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Culture
Heritage
History
Language

Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota
Established 1980

No. 167 Winter/Spring 2024

MinneHyeLites



ACOM GAGHANT (New Year) and VALENTINE's PARTY February 10, 2024



Attendance this year was over 75 people. Our meal was once again catered by Mim's Restaurant with a plentiful amount and selection of Middle-Eastern food. Steven Usitalo, Past President, introduced the new ACOM board which will serve for the next two years. We also welcomed an honored guest, Hayr Simeon from New York, who gave the blessing for the event and for the meal.

Dinner was capped off with dessert consisting of pakhlava made by our new president, Azad Mesrobian along with cookies baked by ADE dance member, Gina Bonsignore. To add some color and Armenian atmosphere, the Armenian Dance Ensemble

presented a suite of three Armenian Go-vand/Kochari dances, wearing their beautiful red costumes adorned with a peacock*.

Following dessert and the dance performance, Music Mundial gave us Armenian music for dancing that encouraged a lot of audience participation.

A wonderful evening was had by all - an annual tradition for the local Armenian community.

**In ancient mythology, the peacock represents Immortality. In more modern times, it is a symbol of guidance, protection, watchfulness and holiness.*





ACOM Cinema Saturdays



Saturday March 9, 2024 at 7 pm

JOIN US IN PERSON!

at St. Sahag Armenian Church, Yerevan Hall
203 North Howell Street, St Paul, MN 55104

Amerikatsi

Director: Michael A. Goorjian, 2022 (116 minutes long)

Charlie, played by the director, Michael Goorjian, joins thousands of other ethnic Armenians in repatriating to his ostensible "homeland" following an invitation by Soviet authorities in 1947.

Shot on location in the Republic of Armenia, *Amerikatsi* is a poignant tale of hope, doubling as a heartfelt ode to a country that is (mainly) realistically portrayed. Michael Goorjian was born and raised in the United States but has Armenian heritage. His initial connection is to an Armenia that existed only in his imagination. The Armenia he discovers on arrival in Yerevan is quite another Armenia. This emotionally moving film is an account of the clash between nostalgia and reality. *Amerikatsi*, Armenia's selection for the 96th Academy awards, has won awards at several film festivals.

Potluck snacks and drinks are welcome!

This film is being shown for educational purposes. There will be a discussion of Amerikatsi immediately following the film.

No tickets are required (the film will be shown free of charge)

<http://www.mnarmenians.org>

RSVP if you plan to attend. Email: hyebar@yahoo.com

ACOM WEBSITE

Remember to continue to check our website:
www.mnarmenians.org

SYMPATHY

To the **Scallen family** on the passing of their beloved husband and father, Steve, as he entered his eternal rest on January 17, 2024. ACOM sends Chacké, Julie, Nora and their families heartfelt condolences for their loss.

To **Kristi Rendahl** on the loss of her brother, Randy Rendahl, 56, who died peacefully in his home in Raleigh, North Carolina, on July 24, 2023.

FROM OUR MAIL BAG

These are sent by folks who get the ACOM Newsletter.

ACOM NEWSLETTER 166

Terry, that was an excellent newsletter. Thank you!
Thanks to all who contributed to it.
Steven U.

Just a note to say that I finally got around to reading the ACOM newsletter. You guys are doing an amazing job. It's filled with informative articles and keeps us aware of happenings with our community. Nice going guys.
Aram C.

CONGRATULATIONS

While she was on vacation in early February, **Caroline Ylitalo** received the amazing news that she was elected to the National Academy of Engineering. This is the highest level of achievement for engineers in the world. Typically, professors and Nobel prize winners are admitted to this exclusive organization.

<https://www.nae.edu/312025/NAENewClass2024>
Ylitalo, Caroline Melkonian, division scientist, Personal Safety Division, 3M Co., Maplewood, Minn. for development of personal safety products, including the N95 respirators used during the pandemic.
CONGRATULATIONS, CAROLINE !

THANKS

Thank you so much for all the effort put forth by you, Nairy and Terry. I'm sorry we had to miss the Ga-

ghant party in February, as we retreat to Mississippi every February. It wasn't much of an escape from bad MN February weather this year.... Anyway, thanks again.
Aram C.

ACOM ANNUAL YEAR-END REPORT

Very nice report.
Cynthia E.

Excellent opening remarks on the 2023 ACOM Annual Report. Very informative and complete.
Francis B.



ACOM BOOK CLUB NEWS

February 2014 was our organizational meeting, in which the first book was selected. We met in the library at St. Sahag.

We read "The Sand Castle Girls" for our ACOM Book Club in 2014. Since then, we have read, according to Francis's records, over 82 books related to the Armenians, their history, experiences and mostly by Armenian authors.

