



# AC



# M

Culture  
Heritage  
History  
Language

Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota  
Established 1980

No. 158 Summer/Fall 2020

## MinneHyeLites

### ARMENIA / ARTSAKH WANT PEACE



**About 150 Twin Cities Armenians, their families and friends marched on Saturday, October 17, 2020 for peace and justice in Armenia and Artsakh.**



**Cynthia and John**



Continue donating to the Armenia Fund or AGBU,  
or any other organization you trust.

Pioneer Press  
**Obituary: John Najarian, 92  
Transplant surgeon was  
medical pioneer at U  
Cases famously included  
Jamie Fiske's**



Dr. John Najarian

NYT Headline  
**John Najarian, Pioneering Transplant Surgeon, Dies at 92**

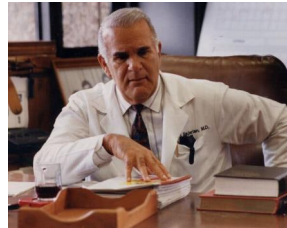
Star Trib Headline  
**Pioneering University of Minnesota transplant surgeon Dr. John S. Najarian dies at 92**



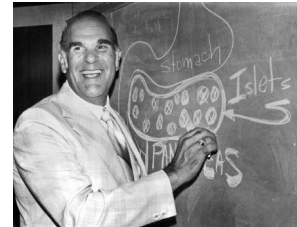
NYT - Jamie Fiske, 14, with Dr. John Najarian, 13 years after he performed a liver transplant on her, making international headlines. Credit...Jim Mone/Associated Press



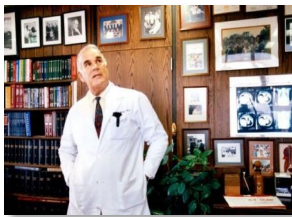
Pioneer Press - Dr. John Najarian is pictured in the operating theater during his long tenure at the University of Minnesota



NYT - Dr. John Najarian in 1993. He was a renowned transplant surgeon and chief of surgery at the University of Minnesota Hospitals who made headlines throughout his career. Credit...Judy Griesedieck/Star Tribune, via Getty Images



NYT - Dr. Najarian in 1976, describing the first successful tissue transplant he performed to combat diabetes. Credit...United Press International



Star Tribune - University of Minnesota transplant surgeon Dr. John Najarian, shown in 1993  
Cred .. Judy Griesedieck - RPA



Star Tribune - Dr. John Najarian, at right, in 1976, next to Sen. Hubert Humphrey.. Credit .. Kent Kobersteen—RPA



NYT - Credit...Mark Peterson/UPI

**John Sarkis Najarian** was born on Dec. 22, 1927, in Oakland, Calif., to Armenian parents. His father, Garabed, sold rugs, and his mother, Siran, was a homemaker.

Dr. Najarian said he began thinking of a medical career when, at 12, he was hospitalized for six weeks with a ruptured appendix. His doctors and nurses impressed him. *"I was going to do everything I could, if I made it through this, to find out how I could become one of them,"* he said in the oral history.

He studied medicine at the University of California, Berkeley. After growing up in the Bay Area, he played college football as an offensive tackle for the University of California, Berkeley, joining the team in its 1949 Rose Bowl loss to Northwestern.

*"The two weeks leading up to the Rose Bowl were when my med school classmates spent their time studying for finals, which were very important and very difficult in the first year,"* Najarian was quoted as saying

in [Cal Sports Quarterly](#). *"So I went to the Rose Bowl with a suitcase full of books, which I never opened, needless to say."*

He served as a heart surgeon in the U.S. Air Force, and it was there that he became interested in transplant surgery. He quickly became a successful organ-transplant surgeon and was recruited by many colleges, ultimately choosing the University of Minnesota Department of Surgery, where then-chief of surgery Dr. Owen Wangenstein was building an academic medicine program known internationally for surgical innovation and a tolerance for unconventional approaches.

Najarian built on early achievements in transplant research and surgery that began during Dr. Owen Wangenstein's tenure, turning the U into a national organ transplant leader. Najarian took over as head of surgery there in 1967, after Wangenstein retired. He was 39 at the time.

