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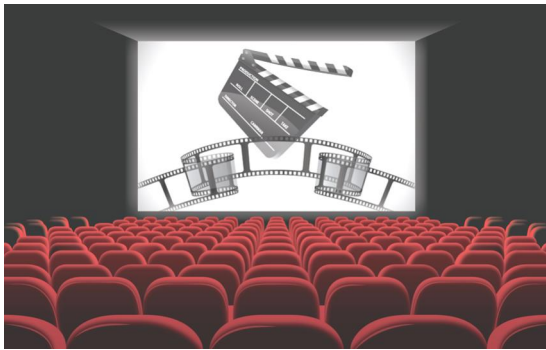
Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota
Established 1980

MinneHyeLites

No. 171 Summer-Fall 2025

SAVE the DATES

ACOM Voski Ashoun
Sunday, November 2, 2025
at 1 pm
St.Sahag Yerevan Hall



ACOM Cinema Saturday
Saturday, November 8, 2025
at 7 pm
Roseville, MN

ACOM Gaghanat: Christmas and
New Year Celebration
Saturday, January 17, 2026
6:30 pm
Cedarholm Community Center
Roseville, MN



(see [Note](#) on next page
about Gaghanat Location Survey)

Attention ACOM members:

The ACOM board tries to reach out with expressions of support and/or celebration such as with gifts of chocolates or plants for members experiencing challenging and/or celebratory life events such as surgery, the birth of new children, or the loss of a loved one. If you know of an ACOM member experiencing such life events, please let a board member know so we may extend best wishes on behalf of ACOM.

ACOM GAGHANT LOCATION SURVEY

We ran a survey towards the middle of this past year to find out if the community members had a location preference for the Annual Gaghanat dinner and dance (Armenian Christmas and New Year celebration). Results of the survey were exactly split in half: Center for Performing Arts in Minneapolis (2025) and Cedarholm Party Room in Roseville (2024). The ACOM Board then decided to alternate locations, giving a chance for everyone to come to a location they preferred.

ACOM WEBSITE

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

FROM OUR MAIL BAG

These are notes sent by folks who get the ACOM Newsletter.

THANK YOU

ACOM Members and Committee:

Thanks for remembering me with chocolates. Much appreciated. Recovering nicely.

Mark K.

Thank you so much for the get well gift, enough chocolate even for me for a few weeks! I'm 90% recovered from the operation (and its cause), and am pretty much up and around like usual. I look forward to seeing you all, maybe at Voski Ashoun.

Leroy E.

To Members of the ACOM Board,
Thank you so much for your thoughtful gift in commemoration of the passing of my sister, Helen. It is comforting to have sincere friends with you during such trying times. The ACOM picnic at Nairy's and Terry's on this past Sunday was perfectly timed for my need to be in the company of pleasant friends.

Thank you. Please know that Helen always enjoyed being with the ACOM members. She always anticipated attending!

It is another milestone as we lose each member of that generation!

With best regards and gratitude,

Art K.

Dear ACOM Board,

Thank you for all the thoughts and prayers. Each day I am recovering slowly. Also want to thank you for the chocolates that I received. Sorry, if we were a little closer, I could share some with you. They are delicious!

Thank you for the ACOM Newsletter informing us of all the interesting happenings. God's Blessings to each of you,

Sarah W.

SYMPATHY

Adrienne Hayes, May 9, 1937 – September 28, 2025, of Richfield, Minnesota, passed away on Sunday, September 28, 2025. Adrienne was born in Syracuse, NY. Survived by children **Jackie, Michelle, Brian and Doug.**

Art Kourajian for the loss of his beloved sister, Helen.

CONGRATULATIONS

George and Aida Yaghsejian on the occasion of their 60th wedding Anniversary in July.

Armen Stromquist and Caitlin Barrett on their wedding in July 2025.

GOOD JOB !

Thank you Lynne, and others for the excellent newsletter...

Marty M.

Hello Terry

I am enjoying reading the newsletter.

You are doing an excellent work as the editor of the newsletter.

Best regards

Koko M.

GET WELL WISHES FROM THE ACOM BOARD

Fr. Nerses Krajekian

Mark Keljik

Sarah Wiersbeck

Leroy Erickson

From Mark W.

Hello all,

First of all, this is not an ACOM board email, as I'm sending to friends outside of there, as well. Just wanted to mention, as I don't think most of you are aware of a connection I have. Back in 2007 I took a trip to Armenia with the Fuller Organization, which is an offshoot of Habitat for Humanity. This was actually a trip that Cynthia did not lead, but was led by Steve Rith Najarian's sister and her husband, who live in Pennsylvania.

Our trip was different than my 2004 trip with Cynthia, in that this one was split with half adults and half teenage children of the adults attending. One of the women I met on the trip was from Pasadena and we struck up a friendship, sharing wine after our work days. Paulette's teenage daughter was also on the trip and we had a very enjoyable experience while in the homeland.