Here's Leroy's record of the first 10 books that the club read:

- 01: 03/14 - Chris Bohjalian - The Sandcastle Girls
- 02: 04/14 - Tom Mooradian - The Repatriate
- 03: 05/14 - Peter Balakian - Black Dog of Fate
- 04: 06/14 - William Saroyan - My Name Is Aram
- 05: 09/14 - various Armenian history books
- 06: 12/14 - William Saroyan - The Human Comedy
- 07: 02/15 - Louis de Bernieres - Birds Without Wings
- 08: 03/15 - Meline Toumani - There Was and There Was Not
- 09: 04/15 - Nancy Kricorian - Dreams of Bread & Fire
- 10: 05/15 - Aline Ohanesian - Orhan's Inheritance

What a great list of books that first year -- and every year afterward!

Contact Leroy if you are interested in participating:
leroy.erickson@minnmicro.com

The club meets monthly on the third Thursday of the month at a location we all agree upon.



WHAT WAS IT LIKE GROWING UP ARMENIAN

On November 12, 2023, Carrie Mesrobian and Lusine Simonyan shared their life stories and Armenian heritage with guests who attended their very interesting presentation at Merriam Park Library in St. Paul. Following are their bios.

LUSINE SIMONYAN



I am from Armenia. I was born in the city of Vanadzor, Lori marz. During my childhood, Vanadzor was an industrial city. My grandparents were accountants, my mother was a teacher, and my father was a builder. Our family was big and the house was quite small. It was located in the lap of nature, next to forest and fields. In general, Vanadzor is a green city with beautiful nature.

I had an interesting childhood in my hometown, both during kindergarten and school years. I was a very active child, I studied excellently, I was even elected as the class leader for 10 consecutive years. I also remember from my childhood that my grandfather used to take me to a lot of events and celebrations where he used to work as a toastmaster alongside his accounting work. I would recite poems of the famous Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanyan, and my grandfather was proud of me.

My environment was Armenian, although the influence of the Soviet Union was quite large. I even remember that during my junior school year I wrote an essay about how proud I was to be a citizen of the USSR. Of course, now I understand that it was not my real position, but a consequence of propaganda.

My mother's side is from Georgia, moreover not from Javakhk, but from the Shulaver village of Marineuli or Shahumyan region in Georgia, where famous traditional Armenian merchants lived. My father's side - the Simonians - came from Nagorno Karabakh about 200 hundred years ago and resettled in Horom village of Shirak marz. In our country, we call them Tajka Armenians. Until now, some of my Simonyan relatives live in the village. I have also heard that the ancestors on my mother's side has descended from the Bagratunis, and my father's side from the Mamikonians. Both of these families were medieval ministerial families, but I haven't found out that they are actually related to my parents.

Although I was born and raised in the Soviet period, my environment was Armenian, the majority of the population of my city were Armenians. I remember that we always spoke in Armenian with relatives and friends, had discussions about Armenian artists

and Armenian traditions. In general, we were a very Armenian family despite the fact that we were not religious. Instead, my uncle's family were classical Christians, their children were baptized at 40 days old, while we were baptized after independence, at a more mature and conscious age. My family gave us a more universal upbringing instead of a religious one, thanks to which I have been shaped as an Armenian woman with universal values.

To be honest, I had many friends who went to Russian schools, and there was a widespread opinion that education in schools with Russian direction was of better quality, but my parents sent me to an Armenian school. At first, I was surprised by their decision, later I realized that it was a matter of principle for them, that their children would receive an Armenian education and study Armenian literature and history more deeply. And that is what happened, I loved those subjects very much. At first, of course, I was upset that I didn't know Russian very well and I was not familiar with Russian classics like my peers from Russian schools, but over time, at a more mature age, I filled that gap. As for English, we had that subject since 4th grade, but the level of teaching was quite low. I remember that the year that I had to graduate from school, an English faculty was opened at the Vanadzor State Pedagogical University, and I was one of the first graduates of that faculty, but my school knowledge was not enough to pass the exam, and I was admitted only thanks to private tutoring. I think that the low level of English in the early years of independence was the consequent of the former USSR.

In 2009, I visited 5 states in the USA. I think my interest in the USA came from my work environment in Armenia, because I started working at USAID and interacting with American people since 2000. In addition, my family hosted American Peace Corps volunteers for 5 years. That's how I first developed my ideas about the USA. On my first visit, I was most impressed by Washington D.C.: to me, that city was a symbol of American professionalism. I still love Washington D.C. the most, even though my professor's joke that it would be nice to love Minnesota as much, as there is the university I am studying at. This is my second visit to the USA and unlike the first visit, which was for 1 month, now I have been here for 6 months and I see much more than in 2009. I am impressed by the work system here: the US govern-

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ment gives people the maximum resources and opportunities, and the citizen takes those resources and opportunities and undertakes to deal with them with a lot of responsibility. I think that it is very difficult to live in this country, residents have to work hard, pay lots and lots of taxes and feel successful and happy at the same time. I really admire the hard-working people here who are trying to build their lives under the capitalist regime and in a country full of contradictions.

