



AC



M

Culture
Heritage
History
Language

Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota
Established 1980

MinneHyeLites

No. 172 Spring/Summer 2026

Letter from the Editor

It's been a long time since the last ACOM newsletter. Many things have happened in our Armenian community in 2026. The event that has had the most impact on the editor, ACOM, and the Armenian community was the passing of Naïry Digris in May of this year. She was, in my words, the Թագուհի (T'aguhi or Queen) of the Armenian community here in the twin cities and Minnesota. Her gentle, caring, and unwavering work for her Armenian heritage will be sorely missed. The loss of her leadership as Director and Choreographer for the Armenian Dance Ensemble has left a hole in the group, that will begin to be filled by her daughter Alarica. She also has left a void in the International and Ethnic dance communities here in the Twin Cities where she was an active organizer, teacher, member and advocate. She is especially missed by me, the editor, who was her spouse and partner for more than 34 years.



Աստուած հոգին լուսավորէ
Asdvadz hokin lousavoreh
"May God illuminate her soul."



We have now entered a new normal in our lives and will continue her legacy in all things Armenian and in the ethnic and folkdance communities she loved and cared for. I hope to continue to edit and produce this newsletter in the months and years to come.



Age 81 of Roseville, passed away on May 16, 2026 surrounded by her family. Born on August 19, 1944, in Cairo, Egypt, Nairy was the daughter of Alexandre and Dicranouhi Digris. She carried with her throughout her life the values of family, perseverance, and generosity that were nurtured in her early years. Nairy attended the American University in Cairo before immigrating to the United States in 1966. She embraced her new home with courage and determination.

Nairy began a career that would span more than 30 years with General Mills, where she started in the secretarial department. Through dedication and talent, she advanced into International Foods Marketing, where her skills and insight were valued by colleagues and friends alike. She later earned her degree in International Marketing from the University of Minnesota. Fluent in eight languages, Nairy shared her gifts in retirement as an interpreter in the legal and medical fields.

Family was central to Nairy's life. She met and married Charles Hassett, and together they raised two daughters, Natasha and Alarica, in Northeast Minneapolis. She later married Terrence McGibbon in 1996, and the two shared a joyful life filled with dancing, hosting family gatherings, and volunteering at their church. Nairy treasured time with loved ones and created a home where



people felt welcomed, cared for, and remembered. Nairy also had a deep love for folk dancing and was active with several organizations devoted to preserving and sharing that tradition. She was a founding member of the Armenian Dance Ensemble of Minnesota and a devoted founder and advocate for ACOM, the

Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota. Her participation in these communities reflected both her pride in her Armenian heritage and her desire to keep cultural traditions alive for future generations. She found peace and solace in her garden, where she tended to her plants and flowers with the same care and attention she gave to every part of her life.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Alexandre & Dicranouhi Digris; uncle & aunt, Vahram & Valentine Kardashian; cousins, Kenny Grodsworth, Vega Mikaelian, & Patty Kardashian. Survived by husband, Terrence "Terry" McGibbon; daughters, Natasha & Alarica Hassett; stepchildren, Andrew (Lynne) McGibbon, Brian (Mary) McGibbon, Beth Ann (Todd Teachout); grandchildren, Erin, Megan, Connor, Alex, Samantha (DaiShawn), Chris, Cassie, & Nikki; cousins, Vaughn & Viguen Kardashian, Steve & Alex Gayzal, & Barbara Grodsworth; uncle & aunt, Geo & Aida Yaghsezian; nieces & nephews, Greg, Angi, Chris, Valerie, Dan, Aric, & Brennan Walsh, and Scott & Steve Hassett.



Gaghant 2026



The ACOM annual Gaghant party was held at the Cedarholm Event Center in Roseville, on a single digit cold Minnesota Saturday. The atmosphere inside, however, was warm and friendly as Armenians in the Twin Cities gathered once again to enjoy good food, entertainment by the Armenian Dance Ensemble, and music provided by Music Mundial. A wonderful evening for all of the more than 70 attendees.



Armenian Fulbright Scholars Statement on Artsakh

I was doing a search and came across this article which I didn't remember from 2020--thought it was great to be listed here (200 American Fulbright Scholars call for Artsakh's right to self-determination in letter to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo)

<https://armenianweekly.com/2020/10/22/200-american-fulbright-scholars-call-for-artsakhs-right-self-determination-in-letter-to-us-secretary-of-state-mike-pompeo/>

I'm listed near the bottom of names, and my entry is longer than most (1998 to S Africa) Other local Armenians listed were:

Hagop Toghramadjian, US Fulbright Grant to Armenia, 2017-2018 and Steven Usitalo, US Fulbright Grant to Armenia, 2011-2012

Thought I'd share - *Kassian V.*

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 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.



