July/August 2013 issue (#26)

yerevan

A MAGAZINE WITH AN ACCENT



Yura Movsisyan

He Came, He Saw, He Scored

Ara Guzelimian of The Juilliard School

The Lakes of Armenia

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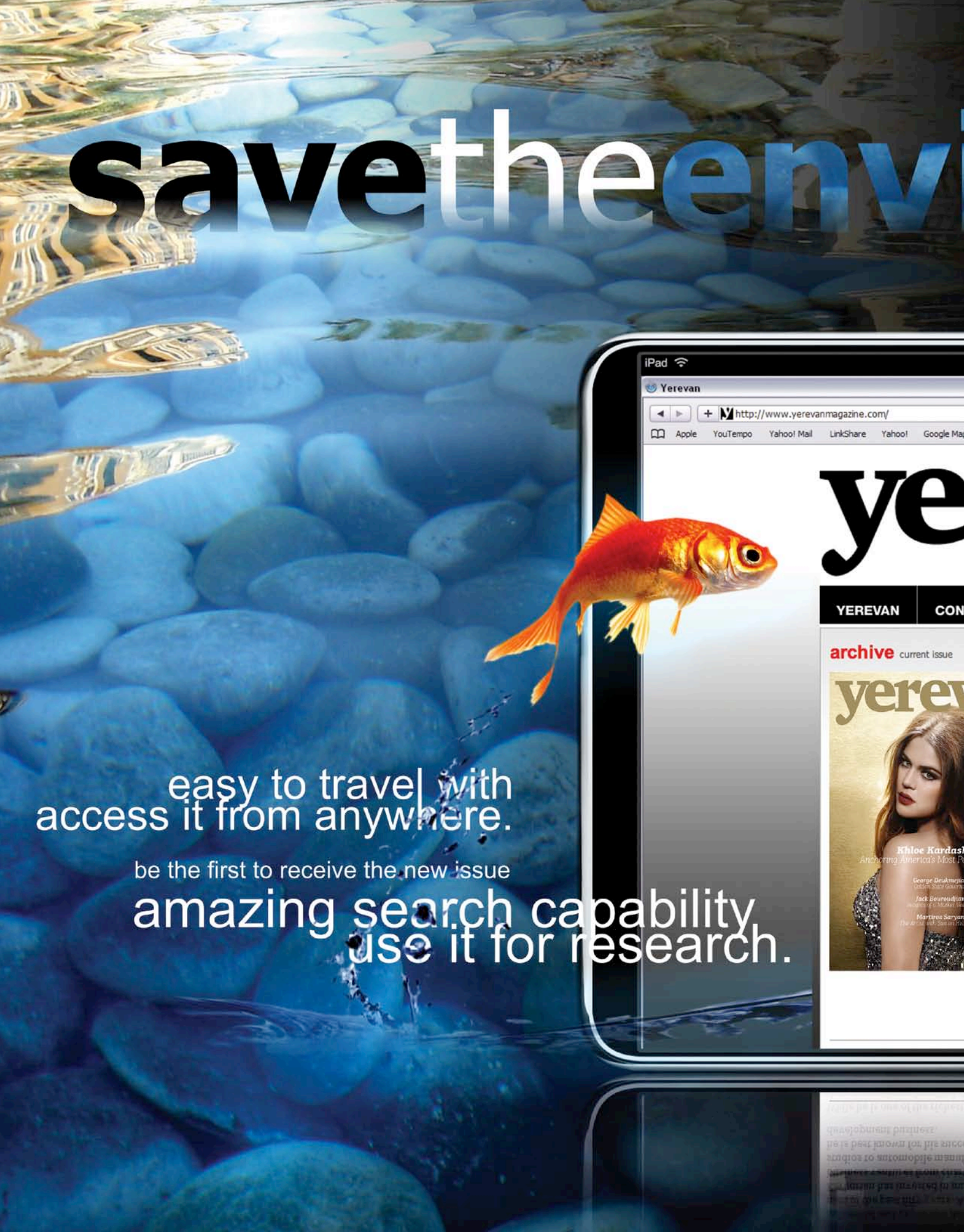
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The city of Nicosia in Cyprus is not only culturally rich, but a place where Armenian establishments live on till today.

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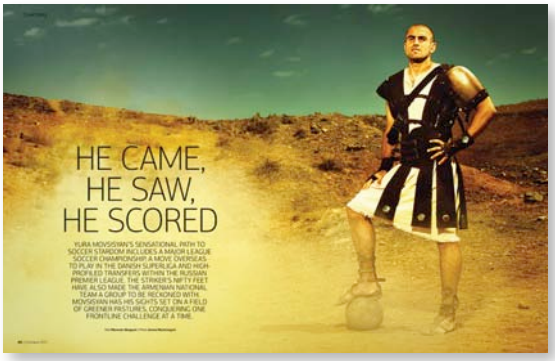

The last four years of Yura Movsisyan's soccer life have led him from the United States to Denmark, Russia, Armenia, and everywhere in between. Everywhere he's played, he's scored.

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Harout and Sarkis Alajajyan of Avet Reels have been setting new standards in fishing reel design and performance since their inception nearly a decade ago.

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Seamlessly blending the world of rollerblading, photography and travel, skater Greg Mirzoyan talks about the action-packed world of inline skating, at home and abroad.

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Fashion of Total Body and Mind

Go from street to gym in easy, functional, and trend conscious separates created by Solow.

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A Company to Keep

When United States manufacturers were moving to China, Harry Kazazian ventured to sail against the flow of business leaders that didn't dare to invest in domestic factories. Kazazian's insight not only served his own business, but also the city of Haleyville and to the U.S. economy.

Exxel Outdoors is the nation's largest manufacturer of sleeping bag and outdoor gear and has been named as one of the fastest growing private companies in America.

Harry Kazazian is the founder and CEO of Exxel Outdoors, America's largest sleeping bag and outdoor gear manufacturing company.

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Revisit AIWA's luncheon honoring *Brave* producer Katherine Sarafian, International House Philadelphia's 52nd annual gala honoring Armenia, and the launch of the World Orphanage Foundation.

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Life in Music

As the provost and dean of the world famous Juilliard School in New York, and prior to that, with a senior post at Carnegie Hall, Ara Guzelimian has spent a lifetime in music.



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Visceral Impact

Arewik Avakian's sculptures recreate a vision of her own childhood, and her work stands for victimhood.

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Vartan Garnikyan brings his creativity to one of Los Angeles' leading graphic agencies.

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Pedaling to a Dream

Englishman Tom Allen traded his mundane existence for a life on the road with a bicycle and a friend. The story developed into the award-winning documentary *Janapar*.

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Armenians played a key role in the transformation and development of the country formerly known as Burma.

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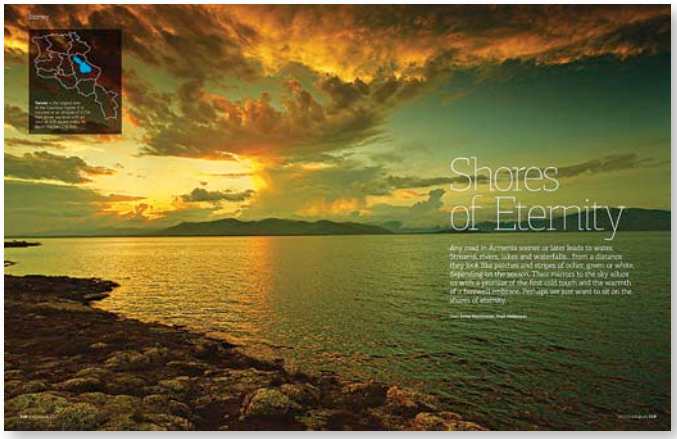
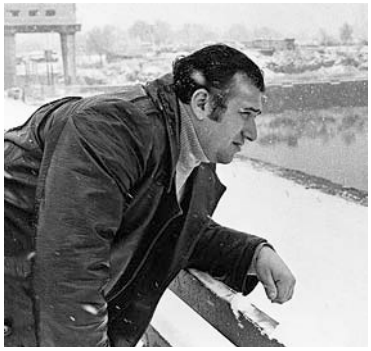


In a country that is so culturally rich, Armenia also boasts beautiful lakes, rivers and waterfalls that speak to the magical quality of nature.

Legacy



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The Last Record

Shavarsh Karapetian holds multiple records as a world champion finswimmer, but he'll always be remembered as the heroic figure that saved 20 lives when a trolleybus fell into a Yerevan reservoir.

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Rapture, Blister, Burn



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Illustration: VAHRAM MURADYAN

Fonts from ParaType Company

The following fonts were used: PF Centro Sans Pro, PF Centro Serif Pro, PF Centro Slab Pro
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The print in the "Alphabet" content includes the font "Noah" by Manvel Shmavonian

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The magazine is registered with the NSDP Library of Congress National Serials Data Program
ISSN 1993-3387 Dated 07/01/2008

The issue has been submitted to print on June 12, 2013.

Printed in the USA: Trend Offset Printing, Inc 3701 Catalina St. Los Alamitos, CA 90720

Price $6.99 Readership 50,000

The editorial office is not responsible for the content of advertising materials.

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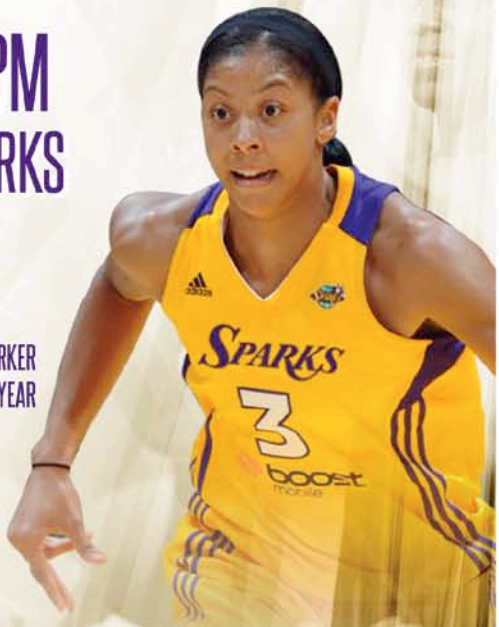

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The Great Outdoors

Let's face it – those of us who live in developed countries have most of our needs and wants covered. We have everything we need to pursue happiness, and yet many of us are often stressed, restless, and experience a lack of the emotional satisfaction and excitement that life should offer.

With summer in full bloom and vacations in sight, the *Yerevan* team embarked on a quest to find people who know firsthand what a fully charged life is. We wanted to know how to be more alive, engaged and fulfilled. The thrill seekers we met generously shared their stories of conquering the skies, diving into blue waters, biking unknown trails and rollerblading through urban jungles. Their vividly detailed stories were painted on canvas primed by an emotional backdrop boosted by adrenaline, expanding short moments into a lifetime of memories. These were the times when they were the happiest – the wind in the sails, the salty mist of the tides on their faces, the water carrying the surfboard, or the mountain tops looking down on pillows of clouds.

And the best part of it is the company of friends. Sharing outdoor adventures creates a different type of bonding among the brotherhood of like-minded souls with few secrets between them. Each friend's worth is measured by the purity of their spirit and the extension of their arm to lend a hand. When you're hanging on a cliff, that hand is the difference between life and death.

Coping with weather, orientation on the rough terrain and at sea, physical strength, agility, perseverance and overall strength of body and mind are skills that can be trained. Some of us are fortunate enough to have special people in our lives, parents, grandparents or mentors that foster these abilities in us, emphasizing the importance of uniting with the simple beauty of nature. They show that, no matter how stressed or lonely we are, nature brings us excitement and a connection to life. This special vitamin N calls for picking the first snow flowers on remote foothills in spring and hiking, diving or sailing in summers. As the scenery, air, mountains, trees and wind fill our hearts, we become wild and strong. This is happiness in its purest form, and it can teach us more than we could ever learn from books. It teaches us to be humble and leads us to a further understanding of who we really are.

So, no matter how rich or poor, we all possess the power to take control of our own life and live it well. And no one else can do it for us. The secret is in the ability to allow ourselves to love what deserves loving most – life itself.



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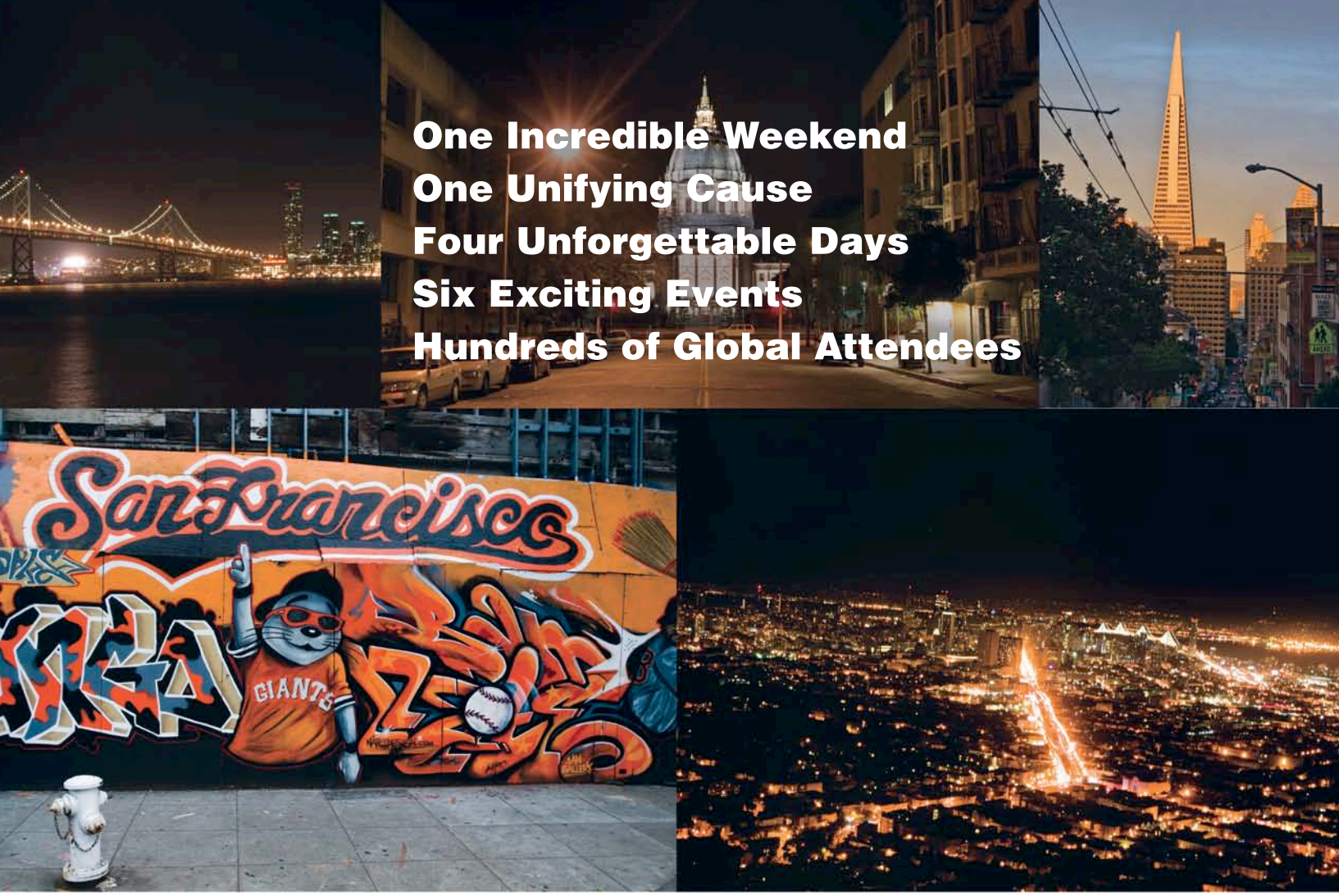

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Dear Editor,
As the cultural committee chair of UCLA's Armenian Students' Association, I would like to express my gratitude on behalf of ASA for covering our first annual Armenian Cultural Festival in a touching article by Ara Tahmassian in the May/June 2013 issue. Yerevan *magazine shares stories of successful Armenians, the richness of our history and culture, newsworthy accomplishments and events showcasing the best of Armenians here and abroad. It is an honor to have our festival be covered by* Yerevan *and we could not be happier about the article's perspective. My family has been a longtime subscriber and we love* Yerevan. *We are always inspired by the achievements of fellow Armenians who serve as role models. Thank you for creating a magazine of such high caliber and including ASA in it. We are grateful and hope to uphold the positive reputation of Armenians at UCLA.*

Zara Hovasapyan
Los Angeles, California

I recently moved to Texas to open my own dental office. It has been a struggle adjusting considering I was born and raised in Southern California with an abundance of Armenian influence around me. I turn to your magazine as an outlet to stay current with what is going on within the Armenian circle. In the last issue, I really enjoyed reading "Abiding by the Dudes." I found it interesting that Blake and Jason Krikorian created such a useful and mainstream technological device in Slingbox. Millions of people use their creation on a daily basis. I also found it noteworthy with the comparisons to the movie The Big Lebowski. *Sometimes taking risks can be beneficial. The notion of not overreacting can be applied to not only business, but life in general. The brothers seem nonchalant; the article was more than entertaining.*

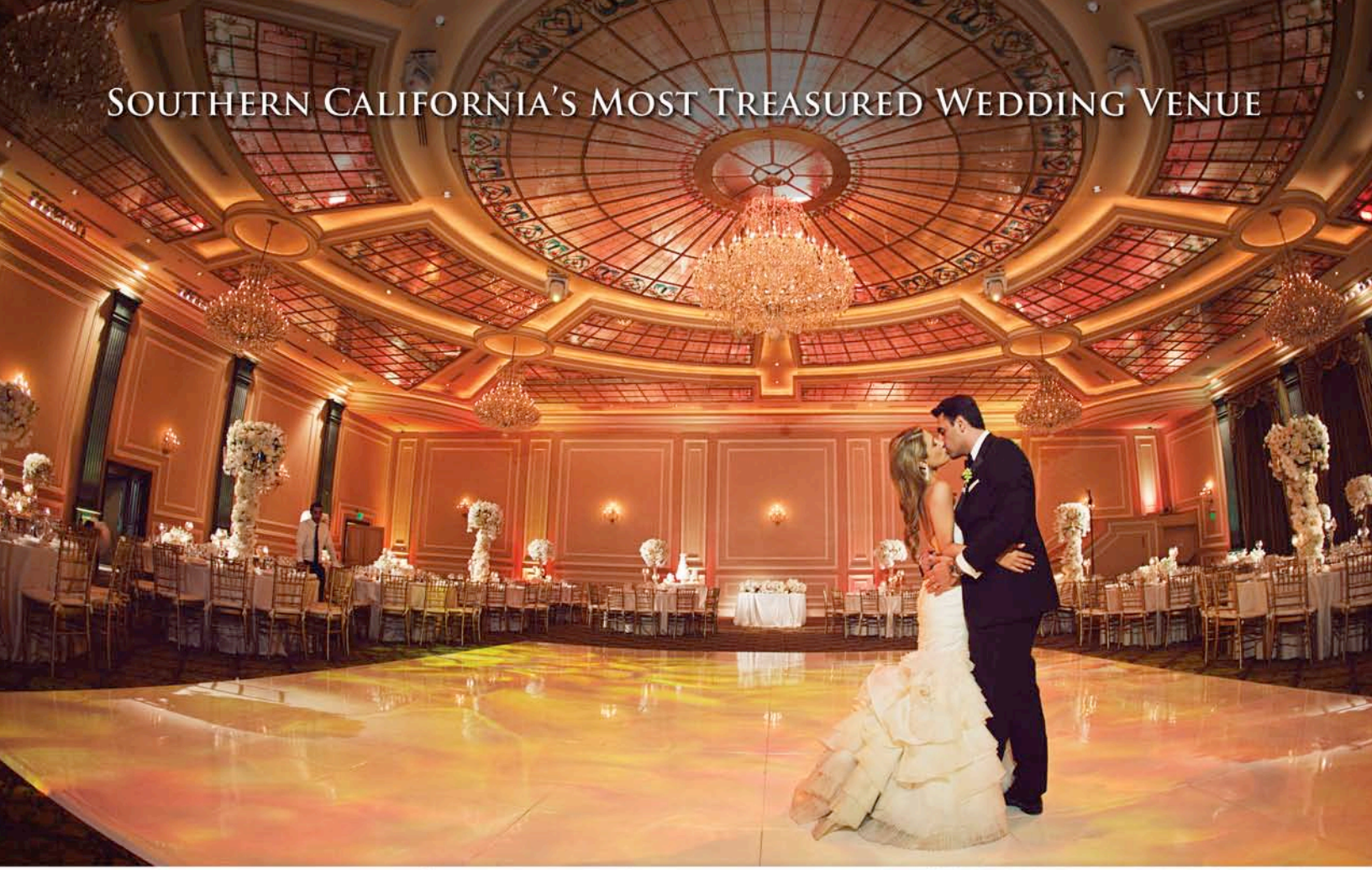
Martin Zakarian
Austin, Texas

I want to thank Yerevan *magazine for being awesome! With every issue, I've seen the magazine grow exponentially with the subjects it covers, and the photography. My family has roots in Boston and Miami and we are avid supporters of your prestigious publication. The magazine relates to Armenians and non-Armenians alike and aims to spread our wonderful culture and accomplishments. The topics vary in range as they appeal to different ages. I will continue to share my love for* Yerevan *with my colleagues and friends. Your work is much appreciated.*

Anna Petrosian
San Diego, California

I visited Yerevan for the first time in my life two months ago as a tourist and it was among the best places in the world I've ever traveled to! I completely fell in love with the city and wanted to share the experience with everyone when I got home. So I created a Swedish tourist guide and website entirely about Yerevan (www.yerevan.se). *Before my trip, I read a lot of articles in your magazine and on your website to get more information about the country. I would really like to see more Swedish people visiting Yerevan. I hope the website I made helps with that!*

Alexander Ljungström
Östersund, Sweden









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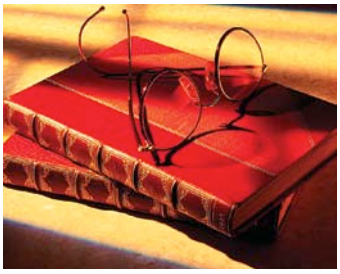
Fidelity Investments in Armenia

Diaspora Armenians with global influence continue to contribute to Armenia's development. Robert Von Rekowsky, the vice president of a trillion-dollar company Fidelity Investments, visited Armenia to share his years of experience in emerging markets and global asset management to help Armenia's business world progress to the next level. According to Rekowsky, there are many reasons that keep him connected to Armenia. "My interest in Armenia and the Armenian company Ameriabank comes from different sources. I have a cultural affinity to Armenia, as my mother's side of the family is Armenian. I first traveled to Armenia in 2002 as a board member for the Armenia 2020 project. Through that project, my interest in Armenia grew. Having analyzed and invested in hundreds of companies across the emerging markets universe – from Latin America to Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia – I hope to bring an understanding of best practices in terms of corporate governance and business opportunities." Rekowsky is the Vice-President of Emerging Markets Strategy for Fidelity Investments, a global financial services company with about $1.4 trillion of assets under management as of December 2012. Rekowsky is an independent board member of Ameria and an acclaimed speaker in economic forums, including the Davos World Economic Forum.



International Poetry Festival

The Writers' Union of Armenia hosted their first International Poetry Festival in Yerevan within the frame of the Yerevan World Book Capital 2012. Over 50 distinguished poets from Armenia, Artsakh, Canada, Australia, the Middle East, and European and CIS countries participated in this festival. Presentations and discussions of translated books were held in Yerevan, Gyumri, Tsakhkadzor and Hrazdan, while literary meetings took place in the universities and schools of Yerevan. Among the honorary guests were the writers Alan Whitehorn, who has Armenian roots, and Marcella Polain. They have accomplished much in the area of global recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and during the conference held in the Ministry of Culture, the guests talked about the importance of the official recognition.





First Printed Armenian Bible

A volume of unique cultural and historical importance, the first Armenian-language Bible translated by Voskan Yerevantsi was presented to Matenadaran. It was printed in 1666 in Amsterdam, and its silver cover is decorated by an artisan from the Erzrum School, one of the famous centers of Armenian silversmith art. The cover of the Bible depicts a scene of the Annunciation and the back cover shows the Resurrection. The opening part of the book depicts the four evangelists and their symbols. This unique book for years has been part of a private collection and was brought to Yerevan thanks to a donation made by Ralph Yirikian, the general manager of one of Armenia's leading telephone companies. Yirikian also donated to Matenadaran two more old Bibles from his personal library. One of the Bibles is dated 1854, and the age of the other Bible is still to be determined by specialists.

April 24 in Glendale Schools

Starting next year, all Glendale Unified Schools will be closed on April 24 "out of respect for the large Armenian community in Glendale and La Crescenta." After yearlong discussions, the Glendale Unified School Board and the Teachers' Association have signed an agreement including April 24th in the list of non-working days. With this agreement, they pay heed to the students who wish to participate in the Armenian Genocide commemoration events without getting unnecessary absences. The Armenian community hosts several events annually to commemorate the Genocide and many students attend them.

Armenian Contemporary Poets in English

In the frame of the *New Voices from Europe and Abroad* book series, the British publishing house Arc published *Six Armenian Contemporary Poets*. The presentation of the bilingual book (Armenian-English) took place in the National Assembly of Armenia. RA Minister of Culture Hasmik Poghosyan mentioned that the poems included in the collection had been carefully chosen and their translations were done at a high level. *Six Armenian Contemporary Poets* book includes poems by Hrach Sarukhan, Khachik Manukyan, Anatoli Hovhannisyan, Azniv Sahakyan, Violet Grigoryan and Hasmik Simonyan. Armine Tamrazyan translated the book, and Razmik Davoyan edited it. The representative of Arc Publications, Tony Ward, said that the book has gained positive feedback and triggered enthusiasm in England.

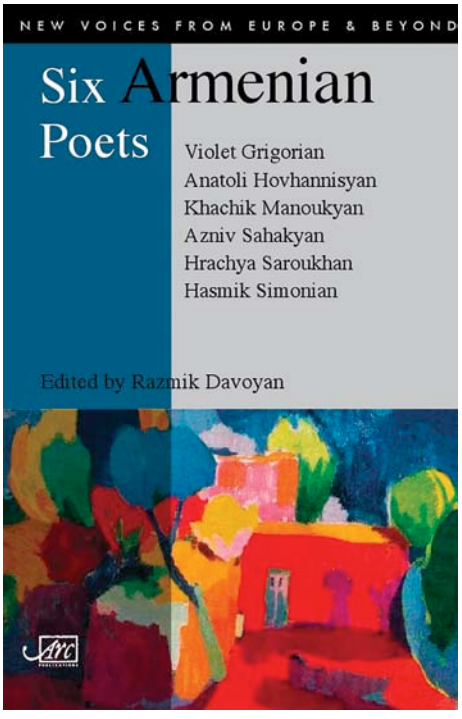


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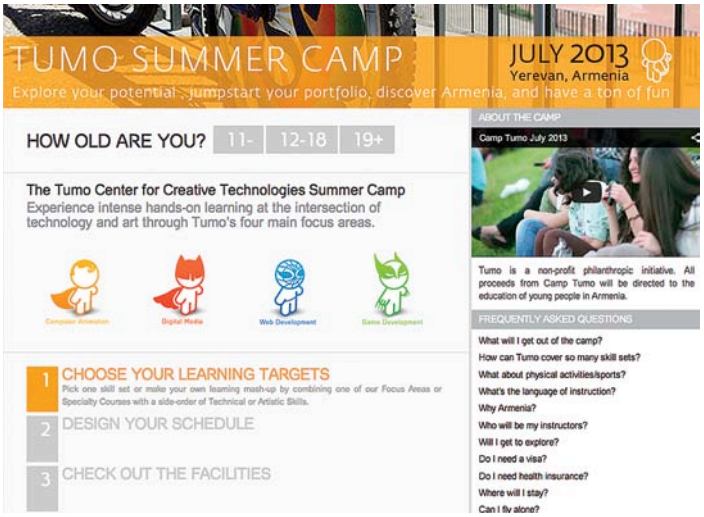
Exhibit in Strasbourg

The exhibit "Armenia: The Mysteries of Stones" opened in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in May, with the presence of the CoE Secretary General, the President of PACE, and representatives of high-ranking delegations. "Armenia is a country of mountains, so it is natural that for us stone is the first artistic means of expression, which has turned into a language of art. For centuries, stone served as a tool for Armenian people, helping them express their creativity. Throughout history, it evolved into an integral part of the cultural heritage of the world. We are happy that stone exhibits will be showcased in the framework of Armenia's chairmanship in the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers," Foreign Minister of Armenia Edward Nalbandian stated in his remarks at the official opening of the exhibition. Armenia assumed the presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and will preside for the next six months.



TUMO Summer Camp

Tumo Center for Creative Technologies is launching a summer camp open to all young people between the ages of 12 and 18. Camp Tumo is an intense experience combining learning and fun at the intersection of art and technology. It will take place in Yerevan in four one-week sessions. Campers can come for just one week starting on the 1st, 8th, 15th or 22nd of July, or they can combine two, three and even four weeks in a row for an in-depth learning adventure. The summer camp's morning program is made up of concentrated versions of the courses available throughout the year to the members of the Tumo. Campers will come away with their own hands-on creative projects by combining one of four focus areas or two specialty courses with a supporting technical or artistic skill. During the second half of the day, campers have an opportunity to go on specially designed guided tours of Yerevan and surrounding areas where they will have an opportunity to gather material for their creative technology projects. They can also choose to participate in sporting events in the adjacent Tumanyan Park, also managed by Tumo. On Saturdays, everyone can join optional sightseeing field trips to some of Armenia's most spectacular destinations.





People's Choice Winner

Armenian guitarist and singer Suren Arustamyan was selected as a finalist and People's Choice resulting from the online voting contest announced by English guitarist Eric Clapton. The competing guitarists, who took part in the contest from numerous countries, had performed their renditions of Clapton's song "Cocaine."



Museum Night

Annually on the night of May 18, the museums of Armenia and many countries of the world are open to visitors all night long. This "Museum Night" takes place on International Museum Day with the aim of raising awareness regarding the importance of museums in the development of society. This year, over 80 museums of Armenia and Artsakh opened their doors for this festival. The Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin participated in Museum Night for the first time with an exhibition dedicated to the pontifical symbols and the church. The Cafesjian Center for the Arts featured two new exhibitions, educational programs, screening of movies and other cultural events. The History Museum, National Art Gallery, Martiros Saryan Museum and Hovhannes Tumanyan House-Museum all attracted a great number of visitors.











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New Adaptation of "Anush" Opera

Cannes Film Festival award-winner Serge Avedikian and French choreographer Nicolas Musin presented the modernized version of the Armenian opera, "Anush." The opera is based on Hovannes Tumanyan's poem *Anush* about a simple village girl's tragic love story. It was first staged in modern day Gyumri in 1912, with the music and libretto authored by the talented musician Armen Tigranyan. The joint Armenian-French project is a mixture of conceptual and technological solutions that tries to preserve the general concepts of composer Tigranyan and writer Tumanyan, as well as the producer and choreographer, while at the same time giving the production an entirely modern breadth and depth. Avedikian, who adapted the libretto of "Anush," cautions, "It's not the 'Anush' that the Armenian audience has been seeing since the Soviet era." The realization of this ambitious project took over two years. The project has been supported by the French and Armenian Culture Ministries and sponsored by VivaCell-MTS.

National Theater Award

This year, the annual Artavazd National Theater Awards ceremony was dedicated to the 125th anniversary of the celebrated Armenian stage actor, Vahram Papazian. Winners within the 15 nominated categories were announced during the ceremony. The Artavazd award for the Best Young Actor/Actress went to Armen Margaryan and Ani Grigoryan (Chamber Music Theater). Yervand Yengibaryan (Zilov in *Duck Hunt*) and David Hakobyan (Arakel in *Longing*) won the Best Male Actor award, and Luiza Ghambaryan (Romantic Comedy) received the Best Female Actress award. Alexander Grigoryan and Hakob Ghazanchyan were winners in the Best Director nomination. The Artavazd Award for Best Play went to Samvel Khalatyan, (*Padam, Padam, Padam...*). The Vahram Papazyan Award was granted to Murad Janibekyan this year. The president of the National Assembly sponsored the award ceremony.



Photolure



HAYAK Winners

Yerevan's Aram Khachatryan Concert Hall hosted the second annual National Film Award ceremony Hayak, which honored the 15 best Armenian filmmakers with prizes in different nominations. The Russian-Armenian director and screenwriter Karen Shahnazarov, who was among the invitees, said a special prize should be given to the ceremony's stage director for organizing the event on a high level. Harutyun Khachatryan was honored with the Best Director award for the documentary, *Endless Return and Endless Escape*. The winner in the Best Actress nomination was Mariam Davtyan (*Voice of Silence*). Yevgeny Tsivagov was honored as the Best Actor for the film, *Garegin Nzhdheh*. The second prize for Best Actor went to Khoren Levonyan (*Garegin Nzhdeh*). Tereza Varzhapetyan and Mikael Poghosyan received the Best Script Writing award for the film, *If Only Everyone*. Vahagn Hayrapetyan was declared the Best Composer (*If Only Everyone*). Shahnazarov's *White Tiger* was honored as the Best Foreign Film. Special prizes were awarded to the merited actors Armen Jigarkhanyan and Nerses Hovhannisyan. Vigen Chaldranyan was honored with the Ministry of Culture's special award for his *Voice of Silence*.

Truth and Justice Act

A bipartisan group of U.S. Representatives introduced the Armenian Genocide Truth and Justice Act. The new measure calls for the U.S. President to build upon the individual states' recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The measure will work toward the improvement of Armenian-Turkish relations, which are based upon Turkey's full acknowledgement of the facts and ongoing consequences of the Armenian Genocide and a fair, just and comprehensive international resolution of this crime. The Armenian Genocide Truth and Justice Act, introduced by Representatives Michael Grimm (R-NY), Adam Schiff (D-CA), David Valadao (R-CA) and Frank Pallone (D-NJ), reflects and reinforces previous U.S. affirmations of the Armenian Genocide as a crime of genocide. The Act cites the U.S. Government's May 28, 1951 written statement to the International Court of Justice regarding the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and President Ronald Reagan's April 22, 1981 Proclamation and Congressional adoption of Armenian Genocide legislation in 1975 and 1984.



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Scotland Recognizes the Armenian Genocide

The Scottish Parliament passed a motion to announce April 24 as the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. The motion, presented by a parliamentarian Marco Biagi, was signed by 65 MPs. According to the motion posted on the Scottish Parliament's website, "the Parliament notes that 24 April is the anniversary of the government of the Ottoman Empire arresting Armenian intellectuals in 1915, which is generally considered to be the beginning of the forced relocations and expulsions that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Armenians in a systematic genocide over the course of eight years; believes that the Armenian tragedy gives the people of every nation reason to pause and reflect; commemorates all those who have fallen victim to genocide or attempted genocide, and recognizes this and all other genocides as tragedies that should never be repeated in any part of the world."