He *"did the tough cases,"* [Dr. Sayeed Ikramuddin](#),



current chairman of the University's department of surgery, said by email. Dr. Najarian performed transplants on kidney patients with diabetes, for instance, or patients so fragile that other doctors would not operate.

In 1970, he gave a new kidney to reportedly the youngest patient ever to have received one at the time - a 6-week-old boy. Dr. Najarian used magnifying lenses to connect the tiny arteries. In 1981, he headed a surgical team that performed a liver transplant on one of the oldest patients ever to undergo the operation, a 64 year-old man.

Months later, he and his team transplanted an adult kidney into a 10-month-old boy who, at 8.8 pounds (the child's use of an artificial kidney machine had prevented him from growing), was the smallest patient ever to receive such an operation at the Minnesota center, which by then was performing transplants on children regularly.

In November 1982, Dr. Najarian performed what may have been his highest-profile surgery. The patient was **Jamie Fiske**, who became the youngest successful liver transplant recipient when Dr. Najarian performed the operation a few weeks before her first birthday. Her parents had made a widely publicized appeal for a donor.

*"They were told that she wouldn't survive that kind of an operation,"* Dr. Najarian said in an oral history recorded in 2011 for the University of Minnesota's Academic Health Center. *"I'm not the kind of guy that takes that lightly. So I told them, 'If a liver becomes available, we'll transplant it, and it will work' — a pretty brash statement, but it did."* The publicity surrounding her case raised awareness of the plight facing the growing number of patients in need of donated organs. This led to national legislation establishing an organ donation and transplant system.

Dr. Najarian married Mignette Anderson in 1952; she died in 2019. A son, Paul, died in 2014. In addition to his son Peter, he is survived by his sons Jon and David, 12 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

In a 2010 interview with Twin Cities PBS, Dr. Najarian, who was then still performing the occasional surgery, was asked if the sight of a transplanted organ coming to life in its new host ever got old.

*"When that kidney goes in and makes the first drop of urine,"* he said, *"when the liver goes in and makes the first drop of bile, and when the lung goes in and expands — these things are marvelous, and they're a miracle today, and I'll never get tired of seeing it."*

## Bedros Keljik History Reminiscences

Can you quickly spot Bedros Keljik without looking at the bottom roster?

Escaped the Ottoman Empire 1890, joined the Osman (Name of the founder of the Ottoman Empire) Masonic Temple in 1909.



Tossed the Ottoman fez in Marseille Harbor in 1890, returned the fez to his head in 1909! The half crescent and star remain components of Turkey's flag today.



## ACOM Book Club News

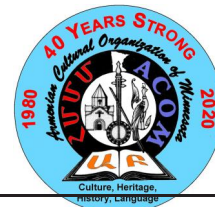
The ACOM Book Club, led by Leroy Erickson, has been meeting monthly on Zoom throughout the year. Summer months were taken off, and the group reconnected in September. Some of the regular attendees, other than Leroy, have been: Tom K, Jim & Margaret F, Cynthia E, Kassian V, Tashina P, Peter H, Azad M, Andrea J, Francis B, Joe T, Ruth & Aram C, Joan P, Alfred K.

For November, the group will read: "The Structure Is Rotten, Comrade" by Viken Berberian, and for December, they tentatively will be reading "Feast of Ashes: The Life and Art of David Ohannessian" by Sato Moughalian.

If you are interested in joining this group, contact Leroy at: [leroy.erickson@minnmicro.com](mailto:leroy.erickson@minnmicro.com)

**ACOM 2020 - CALENDAR OF EVENTS - Nov.—Dec.**

Questions, Suggestions, email: [jpderboghossian@gmail.com](mailto:jpderboghossian@gmail.com)  
or call ACOM President, John at: 231-313-1612

