



MEDIA KIT

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Bleeding Heart
PUBLICATIONS 

ABOUT THE BOOK

PUBLICATION DATE: MARCH 3, 2015

Aida Zilelian's breathtaking debut novel, *The Legacy of Lost Things*, follows three generations of a family of Armenian immigrants living in the United States, as they struggle with one another and against the Old World expectations of their community. When Araxi, the oldest daughter of the desperately unhappy Levon and Tamar, goes missing, the remaining family members are forced to confront their painful histories together, and the role each of them has played in driving Araxi away.

Through Araxi and her family, readers are given a unique look at the generational and cultural tensions that both keep families together and tear them apart. Using spare, poignant prose, Zilelian deftly explores the themes of romance, duty, infidelity, and guilt. Because of the mature content, this book is intended for adult and young adult audiences.



THE LEGACY OF LOST THINGS WINS 2014 MINAS AND KOHAR TÖLÖLYAN PRIZE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

On May 8, 2014, The Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society of the Eastern United States announced that Aida Zilelian and her novel *The Legacy of Lost Things* was one of two winners of the Minas and Kohar Tölölyan Prize in Contemporary Literature. The novel is about an Armenian family who immigrates to Queens, New York, and their struggles to assimilate to the American culture. *The Legacy of Lost Things* will be published by Bleeding Heart Publications in March 2015.



Named after one of the major Armenian literary critics of the second half of the 20th Century and his wife, a devoted teacher of that literature for decades, the annually awarded Minas and Kohar Tölölyan Prize in Contemporary Literature recognizes and encourages the literary works of talented writers in North America. Novels, stories and poetry in Armenian, English, French and Spanish are considered, as long as the authors are of Armenian ancestry, and/or the work has an Armenian theme or revolves around an Armenian topic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aida Zilelian is a New York writer and English teacher. She has been published in several anthologies and more than 25 literary journals, including *Per Contra*, *Red Fez*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Theurgy* and others. She has read her works at various reading series' in Queens and Manhattan, including Sunday Salon, Phoenix Reading Series, Gartal, Rez Reading Series, Oh, Bernice!, and First Tuesdays. She is the curator of Boundless Tales, a reading series in Queens, NY. In 2011 her first novel *The Hollowing Moon* was one of the four semi-finalists in the Anderbo Novel Contest. *The Legacy of Lost Things* is her first published novel and was the recipient of the 2014 Tololyan Literary Award. She is currently working on her third novel.



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how are they going to deal with the truth when it does come out, or how are they going to deal with the fact that it may not come out? That tension, and creating that, is something that unconsciously I have been doing in my stories. When I look back, it’s all about truths and secrets. That’s why the truth and the flaws of characters fascinates me.”

AIDA ZILELIAN Q&A

Your first love was music. Tell us about that part of your creative life and how it segued into you wanting to write fiction? When did you know you wanted to become a writer?

I was a late-bloomer when I started playing live shows; I was twenty-three and had learned how to play guitar from one of my ex-boyfriends. I must have played solo shows consistently for over seven or eight years, released two independent cds and then one day I just felt like what I was reaching for was too high. I had written mostly poetry in high school and wrote in my journals as most angsty

kids did. By my late twenties I had experienced quite a bit of tumult in my family and I started reading David Sedaris. I thought I'd give a stab at writing about my family members. It went on from there.



The Legacy of Lost Things traces the geographic and - you might say, spiritual - migration of three generations of an Armenian family to Queens, NY. You seem to draw great strength and inspiration from your Armenian heritage. Elaborate on that? Why is it important to you to write about and explore your cultural roots?

For years I resented being Armenian. My parents were extremely active in the community and it was quite an insular existence. I went to an Armenian elementary school that my father had helped establish, as well as Armenian Saturday school and Sunday school at the Armenian church. Once I was old enough to completely remove myself from the community I did, and for years. It didn't occur to me until much later that being Armenian was visceral. It crept into the melodies of the music I wrote, the music I listened to, the words that I eventually put on paper. It was inescapable and I grew to respect the reality of that. And it moved me to give it the honor it deserved.

You've mentioned before that you are a first-generation American - and that many of your age group of young Armenian-Americans either completely reject their ancestry and cultural traditions or almost fanatically embrace them. You describe yourself as falling somewhere in-between. How does this manifest itself in your life and writing?

I think it's been very difficult for first-generation Armenians to strike a balance between their strong upbringing and living in America. As I mentioned previously, I definitely strayed for many

years. However, I speak Armenian fluently and I am also teaching my daughter to speak as well. I married an American who is very embracing of my family and culture. Yet I don't really have many Armenian friends. I am very fond of the Armenian friends I have, and it is secondary that they are Armenian. As for my writing, I can't help the way it seeps in.