Ellis Island Medal Recipients

This year's list of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor medalists included 98 names from across the country and nine recipients were the bearers of typical Armenian last names ending with "ian", representing various fields of activity: Silvia Tchakmakjian; Dr. Varoujan Altebarmakian, Shoghag Hovanessian; Hratch Kaprielian; Aso Tavitian; Dertad Manguikian, Hon. Gregory Melikian; Vahe Yacoubian, and Ara Kevork Karajerjian. "This is a country of limitless opportunities, and it was absolutely rewarding to be recognized for the work that I had started years ago," says Silvia Tchakmakjian, the owner & CEO of Silvias Costumes, Inc. - a company that has been serving the US entertainment industry for over 25 years. The Ellis Island Medal of Honor, that ranks among America's most prestigious awards, throughout 27 years of its existence has been presented by NECO (National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations) to hundreds of naturalized and native-born Americans in order to pay tribute to some of the most distinguished citizens of the country who have made significant contributions to their communities and the nation. The ceremony is held annually in May on the historic Ellis Island in New York, where the first US Federal immigration station was opened in 1890.





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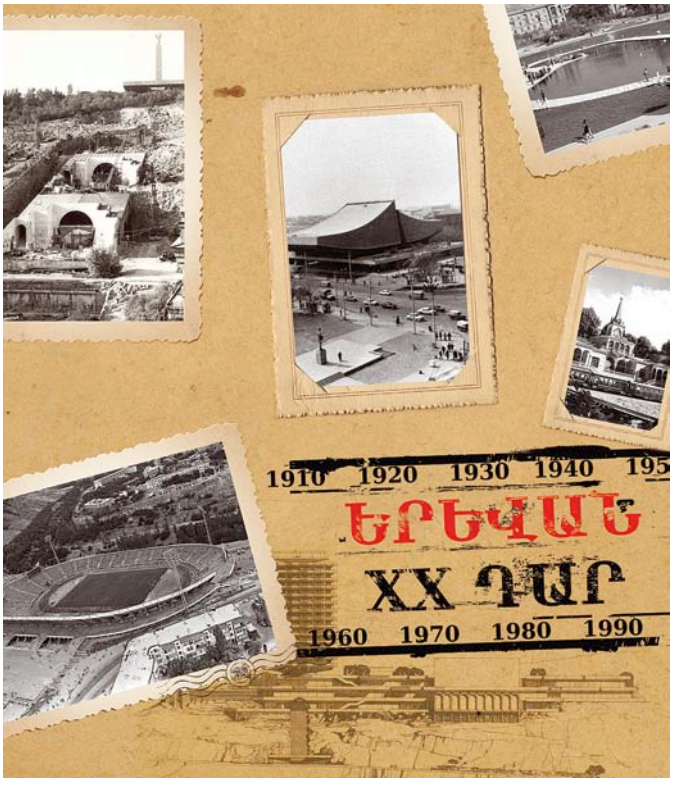
Royal Visit

Charles, Prince of Wales is the first British royal family member to visit Armenia. He was the guest of Dr. Armen Sarkissian, founder of the Yerevan My Love Charitable Foundation, the former Armenia's Prime Minster and First Ambassador to the U.K. They visited Armenia's historic sites and paid a visit to Matenadaran.



Yerevan. 20th Century iBook

15 stories about buildings and places of special significance for Yerevan's life through photos, video materials from archives, and memoirs of different individuals are now available on Apple iTunes. In particular, readers can get acquainted with the stories of Cascade, Closed Market, Ani and Sevan hotels, Koziryok cafe, Youth Palace, Hrazdan Stadium, Moscow and Russia movie theaters, and others. The materials for the project are provided by the National Archives of Armenia, the Museum of History of Yerevan, the Scientific Research Center for Historical and Cultural Heritage adjunct to the RA Ministry of Culture, the National Museum-Institute of Architecture of Armenia, etc. *Yerevan. 20th Century* book is created on the basis of the Mediamax news agency's TV project. The interactive version of the book was implemented with the support of Armenian iBooks Facebook initiative and is free for the readers in more than 50 countries including U.S., Argentine, and a number of European countries.



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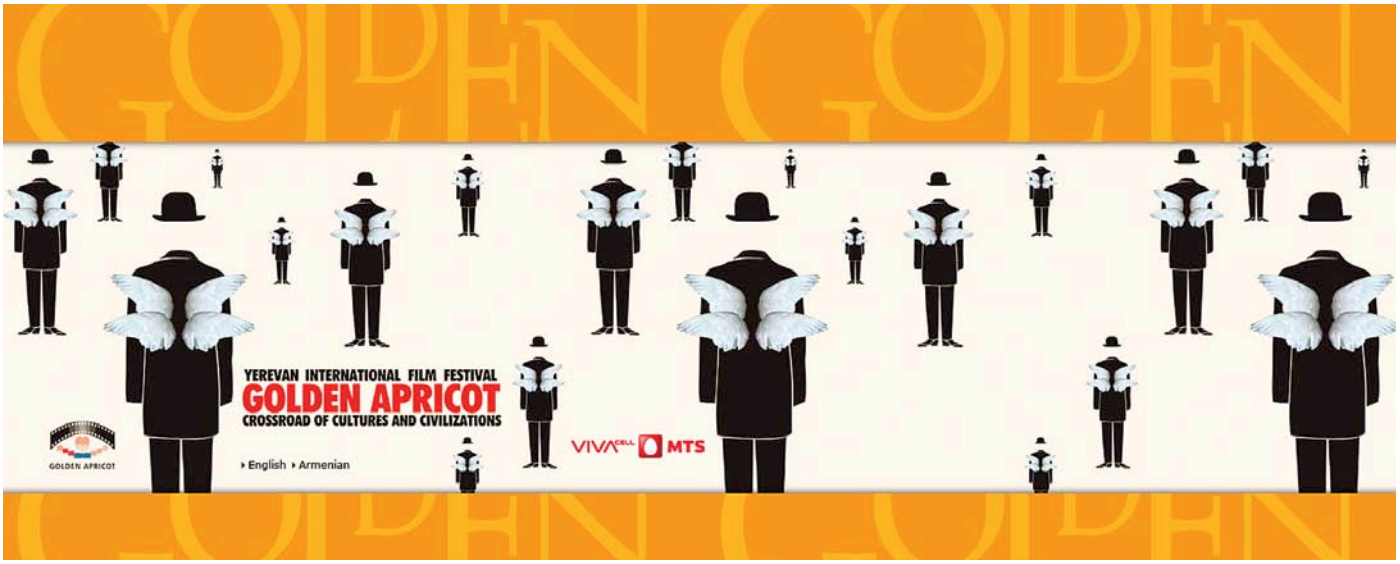
July/August



Yerevan International Film Festival Golden Apricot

A major event in Armenia's cultural life, the 10th annual Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival is scheduled for July 7-14 and is going to be "the greatest cultural event ever in the region." This is an anniversary year for Golden Apricot, and many surprises are expected. Visitors will also witness world-famous directors and celebrities as the festival continues to garner international attention and respect. Golden Apricot carries the theme "Crossroads of Cultures and Civilizations," and it's anchored in the idea of a global human landscape in the process of transformation and the challenges that process creates. Golden Apricot's geographical span includes all continents which are represented through films that depict diverse human experiences of people of various ethnicities, religions and nations as they try to find meaning in our changing world and who struggle to redefine themselves in a world with fewer boundaries. Internationally-acclaimed director Atom Egoyan is the president of the Festival.

The Golden Apricot takes place during Vardavar, a traditional custom that people keep throughout Armenia in July. It is one of the most joyful national celebrations. From morning till night, adults and children alike spill water on each other – a perfect way of cooling down on a hot summer day, as well as enjoying entertainment in this festival of water.



U.S. Open Tennis Tournament

A trip to the world's largest tennis venue, Arthur Ashe Stadium, promises to be a tennis fan's experience of a lifetime. One of the oldest and most prestigious tennis championships in the world, the U.S. Open is chronologically the fourth and final event of the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments. The two-week tournament is held every August and September at the USTA National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. The Arthur Ashe and Louis Armstrong Stadiums host the top-seeded matches and finals in participation of the world's top players. This year, the tournament will increase its base prize money by $4 million, for a new grand total prize of $29.5 million. The tournament includes five championships: women's and men's singles, women's and men's doubles, mixed doubles and several additional tournaments for junior, senior and wheelchair players. The U.S. Open is played on special acrylic hard courts. Before the main events, you can check out the upcoming stars at the free qualifying tournament and the practice day. Arthur Ashe Kids' Day is also a great occasion for children and their families.

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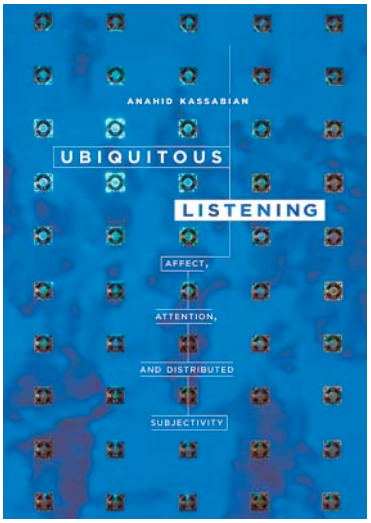
Zoya Pirzad

Things We Left Unsaid

Oneworld Publications, 2012

Renowned Iranian-Armenian writer and novelist Zoya Pirzad's multi-award-winning novel set in southern Iran follows an Iranian-Armenian housewife's struggles to find fulfillment within her family's expectations. A model 1960s wife and mother, Clarisse leads an unremarkable life. She has all she's ever wanted: a well-respected engineer husband and three children, tucked away in a wealthy middle-class neighborhood of Abadan. Swaddled in the comforting monotony of cleaning, cooking, sewing, shopping and dining at the oil company club, Clarisse's greatest anxiety is keeping the peace with her critical mother, unmarried sister, distant husband and quarrelling children. But her tranquility ends forever with the arrival of an enigmatic Armenian family across the street. The debonair widower, his beguiling twin daughters and his mother, a domineering aristocrat with an exotic past, steal their way into Clarisse's home. And before she has time to understand what's happening, passions, politics and a plague of locusts have whipped up emotions that she never knew she had. Zoya Pirzad's most recent collection of stories, *The Bitter Taste of Persimmon*, won the prize for Best Foreign Book of 2009 in France.

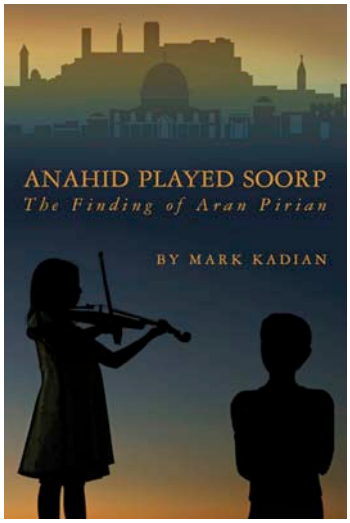


Anahid Kassabian

Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity

University of California Press, 2013

How does the constant presence of music in modern life – on iPods, in shops and elevators, on television – affect the way we listen? With so much of this sound, whether imposed or chosen and only partially present to us, is the act of listening degraded by such passive listening? In *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*, Anahid Kassabian investigates the many sounds that surround us and argues that this ubiquity has led to different kinds of listening. Kassabian argues for a new examination of the music we do not normally hear, one that examines the way it is used as a marketing tool and a mood modulator, and exploring the ways we engage with music.

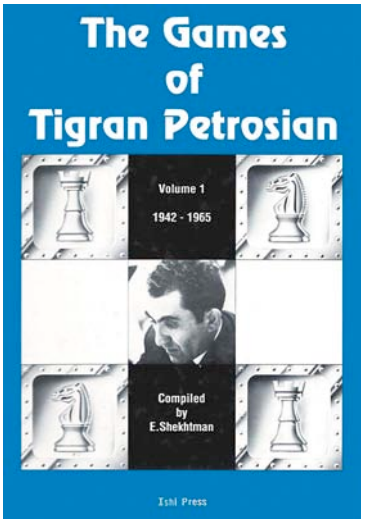


Mark Kadian

Anahid Played Soorp: The Finding of Aran Pirian

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012

Detroit area lawyer Mark Kadian's historical novel, set in the final years of the Ottoman Empire amid the throes of the Armenian Genocide, is told through the experiences of a young boy. Aran Pirian, the twelve year old son of an academician father and musician mother living in 1915 Constantinople, had all of life's essentials and more. However, Aran and his younger sister, Anahid, were unaware of what was about to come. A knock on the door of their home and the abrupt seizure by Ottoman soldiers of Aran's father, Hovan, marked the beginning of events which forced Aran, Anahid, and their mother, Marem, on a harrowing journey. *The Kirkus Reviews* characterizes the novel as "trenchant, crisp and suspenseful with strong renderings of Armenia's national nightmare."



Compiled by Eduard Shekhtman

The Games of Tigran Petrosian (Volumes 1 and 2)

Ishi Press, 2012

From 1963 to 1969, Tigran Petrosian was the World Chess Champion and one of the strongest players in the world. Throughout his lengthy career, he is best known today for breaking Bobby Fischer's 20-game winning streak against grandmasters. Petrosian represented the USSR in the World Chess Olympiad ten times. Prior to his untimely death in Moscow at the age of 55, Petrosian had been collecting his games, lectures and notes, planning to compile them into a book. This publication was made possible through the efforts of his widow Rona E. Petrosian and Eduard Shekhtman who were able to classify and compile the collection of his games. Petrosian is perhaps the only world champion, other than Fischer, to have a complete collection of his games published.

SARKIS HAMALBASHIAN



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շ [sha]

Text **Aram Khachatourian**

շ [sha] is the twenty-third letter of the Armenian alphabet Its name is – շա [sha] and the numerical value is 500.





Suren Manvelyan

The graphic representation of letter շ in the manuscripts of various centuries



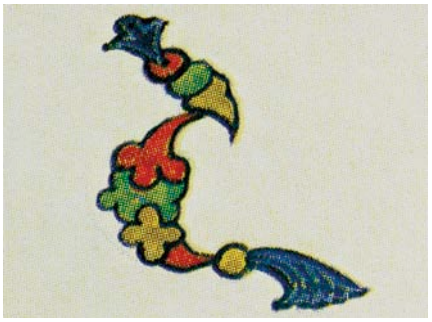
862 981 1045 1064 1099 1169 1215

Letter շ represents a sound corresponding to the English sh [sh]. Many researchers believe that the graphic form of շ comes from the Greek ξ (xi). In addition to the resemblance, they support this assumption with the fact that in the Greek transcription of Armenian proper names, the sound [sh] is usually transmitted through xi: Ἀρτάξατα [Artaxata] – Արտաշատ [Artashat]. Still taking into consideration this assumption, Hrachia Acharyan found it more suitable to trace it to the Pahlavi letter 𐭱 because unlike ξ, its phonetic value is identical to the Armenian շ. In the Greek language, the sound [sh] is absent; therefore when translating Biblical words and names from Hebrew, the Greeks used Σ (Sigma). So, Joshua became Jesus, Moshe – Moses, Shlomo – Solomon, Yerushalayim – Jerusalem, the Mashiakh – the Messiah, and so on. The Greek pronunciation penetrated into the languages of most Christian nations. In fact, changing the phonetic forms of words when transitioning from one language to another is a common trend.

The paradox is that, having the sound [sh] and a language of much richer phonetics for nearly 2,000 years, Armenians pronounce the holy names in the distorted Greek-influenced form. Such transcription has become traditional and familiar, and it is not easy to change it. However, there is some truth in the opinion of Hebraist and biblical scholar Paul Gorski-Platonov who said in relation to the translation of the Bible, but which could be equally applicable to the Armenian, "Should they not, in these cases, use the wealth of our language and artificially throw ourselves into scarcity?"

A somewhat different situation formed in languages whose alphabets are based on the Latin alphabet. In many of them the sound [sh] exists, but there is no letter corresponding to it; instead a combination of two or three letters is used to denote the [sh] sound. For example, the four-letter name of the ancient Artsakh fortress-city of Shushi (Շուշի in Armenian) in English is spelled as Shushi, in French – Chouchi, in German – Schuschi, in Polish – Szuszi, and in Swedish – Sjusji.

Speaking of the letter շ, one cannot forget the famous poem of the Armenian poet Vahan Terian "Շշուկ ու շրշյուն" [*Shshuk at shrshyun*] – "Whispers and Rustling." Even without knowing Armenian, the alliteration of the sound [sh] could be associated with the rustling of leaves and the rustling of walking on the leaves in fall, creating an image of nature in autumn. Onomatopoeic, meaningful sounds of nature in many languages are similar: the English word "swish" and the Armenian շրշյուն [shrshyun], the English word "hush" and the Armenian շշուկ (*shshuk*) and the French chuchotage (*shushotazh*).



Ornamented Initials, Arshit Publishing House, 1992

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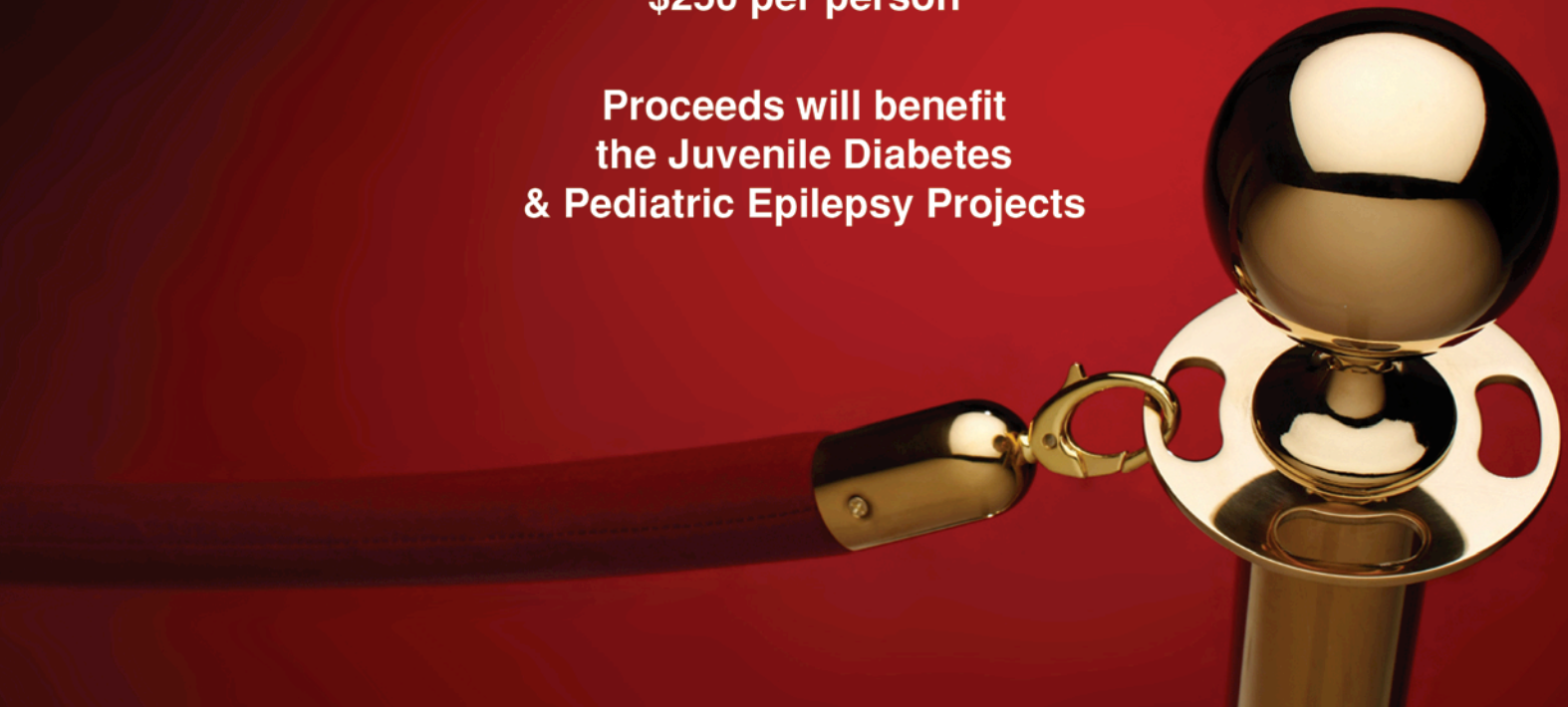


The Estranged Side

Small white trailers lined up in a row, resembling a train. I went to the first one, handed my passport through the window and soon got it back. A few steps farther – barbed wire, filled sandbags, soldiers with rifles ready. This is not Iraq or Afghanistan. It is the center of Nicosia, the capital of two states – the Republic of Cyprus and the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. However, as I have already crossed the border, we should call it Lefkosia.

Text and photo **Anna Lorents**





In actuality, the boundary between the two Cypruses only seems intimidating, I realized. It is a mere formality to cross it. Particularly, from the Turkish to the Greek side. But I'm going in the opposite direction. My companion Raffi was born and grew up here on the Turkish side, but he lives on the other side – with the Greeks. However, he admitted that since 1974, when the border was established, he has not come to this side. Some places are more comfortable in memory than in reality.

***

At first, Raffi seemed somewhat lost. I even thought he regretted that he offered to show me around Armenian-Turkish Cyprus. But that was only at first. Soon with great passion, he once again inhabited these seemingly deserted houses on the border with memories of their former tenants.

"Here lived Nalchajian, there – the Manukians. What a beauty was their daughter! Here – Barber Hagop. Farther on – the shoemaker. The locksmith worked here. Generally, crafts were conducted by Armenians. Now in our Nicosia, all craftsmen are either Armenians or the apprentices of Armenians. That corner shop belonged to my father. And when I was a kid, I kept the keys to these doors in my pocket.

In summer, I worked part-time at the store – sold all kinds of small items. My father believed that you have to learn to work from strangers. And I completely agree with him. My boss was an easy-going man and did not bother to come to work early, so he trusted me with the keys. Those huge homes belonged to Armenians, and those on the opposite side of the street, too. Their owners were very rich. Many of them lived in Cyprus for many generations.





← Border-control point between the two parts of Nicosia

***

The Cypriot-Armenian community, at the time of the events of 1974, when the island was occupied by the Turks, was extremely heterogeneous. After all, it consisted not only of those hungry and in rags who came to the island from 1909 through the1920s from devastated Cilicia, but also the first Armenians who settled in Cyprus back in 578 A.D., during the last years of the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II. Historic documents mention that during the war with King Chosroes, Makarios of Cappadocia captured 10,000 Armenians from Erzinca. About a third of them were sent to Cyprus by the decree of the emperor of Byzantium. To this day, all over the island there are settlements named by them, in which, however, Armenians have long since ceased to live: Armenohori in the area of Larnaca, Armin near Paphos, Kornokipos at Famagusta, and now located in the occupied territories – Patrika, Platani, Spatariko, Musere and others. Many Armenians migrated to Cyprus during the reign of the Byzantine emperor of Armenian origin, Heraclius I (610-641). So the history of the Armenians on the island began long before the Genocide. Ironically, by some unfortunate quirk of fate, once expelled by the Turks from their homes, the Armenians mostly settled in the northern part of Nicosia, which was also destined to become occupied by the Turks. ▸

Ironically, by some unfortunate quirk of fate, once expelled by the Turks from their homes, the Armenians mostly settled in the northern part of Nicosia, which was also destined to become occupied by the Turks.

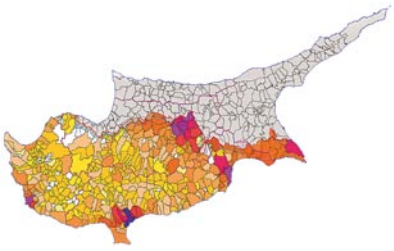


Operation "Attila"

In July of 1974, the control over Cyprus was in the hands of the ultra-nationalists, led by Nikos Sampson, the representative of the Greek underground organization EOKA, known for its anti-Turkish activities. Despite the assurances by the new leadership of their loyalty toward the Turkish population of the island, on July 20, 1974, Turkey sent its troops to the island launching "Operation Attila." Much of the territory of Cyprus was invaded. In the north, the Turkish Federated State of North Cyprus was proclaimed and later became known as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

The European Court of Human Rights has found Turkey responsible for violating the rights of Cypriots who were forced to leave their homes and settle in the north of Cyprus. The line which divides the island into two sectors is still guarded by a contingent of the U.N. peacekeeping forces in Cyprus. Under international law, the Republic of Cyprus, which joined the European Union in 2004, retains sovereignty over the entire territory. This is accepted by the European Union, which also considers the north part of the island temporarily out of the control of its legitimate government.

On the night of March 9, 2007, unexpectedly for the entire world community, a small segment of the wall that separated the two parts of the Cypriot capital Nicosia into Greek and Turkish, was dismantled.



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"On paper, I'm still the owner of this store," says Raffi with a smile. "And also a considerable amount of land not far from here where my father was planning to build a house. However, what are these documents worth nowadays? One day people were just kicked out of their homes. My father, brother and all the other store owners could not even take the goods that had been in their stores. In spite of an agreement with the British soldiers that they would guard the stores until morning, when our people came back, the shelves were empty. All looted. That was not the worst thing, of course. Look at the magnificent houses the Armenians were forced to abandon! And again, they started from scratch – from zero!

We walk down a deserted street; it feels like and really is a zone of estrangement. For some reason, it seems that no one has opened these doors since that day. In any case, they all still loyally retain the fingerprints of their former masters.

"You are asking why I did not come back here?" reflects my companion. "It's because one must always go forward, and I was here once. I've had enough!"

We walk down a deserted street; it feels like and really is a zone of estrangement. For some reason, it seems that no one has opened these doors since that day. In any case, they still loyally retain the fingerprints of their former masters.

***

Which Armenian street does not lead to an Armenian church? Ours brought us to St. Astvatsatsin Church, the one that stands at the Pafi Gates. However, in order to understand why my companion stands with such a confused expression at this typically Byzantine church, my cross-domed consciousness had to make a great deal of effort. The fact is that this temple was indeed built by the Byzantines, and then given to the



← The National School Melikian-Uzunyan is located in the yard of Sourb Astvatsatsin's Church







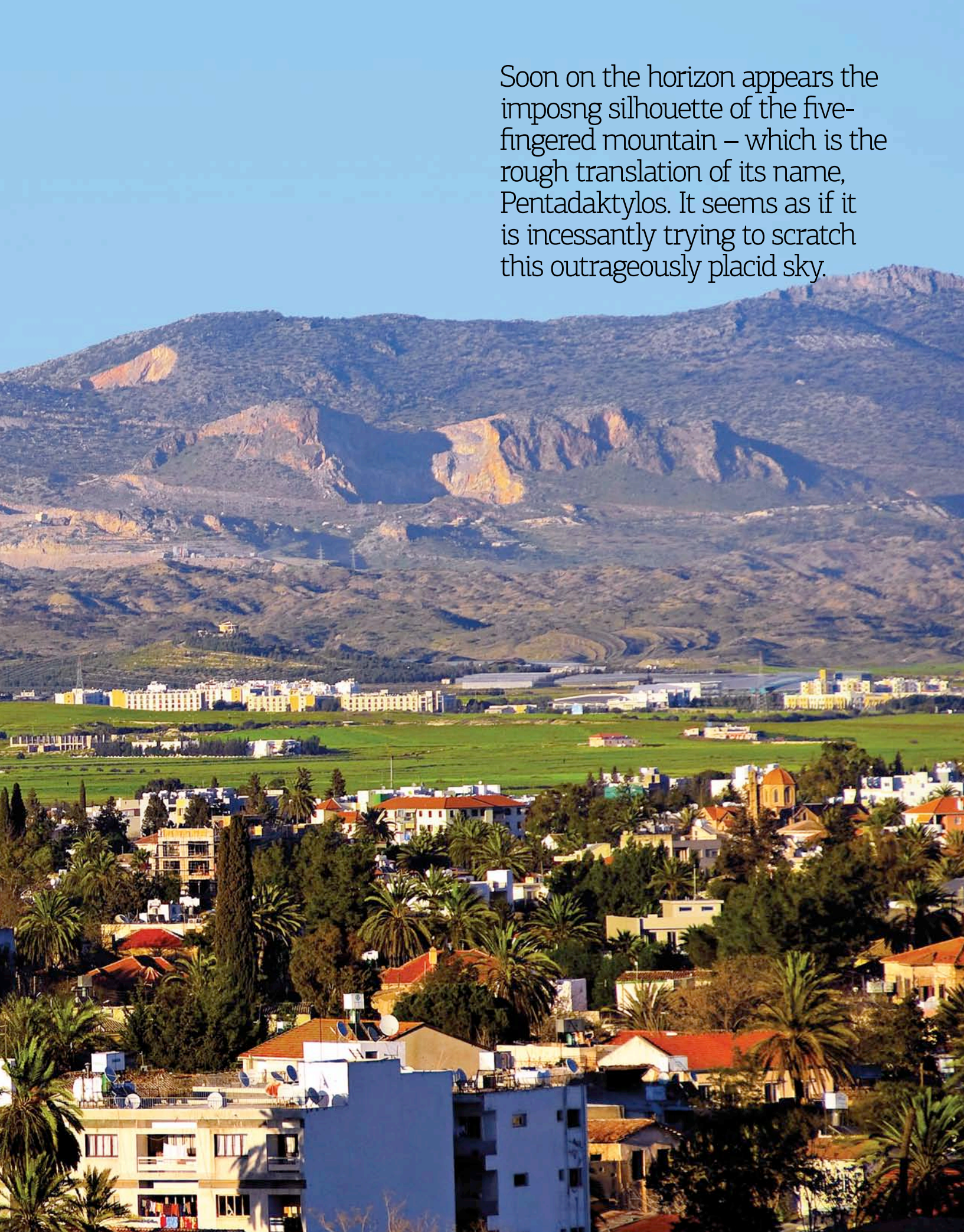
↓
The only surviving sign of the Turkish part of Nicosia with an Armenian surname







Soon on the horizon appears the imposng silhouette of the five-fingered mountain – which is the rough translation of its name, Pentadaktylos. It seems as if it is incessantly trying to scratch this outrageously placid sky.



Armenian community whom it served faithfully. Over time, in its court were located the offices of AAC, the national School Melikian-Uzunyan and the Monument to the Victims. I looked at the familiar face of Raffi and for the first time pondered over the polysemy of the expression "place of worship."
"And you know what is the most interesting? Here we are, walking around, and I recite all these family names ending in -ian, lots of them, owners of houses, shops. But back then in Cyprus, the Armenians were not the largest population group. In 1920, after the arrival of refugees from Cilicia, there were about 10,000 in total. But more than a third of them soon left for other countries. And only 6,000 Armenians stayed and settled here. But we always had a high visibility, I suppose. There was motivation. However, after the separation of the island, many of them left, fed up, tired. Today only 3,000 Armenians live in Cyprus. And God bless them all.

To understand why my companion stood confused by this typically Byzantine church, my cross-domed consciousness had to make a great deal of effort. The fact is that this temple was indeed built by the Byzantines and was later given to the Armenian community.





Linopambaki

During the reign of the Ottomans in Cyprus, there has been a growing number of Islamized and so-called hidden Armenians. At the end of the 19th century, a number of Armenian communities in Cyprus, such as Armenohori, Artem, Ayios Iakovos, Ayios Chariton, Kornokipos, Melunda and Platani, converted to Islam. Later, in the census of the Island they were listed as Turks. Not only the Armenians, but also Greeks, Maronites and Roman Catholics of the island en masse converted to Islam, to avoid suffering at the hands of the Ottomans. There is even a special term – "Linobambaki," for the inhabitants of the island who secretly practice Christianity.



Alexander-Michael Hadjiyra

↑ Sourb Astvatsatsin Church

← Makaravank Monastery, 1973



→
Makaravank Monastery, today

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At the appointed place, Raffi's son is waiting for us. He crossed the border a little farther away by the old Armenian cemetery Ayios Dometios. More precisely, he drove there. In contrast to the checkpoint on the main street of Ledra, from which we have crossed to the occupied zone, the border here can be crossed by car. And we needed it. We decided to visit the most important Armenian center of the island – the Makaravank Monastery, also known under another telling name "Armenomonastiro." It is situated on the mountain ridge Pentadaktylos, about a mile west of Galefki.

We drive past cities, villages and tourist sites built over the past 30 years. The houses seem to be still covered in wet paint. Homes that have yet to find their history, their memories. Homes, the door knobs of which carry the fingerprints of their first owners.





←
Bell Tower of Makaravank

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All the settlements flashing by our windows have one commonality – in the center of each stands a monument to Ataturk. Going through them at the maximum legal speed without stopping, a motion picture forms in my head with this historical figure as the main character – here he thinks about something, there he climbs up the hill, that one calls for something of worth, here he stands with the flag in his hands. For one who was born in the Soviet Union and witnessed sculptural Leniniana, this is nothing new. But I still ponder, what happens to all these stone idols after the the power they symbolize is overthrown?

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Soon on the horizon appears the imposing silhouette of the five-fingered mountain, which is the rough translation of its name, Pentadaktylos. It seems as if it is incessantly trying to scratch this outrageously placid sky.

Our car climbs up the hill, rolls through the woods, and finally the white silhouette of the temple clearly emerges on a solid green background. More precisely, what is left of it.

Built in the 9th century by the Byzantines, in the 15th century it became the property of the Armenians. Ottoman sources preserved from 1642 through 1701 confirm that the monastery and vast areas around it were owned by Armenians and not to be taxed. There is a similar document issued by the English government, which means everything is okay with the papers. ▸

***

Once the monks lived here, and it was most likely an educational institution. Construction and restoration works were ongoing for centuries at Makaravank. The last time the church was thoroughly renovated in 1972, a record of it was preserved on the wall at the entrance – perhaps the single undestroyed Armenian message around the temple. Just the final digits 72 are erased. Looking around, you realize that this was not by accident. It would have been hard to explain how in some 30 years the temple, which stood for over twelve centuries, has crumbled. A hollow wooden box towering over the courtyard is all that is left of the bell tower. Almost all the facilities are stripped of roofs, and the walls in some places are destroyed.

Above each doorway there is an empty, seemingly insignificant frame with traces of carefully carved out Armenian letters – more remaining evidence. And only a bright green spot of an orange tree in the center of the courtyard is a living memory of the past.



Mekhitar Sebastatsi sat on this very spot and admired the view of the beautiful monastery and even decided to found an Armenian Catholic Center here. But later, he chose the Island of St. Lazarus simply because it was closer to the Vatican.



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“On Saturdays and Sundays, there were plenty of people,” Raffi says. “And in this corner house has always lived an Armenian family that took care of the monastery and gardens. Well, they certainly could not manage to take care of the gardens alone. All around there were olive and fruit groves stretching all the way down from the mountains to the sea. You know, in good weather the Cilicia coast is visible from here.

The summer vacation months were particularly crowded because the Melkonyan School students and Armenian scouts would come here. Yet still it was most crowded during two holidays – the Day of St. Makar in December and the day of the pilgrimage on the first Sunday in May, when harisa was prepared and shared. In fact, this tradition is preserved to this day. In May, Armenians not only from Cyprus but also from all over the Middle East come here. They come by bus, accompanied and protected by a U.N. military escort.”



← Pentadaktylos Ridge

↓ Rock of Mekhitar Sebastatsi

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It seemed that my story of Makaravank would end here. But it so happened that I witnessed history, which resembled something right out of a book. We were about to leave when a truck with government number plates arrived at the monastery gate, and three men stepped out. Two of them were wearing heavy-duty gloves. We decided to stay and watch what they would do. These three dawdled as well. Raffi asked them in Greek why they had come. "We travel, visit attractions," said the men. Then they exchanged a few words in Turkish, which Raffi translated for us: "Let's wait until they leave, and then get down to business." Raffi added, "Now the life of one of the walls depends on how long we linger here."