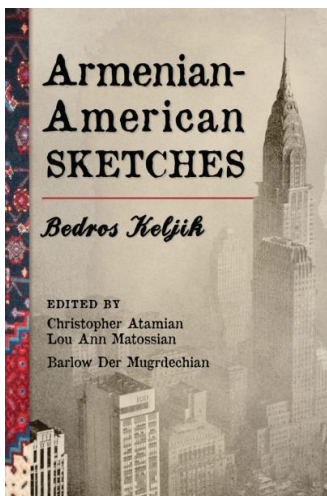


DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
<b>2020</b>			
11-9	Monday	5:30P	ACOM Board Meeting—ZOOM
11-15	Sunday	1:00P	ADE Dance Rehearsal—ZOOM
11-19	Thursday	7:00P	ACOM Book Club Meeting—ZOOM
11-29	Sunday	2:00P	Armenian Folkdance Teaching - ZOOM
12-6	Sunday	1:00P	ADE Dance Rehearsal—ZOOM
12-14	Monday	5:30P	ACOM Board Meeting—ZOOM
12-17	Thursday	7:00P	ACOM Book Club Meeting—ZOOM
12-20	Sunday	1:00P	ADE Dance Rehearsal—ZOOM
12-27	Sunday	2:00P	Armenian Folkdance Teaching - ZOOM
<b>2021</b>			
TBD			ACOM Gagahant Virtual Gathering

**Armenian-American Sketches**

by Bedros Keljik,

Edited by Christopher Atamian, Lou Ann Matossian,  
and Barlow Der Mugrdechian.



This book provides a wealth of information about the early Armenian community in America within the 29 short stories written originally in Armenian by Bedros Keljik. Bedros Keljik's *Armenian-American Sketches*, originally published in Armenian in 1944 as *Amerigahay Badgerner*, is the work of a member of the pioneer generation of Armenian immigrants, and is of both literary and historical significance.

Now fully translated into English for the first time and recently published as Volume 8 in the Armenian Series of The Press at California State University, Fresno, these stories retain their vitality, humor, pathos, and relevance.

Twenty of the short stories were translated by the late Aris Sevag, one by Lou Ann Matossian, and eight pieces, originally published in *Baikar*, were translated by Vartan Matiossian. Volume editors Christopher Atamian, Lou Ann Matossian, and Barlow Der Mugrdechian have also included an enlightening biography of Keljik, "An Armenian Odyssey:

From the Euphrates to the Mississippi," written by his grandchildren, Mark and Thomas Keljik, as well as Bedros Keljik's own translation of his fellow-Kharpetsi author Roupen Zartarian's "How Death Came to the Earth."

Armenians began arriving in America in large numbers at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. They established themselves in communities throughout the United States, maintaining their Armenian culture, while also becoming acclimated to life in America. In *Armenian-American Sketches*, author Bedros Keljik brings to life this period in Armenian-American history. With keen observation, Keljik provides the reader with an often humorous insight into that life, with all of its sadness and joy, with the sense of community, and with the hard work and challenges faced by the immigrants. This is a book which will appeal to any reader who seeks to understand the immigrant experience in the United States.

Click below to purchase from the NAASR Bookstore:  
<https://naasr.org/products/armenian-american-sketches>

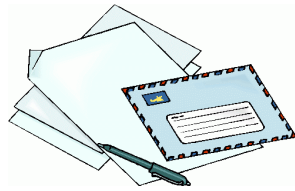




**ACOM WEBSITE**

Remember to continue to check our website:

[www.mnarmenians.org](http://www.mnarmenians.org)

**FROM OUR MAIL BAG****THANK YOU**

We were proud to serve as a partner to the *Cafesjian Family Foundation* as they supported Armenian families and individuals in Minnesota who have been deeply impacted by COVID-19. It is important that we continue to find ways to support each other during these challenging and uncertain times. We thank the *Cafesjian Family Foundation* for their generous support of our community.

**ACOM Board**

Dear ADE members,  
Thank you so much for your thoughtfulness!! We received a box of delicious treats yesterday & have all been enjoying them! It was so kind of you to send them to Marcie (who is very good at sharing... 😊 ) We will always miss Marcie's dad... But it has been comforting to remember him, as Marcie's family really has come together in many ways to help her mom, we are all sharing stories and photos of our favorite Ted memories. He was just a really good man, who did his best to help make things better in the world.

Thanks again,  
**Kathleen, Marcie & Mari**

**ACOM BOARD**

The Hernandez Abreu family GREATLY appreciates the Linden Hills Coop gift card, and my mom and Jamaica and I absolutely savored the fruit basket. We have one gigantic plum (biggest I've ever seen) left now. The fruit basket actually helped tempt Jamaica to my mom's house because we said she'd have to come over to get her share, so that was a plus.