The Armenian communities in different states have undergone through different developments. I haven't managed to be in all states, in all settlements here. I am eagerly looking forward to going to Los Angeles, Glendale, because the majority of Armenians are there, and I know many of my friends there. Wherever I have managed to be, in St. Louis, in Minnesota, etc., I have seen Armenian churches, interacted with local Armenians and understood, that the Armenian diaspora is really multi-layered.

The topic of emigration is still problematic in our country. This is a very difficult topic in my opinion. Being the president of a non-commercial company and especially communicating with children, we often talk to them not only about being Armenian, but also about being a citizen of the Republic of Armenia. We want to have a stronger new generation in the future and less emigration. In my opinion, the Armenian society still lacks the courage to do a SWOT analysis, to understand its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and obstacles on the way to achieving its goals. When we have the courage to reveal our weaknesses, only then we will be able to fight against them. I remembered a moment from my life, when I was in public policy school back in 2006, I wrote an essay on whether the government supports the people or the people support the government. Even now, I think about it and think that this question has 2 sides, both statements are true at the same time, and it is necessary to find the formula as a result of which both the society will be strong enough to build a strong government and the government will give favorable conditions for forming a healthy and strong society.

These issues aren't resolved in RA, and in my opinion, the solution lies in education: we must ask ourselves: what is the definition of being Armenian, are we strong as a government or as people? In Armenia, there is no definite and clear position regarding our identity, we have many dissenting groups with whom we need to work.

It is very important to separate the Soviet period and now, because in the Soviet period, yes, there was a certain Russian influence, especially in the

capital Yerevan. This influence was less in Vanadzor and especially in Gyumri. I remember that although there was atheism in the USSR and Christianity was suppressed, Gyumri and Shirak marzes in general were known for their religious population. And after the independence, the influence decreased quite a bit, I don't think that in general there is a great cultural influence from Russia on independent Armenia.

In the beginning, our curriculum changed after the independence in 1991, there were almost no Russian schools left. But now, in the last 2 years, there are many problems and debates related to Russians and the Russian language in Armenia, because now more than 150,000 Russians have taken refuge in our country since the war, and it is impossible not to take them into account. I have nothing against the language myself, it's good to know a language that allows you to read Russian classics such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Chekhov, etc.

It is difficult for me to give a comprehensive answer to the question about Armenia's relations with Russia, because I am not a politician. I think that the issue is not only Armenia-Russia relations, Armenia is located in a very complex region, and it is impossible not to take into account that fact. Sometimes I also notice that the Russia-Turkey ring is crushing Armenia, but on the other hand, completely getting rid of the Russian sphere of influence can have negative consequences. The same above-mentioned fact that today hundreds of thousands of Russians have taken refuge in our country has its influence on our position. The RA economy is also connected to the Russian Federation by many ties. I do not understand the political strategy taken by our authorities; one day we are pro-Russian, the other day we are pro-Western. I think there are big political issues related not only to Armenia and the Transcaucasia, but also to the east: China, Thailand and the countries of Central Asia, which are perhaps beyond my scope of knowledge.

Armenia needs to diplomatically find the balance to have stable relations both with the East and the Russian Federation, and with the West, and in my opinion, for that, it is necessary to create a strong government so that they will want to take you into account. We need peace, we all want peace, and for that we must be strong enough not to be crushed. I say again, it is difficult for me to give complete answers, because the topic is far from my professional scope, I am just trying to express my concept and wishes regarding my country. There are many things that are political and incomprehensible to me. In the same Humphrey Fellowship, which has been for 45 years, during all that time, I was the first student se-

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

lected from Armenia, while more students were selected from other countries, such as Pakistan, South Korea, etc. I think even these numbers are political.

Armenia is a homogenous country, it is true that national minorities also live in our country, for example, Russians, Ukrainians, Yezidis, etc., but they are very few in terms of percentage. I, being raised mostly in an Armenian environment, did not even pay attention and did not ask myself a question. Families whose relatives were repatriated from the Armenian diaspora during the Soviet period, especially from Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and other eastern countries, ate from defined Armenian or Armenian plus Eastern cuisines. We used to call those Armenians akhpar. Due to their influence, such dishes as ordinary kufta, ishli kufta, hummus, etc., became widely popular in Armenian cuisine since the 1950s. However, during my childhood, these dishes were not prepared in our family, because we did not have any relatives from the Diaspora. In general, cross-cultural ties with Armenia and other neighboring and regional countries have also influenced cuisines. Regarding dolma, all three states of Transcaucasia - Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan - have ambitions that it is their national dish. I think that everyone has a similar dish, but what is important is which nation and how it is prepared.