SYMPATHY

Dear ACOM friends,

We lost our eldest son Armen Bulbulian early morning of Thursday July 16, 2026 to cancer. He was in treatment for colon cancer for 2 years going thru numerous radiation treatment and chemotherapy sessions, to no avail. He was at the Pillars hospice in Oakdale, Minnesota at the time, where he received excellent care. Barbara & I were fortunate to spend time with him during his last days.

Francis and Barb B.

CONGRATULATIONS

The Gagbant was a really nice event, once again. The band sounded great and I thought the dancers looked really good, especially since they had to perform in such a small space. And the food was a big improvement. **Anonymous**

Much fun and good food last night. Again, thanks to the duo - Naïry and Terry for their planning and execution. **Tom K.**

Hear, hear!! I was thinking the same thing Tom. Terry and Naïry have done so much for our organization, not only last night, but over the last 4+ decades. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude for all they've done. **Mark W.**

KEEP IN YOUR THOUGHTS

Virginia Abrahamian is the wife of long time ACOM member Tom Abrahamian, mother of Todd Abrahamian, and aunt of Cynthia Erickson. Virginia is currently in an assisted living facility. For more infor-

mation on how to contact her, please E-mail Todd at todabrahamai@gmail.com. Please keep her in your thoughts.



AN ARMENIAN ODYSSEY: FROM THE EUPHRATES TO THE MISSISSIPPI

Bedros got off a train at St. Paul's Union Depot on a chilly day in November 1899, carrying two canvas suitcases. He was twenty-five years old and had neither friend nor family in the city, probably the first Armenian to settle in Minnesota.

In an interview with the St. Paul Rotarian in 1915, Bedros discussed how this background translated into success as an Oriental rug merchant: "The man who gave up Paradise to come to St. Paul" is the story told by Bedros A. Keljik, our Oriental Rug man.

Born in the inland town of Harpoot, Asia Minor now Eastern Turkey—only a hundred and fifty miles from Mount Ararat, where Noah's ark landed, and in the shadow of the fateful apple tree in the Garden of Eden—where rugs are made in practically every home. The people raised the sheep from which the wool was taken for the rugs and each family made its own vegetable dyes, everything being done by hand.

It was in this atmosphere that Mr. Keljik lived until the age of fifteen, when he came to America [in 1890]. . . . He came to St. Paul [in 1899] and started a rug cleaning and repairing business on West Fourth Street, in one small room. He succeeded from the start in this venture and in a short time began selling Oriental rugs. The growth of his business has been phenomenal, and he has attained an important position in the Oriental rug industry. His grandson, Mark Keljik continued the rug business in Minneapolis until his retirement. He sold the cleaning part of the business to a partner, but still owns some inventory which is available for purchase.

ACOM BOOK CLUB

The ACOM book club continues to meet on the third Thursday of the month. For more information on the current selection, meeting location, or to join the club, contact: kassianvaubel@gmail.com

**ACOM Cinema Saturdays****Cinema Saturday Showings:**

Screenings since the last newsletter:

January	Conan in Armenia, 2015
February	Sinners, 2025
May	Meetings with Remarkable Men, 1979
July	Aurora's Sunrise, 2022
August	Truth to Power (Serj Tankian doc)

ACOM CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2026

Questions, suggestions, email:

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



DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
Sep. 14	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting
Sep. 17	Thursday	7:00 PM	ACOM Book Club
Oct. 12	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting
Oct. 15	Thursday	7:00 PM	ACOM Book Club
Nov. 1	Sunday	1:00 PM	Voski Ashoun
Nov. 9	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting
Nov. 19	Thursday	7:00 PM	ACOM Book Club
Dec. 14	Monday	5:30 PM	ACOM Board Meeting
Jan. 16	Saturday	6:30 to	ACOM Annual Gagbant 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 2025-2026**

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

Submit to: hyebar@yahoo.com

Margaret G. Merjanian, age 86 of Braintree



Margaret G. “Peggy” (Sahagian) Merjanian, age 86, of Braintree, formerly of Arlington, MA, Deephaven, MN, and Middleboro, MA. She died peacefully, Monday, August 17, 2026, at the John Scott House, with her loving husband of 38 years Stephen C. Merjanian, at her side.

