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## HAMPAR KELIKIAN, M.D. 1899-1983

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**HAMPAR KELIKIAN, M.D.**  
1899-1983

On July 24, 1983, a legend — an era — ended with the death of a genius, master-surgeon, and poet: Dr. Hampar Kelikian. His good friend, William Saroyan, said of him: "He is an enormity, both as a brilliantly creative surgeon and as a human being. His kindness, understanding, intelligence, and humor are instant, constant, and inexhaustible, whether he is with a child in a hospital or with a poet at a dinner table . . . He is a genius and therefore immediately understood but also impossible to fully understand. There is always more to be noticed, recognized, and understood." On July 27, 1983, Senator Robert Dole paid a moving tribute in the Senate to his dear friend and healer. As entered in the Congressional Record, "Dr. Kelikian earned fame for his historic accomplishments in the operating room. He earned the gratitude of thousands of people who, like myself, live a much fuller existence because of his operative skills." He was "pure gold", said the senator.

Hampar Kelikian was born on January 17, 1899, in Hadjin, historic Armenia. In 1915 he fled his land where violence stormed, annihilating 1.5 million Armenians including his three sisters. He was separated from the rest of his family and in 1920 he emigrated to Chicago, Illinois, with two dollars in his pocket and a rug to his name. He worked on a farm near Waukegan, Illinois, and his employer, impressed by his talents and his desire to learn, gave him a college scholarship. He became a student at the University of Chicago and at the same time worked in the school's laundry and cafeteria. He obtained his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Chicago in 1924, entered the Rush Medical School, and graduated as a physician in 1927. He interned at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, and from 1929 to 1937 served as first assistant to Dr. Phillip H. Kreuzer, who was in practice with the world-famous Chicago surgeon, Dr. John B. Murphy. Dr. Kelikian practiced at Mercy Hospital from 1928 to 1932 and taught at Loyola University as an instructor in surgery. In 1937 he passed the American Board of General Surgery examination and earned the title of Attending Orthopedic Surgeon at Cook County Hospital and, subsequently, of Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at the Graduate School of the same institution. In 1940 he joined the Northwestern University Medical School faculty as an Associate Professor of Orthopedic

Surgery, practicing at Wesley Memorial Hospital as a senior orthopaedic surgeon.

During World War II, from 1942 to 1946, Dr. Kelikian served as a Lieutenant Colonel, Chief of Orthopedic Surgery, at the 297th General Hospital Overseas. His surgical genius blossomed with the treatment of the severely injured. His initial training as a general surgeon led him to the refinement and broad application of the abdominal-tube pedicle skin graft for the severely mutilated extremity. The traumatized hand captivated his attention and when faced with the problem of traumatic destruction of the thumb, he covered the thenar gap, pollicized the index finger, and enlarged the web space with a pedicle skin graft. He became one of the preeminent orthopaedic surgeons of the United States Army and his services were recognized by President Harry Truman, who gave him a citation and a medal. He was also a consulting orthopaedic surgeon at the Ronkswood General Hospital in Worcester, England, and he received a citation from the Queen.

Returning from the war, Dr. Kelikian continued teaching at Northwestern University Medical School as an Associate Professor of Orthopedic Surgery; he practiced at Wesley Memorial Hospital, which subsequently became Northwestern Memorial Hospital. He became board-certified in orthopaedic surgery in 1947.

Dr. Kelikian's expertise recognized no frontiers. When asked to define himself, he responded: "You may call me a maverick. I do not conform. In surgery, instead of sticking to stereotyped standard patterns and trying to fit the patient to them, I try to improvise methods that meet with the patient's needs." His interest in difficult hand problems continued and he accepted the challenge of reconstructing congenitally deformed hands, a field that was long neglected because of technical difficulties. Dr. Kelikian became the authority in the field and his experience culminated in the publication of a book entitled, *Congenital Deformities of the Hand and Forearm* (1974), a monumental work recognized as an instant classic. His technique of abdominal-tube pedicle skin-grafting found limitless applications in the surgical treatment of the congenitally deformed hand. Multistage pollicizations became a routine procedure on his surgical service. He devised a swivel operation for the congenital proximal radio-ulnar synostosis and each of his surgical procedures had a creative aspect to it. The surgical treatment of macrodactyly and angioplastic disorders attested to his unusual skill and courage in handling the most challenging of problems. In 1969 he was appointed to President Nixon's Task Force for the Disabled and in 1966 he received the Order of the National Cedars of Lebanon from the president of Lebanon.

Disabilities of the fore part of the foot and metatarsalgia captivated Dr. Kelikian's attention in the late 1950's. A historical review of the surgical procedures and his accumulated experience resulted in the book *Hallux Valgus, Allied Deformities of the Forefoot and Metatarsalgia* (1965). Among his many contributions to this type of surgery were his descriptions of the surgical syndactylization of the toes, the extracapsular distal osteotomy of the first metatarsal, and the recession-extension osteotomy of the lesser metatarsals.

In 1973 Dr. Kelikian reached Emeritus status at Northwestern University, but his surgical and teaching activities acknowledged no limitations. In 1979 he was described in an article as "a dear and glorious surgeon and, at 80, still among the best".

Three years ago a terminal illness struck the giant. He defied mortality and, in the words of his daughter, Alice: "Terminal illness failed to deter the push or exhaust the energy." He completed the manuscript of *Disorders of the Ankle*, which will be published with the co-authorship of his son, Armen, later this year.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to be trained by Dr. Kelikian recognized immediately that he was a fearless and creative master-surgeon. His knowledge of surgical anatomy was most impressive; this allowed him to extend the surgical field as needed with confidence and without limitations. He was gentle with tissues and a unique teacher of the atraumatic technique. His operating room was always a colorful and most relaxed place, where teaching, humor, poetry, and song would unite. The "organized confusion" of his operating theater camouflaged an extremely well thought out, well planned surgical procedure. His memory was prodigious and not to be challenged, as one would always come out the loser.

Dr. Kelikian's second love was literature. He was a prolific writer of Armenian short stories and literary criticism. His book in Armenian, *A Doctor and Literature*, was much acclaimed.

A great humanitarian, Dr. Kelikian was instrumental in bringing to the United States an entire generation of young physicians. His influence was enormous and the Armenians of Chicago, as stated by Alice, ". . . knew him as their lay patriarch, a kind of Levantine Godfather". They will forever remain grateful to his memory.

To his dedicated wife Ovsanna, his son Armen, and his daughters Alice and Virginia, we extend our deepest sympathies.

When he was laid to rest, Dr. Kelikian's favorite Armenian poem, translated by him some years ago, was recited as a last farewell:

I say goodbye to my friends near and far,  
to my foes, evil and awake, I say goodbye.  
Every minute with saddened love, I say goodbye.  
To fulgent sun in my flaming heart, I say goodbye.

I say goodbye to all men, mean and meek.  
To the suffering, to the orphans, I say goodbye.  
To the blue sky, the green sea, woods deep and  
dark,  
to the golden chain of memories, my worries, my  
wounds,  
in the golden field of singing larks, I say goodbye.  
To flowers as yet unopened, to souls not yet seared,  
to children, alive and alert, I say goodbye.  
I am going to a dark world, distant land, never  
returning.  
Remember me with the goodness of your heart,  
goodbye, goodbye.

We shall miss him and remember him forever.

S. K. S.