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Aprim Minashe Aprim (1924-2018)

An Assyrian Patriot, a Man of Dignity, Honor and Commitment

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Aprim Minashe Aprim was born in Mosul, Occupied Assyria (Northern Iraq) on October 15, 1924 to father Rabi, Deacon and Levy Officer Minashe Aprim of Kochanis, [Hakkari](#) in Northern Mesopotamia, today's southeastern Turkey and mother Shoshan of Qarajalou, Urmia, Iran.

In 1928, officer Minashe was released from the Levy force. The family with few other relatives moved to the small village of Dostakin, near Nohadra (Dohuk) in northern Iraq and they began to build new homes to settle there. Minashe began to teach children there in open spaces or at home at times since there was no church or school there until 1929 when the Church of Mar Moshi was built and schooling began in that church.



Aprim Minashe Aprim few months old. Circa 1925, Mosul, Iraq.



Aprim Minashe Aprim's parents: Assyrian Levy Officer Minashe Aprim and Shoshan, Mosul c. 1925/6.

After the [Simele](#) massacre of 1933 where over 3,000 unarmed Assyrians, including many women and young boys and girls were murdered in cold blood by the Iraqi army under the command of the Kurdish General Bekir Sidqi, many Assyrians including the Minashe family moved to Mosul where Aprim attended the famous school of Rev. Yousip Kelaita while his father Minashe was hired as one of the teachers.

In 1936, the British authorities in Iraq ordered the Aprim family (Officer Minashe, his wife Shoshan and children Aprim, Bahija, Fraidon and William), to leave Iraq and join the Assyrians who have in 1933 fled to [Khabor](#), Syria. The Iraqi and British authorities in Iraq had continued in their unfair policy of exiling all the supporters or relatives of Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun, who was first kept under house arrest and later exiled to Cyprus with his immediate family members, because he had been [fighting for the future](#) of the Assyrian people in the League of Nations and objecting to the British plans in Iraq that ignored the [Allies](#) WWI [promises](#) for a homeland for the Assyrians in northern Iraq.

After couple of years in Khabor, Minashe and Shoshan had another daughter, Shamrait. Minashe had continued to look for better working opportunities to support his family, but to no avail. He decided to return to Mosul where he had many contacts. He traveled on foot following the railway tracks. Shortly after, Shoshan got



Assyrian School in Mosul. Aprim Minashe Aprim standing in the last row with the arrow pointing at him. His father Minashe Aprim was a teacher at the school. He is standing to the left. Mosul, Iraq. c. 1934.

very ill and was taken to Beirut for treatment. Upon her return, she discovered that her little daughter Shamraitia had passed away from malnutrition and the tough conditions in the [Khabor](#). Shoshan's illness and great sadness overcame her and she passed away on January 31, 1942 in Khabor.

The four children were now alone. Minashe arranged through a good friend that the children be sent back with one of the British conveyances that traveled between Qamishli (Syria) and Habbaniya (West of Baghdad) where the British had a Royal Air Force (RAF) base there. Minashe picked them up there.

In Habbaniya, Aprim began to work at the Navy Army and Air Force Institute (NAAFI), which was an organization created by the British government in 1921 to sell goods to servicemen of the *British Armed Forces wherever they were serving*.

In 1945, with the boom of the Oil industry, Aprim moved to Kirkuk where he attended special seminars and training classes and graduated first in his class with couple of certificates from the Association of International Accountants and from the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. He began to work for the IPC (Iraqi Petroleum Company). He worked there until he retired in 1977.

In Kirkuk, Aprim met Gladys Adam and they were married on November 18, 1951. However, the wedding was set in Habbaniya since most of the relatives were still living there.

Aprim grew up as an Assyrian patriot who always thought about his fellow Assyrians. Living the Simele massacre of 1933 and becoming a refugee as his family was forced to leave his homeland shaped his character. In Kirkuk, he realized that there were quite few Assyrian families that were relatively poor and needed help. Upon discussions with fellow patriots, such as John Aziz and the late Esha Barcham, they decided to establish the Se'ta d'Odrana D'Atouraye d'Mar Giwargis (Assyrian Charity Committee of St. George). They applied for the necessary permit and license from the Iraqi authorities and in 1958 the charity committee was established. Aprim headed the Committee for many years. The charity later expanded to Mosul and Baghdad. The charity group or as it is called in Arabic Jam'iyat al-Rahma al-Athouriya, still exists in Kirkuk.

Aprim always believed that some of the custom that Assyrians performed were outdated. As much as he was devoted to his beloved Church of the East, he also believed in much needed reforms. He and his good friends such as John Aziz, Esha Barcham, Atto Paris and few others had traveled few times to Occupied Assyria (northern Iraq) to meet with Metropolitan Mar Yousip Khnaneesho to discuss various issues related to the



Aprim Minashe Aprim with two British employees at the HHQ NAAFI, Habbaniya, Iraq. Feb 12, 1944.