As we were leaving with a guilty sense of accomplices to a murder, Raffi suggested, "Let's climb up to the Rock of Mekhitar and watch what they will do." After two turns down the road, we parked at the curb and climbed up the hill following a barely noticeable trail. The white rock came into sight through the trees shortly. Raffi spoke again. "They say Mekhitar Sebastatsi sat on this very spot and admired the view of the beautiful monastery and even decided





to found an Armenian Catholic Center here. But later, he chose the Island of St. Lazarus, simply because it was closer to the Vatican.

Indeed, Makaravank is in clear view from here. I zoom the camera display and clearly see how the two men in gloves tear off the surviving remnants of the roof shingles. From the hill of Mekhitar, I throw a farewell glance at the white contour of the defenseless monastery. This way, calmly and with dignity, without fuss and hysteria, die the gray-bearded elders.

P. S.

In the evening, we were invited by Raffi to the kebab-house Berlin Wall located directly under the wall that separates the free and occupied parts of Cyprus. However now, we were on the free side. ■

Emotion from Motion



Vahram Muradyan

Our brightest memories are related to moments that have a strong emotional background, and it's no secret that positive emotions trigger all kinds of beneficial mechanisms in our bodies. Physical exercise brings us energy, vitality, and excitement. Even taking a walk can change our spirits. And when we're in our seats as spectators, we share the excitement of victories, the emotions often overpowering entire cities and countries. Self-help author Tony Robbins' "emotion comes from motion" explains the wide range of sports and active lifestyle-related memories. So, we wondered, "What is the most memorable sports moment of your lifetime?"

Herman Gulbag
Jeweler
I was about eight years old. My father took me to a boxing match in Istanbul to see Garbis Zakarian, an Armenian boxer who was famous in Istanbul. It was incredible to see him be so daring in front of all these Turks. He was wearing a "*khach*" (cross) and before entering the ring, he kissed it in front of hundreds and then stepped into the ring. Several hundred people were cheering for him. He knocked out his opponent and won the fight. It was my most memorable sports event. I was young, and with my father I witnessed the victory of an Armenian boxer among all these Turks.

Kurken Berksanlar
International Marketer
When I was at the University of Delaware, the Blue Hens won the championship that year. It was a very a happy event with a big party in town. It was memorable not only on the game field, but it continued afterwards. We did things that you don't want to know. It was a 24-hour-long party – lots of socializing and drinking. I was 21 years old. Limits were a bit different back then, and so were the responsibilities. This victory brought recognition to the university, and we felt proud because we shared that victory.

Sam Krikorian
Venture Capitalist
As a baseball fan, nothing beats watching a game at Yankee Stadium. There is so much history. Just thinking about the mystique of the place gives me goosebumps.

Edgar Martirosyan
Attorney
The 2007 Fiesta Bowl – Boise State made the impossible happen against Oklahoma. What happened that day is what movies are made of. It was amazing – three touchdowns and a two-point conversion in the final two minutes. It was exciting! The most memorable thing in sports is that you push yourself to the extremes. You get to test your limits, and you win!

Nicole Berksanlar
Account Coordinator
During my first semester at USC, I went to a football game. I had never been to one before, and I didn't understand the game. It was interesting to see thousands have so much appreciation and love for a team. Within the first five minutes, you become that fan as well. It gives you such a sense of pride of attending the school, being able to be a part of something that is so much bigger than yourself. I just remember everybody going crazy and throwing each other in the air. I was there with friends that I had met a couple of weeks ago. There is a tradition that every time they score a touchdown, you throw somebody in the air by the number of how many points the team is at. So, if you are at 30 points, somebody gets thrown in the air 30 times! I was thrown in the air as well and it was a crazy feeling.

Hrant Mirzakhanyan
Taxi Driver
My memorable moment, even though it was a long time ago, was doing the 100-meter hurdles. I won the first prize in the 5th grade. I was the winner among all these students from different schools, and it felt amazing! It was a special moment because it gave me confidence. It felt like I could run for kilometers and still be fine.

Razmik Samvelts
Painter
In 1980, weightlifter Yuri Vardanyan won gold in the Olympics. It was like the epic character "Sasuntsi David" had come to life. It also evoked a feeling of national pride. His victory was also my victory. It was a great feeling.

Tigran Musoyan
Musician
My most memorable moment would be when Armenia's football team Ararat won the championship in 1973. I was only 23 years old then and was proud as an Armenian to see our team win. We hadn't had a championship for a long time, and it was exciting to get that thrill.

Anita Zakharyan
Table Tennis Champion
I remember when I won the USSR individual championship; I picked up my towel and looked around the arena packed with spectators. I noticed my opponent's support group's disappointment, and then saw my happy and tired mother who coached me my entire life. That's when I realized that all the years of our hard work, training when you are sick, being away from family and friends, working out when everyone else is having a good time, have come to this exact moment of victory.

Tony Forberg
Attorney
When France brutally beat Brazil 3-0 in the 1998 World Cup! It was fascinating to watch "Zizou." We were drunk in the middle of the day in a French restaurant, celebrating with a French flag. Brazil lost big time, and Zizou's victory was a thrill.

Arshak Nazarian
Contemporary Artist
I was only 12 years-old when Ararat won the USSR soccer championship, and it was the first sporting event I had ever attended. It is one of me and my brother's brightest childhood memory, and we got to share it with my father. Sports and art create an array of positive emotions. You get a good dosage of endorphins just like you do when you are in love.

Stephanie Vosper
Yoga Instructor
My moment came when I went to my second Dodgers game. We were sitting in a suite. It felt special. In general, sporting events are memorable. It's competitive. It's exciting. It's healthy. Sports are a great way to get aggression out. It would be great if sports could take the place of wars.

Tawaf Hashim
Basketball Player
I am from Chicago and as a kid I grew up watching Michael Jordan. He is the greatest player I have ever seen. Watching him play brings back so many unforgettable moments. He just defined greatness. He pretty much did the impossible, and how can you forget that?

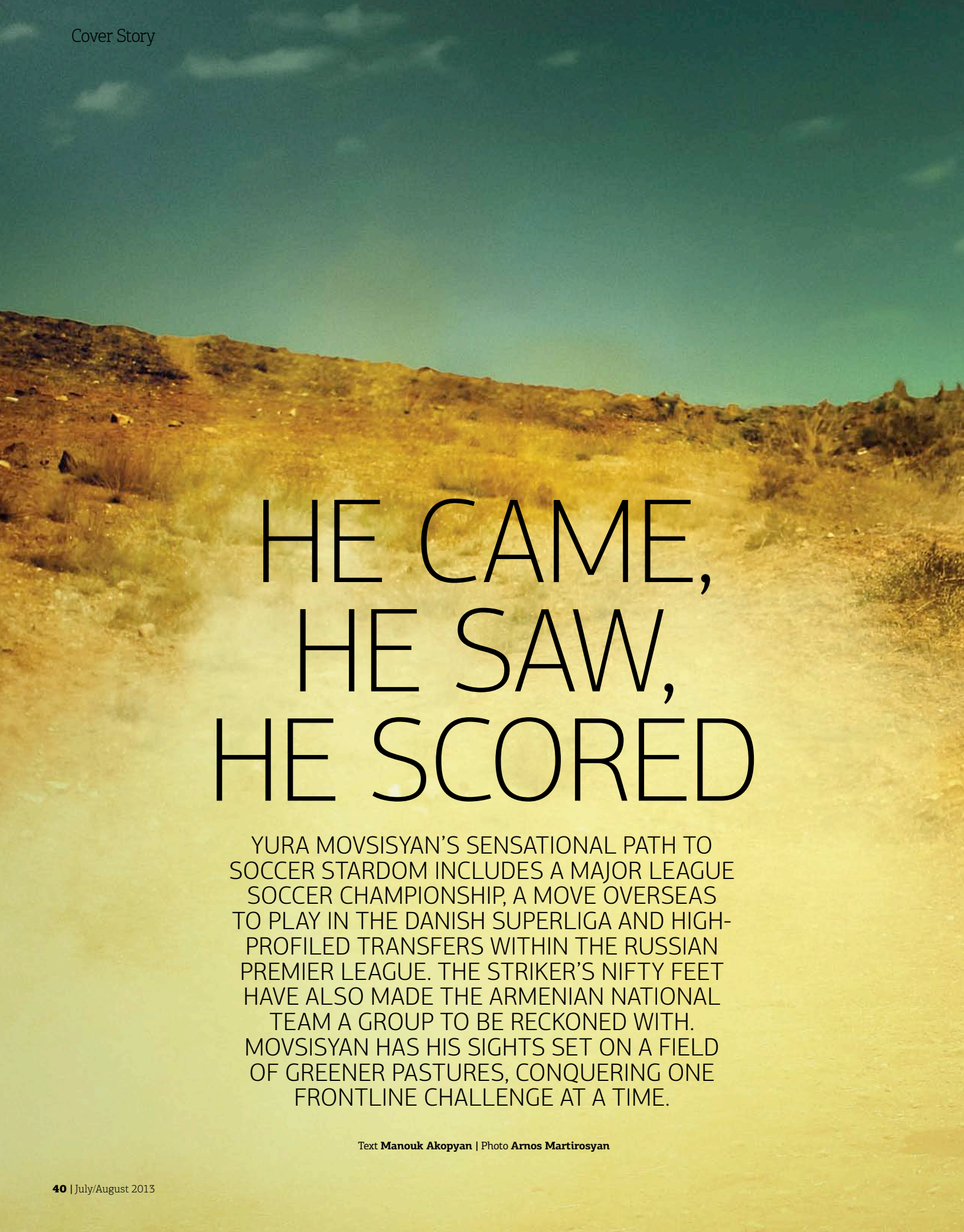
Suzana Grigorian
Service Representative
My most memorable moment would be our team victory during the Navasartian games. We won the basketball championship in 2012. It was unheard of. Our team had never won before, and then we beat 15 other teams. We became the champions. We beat Ararat – a team that had never lost before. The victory felt great!

Dru Babcock
Coach and Surfer
I once surfed a remote reef break with just five of my best friends. We traded waves and smiles for three hours as the conditions just kept getting perfect by the minute. The waves were so clean, crisp and blue. I pulled into and made a five-second tube as my friends watched and hooted in the channel. People travel for days to get what we found; it was the best day ever!

Vartan Michael
Graduate Student, Yale
The Lakers winning the 2000 championship is definitely my favorite. It was the first championship I witnessed as a fan in my era. After hearing so much about the Showtime era in the '80s, it was great for my generation to witness a winning team too. The next day, I gathered all the *LA Times* sports sections I could get my hands on to save the memory.

Hovhannes Manoukian
Comedian
The best part of going to games is the food and alcohol. That just sets up a perfect evening. If the team you are there to see wins, it's added value. For the sake of this argument, we'll call a win "dessert." And if they lose? Just stop off at a convenience store before heading home and buy a bottle of Pepto Bismol.

Suren Oganesyan
Dentist
I've been to hundreds of sporting events, but my first one is my most memorable. I was five, and my father took me to watch a soccer match at the Rose Bowl. I don't remember anything from the game, or who was playing, but I do remember the entire experience.



HE CAME, HE SAW, HE SCORED

YURA MOVSISYAN'S SENSATIONAL PATH TO SOCCER STARDOM INCLUDES A MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIP, A MOVE OVERSEAS TO PLAY IN THE DANISH SUPERLIGA AND HIGH-PROFILED TRANSFERS WITHIN THE RUSSIAN PREMIER LEAGUE. THE STRIKER'S NIFTY FEET HAVE ALSO MADE THE ARMENIAN NATIONAL TEAM A GROUP TO BE RECKONED WITH. MOVSISYAN HAS HIS SIGHTS SET ON A FIELD OF GREENER PASTURES, CONQUERING ONE FRONTLINE CHALLENGE AT A TIME.

Text **Manouk Akopyan** | Photo **Arnos Martirosyan**



Yura Movsisyan is all too familiar with the dramatics. For every stop he's had in his soccer career, his brilliant performances and pristine reputation have left a lasting impression.

Earlier this year, Movsisyan found himself in a position to please; he was facing the pressures of living up to his $9.7 million transfer to FC Spartak Moscow of the Russian Premier League. When the 25-year-old laced his cleats for his first game in red and white against Terek Grozny on March 10, he proved he was worth every ruble the only way he could – by scoring. He scored once. He scored twice. He then scored a third time for good measure, accounting for all three goals in a 3-1 victory. It was his first professional hat trick.

Movsisyan kept the game ball as a memento and phoned his family in California to share the elation from the locker room. It was the greatest game he ever played, right?

"I wouldn't say so. Scoring-wise, yes, but not when talking about my overall quality of play. If I can't touch the sky, I will never say I did. I'm my worst critic on the field. That's the way I've been my whole life, and that's the way I'll always be."

Movsisyan then called the coach who was instrumental to his craft and eventual advancement in the sport. The surprise recipient of the call was one Cherif Zein in Los Angeles. Zein mentored Movsisyan for two years at Pasadena High School and one year at Pasadena City College.

"How many kids would do something like that? I don't know any!" says Zein, who last coached Movsisyan over seven years ago. "He always calls me; he always visits me; he always contributes to our Pasadena club team and gives his time to the kids. And he doesn't have to do any of it. It was very nice. It meant a lot to me."

Before developing into a game-changing forward and fan favorite, Movsisyan faced the growing pains of maturating as a player and person.

He was born in Baku in 1987 at the height of a developing war between Armenia and Azerbaijan and moved to Pasadena, California when his family was granted political asylum status in 2000. It's a dark period of his life, vaulted in a memory bank he'd rather not open.

"I can never hide that I was born in Azerbaijan," he says. "I really didn't know what was going on at the time because we were constantly on the move; we lived in Russia too. I am a very proud Armenian, and my parents raised my brothers and myself as Armenians. Life began for us when we moved to America – that's how I look at it."

Although Movsisyan had dreams of playing professional soccer as a child, he never played at an organizational level until he was a 14-year-old in Los Angeles. He and his brother Movses, two years his senior, played on club teams and later, together at Pasadena High School where Yura scored 32 goals in 13 games. Zein first got a look at Movsisyan when he played for the local club team Lazio but didn't think much of him at the time.

"I was flabbergasted on how fast Yura developed," Zein tells *Yerevan* magazine. "Movses was actually better than him but Yura focused on becoming great. He was persistent in his work ethic and willingness to improve."

With both brothers chasing the same dream, a time came when one of the two had to begin providing financially for the family. So Movses quit soccer to work, allowing Yura the opportunity to further pursue the sport.

Movsisyan played one year at Pasadena City College, tallying 18 goals en route to being named the college's 2005-2006 Men's Athlete of the Year. But he wasn't even invited to the MLS draft combine.

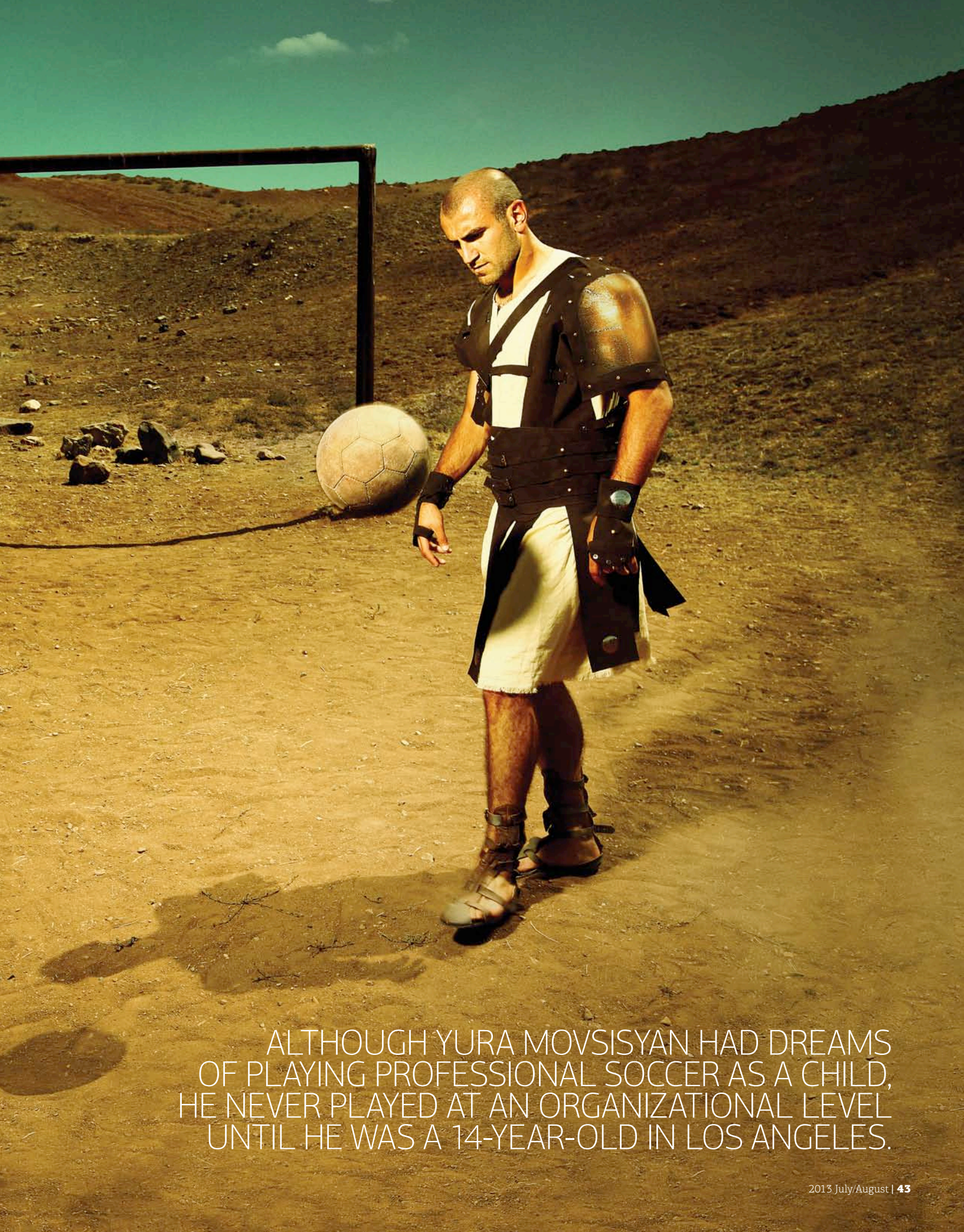
So Zein called Ralph Perez, a former assistant coach for the Los Angeles Galaxy, who called Nelson Rodríguez, Executive Vice President of Competition at MLS, and vouched for the unknown Armenian. Rodríguez told Perez to find suitors interested in drafting Movsisyan.

So he went to Bob Gansler, who coached the 1990 United States World Cup team with Perez as his assistant. Perez's respected judgment and Movsisyan's stellar play at the Nike Friendlies caught the eye of the Kansas City Wizards coach, and Gansler drafted Movsisyan with the fourth overall pick in 2006, making him the highest player ever taken from a community college.

"You look for players who are offensive threats because they are few and far between," Perez tells *Yerevan* magazine. "I liked his heart and determination. Soccer was in his blood 24 hours, the passion – watching, studying, playing – you can't instill that in everybody. A lot of kids aspire and dream, but he lived and breathed soccer. He was motivated to help his family. That's really commendable. He got the opportunity and made the most of it, and I'm proud of him."

At 19, Movsisyan's life instantaneously changed when he moved from familial comforts to the unfamiliar grounds of the Midwest. To boot, he seldom played once Gansler resigned midway into his rookie season.

"Soccer made me grow up fast. When you live alone at such a young age, it's different. It's the real world, and you have a lot more responsibilities. You have to find a way to do all the right things." ▸



ALTHOUGH YURA MOVSISYAN HAD DREAMS OF PLAYING PROFESSIONAL SOCCER AS A CHILD, HE NEVER PLAYED AT AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL UNTIL HE WAS A 14-YEAR-OLD IN LOS ANGELES.



IN HIS FIRST GAME, MOVSISYAN PROVED TO SPARTAK HE WAS WORTH EVERY RUBLE THE ONLY WAY HE COULD – BY SCORING. HE SCORED ONCE. HE SCORED TWICE. HE THEN SCORED A THIRD TIME FOR GOOD MEASURE. IT WAS HIS FIRST PROFESSIONAL HAT TRICK.



The amiable Movsisyan chalks it up as a humbling experience, admitting that it helped him mature mentally and emotionally. With Movsisyan playing mostly a featured role as a spectator, the Wizards traded him to Real Salt Lake (RSL). The deal was a blessing in disguise. It moved Movsisyan into the starting lineup and allowed him to finally showcase his potential.

In almost no time, the intense attacker kicked off a series of cardiac-testing play. He catapulted himself to prominence in 2008 when he scored the equalizing goal in the 90th minute of the regular season finale. The draw would clinch a playoff birth for RSL, its first ever. In the postseason opener against Chivas USA seven days later, it was déjà vu all over again when this time Movsisyan netted the game winner yet again in the 90th minute.

In three seasons, he became a fan favorite and one of the faces of the organization. American soccer fans will remember Movsisyan most for leading RSL to an MLS Cup in 2009 against David Beckham and the heavily favored Los Angeles Galaxy. It would be the last game he'd play in America.

Movsisyan moved to Europe in 2010 when the Danish club Randers purchased his contract. A successful stint in Denmark scoring 12 goals in 30 games earned him a $3.2 million move to Krasnodar, where he enjoyed 23 goals over two seasons before landing on the radar of Spartak Moscow.

The last four years of the feared forward's life have been on the upswing. Everywhere he's played, he's scored, and that's helped tremendously with his confidence, he says. But the main antidote to Europe's physical and tactical play has been his ability to stay calm and patient under pressure.

"Life certainly hasn't been boring the last few years, I'll tell you that much," Movsisyan laughs. "Having two kids and living out of the country is the hardest part. This is just another challenge I'll overcome. Seeing my family happy about my success motivates me even more."

He and his wife of six years, Marianna, have two children, Arman four, and Aida one, and live almost 10 months of the year together.

"Anytime he has family around him, he plays twice as good. My father (Sergey) visits him in Moscow once a month to mentally prepare him to exceed expectations," Movses says.

Movsisyan achieved another proud moment in 2010 when he joined the Armenian national team.

"It's an unbelievable and almost indescribable feeling to represent my country, wearing the red, blue and orange," Yura says. "Playing for a club team is work, and you can enjoy it while getting paid. Playing for your country, you don't play for money. You play for pride and for your people."

In 2012, Movsisyan and Henrikh Mkhitaryan led Armenia to within one victory of a birth in the UEFA championships. They catapulted the country to a FIFA ranking of No. 41 in the world – its highest ever. Armenia finished the qualification round with a respectable 5-2-3 record, with Movsisyan contributing four goals and five assists.

Almost overnight, the perception and expectations of cynic compatriots changed, and fans forgot the days when they'd watch games not in hopes of a victory but just to know by how much Armenia would lose.

"Armenia is definitely going to accomplish feats that have never been done before," Movsisyan says when talking about Armenia's prospects of its first-ever major international tournament. "That is still in our future, and I hope it happens during my era. Although we are a young team, I am confident we can get it done with the group of guys we have now. We just need time."

In the meantime, Movsisyan is focused on his responsibilities for Spartak Moscow, where he hopes to lead the club back to its championship ways. They've won 21 top-flight national titles and 13 domestic cups, but nothing since their 2003 Russian Cup. Owner Leonid Fedun's $9.7 million transfer made Movsisyan the second-largest transfer involving a current or former MLS player, trailing Jozy Altidore's $10 million move to Villarreal.

Movsisyan immediately repaid that sum in the eight games he played for the Red and White before the season culminated with a record of 4-1-3, finishing the 2012-13 RPL campaign as the scoring leader and Bombardir Award winner with 13 goals, helping Spartak qualify for Europa League.

"I always want to accomplish feats that people will remember – everybody dreams of making history. But at the end of the day, I don't care about the on-the-field stuff. Life is not about being a good football player. It's about being an even better person. I just hope the journey continues to be fantastic."

Zein agrees, saying that Movsisyan is a role model for a human success story and a hero for the Armenians.

"It's amazing where he came from and how he kept his roots. He has so much heart and determination. His life story should be turned into a movie, so that it could teach kids what they can do with their lives."

"I look at my career, and it's always moving forward," adds Movsisyan. "And it's the same with life – always progressing. The meaning of life is to progress as you get older."

In seven years, Movsisyan has gone from being a virtual unknown to one of Europe's most prolific goal scorers.

The script to his Hollywood ending remains unwritten. ■

National Games

The history of Armenian sports and Armenian participation in the Olympic Games has deep roots. Wrestling, boxing, hockey, running, javelin throwing, archery, equestrian and other games and competitions were held during the pagan celebrations such as Navasard, Vardavar, Barekendan, Jrorhnek, Tsaghkazard, Trndez and Surb Sargis. The first Armenians who participated in the Olympic Games were the kings Trdat and Varazdat from the Arshakuni dynasty. Historic accounts testify that Trdat III Arshakuni became the winner of the 265th Olympic Games in 281 B.C. in wrestling, and Varazdat Arshakuni won in boxing at the 291st Olympic Games held in 385 B.C. Today, major sports organizations and competitions unite the Armenian people to keep the athletic culture alive.

Pan-Armenian Games

Popularly called the "Armenian Olympic Games," the Pan-Armenian Games are considered the most significant and anticipated sport event which connects the Diaspora to Armenia. The Games are held once every four years in Yerevan. They include competitions in individual and team sport disciplines among athletes from different countries. The event draws thousands of Armenian athletes from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, North and South America and Armenia to compete in 10 disciplines: soccer, basketball, chess, mini-football, volleyball, swimming, athletics, badminton, tennis and table tennis. In 1995, Soviet diplomat Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan publicly announced his idea of organizing universal Armenian games. The suggestion quickly gained the support of the Armenian Diaspora, and on April 30, 1997, the World Committee of Pan-Armenian Games (WCPAG) was created with the help of the Armenian unions of the Diaspora. Melik-Shahnazaryan was elected the first president of WCPAG and has designed the emblem, cup, medals and almost all symbols of the organization. He also chose the official anthem and the farewell song of the closing ceremony. From August 28 to September 5, 1999, delegations from 62 cities and 23 countries, over 1500 athletes, participated in the first Pan-Armenian Games. With the motto "Unity through Sport," the Pan-Armenian Games help to promote athletics in Armenia and discover new athletes who might be included in national teams. For many participants, it is not so much about the games as it is a great opportunity to visit Armenia and meet compatriots from all over the world. Traditionally, the colorful opening ceremony includes speeches, the lighting of the Olympic torch, fireworks, dances and entertainment. It should also be noted that the number of participants has increased through the years: over 3,000 athletes from nearly 125 cities of the world attended the Fifth Pan-Armenian Games as recently as 2011.





Homenetmen Navasartian Games & Festival

Named after the ancient Armenian games, the Navasartian Games in Los Angeles attract over 30,000 people each year, making it one of the biggest events in the Armenian community in the U.S. Launched in 1975, this showcase event organized by Homenetmen Western USA today boasts the participation of 300 teams, 8,000 athletes, and 2,000 scouts over a period of eight weeks. Various sports that comprise the games include basketball, soccer, volleyball, track and field, tennis, swimming, ping pong and chess. The games culminate on the weekend of the Fourth of July with a festival and an elaborate closing ceremony featuring the collective family of Homenetmen athletes, scouts, parents and volunteers from the 18 chapters in the Western U.S. Local businesses and organizations participate in the food and games booths of the festival, adding to the popularity of the Navasartian Games. Activities are geared toward promoting a healthy lifestyle, family and community involvement. In addition to competitive sports, the Navasartian Games have a full calendar of cultural events featuring famous Armenian artists.



ISNA: Hemmat Khalhi

Pan-Armenian Games (Iran)

The Ararat Sport and Cultural Center in Tehran has conducted the Pan-Armenian games since 1964. For almost a half century, Ararat has kept the Armenian identity alive through cooperation between the Armenian communities from different regions of Iran. Annually, for one week, the Ararat Center hosts over a thousand Armenian athletes competing in nine sports disciplines: football, basketball, tennis, table tennis, volleyball, swimming, billiards and running. Participants arrive from various Armenian athletic organizations and unions located in Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz and Tabriz. High-ranking officials from Iran and Armenia usually attend the games as well. In his speech at the opening ceremony in 1998, Iran's President Mohammad Khatami stressed the important role of the Armenian community throughout Iran's history and stated that the Armenian community in Iran has been successful in preserving its independence and identity through centuries of hardship and difficulty. Year after year, the Iran Pan-Armenian Games have successfully continued bringing together an increasing number of young members and athletes for competitive tournaments. With more than 15,000 weekly spectators, the games attract the community at large. This national festival gives the youth the opportunity to meet, mingle and share experiences through the thrill of sports. The event also reflects the strength of the tight-knit Armenian community of Iran.

The Armenian-European Games

The Armenian-European Games are organized every two years by the Union of Armenians of Switzerland, and they are open to Armenian individuals and all Armenian organizations. To join the tournament, the participants can choose between the following sports: indoor soccer, volleyball, basketball, table tennis, badminton, chess and backgammon. In 2012, the AGBU (Sofia Chapter) had the honor of hosting the Armenian-European Games. More than 300 Armenians from France, Italy, Austria, Greece, Armenia, Bulgaria, England, Switzerland, Romania, Germany, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Abu Dhabi and Dubai responded to the invitation and showed sportsmanship, team spirit and a desire to get acquainted and communicate in Armenian during Easter. The sporting event was under the patronage of the Sofia municipality, and the mayor of Sofia was the honorary patron of the games. The Armenian-European Games were held at the biggest indoor sports arena in Sofia, the Vasil Levski National Sport Academy. Jury members were accredited by the relevant professional associations, ensuring that the judging process was conducted at a professional level. The Primate of the Armenian Diocese in Bulgaria blessed the participants and emphasized that "the conduct of sports games on days when the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church celebrates Easter, makes the presence of the participants and guests even more significant." Evenings following the daytime competitions are filled with music and dance.





AGBU World Games

Since 1955, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) World Games have brought together youth from around the globe to engage in sporting competitions and create lifelong bonds. Over the years, the AGBU World Games have been held in Beirut, Buenos Aires, Geneva, Sofia, Paris and Sydney. The positive outcome of these games has proved so popular that AGBU Regional Games now take place regularly in North and South America. In the summer of 2012, the AGBU World Games returned to Los Angeles. In addition to the week-long athletic events, over 1,700 athletes, members and supporters enjoyed Southern California by participating in sightseeing trips, cultural events, social mixers and beach parties. The 2012 opening ceremony was held at Pasadena City College. No one went home from the games empty-handed; all the athletes received trophies, medals and recognition for their participation in AGBU's World Games. The event culminated in a one-of-a-kind Victory Ball held at a Hollywood studio back lot fashioned after a New York City street. In its near 60-year history, the AGBU World Games have united Armenian youth with the goal of reinforcing their commitment to the organization and forming lifelong friendships with peers through good sportsmanship and teamwork.

Armenian involvement in sports and participation in Olympic games dates back centuries. We are now finding new and exciting ways to channel our passion for sports by continuing with cultural events.



Ahead of the Curve

John Sarkisian personifies the essence of the entrepreneurial spirit. He is the founder and CEO of SKLZ, a comprehensive line of athletic performance and skill development training products, the engine that drives athletes around the world.

Text **Manouk Akopyan** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**



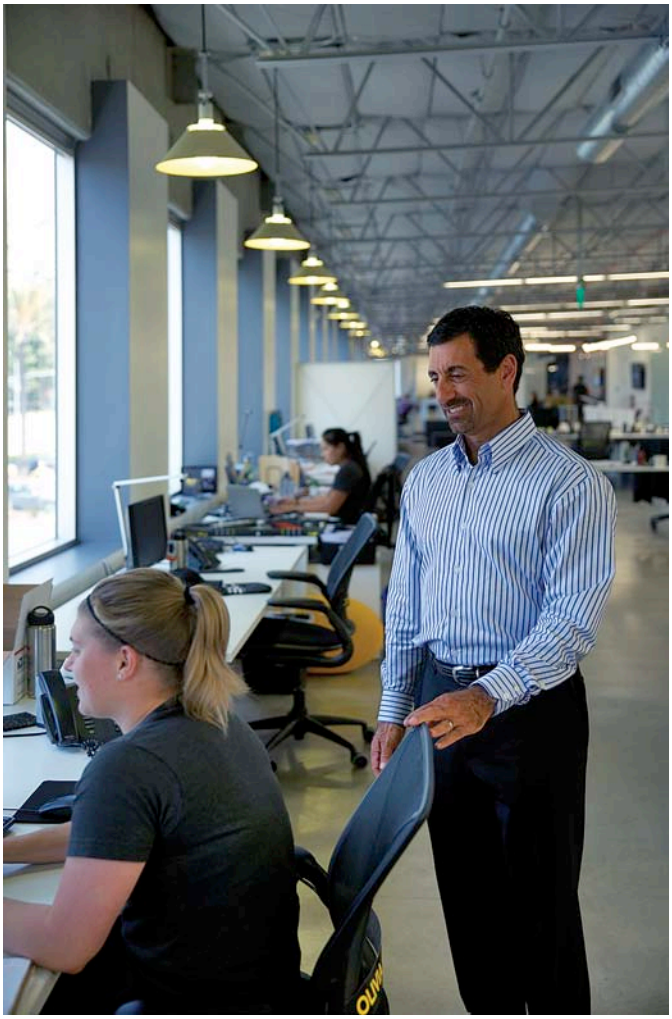
When Detroit native John Sarkisian was a University of Michigan undergrad studying economics, he came to a realization: he didn't want to work for a corporation. He was more interested in running his own. The only way his serial entrepreneurial drive would be quenched was building businesses from the ground-up. So he liberated the businessman within him when he settled in California years later. His first career opportunity came in the field of real estate when he was still in San Diego State University's MBA program. In 1992, a wife and four children led him to start Pat and Oscar's restaurants, a successful chain of family restaurants in Southern California and Arizona until Sarkisian sold it to Sizzler International in 2000. He then got his feet wet in credit card security technologies when he co-founded Semtek Innovative Solutions. He sold that, too. It was right around the time the avid outdoorsmen's interests were changing.