ACOM BOOK CLUB

Changing Structure and Planning



Thank you, **Leroy Erickson**, for being the ACOM librarian for 11 years. The ACOM Book club continues to meet monthly, and if you are interested in joining, contact Kassian Vaubel at: kassianvaubel@gmail.com



ACOM Cinema Saturdays



Cinema Saturday Showings:

May Showing:

"2000 and None"

June Showing:

"Le Voyage en Armenie"

November selection:

"Don't tell me the boy was mad."

By Robert Geurdigian

ACOM CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2025

Questions, suggestions, email:

ACOM President Kat Keljik at: k.j.keljik@gmail.com

DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
Nov. 2	Sunday	1:00 PM	ACOM Voski Ashoun
Nov. 8	Saturday	7:00 PM	ACOM Cinema Saturday
Nov. 10	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting
Nov. 20	Thursday	7:00 PM	ACOM Book Club
Dec. 8	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting
2026			
Jan. 12	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting
Jan. 17	Saturday	6:30 PM to ?	Gaghant/Barahantess Party



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

ACOM BOARD MEMBERS 2024-2025

President:	Kat K.
Vice President:	Kassian V.
Past President:	Steven U.
Secretary:	Kathleen D.
Communications Secretary:	Lynne G.
Treasurer:	Naïry D.
Webmaster & Newsletter Editor:	Terry M.
Members at Large:	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, please get in touch with us if you have comments, suggestions or would like to submit an article for an upcoming ACOM Newsletter.

Quick visit to Dublin for Jennifer and Tom

By Tom Keljik

We left the week of unbelievable Minnesota warm weather on May 1st for a seven hour air ride to Ireland where we would spend the week exploring Dublin with a side railroad trip to Belfast. Weather in Dublin - two days before reached into the high seventies sending the Dubliners into a frenzy of climate excitement. During our stay it returned to averages in the mid 50's, although many roamed the streets in shorts and tee shirts while we maintained a layered clothing approach.

We had a marvelous time starting with a walking tour led by Tara a life long resident beginning in Saint Stephen's Green where the 1916 Easter Uprising for Irish Independence resulted in many deaths and eventual execution of its leaders. The British Empire was fighting in Europe against the Germans and was not in the mood of bending to the Irish Catholics any time soon. Our walking tour continued with many suggestions of museums and historical sites as well as numerous pubs worth visiting.

Over the next several days we made excursions to the National Library, Museum, numerous churches and a pub or two. Many remnants of Vikings presence from an initial invasion of Ireland in 795 AD in the National Museum. Jennifer, of Irish and Swedish descent found herself very much at home.

Our train ride took us to Belfast for a close look at the Troubles. Of course Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, so even though the journey crossed an international border there was little to tell we entered a different country.

Liam was our Irish Catholic black-taxi driver (married to a Protestant) that took us on a drive through the Protestant as well as the Catholic neighborhoods. He first took us to the side with an abundance of Union Jacks flying and a memorial that hyped the violence perpetrated by the Irish separatists on the pro UK people. We stopped at the twenty foot high wall separating the two communities and left our graffiti of encouraging a less violent world.

Our travel through one of the gates (all are closed at late night) led us to the Catholic side - no Union Jacks we're flying. On a major portion of the separating wall is a long mural of world societal injustices, including that in Ireland and added most recently that of Palestine.

Liam took us to a memorial outside of the beautiful church he was an altar boy that listed those killed and imprisoned during the Troubles during the late 1960's. He pointed to a name on one memorial and said that it was his uncle who spent six years incarcerated.

We returned to Dublin the same day and headed off to a tour the following day of Kilmainham Goal, a former prison now a museum. Led by a well informed tour guide named Tom, we were given a historical understanding of the changing nature of incarceration over time. When opened it was considered a state of the art prison. Taken to the prison yard we were told that the black cross to one side was where the executions of the perpetrators of the Easter Uprising occurred in 1916. These executions gave significant fuel to the separatist movement.

Our tour guide mentioned Prime Minister William Gladstone who was favorable to Irish home rule and offered bills for consideration in 1886 and 1893. As we walked to another location in the prison I caught our guide and told him of Gladstone's numerous attempts to help the struggling Armenians. In 1896, in his last noteworthy speech, he denounced Armenian massacres by the Ottomans in a talk delivered in Liverpool. Interesting that Gladstone's fathers was heavily involved in the sugar industry in the British Guyana relying on 2,508 slaves. The UK abolished slavery in 1833 freeing over time some 800,000 Africans and their descendants.

