is by far, the most complex both physiologically and emotionally. Humans are feeling machines that think, not thinking machines that feel. The practice of medicine is an art, and the creation of art keeps me open to novelty and new ideas about healing and health.

My approach is unique, individualized and in accord with both human and biological nature.

My personal spiritual journey continues to lead me to recognize the importance of stress reduction by identifying and living in accord with each of our authentic selves and understanding man's relationship to the Divine. My artistic unfoldment allows me to communicate my ideas in the many languages of the visual and literary arts, many times using stories and analogies to enlighten those who have been held hostage by archaic cosmology and out-of-date medical and health information.

One of my most inspiring memories was reading about Salvador Dali's classic episode of the 1950's TV Show, "What's My Line?". Blindfolded panelists were absolutely stymied. They asked, "Are you a performer?", "Do you consider yourself a leading man?", "Are you an athlete?", "Are you a writer", "Have you made headlines?", "Are you human?".

He answered "Yes" to all of their questions. One panelist asked finally, "Are you Salvador Dali?" And again, he responded, "Yes".

Salvador Dali wanted to be "everything".

I too continue to strive to become as close to everything as I can. When I fall short, I know who has the experience and compassion to fill in the holes and teach me. Even though the rest of my life remains a mystery, I continue to experience it by being of service to others and giving in whatever form possible. My greatest joy is both exploring that which exists in the dark and illuminating the new which separated and derived the old. I listen and stay receptive.

As a doctor, I am neither typical nor conventional. As an artist, I am committed to changing the world with one piece of art at a time. As an individual, I walk the left hand path of life, searching to be everything and being as authentic and truthful as I can.

Thank you for caring enough to read my autobiographical sketch.