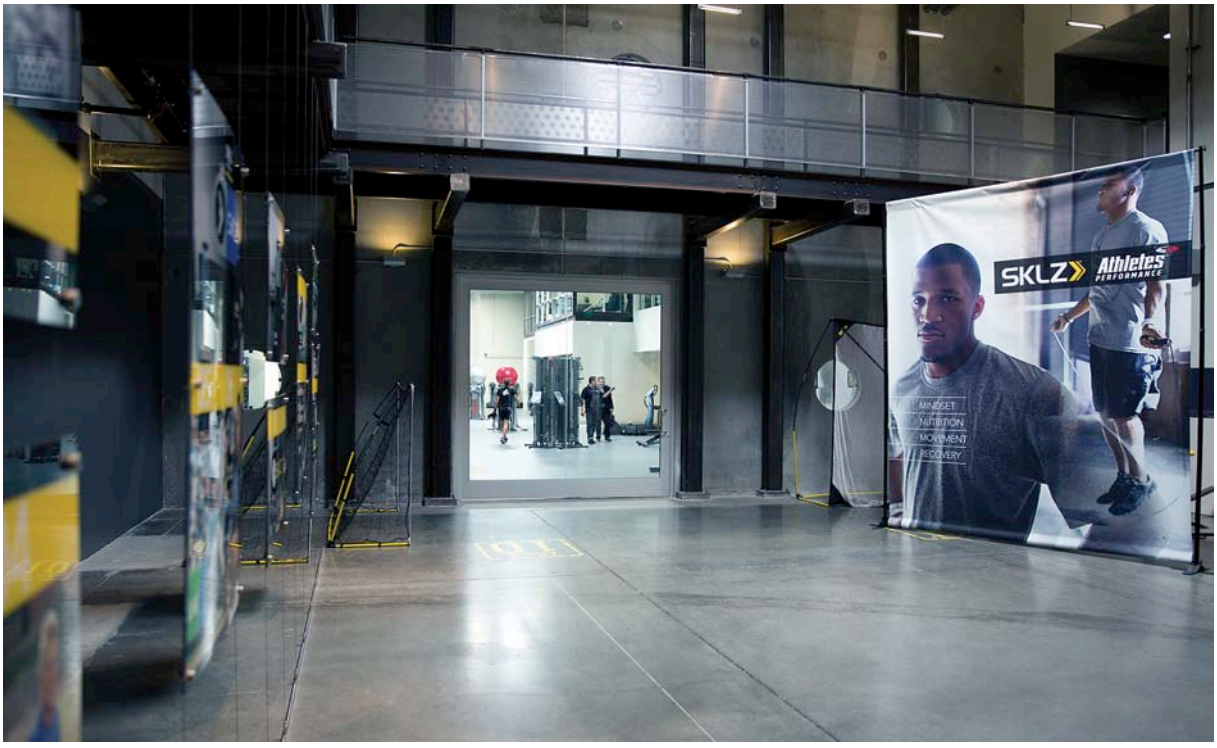


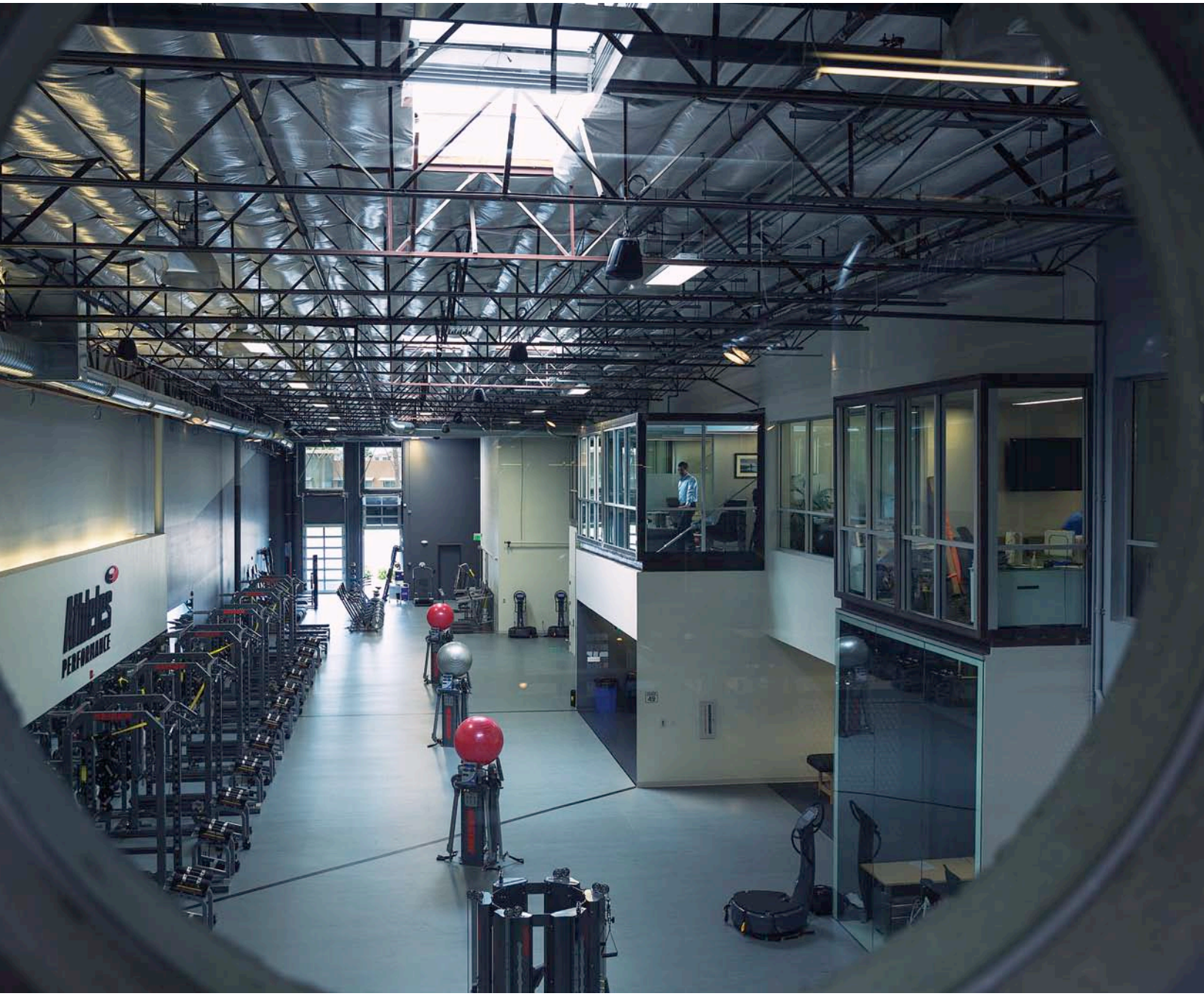
John Sarkisian was a father to three little-league-playing boys in 2002 when he founded Pro Performance Sports to commercialize the Hit-A-Way baseball swing trainer. It was the perfect way for his sons to learn the fundamentals of hitting and increasing their hand-eye coordination, while not paying hundreds of dollars at the batting cages. With that being his only product, Sarkisian sold 600,000 units to consumers through direct marketing TV ads in two years. By the third year, he had already attracted Walmart as his first major retailer, Derek Jeter as an endorser, and he created the subsidiary SKLZ, which is now a comprehensive line of athletic performance and skill development training products. "Whether it's the kid trying to make the team in high school, the everyday guy who wants to run a triathlon, or a professional athlete who wants to get better, we give them the ability to train and reach their potential," says Sarkisian. "We deliver the tools, instructional content and programs to aspiring athletes." ▸

Sarkisian's vision at SKLZ is to elevate the athlete within you. He not only promotes an active and healthy lifestyle, but lives it as well – even with a nagging knee that needs replacement surgery. Sarkisian is an avid cyclist and participates in about a half-dozen criterium races a year. "It's not only about being physically healthy, but mentally as well," he says. "Everything we do with our team is – how do we directly talk with the consumer? And how do we ethically deliver on our promise?" In essence, his natural performance-enhancing products are the anti-video games, anti-sedimentary lifestyle remedy for today's generation. Sarkisian has an open door policy on innovation. If the idea aligns with the company's mission and demonstrates efficacy, they'll develop, manufacture and market the product. Such was the case with Joe Mauer, the MVP catcher for the Minnesota Twins, and his family. Mauer's father Jake built a contraption that dropped baseballs down a tube from eye level and released them at waist level. It would help Joe to become the No. 1 overall pick out of high school, a lifetime .320 hitter and the best catcher over the last ten years. The Mauer mechanism turned into the product that is commercially known today as the SKLZ QuickSwing PX4 Baseball Hitting Trainer.





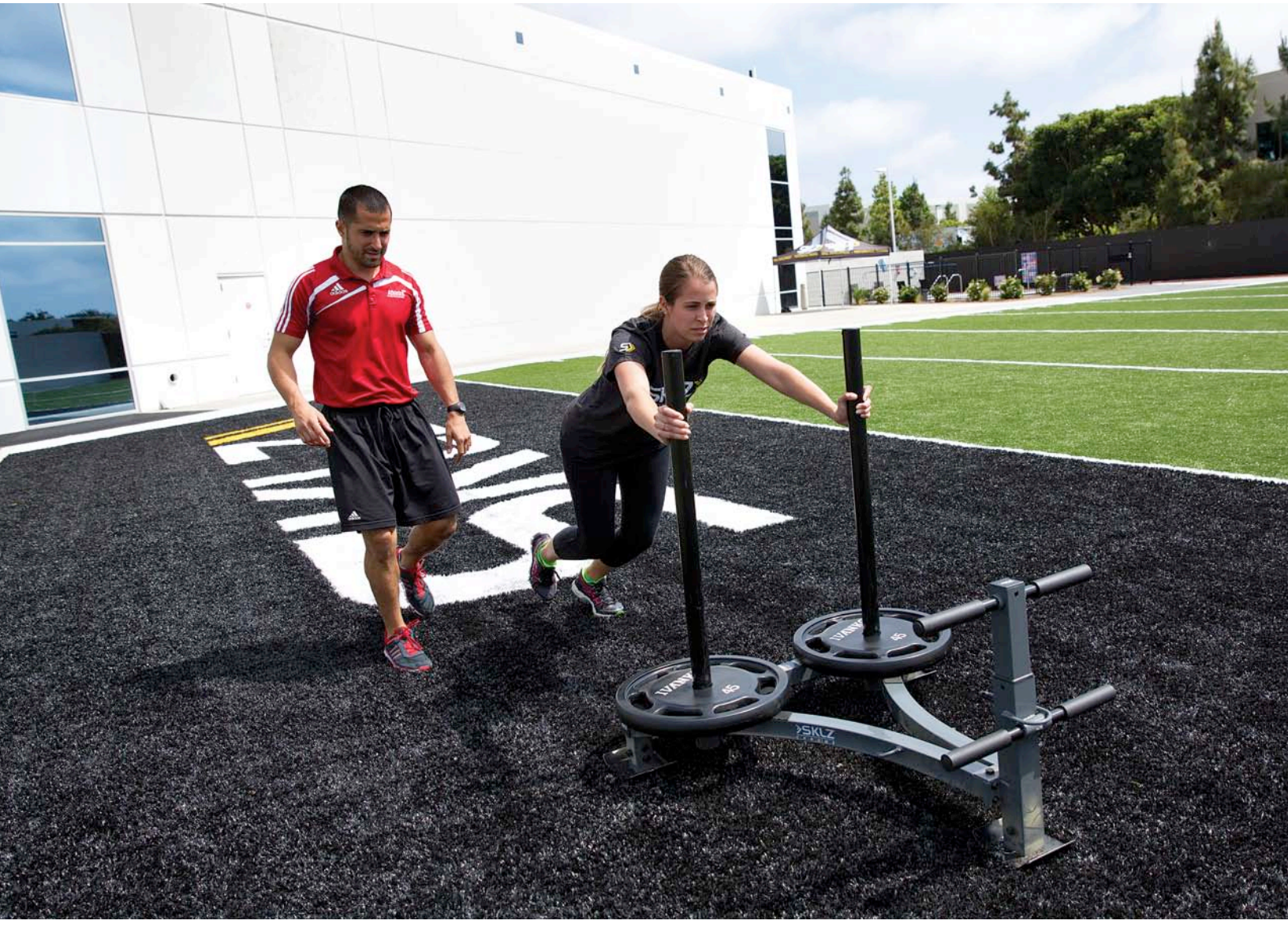




Last year, SKLZ signed San Francisco 49ers running back LaMichael James to an endorsement deal to represent the company as its ambassador. James, a 2010 Heisman finalist who finished his career as the all-time leading rusher for the University of Oregon, tells *Yerevan* magazine that the SKLZ line of products have tremendously improved his already stellar skill set. "Once you get to the professional level, everybody is trying to get the upper hand. You can't take any days off because the next person will pass you. Training is truly important, and you have to have that approach on and off the field. With all of their resources, I'm trying to be the best player that I can be," he says. The speedy James averaged five yards a carry throughout his 2012 rookie season, and he's looking to build on his explosiveness by using products such as the flat rung agility Quick Ladder. "I'm blessed to be one of faces of the SKLZ organization. It's my part to be honest with the product. When I say 'they have the best training equipment,' I really do believe it. Everything an athlete can possibly need, no matter what sport they play, it's there. And their training facility... wow, it's mind-blowing. I've never seen anything like that in my life." ▸

SKLZ built on its strategic partnership with Athletes Performance, the program for training and development of America's top athletes and future stars, this April when they launched a 7,000 square foot training space outfitted with an outdoor turf field and a sprint track. The state of the art facility serves more like a Taj Majal for fitness that offers the full line of Athletes Performance programs that have been made famous by college and professional players from all major sports. If Athletes Performance were a country, with the combined sportsmen that have trained in their Phoenix, Los Angeles, Florida, and Texas facilities, it would have ranked sixth in the 2012 Olympics medal count. The laboratory at SKLZ will provide tailored programs personalized for each individual's needs – all based on the latest science and data gathered over years of working with elite athletes. Sarkisian says that the transfer of knowledge through instructional content and the development of new training products truly excites him. "There are not a lot of brands with our scope and size, and Athletes Performance knows what is going on in the world in terms of assessing mindset, nutrition, movement and recovery. The partnership is a momentous occasion for our company that allows us to stay ahead of the curve."

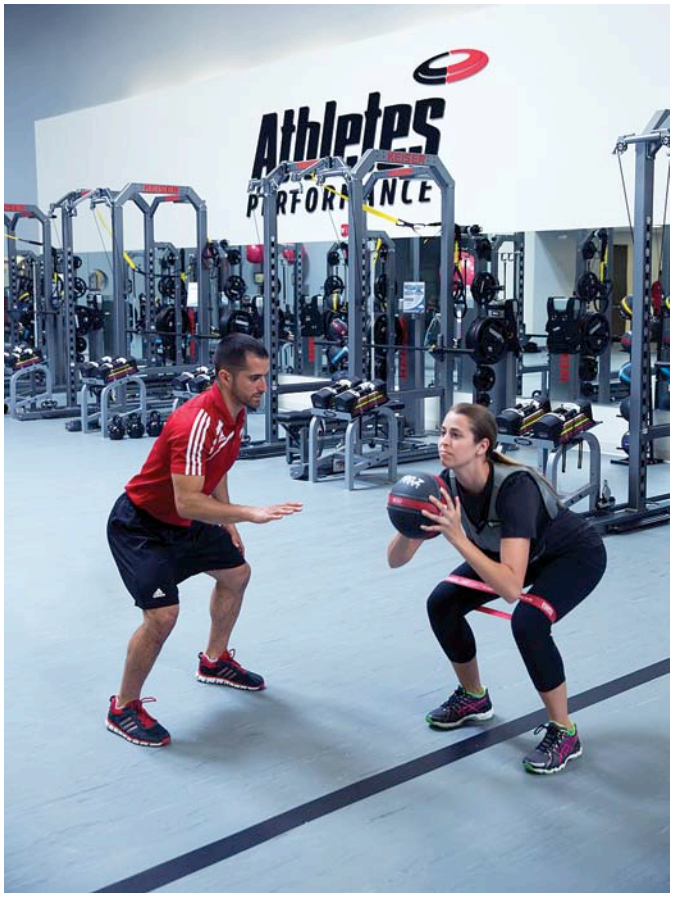












Sarkisian used the original revenue from the Hit-A-Way to begin developing a wide range of other training tools. Today, SKLZ has an expansive catalog of over 350 products for football, golf, baseball, soccer, lacrosse, basketball and other sports. They are found in 11,000 individual stores, including Sports Authority, Dick's Sporting Goods, Big 5, Walmart and Target. Their products are dispersed across 50 countries and have attracted such athletes as Albert Pujols and Warren Barton as ambassadors. In 2010, SKLZ reported $41 million in revenue and $60 million by 2011. A three-year growth of 186% led them to move their headquarters for a third time to Carlsbad, California – a 16,000 square foot modern facility that is roughly three times the size of their previous location. *Inc.* Magazine recognized SKLZ as one of the leaders in an emerging market in their "Inc. 500 | 5000" list of the fastest-growing private companies in America. "We've had up-years with revenue, growth of people and products every year. Overseas sales account for 10 percent of our business," Sarkisian says. "Our aggressive growth is fueled by the team working every day with the same passion and entrepreneurial drive that came with the launch of our very first product in 2002. Seeing the company grow means we are staying true to our DNA." ■


GOODYEAR
SONY
MICHELIN



WHERE **EAGLES** TREAD

Between the carbon fiber wings and steel tube fuselage, bolting in the sky at a speed of 260 miles an hour, beats the heart of a champion. Fasten your fears – you're about to enter the danger zone. Insert Top Gun soundtrack, and press play.

Text **Ara Tahmassian**

Children tug their mother's hands – "Look mommy, up in the sky!" – and a mighty voice projects over the sea of faces at Andrews Air Base. "High above is a man who's dedicated more than half his life to the pursuit of excellence in extreme flying. He's a former U.S. National Aerobatic Champion, Red Bull Air Race extraordinaire, and one of America's most decorated aviators – from Boston, Massachusetts – Michael Goulian!"

Cue the high-octane music, as 3,000 feet away a propeller pierces the western sky over Maryland. Goulian's Extra 330SC, the world's newest custom-built premiere aerobatic aircraft, dips down and tornadoes toward the crowd at a roll rate of 420 degrees per second. Several revolutions later, a crisp snap roll to the right boasts the sleekness of its wingspan. An even crisper snap to the left displays the supremacy of the pilot's skills. Right again, then left, and back to center. Momentum thrusts the 1,200-pound-plane spiraling down at unearthly speeds to the center of the crowd's view. The faint-of-heart look away.

Hats fall off and ice cream scoops topple to the ground. Spectators swiftly turn their heads from one side to another. Goulian is up again, maintaining speeds of 220 to 240 miles an hour. He looks out the cockpit toward the left wing, setting it on the horizon, and then follows with a series of razor sharp point rolls. As he ascends, he battles the forces of gravity with all 350 horses of the plane's Lycoming Thunderbolt engine. He checks the altitude; he's reached 2,000 feet. The plane rolls backwards – now it's upside down.

The music stops. Thousands are silenced by the image of a plane on its stomach – some close their eyes.

Just then a white smoke spurts out of the tail and simultaneously the high-pitched voice of Steven Tyler, aka The Demon of Screamin, shouts "Ya…Livin' on the edge!" The music's on high blast, it's the cool Aerosmith (before Steven Tyler was an old lady on *Idol* – that Aerosmith) mixed with even cooler aerobatics. The crowd goes



↓
Goulian in formation with the Unites States Navy's flight demonstration squadron of F/A -18 Hornets



↑
Suited by sponsors, carried by legacy, flies with heart.

wild. Pure aerial insanity ensues. This is the Goulian Aerosports experience, and it's just getting started.

Twelve minutes of that and kids beg their parents for flying lessons; they all want to be like Michael Goulian. His air shows have reached mythical proportion.

A story was published in *The Salt Lake Tribune* about an 11-year-old-girl who witnessed her hero in aerobatic flight at the National Championships in Nevada, and said, "As soon as I saw that, I knew it was what I had to do."

Goulian is an aerobatic pilot. Imagine fusing the movements of a trapeze artist with the speed of a Formula-1 racer – but up in the sky. Only a handful of civilian pilots successfully make a living in this chosen profession. A master of modern aerial maneuvers, Goulian's performance style is uniquely edgy, complex and aggressive.

"I fly my heart out," confides Goulian. "It doesn't matter if people know planes or not. My hope is that they see a person in that machine giving it everything he's got. If they can recognize that, then that itself brings about a certain type of emotion."

The excitement is amplified with carefully choreographed music, which he and his team believe enhance the spectator's experience. "At the end of the show, we want people to be amazed. I want the whole crowd to be giving each other high fives. We make it as beautiful as we can so that at the right time of the day, if we catch somebody on the right emotional level, there might even be a tear in their eye."

Michael Goulian is made of the right stuff – legendary stuff. A competition pilot at 17, National Advanced Champion at 22 and Unlimited Champion by 27, he represented the United States at the World Aerobatic Championship on three separate occasions. Before he was 30, he literally wrote the book on advanced aerobatics. Recently, he joined an elite group, becoming one of only seven aviators in history to be awarded all three of the air show industry's top honors: the ICAS Sword of Excellence, the Art Scholl Memorial Award and the Bill Barber Award.

"It's a beautiful day here in Massachusetts," says Goulian as he points to the clear skies outside Goulian Aerosports in Plymouth. He's got a small-town Mayberry charm to him, far from the reckless Maverick I expected. The only thing he has in common with the Tom Cruise character from *Top Gun* is his spiky hair. Maybe that's why he's adored by fans, because of his charm – the hair's pretty cool too.

Behind his office chair hangs a picture of Goulian's plane flying in formation with the world famous Blue Angels, the Unites States Navy's flight demonstration squadron of F/A -18 Hornets. "That was such an honor," he admits. "I feel lucky to be where I am today." He's being modest; luck has very little to do with his success, rather years of practice and dedication. When kids approach him after shows, his advice for them is, "Take the next twenty years of your life and think about nothing else. Live, breathe, eat it, and you'll get there. It doesn't matter what it is. Live life with passion and at full speed."

The 44-year-old pilot's heart rate was elevated when we met. He had just come out of a gruesome spin session at the gym – part of his daily workout regimen. Gravity takes its toll on the plane and an even greater toll on the pilot's body, so he must stay in pristine shape. The flying routines are intense to the point where his crew chief likes to joke that when it comes to the state of the plane after a show, they have more of a "remove and replace mentality" rather than repair.

In 1987, flying a Pitts Special bi-plane, Goulian performed his first air show. "I'll always remember that. There's still that little kid inside of me, full of emotion."

The plane didn't have a starter, so his dad had to hand start the propeller. It was only a year before, on his 16th birthday, that



← Goulian's propeller – nicknamed "The Claw" – rips through the sky.

Goulian had received his pilot's license, and already he was competing.

"I thought it was the coolest thing watching my brother solo an airplane for the first time," recalls younger brother Matthew Goulian, who soloed both an airplane and a helicopter on his own 16th birthday.

But before both brothers sat in a cockpit, their father Myron Goulian, born in 1931, was the youngest pilot in New England's recorded history to receive a pilot's license at – you guessed it – 16 years of age. "I plan to further my aeronautical schooling and eventually become an executive in aviation," young Myron told a local newspaper that day – which he eventually did. In 1964, after serving in the Korean War as a sergeant in the U.S. Army, he founded Executive Flyers Aviation at Hanscom Field, which is now one of the largest flying schools in the Northeastern United States and one of the most well known in the country, having trained future airline pilots and NASA astronauts.

"My grandfather came to the states from Armenia and went right to work as a shoemaker in Lowell. They lived near an airport, Haverhill Airfield. My dad fell in love with planes and told his parents all about it," tells Michael. "Realizing my dad's passion was flying, they worked for a few years, and so did my father by raking leaves and doing other odd jobs, until they saved $600 to buy a Stearman, an old WWII plane. He used it for his first real job, crop dusting."

Imagine fusing the movements of a trapeze artist with the speed of a Formula-1 racer. Goulian is an aerobatic pilot whose air shows have reached mythical proportions.

Legend has it that Myron would perform aerobatic routines while on the job and crowds would gather to watch his short field and obstacle clearance maneuvers.

"He was very involved in the community, a member of the Rotary Club, sponsored little leagues in town, was president of the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission," recalls Michael. Myron Goulian wanted to make aviation better for everybody and help people appreciate all that it had to offer.

"When Michael's dad passed away in 2000, it was incredible to see 40 years worth of students come to his wake to pay respects," remembers Karin Goulian, Michael's wife. "My dad never wanted me to be the boss's kid. I had to work hard for everything I got, basically doing all the beginning jobs, sweeping the hangar floor, washing the planes and cleaning the bugs off them. I learned a lot about the business from the bottom up, flying has taught me a lot about life as well," reveals Goulian.

In flying, as is with life, no two days are the same. The wind varies, the temperature is different, weather can be unpredictable, and your personal fitness is consistently tested.

"It always pushes a limit. The biggest factor in safety is knowing where your personal limit is and not crossing it. When you look at an airplane accident, it's usually that the pilot didn't know, or did know and willingly crossed their limit and got into a position where the airplane wasn't capable, or the person's skills were not adequate," explains Goulian, who shares with a heavy heart that he's lost friends because of this risky sport.

"It's not without danger. And the fear grows when you get older and have a family. But



← The man in the sky humbled by junior aviators.

if it's in your blood and in your soul, that's who you are and that's what you do."
Goulian was selected to compete in the Red Bull Air Races, a much-coveted position that only a top-tier group of pilots around the world possess the right amount of mojo to even attempt. By maneuvering the plane, pilots must navigate through a series of obstacle courses containing pylons, which are colossal cones that serve as gates – and do it faster than the other guy. In 2008, he won first place at the Budapest races, but a few years back he had a close call in London. Goulian was making great time as his plane was passing through a quadron of pylons, when suddenly his right wing collided with one. The plane's nose dipped down towards the Thames River and the wing came perilously close to touching the water. Although this kind of thing is not unusual, for Goulian this is unacceptable.
"I was trying to do too many things at once. I arrived late. I was tired and was not comfortable in the plane. It was one of those things that almost cost me my life. You have to learn from that and not let complacency creep in. I lost respect for the danger. I was lucky, and I won't do that again."
While he's in the sky, the team at Goulian Aerosports does everything in their power to minimize such risks. "What they do on a daily basis, working with our sponsors, the customers, organizing the air shows and keeping the machine in the air – happy and healthy – is a full time all-encompassing job," admits Goulian. That team includes Karin Goulian, Matt Chapman, Chris Porter and Carl Paris, who all wear many hats to make the shows work. "If my compatriots really knew how good my team is, they'd know that it's really not me. They're the secret."

> "It's not without danger. And the fear grows when you get older and have a family. But if it's in your blood and in your soul, that's who you are and that's what you do," says Michael Goulian.

The more I learned about Michael Goulian and his family, the more I understood that this story is bigger than one man's dance in the sky or the limits of man and machine. It's about family supporting one another's passions. To this day, Myron's wife Rita, along with their sons, runs the family business that her husband started out of love five decades ago. And maybe one day Emily, Michael's six-year-old daughter, will continue the Goulian family tradition of flying solo on her 16th birthday. "I think she thinks everybody has a plane," chuckles Goulian. "She's starting to understand how special flying is and that it's something not to be taken for granted. But whatever she wants to do, I'll support it."
Before each show, Goulian gets away from the crowd for about an hour. He's suited up and the iPod is in his ears, usually playing something from his routine, maybe some Bon Jovi and a sprinkle of AC/DC. His body goes through the motions and movements of flight. He plays out his routine numerous times; he imagines the feel of the plane, the atmosphere in the cockpit, the crowd's reaction, and then he thinks about how it all started.
"My grandparents came from humble beginnings and so did my parents. I was certainly afforded some opportunities, but I also had to work hard for all this. I appreciate the fact that I fly a spaceship of an aerobatic airplane. I don't take that for granted, so when I fly, I remember that. It's still a dream for me every day."
They say some eagles learn to fly by being pushed from the nest. When you watch Michael Goulian in the air, you see a man who willingly jumped out at full speed, in the process earning his wings, and never looking down. ■









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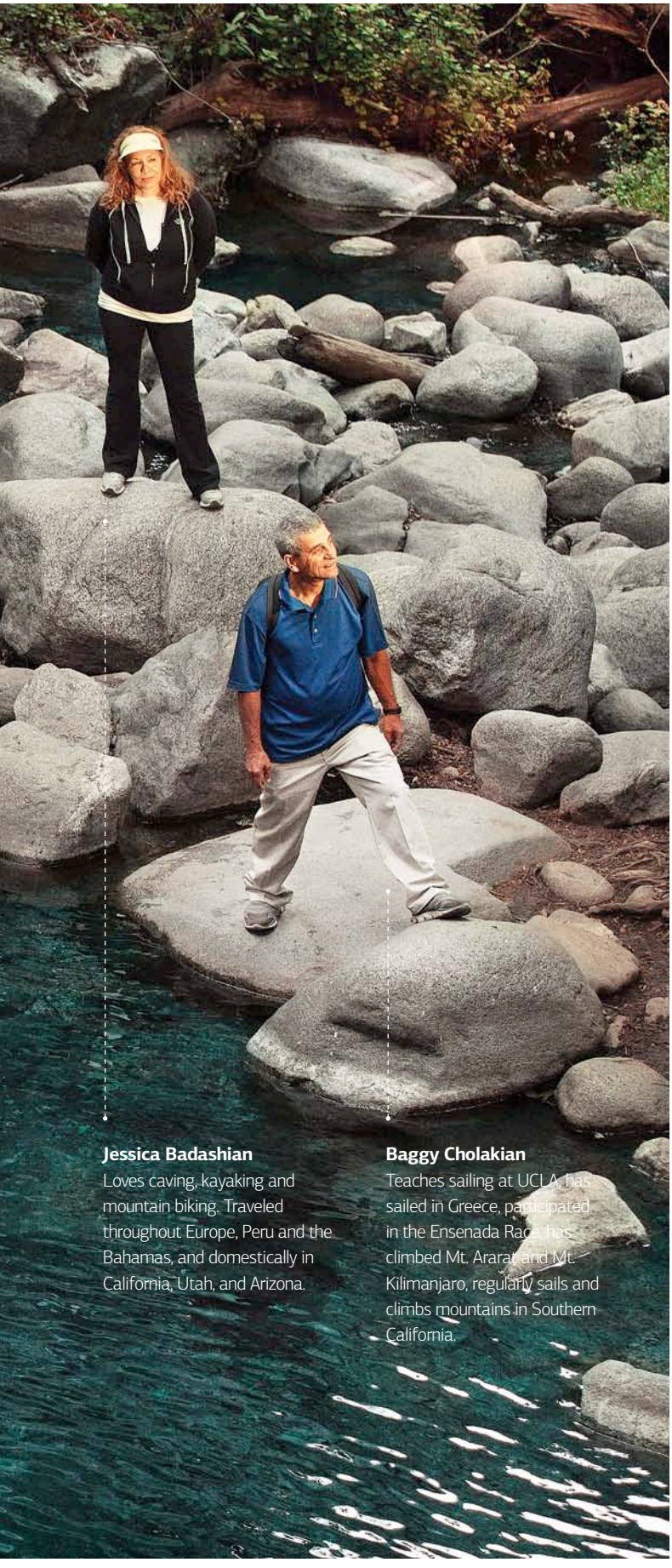
Trails of Adventure

The kindred spirits we met for our roundtable have experienced the world's most exotic corners firsthand. They describe extraordinary situations that are hard to imagine for outsiders like us. What is it like to see the sunrise from Mt. Everest, knowing that you have lost a friend on the same trip? And what could force someone to travel days to the basecamp of Mt. Kilimanjaro, get close to the summit and still feel okay walking away without reaching it? Karo Ovasapyan, Baggy Cholakian, and Jessica Badashian are three free-spirited globetrotters who know the taste of adrenaline and can justify why a simple trip to a vineyard in Italy would not satisfy their appetite for adventure.

Text **Joanna Buickians**

Karo Hovasapian
Mountain climber, from the South Pole to the North Pole, he's climbed the highest peaks on all seven continents.



Jessica Badashian
Loves caving, kayaking and mountain biking. Traveled throughout Europe, Peru and the Bahamas, and domestically in California, Utah, and Arizona.

Baggy Cholakian
Teaches sailing at UCLA, has sailed in Greece, participated in the Ensenada Race, has climbed Mt. Ararat and Mt. Kilimanjaro, regularly sails and climbs mountains in Southern California.

Joanna: What does it look like going on your expeditions?
Baggy: I'd never been to Africa before I went to Kilimanjaro. I was planning to go in a group of seven people, but due to scheduling conflicts, no one could come, so I went alone. It was still enjoyable. On the last day, I was supposed to reach the summit. I was feeling macho, like this is a piece of cake. But then on the last part in Kibo at about 1,200 feet elevation, I gave up. It was supposed to be easy, and I was not dying or anything. I wasn't even pushing myself too hard, but I couldn't do it. And I was fine with that. I am going back in August to try again.
For me, the best part is not about going to extremes. I would rather be with people. That's why I like sailing. I'm not so extreme as to sail around the world, because it involves lots of time spent on the water, and it becomes boring. Then, some parts are really dangerous, could be deadly. My suggestion for beginners is to try short trips, like to Catalina, where you'll still see the real ocean and big waves. Once you try that, you can go to Mexico, which takes about five hours. And in summer, there's a race to Hawaii – 500 sailboats of all kinds. It takes about a week to get there. Sailing is not such an athletic thing, and for many it involves a lot of drinking.
Karo: Our expeditions are not short. They usually last around two or more months. We start at the base camp, then go to the 2nd and 3rd camps, and later come back down through base again. You are always going up and down. It took us 61 days to summit Everest. It should have taken around 40 days, but due to climate change the weather has been getting worse over the years. When there's bad weather, you're sitting there in the altitude. I lost 30 pounds. Going up to the summit there is a little bit of relaxing, and you start at midnight. I started at 12:45 a.m. and reached the summit at 6:15 a.m. There I sat for 30 minutes waiting for the sunrise. It felt like I was the only one of the 6.5 billion people on Earth to see the sun come out. Then I got back down to the base camp in a record 18 hours straight from the camp to the summit to the base camp. Tragically, I lost a friend up there, one of three friends lost on expeditions. I have photos and videos to remember.
Jessica: We used to have a geology group, and one of the things we did was climbing. We did Angels Landing Peak in Zion National Park, which is at 5,000 feet elevation, a five mile trek in 110 degrees heat in summertime. There were times when I had to lay on the floor and pour water on myself just to get motivated to get up. At one point, you have to pull yourself up to the top by a swinging rope. At these moments, I didn't think about anything – home, work or the kids. I was there to make it to the top and was proud of myself when I reached it.
Joanna: What draws you to these different sports? Is there a special kind of satisfaction?
Jessica: I am not one of those women who go to the mall. I would have an anxiety attack! I am crazy about nature – caving, kayaking and hiking. In the early mornings, I go hiking, and that's what I look forward to throughout the day. Even in my office, I think about nature and mountains. Especially the heights – some people don't realize the intensity of it unless they really have it in them.
Karo: I agree. It's like you're fighting and working hard, getting ready for expeditions, and you can fall into this thinking of, "This is my last time. I'm getting tired, hungry and weak." But, if you reach the summit and stay there for five, ten or 30 minutes, I guarantee, in one week, you will be up there again. You forget all about the

hard times – all the hardships are left behind, it was all momentary. Soon you just want to be up there again, because it's there.

Jessica: When you're on top of the mountain, you feel intensely alive. Those five minutes on the summit are worth a lifetime. It's hard to describe.

Karo: First, you have to love nature; you have to love it so much that all the hardships are forgotten. Most people turn back half-way and don't make their goal. They don't love it deeply enough to forget the tiredness. They're not so in love with it that they would endure it. You have to endure all the trouble to get to the goal. Their bodies don't want to, and they don't want to push themselves farther.