We enjoyed numerous meals of fish and chips, Irish mashed peas, Irish stews and a few pints of Guinness. While returning from a pub visit, we entered the yard of Christ Church Cathedral and were confronted with a khachkar. The monument is beautiful with artwork designed by Aram Hakumyan, who lives in Ireland. It features a Celtic and Armenian cross including many Irish and Armenian details, such as shamrocks and grapes.

The Irish have also been dedicated journalists of the truth. One of the few newspapers to suggest that a massacre was happening in 1915 was the *Irish Times*. Ohan Yergainharsian, the Honorary Consul of Armenia to Ireland, whose grandfather was the only survivor of seven brothers and four sisters from Erzurum compiled a series of *Irish Times* articles from 1915 reporting on the Genocide.

Ireland also has a small but growing Armenian community, with estimates of up to 500 Armenians in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and county Clare. The majority of Irish Armenians live in and around Dublin. There are even some living in Northern Ireland.



(Continued from page 2)

Fast forward four years later in 2011 and I was visiting the LA area. I contacted Paulette about meeting up and we had a day where she took me to Glendale, the Hollywood Bowl and downtown LA among other places. As she was driving me around, she pointed out buildings her and her husband owned in both Glendale and downtown LA. And yes, I was saying hmmm to myself. After returning home to Minnesota was talking with my mother about the trip and mentioning about the buildings they own, especially the skyscraper downtown LA. She asked me Paulette's last name and I mentioned Garagos. So my mother says, "Mark Garagos, the famous defense lawyer? Well, then everything dawns on me. Paulette had told me in Armenia her husband Mark was a lawyer, but I made no connection. Yep. Which leads to a much more recent update. Their daughter Teny, who was just a teenager on that trip back in 2007, is now in NYC and has become a big time defense lawyer. She's a big part of the defense team for Sean Combs or P Diddy, the rap singer who is currently on trial with very serious charges against him. So she's following in her father's footsteps. Teny is now in her mid-30s and has become quite accomplished in her own way. Whether you agree or not with their defense of those charged is another matter, my message is that if I ever get in big trouble, I have a couple people I can call. :*) Whether I could afford them is another matter!

My one regret is that when I visited LA back in 2011,

Paulette had invited me to stay in their guest house. But I already had hotel set up, so declined. :*) I'm hoping to get over there next winter for a visit, when I head back to AZ.

Btw, if you remember Sharon Yeghian and James Tabibian, who were here with Mayo back around 2011-2012,

They've both become quite successful back in CA. Sharon is now Director at Pasadena Center for Neuromuscular Medicine, as well as Assistant Professor of Neurology at Olive View-UCLA Medical Center and James has created a business called GI Expert Opinion <https://www.giexpertopinion.com/> and just authored his second book on the digestive system. Pretty cool.

Mark W.

Here is Modoyan playing on YouTube

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=9lCflb9u-YU>

I thought everyone might enjoy this article--I'll try to find some of his recordings!

<https://mirrorspectator.com/2025/09/04/nikolay-madoyanthe-violin-has-become-an-extension-of-me/>

A Luta Continua!

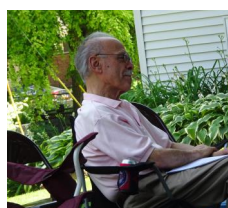
Kassian Mmabatho Vaubel
he/him/his



ACOM Summer Picnic - July 13, 2025



The annual ACOM Summer picnic was held, again, at Naïry and Terry's backyard in Roseville. The potluck picnic was well attended and gave all an opportunity to catch up with each other. The weather was delightful for this mid-summer gathering. New acquaintances were welcomed and old friends warmly greeted. A great way to spend a mid-summer afternoon.



Obituary for Helen (Kourajian) Peterson



Helen Peterson passed away peacefully at 97 years of age on July 6, 2025 at her son's home in Edina. Helen was born in Jamestown, North Dakota on May 15, 1928 to Armenian refugees Vahan and Sarah Kourajian, the second of nine children, graduating from

Jamestown High School in 1946. On Christmas Eve of that year she became engaged to high school sweetheart Robert Peterson upon his return from naval service in World War II.

Helen and Robert were married in Jamestown on May 25, 1947. The young couple moved to Minneapolis while Bob studied refrigeration at Dunwoody institute. Bob and a partner started Ideal Equipment and Refrigeration Company in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, and also sold Mercury outboards and Crosby fiberglass boats, beginning a lifelong love of boating. Helen became an avid water skier when the family would spend weekends camping and boating all around Minnesota's lakes.

Helen lived a life of dedication to her husband of 71 years, and the activities of her three sons – Cub Scouts, go-karts, camping, boating, water skiing, skating, Little League, and more. She lived a “June Cleaver” type life of suburban homemaker in the idyllic times of the 1950's, caring for Robert and their three sons.