**Kassian V.**

I am deeply moved by the peaceful way of making our thoughts into the public realm. I have not seen this approach before (Oct. 17 March in St. Paul). Thank you. I will try to come, via zoom, to something.

**Der Yeprem**

I was "at" the poetry IALA reading yesterday, but really got tied up today. Wish I could have been there (Oct. 17 March in St. Paul).

Thanks for all you do  
**Der Yeprem**

I'm always awed by the range of activities in the an-

nual ACOM newsletter. For a small community, you guys punch far above your weight.

**Gary Lind-Sinianian (ALMA. MA)**

**SYMPATHY**

It is with great sadness that we share the loss of a dear friend of ours, a former ADE dance member, **Lance Benishek**, who danced with us in the 1990s. He was well known in the U.S. for his research and documentation of early 20<sup>th</sup> century American dance, yet he enjoyed dancing with the Armenians and we all had fun getting to know him. He passed away in his sleep on June 26, 2020 after a long illness. He was only 59. We will miss you, Lance!

Our warmest condolences to **Marcie Myers** on the loss of her **beloved father** in August 2020. He was a very kind gynecologist who had delivered "thousands" of babies.... Our sympathy is also extended to Marcie's family, Kathleen Daniels and Mari Daniels Myers, both ADE dance company members.

Another local Armenian great humanitarian, **Dr. John Najarian**, passed away on August 31, 2020 at the age of 92. ACOM is saddened by this loss and wishes courage to John and Mignette's sons and grandchildren during these difficult times. ACOM community members' expressions and recollections are found in this newsletter.

Unbelievable as this may sound, Kassian Vaubel's sister, **Alexis Hernandez Abreu**, passed away on September 21, 2020 at the young age of 49, after an extremely long battle with cancer. ACOM sends their most heartfelt condolences to her husband and children, Alexis' mom, Carol, her brother Kass, her niece Jamaica, and many, many friends and family members. She will be missed for a very long time. (See more in related article in this newsletter)

Sincere condolences to the Kourajians, specifically Art Kourajian, on the loss of his sister-in-law, **Myrna Kourajian**. She died on October 11, 2020 in Hugo, MN at the age of 89. Preceded in death by her parents, husband John and other family members.

ACOM extends its sincere condolences to **Patty Kardashian** for the loss of her beloved father in Arizona. He had been ill for a while, and the family was with him when he passed on October 24, 2020.

**SPEEDY RECOVERY**

ACOM wishes all Armenians in the ACOM community, their families and friends who have been afflicted

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

by Covid-19, a very speedy and full recovery. Prayers go out to all those who are suffering from this horrible disease or from any other ailment that is holding them back.

Also, good luck to all those who have lost their regular employment, again due to Covid-19. We have to keep up our faith and positive attitude, even though it seems so very hard to do sometimes.

To **Terry McGibbon** who had total right knee replacement surgery on June 23, 2020. Even though he was active and continued to dance (until Covid-19...), his knees were very painful. The doctors called him "stoic". Then on September 15, 2020, he had his other knee replaced, figuring the time is perfect now to get this done and get it over with. Thank God, he is on the path to recovery now, and feels as good as his shiny cobalt/chromium and titanium knee implants.....The bells will sure be ringing at the airport security if he ever decides to travel.....!!

**'Tis the Season to'**... have knee replacement surgeries... The other ABC (Armenian By Choice) in the ACOM community to succumb to the side effects of being extremely active is **Jim Favre** from Rochester, MN. He had his first total knee replacement surgery on October 22, 2020 and has planned the second one for January 2021. Surgery was successful, and we wish him a speedy recovery. Jim, we know you will do really well on your new knee joint and will go back to your favorite activities in no time (COVID-19 permitting ...)

**Mitchell Erickson**, an avid and very active soccer player, tore his ACL, MCL, Meniscus, and Patellar Tendon (besides dislocating his shoulder) while playing soccer on Jan 27, 2020. He had surgery on Feb 7th, and has been going to physical therapy since then. His knee has recovered so that he can run, but he's still not back to the point of feeling normal or being able to play soccer. Good luck, Mitchell, and hopefully, you will be fully recovered soon.