Wedding Day, Aprim and Gladys Aprim, Habbaniya, Iraq. Nov 18, 1951.



Assyrian Charity Committee of St. George, Kirkuk, Iraq. Seated right to left: Malkisdaq Oshana, Shimshon Yokhana, Aprim Minashe (President), and Esha Barcham. Standing right to left: Elias Haroon, Syamando Khzeran, Shawil Seemawan, shamasha Poulos Moshe (later priest), Daniel Porro, and Adam Khoshaba. Oct 17, 1959.

church, such as the commemorations on the third, seventh and fortieth days of the passing of an individual. These commemorations put some burden on some people. These events were a whole day activity sometimes and the guests or attendees needed to be fed in the church first and even later as they visited the home of the people remembering the departed. Aprim believed that the third day was important to commemorate since Jesus rose from death on the third day; however, the rest were unnecessary. After couple of visits and discussions, the Archbishop agreed and the seventh and the fortieth commemorations were canceled in the church. However, a certain prominent Assyrian leader went back to the old habits when his father passed away and he feared the backlash from his fellow tribal men living in the villages in the north. This prompted others to follow suit and the habit returned.

Aprim was a handsome, neat, and a gentleman. He escaped couple attempts on his life by the envious locals. One night while with his long time friend John Aziz at the gardens of the IPC employees club that he attended, a group of Turkomen men were seated next to their table. The Turkomen are Muslims and they lived in Kirkuk for many generations. There was always tension between the Assyrians and the Turkomen. In 1924 for example, Turkomen butchers attacked Assyrian women who had gone shopping during a dispute over a price. That dispute escalated to fire exchange between members of the Assyrian LEVY who came to defend the women and the Turkomen of the neighborhood firing from inside their homes. The men at the next table began to discuss in their own native language how to get rid of the two Assyrians. Aprim and John understood the Turkoman language, but never made that public. In some sort of a miracle, as Aprim and John were rushing to the outside gate to save themselves, a speedy car out of nowhere made a sudden stop and the driver asked them to jump in. Aprim and John never recognized that driver who dropped them home safe. Later, Aprim asked John, so who was your friend driver. John answered, I thought he was your friend. Aprim always called that driver St. George (Mar Giwargis), my protector.

The name Minashe has always given Aprim problems in government business affairs since it is a name used by Jews as well. And since Iraq considered Israel as an enemy, having a Jewish name gave its bearer much difficulties. He was lucky at one point to befriend a police officer who helped him change the name officially to Shima (Shema).

The period from 1964 to 1970 saw troubled times again for the Assyrian members of the Church of the East in Iraq. Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun had decided to join the West in celebrating Christmas on December 25 instead of January 7. The Church was isolated in some way and the patriarch wanted to celebrate Christmas along with the Western world. The archbishop of India, Mar Toma Darmo, rebelled and refused to follow an order by the



On their way to meet with the Assyrian Metropolitan. From right to left: Aprim Minashe Aprim, Atto Paris, Esha Barcham and unknown. In Salah al-Din, Arbil. June 5, 1959.



Aprim Minashe Aprim with his best friend John Aziz. Northern Iraq. c. Late 1950s.



The Late [Mar Eshai Shimun](#), Patriarch of the Church of the East, with Aprim Minashe Aprim, as the Head of the Mar Giwargis Assyrian Charity Committee (Seta d' Odrana d'Atouraye d' Mar Giwargis), to the left. St. George Church, Kirkuk, Iraq. May 16, 1970.

In the summer of 1980, the oldest son Fred had taken an annual leave from work and traveled to Germany to visit few friends. Two weeks after his departure, the Iraq-Iran War began. Aprim knew that if Fred returned to Iraq he would be drafted by the army and sent to war. He called his son and asked him not to return and wait for further instructions. The family here decided to leave Iraq separately. Traveling together would raise suspicions. Few weeks later, the two youngest children George and Flora left to Jordan and from there to Syria. They took the risk of being held back because Flora's passport was not renewed. She always says that she never stopped praying that the station's police would not pay attention to the details. Even today she always says that God blinded the police so that they would miss the dates – and the siblings went through. Immediately after that, the middle daughter Fiona traveled to Jordan with her cousin Jacob. And on October 14, 1980, Aprim and Gladys left Baghdad to Mosul on a train and from there they took the night train to Hasaka, Syria as sirens from the Iraq-Iran war were echoing in the dark skies. The parents kept praying throughout the journey to the Iraqi borders that they would escape a detailed luggage inspection since all their life-savings were stacked between the bottom layer of the suitcases and an additional layer they added at the bottom and sewn in a way to appear as a single layer. God listened to their prayers again as the officer who asked them to open their luggage just touched the upper stack of clothes and ordered them to get moving. On his birthday on October 15, they arrived to Hasaka, Syria station where the children were waiting for them. Aprim here said that this was the happiest birthday that he ever had knowing that all his children are safe. From Syria they traveled to Cairo, Egypt, where they were joined by Fred later. The oldest daughter Susan had remained behind because she was married already.