Peggy was born in Cambridge, to the late Hovnan and Nevart (Mayissian) Sahagian. She was raised in Arlington, and a graduate of Arlington High School. Peggy later raised her own family for twenty-plus years in Arlington. She was an avid sports enthusiast playing field hockey and basketball in High School – volleyball and softball – later as an adult.

Peggy was employed at Control Data Corporation for twenty-five years as an administrative assistant for the Customer Engineering Department in Waltham. She later accepted a position as an instructor for the same department at the corporation’s headquarters in Minnesota in 1982. She went on to work as a full-time administrative assistant at Saint Bartholomew’s Church in Minnesota for many years. She retired in 2013 and bought a house in Middleboro, MA.

While living in Minnesota, she and her husband, Steve, were members of the Bob Speltz Land-O-Lakes Classic Wood Boat Club, with Peggy as the

editor of the monthly newsletter and Steve as the Club’s official photographer. They owned 2 wooden boats and enjoyed cruising on Lake Minnetonka for decades. Peggy also enjoyed cooking Armenian dishes, sewing, knitting, and crocheting. Most of all, she enjoyed spending time with her family.

Peggy was a member of and sang with the Komitas Choral Society at St. Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown, MA. She loved music, Neil Diamond was her favorite.

Peggy was very active in ACOM during her time in Minnesota. She edited and put together our newsletter, *MinneHyeLites*, for many years, and got it printed and out into the mail, aided by her husband Steve and others. She always came to ACOM events and added much to our discussions. She was a joy to be around, since she was smart, a really nice person, and she had a great sense of humor. We missed her dearly when they moved back to Massachusetts, and are sorry to hear of her passing.

Devoted mother of Richard K. Vartanian and his wife Theresa of Braintree, and Gregory M. Vartanian of Upton, MA, loving grandmother of Keith R. Vartanian and wife Sabrina, and Shae T. Vartanian. Peggy was the last of 4 very close siblings. She was predeceased by Harry Sahagian, Elizabeth “Betty” Sahagian, and Helen Wilson. Peggy is also survived by several nieces and nephews.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Peggy’s memory may be made to St. Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church of Greater Boston, c/o 38 Elton Avenue, Watertown, MA 02472 or by visiting www.soorpstepanos.org/giving/.



10-Year-Old Armenian Chess Star Sofia Baghramyan Wins European Silver

Armenian Report July 9, 2026

Armenia’s Sofia Baghramyan captured the silver medal in the girls under-10 rapid competition at the European Youth Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship.

The championship was held in Rzeszów, Poland, where Baghramyan finished with 7.5 points from nine rounds. Her performance also earned her a 189-point increase in her rapid chess rating.

The result came after Baghramyan had already claimed a bronze medal earlier in the tournament, giving the young Armenian two podium finishes at the European championship.

Baghramyan has built an impressive record despite her age. Earlier this year, she won the European girls under-8 blitz title at the European Youth Chess Championship in Prague.

She is also a world champion in chess problem solving, having previously won the gold medal at the World Chess Solving Championship.

With another medal on the European stage, Baghramyan continues to strengthen Armenia’s reputation for producing world-class young chess talent.



Historical Records Reveal How Two Armenian Lawmakers Rejected a Chance to Escape Death in 1915

Historical records preserved by Agos newspaper shed light on the final days of two prominent Armenian members of the Ottoman Parliament who were arrested and murdered during the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

The story of Krikor Zohrab, an influential lawyer, writer, and parliamentary deputy representing Istanbul, and Vartkes Serengülyan, a deputy from Erzurum, returned to public attention after former HDP lawmaker Garo Paylan called for a parliamentary investigation into the fate of the seven Armeni-

an members of the Ottoman Parliament who were detained during the genocide

For more information, a link to the article is below:

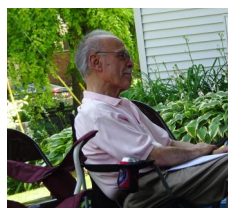
<https://www.thearmenianreport.com/post/historical-records-reveal-how-two-armenian-lawmakers-rejected-a-chance-to-escape-death-in-1915>



ACOM Summer Picnic - July 12, 2026



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.



What Was It Like Growing Up Armenian In .. No. 17



Our Panel - Moderated by Kassian Vaubel
Rachel Kirchner and Phil Asgian

The 17th episode in this Growing Up Armenian Series was held at St. Sahag Armenian Church on Sunday May 17, 2026. The session was ably run by Kassian Vaubel who posed a number of questions to our participants. This panel discussion was followed by a Q&A period and refreshments provided by ACOM.