#### **ACOM VOSKI ASHOUN 2020**

Due to the fact that ACOM, like any other group or organization, cannot hold "in-person" events, the Board decide to present the annual Voski Ashoun program this year on ZOOM. Those who connected and joined through the link thoroughly enjoyed the short stories read by Peter Hajinian, the poems read by Andrea Johnson, and the combined video and music clip of Henry Gregorian, taken from his past performances.

If you missed this interesting program, you can go to ACOM's website, [\*\*Voski Ashoun\*\*](#) link.

Thanks for sharing this presentation. I watched and listened sometimes with joy and tears. So proud of all the work ACOM does for our small community.

**Azad M.**

#### **REFLECTIONS ON DR. JOHN NAJARIAN**

I read the obit. What A COURAGEOUS MAN with such integrity. Humanity has lost a gift.

**Der Yeprem K.**

Hey Pete (Najarian), sorry for your family's loss. As a member of the Twin Cities Armenian community, we have always been incredibly proud of the icon, yet so personable figure your father was. He was an amazing person outside of all his medical accomplishments. Praying peace for you.

**Mark W.**

*Pete re-tweeted this and over 3300 people have seen it last I checked. I know we were all so proud to have a connection to him.*

I am sure he will be remembered by his patients and their families with great gratitude, and by his friends and family with great sadness and loss. We can hope his legacy will inspire others, especially in these times of COVID and so much suffering.

**Joan P.**

A huge loss to our community. A giant. My mother always sat in the pew right across from John and Mignette at Plymouth Congregational Church. She thought he was like God.

**Andrea J.**

Sad, though not unexpected, but it also made me feel very proud that he got a large front-page article! I went to school with his youngest son, Pete, at Mpls. Central. Dr. Najarian always attended his football games and it was cool to get to see him, though I never actually "met" him in person.

**Kassian V.**

I take it you all saw the write up about Dr. Najarian in today's paper. Was on the front page. He died in the past few days. Another pioneer. I'm so glad he came to the Twin Cities.

**Cynthia E.**

I saw the sad news in the paper this morning. We had our regular weekly Neighborhood coffee on our outdoor deck and Dr Paul Quie who worked with John gave wonderful stories of John's leadership in putting the Univ. of MN on the medical map.

I have 2 interviews done with John Najarian which Terry put on the ACOM website for our Armenian community.

**Francis B.**

**CONGRATULATIONS**

To ACOM's dear friends, Ruth and Aram Charchian, on the occasion of their 56<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary which they celebrated on July 25, 2020.

**FESTIVAL OF NATIONS**

In an on-line meeting with members of the International Institute of Minnesota and directors of the Festival of Nations, we were told that they had to make the tough decision of **not renewing** their reservation at the Xcel center and canceling **2021 Festival of Nations!** This is very sad news for many of us personally, and for the ACOM community, as we have been involved with the Festival since it started back in 1932. However, until a solution is found for COVID, we are going to remain in limbo for a lot of activities that we typically expect to see happen.....

Some wise words from Janet Rith-Najarian: on the FON:

*That is a stunning disappointment. We had a surreal Spring, followed by a Summer in limbo, but now we are going down that slippery slide into Winter. I fear that life as we know it is really going to start to change in all kinds of ways, with all kinds of losses, and ripple effects in the economy, in healthcare, in our communities. We need to brace ourselves and find ways to support each other in this shifting landscape.*

**Janet**

**ACOM GAGHANT – JANUARY 2021  
IN-PERSON EVENT CANCELLED**

Due to the ongoing concerns of COVID-19 and the closure of MidPointe Event center, ACOM has decided not to hold a “physical/in person” Gaghanant celebration this year. This was not an easy decision. This will be the first time in 40 years that we haven't celebrated Gaghanant. But we are convinced this is best for everyone's safety, protection and good health. Even though ACOM's Gaghanant location, MidPointe Event Center, and the musicians from Music Mundial were reserved since January 2020, the unfortunate events in Minneapolis and St. Paul in June which resulted in riots, fires, and the destruction and closure of Mid-Pointe, made it an additional factor that accelerated our decision to change our annual Gaghanant event into a virtual one.

ACOM has plans for this virtual Gaghanant at the beginning of January 2021! We will send out more information later this year through email and will be posted on our website.