After six months stay in Cairo, Aprim, Gladys and their youngest son George entered the United States as immigrants on April 19, 1981. Gladys' oldest brother Baba Adam had initiated the immigration documents for his sister many years earlier. The rest of the family, older son Fred and daughters Fiona and Flora joined them six months later on December 22, 1981 as they were over 18 years of age and could not enter with the parents. The family lived in San Mateo for four years before purchasing their first home in Hayward, California in 1985 where part of the family still resides.

In late 2016, doctors gave up hope of productive life for Aprim, but a miracle kept him alive. He was home with constant care, with the exception when he had to be driven to his doctor's appointments. His wife Gladys took care of him night and day and his son-in-law Atour Daniel who had retired earlier was of great help. Despite his deteriorating health at times, the last two years of Aprim's life were a blessing for the family as the children discovered the other side of this disciplined and almost always serious man that they have not witnessed before. Aprim had begun to show his affectionate, funny and spontaneous nature. He even joked at times, something that was just not him. On one occasion, as his wife had entered home upon her return from a relatives' funeral, Aprim was being walked back to his favorite chair in the living room, they ran into each other in the hallway, Aprim looked up, smiled at his wife and said innocently and sweetly, "Gladys, where have you been? I missed you."

On the evening of August 12, 2018, Aprim was nearing the end of his life journey. His favorite priest Rev. Yoshiya Orahaha came by at the request of the family. Rev. Orahaha has been for some time making regular after Sunday service



At a picnic at Sar-Aus between Sulaimaniya and Halabja in northern Iraq. Standing left to right: Aprim's father Minashe, brothers Fraydon and [William](#), Julia (William's wife), Gladys Aprim, Bahija (Aprim's sister), then Aprim Minashe Aprim. Seated in front of Aprim is David Baba, Aprim's brother-in-law, David and Bahija's kids Jacob and Helen and finally Aprim's children Susan, [Fred](#) and Fiona. June 29, 1958.

visits bringing with him the Holy Communion for Aprim. He prayed over him and as the priest and then the family said their amen, Aprim repeated it subtly to the surprise of everyone since he had been silent all day. Couple of hours later, as wife, children and many grandchildren were around him and as Matt Redman was singing in the background his beautiful Christian song [10,000 Reasons](#), Aprim took his last breath quietly and peacefully while he was being kissed, hugged and caressed.



The Aprim Minashe Aprim's family picture three years before the passing of Aprim. Aprim and Gladys seated. Standing left to right, George, Fiona, Susan, Flora and [Fred](#). Hayward, California, 2015.

Aprim lived a hard, but full life. He lost his mother as a child, moved from one village to another in northern Iraq, and became a refugee in Syria, a foreign country for him. That motivated him and pushed him to seek a better life. He always wanted to be the best in what he did and he proved it. His family home in Kirkuk was one of the best. He provided well and generously for his family. He enrolled all his children in the Christian private school, Dar al-Salam al-Ahliyya, because he wanted them to have the best education. Aprim Minashe Aprim never touched anything that did not belong to him. He lived a wholesome and clean life and was always ready to give and help at the Assyrian church, where he devoted his entire life to and to the Assyrian community at large.

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Editors' Note:

Aprim Minashe Aprim, the father of [Frederick A. Aprim](#), is reciting a poem in this 2017 video that was taught to them as grammar students in remembrance of the [genocides](#) against the Assyrians that occurred before, during and after [Word War I](#).

The poem recalls the Urmia region, towns and villages in northwestern Iran, where [indigenous](#) Assyrians have lived for thousands of years.

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"Our Smallest Ally is now homeless, and dependent on our charity at [Baqubah](#), for its lands and villages have been utterly destroyed, and it has the further mortification of seeing - from reasons beyond our control - that although it threw in its lot with the ultimately victorious side, Kurds, and others of the defeated enemy, are in practical possession of its ruined homesteads."

— H. H. Austin, Brigadier-General

"Can Great Britain, now that she is responsible for order in the country, afford to neglect so valuable a military asset as this nation has proved itself to be?"



— Dr. W. A. Wigram

 [Our Smallest Ally](#) (PDF, 17 MB)

 [Our Smallest Ally: A Brief Account of the Assyrian Nation during the Great War](#)



Aprim Minashe Aprim
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