Rachel Kirchner

Transcribed by [TurboScribe](#). Abridged by Editor

I'm from the Milwaukee area, originally. My dad is half-Armenian and my grandma is the full Armenian one. She came over from Marseille during World War II.



My dad was the youngest of six, and I have 14 cousins on that side; all of my cousins are around my age. None of them married any Armenians, so we just have Armenian from my grandma. I actually do have second cousins in Armenia now, and they say that they are from my grandma's sister, who moved back there from Marseille. They lived in Artik, which is in Armenian proper now. I actually never have found out, yet, where our ancestors lived. My grandmother's Armenian name was Ohanian.

My relatives had a farm near Artik at some point. They all live in Abovyan now, which is just around Yerevan. But I think they still have the house in Artik. At least there's lots of cousins now, so I don't even know all of them. But they have that place still.

My great-grandparents, during the genocide, went along the Mediterranean until they made it to Marseille. That's where both my grandmother's brothers stayed. One of them lives in Lyon, now. All of their descendants lived in Marseille. I visited both those branches of the family before.

Our Armenian ancestry was kind of this vague thing for us, because my grandma was very Americanized. She wanted to be American. She wanted to fit in. And if she wasn't American, then she would say I'm French. It was kind of like this mysterious

thing for me. I was like, Armenian, what even is that? And the fact that we didn't know that much about it made me want to know more about it. Most of what we heard was, it was once this great empire, that kind of stuff. It was just all this kind of vague information about how ancient and old it used to be, this great thing, and now it's just this small little thing. So, I ended up finding out a lot about my family history on my own.

Because my grandma didn't talk that much about it to her kids. I haven't tried that hard to get what I could get out of them. I knew that family was in Marseille. And I knew that they were in Armenia. And we had these vague details, but nobody really had been in contact with them for a while.

My grandma died when I was 18. All of this kind of led me to become more and more curious about our history. A lot of what I learned about the history of Armenia and the culture is stuff that I just sought out myself. And then I actually ended up finding my family members on Facebook. I had all of the old family photos that we got after she died. So, I basically just went on Facebook, typed into the search bar, Ohanian in Marseille. I saw the people that came up, and I chose, four of them.

I sent them all the same message in French. And it was "Hey, I'm this person's granddaughter. Here's a bunch of pictures. Do you know any of these people?" And one of them was my dad's first cousin.

I started just learning about it probably in my teens when I was in high school. Then, when I was in college, I think I was 19, I found them. When my family went on their first international trip, they were in Europe and I kind of deviated off of their route to go visit the Marseille family in 2018. But France is scary. Because everyone speaks French, nobody speaks anything else. In Roussillon, very close by Marseilles, I had an uncle that lived there.

My grandma, when she married my grandpa, who was a German, had been living with her aunt and uncle. Because her whole family was still in France. And they kind of disowned her because she did not marry an Armenian. So she was very separate from the Armenian community because of that. And that was very sad.

I grew up not knowing there was actually a pretty sizable Armenian community on our doorstep. I finally did get to know something about them. A lot of them came from Tomarza, which is in Turkey. We've got a dance called Tamzara. It was spelled a little different, so I didn't know if it was exactly the same thing. That's really funny, I didn't think you could connect those two together. I've seen it spelled both with an O and with an A, but I think it's the same place. I

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

learned about this Armenian connection because they had an Armenian festival every year that my family started going to a lot later on.

My little brother had just turned 19 when he started getting interested in Armenian things and wanted to go to the Armenian festival. And our parents started going as well. It was in Racine. This church, had a festival every year, and one year my parents got me a cookbook, it's recipes from ladies who came over right when everything was just starting. And they have their stories next to their recipes. Every lady who's represented has a whole story written out about them, and a lot of them came from that region.

My schooling was not Armenian-related. I just went to a Lutheran school, and then a public high school, and then I went to UW-Madison. I was actually a part of a Slovak dance group when I was in Milwaukee. After coming here, I was looking for something like that. And found the Armenian Dance Ensemble of Minnesota.

I majored in Forestry. I'm an arborist right now. I actually very recently started my own company. I'm just cutting people's trees and digging holes and planting flowers and the like.

I did not grow up with the Armenian language but it is actually the reason I got involved with the Armenian dance group. Because I had been looking for information about where I could find resources. I've studied a few languages and the hardest thing about Armenian is just the lack of resources. There's Eastern and Western and varying degrees of resources, and they are just old and they don't work very well.