**INTERESTING ARTICLES TO READ**

The South Dakota State history press published a quarterly booklet and the last issue had a long article about Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter, Rose Wilder Lane and her work for Near East Relief in 1922. She said “*It was in Armenia that I learned fear*” and wrote about the Armenian Genocide. I urge you to read it. The title of the booklet is South Dakota History, Vol. 50 No. 2 Summer 2020.

**Azad M.**

Another article you may find interesting to read is: Are Armenians Caucasians? If you search [Are Armenians Caucasians? - PeopleOfAr](#), you will find this long and very interesting article that you can read at your leisure.

**Ruth C.**

**COMMUNITY NEWS**

In March 2020, Leroy and Cynthia Erickson traveled to California to help their eldest son Christopher and his family move to a different apartment. Little did they expect that, after Leroy returned to MN, Cynthia would end up staying several months to provide child care during the pandemic! It was a great time, though, and Cynthia and her grandson Agni got to know each other quite well, through reading books, racing Matchbox cars, making video calls to distant family members, and playing in a sink full of water. Agni learned 'chope chope' and a variety of other Armenian vocabulary and took his first independent steps while Grandma was with him. So exciting! We visited the Famous Ferry Building Farmers Market, Ocean Beach, Muir Woods, and the more local Crocker Park. Grandma Cynthia recognizes what an unusual gift their time together was!

My name is Lisa Meuwissen. My mom and I joined Roxie Charchian at an ACOM New Year's event a while back. We really enjoyed it. My mom is still fighting cancer and we are lucky to still have her with us today. She is doing well but we take it week by week.

My mom Armeny was Armeny Mugurian from Michigan. Her parents both came from Turkey when they were young through Ellis Island and then to Detroit, Michigan. Their names were Charles and Agnes Mugurian. My daughter's name is Alex, and baby Reese was born on August 27, in Lincoln, NE. .

(Continued on page 9)



## MARGE GOGIAN & TURK'S INN

Marge Gogian's life was all about style. She was a New York City fashion designer for decades, until her father's heart attack in the 1970s, when she moved home to help run the family's restaurant near the Namekagon River and Hayward.



This was no casual, log cabin setting, and it was remarkably out of place for Northwoods Wisconsin. Marge's parents were Armenians, but born in Turkey, and their arranged marriage lasted 53 years.

**Turk's Inn** lasted almost 80 years, until Marge's death in late February at age 85. The last time I saw her was in 2010, when she was filling in for a waitress who didn't make it to work.

The restaurant was as much of a piece of art as Marge's world of fabrics and runway models. Most ceilings and walls were hues of red. Linen napkins were light pink. Chairbacks were nearly lime green. Holiday tree lights twinkled all year, on archways and pillars.

The menu was exotic for its time and location: appetizers of flaky, cheese-filled borek, kabobs of lamb, served with nutty pilaf, and slices of baklava, served with thick Turkish coffee for dessert.

With the passage of time, the restaurant's Persian textiles, Byzantine art and souvenirs from worldwide travels became artifacts. The once-common celebrity sightings – verified by many framed, autographed photos – turned into snapshots of a heyday history.

Turk's Inn patronage crossed the political spectrum: from Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun to the Kennedys – John, Robert and Ted. How some of them found their way to Hayward remains a mystery.

In Wisconsin are at least 12,000 places to eat and drink, and most of the businesses that are independently owned fail within the first year. Turk's Inn did more than just survive.

The menu stated that "the art of cooking is an art to be proud of" and "eating should be an unhurried pleasure." My last meal at Turk's Inn lasted almost three delicious hours, with the gracious Marge doing it all: taking orders, pouring wine and serving food from a cart wheeled carefully from kitchen to table.

For all I knew, she was also preparing the food. The other dozen diners that night were celebrating a

birthday and a soldier's recent return from war – special occasions that deserved a special setting.

You could call Turk's Inn an at-risk tourist gem and not be wrong. You also could argue that keeping it open wouldn't be right.

"*It probably won't open again,*" acknowledges Tom Shuman, a longtime family friend and executor of Marge's will. "*It was such a legend in its day.*"

### Recollections

I worked at the Turk's Inn in Hayward, WI, many years ago.

My uncle Arthur Bulbulian knew Marge's father George Gogian. I worked there during the summer of 1962 during a break from college. At the time, Marge (the bartender), her mother (the cook) and father (the schmoozer) were there. I was a waiter and took orders and did everything else when not serving. I worked there every day from 9am to midnight. They gave me a small/shed/cabin right down by the Namekagon River which was 300 ft. from the restaurant. I loved sleeping at night by the sound of the gurgling river.