Turks often say that coffee is Turkish, but why or how is it Turkish? Coffee came out of Brazil, became famous all over the world, and us, the Turks, and my Palestinian neighbor prepare and drink it in the same way. As for modern Armenia, now we have many restaurants presenting oriental cuisine, after the war in Syria there was another big wave of repatriation of Syrian Armenians, and thanks to them in recent years I got to know za'tar, hummus and other oriental dishes. Now also, in contrast to the Soviet times, there are many Chinese restaurants, sushi bars and other food outlets in our country, which means that the next generations will have tried more mixed cuisines than we tried at the time. A few weeks ago, I prepared ghapama as an Armenian dish for my friends and professors, because as far as I know, there are no disputes about this dish, everyone agrees that it is a pure Armenian dish. And people quite liked its taste. But even in this case, when we are dealing with completely Armenian food, the very name ghapama is influenced by other languages, it is not a native Armenian word: it is impossible to avoid historical interactions and as a result of all that, it is very difficult to distinguish what is purely Armenian and what is an effect from other peoples.

As I mentioned earlier, our family was not as religious as my uncle's family or many, many other fami-

lies, but after independence, Christianity spread a lot in Armenia, people began to more openly visit churches, be baptized, etc., in contrast to the Soviet period, where atheism ruled, and all religions were oppressed. About 10-12 years after the independence, my daughter and I were baptized. I was already 32 years old; my daughter was 12. She was close to one of my friends who participated in the first Artsakh war and was also a devout Christian. Perhaps having been influenced by him, one day my daughter said that she wants us to be baptized during our birthdays (our birthdays are very close to each other). That's how we were baptized. Sometimes we also go to church together. I really like the architectural style in which Armenian churches are built. They are very different from the luxurious style of Catholic churches, and that has its own meaning.

Since 2010, I have been the director of Child Development foundation. Child Development foundation is a nonprofit organization in Armenia working in the child protection, education and social protection sectors. We have four branches in Armenia, one in Yerevan and three in a remote community of Vayots Dzor province, established during three years after the war. We provide services for 400 children annually. These are children with special needs, children who dropped out of school, children in poverty. We provide ongoing social and educational programs. We have speech-language therapists, social workers, psychologists, art therapists, ergo therapists, who are working with children and their families. Our key values are based working as a family in the frame of social work. Because we believe that, with social work methodology, we can rebuild competencies, develop a comprehensive approach, empower families and communities, all with economic growth and investment in their welfare.

We work with Government authorities - Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Ministry of Work and Social affairs. We build strong communication in community level with regional administration supporting local governance in Armenia. Also, we have social enterprise attached to our nonprofit organization: we produce ecologically clean developing toys, games for children. This business supports to cover part of expenses. After forcibly displacement of people from Nagorno Karabakh, we call this region, Artsakh, we support families who lost everything. With the support of UNICEF, we provide safe spaces and psychosocial services for more than a hundred children. These families still face challenges and the problem of housing and employment. As a result of displacement, these families have lost everything. It is like short term solutions that we could make.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

The government has a money distribution system and some budget. But these people still need to have some work. Children need to go to schools. From what we know, all children are now enrolled in schools. This is what we know that every child from Artsakh goes to an Armenian school. They also have this immigration issue with a passport, which is terrible because they all had Armenian passports, and now they need to be internally displaced people's status, because it's Azerbaijan, not Armenia. Still, I think there must be long term approaches for understanding. But first, we really need safety and security now to continue our work.

Our staff consists of 80 people within the regions and Yerevan. We are cooperating and promoting with the Ministry of Education and advocating in various aspects of education, because we really believe that education is the key for strong countries. Rus-

sian people who came to Armenia, about 150 000 of them, impacted the economy a lot and it caused several issues such as lack of houses for rent and increased cost of living. It's extremely difficult to find housing there. Even though it looks like the Armenian economy is booming, it is not really so. And so, it is a very tough situation in Armenia now. It is worth watching, it is on YouTube.

For me, to be an Armenian is to have that gene pool, to be the bearer of traditions, beliefs and other values that have been handed down to us for centuries, or at least to be aware of our past, our traditions and everything that the Armenian people have followed, and by following all that, today, in the modern world, to create a universal idea that will correspond and unite all Armenians, regardless of the diversity of our thinking and worldview.

CARRIE MESROBIAN

Growing up years



I was born in Golden Valley, Minnesota. I'm the youngest of two girls. My dad (Azad) is fully Armenian, and my mother (Karen) is Norwegian. We grew up in Minnesota, in a little town called Mankato. Our family was the only Armenian family in that city. All our Armenian

relatives lived in different places like Chicago, Toronto, Lebanon, or California, some in Boston. My dad's family was originally from the Black Sea area and Aintab, though he was born in Aleppo, Syria.

We were definitely diasporans, but my dad took it one step further and didn't marry an Armenian woman, which was sort of its own story. My parents met through mutual friends who went to college in South Dakota, where they both attended school. I didn't even know we were half Armenian until someone at our church said, your dad has such a funny little accent. I didn't know what they meant. As life went on, it became clear that my family, my father, had a lot of unusual activities. Like, he would make Lahmajun in the late summer because that's when all the tomatoes came in. My Midwestern friends were like, what's that? So, I would make them eat it and then that became part of our story: weird pizza at the end of the summer.