I spent three months in Jordan in 2023. After that is when I went to visit my family in Armenia for the first time. Before that, I really wanted to learn how to read. Because I knew that English wasn't really a big deal there, except with the younger people. I made myself this whole spreadsheet about uppercase letters, lowercase letters, print uppercase, print lowercase, written uppercase, written lowercase. I organized it all because I don't really think the alphabetical order is very intuitive. I wanted everything grouped into types of sounds, like the aspirated sounds, the non-aspirated sounds, the just regular vowels, the consonants that were the same in English, the consonants that were totally not existing in English. I actually did get to the point where I could sound words out when I was there. I mean, I was reading the words, of course, not really understanding what they were.

I learned a great deal before I went, and I've always wanted to keep up with it. But like you said, af-

ter a certain amount of time not using it, it just kind of exits your brain. So, I think if I am going to go back there ever, I would definitely try and brush up. It's always something that's in the back of my mind that I really want to, because I feel that's really the only way to communicate with my family. Because the older ones don't speak English. And if it's not English and it's not Armenian, then it's either French or Russian. I feel, yes, I would love to continue, but it's just such a hard thing to keep up on.

As far as Armenian food, we didn't eat a lot of the very common stuff. But my uncles and aunt and dad put a little website together after grandma died. It was just a lot of her recipes, some of them were just regular modern Armenian recipes. Dad would use phyllo that he made. I asked her how to make phyllo once, and she said, just buy it.

I went to LA in 2020, and we did go to Glendale. I had chosen four different places I wanted to go to before we got there. We stopped at all of them and picked up a ton of food, then went to the beach and ate it.

I love pastries. I love baklava. Actually, most of the baklava that I've had experience with is from a friend of mine. She made very, very good baklava. It's always been about the pastries for me. At least two of those restaurants out of the four were pastry shops. Azad Mesrobian was our local master baklava maker.

As far as being negatively affected being Armenian, I think it was probably the opposite. It was more like I kind of wish I looked a little more Armenian. Because Armenians didn't look at me as Armenian. I look like my mom and I don't kind of resemble the Armenian side very much. I think we didn't really grow up very culturally Armenian. I've met my family and I still don't truly feel like I'm Armenian. But this was kind of an avenue for me to explore family that's very closely related to me and that's still living somewhere else. Which was very nice and very eye-opening. Since we didn't know anything about them, I didn't know what to expect. They're very poor, which is kind of shocking to think about. I live in a fairly comfortable situation. It feels that because of a choice that my grandma's parents made to send her over, I became American and they remained Armenian. It opened my eyes up to that disparity.

I worked in a German restaurant in Madison throughout college. One day I was serving a table and the customers were up from the Chicago area. One of them misplaced his sunglasses. He was super worried about the sunglasses and I said I'll mail them to you. I was getting his name and address and

(Continued from page 9)

he said his name was George Shaughnessarian. "Are you Armenian by any chance?" I asked him. Yes, yes I am. I mailed him his glasses back and also sent him a little note about my family history. He sent me a note back about his family. It was a really nice little connection.

Which is fun to think about. And it's fun to look at in films, when you just see one name in the credit and it's obviously an Armenian name. And then you do a little bit of research on them.

Phil Asgian

Transcribed by [TurboScribe](#). Abridged by Editor



I was born in Calgary, Canada, in the Canadian Rockies. I could have dual citizenship, but I just would have to find the papers. Later our family moved to several U.S. cities. We started out in Denver, Colorado, and then we moved to Creston, Arizona, Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and wound up in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

My paternal grandfather was Artem Asgian, and he was Armenian. My mom and other grandparents are not Armenian. My dad was baptized in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, but raised in the Episcopal Church. My Armenian grandfather immigrated to New York City in 1913, lived there the rest of his life. My great-grandfather, who lived all his life in Armenia, was Garabed Estigian. They were born and lived near Sepastia in Western Armenia, which is now part of Turkey and is referred to as Sivas. Sepastia was part of the Greek kingdom of Pontus, and later part of the Roman province of Armenia Minor. It was on the Silk Route, a trade route between Europe and Asia, and when my grandfather Artem lived there, there were actually caravans of camels that came through Sepastia on the trade route. Before the genocide, Sepastia's population was mostly Turkish, mostly Muslim, and about a third of the population was Armenian, and some Greeks. Today, fewer than 100 Armenians live in Sivas, formerly what used to be Sepastia. When my grandfather Artem Asgian came to New York City, if you look at the ship's passenger manifest, he's listed as Harutun Estigian. No other Armenian family members came with Harutun (Artem). He did serve in the U.S. Army in World War I, and after marrying my grandmother, Artem changed his name, and he was now known as Arthur. My great-grandfather, who lived his whole life near Sepastia, was Garabed Es-