In 1963 Bob and Helen purchased a home in

Tonka Bay, moving to Lake Minnetonka, and cementing the family's love of life on the water. When the boys left home by the early 1970's, Bob and Helen devoted vacation time to travel, especially loving cruise ships. When Bob retired at 55, in 1982, they took up golf and began wintering in Mesa, Arizona, before returning full time to the Twin Cities in 2013 to be near their family. After Bob's death in 2018, Helen remained at Highland Path assisted-living, before moving to Edina to live with son Michael and his wife Georgina.

Helen was preceded in death by husband Robert, her parents, brothers Casper, Charles, and John; her sisters Mary and Virginia; and is survived by her two brothers Thomas (Bonnie) and Arthur Kourajian: a sister Dorothy (Dave) Pokorny: and her three sons – Michael (Georgina), David (Linda) and Daniel (Nan); eight Grandchildren – Angela (Areyan) Hashemi-Rad, Ann, Jannette, Elizabeth Skilbeck, Benjamin (Rachel,) Tessa (Adam) Feichtinger, and Nicholas (Carrie,) and five great-grandchildren – Nadiya Hashemi-Rad, Charlotte and Thomas Skilbeck, and Chase and Chloe Peterson.

A Celebration of Helen's life for friends and family was held Friday, July 11, 11:30 - 2:30, at Hazelwood Tonka Bay. Private internment was at Fort Snelling National Cemetery, on July 22nd. Helen was proud of Robert's Naval Service, and the family preferred, in lieu of flowers, any memorials to your local Veterans Administration.

Obituary for Adrienne (Agababian) Hayes



Adrienne Agababian Hayes 88, passed away peacefully in Richfield, MN surrounded by family on Sept 28, 2025. She was born in Syracuse, NY to Vahram and Askanoush Agababian (née Markarian). Adrienne is survived by four beloved children: Jacqueline, Bryan, Doug, and Michelle; six grandchildren, and one great grandchild all of

whom she greatly adored. She was preceded in death by her husband of 62 years, James Ralph Hayes and sister Angele Khanzadian of Syracuse, NY.

Adrienne had a Master's degree in counseling from Syracuse University and dedicated her life to supporting students in her leadership roles at the Southwest MN State University's Women's Resource

Center, Non-Traditional Student Center, and the International Student Centers at both Southwest MN State University and Metro State University. Exceptionally gifted as a counselor, she skillfully guided hundreds of students in navigating their life paths.

Adrienne had a gift for putting people at ease, warmly inviting others into friendly conversation adding richness to all those around her. A first generation Armenian, she was proud of her heritage and both embraced and reinvented traditions throughout her life. Adrienne's legacy of empathy and embrace endures in everyone she encountered. She will be greatly missed and always remembered. In honor of her lifelong commitment to equality and justice, please consider a memorial donation in her honor to the ACLU: <https://action.aclu.org/give/tribute-gift-aclu-foundation-minnesota>.

Constantinople to Vienna 2025 Jennifer and Tom

By Tom Keljik

Let's get together and discuss the possibilities of taking a Viking cruise up the Danube. Jasbir and Frances were deep into planning another trip and were checking to see if we were onboard. After a number of exchanges we said we were in! Of special interest to us, was an extension on the front for a three day visit to Istanbul.

The trip was planned to get its start in Istanbul, fly to Bucharest followed by a bus trip to Constanta on the Black Sea where we would board the boat. Next to Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovak Republic, Hungary and ending in Vienna. Bus trips away from the Danube were also included.

As a student of history (also once a high school history teacher) I asked my travel partners about the critical dates 1453 and 1683. Also "who was Basil II the Bulgar Slayer (Armenian ancestry claimed) and what significance did he have on the Rus leader Valdimir solidifying his people to Orthodox Christianity? All were too busy preparing for the trip to take the test.

My brother and I had traveled to Istanbul in 1998 and besides conducting some rug business and sightseeing, visited the neighborhood our grandmother Zabell Kertighian was born and spent her first 19 years of life. My return to Polis (as she always referred to it) triggered thoughts of what it must have been like to have been a young Armenian-Ottoman citizen in Constantinople.

She was born in 1892 in Kadikoy On the Asian side of the city. Family stories told of her father being a doctor in the Ottoman Army. Some point in 1899 he died. Whether from illness or in supporting the Ottoman Army is unclear. It left the family destitute. Zabell's brothers had both left for France - one for education and the other for business - neither able to support the struggling family in Polis.

Two older sisters had married Armenians in the USA. One in Los Angeles and the other in Salt Lake City. Paul Ourfalian had married Zabell's oldest sister. A rug dealer, he had correspondence with Bedros Keljik, my grandfather also a rug man. He suggested that since Bedros was not yet married he might be interested in his wife's

youngest sister. The preceding newspaper article provides proof of the outcome.

