

to prove that he was Armenian, not Georgian.¹² Usually, hardened criminals convicted of murder, rape or grand theft were put in charge of political prisoners and the guards were indifferent to the abuses that ensued. “The political prisoners lived in constant fear of the criminals who seemingly had no moral or ethical boundaries.... They would force other prisoners to fulfill whatever demands or urges they had, at the threat of death....”¹³

Malnutrition and heavy physical labor took their toll on my father. One evening toward the end of a hard day’s work, while lugging bricks, he fell down and fainted. A falling brick broke a bone in his foot. He was transported to the camp’s hospital where he contracted jaundice, a severe illness that damaged his liver for good and had its detrimental impact at the end. He was released after a month in hospital. The good doctor, a political prisoner himself, told him that he had had no hope of saving him but had cared for him the best he could. My father remembered that doctor as a guardian angel who gave him a second life, to endure the hardship and return to his family.

While writing this book, a question has continued to perplex me. Why is it that overall we have such a small number of testimonies from Armenian survivors of Stalinist persecutions, and in particular, no first-person testimony from Norilsk? Was the fear so deep-seated as to compel silence even in freedom? Or maybe few of them survived that Siberian hell and returned. The Armenian

12 Alazan, «Տառապանքի ուղիներով» (Through the roads of suffering), p. 134.

13 Hosford et al., *GULAG*, p. 24.