tigian, and he was a peddler in secondhand goods. Eskimis is the Turkish word for old, and since he peddled or traded in old goods, if he had ESK at the beginning of his name, that would make sense. Another detail Lou Ann mentioned was, if there's a J in the Armenian surname, Cafesjian would be an example, that indicates that that surname is derived from a trader or profession, as opposed to a village or a place.

Some of you may remember years ago there was a member of this community, Vartkes Ehramjian, with whom I worked. I was telling Cynthia one day that he was puzzled by my name Asgian, and he says, he couldn't figure out what it was. Vartkes spoke a lot of languages, and one day, he came running down to my office, and he says, I figured it out, your last name. He says, Asgi is a Turkish expression for cook. He says, you're the son of a cook. And it turns out my grandfather, who came to New York City from Armenia, was in the restaurant business for several years.

My father, Charles Asgian, was born in New York City in 1923. And he relayed the following information to some of our family members about the Armenian community in New York City, where he grew up. Between World War I and World War II, there were a sizable number of Armenians that immigrated to New York City and would gather on Sundays in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. While the kids were playing, parents would network and find out what happened to their families, principally in the genocide or other family history they could gather. As far as my grandfather, Arten, could find out from talking to those in the park, everyone in his immediate family had been killed in the genocide. So he was the lone survivor.

During these networking events, Armenians did a lot of outdoor cooking, and that's where my dad learned a lot about Armenian foods. Because while his dad was Armenian, he didn't cook. And his mother was not Armenian, and she basically cooked stuff she grew up with in Europe, you know, elsewhere. It was there in those gatherings in Van Cortlandt Park that my dad learned about Armenian foods. The way our family learned about Armenian foods was principally because of my non-Armenian mother, who was a very adventuresome cook. She learned to experiment, dad would tell about a dish, and she'd go searching for recipes, and she'd find something out, and eventually she got better at it. What we know about Armenian dishes in my immediate family principally came from my mom's experimentation.

My mother is German, Austrian, and Hungarian.

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

At one point, her ancestors were almost part of the Ottoman Empire, then, because the Ottoman Empire abutted right up to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Our family was not engaged with the Armenians in the area. I'm the oldest of eight kids. So my parents were pretty busy just herding children. My first real direct engagement with an Armenian community after being in the Twin Cities was through ACOM and other organizations. As I was preparing to go to Armenia back in 2008, I wanted to learn more before I went.

I belong to Westminster Presbyterian in Minneapolis, and the Presbyterian Church has a foundation, the Jinissian Memorial Foundation, that some of you know about. They do work all over Armenia, and they really understand about Armenians in need. I talked to people that worked with the Jinissian Memorial Foundation, that gave me some information and some leads. Then I contacted people here at the church, and that led me to Cynthia, who was then president of ACOM. She was kind enough to tell me about ACOM, so I learned a little bit more that way. Then, totally by accident, I ran into Lou Ann Matassosian who worked for the Cafesjian Foundation. At the time she was one of the editors for the Armenian Weekly. Lou Ann said, oh, well you're going to Armenia. You've got to write an article for me. I did, and took photographs and stuff, and she published it.

Just before I was getting ready to go to Armenia, my brother-in-law says, I know somebody that's working over there right now. He was the project manager for the Cafesjian Museum that was being constructed in the old Cascade monument, built during the Soviet period. He gave me a tour of the whole museum and what was going to happen, how it would be laid out, very interesting.

I was there a little better than two weeks with Jinissian group. One of the interesting things with the Jinissian Memorial Foundation is they take people to do study tours. One of the conditions of going on these tours and learning and going to all the different sites where they have vocational schools or recreation centers or neighborhood clinics and all kinds of things is when you get back you have to speak about it. And spread the word. Which is what led me to doing the presentation here at St. Sahag and doing one at Westminster and writing the article for the Cafesjian Foundation.

I attended public schools in Canada and several American cities as our family moved around. Interesting enough, none of the schools that I attended taught anything about Armenian history.