As we flew to our destination - Istanbul, I began to wonder what it was like being an Armenian in that city during the early 1900's? Upon returning home I dug out a book written by Fatima Muge Gocek - 2018. - a Turkish professor of history at the University of Michigan. I had the good fortune to be invited to lunch with her and accompanied by Nairy and Terry. Exploring the book I found that the Ottomans had moved many Armenians from the hinterland to Constantinople to take advantage of a merchant and craftsmen savvy people some even finding themselves in important government positions. How long the Kertighians lived in Constantinople is unknown nor where their previous home may have been.

In 1896 - August 26 Armenian revolutionist attempting to gain the attention of Western European nations of the growing plight of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire by forcibly taking the Ottoman Bank. This act led to a rampage through the Armenian neighborhoods resulting in the deaths of some 5,000 Armenians. There were other bloody occasions that the Armenian community in the city would be targeted before the roundup of the Armenian Intellectuals on April 24, 1915 designated as the start of the Genocide. Zabell never talked about these troubling times as a young child in the city before her leaving in 1911.

Of the three days in Istanbul our guide - nickname of Echo - (lives in Izmir) took us to the main attractions everyone visits - Hagia Sofia - (returned back into a Mosque), the Blue Mosque, Hippodrome grounds, Topkapi Palace and topped off with a boat cruise around the straits portion of the Bosphorus.

Our schedule was so full we couldn't sneak over to my grandmother's beloved Kadikoy district. Perhaps another time. Upon saying goodbye to our Turkish guide, Echo told me he was next off to visit his Armenian friend on an island just off of Kadikoy - wow!

Bucharest Romania was our next destination. The recent history of Romanian is still traumatized by the reign of Communist dictator Nicolae Ceauseque - 1965-89. We stayed in the beautiful hotel constructed by him, now a Marriott. In addition he cleared a neighboring area for the building of the massive Parliament building - third heaviest building in the world. His dictatorial and harsh treatment of his people led to a revolt and his and his wife's eventual execution in 1989. Our several cab drivers shared with us there continued frustration with the state of disarray and corruption.

It is interesting to note that Armenians appeared in the early 10th century as merchants in Transylvania and Wallachia. This migration was undoubtedly due to the movement of the Ottoman Empire westward into Europe. We had the opportunity to eat in a beautiful restaurant one evening and noticed this posting -

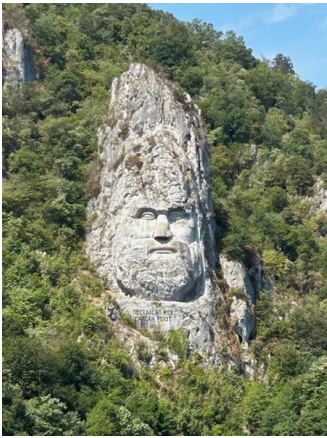


In the 18th century Armenians from the Cilicia diaspora built the city of Armenopolis (today - Gherla). It is the site of the Armenian Catholic Church consecrated in 1748 after the majority converted to Catholicism. Bucharest also had a well established Armenian quarter at one time.

Romania was one of the first countries to take in Armenian refugees from The Hamidian massacres in the 1890's and the 1915 Genocide. Many have migrated over the years. Today the population with Armenian ancestry is around 4,000.

Our trip schedule was modified since the Danube was below the depth requirement to sail from Constanta on the Black Sea coast. Via bus, we traveled to Bulgaria where we finally met up with the Viking boat.

According to Wikipedia, *Armenians were present in what is now Bulgaria no later than the 5th century being part of the Byzantine cavalry. Since then they have had a continuous presence and have often played an important part in its history from early Medieval times to the present.*



Our primary destination was Sofia, which in early years had a significant Armenian community.

Back on the boat and up the Danube with traveled through the Iron Gates a picturesque site.

Our next destination was Serbia. Again resorting to Wikipedia - *Also, a little known historical fact, during the Battle of Kosovo against the Turks in 1389 (which is one of the most important battles for our people), Armenians were part of the Turkish army. But after they saw our churches and met the local people, they changed sides and fought for Serbia against the Turks. Although the battle itself had no clear winner, Serbia took so many casualties that it was the beginning of the end for our state. The few surviving Armenians stayed in Serbia and built a church a couple of years later, and it is still an active monastery today.*

Here I am beside a remnant of the Armenian Church in Novi Sad Serbia.



Back on the boat, we traveled up the Danube and visited many wonderful sites in Serbia, Croatia, and Hungary. Budapest was especially pleasing.

Much like the majority of Eastern European - Balkan countries, Armenians had migrated along with Ottoman incursions and business interests. Wikipedia says - *Mostly migrating from Armenopolis they founded schools, built hospitals, joined the Hungarian army and contributed to the culture of Hungary. They gained positions, became teachers, medical doctors, priests, generals, ministers, etc.*

While walking the beautiful streets of Budapest, Jennifer was asked if she would take a photo for a family. Noticing their accent and cross hanging from their necks, I asked where they were from. They said presently from California, but had been citizens of Syria. I told them I had Armenian roots and they began to praise the Armenians they had known in Damascus as bright industrious people.