Baggy: The challenge is part of the beauty, but I never pushed myself. In Kilimanjaro, I couldn't do it because I thought, "The heck with it. I'm here, I've done this much." For me it is the enjoyment factor; if I go half way, I'm satisfied. If I decide to do something, I will do it. If I can't accomplish it, I will go back and try again. That way, I won't put myself through too much torture. But I also understand adrenaline. We are sailing in Santa Monica, having a great time, water is splashing in our faces – it's out of this world. When I come back, I feel almost drunk. People are talking to me, but I can't stop smiling, replying in some gibberish. You have to enjoy being in nature, just like Karo said.

Joanna: Nature can show its power...

Jessica: The world's climate is changing and sometimes the sea is really torturous. We've never seen the kind of winds like the one ones we saw while going to Mexico. Usually the wind dies around 6 or 7 p.m., but the wind was blowing the whole night for two days. Everybody got sick, including the captain. Nature always has the upper hand, especially in the ocean. It can upturn your boat at any moment.

Karo: Some people going on expeditions forget that they're dealing with nature. But it doesn't like to joke around. You have to respect nature, otherwise you will get punished, no matter how strong you think you are.

Baggy: That's true. A Frenchman who won championships sailing around the world solo on a 120-foot boat said in his acceptance speech, "I won this medal, it's a big accomplishment, but I always respect God, because I know if I have a 120-foot boat with a 130-foot mast, He has a wave that's 150 feet." Most sailboats don't capsize, because they have about four tons of concrete on the bottom to keep them afloat. But this wave was so huge that his boat did a 360 degree turn with him inside, and the doors closed. He whirlpooled like a cloth in a washing machine. One should know nature's rules and respect them. And even if the forces of nature take your life, that's also acceptable. I'm sure the guy that went to Everest and didn't make it knew that.

Karo: He made it to the summit and died coming down. He sat down. He shouldn't have stopped. And we knew he was dying and couldn't help it. There was a lot of high wind, and the oxygen was almost finished. When he walked from the base camp to the summit and used all his oxygen, we did our best to help him, but found him after 12 days.

Joanna: What was the most dangerous situation you found yourself in?

Karo: I thought I would die when I fell into a big glacier with an opening in the center with no visible end on the bottom. I broke my finger and was scratched all over. Luckily, I got roped around twice, and my backpack and I got stuck as the V-shaped crack got narrower. Then I took out my ice screws, safely screwed myself in and started going up.

Jessica: I did Half Dome in Yosemite and got up to the point where I was looking down the stairs and was afraid to look up, because I didn't know how I was going to get up there. The kids behind me were encouraging me. But I thought if I slip for one second, I would fall and die.

Another time I was skateboarding with my son, David. We were on one big skateboard going downhill. We got to a point when the board was about to go into the street traffic. David pushed me off, and I broke my arm. When you like sports and enjoy it, you don't necessarily think about the dangers, the rights and wrongs.

Baggy: On a regular bright sunny summer day, I was sailing around the Los Angeles close to the LAX area with two students from Germany. We were joking and having fun when the whole thing turned upside down. But before this happened, we passed by a small boat, a 10-footer with a family and a kid. They were just fishing, but after the weather changed, we saw them flagging us, showing that their engine didn't work and they couldn't signal anyone on land. We radioed, thinking someone will come and pick them up. In about 10 to 15 minutes, the winds were blowing like crazy from all directions. The Germans were excited because they thought they could see some real sailing. But we rushed back to the docks at UCLA to head back for the family. Luckily the coast guard found them before us. It was the worst moment because I felt responsible for this family. The size of their boat and the strength of the winds was our biggest concern. Another time when I was learning wind surfing, I got caught in big waves. At the time I almost lost everything, wanting just to get to the beach. I lost my main mast, but I was able to save the board, which was very expensive. Equipment is really important. If you don't have the right type of clothing, you may get hypothermia and die. That may happen if you don't have the right boat or protection.

Joanna: Do you feel any responsibility to your family on these trips?

Karo: Honestly, that was my main concern, especially my mom and siblings. I'm the youngest of six siblings. It was painful for both sides. They were always worried, but they knew that I had no limit, I had to go. I didn't get married until I was 50 because there was a possibility of dying. I have two kids now, so I have my limits, which is a big responsibility.

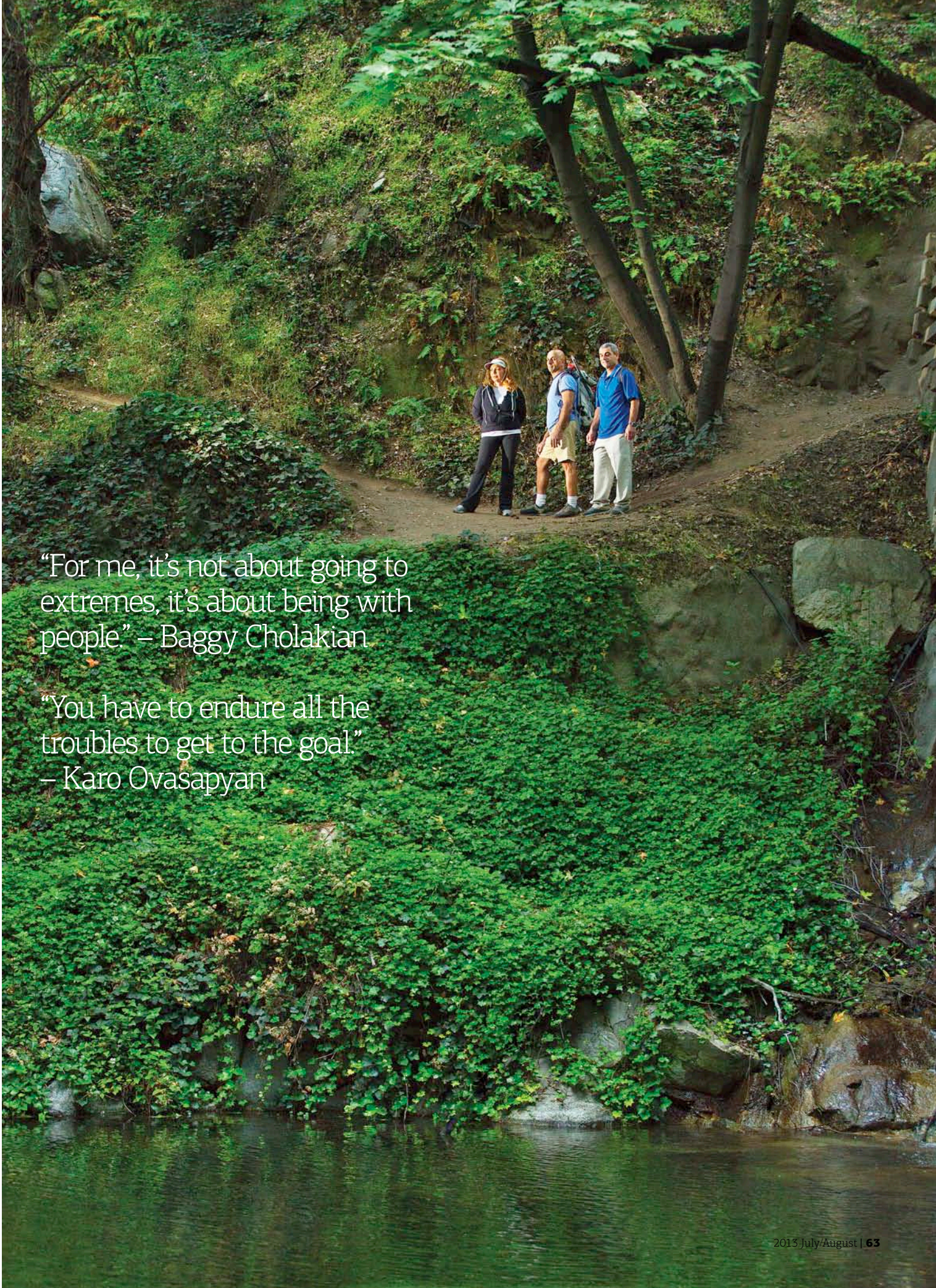
Baggy: I have a daughter, Diana, who is graduating medical school, and now it would be much easier to leave her and go on trips. Still, it doesn't matter how old your kid is, you're responsible for them for the rest of your life.

Jessica: That's true, from the second they're born.

Baggy: I'm sure, they will go through their own challenges, but being a parent is such a joy. We often talk about going to India or Armenia together. I don't care about physical challenges. Being responsible for my daughter is what pulled me back.

Joanna: What are some of the most memorable trips you've been on?

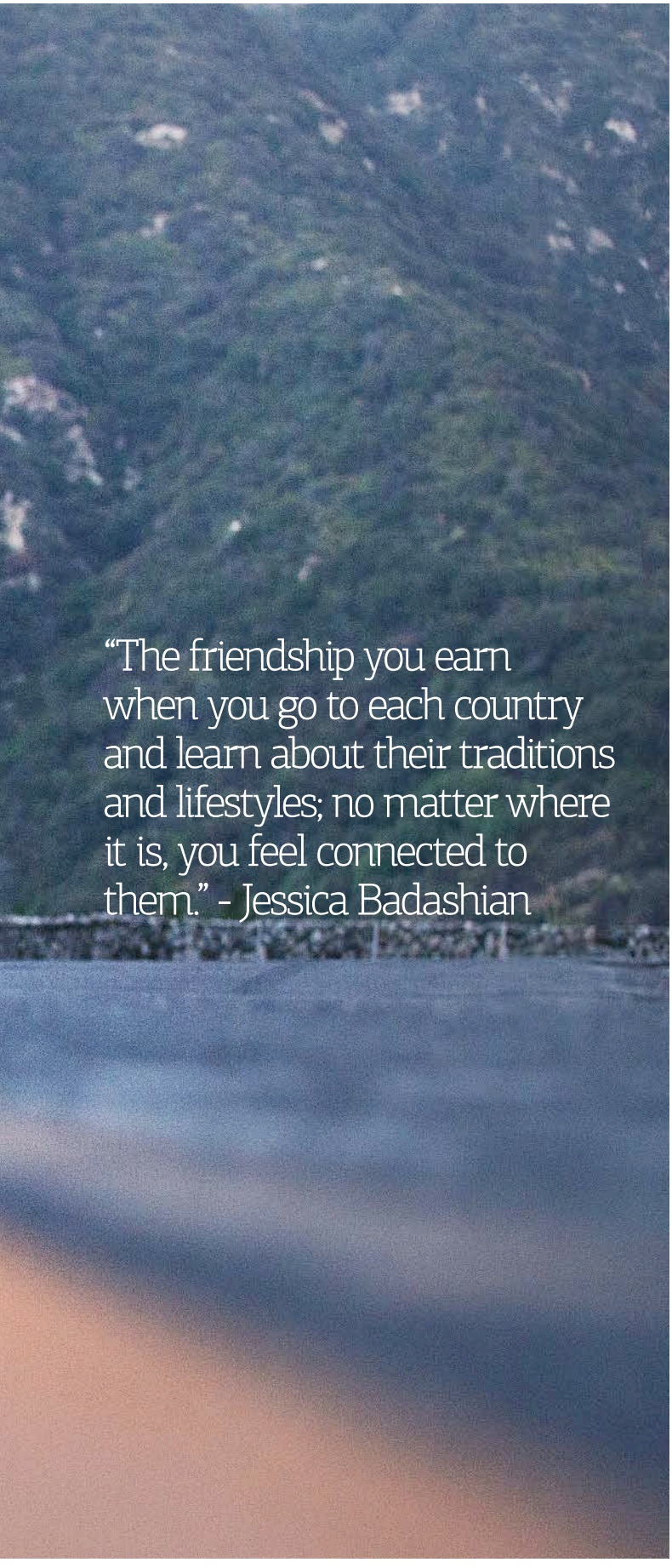
Baggy: Mine was Ararat, this was the most memorable. I've dreamed about it since I was 11. But this one was something to get excited about. An achievement I wish I could tell my mom. All the time going up, I was thinking, "This is the land of our ancestors." ▸



"For me, it's not about going to extremes, it's about being with people." – Baggy Cholakian

"You have to endure all the troubles to get to the goal." – Karo Ovasapyan





Karo: Each time you meet different people, and every expedition has a different memory. From childhood I loved nature. The most interesting trip was in Indonesia for two weeks going through the tropical jungles to get to the mountains to where we were going to climb. We hired native people, and they guided us to different places. For 25 years I was dreaming about Mt. Everest, not to show or tell others, but for myself. I thought, "Why can some people do it and I cannot?" That's why I did these things, to prove to myself that I can.

Jessica: I have friends that like going to Europe, and they don't understand why I would go to Machu Picchu versus going to Spain. When I am 70, I can sit at a nice restaurant in Spain and enjoy it, but I would not be able to do the Inca trail then. Before getting to the hike at Machu Picchu, I had to sleep there on the streets at some points. I like adventurous sports and especially caving, which is not so popular in the U.S. I've done it in the Bahamas on Sal Salvador. Out of 20 people in the group, only ten made it. The rest had panic attacks and had to get out of the cave. We went deep into the cave under the ocean, where you have to put your mouth up just to get a little bit of air. But the feeling afterward is incomparable.

Joanna: How do you balance your work with these expeditions?

Karo: I work with my brother in the wood factory, and he understands that I need to go on these trips.

Baggy: I'm self-employed, working in insurance. When I travel, my office covers for me. I've never had a problem.

Jessica: I work in finance, spending long hours in the office. If I don't do an activity on the weekend, I have a hard time getting to work on Monday. When stressed, I dream of places that I will go next.

Joanna: What are some of the different friendships formed from the trips?

Jessica: I adopted a daughter in Peru. One day I saw a little girl beautifully dressed in traditional clothes with a little llama. They were going around, trying to have pictures taken to make money. These people were so poor that the girl probably didn't even go to school. I felt sorry, especially for the kid. Visiting each country, you feel connected to people; you learn about their lifestyle and traditions. In my trips, I've met many people, mostly students. We became friends and try to stay in touch, updating each other on our next journeys and life at home.

Baggy: The sports bring you together.

Karo: Friendship is important. I can say that I am one of the richest people in the world, not financially, but because I have friends all over the world. When I travel, I don't need to go to a hotel because I have friends everywhere. Almost every month I have one or two people staying in my house. It is open to travelers, climbers, even people I don't know. So much that it's called Hotel Karo!

Joanna: What are your biggest achievements?

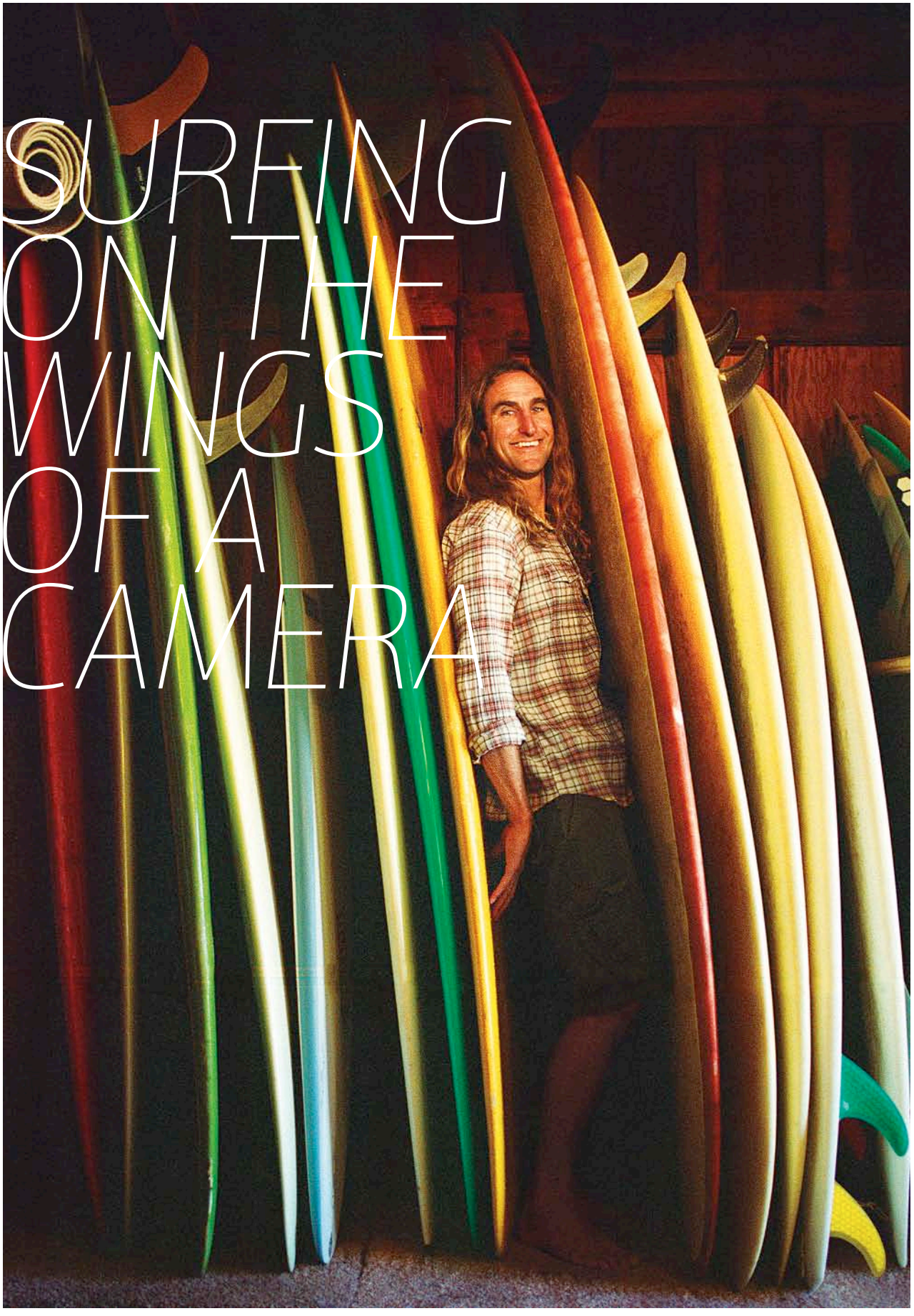
Jessica: I have raised two boys.

Baggy: I've brought my daughter to this point, and that is not passable. The rest are all bonuses. I can't find anything else that matches that.

Jessica: (Laughing) Right, like we can jump down the mountain, and it doesn't matter, we did our job.

Karo: Before, it was becoming the only Armenian who carried our flag all over the world to the highest summits of each continent and geographic poles. I hope the Museum of Armenian History will take that flag – that's the only home I can see for it. But now, it's my kids, they're the heaviest backpack I have to carry. ■

SURFING ON THE WINGS OF A CAMERA



THE WORLD TRAVELER, ADVENTURER AND SURFER BRANDEN AROYAN EXPANDED HIS HORIZONS BEYOND THE CAMERA AS HE CARVED OUT A CAREER IN SURF PHOTOGRAPHY, SHOOTING PHOTOS OF STARS LIKE KELLY SLATER AND JACK JOHNSON ON TRIPS TO EXOTIC LOCATIONS. IT ALSO LED AROYAN TO WIN AN EMMY AWARD FOR HIS DOCUMENTARY, ALASKAN DREAMS.

Text **Joanna Buickians** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

It's a sunny afternoon, velvety clouds imitate shapes and figures floating across a blue sky reflecting the breaking waves of the ocean underneath. On the short three-mile stretch of Montecito beach near Santa Barbara, lined with upscale houses amid the succulents, wildflowers and redwood trees, lives a photographer waiting to catch his next wave. With his long wavy blonde hair and salty blue eyes, the six foot-tall, thin and tanned Branden Aroyan, 38, could easily pass for a full-time surfer. A close approximation, as he is a high-profile surf photographer who travels the world with celebrity surfing enthusiasts.

Aroyan's father, the founder of the Middle Eastern food distributing company Naroya (derived from putting the last consonant of his surname to the initial position), instilled a passion for photography in his son since childhood while taking pictures and portraits on family road trips. "Since my first photo in the fifth grade when I shot my dad in front of the shop, I just started running around with the camera." Though he admits to making lots of mistakes when he first started, those were the creativity-sparking errors that cultivated his curiosity in photography and led him to pursue it as a profession. "Sometimes photos would be really dark or silhouetted, but they still looked cool. Later, in college, I took my first photography class."

Another love of his life was surfing, which he also enjoyed since childhood, taking quick jaunts to Malibu from his Westlake Village home. So it seemed providential that while finishing his studies at Brooks Institute, an opportunity arose to go surfing and take photos on a trip to Fiji.

Stepping into his photography studio feels rather like entering a dimly-lit shack on an island in the South Pacific. A large picture of a koala from Australia, pencil sketches, a Bob Marley calendar and a five-foot wolf skin near the garage door that he brought from Alaska, are all hanging haphazardly on the walls, by a long line of surfboards and boxes of shirts from his new company. He casually justifies his wife's and his 40 surfboards ranging in lengths and styles from short to long, finless or free friction. "There are so many different waves and each one can call for a different surf board."

Amid the clutter of his studio, a dusty picture of a wave tumbling on itself in the ocean is in striking contrast with the glamorous photos of surfers, entrepreneurs and musicians he captures nowadays. This was his first project before graduating when a group of surfers from San Diego called his school asking for a surf photographer to take on a trip to the South Pacific. The pay was poor, but it was a real assignment and a ticket to Fiji. "That just opened my eyes to traveling and visiting other cultures. The Fijians are so pure and hospitable. ▸

FIJI SET THE COURSE OF AROYAN'S CAREER, ALLOWING HIM TO TRAVEL THE WORLD AND SURF DIFFERENT OCEANS. "TO ME, THE CAMERA IS A PAIR OF WINGS; IT TAKES ME ALL OVER THE WORLD AND IS A KEY THAT UNLOCKS DOORS TO PLACES I NEVER WOULD HAVE DREAMED OF GOING."



Branden Aroyan



↑
Fletcher Chouinard product testing one of his own hand-shaped boards deep within the Tuamotu Archipelago.

←
The Malloy Brothers: Dan steering, Chris jumping off and Keith in front.



Branden Aroyan

They might look mean, but they're super friendly – they would paddle out and shake hands with everyone in the water."

Fiji set the course of Aroyan's career, allowing him to travel the world and surf different oceans, capturing the essence of life in the ocean. "To me, the camera is a pair of wings; it takes me all over the world and is a key that unlocks doors to places I never would have dreamed of going. It's like an invitation to go to those places."

Since then, Aroyan has traveled to the Philippines, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Australia, Portugal, and New Zealand, among other exotic countries, for his assignments. For him, being a surf photographer doesn't mean shooting the underwater coral reefs. He prefers documenting the story of people. "I'd rather shoot someone getting a really good wave than snap a starfish," he jokes.

One of the highlights of Aroyan's career was traveling to the uninhabited islands off the coast of Chile with the founder of Patagonia, Yvonne Chouinard. "Within two weeks, another major group joined our trip. It was full of stars: Jack Johnson the musician; Hawaiian Gerry Lopez, Zen master surfer from the 70s; and Chris Carter, the author of *The X-Files* who was a surf journalist back

in the day. Keith Malloy and his brother Chris were filming the trip, and it ended up being in the film *Broke Down Melody*."

Aroyan uses different techniques to take pictures in the water. He even invented a contraption that helps him photograph while surfing. "I like being in the water – there's surfing and shooting, swimming and shooting, or sitting on a surf board and shooting on the sidelines, or just floating around getting in the zone, which is probably the most fun," he adds, peppering his conversation with spirited laughs.

Not surprisingly, he is not concerned about the dangers of the sport, and when asked, breezes over my question about sharks calling them "curious puppy dogs" and admitting that he has never had a confrontation with them.

He claims his biggest concern is losing his camera, which has happened in the past. He describes the



→
Joel Tudor settles into the waves trim line.



Branden Aroyan

↓
Pipeline Hawaii, the safe view from the beach



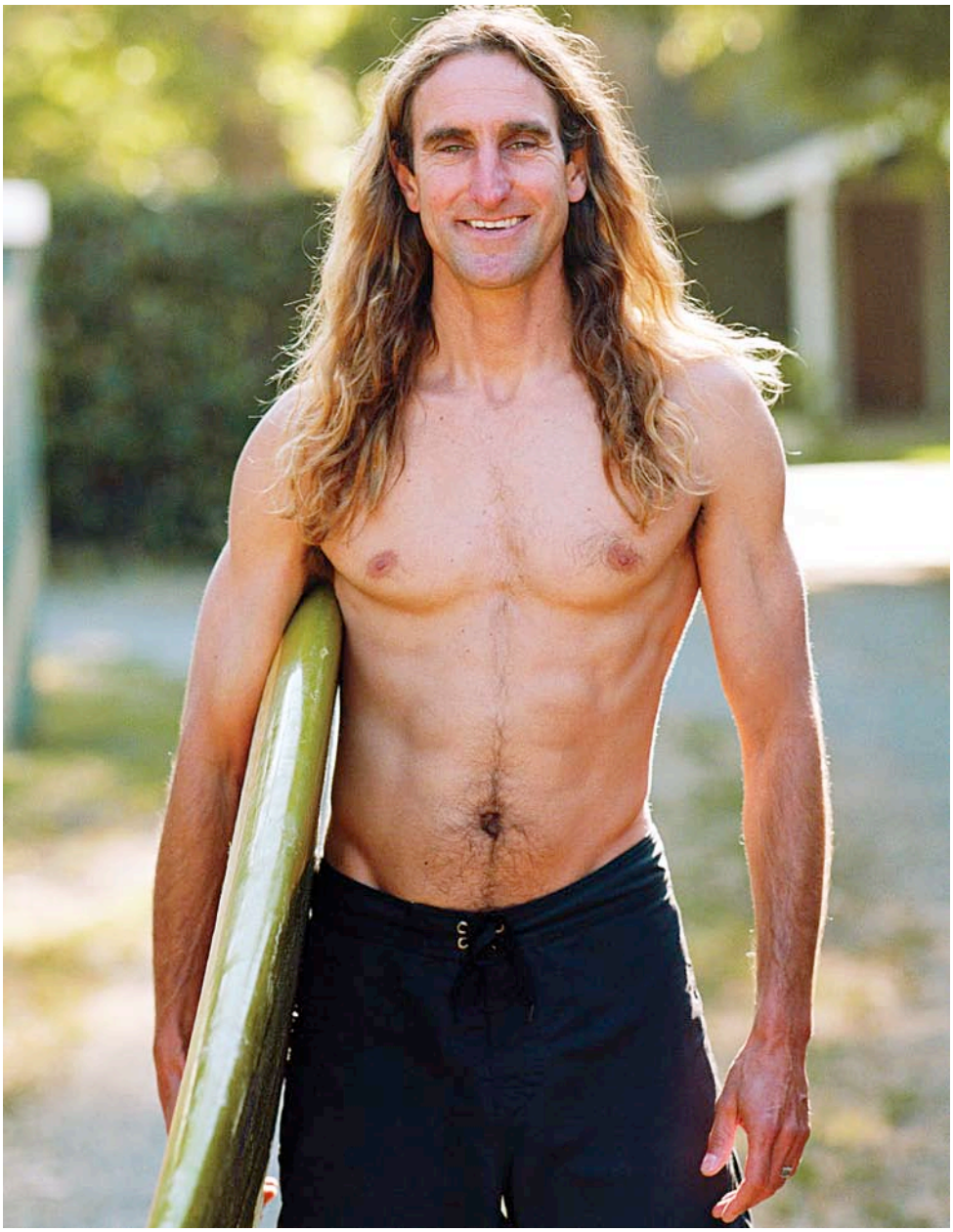
Branden Aroyan

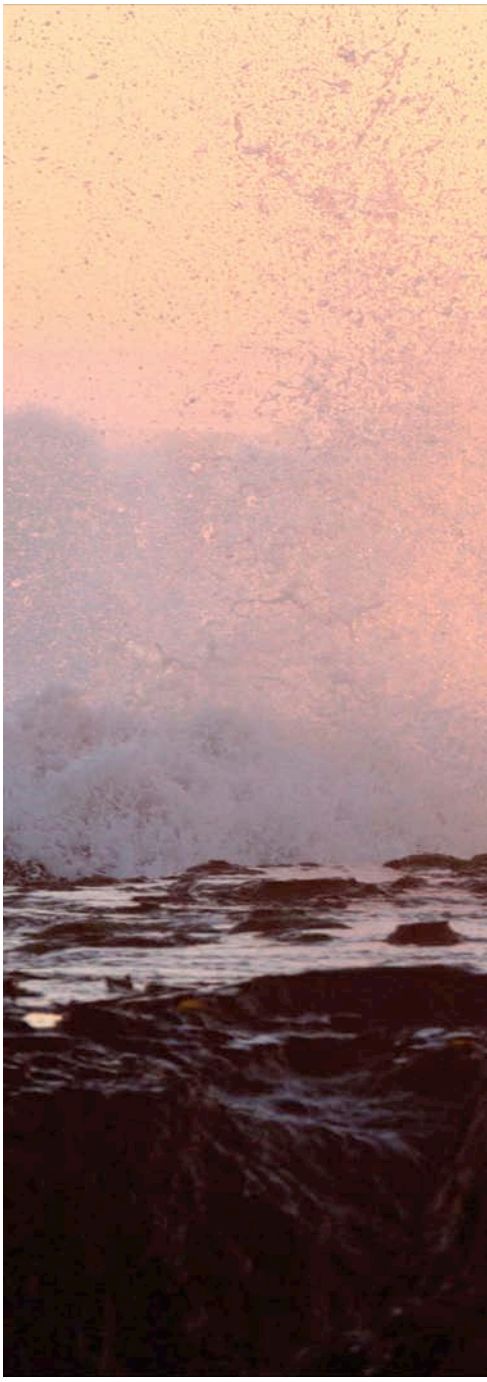


Branden Aroyan

AMID THE CLUTTER OF HIS STUDIO, A DUSTY PICTURE OF A WAVE TUMBLING ON ITSELF IN THE OCEAN IS IN STRIKING CONTRAST WITH THE GLAMOROUS PHOTOS OF SURFERS, ENTREPRENEURS AND MUSICIANS HE CAPTURES NOWADAYS.

BRANDEN AROYAN HAS ADDED FILMMAKING TO HIS CAREER PATH, WINNING AN EMMY AWARD FOR A DOCUMENTARY CALLED ALASKAN DREAMS. *THE FILM IS ABOUT A SCHOOLTEACHER FROM DEEP IN THE ALASKAN BUSH WHO BRINGS HER STUDENTS TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.*





↑ Kelly Slater reading the conditions in Santa Barbara

← Aroyan with one of his 34 boards. "The ocean keeps me young and more wise each time."



Branden Aroyan

process through a metaphor – for him, it's like "a bull and a matador; the bull is walking around and the matador is standing there getting ready. The bull charges at him, and that's pretty much what it's like."

Though he thoroughly enjoys still photography, Aroyan has added filmmaking to his career path, winning an Emmy award for a documentary called *Alaskan Dreams*. The film is about a schoolteacher from deep in the Alaskan bush who brings her students to Southern California. It turns out that the wolf skin hanging on his wall was a gift, a memento from one of the elders in Alaska.

It is not surprising that Aroyan derives his life philosophy from his surfing experiences. "I come up with analogies of surfing and life, like going with the flow, trying not to hold on, being able to let go and just keep moving, and that whole hunting philosophy of all the different elements of the earth that come together to make a perfect wave and being a man in the middle of it."

"That trip was where it all started," he reflects on the photo he first took in Fiji. "Traveling to these amazing places and shooting photos of people surfing and having a good time and getting a couple waves myself. Yes please, sign me up!" ■


AVET REELS

A Reel Story About a Big Fish

"Harout, come to the front desk…Harout," echoes the loud speaker throughout the office and hallways of the warehouse I'm standing in. I'm told to wait a minute in the lobby as Harout makes his way to the front from the factory floor. While I wait, I rummage through the dozen or so fishing magazines strewn on the smoked glass coffee table in front of me. In each magazine I find the spine cracked to a specific page and open it to see the viper blue or matte silver hew of the famous Avet Reels, held up by an angler who just landed a 200 pound fish, or a written review of the reel with words like: 'solid,' 'quality,' and 'American ingenuity' plastered all over the page.

Text **Patrick Bairamian**

The door to the lobby opens, and I meet the brother and co-founder of Avet Reels, Sarkis Alajajyan. He tells me that Harout, his younger brother – the other co-founder of Avet Reels, is on the factory floor, and that he'll take me to him. I follow happily with a vague idea of what to expect. Once Sarkis opens the swinging door to the factory floor, he leads me passed rows of machines. We see Harout in a red polo shirt standing in front of one of the CNC (computer numerical control) machines, adjusting a piece of machinery. He greets me with a smile and warmth I would expect from an old acquaintance, and signals me to follow him. We move towards the loading dock of the factory towards the back where a large opening allows sunlight to flood in illuminating the grey concrete floors. Harout stops in front of a large stack of solid aluminum rods, some as long as twenty feet. "This is the aluminum which goes to this machine," he points behind where we are standing to a machine that is over twenty feet. But the rods aren't just any type of aluminum – they're the best kind. You know, the grade of aluminum used in… space. Harout opens the Plexiglas window for me to peek in, and I see the metal drill dripping with white fluid. I ask what the fluid is, and Harout tells me that since the drill works twenty four hours a day being fed the rods automatically, it can get so hot that it may melt the metal, so the fluid (which is an industrial mix of water and oil) constantly cools the metal for the drill to get a consistent product without flaws.

From the loading dock to the cutting machine, Harout walks me around the factory with the CNC machines supervised by workers who keep a steady eye on the computers that control the machines. Yet the factory, just like the owner, appears calm and operated with ease. No one wears greasy attire or has sweat on his face. The workers seated at the assembly line intricately handcraft and inspect every inch of the reels. "So, when does the fulfillment shipping service come to pick these up?" I asked. Harout lets out a deep chuckle, "There is no service like that…we make the reels here, and ship to the customers ourselves."

A Humble Beginning

As I sit with Harout in a room adjacent to the factory floor, I share my amazement with the size of the factory. He smiles before saying, "If you think this place is big, wait until you see the other space we're moving to." Naturally, I want to know how he attained such success, and when the idea of creating the best quality fishing reel in the industry which boasts annual $115 billion just in the U.S., came into existence. ▸



Harout Alajajyan is the youngest of four brothers. His parents moved from Damascus, Syria in 1946 to Armenia during the historic "great repatriation," at the time when over 100,000 Diaspora Armenians from around the globe moved back to Soviet Armenia. Harout's father, Avet Alajajyan – the namesake of the company, was a shoemaker in Armenia. "He gave us a great life. Times were very hard on our family – just like a lot of families at the time, but he always found a way to put food on our table."

As Harout and his brothers grew up under the Communist regime, Harout's father feared that his sons would have few opportunities to succeed in life. "We all were like my dad – entrepreneurs. We worked for ourselves…as far back as I can remember. So my dad worried that if we continued to work for ourselves and grow, the Communists would regulate us, and we would be jailed. My father wouldn't stand for it." Regulate was an understatement. Stories of men who worked out of their homes after their factory jobs to earn even few more roubles to provide for their families could face exile to Siberia if the Soviet police ever caught wind of such actions. That was the reason why, in 1986, Avet Alajajyan moved his wife and four sons to America.

"We only had $2000 when we moved to America," says Harout. $2000 was a considerable sum in those days, especially for those coming from the Soviet Union. Considering the fact that the money had to provide for a family of six, including food, and clothes, and in a country whose language no one in the family spoke. Needless to say, hard work was all they could foresee in the nearest future.