The main characters in *The Legacy of Lost Things* - the parents Levon and Tamar and their daughters Araxi and Sophie - have very complicated, dysfunctional relationships that lead them into painful estrangements and betrayals and cause them to disintegrate as a family. But underneath and through it all, you sense their love for each other and their desire to re-capture what has been lost. How much of this book is based on real people and real situations? Have you ever "gotten into trouble" with family members or friends for portraying them too closely in your fiction?

Araxi and Levon are my parents. And Sophie is my younger sister Alice. Those who know me and read the novel will see this as an obvious fact. I have definitely offended friends and family with my stories that have been published. In fact, one of my stories is based on a person who used to be a



very dear friend of mine. We became colleagues when we started teaching together and had a terrible falling out. When the story was published it fell into her hands and it caused a raucous. My mother isn't too fond of some of the pieces about her either.

Which of the two young women in your book - Araxi or Sophie - do you identify with the most? How has your life informed theirs - and vice versa? Do you learn about yourself from your main characters?

I am very much Araxi. Had my parents not divorced when I was twelve I suspect I would have followed in her footsteps. As I wrote through her character I realized in myself how doggedly I will see something through to the end or rather not change my mind if I know in my gut it's goes against my grain. It brought to light many of my personality traits that I may not like about myself, but that I have learned to accept.

What made you decide to tell *The Legacy of Lost Things* from four different points of view - those of your four main characters?

Partly, I needed to force myself to see all the perspectives because I needed to forgive those very same people who are in my life. I also wanted to bring the reader to understand what would cause an adolescent to abandon her family with such little remorse.

You are very active in the New York and Queens literary scene. You give readings on a regular basis and have organized and curated readings for various writing groups. Tell us about all that, and how being a part of a writing community is important in New York City.

I started Boundless Tales, my reading series, in 2012. I felt that there wasn't much of a literary scene in Queens. And far be it from me to create one, but I thought it strange that the readings in Brooklyn and Manhattan catered to established writers or a literary community that was unreceptive to writers from other boroughs. I didn't want it to be an open mic because I wanted the writers to feel their work was valued. So I asked for writers to submit their work and I read all the material. It's been fantastic watching the reading grow and meeting such a wonderful group of people who are now part of a huge literary community in Queens.



You've been published in more than 25 literary journals and anthologies and won several awards. Most recently *Legacy* won the 2014 Tololyan Literary Award. Tell us about that and the others?

The Tololyan Literary Award is given to an Armenian writer who shows promise in his/her work and career as a writer. I submitted *Legacy* before it was even accepted for publication and I was thrilled to receive the news that I had won. I was flown out to Chicago for the ceremony. It was a long and persistent process having my work accepted in literary journals and anthologies. What I've grown to love in that process are the sincere rejection letters, assuring me that the piece was great but that they couldn't include it and to please keep them in mind in the future.

Somehow you balance your active writing life with a teaching job and your home life with your husband and daughter. No small task. When and how do you like to write?

I wish I could write every day. But writing for me happens in unplanned bursts. If I don't write for a while I get irritable. I always want to and I always have to, but it really is about having a supportive husband who will give me the time when I need it. I write in the evenings when I can and during the weekends.

If you had to choose three writers - from fiction, non-fiction or poetry - who have most profoundly influenced you, who would they be? Have any musicians or singer/songwriters influenced your writings?

David Sedaris, Truman Capote and Sylvia Plath. Their precision with words – I can taste the words when I read their work. I remember reading an article when Truman Capote talks about how when he was in elementary school all the kids ran to the playground at the end of the day, and he commented that he ran home to write. That always struck me. Musicians – P.J. Harvey, Johnny Cash, Elliott Smith and Billie Holiday. All very intense, I know. But necessary.

In April 2015, just one month after *The Legacy of Lost Things* will be published, the 100-year anniversary of the Armenian Genocide will be commemorated. This horrible event took the lives of more than 1.5 million Armenians during and after World War I. How did this event impact your family and community? How does it affect you and your writing today?



My paternal grandfather, Garabed Zilelian was orphaned in the Armenian Genocide. The character who portrays him the novel is based on the many stories I was told about him. Armenians have a very long and beautiful history of culture – poetry, music, dance, and were the first people to accept Christianity as a religion. Unfortunately, because the Armenian Genocide has been denied by the Turkish government for almost one hundred years our protests for recognition of this event has started to define us. The themes of escape and violence are predominant in my novel. Although the genocide was not the main focus, I wanted to show the impact of the genocide on today's younger Armenian generation. I don't know necessarily if that has been noticed or acknowledged in many works of literature.

