



Belly Dance

New England

A Page Turns in Our Story

by *Amina Delal**

It's the end of an era on Mt. Auburn Street - in Watertown, Massachusetts, that is. Acme TV Supply has closed its doors after 54 years, and I just couldn't let this important little *bijou* of our regional history pass without some remembrance. I hope you will forgive me my self-indulgence.

To many newer dancers this won't mean anything as, these days, so much shopping happens online or at events. But to those of us more highly seasoned who've spent most all our adult lives in the B.D. biz, Acme has been there throughout, known for its international recording collection and other sundry supplies like books, videos, finger cymbals, or a dumbek should you need one in a hurry. Serving at least four generations of dancers, students, and other associated fans, it was a principal source of fodder for their musical consumption. More than a storefront for records and electronics, it was a local slice of neighborhood life tucked in among the ethnic markets, the laundromat, hardware store, "packy", and pizza shops. Nowhere on the block was more welcoming, as people would daily stop in merely to say "hello" and catch up. I couldn't count the number of times I'd walk in to find musicians, dancers, students, and other music enthusiasts just visiting although, you always would give the place a peruse. And like any other marketplace, it provided a community center to exchange news, and events information was always posted in the window or just within.

Beyond the embrace of what was happening in the shop, and quite unbeknownst to its proprietors merely going about their business, Acme became a vital resource for those of us living in the hinterlands through its charming homemade mail-order catalog. There you could ponder their extensive stock of the titles with photocopies of the covers (first on vinyl, then evolving to tapes and CDs). These were the lifeblood of the belly dance disciple with no local scene. You just had to call or write them and they'd pop one in the post. Not only did it serve as an important source for belly dance music (not available via conventional sources), it provided us with hours of amusement pouring over the printed images of the album covers. So if the title was in Arabic, Turkish, Greek, or Armenian, you could always remember or request it by what the dancer on the front was (or wasn't) wearing.

As a baby belly dance student in New York state, I'd never have progressed without them. Even as I studied with my very first six-lesson-wonder teacher at the YMCA down the street, I was sending away to Acme to feed my newfound passion. In the beginning it was the music used in class: George Abdo, Eddie Kochak, and the Feenjon Group, but I was thrilled for it. Later as my knowledge and tastes became more sophisticated, I began to explore things more "old country" and truly have Acme to thank for it. I still didn't know what it was all about yet but I was totally digging it (and am still).

That was all longer ago than I am going to admit. Suffice to say it was back when we still had to place our orders via what is now termed "snail-mail" or by telephone, and calling Acme (long distance!) was always a pleasure. I used to be so impressed that the owner, Gary Garabedian (who's real name was Arthur), helped me himself. I had no idea that what I thought a big comprehensive store was this funky little shop in a cozy neighborhood. It was a big deal to me. Gary was always so helpful and generous. Buy three or more items and you'd receive a discount. Before I ever met him in person, it was obvious he was the dearest man.

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Up the road when I actually moved to the area (primarily so I could dance) and finally visited the store, there was Gary behind the counter with his twinkling brown eyes. I was very flattered when he seemed to remember who I was (so silly). He was always so nice, easygoing and helpful. He'd come out from the behind the counter into the front of the shop, look through recordings with you and tell you about them if he knew. Not so good with the Arabic offerings, we speculated together. Then after you took them home, he'd want to know what you thought so he could suggest them to other dancers. I'm sure we were all very ignorant of his and the other associated cultures but he was always, always so helpful, patient and kind, terribly kind. And this wasn't just for me. I have no doubt that he treated everyone with the same courtesy and genuine niceness. It was his nature.

Later Gary's son Gary (whom his father called by his middle name, Aram) joined and subsequently took over the business. With his talented hands, Gary/Aram became the main TV and stereo repair guy while easing his dear daddy-o's burden and allowing him more time for public relations. Never did a day pass without any number of callers popping by to see them, chat, and make a purchase but often mostly to visit. They ran it together merrily for years and I was always so happy to go to see them both. </p>

Sometimes when I'd be annoyed by other aspects of the business (politics and club owners, a bad show by an uncooperative band), I knew a trip to Acme was removed from all that. One always felt welcome and received a reassuring sense of belonging without other baggage. And today how often do any of us have a place like that to go?

Gary the elder eventually became ill and finally left us in July 2002. Unfortunately I wasn't in town at the time, missed his passing and memorial, and then found out only after the fact. It was a shock and I was deeply saddened by my friend and father figure's passing. Bereft of a proper farewell, I felt hugely frustrated for a very long time. There were sighs and tears, futile head shaking and that horrible feeling knowing I'd never be seeing him again. Well, there was

a snapshot of the Garys together tacked up in the back of the shop. And since then I'd always see it and say hello to him there.



"The Garys" - Gary Garabedian Sr. (L) and son

Afterwards, even as Gary/Aram was carrying on business as usual, there remained a sense of his dad's gracious presence pervading the place. For several years hence I always expected to see him there with his sparkly eyes and ready smile. And since then, hardly a day passed when someone who doesn't frequent the neighborhood would stop in and ask for him only to be disappointed to hear he was no longer around.

In these last few years older ways of commerce have changed. Now with so much music, of all varieties, available online people have changed how they do their shopping. Recording sales dwindled. Gary was making the bulk of his money making house calls, doing factory-authorized repairs on big home entertainment centers. More and more he'd be absent from the shop and on the road. Sad to say, it got to the point where maintaining the store just didn't make economic sense.

And then lo, Gary found himself an awesome job with a thriving company, well worth his time and skills, sparing his aching back, with all the right benefits, convenient location, and a reliable paycheck. Certainly there's nothing wrong with that. Well, need we say more beyond wishing him well and hoping he will prosper from this new beginning? Of course we want the best for him despite our sadness for the passing of the dear little, ever-hospitable hub that was, for so long, much a part of the Mt. Auburn street scene.

Myself I'll still be down there shopping the little markets, popping into the bakeries, hardware store, and post office. But surely for the foreseeable future it will hard to conceive of the storefront at 615 Mt. Auburn of as anything else but Acme TV Supply, no matter who moves in next.

Words are not enough to express my gratitude to the Garys who will always loom large in my personal remembrances. I know too that I speak for any number of other dancers and enthusiasts whose lives were warmed and enriched from their visits to that special sweet oasis in the heart of Watertown.

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