As I got older and started learning a little bit more about our history, it was overwhelming sometimes. There's a lot of guilt in acquiring this knowledge. A lot of bad things happened to our family, and there are stories we don't know, and it's very sad. There's no

place to go back to, really. We wouldn't go back to Turkey and we're not from the place that's currently known as Armenia. And we can't go back to Aleppo, where my dad was born, because that's not really where we're from.

When my dad married my mom, a person outside of his culture, that was the beginning of marking our family as outliers. The first time I actually felt like we had done something wrong culturally is when we were in Yerevan and we were on a tourist trip, and the whole bus was full of diasporan Armenians. This woman said to me, *I can't believe you don't speak Armenian. That's horrible. I can't imagine. What a shame.* My response was first, *I don't even know what your name is, lady, and yet, you're insulting us.* My dad specifically wanted us to grow up not on either coast. He wanted us to be Midwestern. He wanted us to not be status conscious, materialistic, etc.

On food and culture

A lot of being Armenian for me involves eating specific foods, especially garlic, I think. Armenian food is so much more appealing to me. I have a very strong stomach. I really like a lot of spices, so in that way, it works out well for me. Sharing the food, I think, is the easiest way to share who you are. When we had a culture fair at school, my dad would make cheese boereg or baklava, and we would bring it and everyone would be like, wow, this is so good. For me, the food is the strongest thing I carry. I'm very fussy about Armenian food; hummus, for example. I know my dad makes it in the blender and everything, but other people's hummus is just not right. I can't buy it at a grocery store. Recently, I went to a Middle Eastern place, and I thought I was

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

getting Lahmajun, and it was like a different kind of meat pie, and I was just appalled. But then again, I don't really know what cuisine we're talking about because my dad is cooking from his memory of what his mother used to make in a brick oven down at the bakery that wasn't in their house because they didn't have a kitchen. I don't know if that's even useful to think about. And it's also based on what we have available as food products in American grocery stores.

On religion and church

Where we grew up, there was no Armenian church, not even an Eastern Orthodox church. At

this point, I don't have religious inclinations, so when St. Sahag was founded, that wasn't really a cultural touchpoint for me. We went to this church that was really close to our house, an evangelical covenant church. At the time we joined, my parents really liked the minister. But then a couple of years in, this insane man rolled up and became the minister. I have nothing good to say about him, or any of that. Comparing that experience to something like the mass at St. Sahag — there's no comparison. The formality there was next level, the stained glass, the rituals. It looks more like a magical art project. For example: the incense, and the kissing of the Bible thing blew my mind. I didn't know anyone ever did that.

On understanding Diaspora and history

I've met Armenians who say they want to be buried in Armenia, even though they have never been there. If you think about it, Armenia for diasporans is like a fairytale, a story carried by children who were orphaned after deportation and landing in an orphanage in Aleppo. They don't even know how old they are; it's not like they have a full understanding of what has happened historically — they're children. So, our perception of the place is cobbled together from all these mixed-up memories. I know it's helped my dad to meet other people whose families are from the region. For example, the guy who owned the butter factory where my grandfather worked: Levonian. Levonian hooked everyone up with jobs and found everyone wives. Levonian was the social core of the refugee camp life in Aleppo. But to ask these little children, where did you grow up? If they were lucky enough to be told, or to remember, they might say the name of the town, or my parents owned a hotel on the Black Sea. I don't know how many inns were owned on the Black Sea by Armenian people, but it sounds like that was a story a lot of people could repeat. Could be true but may not ever be verified.

My father's stories

My dad writes letters to his grandkids every week, with \$20 in each envelope. He has done this for years; I could wallpaper my house with his letters. In the letters, he tells stories about things they used to do for Easter or things they used to do when they were sick. And he will just come out with these things, and my kid will read the letter, and we'll just be like, whoa, Papa, that's bizarre. When I was pregnant, he told me, don't look at ugly things or the baby will come out ugly. Which made me laugh. Once he said, my mother used to make us drink a little shot of our own pee when we were feeling anxious. We'd hear these things and think, well, that's a totally different experience.

On Armenia, the nation

My dad and sister and I visited Armenia in 2008. It was very cool. I really liked Yerevan: cafes

everywhere, restaurants, people. It's a super fun little city. All the old Armenian guys on the trip were always cracking jokes, this kind of black funeral humor all the time. All of these men that look like my uncles doing the same thing and being sort of irreverent was very familiar to me. I've got mixed feelings about how diasporans respond to the current state of Armenia. There's this impulse to protect and offer charity, but I don't know enough about actual Armenia to discern what's truly going on, what's needed. It's like Kim Kardashian going there and being like, hi, I'm Armenian, I know what everyone needs. But does she know what the people there need and want? I don't know that she's able to convey that to the world any better than I am. I think there's the desire to wish well for this culture on the part of diasporans, but I don't know that what we actually do is the right thing or is always effective.