My advanced schooling was business related, I

spent the bulk of my career in accounting. I worked for 15 years in international operations developing accounting standards. That led me into managing large technology projects, which is where I spent the last half of my career. And wound up managing a technology collaboration based out of Macalester between Macalester and 13 other colleges and universities. We shared technology solutions to save money.

We'll take a little detour here. I have a long time fascination with pipe organs. I got interested in them because I sang in church choirs for over 50 years. The pipe organ was always in the background. And I was curious; well how does that work? And where did it come from? So I started digging in and I got introduced to organ builders. And did some work with some of them.

I worked with Michael Barone, from Minnesota Public Radio, who does the organ program, for over 30 years. I toured organ factories around the world. And learned a lot about it. And then I decided more people should know about pipe organs. Particularly younger people. There are a lot of older organists but not too many younger organists. I started a program back in 1998 to bring the pipe organ into schools and adult education centers. I got two organ builders to work with me to build a little demonstration pipe organ. That can be transported around in a van. With the help of music educators around town, I developed a program to teach people about the organ.

I do an organ camp for piano students once a year, there were two students at different points in time. They started coming when they were in third grade. They went all the way through twelfth grade. Every year they'd come back. One of them finished his master's degree in organ performance at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and is now the accompanist for the Minnesota Boys Choir, and is teaching music theory. The other one just finished his Ph.D. in organ performance in Oklahoma. He is going to come back to the Twin Cities to be the new organist at Gloria Dei Lutheran starting in June.

My relationship with Armenian language is really limited. I didn't grow up speaking Armenian. I have a niece who has a fascination with languages. And she is fluent in several languages. She learned to read and write in French before she could read and write in English. And she learned the Armenian alphabet. She has many more Armenian conversational skills than I do. Before I went to Armenia, I borrowed my niece's language tapes. I learned several words that came in handy along the way. But I haven't real-

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

ly had a lot of opportunities to use them. And so, some of those words have kind of fallen by the wayside. But there are still a few here and there. But it's limited, I'll say that.

We had pilaf every week at home. On occasion, shish kebab, eggplant, lavash, beet bread, baklava, dolma, fruit leathers, Bastourma, if you could find it. When I was in Armenia, I got exposed to a wide variety of foods that I had never eaten before. They've got different foods and one of the recipes that I brought back from Armenia was for Spas or Tanabour, which is a yogurt soup. It's really good and very hearty, made with whole wheat. We had that when I was three. There was a family in the southern part who gave me a recipe for Spas. And that's the one that's in the St. Sahag cookbook. I also found the Armenian equivalent of lutefisk. In the mountains on the eastern side of the country. This was called Khash. it takes boiled cow or sheep parts, which might include the head, feet, and stomach of a cow or sheep and they boil it for 12 hours until it gets really gelatinous. Then they throw garlic and all kinds of things in there to give it a little bit of taste. It was the worst thing I've ever experienced in my life. The only redeeming thing was when they served a Khash to you, they put an entire bottle of vodka in it. That helped kill the taste. That's my Armenian food experience.

There wasn't any sense of being different or whatever. But being Armenian has really helped

broaden my understanding of history. And particularly history related to different faith traditions, which I'm very interested in. Seeing how connected these traditions are and how they've evolved over time has been very interesting to me. And also just going to travel to Armenia, like the Jinissian Memorial Foundation. I probably wouldn't have done that if I didn't have Armenian heritage. Just learning the traditions of people here in Minnesota that have Armenian heritage has been exciting.

My dad was a well read person. So every time he'd come across a name with an I-A-N or a Y-A-N, you know, then he'd go digging. And so some of the ones we've all heard about, like you just mentioned Cher and then the fellow that played Mannix in that TV series back in the 70s, Mike Connors. His Armenian name was Krikor. Well, my dad got enamored with that character and he wanted to name my youngest brother Krikor. My mother would have no part of that. She said she was not going to raise a child named Krikor. The compromise was Robert Gregory.

When I was in Armenia in Yerevan, I did go to the music conservatory there because of my interest in music. There's a big statue outside of Kachaturyan. There's also one of Hovanes there as well. Within the Minnesota community, I knew Beatrice Ohanesian and her sister Sita, and it turns out that what I learned from their family, years later we had three Armenian families that joined Westminster that all have roots in the Armenian community in Baghdad. And they all knew Sita and Beatrice.