"I worked various jobs. First, as a diamond manufacturer, then as a machinist, then a communications manufacturer," explained Harout. "But I stuck to the same industry mostly, manufacturing." When asked where he learned his manufacturing experience, Harout smiles in the direction of his brother Sarkis' desk. "During the Soviet times, we would get a ten-day vacation. When I was fourteen, I ran to my brother Sarkis, who worked at a factory at the time, and begged him to teach me about machines; so he did. At the end of the ten days, I received 'machinist' status by the factory…which wasn't allowed – but I was that good."

So how did fishing reels become part of this journey? When the brothers were becoming established in their professions in 2000, they all decided to combine minimal funds to purchase two milling machines. When Harout and his brother Sarkis bought the two hand-operated machines, the salesman gifted them with one of the most expensive fishing reels on the market. "I looked at Sarkis and said, 'we can make a better one.'" That's when Avet Reels was born.

American Ingenuity Defined

Around 1903, the American industrialist Henry Ford once said: "A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business." So what would the great Henry Ford say about Avet Reels? Avet Reels is a company name that has earned respect from amateur and professional sport fishermen almost overnight, and I have experienced first hand how highly people value the brand. While on a sport-fishing trip with my uncle, a fellow



Avet Reels is a company name that has earned respect from amateur and professional sport fishermen almost overnight.

angler approached us and asked my uncle, "Is that an Avet? Where did you get that? I've been on a waiting list for the past three months!" The story of the wait-listed angler is all too familiar to Harout. "We're constantly behind on orders. Our machines work twenty four hours a day, while we're here seven days a week." In the business world, this is the best kind of problem a business can run into. Harout agrees, repeating that they are in a process of moving to a larger location to meet the demand from anglers and dealers. What's so special about these reels that create such high-demand and how does one realize they are the best?

"The ultimate model for a successful business is that you sell what you yourself would buy," starts Harout. "At first, I wanted the best for myself. So I machined the best reel to use for my own fishing trips. I used 8-ball bearings, when reels at the time had three-or

four, as well as aerospace grade aluminum. Just like the racecar industry, they want the best tires, the best engine, and of course the best drive. Otherwise, what's the point of spending so much money on something that isn't going to be number one?"
A lot of companies have been known for quality. Henry Ford was the first to introduce the concept of affordable products that could be purchased by the very people that were standing in the assembly lines manufacturing them. But years of growth and greed have allowed for such companies to dwindle and lose their credibility in the world-economy. I asked Harout to explain the difference between the quality of his reels compared to a Shimano reel (Shimano being one of the largest fishing reels companies in the world). "The difference is that the people designing our reels fish. Sometimes, you might find a fishing reel from other companies that have extra gismos that are not needed, or are missing things that are essential to a fishing reel because the design team might lack anglers," says Harout. "If I were to say one thing about our company, it's that we don't make anything that we're embarrassed to sell; and since we're all fishermen, we know the importance of why what we make and use needs to be the best."

Gone Fishin'

In 2003, Avet Reels introduced their first line of reel designs at the Fred Hall show – the Long Beach Convention Center hosts this event that attracts annually tens of thousands of outdoorsmen and is the most popular outdoor show in the United States. During their first run, Avet Reels won the "Best product of the show" award, foreshadowing their future success. Since then, Avet Reels has locked the attention of salt-water anglers for the last 10 years, and they haven't spent a cent on marketing. "Word of mouth," answers Harout explaining how the popularity of his company keeps growing without billboards, TV infomercials, giveaways and general marketing techniques. "When I'm on a boat, and I reel in a 100 pound fish with a reel that weighs less than a pound – it's going to turn some heads." Think about that for a moment. Something the weight of a full can of soda would pull in a fish weighing 100 pounds – a fish which is using every muscle in its body on top of the 100 pounds, to resist giving you an inch. Here's an example for anyone who hasn't fished before. Imagine you're standing at the bottom of a 100-story building, and you're asked to lift a grand piano up to the top floor using nothing but a cable, a pulley, and your strength. Assuming you have the strength and the strongest cable available, where the most of the strain is going to be put on? The pulley, of course!
As Americans, we've learned one thing as a fundamental truth to the success of this country's businesses, and that is that quality sells itself. "The only competitive marketing we've ever done is out fishing on a boat. There is no other test for a fishing reel except when it does what it was designed to do – catch fish," says Harout. These 'tests' have happened so often with Avet Reels that the reels themselves have become an industry standard among fishing charters and fishing boat captains.
The best example of this is the 'Sprit of Adventure' long range sport fishing charters out of San Diego that are constantly booked throughout the year with dedicated anglers that go on five to thirteen-day fishing trips. Flip through the brochure or any of their photo galleries and you'll see an Avet Reel propped up next to a 100-pound yellow-fin tuna with a grinning angler holding both fish and pole with pride.
If you're thinking that Avet Reels can only be used by expert anglers, Harout and his brother have already thought about you too. "The spinning action might be confusing for those who have never cast out a line using one of our reels. We saw this problem and invented a magnetic control for those who can't do it manually. It's the difference between driving a car manually or automatically – we offer both for everyone."

As Americans, we've learned one thing as a fundamental truth to the success of this country's businesses, and that is that quality sells itself.





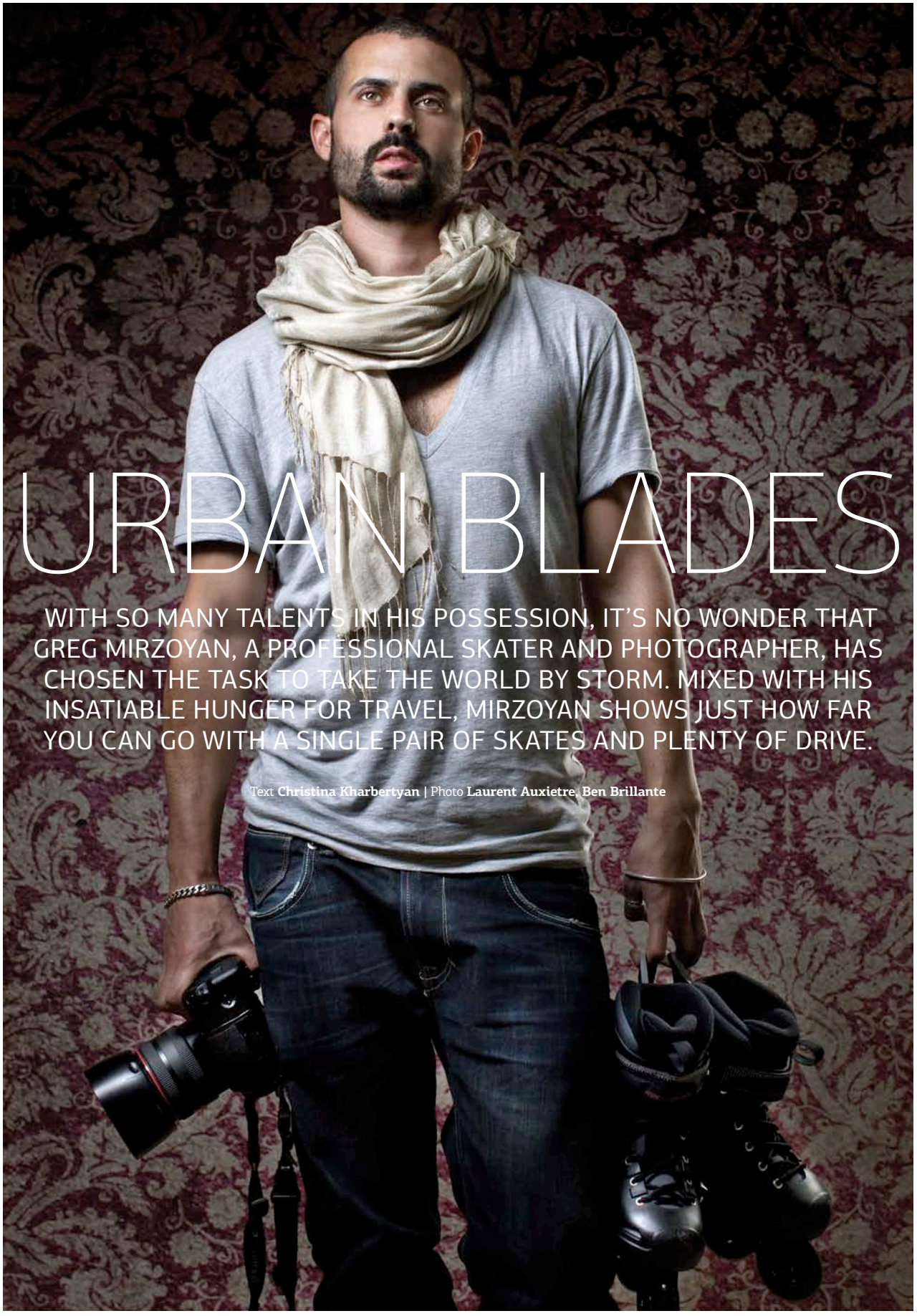
Near the end of the interview, I spot a dozen or so poles in the corner of the conference room. Harout catches my gaze and, as if reading my mind, answers the question I had not yet formulated, "That's the next step. We'll design poles, but first we have to redesign freshwater fishing reels and fly-fishing reels. Poles will come with that evolution in the company." Suffice it to say, Avet Reels isn't limiting itself with their domination of the salt-water fishing industry. They're about to drop their anchor into foreign waters. Freshwater companies, watch out, there's about to be a new fish in the pond.

Message from the High Seas

Harout is never short of weaving his appreciation for the opportunities given to him by the American model for pursuing happiness. True, he has seized success through his diligence, hard work and the dedicated support of his family, but his smile always alludes to his father, the namesake of the company. "I'm so proud to have my father's name as our company brand – especially since we're global, and an Armenian name has made its way around the world."

An industry innovator and family man, Harout Alajajyan addresses young Armenian Americans, "The answer to success is in hard work and using your intellect in the capitalist society. Of course, if you work not just for money, you'll find more – you'll find happiness; but in the end, it just comes down to hard work."

As our meeting comes to conclusion, Harout's son, Onik enters the room. Alajajyan tells me that Onik will be going to law school soon, and will take over the business when his father retires. I ask Harout when that will be, to which he responds with a laugh, "How can I retire when my reels go up against billion-dollar companies and win…no, no, it's too much fun and accomplishment to quit yet." ■



URBAN BLADES

WITH SO MANY TALENTS IN HIS POSSESSION, IT'S NO WONDER THAT GREG MIRZOYAN, A PROFESSIONAL SKATER AND PHOTOGRAPHER, HAS CHOSEN THE TASK TO TAKE THE WORLD BY STORM. MIXED WITH HIS INSATIABLE HUNGER FOR TRAVEL, MIRZOYAN SHOWS JUST HOW FAR YOU CAN GO WITH A SINGLE PAIR OF SKATES AND PLENTY OF DRIVE.

Text **Christina Kharbertyan** | Photo **Laurent Auxietre, Ben Brillante**

All great love stories start with a moment – a single glance, the first interaction. For Greg Mirzoyan, it all began shortly after he learned to walk. Born and raised in Paris by French and Armenian parents, Mirzoyan grew up hearing stories about the Armenian culture from his father who tried to keep the traditions alive – not surprising for a native of the city with the long-established community of the largest population of Armenians in Western Europe. At the age of four, Mirzoyan's parents gave him his first pair of rollerskates with plastic wheels painted in fluorescent colors. From the second he slid his feet into those vintage four-wheeled skates, he was hooked. Skating through his childhood into adolescence, Mirzoyan eventually decided to dedicate his life to the sport. Thus, his parents' gift marked the beginning of a lifelong love for rollerblading.

Mirzoyan trained every day to hone his skills. His techniques ranged from free skating to aggressive skating, which focuses on spins and grinding down stair rails. Next, he transitioned to bladercross competitions in which skaters have to maneuver around obstacles to the finish line. His talents came naturally and were mastered through practice. When he was younger, he participated in many of the bladercross competitions, including those in Russia and Korea, and won most of them.

A pivotal moment came in 2004 when he won a bladercross competition in Paris. After his victory, he made another investment in his future. "With the prize money, I bought a camera so I could take pictures of my friends skating," Mirzoyan explains. "I enjoyed taking pictures a lot. I eventually sold my first camera and bought a bigger one."

Once he had the camera in his hands, his journey truly began. Without much thought, he was naturally able to mix rollerskating with photography. The skating competitions slowly left his life, and sport photography took their place. Even though Mirzoyan was always talented in skating, he admits that participating in competitions was not for him. "I don't like the idea of competing," he says. "I'm too polite to do that. I think I'd rather let other people go first."

With dedication to his sport and his craft, Mirzoyan became a professional skater and starred in skating videos that became popular on the Internet. In 2008, while attending an event in Paris, he met the marketing manager of Rollerblade International, the company credited with creating the first modern inline skate. At the event, the marketing manager of the company told Mirzoyan about a rollerblading video he had seen and that he wanted to meet the skater in the video. As luck would have it, Mirzoyan was the man the marketing manager was looking for.



On the city streets of Beijing, with the bright lights as his backdrop, Mirzoyan effortlessly jumps up and down staircases and swerves around hundreds of pedestrians.

Shortly after that fortunate encounter, Rollerblade International signed him as a professional skater. Eventually, Mirzoyan took over many of Rollerblade International's visual projects, including shooting pictures and videos of skaters in dozens of countries. Throughout the years, Mirzoyan has zoomed through countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, India, Russia, China, and other countries throughout Europe and South America. During each of his trips to a different country, Mirzoyan goes sightseeing with eight wheels on his feet. But he does not skate in a straight line toward his destination like the majority of the population. The type of skating he practices is considered "aggressive," the fast-paced, adrenaline pumping cousin of street skating.

Videos of Mirzoyan document him in Brazil, jumping from the sidewalk to the wall with the Christ the Redeemer statue looking over him. On the city streets of Beijing, with the bright lights as his backdrop, Mirzoyan effortlessly jumps up and down staircases and swerves around hundreds of pedestrians. In the more suburban parts of town, he rides calmly by rivers and pagodas, under colorful paper lanterns

and canopies of trees. Instead of walking by the Bird's Nest stadium, the iconic building that hosted the 2008 Olympics, the skater explores the area on wheels, jumping off benches and traversing the green lawns with the crisscrossed wooden beams of the stadium acting as his spectators.

In Los Angeles, he tests the infamous traffic by speeding alongside buses while holding onto the front fender. The crowds on Hollywood Boulevard do not deter the courageous Mirzoyan from skating down the iconic street, weaving around tourists and costumed men. While the majority of his skating occurs in relatively low-risk situations, Mirzoyan is no stranger to performing daring feats. In Poland, he took his adventures to the next level by rocketing down a dark and winding underground salt mine, coming abruptly to a halt before a dead end. Outside, he rides in the middle of the street with the rest of the cars as his roadside companions, as if he were not a man on skates, but his own version of a motor vehicle.

Watching Mirzoyan glide smoothly on the streets and surpass every obstacle with ease is an incredibly hypnotic experience. The ebb and flow of his jumps and rides fill his audience with serenity, even during the most complicated tricks. The calmness he exudes with his every move is the mark of a true master, of a man who has been refining his skills for a lifetime. Skating comes as second nature to Mirzoyan, much like a fish in water.

With all the stamps on his passport, Mirzoyan has met a wide variety of skaters in different environments, from rural Indian villages to the skyscraper-laden streets of Asia and America. His observations of athletes in their own cities revealed to him what skaters have in common, and what their preferences are when it comes to how they get around on eight little wheels.

"People love to meet in one place where no one is disturbing them, and that's pretty much the same in every country," he says. "In the U.S., people don't go from place to place on skates because everything is so spread out. In cities like Paris, it's much easier to move around

The crowds on Hollywood Boulevard do not deter the courageous Greg Mirzoyan from skating down the iconic street, weaving around tourists and super heroes.



Rollerskating

The skates, invented by two hockey players in Minnesota in 1980s were originally intended to be used by hockey players to train in the off-season. Like in many European cities, rollerskating occupies a special niche in the Parisian landscape. In Paris, skaters gather in groups, often of thousands skaters, called Friday Night Skates. Group members meet in designated spots and skate together around the city. The popularity of these skating gatherings has spread to other countries and cities. In Berlin, as many as15,000 skaters congregate during the summer months. Rollerskating has been around in Armenia for quite a few years. Legend has it that the first sighting of the sport in Armenia was in Freedom Square. Many skaters now flock to Yerevan for their high-octane fix; they even celebrated the city's 2,794th birthday by rolling around the annual festival.



on skates because everything is much closer together."

Just like his talent for photography, his passion and dedication to skating took off from the beginning.

In the past, Mirzoyan tried many kinds of jobs and studied a large variety of subjects, but never liked any of them. It wasn't until photography and skating entered his life that he found hobbies that stuck around for life. That's because roller-skating is not like other sports, and Mirzoyan was not an ordinary child. "When I was a little bit younger, I liked to do things a little differently," Mirzoyan recalls. "I think that's why I was so attracted to skating, because it's not what everyone else did."

Although the connection between his two passions and traveling is not obvious, the skater intertwines them in his work and in his everyday life. He says, "When you travel, you have a scope of things that not everyone has. It's very personal. When you start doing this, it's like an addiction."

It's hard to imagine a man that is talented at so many arts, a man who can seamlessly blend an action sport with conceptual art, then throw travelling into the mix. Because he travels for work, most of the cities he visits are locations where skating is just beginning to develop. Sometimes, his travels evolve into semi-permanent arrangements. Before moving to Barcelona in 2011, the skater called England, India and Switzerland home for a short period of time.

"When I lived in other countries, I learned how to be a professional photographer," Mirzoyan says. "I mixed photography with skating because it was obvious, and I also made sure that I was taking pictures of all the things I encountered because it's nice to have a variety of work. It came naturally. My work is my whole life," Mirzoyan admits. "It's difficult to balance. I'm always thinking about my work. I can spend entire days working. I just go for it 100 percent."

The world is Mirzoyan's skate park and he makes sure to document each step of the journey, whether through dynamic, action-packed photographs or heart-pumping videos of himself, holding onto a car bumper, gliding on the street as though he were floating on air. ■



Fashion of Total Body and Mind

From sweat sensors in workout gear to trials of smart clothes that provide built-in cooling effects, the athletic loungewear market is taking the once-glamorous individual who felt the need to galvanize the world with her stylish clothes. All across America, women have replaced their beloved pair of jeans with their favorite pair of leggings. Despite the controversy raised over the umbrella concept of "street to gym" attire by numerous style experts, the appeal is at its all time high. Mike Bastegian, owner and president of Solow and Solow Sport, a manufacturer of active wear, foresaw the demand back in 2000 with not only a cult following but a game-changing fashion business plan.

Text **Sauline Kojababian**

During the era of Juicy Couture sweatpants paying retailer's rents, the shift into loungewear was introduced to a mass market of teens, moms, gym-goers and ladies who lunched. Suddenly wearing a tracksuit channeled more than just an outtake scene from an Italian mobster film. It represented classy comfort and trend focus. During that same time, Solow was being rebranded into something with more depth and function. "We started off as an underwear company and gradually moved into loungewear. The ceiling was limited and the competition was too high. As soon as we made the decision to skip the underwear and build up the loungewear, our sales went from zero to $1 million in the first year. We became a cult-like brand for a younger clique of girls on the east coast who needed our signature legging in every color," says Bastegian. With the change in the economy, Solow rebranded yet again and concentrated on an older, more sophisticated target market. They didn't want to compete with the H&Ms or the Forever 21s. The company hired a new contemporary designer, and by their third year jumped from $2 million to $6 million in sales. The line grew so large that Solow Sport was established to build not only a clientele of casual lounge customers like the main line, but true athletic clients as well. The company had to focus on traditional fitness sport outlets such as cycling, yoga and running, but also keep up with the trending hybrid fitness studios including Cardio Barre, Bikram Yoga, Pilates and Barre Method. "The attention of the brand had to be distinct yet versatile for the diverse types of workout outlets, which was achieved with the add-on of Solow Sport," Bastegian explains. Solow can be described as an expression of simplicity and style with silhouettes that are fitting for day, travel, nighttime and lounge. The line includes hoodies, linen jackets, soft tees, dresses and skirts. The Solow woman loves to layer her pieces together to and from the gym as well as for carrying out her daily activities and running errands. She wants to feel put together but be comfortable at the same time. She may have a busy lifestyle, and her attire needs to withstand the day effortlessly. "Maybe it's an economical factor, but glamour isn't the main effort anymore. If people could, they would wear our attire to work. I know people who wear Solow every single day. Our clothes do not represent a careless attitude about appearance. You will always look presentable. It just has become more socially acceptable to simply want comfort."

With showrooms across the United States and in Canada, Solow is constantly developing. They are sold in Bloomingdales, Nordstrom, Urban Outfitters, Anthropologie, and Fred Segal.

Solow Sport is more of a true active wear collection with leggings, sports bras, shorts and camis. It is for women who incorporate fitness into their routine. They are concerned about detail, fit and function. The company uses fabrics that are durable through high performance, offer support and are blue-sign certified, which represents a global movement toward more sustainable products







without losing the integrity of quality and design. All of Solow's products are made in the U.S., are environmentally friendly, and the company does not support child labor.

With showrooms across the United States and in Canada, the brand is constantly developing. Solow products have been featured in *Glamour, Vogue, Cosmopolitan*, and *Shape* magazines. They are sold in Bloomingdales, Nordstrom, Urban Outfitters, Anthropologie, Fred Segal, as well as the online retailer giant *ShopBop.com*. Their online sales business is just as lucrative as that of their department stores. "At a recent meeting with Nordstroms, the sales analysts mentioned their fastest growing avenue is online sales. While brick and mortar is steady without steep increases, online is constantly rising. It is certainly the future," shares Bastegian.

> "Our clothes do not represent a careless attitude about appearance. You will always look presentable. It just has become more socially acceptable to simply want comfort."

Other than distribution in stores, Solow has recently partnered with the bohemian chic retailer Free People and co-branded the "FP Movement" which is specially limited to the brand. Free People is planning to open FP Movement stores in Los Angeles, Miami and New York. Solow also has a private label at Free People's sister company Anthropologie called Lolli. While Solow has fashion covered, Solow Sport is working with cycling titan FlyWheel on a co-brand to be sold exclusively in all of their studios. They have designed unique cycling bottoms with a built in gusset for comfort during rides, among other specialty products.

While rival Lululemon might be doing billion dollar sales annually, they are declining in customer loyalty, sustainability and, most importantly, a high moral standard with their production. The company recently was under fire for a detrimental recall of products that affected 17 percent of all women's pants in stores. What was the problem? Let's just say buyers experienced onlookers notifying them that their pants were rather sheer. Not sure how functional see-through leggings can be while doing squats and lunges. Solow does not consider Lululemon competition because its focus is less commercialized and grass roots-oriented. The company uses brand ambassadors made up of true athletes that live and breathe



Yoga Made Easy
Solow active wear is a lifestyle brand for many yoga enthusiasts. According to a recent *Forbes Magazine* report, about 20 million Americans over the age of 18 practiced yoga last year, or 8.7% of the adult population, up from 15.8 million in 2008. Yoga is known to help with brain function and building a clear mind. Bikram Yoga, created by Bikram Choudhury, is a phenomenon as well. It consists of a series of postures and breathing exercises performed in a 105 degrees room.





a lifestyle of healthy and conscious living. They represent Solow because of what the brand has to offer as a whole, which is an ethical, honest and ecological active wear company.

Bringing over the creative director Rebecca Rich, who lives the lifestyle of a vegan yogi, designs with passion, and has a true love for sportswear, was an important step for Solow. Before working with Solow, Rebecca designed for T Los Angeles, Velvet, Tart Sportswear, 39 sixtyone and her own line under Rebecca Rich. You would think with a background as a collections designer within the contemporary market, working with active wear would be difficult, but it has been the complete opposite for Rich.

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"I look at everything as design," she says. "We just happen to make active wear. It is about incorporating a fashion aesthetic into active silhouettes. I have always been active with dance, yoga and Pilates. It has been easy to integrate the needs of athletes into the collections." She looks to European and Japanese magazines for inspiration as well as what is happening on the runways in Milan and Paris. "As a designer, it is kind of fun to have some restrictions. I could design camis and bras all day! Wait, and I do," she laughs. Rebecca stresses that fabric is what is most important in this market. The performance has to be water wicking, stretchable, yet, supportive. Each fabric is thoroughly tested before it makes it into the line. The process is no different from any other design process. A concept is created, fabrics are chosen, samples are made, and then it is competitively priced and added to the line. "Solow is now best known for our fold-over yoga pants, leggings and fold over ruffle leggings. We are the only company to have introduced ruffles. Others have tried but we have a secret trick," says Bastegian as we tour Solow's distribution office in Los Angeles. He points out an inspirational quote on the board and introduces me to the employees. The energy around the facility is positive, and one could tell that each individual carries out the company mission with commitment. I leave the office with a firm handshake and think to myself, "I too want to be a part of the Solow movement." ■

A Company to Keep

When United States manufacturers were moving to China, Harry Kazazian ventured to sail against the flow of business leaders that didn't dare to invest in domestic factories. Kazazian's insight not only served his own business, but also the city of Haleyville and to the U.S. economy.

Text **Ani Nazaretyan** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**





In his speech given at the "Insourcing American Jobs" forum hosted by the White House in January of 2012, President Obama declared, "I want us to be known for making and selling products all over the world stamped with three proud words: Made in America." The forum was held with an objective to bring jobs back to the country by means of "insourcing" and investing in the United States. Harry Kazazian, Founder and CEO of Exxel Outdoors, was among the few business leaders from across the country who had earned an invitation to the forum.

The indoor space where we park our cars, also known by the fancy name of French origin – "garage," once again over-fulfilled its function, becoming a cradle for another multi-million dollar company. It was here that more than 20 years ago the new graduate from California State University, Northridge, Harry Kazazian, started his first company, Prestige Apparel, that would lay the foundation for his future successful endeavors in the industry.

"When I just opened the factory in Vernon, Calif., my mom and dad would come and help me out, although they both were retired at the time. They were also the ones who gave me the startup money for the business. That was a big sacrifice on their end and I can never forget that," Kazazian says. "I started Prestige Apparel with one worker, and then had ten workers, that soon turned into twenty and just kept growing."

Back in the '80s, numerous textile-based U.S. businesses had started to open factories in Mexico and conducted manufacturing operations in a free trade zone, importing material and equipment on a duty-free and tariff-free basis. The operation became known as the Maquiladora Program. It allowed the factories to cut the fabric in America, sew it in Mexico and bring it back to the States. "I decided the best thing to do was to move the Prestige Apparel plant to Mexico and ended up living right across the border in Texas for almost 13 years," Kazazian says. The company's clientele at one point included quite an unusual overseas customer – the Kuwaiti army! One day, during the Gulf War (in which the United States intervened on the side of Kuwait), Kazazian received a call. The voice on the other end of the line explained to him that the Kuwaiti army was stuck in the middle of the desert with no army clothes, so they needed to put together a big order. While others in the industry did not have the capabilities to take that order, Kazazian took it and supplied the Kuwaiti army with necessary clothing.

Exxel Outdoors is the nation's largest manufacturer of sleeping bag and outdoor gear and has been named as one of the fastest growing private companies in America.

The economic recession didn't spare even the largest U.S. companies. American factories were being closed permanently, and the luckiest ones were relocating their businesses to China, India or



Mexico. The country was losing its once powerful manufacturing capacity and transitioning to a service-oriented economy, leaving thousands of people across the nation unemployed.

Kazazian and his long-time friend Armen Kouleyan opened the first Exxel Outdoors factory in Mexico in 1997. The company produced life vests, apparel, and sleeping bags. Their partnership at the time was on an artistic level: they both were guitarists and singers in a rock band Iron Tears, playing locally in Los Angeles.

"We both see the big picture, but we get there in different ways," says Kouleyan speaking about their business approach. "My approach to business is methodical and detailed, whereas Harry's usually starts with him getting a new idea in a flash. When we put the two together, it works. But most importantly, we trust each other. We never lose sight of the fact that we're on the same team, so we put in the work it takes to resolve any disagreements. I think it helps that we're both passing down our values to our kids."

Three years later they moved the plant to the U.S., a transition that marked the beginning of a highly successful business. Exxel would become the largest sleeping bag manufacturer in the country.

Back in the U.S., more than 80 workers of the Brunswick Corporation's factory in Haleyville, Alabama were soon to join the desperate army of the unemployed across America. "My partner read that Brunswick was divesting itself from the sleeping bag business. At the time we were on a scavenger hunt, looking for whatever technology we could buy cheap to take it to Mexico. We decided to go to Alabama to see the factory and perhaps do some asset sale," Kazazian recalls. He contacted the head of the Brunswick plant to let him know about his plans, so the company arranged a tour of the factory.

Kazazian immediately loved the plant. He sensed its real potential and following his entrepreneurial intuition, asked administrative manager Barbara Garrison, whether the factory could be made profitable. Garrison believed that it could and introduced Kazazian and Kouleyan to the workers and the engineering team. Seeing the productivity of the employers, Kazazian realized that by modernizing the factory's equipment, they could manufacture sleeping bags at a lower cost and of better quality than the ones imported from China. This was taking place at the time when his competitors were closing their American operations left and right and moving off-shore. But Kazazian bet. And he bet big.

First, he bought the Haleyville plant, closing all his operations in Mexico. Next, he moved back to Los Angeles where he opened a distribution facility and offices in the San Gabriel Valley, to work out of, while flying often to the Alabama plant. This transition marked the beginning of a highly successful business.

"There's a mutual loyalty at this

company – owners to the employees and the employees to the company," Barbara Garrison tells *Yerevan* magazine. "It didn't take us long to show them we could produce sleeping bags profitably at an unbelievable rate while keeping the cost to a minimum. This impressed Harry and Armen, and they invested even more money into the company. In turn, we were able to improve our technology enabling us to be more competitive with the foreign suppliers. With the increase in business, we were able to rehire previous employees. In a rural area as we are in, every job is important." With the factory running at a profit, Garrison was soon promoted to the position of the Plant Manager, and eventually to VP of Operations.

What once seemed impossible became a fact: Exxel Outdoors eventually grew enough to be able to compete with Chinese manufacturers. "Exxel has been a great corporate partner here in the city of Haleyville," says Mayor of Haleyville Ken Senseri. "It had a tremendous economic impact with the amount of people the company employed. We do everything we can to be able to assist them with their production and any expansion that they may be considering," the Mayor concluded.

"Being environmentally friendly is especially important to us, so we explore ways to run the plant completely on renewable energy," Kazazian states. Today the company is already recycling 98 percent of its industrial waste, whereas the cloth waste is being shipped to India-based companies where the material is repurposed for other uses. Exxel continues to be one of the first companies in the country that provides immediate help to the victims of natural disasters (including Hurricane Katrina, the Haiti earthquake, Columbia floods and others), donating sleeping bags, blankets, apparel and other first aid products.

However, at one point, there was an obstacle that hindered the American manufacturers: jobs at Exxel Outdoors and other U.S. sleeping bag factories were at risk because of "GSP," a wide-reaching American trade preferences law, was providing duty-free benefits for sleeping bags imported from Bangladesh. Kazazian was the first to take actions. He petitioned the Obama administration to exempt sleeping bags from Bangladesh because cheap imports endangered the jobs of employees at his plant. "We've been working in Washington to make sure that our American factory is on an even playing field, and so we've been lobbying to make sure trade laws were fair to American companies," Kazazian says. After two years, their efforts paid off; President Obama signed a law that took away duty-free status from Bangladesh.

> "My goal is to turn Exxel into a $100 million company in next two to three years and continue holding the leading position in the industry," says Harry Kazazian.

Today, Exxel Outdoors is the nation's largest manufacturer of sleeping bag and outdoor gear and has been named to the 2010, 2011 and 2012 "*Inc.* 500 | 5000," a prestigious ranking of the fastest growing private companies in America. "We have the best equipment in the world, got a great workforce and invested a lot of money into that plant," Kazazian says speaking about the company's success.

Last year Exxel added another 50,000 square feet of facility space to its Haleyville factory, bringing it to 300,000 square feet. "My goal is to turn Exxel into a $100 million company in the next two to three years. We are one of the top three manufacturer-distributors of personal floatation devices (UL) and also one of the top three for fishing vests. We want to create new products for the outdoor market and continue holding the leading position in the industry," Kazazian comments.

The company's products under the brand names Suisse Sport, American Trails, Disney, Sanrio (the Hello Kitty franchise) and Marvel Entertainment are distributed nationwide at such mass retailers as Walmart, Kmart, Target, Big 5, Dick's Sporting Goods, and Academy Sports + Outdoors.

Our interview took place in his house in the Verdugo Mountains, where he lives with his wife, Suzy and step-son, Nick. "I bought this vacant land, and then built my house on it five years ago," Kazazian says. "When I was growing up, my dad had a farm in Fresno. He had a special passion for living off the land, and he cultivated his own vineyard, orchard and vegetable garden. I used to make fun of him, and say, 'Dad, it is so much cheaper if we just go buy fruit and vegetables. Why are you doing this?' Years later my parents passed away. Then, when I was building my home, just as important to me as planning the interior was planning where I was going to put my orchard, my garden and my vineyard. And now every time I look out there, it reminds me of my father." Kazazian stays active in the Armenian community donating his time and efforts to such non-profits as the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry, Armenian Dental Society of California, and Armenian Youth Federation.

Exxel's success has drawn the attention of the national media, from Fox Business News, CNBC, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, and *Los Angeles Business Journal*, among others.

Kazazian's biggest contribution to the country remains bringing numerous jobs back to the United States from Asia. In 2012, Kazazian and his company were recognized by the Obama administration for the success in bringing jobs back to the country.

"My favorite part is to hire people, and I wish to do more of it," he confirmed. ■

AIWA Honors Katherine Sarafian

The Crystal Ballroom at The Beverly Hills Hotel opened its doors on Saturday, April 27, for a celebration luncheon organized by the Los Angeles affiliate of the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA).







The honoree of the event was Pixar Animation Studios Producer Katherine Sarafian, whose latest animated feature film *Brave* became the winner of some of the most prestigious awards in the world of entertainment, receiving the Golden Globe Award, the BAFTA Award (The British Academy of Film and Television Arts), as well as the Academy Award for the Best Animated Film.

"One of AIWA's missions is to recognize and acknowledge Armenian women who have worked hard and achieved success," said AIWA Program Committee Chairwoman Lily Balian. "We call attention to these people because these are the women who can inspire our younger generation and act as role models."

AIWA was established 22 years ago in Boston as a non-profit, non-sectarian and non-political organization with a mission to enrich and promote social, economic and personal advancement for Armenian women worldwide.

The Los Angeles affiliate of AIWA was founded by four women – Savey Tufenkian, Flora Dunaians, Hermine Janoyan and Elizabeth Agbabian.

"I love the organization because it's all about women, all about helping and working with women, and I am happy to be here today to honor Katherine Sarafian. Her success might seem sudden, but we all know that it took years and years of hard work," said writer and television host Joan Agajanian Quinn, who has been with AIWA for more than 15 years.

The opening speech at the event was given by Silva Katchiguian, president of AIWA Los Angeles, who in her turn thanked the attendees and guests of honor and expressed hope that Sarafian's success will turn out to be contagious in its nature and will inspire women in the Armenian community to strive for more.

Actor Ken Davitian, who recently









hosted the debut of *Orphans of the Genocide*, a documentary by filmmaker Bared Maronian that aired on Valley PBS, was invited by AIWA as the Master of Ceremonies for the event.