Here I am in Central Budapest with a Khachkar



Our trip ended in the magnificent city of Vienna. Wikipedia once again - *Armenians have a long history in Vienna, dating back to the 17th century when Armenian merchants established the city's coffee house culture and found new markets in the Habsburg Empire. Over centuries, the community grew, particularly after the [Armenian Genocide](#), and today the community is centered around the [Armenian Catholic](#)*

[Mekhitarist Monastery](#), the [Armenian Apostolic Church](#), and various cultural organizations. The community has become a vibrant part of Vienna's cultural mosaic, preserving its traditions while integrating into the city's multi-cultural fabric.

Historical flashback - 1912, the Mayo brothers were building a new home. They had need of a massive rug 25 by 60 feet and commissioned Bedros to travel to Constantinople. Less than a year after Zabel's departure via the Orient Express and crossing the Atlantic, Bedros would journey there and back. Our route via the Danube was a shortened waterway equivalent to the much lauded Orient Express. Connecting Constantinople and Paris!



Except our trip ended in Vienna.

QUESTION - In 1902 three notorious characters were in Vienna the same year. Yugoslav's dictator, one German dictator and a Soviet as well. Can you name all?

Ok - how about the answers to the significance of 1453 and 1683?

What about Basil II the Bulgar Slayer?

Attend Voski Ashoun and get a free glass of wine for the first who answers all correctly.

What was it like Growing Up Armenian in - 16th in the series



For the 16th episode in the series, Lou Ann Matossian and Greg Broburg shared their “Growing up” stories with the audience at St. Sahag Armenian Church Yerevan Hall. The discussion took place on June 8th 2025 and was ably moderated by Kassian Vaubel - ACOM Vice-President

Lou Ann Matossian



I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, grew up in the Washington, D.C., area, and went to school in Philadelphia. For the first third of my life I moved about a dozen times up and down the Northeast region. In my late 20s I came to south Minneapolis and have lived

here ever since. Looking back, I consider Washington my childhood home, with Philadelphia a close second because I came of age there.

My father, the late Garo Matossian, was one of the last Armenians to be born in Aintab. A child survivor of the Armenian Genocide, he grew up in Aleppo and graduated from the American University of Beirut. There he met his future wife, Mary Kilbourne, an American student whose missionary relatives had also served in Aintab. For this reason, I like to say that although I’m half Armenian, I am 100% Aintabtzi.

As the eldest of four, I was the first American-born child on my father’s side of the family. My Armenian grandfather died young, and I never met my Armenian grandmother because the U.S. immigration quotas were very strict during her lifetime. Of course, there was no Internet or email. Long-distance calls were terribly expensive, and the audio was poor. I used to collect the Syrian and Lebanese postage stamps from the airmail letters that came in a language I couldn’t read. At age 14, on a family trip to the Middle East, I finally met my Armenian cousins. Soon afterwards, the Lebanese Civil War started, and I didn’t see them again for years.

As I mentioned earlier, my father and his family came from Aintab. Some of them were descended from a Persian Armenian merchant, probably from New Julfa in northern Iran, but after several generations they consid-

ered themselves Aintabtzi. My father used to joke about a more recent relative from Ourfa. He was known as “the *odar*” (outsider) because even though he was Armenian, his town was about 90 miles away, the same distance as Minneapolis to Rochester. Now we can drive that distance in an hour and a half, but by horse and wagon, the trip would have taken about four days.

In the time of my grandparents, Aintab was a center of Armenian education, cultural renaissance, and religious awakening. This was due not only to the *Zartonk* (the Ottoman Armenian cultural movement) but also to the work of American medical missionaries and educators. My mother’s relatives, the Shepards, served at the American hospital, and my Armenian grandfather taught at Central Turkey College. He and my grandmother were active in Armenian church youth evangelism and religious instruction. My grandmother was quite proud of her high school education and eventually headed a church-affiliated school in Aleppo.

While I was growing up, the Armenian-American community was not nearly as diverse and international as it is today. Due to the strict immigration quotas, most Armenian-Americans were elderly survivors of the Genocide, plus their American-born children and grandchildren. I didn’t grow up in the community or take part in events until I was in high school. By that time, the quotas had lifted and I could meet other young Armenians who, like me, were closer to the immigrant experience.

I didn’t go to Armenian schools. There were none in my area, and in any case my parents expected their children to succeed in the American educational system. When I was a child, cultural diversity was not celebrated the way it is today. Also, my father was working hard to make his way in this country as a new American citizen. As he once put it, I was raised as “an American of Armenian descent.” There would have been no reason to send me to Armenian schools even if they had been available.