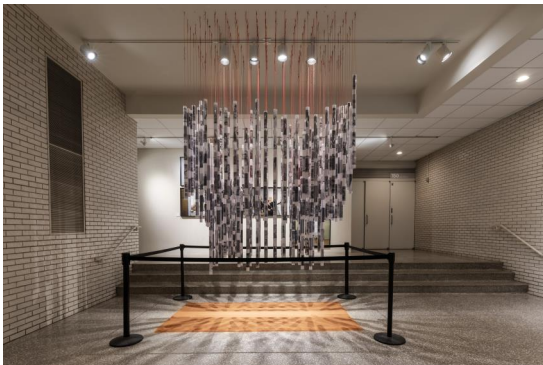
About my family

My own family is also bicultural; my husband's mother is also an immigrant, from the Netherlands. Our son has both of our names: Mesrobian and his father's last name, Durand. He is a Durand-Mesrobian.

For the past two decades, I've worked as a writer. novels, web content, lots of stuff. I currently work for a company writing marketing copy and collateral. I used to teach Spanish and Creative Writing in high school. I'm on my city's library board because I'm a big reader and I think it's important we support libraries. I've never written anything about Armenia or Armenian stuff. Maybe I will someday.

NICHOLAS LENTS and his works of art

Nicholas Lents is a recent graduate of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Majoring in photography, Nick completed his senior thesis project 'Everything the Old Country Has Forgotten and Nothing the New Country Has Seen Before' on his efforts to reconnect with his Armenian heritage. The project consists of a series of portraits of members of the Armenian American community in Minneapolis and St. Paul. For the MCAD Senior Showcase in December, Nick displayed these portraits alongside a sculptural piece called "One and a Half Million Fragments of Memory." The sculpture consisted of a hanging



structure of small cylinders of historical images taken by Armenian photographers before, during and after the genocide suspended above desert

sand that was imprinted with a weaving pattern created by a contemporary Armenian rug-maker. Nick wanted the cylinders filled with images printed on



trate the continuous efforts by Armenian people to be proudly and openly themselves in spite of adversity and to preserve as a unique, beautiful culture throughout all of history.



Members of the Armenian Dance Ensemble - picture taken at MNHS in April 2023 at ACOM's Genocide Commemoration event

Nick says: *The body of work is ongoing and I am looking for more people who are willing to participate by letting me photograph them.*

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of you were probably aware of this since it happened 19 years ago. I just found out about it and wanted to share the fantastic news, in case you had not seen it. ND

Vatican Unveils Monument of Saint Gregory the Illuminator

by Asbarez Staff, January 19, 2005

(VATICAN CITY)—Pope John-Paul II—along with Armenian Church officials—attended the official inauguration of the statue of Saint Gregory the Illuminator in the Vatican on January 19.

The almost 18 foot high statue was placed in the last remaining empty niche along the walls leading to St. Peter's Basilica—which house the statues of famous saints. It is situated at the site where visitors wait to climb the cupola.

An almost 2-foot gilt bronze Armenian Cross is situated in the right hand of the statue—and a Holy Bible in the left. Two Armenian crosses and Saint Gregory's medallion adorn the statue's vestment.

The Latin and Armenian inscription on the pedestal reads—"Saint Gregory Illuminator of Armenia 301."

On his trip to Armenia to mark the 1700th anniversary of the conversion of the Armenian nation to Christianity, Pope John-Paul II became inspired by a visit to Khor-Virab where Saint Gregory was confined—crouched in the dark for 13 years.

Thus, at the urging of the Armenian Catholic Patriarch Nerses-Bedros XIX, the Pope pledged to do his utmost to erect—in the Vatican—a statue of the Saint Illuminator of the first Christian nation.

In 2001—the Vatican launched an international design contest for an artist to sculpt a marble statue of the Founder of the Armenian Church.

The winner was artist Khachik Kazandjian from Paris—who recently created a 30 feet high monument of Alfred Nobel, located in the center of the city of Sevan where Nobel lived and worked. Kazandjian is also a founding member and the first President of the Society of Armenian Artists of France.

[See Picture on Page 12](#)

“Armenian Melodies” Float Wins “Grand Marshal” Trophy for Most Outstanding Creative Concept and Float Design at the 2024 Rose Parade

PASADENA — “Armenian Melodies” has won the “Grand Marshal” award for Most Outstanding Creative Concept and Float Design in the 135th Tournament of Roses, which took place in Pasadena on Monday, January 1, 2024.

Inspired by the strength of Armenian matriarchs throughout history, “Armenian Melodies” features dynamic Armenian mother and daughter figures dressed in vibrant, traditional garb, surrounded by important symbols within Armenian heritage and culture. This concept ties in perfectly with the 135th Tournament of Roses theme, “Celebrating a World of Music.” “Armenian Melodies” showcases several mu-



sical instruments that are endemic to Armenia.

In its sixth year of participation in the Tournament of Roses, AARFA’s “Armenian Melodies” captures

the heroism of Armenian mothers, exemplifying determination, resilience, and fortitude in the face of centuries of upheaval. Through their steadfast support, Armenian mothers inspire their families and communities to persevere, even in turbulent times.

