



# Simon Mozian

## His story is a part of Detroit's history

**A** city is no better than its people, and its worth, as a place to live, work and raise a family will always be a reflection of the people who make it what it is.

So, in many ways, Simon Mozian's story is Detroit's story.

A story of hope and perseverance in a new world, born of tragedy and despair in the old.

Simon Mozian will be 85 on Aug. 6. On May 1, he will close the doors of his hat cleaning and shoe repair shop on Woodward near Palmer, catch the Woodward bus on the corner and ride home for the last time. His wife has been ill, and his yard needs tending. "It is time," he says.

He will sell the last of the unclaimed shoes and hats, the old counters and glass cabinets, the shoelaces and cans of polish and the machinery, if he can find a buyer for it. "If someone wants it," he says, "I don't know near Palmer, catch the Woodward bus on the corner and ride home for the last time. His wife has been ill, and his yard needs tending. "It is time," he says.

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The grocery store next door will knock out the wall and pile cases of Faygo pop on the worn wooden floor and the nearly 60 years of National Shoe Repair and Hat Cleaning will become another small piece of Detroit history.

HE IS a short man, not much taller than five feet, with skin that looks like lacquered paper stretched tight over his face.

With the kind of recall peculiar to the elderly, Simon Mozian, an Armenian, remembers the day in Turkey that changed his life.

"June 30, 1915. We were the last group in the genocide. In Sivas (Turkey, his home), they came and closed the houses and took my father a prisoner," he says. "Then they took my mother, my brother and sister and me on a journey to I don't know where."

In the villages, he said, they begged for food to stay alive, and, later that summer, somewhere near the Euphrates River, his mother died. "Nothing we could do. Just put some dirt on her and walk away."

His brother and sister were adopted by villagers, he said, and over the next few years he made his way to Adana, Turkey, then to Aleppo, Syria, and finally to Beirut, where, in 1920, an Armenian refugee agency made it possible for him to come to the United States and to Detroit.

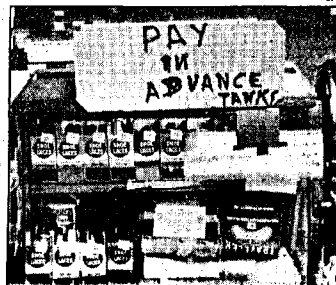
"It was not good for jobs here then," he says, "and I stood on line for two, three days to get a job at Briggs for 35 cents an hour, and then I have to pay graft of \$10 to Armenian man at Briggs for getting me the job."

HE WORKED later at Ford and Dodge, and, in 1926, he and a partner opened the shoe repair and hat cleaning shop on Woodward, a few doors from the present location. His partner retired in 1960.

Though the business has changed substantially since 1926, Mozian has never



**Neal Shine**



A note on shelves of shoelaces and heel taps tells customers of his credit policies.

done anything else but clean people's hats and fix their shoes.

"Sometimes at Easter we would do 200, 300 hats in one week," he remembers. "It was a good living for two of us. Now no hats, and people with sandals and plastic shoes."

A Tuesday morning conversation in the shop was not interrupted by a steady flow of customers.

Lee Jennings, who lives around the corner, came by and bought a pair of unclaimed brown oxfords and told Mozian he'd be back today to buy some boots. A woman from Wayne State wanted heels for her shoes. Mozian looked doubtfully at the spike heels and said he would try. "About how much?" she asked. "Three ninety-five," he said.

MOZIAN KNOWS this piece of Woodward is a different place than it was in 1926 but accepts it, even seems to understand it.

There are deep scars on his head from a beating he suffered 18 years ago in a burglary, but he doesn't mention it until he's asked.

He keeps the front door bolted and years ago replaced his front windows with heavy boards, giving the place the look of perpetual nighttime. He apologizes for the boarded front.

"No windows. No sunshine," he says. "Old jailhouse."

Then, with the air of a man who has seen worse times, he smiles and shrugs and bolts the door.

ers of his Woodward Avenue hat cleaning and shoe repair shop for the last time. In Woodward a few doors away. He moved to the present location 11 years later.