The Armenian I learned growing up consisted mostly of endearments, politeness phrases, simple commands, food words, and a nursery-rhyme song which I have taught to several people. My parents occasionally used Armenian as a secret language, just my grandparents in Aleppo had used Turkish as a secret language. As a teenager I taught myself the Armenian alphabet using a set of homemade flash cards. Then I went to my father and asked for lessons, and although he was happy to oblige, I am mostly self-taught. The frustration of not being fluent in Western Armenian will probably always be with me. It’s one reason why I ended up studying linguistics in graduate school.

The Armenian and Middle Eastern foods of my youth included dolma, sarma, well-done leg of lamb studded with garlic cloves, pilaf, homemade yogurt, tahn (a yogurt drink), hummous, baba ghannouj, jajik, tabbouleh, basterma, soujouk, kufteh, kebab, lahmajoun, apricot leather, dried fruits and nuts, dried chickpeas, and ma’mouniya. My father taught me how to forage wild mulberries. There was always a quart glass jar of homemade Aleppo red pepper on our kitchen table. My aunt Angele used to pre-

(Continued from page 9)

pare it on her balcony in Aleppo and ship a year's supply to us in America, because in the early days you couldn't find good red pepper in an American grocery store.

One of my fondest childhood memories was shopping at the Armenian grocery store about every six months with my father. Just the smell of the spices was overwhelming as soon as you opened the door. The olives, the cheeses, the pastries, the preserved vegetables, and so much more ... it was a different world from our American suburb. My father's whole demeanor changed. Now he was a young man in Aleppo or Beirut, chatting away in Armenian and Arabic. He would place a big order and slip me a treat along the way.

I feel so honored, so lucky, to have been born into a culture as ancient and rich and accomplished as ours is. Growing up bicultural with an immigrant parent, but with no Armenian relatives or community around me, I had to work extremely hard to figure out where I fit in. Learning about Armenian history and heritage was quite the challenge because most of the books were written for adults, often in a language I couldn't read. Out of that frustration and my own hunger for knowledge, I found more and more to love and cherish. I came to value my Armenian culture not only for its own sake, but also because, as an American, I could never take it for granted. Over the years, I've become a cultural bridge-builder, helping others make their own connections to the Armenian people.

As a child, I felt different in a good way, with a few exceptions. My family ate plain yogurt with dolma, sarma, grilled meats, and stews. Other kids thought of yogurt as a kind of sweet pudding, so they turned up their noses. And *chi kuffeh*, made from raw ground beef, did not appeal to my childhood friends at all.

The most discomfort I ever felt about identity was not from Americans, who had no idea what Armenians were, but from newly arrived Middle Eastern Armenians who looked down on us for not speaking the language. After a few years in this country, they understood better how hard it was to raise Armenian-speaking children without the cultural institutions and tightly knit neighborhoods of Aleppo and Beirut.

The major turning point in my cultural evolution was the family trip we took to the Middle East when I was just 14. Until then I had not given much conscious thought to questions of identity. At home I was Armenian, but in Aleppo I was American, unable to communicate, not understanding where I fit. My older cousin Nerses took me aside, encouraged me, and inspired me to study and learn. Months later I sent him an airmail letter, with an American stamp, handwritten in Western Armenian. It made him so happy. We both remember it to this day.

Greg Broburg



Greg was born at Bethesda Hospital in St. Paul, and has lived essentially his whole life here in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. His grandparents on his father's side were Swedish. When his dad was studying to minis-

ter, he had an assignment where his grandfather was in Rhode Island, so his mom and dad and he went to Rhode Island, and that's where his sister was born, in Providence. They then made the decision to come back to Minnesota. His mom had good ties here. She was a musician, organist and choir director, and performed at St. Sahag. But really the center of their lives was the Armenian family.

The family was Balian, that was his grandfather's family. His grandmother's family is the Ousdigian family, and the Ousdigian family doesn't have quite the familiarity, but they were an amazing family. His uncle was the head of a company called the Pushbutt Bullion Shipping Company. They built ships, and they had been in business for a couple hundred years. Their ships would go from the Black Sea, through the Bosphorus, to the Mediterranean,

His grandma's family came from Trebizond. And his grandpa came from another part of Turkey. He didn't know what the English name is. The name Balian came from Bali. There was Krikor, son of Bali who changed the name to Balian. So that's where it came from. Even though Bali is honey, the name is not related to honey.

It was probably his grandma's family and brothers and sisters that he most associated with. And his cousins. He has three cousins. The oldest daughter was Eva. So that was our Armenian community.

He did not go to an Armenian school. There were a few Armenians along the way, but nothing specifically related to Armenian, to talk to each other commonly. His mother and sister did learn Armenian. But rest got bits and pieces. People talk about Pig Latin, he called it Pig Armenian. You know, Ejer Geragor and Intrases, you know, they all learned it. His mom's favorite one was Chunkidar (I don't know). He recalls maybe 20 words. There's probably more than that if he thinks about it.