Some of you may remember, we went to Turk's Inn just before the place was sold and the food was not very good. Eventually, the land which was leased for 100 years went back to the state if I remember it correctly.

The name "TURK'S INN" was sold to a Brooklyn, NY operator and did well initially.

**Francis B.**



George 'The Turk' Gogian and his daughter Marge at President Kennedy's inaugural ball.



**COMMUNITY NEWS**

*(Continued from page 7)*

We hope to Zoom in with you and my mom soon!! I'll watch for opportunities!!



**Our family's 4-generation picture. From L to R: Armeny, Lisa, Alex, baby Reese**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Alexis Vaubel Hernandez Abreu**

September 13, 1971—September 21, 2020

Our Peace Child died on Peace Day

My sister, Alexis, was born September 13, 1971 and died September 21, 2020, the 75<sup>th</sup> International Peace Day. Her passion was world music and dance in which she excelled from early childhood. She started playing classical cello, through the Suzuki method, at age 3, and also studied and danced classical ballet from elementary school onwards. In high school she started dancing with the Ethnic Dance theater, and planned to tour professionally after graduating, but chronic illness she contracted in Nicaragua prevented this. She especially loved dance from the Caucasus, Georgian and Armenian. She danced several years with the Armenian Dance theater at the Festival of Nations in the late 1980's.

In 1985, Alexis performed in the US and Moscow with Peace child, and in 1986, was the lead dancer in the US-Soviet Peace Child Tour, the first collaboration of US and Soviet youth to be allowed to perform in the US. They performed in 6 Soviet and 10 US cities, singing in English and Russian with local choirs of 1000+ children in some cities. Then CA governor George Deukmejian gave a glowing state welcome and personally introduced the Los Angeles performance, with a special welcome to the Stas Namin Group, the first Soviet rock band to tour the US, headed by Armenian-Russian rock legend, photographer and theater producer Stas Namin (Mikoyan), grandson of revolutionary Anastas Mikoyan. The Peace Child show featured the Stas Namin song "We Wish You Happiness/ Мы желаем счастья вам", which later became the #1 hit on the Soviet pop charts. As the lead US dancer, Alexis especially enjoyed working with the Soviet lead dancer, Tigran Nalbandyan.

In high school, Alexis also played with many musical groups, including professionally with Electric

Arab Orchestra, which played at the Fine Line and other Twin Cities music clubs (she was allowed to perform, though she would not have been allowed to attend as she was only 16 and 17 years old.) Throughout her life, she picked up different instruments, playing Celtic, Arabic and Afro-Cuban music on Irish whistle and flute, Celtic harp, percussion, nai, accordion, and more. She also collaborated on original music created for theater, especially at *In the Heart of the Beast Theater*.

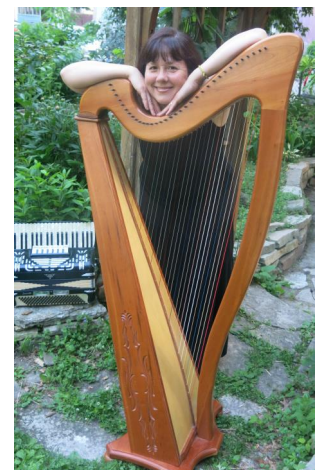
She was a fervent peace and social justice activist. As her cousin Anne Vilen said, "Alexis was, even as a child, that gentle, fierce, steady musical note beating a drum for a better world." In high school she was very active in peace and justice movements, especially in Central and South America, traveling to Nicaragua to work with Sandinista youth, working for peace in El Salvador, and against apartheid in South Africa.

She met her husband Raudemar Ofunshi while studying abroad through the U of MN in Havana. After a several-years of challenging legal battles Ofunshi was able to come to MN, where they married and had three children: Akin (now age 16), Oya (14), and Osumare (11), who all grew up steeped in the family's love of international dance and music.

During her 3½ year battle with cancer, she was supported by a loving community of family and friends. Our entire family thanks the ACOM community for your generous support during this time: You have made delicious meals, gave generous donations, and so much emotional support.