"I've been trained to listen to women," said Davitian in his usual half-serious, half-joking tone. "They called me and said, 'this is what you're doing on Saturday,' and I said 'okay.'''

Then he added, "It's very warm to me that the Armenian community is starting to be involved in the world of entertainment. It's one of the fields that we have not been able to conquer yet. I know Katherine Sarafian's work and am honored to meet her today. I appreciate independent women and am happy to see more and more Armenian women engage in the field of entertainment."

His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, bishop of Katherine Sarafian's late Father Der Hyre Sarafian of St. Vartan Armenian Church in Oakland and Fox News 11 reporter and anchor Araksya Karapetyan were also among the guests of honor. Both addressed the attendees and the honoree with their heartfelt speeches.

Sharing her impressions with *Yerevan* magazine, Sarafian said, "I've been aware of the organization for over 10 years. I am consistently impressed by AIWA's ability to find the right causes for Armenians and for women. This team knows how to put things together, knows how to communicate and has great ties within the Armenian community and outside of it. Honestly, when I was initially told about this event, I didn't immediately understand that it would be held in my honor and thought I would be one of the keynote speakers. I couldn't even comprehend that level of support and love. It was a moving tribute, and I was honored to have them make it about me."

Philadelphia Praises Armenia

The Armenian culture is known for its age-old traditions, delicious recipes and an abundance of art, music and literature. International House Philadelphia (IHP) hosted a gala promoting everything Armenia has to offer.



Every year, the non-profit organization International House Philadelphia chooses one nation's art, education and culture to showcase. On May 18, IHP hosted its 52nd global gala "Treasures of Armenia," celebrating Armenian traditions and the accomplishments of its people.

Guests enjoyed live music by the Steve Vosbikian Ensemble as well as a wide range of Armenian delicacies. "Treasures of Armenia" also included an art exhibit featuring the works of Hratch Babikian, Sophia Chitjian and Ara Zeibanian, among others.

"We familiarized attendees with the culture and cuisine and by the speeches about Armenian heritage," said Lena Ohanessian, a member of the gala committee.

A portion of the proceeds benefited Armenian students who are residents of IHP as well as a housing project in Vanadzor and the Armenian Sisters Academy, the only Armenian school in the greater Philadelphia area.

In a message to attendees, Jim Papada, IHP's board of trustees' chair, said, "The people of the Armenian Diaspora have contributed in diverse ways to many of your own chosen professions, including the fields of medicine and biotechnology, architecture, engineering, business, academia and the arts."

One enthusiastic attendee in particular was John Ohanesian, winner of *Yerevan* magazine's "Win a Trip to Armenia 2012" contest. Ohanesian flew to Philadelphia from Los Angeles to show his support before his upcoming trip to Yerevan later this October.

"The most moving part was that a lot of the guests were not of Armenian descent," said Ohanesian. "There was great cross-cultural interaction. It was a chance to open a dialogue about one's culture and engage in conversation about family history."

World Orphanage Foundation Launches Efforts

Sara Kazimi has had a passion for providing for children ever since she was a 16 year-old feeding the homeless each Thanksgiving. With that same enthusiasm for assisting in a benevolent cause, the philanthropist Kazimi has now launched the World Orphanage Foundation.

The World Orphanage Foundation (WOF) is dedicated to building awareness, raising funds, and providing education for orphanages around the world. WOF plans to collaborate with UNICEF for official support in their global orphan relief initiative. Kazimi says that teaming up with UNICEF will give her room to maneuver in the international sphere. "My mission is to link myself with every orphanage around the world. I want the World Orphanage Foundation to be globally connected to every country," she said.

One of the many countries on the list is Armenia. WOF is already working with an existing orphanage in Armenia and will further pursue the project later this year.

Editor and stylist Lisa M. Berman hosted the official launch of WOF, which took place at the Calabasas Country Club on April 4. The night also included a fashion exhibit by Leo Bella and Simin Couture of Beverly Hills organized by The World Networks. "This is just the beginning. Every year The World Networks will host a red carpet gala to raise awareness and funds for one lucky nonprofit organization," said Lousine Karibian, founder of The World Networks. "This is our way of giving to the community in honor of our members who have decided to join our exclusive worldwide professional-business network."

Kazimi further discussed WOF's process of researching orphanages and making sure that in addition to UNICEF, their respective country recognizes them. The foundation doesn't necessarily always start the orphanages, but it connects with already established ones to provide resources. Kazimi says that the ultimate goal of the foundation is to act as an umbrella organization for all orphanages around the world in order to be better linked.









Nan Melville

Life in Music

Ara Guzelimian calls it a 24/7 position. But actually being the provost and dean of the world famous Juilliard School in New York encompasses much more work than one could fit in a day. It is the latest of the many coveted artistic and administrative positions he has excelled in and is well known for.

Text **Florence Avakian**

Born in Cairo, Egypt to Armenian parents, Guzelimian moved with his family, which included his older brother, to the United States when he was eight years old. Growing up in Los Angeles, he graduated from UCLA with a B.A. in Music History. An accomplished writer and critic, he has authored articles and reviews for *The New York Times*, *Musical America*, *Opera Quarterly*, *Opera News* and *Symphony Magazine*, among others. In his educational position at Juilliard, he revels in finding "behind every door a potential miracle."

Florence Avakian: As the dean of the Juilliard School, what are your responsibilities, and what educational programs are you involved with? And why is Juilliard so renowned?
Ara Guzelimian: As the chief academic officer, I oversee the faculty and the students on a day-to-day level in all three primary divisions of the school, including music, dance and drama. Music is the oldest and for some people the best known. The dance division began in 1951 and is celebrated in the arts and dance world. The drama division started in 1969 when the

"On my worst day here, I can stick my head into a rehearsal and say 'hello' to a student, and instantly life is quite fine. Behind every door there is a potential miracle."

school moved to Lincoln Center. I work with the heads of the faculty overseeing curriculum and the artistic planning of the teaching divisions. I am also deeply involved with admissions and day-to-day artistic and academic administration.

Like Carnegie Hall, there are some names that almost take on iconic meanings and aspirational models. There is that famous saying of "how do you get to Carnegie Hall – practice, practice, practice." The only reason this works is that everyone realizes the tremendous accomplishments of the school. Over the years, the caliber of the teaching and especially the alumni across all three divisions have helped establish Juilliard as a kind of household word. I wouldn't say it's alone in this among the world's great conservatories, but it seems to be seen as one of the most widely recognized. This recognition is built on the record of great teachers and great students, and also, creativity which carries its own mystique.

You have held so many artistic positions in eminent organizations. Why did you change from more of an artistic field to an educational field? And have you ever regretted it?

At Carnegie Hall I had the great privilege of working with Isaac Stern for the last years of his life. He was the president of Carnegie Hall for 40 years. Quite a remarkable tenure. And at that point in his career, he was dedicated to expending his energies on the next generation of musicians. He led a series of workshops for young musicians, and I had to administer them. So I found myself getting up every morning with a bigger spring in my step. But after a certain point, as much of a privilege as it is, it doesn't take a genius to work with the greatest artists, which Carnegie Hall is privileged to do. Rather it requires great skill to work with emerging young artists and help guide them. I also began to think about the next chapter of my life – that of being more devoted to having a hand in helping, cultivating and nurturing the next generation of artists. Frankly, it's also a part of getting older as well. I wanted to have a role in giving back and imparting what I had learned. There was nothing that Isaac Stern wouldn't do for a young musician. And I thought if Isaac Stern isn't too busy to stop in his tracks to do this, that's a pretty golden standard for me. Plus, another thought came to me in my last year at Carnegie Hall. If Carnegie represents the end of a rainbow for an artist's dreams, which it does, it's hard to go from Carnegie Hall to another place of that elevated artistic caliber. It then made sense for me to go to the beginning of the arc, and go to a place of the highest artistic standards where one is at the beginning of his or her artistic development rather than at the culmination. And I've never regretted it for a moment. On my worst day here, I can stick my head into a rehearsal and say "hello" to a student, and instantly life is quite fine. Behind every door there is a potential miracle.

What significant differences have there been between these various administrative positions that you have been involved in? Has it all been a progression?

Oh sure! Having a kind of human organism at the center of your life as when I worked with the Los Angeles Philharmonic is one distinct kind of experience. It was at the Aspen Music Festival, which is also a teaching institution that I first got involved in a more educational setting. Then at Carnegie, I became a presenter. They are all interrelated, but there are various different prisms or glasses within which you view the musical profession. And I find that extremely helpful in informing my work here at Juilliard in that I know where the students are headed, and I'm conversant with that. I can give the students counsel or help shape curriculum with the faculty along those lines. It definitely is a progression which leads education to the beginning of the arc.

You have held so many artistic positions, and now you are also involved in the educational sphere. What do you envisage as the future of the arts and the future of Juilliard?

The arts are an essential part of life, like bread and water. It's essential to subsistence. As long as society exists, the arts will be a necessary part of it. So I don't worry about the need for artists in society, even though we live in tough economic and socio-political times. The harder things become, the more the arts become such a fundamental outlet of human expression. Sometimes people are threatened by the truth of the arts and try to marginalize it in one way or the other. I think it's important that there is a school, which educates young artists, constantly helps young artists be the best advocates for the arts as well as be the great artists. So the nature of arts education is undergoing a significant change. There used to be something called the monastic model as in a monastery. You would lock yourself into a studio and practice your violin to perfection, eventually emerging to a grateful world that would receive you with bravos and rose petals. It's legendary, but to some degree there's a measure of truth in it. But more and more these days, young artists have to exist with a clear-eyed attitude. There's a wonderful Armenian expression, "achku patz," play with your eyes open and with an understanding of society as well. They not only have to play their violin well and wait to be showered with bravos and gold coins, but they also have to articulate the need for the arts and be more imaginative about creating their own niches. The arts can't exist in isolation. The most important thing for a performing arts conservatory is to be true to the artistic training, and add to that an entire core of worldly knowledge to make sure that the best case for the arts is made within society. ▸



Nan Melville

← Guzelimian presents New York City Ballet Artistic Director Peter Martins with an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from The Juilliard School.

"I admire teachers who were fierce in their pursuit of knowledge not content with an easy answer and many great musicians who made sure that music is a communicative art."

How has your Armenian heritage influenced your music and musical career and shaped your life?

I think there is an aesthetic sensibility within the Armenian culture, an appreciation for the values of craft and beauty and working hard for a beautiful result. Whether it is grandmothers doing lacework or handmade tablecloths or whatever form it takes, that becomes an internal part of your values before you even know, such as the beauty of the liturgy, the importance of the music. It almost gets built into your DNA even before you know it. To this day, I still get such a powerful response when I hear the "Badarak." I am most familiar with the Yegmalian "Badarak" which I used to sing as a chorister earlier in my life. When I was involved in the university chorus at UCLA, I brought some Armenian folk music to the then conductor who made some arrangements. I have come to realize all these things long after I grew up. In one way or another, the Armenian influence has never been terribly far, and it keeps appearing in my life in interesting ways. In my Carnegie Hall days, I was closely involved with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Project. Yo-Yo incorporated a duduk player, Kevork Danbaghian, who has played concerts and recorded with this project. The string quartet with the Silk Road Project, which now has many independent lives, has recorded the arrangements of the Gomidas settings for several Armenian folk songs. It's always made me proud to see those intercessions of Armenian culture with my professional musical life. Juilliard also has a baroque historical performance program, and the great da gamba player Jordi Savall is a regular visiting faculty member and an artist of that program. He's interested in all kinds of musical traditions and has issued one of the most beautiful records of Armenian music called, "Armenian Spirit, Hai Vocki." It's on CD. I think his interest existed quite apart from our conversations. But it was great to be a small part of this.

You have been part of a great melting project – a forum with two gifted giants – Daniel Barenboim, the acclaimed musical director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, and the eminent author, literary critic and scholar Edward Said, who wanted to bridge the gap between cultures. Barenboim founded in 1999 the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra made up of Israeli, Palestinian, Arab and other musicians "to enable intercultural dialogue and to promote the experience of collaborating as a matter of common interest." Why were you so involved with this endeavor?

I edited and wrote the preface to their book of conversations, entitled, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society.* It partly began with Barenboim, who is Jewish, was born in Egypt, grew up in Israel, and has lived mostly in Europe. He knew that I was an Armenian born in Egypt in a music-loving family. By then Edward Said had become a close friend of his, and had come from a Christian Palestinian family whose lives had also been disrupted. Said was born in Jerusalem, but grew up in Egypt and lived most of his life in the United States. He also came from a music-loving family. We all had this common bond coming from a background of complicated personal geography and had this common love of music. And they created the East-West Divan Orchestra, which includes Europeans, Israelis and Arabs. To some degree, it's been rather unpopular from all sides, which means it must be doing something right. They don't pretend it's a political solution, but they both felt that unless you take some action,



Peter Schaaf

Ara Guzelimian

▸ Provost and Dean of The Juilliard School since August 2006.

▸ From 1998 to 2006 he was Senior Director and Artistic Advisor of Carnegie Hall. In that post, he oversaw the artistic planning and programming for the opening of Zankel Hall in 2003.

▸ Host and producer of the acclaimed "Making Music" composer series at Carnegie Hall from 1999 to 2008.

▸ From 1993 to 1998, was the Artistic Administrator of the Aspen Music Festival and School in Colorado.

▸ From 1992 to 1997 was the Artistic Director of the Ojai Festival in California.

▸ Associated with the Los Angeles Philharmonic from 1978 to 1993 – first as producer for the Orchestra's national radio broadcasts, then as Artistic Administrator.

▸ As a writer and music critic, he has contributed to *Musical America*, *Opera Quarterly*, *Opera News*, *Symphony* magazine, *The New York Times*, *Record Geijutsu* (Tokyo), and the journal for the IRCAM center in Paris.

▸ In September 2003, Guzelimian was awarded the title "*Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres*" by the French government for his contributions to French music and culture.

you're part of the problem. And the action they took is in the active making of music. You're obligated to listen to the other's narrative. It's one powerful metaphor for one positive action.

You were born in Cairo, Egypt but grew up in Los Angeles. What were the forces that shaped your early life? And what early experiences made a deep impression upon you?

In Cairo, we lived in such a deeply Armenian area. I went to the Kalustian Armenian School, and the Armenian church there. Our friends were mainly Armenian. And in Beirut, I went to the grammar school associated with Haigazian University. Even today, whenever I'm with my mother or brother, we always speak Armenian, and occasionally also with our Armenian students at Juilliard. I was eight when my family left Egypt; then we lived for a year in Beirut and another year in Boston. I was ten when we arrived in Los Angeles, and I consider it home. I saw some of the greatest artists there, including the last recital of Heifetz, Rubinstein again and again, Leontyne Price in her prime, Dietrich Fischer Dieskau, Jaclyn Dupree, Birgit Nilsson. It was a banquet. The year after we arrived, I heard Van Cliburn in rehearsal at the Hollywood Bowl, and met him backstage afterward. I was a knobby-kneed kid in shorts shaking hands with this lion in music. I always thought I had the most wonderful upbringing in music, largely due to my brother Armen, who was playing the piano before I was born. He was an extremely generous older brother and took me to all these concerts, and I was the kid brother tagging along. He has a busy career as a pianist, vocal coach and chamber musician and has taught at the University of Southern California for many years. My mother Angel and my late father Levon were always great music lovers. I was lucky to grow up in a close knit family, and for any Armenian who has the closeness of not only an immediate family but also aunts and uncles, it helps a child grow up feeling safe and secure in the world, despite the disruptions. It's a foundation which doesn't shake easily. My musical education was somewhat disrupted with my family's moves, so by the time I was taking piano seriously, I was in my mid-teens. I knew then I would never have a serious focus on performance. I play the piano functionally, also sing, and have been a choral conductor. It takes a special inner drive and motivation to be a performer. I see it and work with it daily, but I know I don't have that. However, I've been extraordinarily lucky and blessed to live this life of music as an administrator. At UCLA, I began as a math and science-oriented student, and took exceptionally complicated music classes just for fun. In my sophomore year, I had this revelation that if this is what I love doing so much, why don't I change? So I became a music and music history major. My mother always encouraged me to do what I love. That was a real gift. You know music history is not one of the more practical career patterns. But I was so fortunate to become a young music critic. Then I continued to do some lecturing and public interviews at the Metropolitan Opera, Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, such as with James Levine. That's the extent of my performance life. There I feel secure. (He laughs heartily).

You have met so many interesting people and personalities? Who are some of the people you most admire?

Of course, my parents who with their difficulties and disruptions provided security, solidity and encouragement for my brother and me. Without that foundation, much of what followed would not be possible. My brother who at a difficult time in my family's life and at an age difference – he's eight years older – when he doesn't want his kid brother hanging with him, was incredibly generous in including me in his musical life. I also admire various teachers who were fierce in their pursuit of knowledge, not content with an easy answer, and went after what interested you. I also had the good fortune to work with some remarkable people. Carlo Maria Guilini, the great Italian conductor, approached music as a somewhat holy and philosophical mission. The purity of that made a tremendous impression on me. And Isaac Stern, who was not only a great but also tireless musician. Also, I admire many great musicians who made sure that music is a communicative art. They helped me understand the performing arts are among the most precious and tangible expressions of being alive. Without those kinds of experiences, our lives would be poorer. There was a famous cartoon in *The New Yorker* a few years ago with the caption, "Life without Mozart," and it shows a wasteland with garbage and discarded spare tires.

What other passions do you have besides music? Do you exercise?

I have lots. I love to read almost anything and everything. I even read the cereal box while eating breakfast. I love nature, the outdoors. I love to travel and experience different cultures and different world views. I love to walk, and New York is a great city for this. Walking is also great thinking time.

Who is Ara Guzelimian?

(He laughs softly while he thinks for a few minutes).

An educator, a nature lover and a family man. ■

VISCERAL IMPACT

It has become vitally important today to surround ourselves with art and to choose thoughtfully the artistic realm we want to be in – those places where we find solace and pleasure. However, every once in a while we come across a piece of art that transports us past sheer aesthetics into the world of emotional uncertainty – museum-quality artwork that is not always something you would want to hang on your wall or display in your home. Nevertheless, it is intentionally made to evoke an emotion or to create one. Once at a party, I heard a group of mostly women discussing sculptor Arewik Avakian's body of work. They had gathered around one of the guests who was showing images on his laptop. Since most of the comments were critical, I decided to take a quick peek.

Text **Gohar Barseghyan**

The sculptures were strange and off-putting. In one of the photos, a full-grown woman's head is precariously balanced on the shoulders of a child's body. This sad looking child/woman is topless with a mantle of fur draped over her shoulder. She is wrapped in a man's extra-large oxford white shirt and stands on a chair in a pair of gigantic men's work shoes.

The impact was visceral. All manner of mental disturbances ensued. Many of the women looking at the photos found Arewik Avakian's work to be offensive and ugly. The disturbing juxtaposition of hopelessness and uncensored sadness made them uncomfortable, and yet they all had something to say, which was what caught my attention. In a genuine way, Avakian's work was seething with power and force.

My own mind raced around the whole composition, trying to see it in 3D, rotating it and seeing it from different angles. But what I saw was my own captivity expanding inside this "ugliness" and isolation. The thought of being trapped as a woman in the body of a child touched some deeper part of me and made me cringe. I felt my own repulsion against circumstance – shrouded in the uniform of the male world, suppressed, weighted down and taught to be inferior. These concepts invaded my mind when I stared at the sculpture. No wonder the women around me were responding negatively! How hard it would be to walk in such shoes! Each step arduous – somehow worse than foot-binding, simply cruel and torturous, a heavy, eternal lift and shuffle gait at best. The chair that she stood upon to come up to shoulder height was a further embarrassment. It was a practical pedestal, and the sturdiness of its four legs promised to outlive this oddly ancient and fragile creature. The chair will survive her sadness. Her isolation can never touch it. She can only stand upon it forever trapped and locked away in a wax body.

For a long time, I couldn't shake these images, as they definitely left their mark in my consciousness. So I contacted her in Holland where Arewik currently lives to get some answers.

A beautiful woman in her early forties was sitting in front of a large bookcase. Before long we both





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"The Love-Power-Victory Girl" (fragment)



←
"The Love-Power-Victory Girl"

let our defenses down, and a touching conversation ensued in which Avakian shared some of the keys to understanding her work and its moods and attitudes.

Arewik Avakian was born and raised in Yerevan. After graduating from high school, she studied to be a linguist at the "department of brides," as she likes to call it, in order to gain a diploma for her "dowry" and learn a few tips from her classmates on how to be a good wife. After all, many young men would flock by the Department of Humanities building in search of a cultured future wife. But her graduation and expected marriage did not work out in the intended fashion. Moreover, the Soviet powers collapsed and extreme poverty and the cold of several severe winters forced her to move to Holland in 1994.

She found a position as a translator and also started teaching yoga classes, but she still felt a gap in her life that she wanted to address. Art seemed like the path to take to fill that emotional need. She enrolled at the Den Bosch Academy of Art to explore and search for her style and voice. But instead of finding her place, she realized quickly that the current art trends appeared to be heavily based on male logic and rationality.

"Female qualities such as sensitivity and intuition are considered wrong. It's like telling ourselves that we are not worth anything," explained Avakian. She had a hard time while studying at Den Bosch academy as she was constantly being reprimanded for not following the rules and criticized for deviating from the preset guidelines and accepted styles. ▸

THROUGH AN ELABORATE PROCESS OF KNEADING HER DELICATE WAX SCULPTURES, AVAKIAN RECREATES A VISION OF HER OWN CHILDHOOD INTO AN EXTERNAL REALIZATION.

Traditional academia can be strict in all countries and has been like that in all ages, so it's not something new. From Avakian's perspective, she thinks it is impossible for an institution to adapt to new ways of thinking. Institutions are generally more interested in promoting what they are already comfortable with instead of breaking new ground. After graduating from the academy, Avakian tried to make sense of her process. On one hand, she had been formally trained in many genres. On the other hand, the majority of these styles went against her personal aspirations and sense of art's purpose. This was not acceptable. It was, in a technical sense, anti-art, a case of too much focus on the techniques whereas time has taught us that art isn't a toolbox. For more than a year she struggled with a spectrum of doubts and wrestled low self-esteem. She began to believe that she had no talent and couldn't make anything worth anyone's attention. Her anxiety and disappointment reached extreme levels. At times even walking by a museum or an exhibition could make her nauseous. Out of this physical sickness and encroaching nausea, Avakian began realizing the true backbone of her anxiety. It was the same calcified prison she had felt trapped in as a child in Armenia. When she became honest with herself, it became clear that it was her consciousness about all women and their struggle, including her own, that was fueling her need to speak up and address the taboos in society. She was being smothered by patriarchal oppression even in the world of art, where liberty and freedom can take on altered meaning and provide opportunities for anybody.

During this period of her life, Avakian struggled with the growing discomfort within. This internal strife would gestate and evolve. Her anxiety levels skyrocketed and compelled her to create. As her intellectual creation found its way out of the dark spaces of her imagination materializing into the certainty of the real world, the anxiety itself let go of her. She was resolving her inner conflicts by using her body to facilitate creation as a form of release – a birthing process.



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"The Pretty-Pink-Bunny-Lipstick Girl"

"The urge to make a sculpture, to create, starts with a sense of discomfort. I become anxious. Recently, I feel it less intensely since I now recognize the feeling. I calm myself down as I can feel it's the origination of an idea. Slowly, as I work on the piece, I gain my calmness back. I love my work. It lets me open up. It's an outlet where all the anxiety, memories, pain and fears are released."

Like many artists of both genders who have been working around the centralized themes that feminism brought to light many years ago, Avakian's work is focused on how images of women are used in society. She is standing up against the historical persecution and suppression that was evident around her as a child. "Protesting is better than being silent. We need to go through the process of realizing what our pain is, recognizing it, expressing it and healing from it. And then we can celebrate our womanhood. My first work turned out to be a self-portrait. I had no idea that I was sculpting my own face. I wasn't aware that whatever I was doing, it was my real self being reflected in my work. The more I worked, the more I realized that it really was me. In my latest works, even though they don't have my face, they still carry my sadness in them."

WHILE A VIEWER MAY HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME GRASPING THE INTELLECTUAL STRUGGLE, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE AN INVITATION TO RESPOND TO THE CORE MEANING.

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"The Unicorn Girl"



→
"Lady with Fur"





←
"Benedicta tu in mulieribus"

Through an elaborate and detailed process of kneading the faces and bodies of her delicate wax sculptures, Avakian is able to recreate her internal vision of her own childhood into an external realization. In a real sense, she is making the forgotten visible again. Her work is a process of recovering, remembering and exposing to the public gaze the traumas that had previously remained silent. Obviously, Avakian and her work came out of the society she grew up in, and so our conversation eventually veered away from the art world and into the realm of social and cultural upbringing.

"When I make sculptures I always start from the face. Sometimes I see objects that inspire. Or it might be a gesture that can trigger my imagination. In our culture, a boy is told from a young age that he is a boy and can do anything he wishes. I still feel pain inside me for that. I felt that I could do a lot of things better than boys my age. I was smarter, faster and more flexible. Instead, I was always reminded that I was a girl and I couldn't do this or that. That's how they break us – when we are little. I'm fighting it to this day. Then the girl grows up to be a beautiful woman and gets power over men for a short time. She is taught to manipulate

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"Drummer Girl" (fragment)



→
"Drummer Girl"



men with her beauty. 'Don't sleep with a man until he does things for you.' And when you get older and your beauty is gone or wasted, you are ruined as a woman. As a young girl you were nothing, as a young woman you had some power, and after forty, it's pretty much over!"

Avakian's early sculptures struggle with place and voice and are now associated with, at the very least, victimhood or helplessness. Her early works reveal in a beseeching manner, specific stories of loss, suppression and hopelessness. The postures, the outfits and facial expressions are world weary and yet expectant for some kind of change. The artist seems to know inherently that women and children often never discover their unrealized potential.

Most of the sculptures have been halted in time in a condition of permanent subservience, half-expectant looks across their faces, which also show signs of the deep-set traces of boredom and indifference.

"St. Mary is my beloved character in art and literature. I was making a sculpture of a mother and a child. Mary generally expresses motherly love. In my case, the sculpture expresses no love. It's rather indifferent. A friend who was the first one to see the piece said that it was me and my loneliness expressed in the sculpture. It was my discomfort with where I was and how I had no idea of where I was going," she says.

There is a huge dose of discomfort in the works of Avakian, and many women hate it. But her personal turmoil and her need to protest against the male domination, present in most engineered societies, is real. Her struggle against these institutions has resulted in the creation of a pure, female vulnerability – and this openness has resulted in myriad opinions from apathy to raw aggression in the reactions of the viewers.

Nevertheless, there's something empowering in the facial expressions of Avakian's work. There is a quiet refusal on the sculpture's part to react to whatever is done to them. It's not aloofness per se, but rather a deviation from the norm. With a giggle, Avakian remembers how an elderly woman, who saw Arewik's work at her boyfriend's office, called it "art – made by a sick and immoral person."

While a viewer may have a difficult time grasping the intellectual struggle intended by Avakian, there will always be an invitation to respond to the core meaning. Her work is accessible directly through the sculpture's expressive features. There is an emotionalism that goes even beyond gender politics. From Arewik's personal observation, the sculptures have a great presence at exhibition halls and though the pieces may have an air of indifference, the audience reaction rarely is indifferent. Visitors are either drawn to her work or repulsed by it. Those who are intrigued by the work stare at them for a

AVAKIAN'S EARLY SCULPTURES STRUGGLE WITH PLACE AND VOICE AND ARE NOW, AT THE VERY LEAST, ASSOCIATED WITH VICTIMHOOD OR HELPLESSNESS.

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"Dreamy disguise, adieu enfance" (fragment)



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"Dreamy disguise, adieu enfance" (fragment)



long time. The intense emotional response to her work, whether negative or positive, is a suggestion that it has touched deeply upon hidden values and memories.

When I look back on the day that I saw her sculptures for the first time, I was drawn to them. I wanted to study them and learn a thing or two about them because of the way they were dressed or how they looked. My actual emotions were locked up, though. I didn't really feel them at first. However, in a few days an unknown sadness poured in, and I was transported to my own childhood. The sadness left a bitter taste for a while, and I felt that there must be something unspoken or someone truly trapped in the sculptures that can only be released by a certain impulse from the viewer/respondent. In our interview, the more I spoke with her, the more I recognized the forces that drew my attention to her work – the forces of remembrance and forgiveness. Who is Avakian? Is she the lonely, expectant child, full of creativity, life and passion, facing a world that did not need her that way? A world that needed to strip down all the best in her and leave only those qualities that were needed by a society ruled by men and designed for men? Who am I? Is my process so different?

Avakian believes that the times are changing. Her work is somehow helping the change. More women are getting rid of the cages they have been living in. It is her hope that more women will begin to look at her work and feel that they are not alone. Instead of being repulsed, they won't fear that same trapped person. And then change can begin. A profound kind of transformation that is hard to describe. Today, Avakian is bringing new emotional energy to her work. The delivery of her past removed her sadness and alienation, vacating room for other energies and possibilities. And in comparison, there is a vitality in her latest sculptures that is almost bursting with fun. How could such a huge visual change take place? She describes this transformative shift modestly. "A few months ago, when I was working on the deer sculpture, I realized that it possessed calmness, and I have a feeling that my new works will continue in that style. The tension on the faces is over. I feel like celebrating my femininity rather than dwelling on the past." ■

Photoshop MD

Imagine a job that starts early in the morning, ends at no specific time the next day and the main responsibilities consist of creating skin, raindrops, wrinkles, dust, hair and metal from scratch. This is what Vartan Garnikyan calls a dream job.

Text **Ani Nazaretyan** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**



For the past nine years, Garnikyan has been employed by Midnight Oil Creative – one of Los Angeles' largest independent agencies specializing in digital media, print, experimental design and packaging, ad campaigns and more. Clientele of the company include the biggest movie and gaming studios in the country such as Disney, Fox, Warner Brothers, Microsoft and Sony.

Garnikyan started his career as an 11th grade student, thus becoming one of the youngest graphic artists ever to be hired by the agency. "For as long as I can remember, I've always been fascinated by movies. I have always known that I wanted a career in this industry, but wasn't sure where to get my start until the day I began to learn Photoshop." Still in high school, he was hired by the City of Glendale as a graphic designer for the Neighborhood Services Department of the Glendale Youth Alliance. Shortly thereafter, his work for the City of Glendale caught the attention of one of the biggest companies in the industry, and he received a job offer. For the 11th grade student who nurtured a passion for movies and Photoshop, it was a heaven-sent opportunity, and he jumped into it head first.



Since then he has worked on such blockbusters as *The Dark Knight*, *The Avengers*, *The Harry Potter Series*, among other projects. "I'm one of the few people I know that absolutely loves his job, the company he works for, and everyone he works with. I've never had a bad day at work. There's no such thing when you love what you do," says Garnikyan. "For the past nine years I have learned almost everything there is to know about programs like Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign, from 3D renderings, artwork design, artwork manipulation, texture/pattern creation, typography, high-res finishing, etc." Currently, Garnikyan specializes in artwork design and theatrical standees (large self-standing displays promoting a product, movie or event), and has played a major part in creating standees for almost every movie that has come out during the last five years. "Vartan is a highly skilled creative designer," says Todd Julian, Director of Retail Display at Midnight Oil Creative. "His Photoshop skills are light years ahead of anyone we know of in our business. Vartan's creative interpretation, his lightning-fast quick key capabilities and his unbreakable determination to complete that which can't be completed is a force to be reckoned with".

I was curious to see where all those theatrical standees and humongous posters covering entire buildings in Los Angeles are created, so Vartan arranged a tour of the company. Moving from one room to another, down to the print department, then to the grand format department where the gigantic posters are made, we passed through corridors whose walls were covered with movie posters, prototypes of standees and all sorts of artwork related to the film and video game industry. Eventually we reached the room where the actual ones are born. In the far end of a room piled with cardboards stood the prototypes of theatrical standees that would see public release almost a year from now. Garnikyan was working on a mini-version of a seven-foot tall version. "You have to know a little bit of everything here. I don't just do the artwork design, but try my best in engineering and look for creative ways to make things work. When you create such a standee, it must look as perfect as possible, every tiny little detail matters. That's when my job begins."

The sand particles or the raindrops that are almost invisible on a 15-inch paper suddenly acquire new nature and demand utmost attention to their shape and form in a larger-than-life-size version. That is when a graphic designer assumes for a while the role of "creator of the universe," making clouds, fire, snow, sand, smoke, lightning, water, and pretty much anything you can think of, all from scratch in Photoshop. Interestingly enough, Garnikyan uses a lot of his own products in creating the artwork, so if there is a rug or a lamp in a standee that you see in the movie theatres, chances are they are copies from Vartan's house. Some of the most successful and award-winning standees in which he has had creative input have been for *Tron*, *Sherlock Holmes 2*, *Rock of Ages*, *Step Brothers*, *Monsters University*, *Iron Man 3* and *Fast & Furious*, among others.

"Vartan's professionalism and personal drive to be creative, to learn and grow set him apart in a crowded landscape. Vartan is definitely the guy you want on your team," says Michelle Azzopardi, Creative Director at Midnight Oil Creative.

"Someone once said, 'Few people recall accomplishments, strange as it seems, but every person can remember – with remarkable accuracy – the outstanding tough beats of their career.' My career is no different," says Vartan Garnikyan. "In my opinion, it's one of the most competitive positions in a very competitive industry. When I was first hired, I was told, 'for every project we win, we'll have ten that are torn to pieces. Learn not to take it personally.' Nine years later, I am no closer in learning that than on my first day of work. And honestly, I don't think a day will come where I don't take it to heart. I suppose that is the difference between a job you're forced to do, and a career you wake up every morning wanting to do." ■



Pedaling to a Dream

My conversation with someone who has crossed over 40 country borders (from the United Kingdom all the way to Mongolia) in less than seven years promised to be quite a compelling one. But my anticipation was amplified by the fact that all those trips were taken on, believe it or not… a bicycle. But there is even more than that to this unusual story.

Text **Ani Nazaretyan**



→
Tom Allen's *Janapar* premiered at the Raindance Film Festival in London



For Tom Allen, a young native of England, what once started as an escape from a mundane existence in the county of Northamptonshire in the east midlands region of the country, turned into a way of life, and then something entirely different, particularly after he met the woman of his dreams in the remote city of Yerevan, Armenia. Tom's journey on a bicycle was eventually developed into a documentary, titled by the not-so-English word *janapar* (road or journey in Armenian). The film premiered at the Raindance Film Festival in London a few months ago and was awarded the prestigious Spirit of Adventure – Gold Award at the 2013 Sheffield Adventure Film Festival.

If it weren't for the ardent desire to take the most that life has to offer and to dare to turn his life 180 degrees toward the unknown, Allen would have never known the taste of an extraordinary life. "After I graduated from the university, I had to find a job. The problem was that I was studying a subject which I wasn't really interested in – computer science. Though I was really good at it, I couldn't think of anything worse than to be stuck in some office in front of a computer," says Allen. "My parents are both teachers, and they have always encouraged me to take opportunities and to make my own choices. They've never forced me to choose a certain profession and have always supported my decisions. On the other hand, that freedom complicated my task of deciding what I wanted to do in life. I would constantly ponder, 'what if I am missing out on something better?' I guess that's why I got to the age of 23 with a degree on my shelf and still doubting what to do in my life."