What's next for you? What is your next book about?

I started writing a novel this summer written through the perspective of Sophie, Araxi's younger sister. She's in her twenties and her friend Adrian, who she is secretly in love with, is moving out of the country with his fiancé.

PRESS RELEASE

AIDA ZILELIAN'S *THE LEGACY OF LOST THINGS* TRACES THE STRUGGLES AND DYSFUNCTIONS OF AN ARMENIAN IMMIGRANT FAMILY LIVING IN NEW YORK

To Be Released in March 2015 by Bleeding Heart Publications, Debut Novel Uses Spare, Poignant Prose to Explore Themes of Romance, Duty, Infidelity and Guilt

BANGKOK – December 10, 2014 – [Aida Zilelian's *The Legacy of Lost Things*](#), a powerful and haunting first novel that delves deeply into the struggles and dysfunctions of an Armenian immigrant family living in the United States, will be the second book published by [Bleeding Heart Publications](#), a new literary publishing house based in Southeast Asia that specializes in creative non-fiction and fiction for the U.S. market. The book will be released in all formats on March 3, 2015, and be available online and in bookstores.

Zilelian, a New York writer and English teacher, has been published in several anthologies and more than 25 literary journals, including BHP's *Transfusion*. Even before acceptance and publication, [The Legacy of Lost Things](#) started attracting national attention. In May 2014, it won the Minas and Kohar Tölölyan Prize in Contemporary Literature, an annual award that recognizes and encourages the literary works of talented writers in North America who are of Armenian ancestry or whose work has an Armenian theme.

In [The Legacy of Lost Things](#), Zilelian traces three generations of a family of Armenian immigrants living in Queens, New York, as they struggle with one another and against the Ole World expectations of their community. When Araxi, the oldest daughter of the desperately unhappy Levon and Tamar, goes missing, the remaining family members are forced to confront their painful histories together, and the role each of them has played in driving Araxi away. Through Araxi and her family, readers are given a unique look at the generational and cultural tensions that both keep families together and tear them apart.

"I don't think the truth always comes out in stories," says Zilelian, who freely admits that her main characters are based on her





family members. “You’ll see that to be the case in *Legacy*. There’s a huge truth that’s never discovered. But what I do like is when characters are sitting on the truth. And you don’t know what’s going to happen, and you don’t know what’s going to come of it. That tension of . . . how are they going to deal with the truth when it does come out, or how are they going to deal with the fact that it may not come out? That tension, and creating that, is something that unconsciously I have been doing in my stories. When I look back, it’s all about truths and secrets. That’s why the truth and the flaws of characters fascinates me”

“Aida writes with such heart and passion, using such spare, poignant prose,” says Cali Dawson, co-founder and managing director of [Bleeding Heart Publications](#). “I remember going over this story in editing many times and it never failed to give me goose bumps and make me sigh. I was surprised that this novel hadn’t been picked up for publication by the time it hit my desk. But I was not surprised that Aida was well known in her community and had published work before. She is a natural and gifted writer.”

[Bleeding Heart Publications](#) was created in 2012 in Bangkok, Thailand, by a small, dedicated group of British and American ex-patriots – led by co-founders Gordon Ross, director, and Dawson. The independent press has four books scheduled for publication in all formats in 2015 and is aggressively seeking manuscripts and short stories from new and previously published authors. [Bleeding Heart Publications](#) also will publish *Transfusion*, a twice-yearly literary journal featuring short stories of 5,000 words or less and poetry. The company is registered in Singapore with editorial offices in Bangkok, Thailand.

[Bleeding Heart Publications](#) launched in the US with a comprehensive PR, advertising and social marketing campaign, including a [full-page ad that ran in the New York Times Book Review](#) on Sunday, Nov. 30, 2014. It also has allocated six-figure USD budgets for marketing each of its first two books.

[Bleeding Heart Publications](#) is partnering with Greenleaf Books in Austin, Texas, to provide book and cover design, production and distribution services, and marketing across all formats and platforms in the U.S.

For more information about Aida Zilelian and [The Legacy of Lost Things](#), visit her author’s website. For more information about [Bleeding Heart Publications](#), its authors and submission policies, visit BHP’s [website](#). For media inquiries or to arrange an interview with BHP’s principals or authors, contact Scott Busby at The Busby Group at scottb@thebusbygroup.com or 310.475.2914.

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