Armenian Player Drafted in MLB

Hi all, thanks to Marty for pointing this Armenian player out to me. Today they held the annual Major league baseball draft of high school and college players. It's a pretty big deal to get selected in the first round, especially when one of our own was picked number 11 overall. There are 30 major league teams and 20 rounds drafted, so 600 players selected in total out of thousands of high school in college kids. So being picked just outside the top 10 of all players is quite remarkable.

He grew up in Maryland and the local team in DC, The Washington Nationals ended up picking him. We'll have to keep an eye on him to see how quickly he advances. Pretty much all of these players will start in the minor leagues and work their way up, but being a college player, he is a little more advanced than someone right out of high school. So he may move up quicker. In the past, that may mean 2-3 years, but it seems more recently the elite players have been called up sooner. And no, us Armenians have never been known to be fast ☐ Anyway, some exciting news for us in the baseball and Armenian world!

Mark W.

1:00 PM Sat Jul 11 ***
nbc sports.com

NBC Sports

 **Chris Hacıopian**
WSH • 2nd Baseman
[PLAYER STATS](#)

Nationals selected Texas A&M 2B Chris Hacıopian with the No. 11 selection of the 2026 MLB Draft.

Hacıopian transferred to Texas A&M after posting an impressive .375/.502/.656 with Maryland in 2025, and while he didn't match those numbers in 2026 (.319/.405/.578), he certainly did enough to remain one of the top collegiate bats in the class. It's also worth noting that he dealt with back issues this spring, which can help explain the dip in production. When at his best, Hacıopian makes hard contact to all parts of the field, and there's enough power in his right-handed bat to project 20-plus homer seasons at the highest level. The biggest concern is that he's a below-average runner, and there's a chance he'll need to move from the middle-infield. The bat can play at third or left field, but obviously that puts more pressure on him to reach his offensive upside. There's reason for optimism, but Hacıopian might profile as a better "real-life" prospect than a future fantasy star. - Christopher Crawford

ARMENIAN DANCE ENSEMBLE OF MINNESOTA

NEWS

ADE DANCE REHEARSALS Wednesdays at 7:30 pm : yekibdos@gmail.com 7:30

Wednesday evenings at 7:30 pm in St. Paul.
Interested in joining the group? email: yekibdos@gmail.com

ARMENIAN DANCE ENSEMBLE of MN
Various performance pictures including:

Mosaic Festival
iFest 2026
and Minnesota State Fair



**Mosaic
Festival**



MN State Fair

The group, again, performed on the Cosgrove Stage on the first day of the Fair. ADE also performed in June during the "Kick-off to Summer" on the Fair Grounds.

The Mosaic festival held at Landmark Center in St. Paul in February, showcases many local dance groups and is put on by Ethnic Dance Theater and Landmark Center.



iFest 2026

A re-incarnation of the old Festival of Nations under new management. The Armenian group performed a new Choreography by our late director, Nairy Digris. Music taken from the Khachaturian Ballet - Gayana

ACOM 2026 PAID MEMBERS

If you do NOT SEE your name below, then you have NOT renewed your 2026 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 and Jeanne
Asgian, Phil
Badman, Jeanne
Broburg, Greg
Charchian, Aram and Ruth
Daniels, Kathleen; Myers, Marcie, Mari
Digris, Naïry; McGibbon, Terry and Hassetts
Ericson, Bradley
Erickson, Cynthia and Leroy
Favre, Margaret and Jim
Gauro, Boghos and Lana
Gildensoph, Lynne
Hakobyan, Artur; Papyieva, Nina and family
Johnson, Andrea and Lowell
Keljik, Mark; Grantz, Caren
Keljik, Tom; Collins, Jennifer
Kourajian, Art
Matossian, Lou Ann
Meketarian, Martin, Mara and family
Mesrobian, Karen
Ohannesian, Judy; Tiffany, Doug
Savayan, Peka, Maria; Anderson, Stephen
Usitalo, Steve; Aroutiunian, Margarita
Vaubel, Kassian and Family
Wiersbeck, Mark
Wiersbeck, Sarah
Yaghsezian, George, Aida, Gregory
Ylitalo, Caroline, David and family

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, 2026

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<==



Complete this form and
Return it with your check to



Michele Hayes, Treasurer
1703 Skillman Ave. W.
Roseville, MN 55113

We appreciate and count on your continued support

MinneHyeLites is emailed to all and distributed via USPS only to those who request it. This saves ACOM considerable printing and mailing costs. If you would like to receive your newsletter via email, just send your email address to hyebar@yahoo.com



1703 Skillman Avenue
West

Roseville, MN 55113

We're on the Web

www.mnarmenians.org