Armenian birds play a significant role on the float, with the crane, chukar, and little ringed plover, which are indigenous to the Armenian Highlands, nestled around the mother and daughter, adding depth and character to the rich tableau. Armenian instruments also feature prominently in “Armenian Melodies,” as the name suggests. Traditional wind instruments native to Armenia, including the duduk, shvi, blul, and parkapzuk, adorn the float, while percussion instruments such as the dhol and nagara round out the floral orchestra, adding to the spirited tapestry.

Enhancing the float’s colorful and meaningful scene, symbolic objects are scattered throughout. In addition to AARFA’s tricolor Armenian logo, a bushel of pomegranates, representing good fortune and abundance, perches alongside the mother and daughter. Apricots, deeply rooted in Armenian music and culture, can be found at the front of the float, along with the aforementioned duduk, which is crafted from apricot wood. Intricate and historic Armenian patterns are highlighted on the mother’s dress, while the “arevakhatch” or sun cross, symbolizing eternal life, completes the design of “Armenian Melodies.”



Armenian Youth Initiative Presentation



You are all invited to attend a presentation by Marty Meketarian on his recent work in Armenia.

This will take place at:
Merriam Park Library
1831 Marshall Ave.
St. Paul MN

Sunday, March 17, 2024 at 3:00PM

This presentation is an opportunity for donors and friends of the program to see what was done during the month of January, 2024 in Armenia, as well as an update on the current situation regarding Artsakh families.

A question and answer session will follow. The program will last approximately 1 hour. All are welcome. Refreshments will be served.



A look Back:

St. Paul Armenians Participate in Ethnic Festival

By: Woodrow Keljik St. Paul Paper 1973

The triennial Festival of Nations was held May 11 -13 in St. Paul’s new and beautiful Civic Center. The Festival sponsored by the St. Paul International Institute, has a long standing history dating back to the 1930’s.

More than forty ethnic groups participated in the Festival this year and upwards to 20,000 people attended

Few National groups drew more attention than the Armenians who were prominent both in their food stand and display booth. The reader should bear in mind that the total communicating Armenian population of the city of St. Paul hardly exceeds 100 adults. Of this small group, 30 or 40 individuals were involved in Festival activity.

(Continued on page 11)

ACOM CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2024

Questions, suggestions, email: azadmesrobian@hotmail.com
or call ACOM President Azad at: 507-382-1838



DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
3/9/2024	Saturday	7:00 PM	ACOM Cinema Saturday (see page 2 for details)
3/11/2024	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting (ZOOM)
3/17/2024	Sunday	3:00 PM	Armenian Youth Initiative Presentation
3/21/2024	Thursday	7:00 PM	ACOM Book Club
4/8/2024	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting (ZOOM)
4/24/2024	Wednesday	TBD	ACOM Genocide Remembrance

NOTE: dates and times are accurate at the time of publishing. For an up-to-date calendar, please visit our website: mnarmenians.org



(Continued from page 10)

Mrs. John Najarian, wife of the distinguished head of the Department of Surgery at the hospitals of the University of Minnesota, together with Mrs. John Basmadjian and Mrs. Virginia Fuchs, were in charge of the food effort. Armenian shish-kebab, pilaf and salads were prepared and sold to a value of several thousands of dollars. The display booth exhibited actual oriental rug weaving on a loom by Mark Keljik, lace-making by Mrs. Avakian, a visitor from Schenectady, N.Y., and backgammon strategy and rudiments taught by Mr. Woodrow Keljik. Other artifacts also graced the booth, viewed by thousands.

The Keljik family of St. Paul, the arrival of which here dates back to 1899, was duly noted over the speakers and tribute was paid to Mr. Bedros Keljik, the first permanent Armenian settler in this state.

Mr. George Chilian, a prominent Armenian patriot whose arrival in the city occurred only twenty years after the advent of Mr. Keljik, was also present together with his daughter and grandchildren.

Much of the heavy preliminary work was accomplished by two Armenian women of St. Paul who always furnish the leadership of social events of this nature.

Mrs. Patricia Heilman (née Nakasian) and Mrs. Joan Poritsky (née Avakian) were the heroines of the effort.

All Armenians of both Twin Cities (St. Paul and Minneapolis) were aware of the planned visit of His Holiness, Catholicos Vasken I that weekend and were saddened to learn that illness had prevented his departure from Etchmiadzin.

ARMENIAN DANCE REHEARSALS

Sunday afternoons, at 1 pm in Roseville.

Interested in joining the group? email: yekibdos@gmail.com

**ACOM BOARD MEMBERS 2024-25**

President:	Azad M.
Vice President:	Kat K.
Past President:	Steven U.
Secretary:	Kathleen D.
Communications Secretary:	Lynne G.
Treasurer:	Nairy D.
Webmaster & Newsletter Editor:	Terry M.
Members at Large:	Kassian V., Mark W., Phil A.
Board Advisor:	Tom K.