Alexis was a proud member of the Qawalangin Tribe of Unalaska, AK. She was also deeply connected to her Cuban family, and her final wish was to rest there beside the parents of her husband. We will be bringing her to Cuba as soon as COVID restrictions allow.

—Kassian Mmabatho Vaubel



If you have in interest in Armenian dance, if you have danced in the past, or have never danced but really would like to learn and participate, this would be a good time to give it a try. All the dances are taught, and costumes provided. It is a volunteer activity and we only ask for your time commitment. Rehearsals are typically held on Sundays at 1:00 pm in Roseville. Remember: you do not need to be Armenian to become a member of the dance group, just a desire to learn and enjoy Armenian music and dance.

**Note:** if you wish to perform with the group, you need to purchase your own "character shoes" and be ready to wear makeup and perform without eyeglasses.

For additional information, call Naïry: 651-639-9346 or email: [hyebar@yahoo.com](mailto:hyebar@yahoo.com)

*The Armenian Dance Ensemble has been representing Armenian Culture through Dance and Music for over 25 years. Below is our schedule so far this year.*

**Unfortunately, all performances were cancelled this year due to Covid-19**



DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
14-Mar	Sat	12:40 pm	Festival of Nations - preview
9-Apr	Thu	7:00 PM	Jones-Harrison Residence
4/30, 5/1, 2, 3			Festival of Nations
29-Aug	Sat	12: 1:30	MN State Fair
20-Sep	Sun	7:00 PM	Edinburgh Park Amphitheater



## ARMENIAN DANCE ENSEMBLE (ADE)

### RESUMES REHEARSALS ON LINE

Spring and Summer have come and are gone, and ADE members were missing their by-monthly rehearsal times and starting to forget dances ??? maybe ??? Not only the Festival of Nations and the State Fair where ADE typically performs each year were cancelled, but another 10 venues also decided not to have any performances from outside vendors and cancelled all dance performances. ADE consequently did not perform anywhere this year!

The immediate solution became "rehearsals on-line through ZOOM" and our first one was Sunday, August 9<sup>th</sup>. It was great for all of us to see each other's faces, visit and go through dances to refresh our memories. Our plan is to continue these rehearsals which will give us a chance to stay in touch with each other and keep our Armenian choreographed dances better engrained in our brains.

## ARMENIAN DANCE LESSONS ON LINE

Since no actual, in-person dances are happening these days, I decided to teach simple Armenian folkdance steps on-line. The first class was Sunday, August 30<sup>th</sup> at 2pm, followed by one on September 27<sup>th</sup>, and another on October 25<sup>th</sup>. These sessions are now planned to take place on ZOOM on the **last Sunday of each month**, starting at 2 pm and lasting about 40 minutes. Steps will be explained and demonstrated, and then the participants will be able to do them with the music, in the "comfort" of their own homes. These will not be choreographed dances. Upcoming planned ZOOM sessions are: November 29, December 27.

There has been substantial interest for this event on-line, and the participants for the first class were Armenians and non-Armenians alike, some of whom were from as far as New Mexico and California. If anyone is interested in receiving the link in order to participate, send me an email and I will add your name to the list. The ZOOM invitation will come to you about 2-4 days before the event.

Email Naïry @ [yekibdos@gmail.com](mailto:yekibdos@gmail.com)

### ACOM BOARD MEMBERS 2020-21

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**Vice President:** open  
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**Treasurer:** Naïry D.  
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**Board Advisor:** Tom K.

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

[www.mnarmenians.org](http://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.



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*If you have not yet renewed your membership, and would like to do so, please use the form on the back of the Newsletter to mail your check. Let us know if you are interested in receiving a copy of the Board Member biographies. Email your request to:*

**hyebar@yahoo.com**

## 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, 2021

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: \_\_\_\_\_

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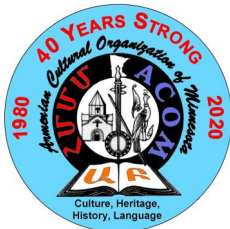
Nairy Digris, Treasurer  
1703 Skillman Ave. W.  
Roseville, MN 55113

We appreciate and count on your continued support

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1703 Skillman Avenue West

Roseville, MN 55113



**We're on the Web**

[www.mnarmenians.org](http://www.mnarmenians.org)