One of the things that was interesting about growing up and who they were as Armenians, his grandma said, never tell anybody that you're an Armenian, they'll kill you. And so, she had a kind of a fear. She did amazing things. "I think she came to America, and she wanted to see us live. So, she really didn't want us to talk about being Armenian". There was no pressure on them to speak, and there were no other Armenians. His grandpa's town was Kayseri.

The food was one of the absolute best parts of growing up as an Armenian kid. We had a farm where we grew the fresh foods, and they paid off the house mortgage in the Depression off of the foods, which were raspberries and strawberries and tomatoes, tomatoes, tomatoes, and lettuce and cabbage and dill. So, everything was fresh. You're a little kid, and somebody puts food on your table and says, eat, and you can't say that's not Armenian food, you know, it came from grandma. It must be Armenian.

Well, it was kind of a confusing era when I was young. Because there were stories about Turks and Armenians. Along with his grandma and her brother and sisters, there was a tag-along, a guy named George Gropion, who brought his sister and brother and eventually married one of grandma's sisters. He called himself the Turk. He had a

(Continued on page 11)

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restaurant that was very famous up in Wisconsin called the Turk's Inn, which is still in existence. It was continued on in New York City, so it's called the Turk's Inn in New York City. So being young and being an Armenian at the center of this, there were bits and pieces of conversations that sometimes included some dark things about the killings and so on, and how the Turks were involved with this. Greg had to try to sort that out. And that helped him understand why George Gropion, who was an Armenian whose family was killed, came and he called himself the Turk. He was an Armenian, but said he was a Turk. Greg thought, as a marketing tool, it was something that he used to find customers.

His grandma only had one Armenian friend come to meet him. He lost track of them. But he remembers going to the University of Minnesota for financial support and request for some help on his tuition. And he said, "I'm a minority". And they said, well, what are you? And he said, "I'm Armenian". And they said, well, you're not a major minority. And to him, well, the point of being a minority was **not** about the idea that you had to be a major minority.

There are a few events. One of them was a story that his aunt Lusine gave about her older sister at her funeral about being a little girl. The year was 1919. She couldn't

speak any English. And her older sister was asked to come down and get her to stop crying. And so, her older sister had to teach her English so that she could understand what the teacher was saying. So, you know, that's kind of a memorable event. Obviously, this young lady, who's now 94 years old and a fabulous doctor, pediatric neuropathologist, that grew up to be head of hospitals and doing a lot of amazing medical research, absorbed the language before kindergarten. He was around Armenian also when he was that age, but didn't absorb the Armenian because probably there wasn't enough of it. Grandma and Grandpa talking to each other and having to sort out what people are saying to each other and turn it into something you can actually say. You know, "okay, I recognize that word and I recognize that word". But to try to make a sense out of it was difficult. So, that's one event. Another event was his mom was an amazing music teacher in Maplewood for decades. And she had a little girl. And the little girl had come with her family from Beirut. And so, at any rate, she was sitting in the front and looking dumbfounded. And so, mom asked where she's from. The girl was able to put together enough English. So, she said, I'm from Beirut and I'm an Armenian. And mom started speaking Armenian to her. So, that's something that stands out.



ADE DANCE REHEARSALS Sundays at 3 pm : yekibdos@gmail.com

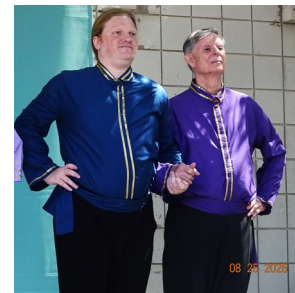
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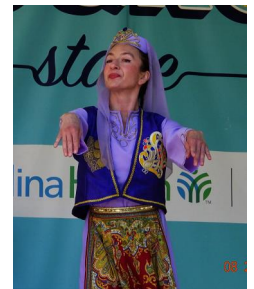


ARMENIAN DANCE ENSEMBLE of MN Various performance pictures including:

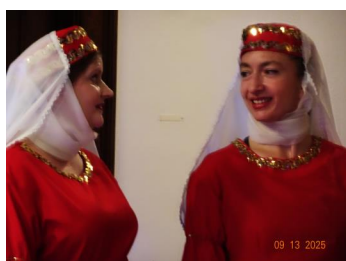
**St. Sahag Armenian Festival
Village Shores
and Minnesota State Fair**



MN State Fair



Armenian Fest



Village Shores



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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.

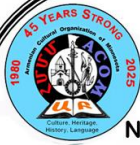
CONSTITUTION

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.



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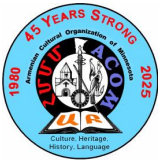
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