Any ACOM current year dues-paid member who is interested in serving on the Board is welcome to contact us:

www.mnarmenians.org

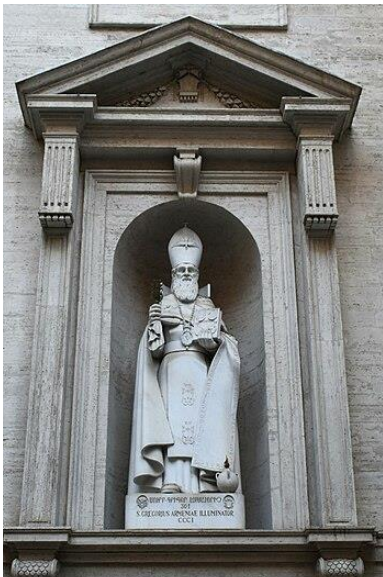
Likewise, get in touch with us if you have comments, suggestions or would like to submit an article for an upcoming ACOM Newsletter.

ACOM 2024 PAID MEMBERS

If you do NOT SEE your name below, then you have NOT renewed your 2024 membership. You can still send in your membership by filling in the form on the back of this newsletter and mailing it to the address on the form. You can also use PayPal, accessible from the website.

THANK YOU !

Andeweg, George, Jeanne
 Aroutiunian, Margarita; Usitalo, Steven
 Arslan, Arnold
 Asgjan, Phil
 Daniels, Kathleen; Myers, Marcie, Mari
 Digris, Naïry; McGibbon, Terry & Hassetts
 Erickson, Bradley
 Erickson, Cynthia, Leroy
 Favre, Margaret, Jim
 Gauro, Boghos, Lana
 Gildensoph, Lynne
 Hayes, Michelle & Lila
 Kashian, Darla & family
 Keljik, Kat; Earley, Matt
 Keljik, Mark; Grantz, Caren
 Keljik, Tom; Collins, Jennifer
 Kourajian, Art
 Lents, Nicholas; Francis, Walter
 Matossian, Lou Ann
 Meketarian, Martin, Mara & family
 Mesrobian, Azad, Karen
 Poritsky, Joan
 Savayan, Peka, Maria; Anderson, Stephen
 Vaubel, Kass, Carol, Jamaica P.
 Wiersbeck, Sarah



Date of Picture: 10/5/2019,
Source: Gary Todd from
 Xinzheng, China

ARMENIAN CULTURAL ORGANIZATION OF MINNESOTA — ACOM

MISSION STATEMENT



- 1) To provide programs and events which encourage its members to learn Armenian culture, language, history and heritage.
- 2) To provide programs of Armenian culture, language, history and heritage for the general Minnesota area.
- 3) To provide an environment which encourages participation of all Armenians, their relations and friends who have an interest in Armenian culture, regardless of religious, political or social differences, and to promote harmony among its members.
- 4) To provide periodic gatherings and meetings for the cultural furtherance of the Armenian people, their relations and friends who have an interest in Armenian culture within the general Minnesota area.

CONSTITUTION

The Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota (ACOM) preserves and promotes Armenian culture, language, history and heritage in Minnesota and the upper Midwest. Founded in 1980 and headquartered in St. Paul, ACOM is the oldest and largest Armenian organization in the state.

ACOM welcomes everyone, regardless of ethnic, religious, or political affiliation, who takes an interest in Armenia and Armenians. Our members include first-generation through fourth-generation Minnesota Armenians, their families, and non-Armenian friends of the community.

ACOM's numerous cultural and social events include Armenian dance parties (Gaghant), guest speakers, folk dance lessons and performances by the Armenian Dance Ensemble of Minnesota, Genocide commemorations, summer picnics, and series of Interviews of Presenters talking about their heritage. ACOM also sponsors all Armenian activities at the International Institute's Festival of Nations, a major regional folk festival held annually in St. Paul. Minnesota Armenians were founding participants in 1932; today, the Festival is ACOM's most visible public venue.

As an independent, 501 (c)3 non-profit organization, ACOM is supported primarily by membership dues and private donations. Gifts to ACOM are tax-deductible to the extent permissible by law.



ACOM MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Valid January 1 to December 31, 2024

Name: _____

Street: _____

Phone: () - - E-Mail Address: _____

☐ Household Membership \$35.00

Includes all members of one household

☐ Out Of State..... \$15.00
(Newsletter Only)

☐ Contributing..... \$100.00

Comments: _____

==>Please Make Your Check Payable to ACOM<==



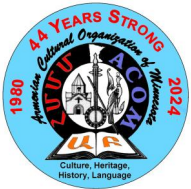
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Nairy Digris, Treasurer
1703 Skillman Ave. W.
Roseville, MN 55113

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1703 Skillman Avenue West
Roseville, MN 55113

We're on the Web

www.mnarmenians.org