Tom and his best friend Andy decided to bring change into their lives by cycling – something that they spent their teenage years doing together. Except this time the plan was to go a "little" farther – to cycle around the world! With no biking experience, with no particular athletic talent and no clue what they would eat or drink, or where they would sleep, they set off equipped with their bikes, a tent, video camera and a dream.

Tom and Andy started their trip in 2007. Thinking to document their journey, the two friends started to do some publicity before setting off, telling

"I chose the word *janapar* because it's simple, personal, unique, intriguing and couldn't be more relevant to the story," says Tom Allen.

everyone about their plan. Soon the news about two lads attempting to cycle around the world reached documentary film director James Newton, who had previously made films for the BBC.

They traveled through the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, and in the winter of 2008, they arrived in Armenia. During the first 10 weeks on the road they were accompanied by another friend, Mark, who had always intended just to cycle around Europe, so ten weeks later he returned to England. The two young men were six months into the trip, however, when Andy also decided to give up the grand plan, and Tom was left all alone with his bike, struggling to keep the dream alive.

"How many times did the thought to turn back and reconsider the entire plan occur to you during the trip?" I asked. "Never," was his response. "I was sick of the options I had in England. So when I left, I didn't leave with any plans to come back. The whole point was to get away from the options in a life that I didn't want. While there were very difficult times, I never felt that going back was an option."

"I met up with Tom and his friend Andy in 2007. They were enthusiastic about their plan, and I could see there was a potential for a story to develop. We talked about them filming their experience on a MiniDV video camera and sending the footage back," says director Newton. "The creative process turned out to be challenging and unpredictable. To start with, it was a question of working out what the story was, and in



fact whose story I was going to focus on. Then it was a process of visualizing the film from over 300 hours of footage and finally getting into an edit suite and working my way through it, reducing it down to the film we have today. I think the biggest challenge was how to structure the film. It was too predictable in a linear fashion, so we ended up starting the story in the middle of the Sahara Desert. From there we could go back and show how he came to be in the desert on his own, and then follow him as he figures out what to do with all the challenges that have come his way."

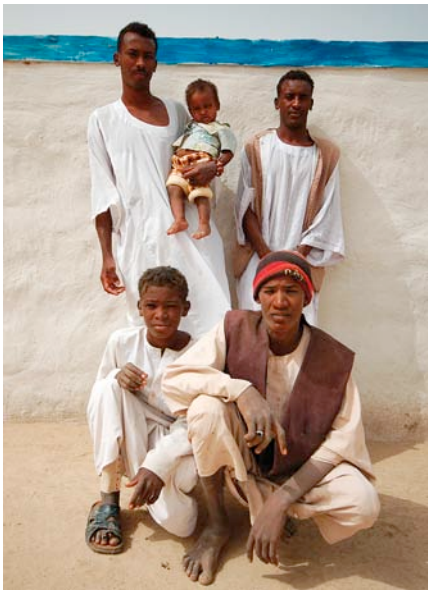
The post in Allen's blog reads, "I finally decided on a title: *Janapar*... It's an Armenian word...I chose the word *janapar* because it's simple, personal, unique, intriguing and couldn't be more relevant to the story. It manages to be pronounceable in English without assistance. And I just like it." The title font was designed from scratch using the Armenian alphabet for influence.

Tom's plan was to get to the Iranian border and continue cycling farther – all the way to India, Australia, South America, Canada and eventually back to England. However, what was supposed to be a three-day stay in Yerevan lasted nine months because of a woman named Tenny Adamian, his future wife. His plan wavered as he suddenly faced the need to choose between settling down or continuing the trip that once constituted all his goals and dreams. At this point Tom's story takes an unexpected detour.

The world premiere of *Janapar: Love on a Bike* was held at the 20th Raindance Film Festival in London



Janapar was awarded the Spirit of Adventure at the 2013 Sheffield Adventure Film Festival









→
Allen's wife,
Tenny Adamian

in Sept. 2012. "Certain things are played in your imagination rather than on the screen," says Tom. Thus he sat down to write a book to complement the film. To raise money for its publishing, Allen launched a Kickstarter campaign, and in only 21 days he received the funds needed to publish the book.
Recalling the months spent in Yerevan, Tom says, "Every morning I used to go to Victory Park to run. It was good to go there early without everyone staring at you, which was an issue sometimes as people were not used to seeing someone cycle or run along the streets of the city. When I first arrived to Yerevan, there weren't too many bicycles around. Nowadays you can see a few more," he says. During that time he got to know the city pretty well, could understand the language enough to get by and found work as a programmer. "Another of my favorite places to go was in the Vernissage market. It was a small café known only to the workers there," he said. "I have many good friends in Armenia. While I've been to many places that are better in terms of living conditions, still, Yerevan is one of those few cities where I could spend the rest of my life."
I asked Tom to revive some of the most memorable episodes from his life on a bike. "We found hospitality in unexpected places," he started. "In Romania, while cycling in the mountains, we came across a village of gypsies. We were always told by the people in Romania and even people outside of the country, that we should stay away and be afraid of gypsies because they were dangerous and would steal our belongings. But what actually happened was the exact opposite. We





Tom and Andy decided to bring change into their lives by cycling, so they traveled throughout Europe and in the winter of 2008, they arrived in Armenia.

were immediately invited to stay in a house with this middle aged couple. They looked after us and gathered mushrooms in the morning to make breakfast. That was just a typical story of people being scared of each other when there was no particular reason for it."
Having traveled to so many countries and encountering all sorts of people on his way, Allen's come to certain conclusions.
"I would say people in general are kind, helpful and hospitable if they feel like it. And if you show up on a bicycle, they usually feel like it," he laughs. "On the other hand, people are paranoid and afraid of each other, making quick judgments when they see someone who looks suspicious. The way you approach people will have a big effect on how they treat you. If you don't expect something bad from them, they'll probably give you what you expect. And if you look afraid and suspicious and treat them in that kind of way, you will most likely receive it in return. I wanted to turn what happened to me into a story that would make sense not just to me but also for someone else."
Allen continues cycling around the world and is planning another trip to Armenia next summer. "Traveling or going on adventure is a simple thing, and you need little to do it. In fact, all you need is time," he says. "Rather than spending money on equipment and making big plans, just keep it simple and start. It is easy to make it more complicated than it can be. Once I left, it was a matter of waking up in the morning and thinking, 'where should I go now?' There is one major thing that I learned as a result of all these trips: living simple is always better." ■

Family Trees from Burma

Bordering the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, with China to its north and Thailand to its southeast, lies the country of Burma. This land, larger than Spain and Portugal combined, is a resource-rich country and can sustain itself by what nature has provided. Currently known as Myanmar, Burma has been influenced by many cultures, religions and governments. While it was under British rule, Armenians played an integral role in its transformation.

Text **Ani Garibyan** | Photo **courtesy of Vahe Apcar**

Author Margaret Sarkissian explains in *Armenians in South-East Asia: Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* that in 1605, "with the aim of stimulating trade within his dominions, Shah Abbas [of Persia] resettled many of the urban Armenians from Julfa [a province in Ottoman Armenia] to the royal capital at Isfahan [Persia] and granted them a monopoly of the silk trade."

New Julfa soon became an epicenter for trade between Europe and Persia. Sarkissian, a professor of music at Smith College, adds that, "Armenians had a great reputation for skill with languages and often acted as interpreters for Europeans in Southeast Asia."

Christianity also played a great role when it came to trusting Armenians as the middlemen of trade. In *Armenian European Relationship in India*, Bhaswati Bhattacharya, a lecturer of art and history at Erasmus University, writes: "When the Portuguese arrived in the East in the sixteenth century, the other factor they shared with the Armenians was faith: Christianity. Armenians were good at taking both sides. To the Europeans, they were more like them, and to the Asians, they were more Asian than European. Armenians were able to establish a trading network that spanned from Holland to China."

Only a handful of Armenian merchants initially settled in Burma. Once their families immigrated there, the community insisted on building an Armenian church and invited an Armenian priest to head the church. The connection of Burma's first Armenian priest is where the stories of native Burmese Noel Minus and John Martin come to play.

The Minus'

Noel Minus' story began when his great-grandfather Mackertich Minassian (Minus, born in Shiraz, Iran) was sent to Mandalay as a priest. As Noel explains, "There was already an Armenian community living in Mandalay, which at that time was part of the Burmese Kingdom. The Armenian community had already built a church and was looking for a priest, preferably from Persia. No married priest would move to Burma, and so the higher-ups in Constantinople sent Mackertich to Burma to be the community's priest." Shortly thereafter, Mackertich met fellow Armenian Miss Johannes, and they married.

By this time Britain had occupied all of Burma and was ushering in a new era in the region with English being the main language of communication. It was replacing the traditional Hindustani and Burmese languages.

"My great-grandmother did not speak English. My father remembered growing up in the complex his grandmother had created, not being able to speak to her in English. They would converse in either Burmese or Hindustani," says Noel. "They were more accustomed to Indian and British food, but they were also exposed to Armenian food such as dolma made of cabbage leaves."

Noel's grandparents' ten children were mainly raised by servants who conversed with the children in English, thus the children never learned to speak Armenian. Noel recalls, "We used to go to church

but mostly on the feast days of Easter and Christmas. We could not understand the sermons." Noel explains further that when there was a marriage in Burma between a Burmese-Armenian and Iranian-Armenian, their children would not speak Armenian. But if the couple married in Iran and then moved to Burma, their children would speak Armenian. Exposure to his roots was heightened when Noel spent his summers with his Iranian-Armenian cousins, attending church and singing in the choir.

Noel began attending the American Baptist College Judson College in Rangoon to study medicine. The college was closed during the spring due to unbearable heat. Noel and his cousins spent their youthful days at the resort town Maymyo. One day when they were biking back to the resort, Noel's cousin demanded, "Come on! We must follow that car!" To which, Noel asked, "What for?" and his cousin explained that a girl in the car winked at him. They quickened their pace in an attempt to reach the vehicle. The cousins were unable to match the speed of the car, but they managed to catch her name – Nancy. They crossed paths again when two years later Nancy attended Judson College to also study medicine. She turned out to be Noel's future wife.

In early 1942, Japan invaded Burma and changed the country forever. Many fled to India, as did Noel's cousins. They sneaked onto a boat in the dark and it wasn't until months later that Noel received word from a person named George Apcar that they arrived safe and were doing well. Soon after that, Noel and his brother headed out in a three-car convoy towards India. On the road, they were advised to abandon their cars because road conditions were unstable and instead to travel by boat. They heeded the warning and continued by boat.

"At a certain point, the men would get off the boats and walk the rest of the way. At times, we had to slash our way through the jungle," says Noel.

The entire trek to India took about 24 days. When they finally arrived in Calcutta, they reconnected with their friends at the Armenian-owned Agabeg Hotel. Eventually, Noel and his cousins relocated to an isolated town in India to be safe from bombings. Two months later, his brother joined them as well. Noel's father stayed behind and luckily survived.



↑ High-ranking priest, Ter Essai Johanness and family, 1918



→ Grandfather of the Martins, 1929

Only a handful of Armenian merchants initially settled in Burma. Once their families immigrated there, the community insisted on building an Armenian church.

The marketplace in Calcutta was not only a place to purchase goods but also a place to receive information about friends and family. One night in the hustle and bustle of the market, Noel learned that Nancy had also escaped to India. That same night, without a moment's hesitation, Noel went to her home and in 1945 they married. Noel explains that "there was a lot of intermarriage between Armenians and Burmese, and Armenians and Anglo-Burmese. There were not enough Armenian girls for the men to marry."

Unlike many, Noel was fortunate enough to continue his education in India.

"I hated that university," he admits. "I was the only non-Indian there. In Burma, there was much more diversity in students."

Upon returning to Burma, he could not find a government job. By then, it was "Burma for the Burmese." He quickly understood that there was no future in his birthplace. They decided to move to Australia and as they prepared to go on their journey the Burmese closed all ports

in Burma. After a second attempt to leave, they decided to remain and opened a business with Nancy's brother. By the late 1940s, Burma had gained independence, and it was difficult for a non-Burmese to build a solid future.

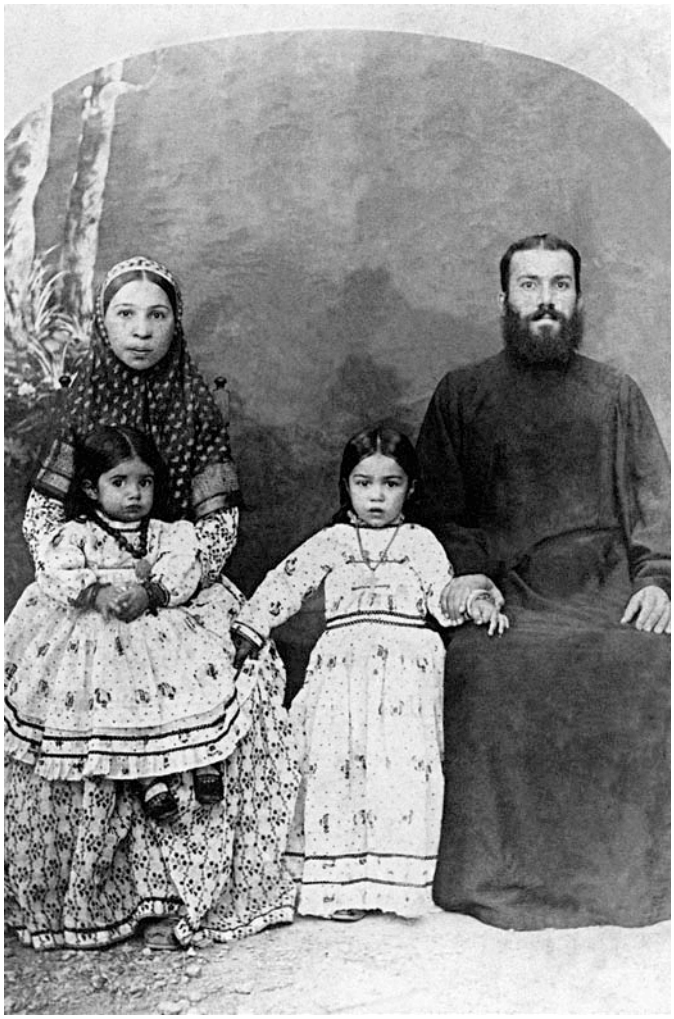
"My cousins who had stayed on in India went to Hollywood, Calif. After a third attempt to move to Australia, we decided to head to California instead in 1951."

Burma's mines attracted President Herbert Hoover, who was known as an outstanding mining engineer. Hoover worked closely with A.C. Martin.

The Martins

Noel's brother married Maisie Martin. The Martin clan moved to Burma from Isfahan, Iran. As Noel explains, the Martin children understood Armenian because their parents were from Iran. Yet their understanding of the language was not as advanced because the children were sent to Darjeeling, India for schooling. In Burma, similar to the Minus', the Martins employed servants who maintained everything on the premises, including their tennis courts. Katherine Martin explained that though she and her sister were already in their early and mid-twenties, they did not know how to make coffee or do laundry until they moved to the United States. She did not remember doing homework, at least not the way it is in the U.S. What she remembers is constantly playing.

"We would just play. We didn't do anything. We were just stupid," she laughs. On weekends, their parents



← Johanness family in New Julfa, 1895

→ Burmese Armenian children performing in a school play.



↑ John and Maisie with parents



→ Graduation photo of Arsham Apcar.

Sarkies Brothers

The Strand Hotel in Rangoon, Burma was considered the jewel of the hotels owned by the Sarkies brothers.

The brothers were born in Isfahan and singlehandedly brought the concept of the luxury hotel chain to South-east Asia.

According to *CNN Travel*, The Strand Hotel has played host to many famous individuals. Some of them have included George Orwell, Noël Coward, Rudyard Kipling, Somerset Maugham, David Rockefeller and George Soros.

Aviet, one of the four Sarkies brothers, bought what was once the British Burma Hotel and renamed it "The Sarkies Hotel."

These hotels have been and continue to be landmarks in Burma and southeast Asia.

One of the biggest names to visit Burma was President Herbert Hoover, who was also the first American president to visit Burma.

Hoover had done so first in 1905 prior to his presidency as a mining engineer. During his visit, he met with A.C. Martin, Burma's mining and railway mogul.



would always host parties. The siblings expressed that they knew more about their mother's side, the Apcar side, compared to the Martin side. John Martin, Maisie's and Katherine's brother, spoke about the country and stated, "Burma is a rich country. They have three rivers. The country produces large amounts of rice, tea and coffee. They have plenty of natural resources."

Northern Burma had silver and ruby mines; rubies of the highest quality came from the mines in Mogok. He proudly spoke about his uncle, A.C. Martin, a mining and railway mogul in Burma. He was part of the team that built the railway connecting Rangoon to Mandalay. A.C. also supported the creation of Burma's many infrastructures. John explained that this resourceful territory once fell under China and with the help of his uncle, the British were able to occupy the mines. These mines also attracted President Herbert Hoover, who was known worldwide as an outstanding mining engineer. Towards the end of his mining career, Hoover was stationed in London and worked closely with mining companies from the British territories, including Burma, where he closely worked with A.C. Martin. Another famous Martin, Uncle Balthazar, also became wealthy and purchased a bank, calling it the Balthazar Bank, which was sold to the Americans who converted it into the American Embassy in Burma.

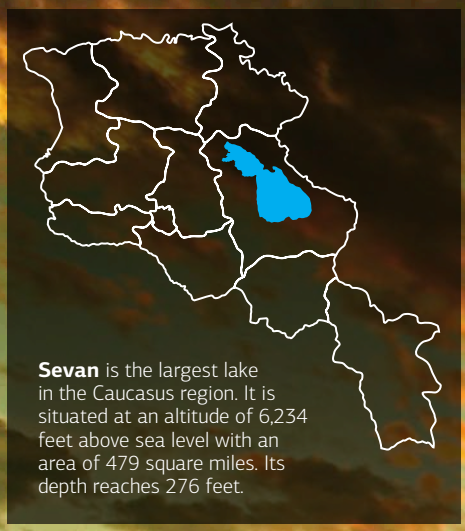
The Martin last name comes from Martirosian. As many Armenians in Burma, the Martins shortened their name to make it easier for the Burmese and English to pronounce. The patriarch of the family owned various stores in Burma. However, not all the Martin uncles became famous in Burma. In fact, some of them were sent back to Iran by the patriarch because they could not run the businesses.

John says, "There was a funny story when my father explained to my uncle that if a customer comes in and you don't have a certain product, suggest a different but similar type. One day, a customer came in and asked my uncle if they had toilet paper. Not quite understanding, he said, 'no, but will sandpaper do?'" John continued with another story regarding shoe polish that was named Cobra. "When another customer asked for Cobra boot polish, his uncle jumped on the counter and started yelling, 'Cobra! Cobra!'" That uncle too was sent back to Iran. Dentist Dr. Yokohama warned the Martins to evacuate to India six months before Japan's invasion of Burma. The Martins would later learn that their dentist was a secret intelligence agent in the Japanese army. As the wealthy evacuated Rangoon, they entrusted their valuables to Balthazar Bank.

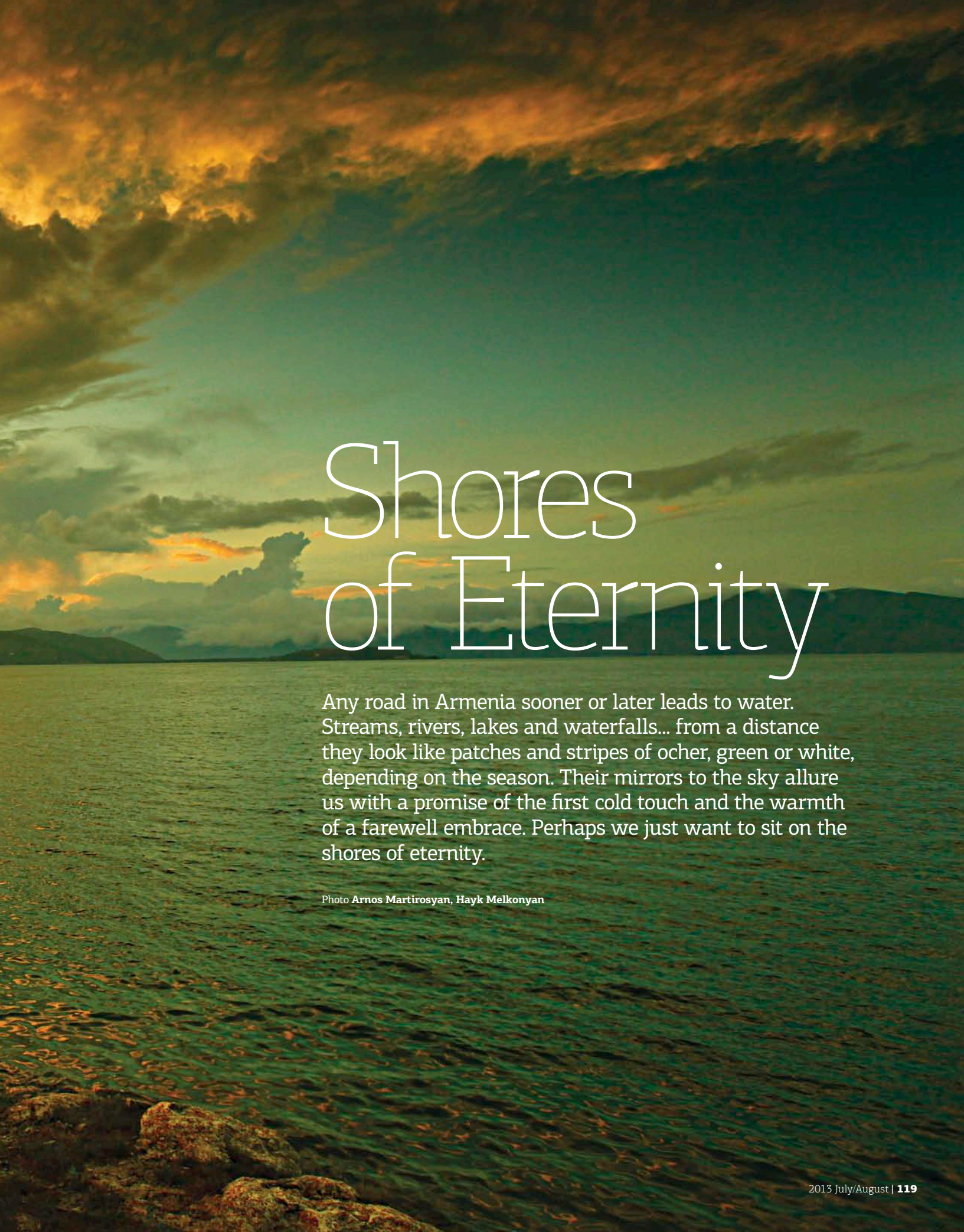
Due to his respect for the Martins and the Balthazars, Dr. Yokohama gunned down a Japanese Colonel on the steps of the Balthazar Bank because of his intentions to rob it.

As the Japanese invasion grew, Martin's father moved his merchandise to another store on Sule Pagoda Road, a location where he had his first liquor business. It was one of the last remaining stores to remain open during the Japanese bombings. The British merchants also gave him their warehouse keys as they fled. However, the Martins evacuated to India. Their father was on one of the last boats to India.

Armenians made a grand impact on the development of Burma similar to their relatives in Singapore, Japan, India, Indonesia and other Asian countries. It is no wonder that Shah Abbas took in these hard-working, business-minded and resourceful people to transform his kingdom. ■



Sevan is the largest lake in the Caucasus region. It is situated at an altitude of 6,234 feet above sea level with an area of 479 square miles. Its depth reaches 276 feet.



Shores of Eternity

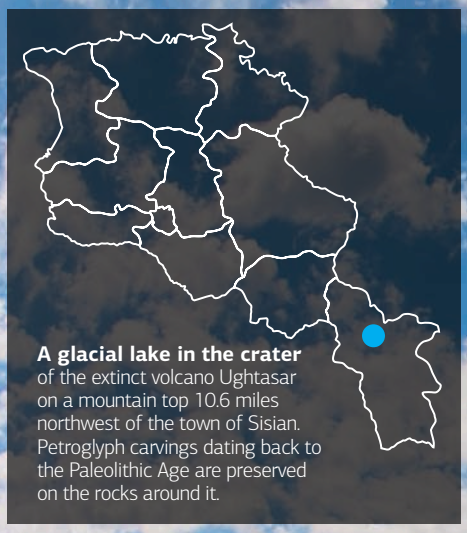
Any road in Armenia sooner or later leads to water. Streams, rivers, lakes and waterfalls... from a distance they look like patches and stripes of ocher, green or white, depending on the season. Their mirrors to the sky allure us with a promise of the first cold touch and the warmth of a farewell embrace. Perhaps we just want to sit on the shores of eternity.

Photo **Arnos Martirosyan, Hayk Melkonyan**



A cascade of waterfalls in the Khachakhpyur River Gorge, about two miles from Yenokavan Village in Tavush Province. It is located at an altitude of 3,661 feet above sea level.





A glacial lake in the crater of the extinct volcano Ughtasar on a mountain top 10.6 miles northwest of the town of Sisian. Petroglyph carvings dating back to the Paleolithic Age are preserved on the rocks around it.





The Mermaid Hair Waterfall in Jermuk is located at an altitude of 6,562 feet above sea level.



The lake in the Rocks of Armenia Park
in Jermuk





Shaki waterfall is located two miles northwest of Sisian and reaches a height of 59 feet.





Kari Lake (Stone Lake) is located at an altitude of 10,522 feet above sea level on the slopes of Mt. Aragats. It has a perimeter of 0.71miles and a depth of 39 feet.



Fun and Games

Today, who remembers when kids of all ages played outdoors and made their own fun? Now, activities are rarely informal and impromptu. Back in the day, kids and adults alike played spontaneously outdoors and often, using their ingenuity, and they created their own games for. The players determined their own challenges of athletic achievement, collaboration and leadership. Vacant lots, back yards, neighborhood streets and sidewalks, and beaches were their playgrounds.

Photos and text provided **Ruth Thomasian from Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives**



Astrik Aznavorian 22-89, Arlington, Massachusetts

Free to Ride

Sisters Louise and Lilliane Zeytounian, ages eight and twelve, pose on this empty street in Rosny-sous-Bois, a small town west of Paris near Ecissy-les-Moulinoux, one of the centers of the Armenian community in Paris. The handwritten message on the back of this black and white snapshot dates it as "Sept. 1944," just days after the liberation of Paris from German occupation during World War II. Streets were empty of privately-owned vehicles because the Germans had confiscated them. One can just imagine the colors of "victory" the sisters are wearing. Their identical dresses and hand-knit argyle knee socks undoubtedly make a great patriotic statement – with no scrapes on their knees. And their four-wheel roller skates, that they called "patins à roulettes," quite possibly provided a mode of transportation for them during the war. Now they look like they are ready to glide into a victory polka.



Anna Shadbegian 33-87, Shrewsbury, Massachusetts

Body Language

Andrew Shadbegian, second from left, and his friends from landlocked Worcester, Mass. show off their muscles at Nantasket Beach in Hull in the 1930s. The human pyramid demonstrates not only their strength, but their trust in each another and their collaborative spirit as well. Today, their smiles, their hands and muscles all talk to us, their new audience.



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The Last Record

If Shavarsh Karapetian lived in Ancient Greece, he and his lifesaving deeds would have become a part of Greek mythology on the same scale as those of Hercules. His heroic acts saved the lives of countless, and it all happened in times of peace. All of that on top of his athletic achievements as a multiple record-holder and world champion finswimmer.

Text **Zori Balayan** | Photo **from the Karapetian family archives**

Close Encounter

The fire started at dawn, and the first passersby was watching in terror as the flames were taking over the structure of the athletic-concert complex on Tsitsernakaberd Hill. It seemed that on that February day of 1985, the city would lose the sports and arts complex that the citizens were so proud of – a magnificent modern structure built just a year earlier. The firefighters were already on site supported by volunteers. Shavarsh Karapetian was one of them.

He noticed the blaze as he was arriving at his workplace across the street. In such critical moments, some people turn the gears of their mind to autopilot – their reactions time up to the highest limits, and they act before the impulses reach their conscience. For him, human dignity prevailed over the basic instinct of survival. Shavarsh picked up the water hose from someone's weakening hands and aimed the powerful water stream on the raging fires. He was amidst a scene of terror – people screaming, walls of the building collapsing, and the firefighters losing consciousness, choking on smoke. And then... an explosion.

Shavarsh could not recall how he had appeared in the intensive care unit of the hospital; he was unconscious when the emergency squad rushed him in.

Chronologically, that was the third of Shavarsh Karapetian's heroic deeds. I started this article with the fire incident because it occurred long after the publication of my book about this amazing person, so naturally it was not included in it. Frankly, it seemed to me that there is something mystical in all of this – for some inexplicable reason Karapetian always happens to be the one who is "there" at "the site of the accident."

The first of such incidents occurred in 1974 in Tsakhkadzor. This mountain resort was built as the Olympic training camp for the USSR athletic teams before the Olympic Games in Mexico. Numerous Soviet athletes and Olympic medalists trained there in conditions of high elevation. Among them were Shavarsh Karapetian and his teammates. On January 8, 1974, he was coming back to Yerevan from Olympic camp. The bus carried more than 30 passengers, many of whom were athletes, singing and joking. On one of the steep road curves, the driver stopped the bus because something went wrong with the engine. He got off the bus to check. At first no one noticed that the bus was slowly rolling down the slope since it was too noisy in the passenger's cabin. Shavarsh was the first one who realized that the driver's seat was empty. In the meantime, the bus was quickly gaining speed, inevitably approaching the edge of a deep canyon. Every second was crucial. Shavarsh broke the glass divider between the cockpit and the passengers' salon with his elbow. He jumped into the driver's seat and hit the brakes. It was no use, the brakes failed. A second more and the bus would have fallen off the cliff. But in just that same instance, Shavarsh turned the steering wheel toward the mountain slope. That was the only right decision and prevented a catastrophe that saved the lives of 30 people. Later, when he was asked how he managed to do that, Shavarsh famously said, "It's just that I was the closest to the cockpit..."



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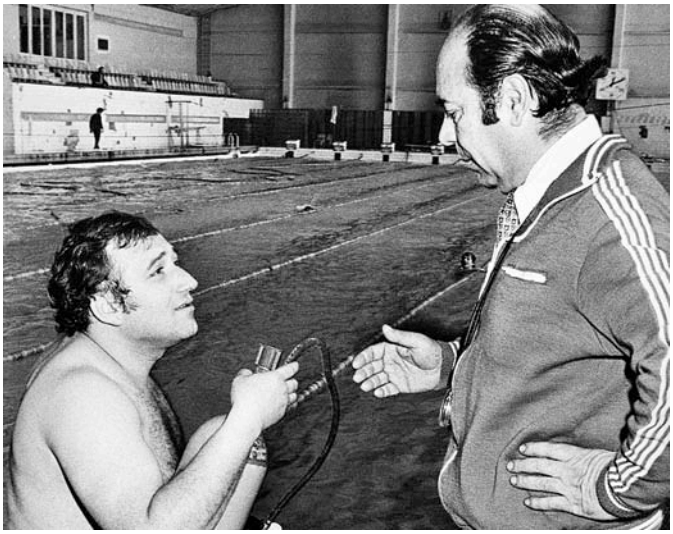
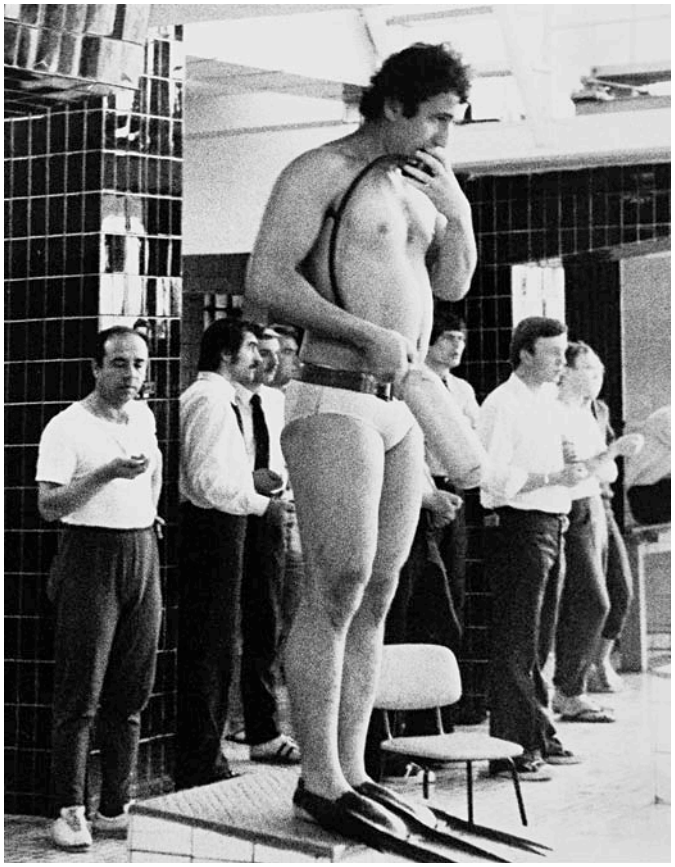
There is something mystical in all of this – for some inexplicable reason Karapetian always happens to be the one who is "there" at "the site of the accident."

The Price of Seconds

The second time Shavarsh Karapetian happened to be at the epicenter of an extreme situation was in 1977. A trolleybus full of passengers was crossing a dam over the Yerevan Water Reservoir, which the citizens call "the sea." No one will ever know why the street car abruptly turned sideways, crashed through a low barrier and fell into 20 meters of water. As I was looking through this voluminous case compiled by the investigative commission, the terrible picture of the accident passed before my eyes. The trolleybus dived into the water nose first, and there on the very bottom was the driver himself. It was impossible to tell the exact reasons why it happened, but the forensic experts established that the driver had a history of heart disease. His medical card also stated that he suffered from hypertension. It is possible that passing through the dam the driver lost consciousness, fell to the side and involuntarily turned the wheel.







← (Top) Shavarsh Karapetyan during the USSR Underwater Swimming Championship in Kiev, 1974.

← Shavarsh with his coach Liparit Almasakyan

↑ Shavarsh's brother Kamo before the race

At that same time Shavarsh Karapetian's father, Vladimir, was driving home by the reservoir. He knew that his two sons were practicing there. He often visited them during their long practices, which sometimes lasted for four, even eight hours. That day Shavarsh and Kamo had a regular intensive practice. Shavarsh had just completed his usual 20-kilometer warm-up run (a champion's warm-up), when he saw an unbelievable sight – a trolleybus plunging through the air. And a few seconds later, concentric water circles covered the top of the vehicle. In an article about Shavarsh, journalist Yevgeny Bocharov wrote: "It's striking that it took him only a fraction of a second to come up with a decision, which became the most significant decision of his life. In the meantime, just like the rest of us, he spends many hours, sometimes weeks, on many far less significant decisions. But here – just an instant." It is understandable, however, that these seconds for Shavarsh and Kamo were different from those for most people.

The fact that the two brothers were there at the water reservoir was pure coincidence. Just as it was when Shavarsh was the closest person to the driver's seat in the bus in 1974. However, there is a legitimate explanation why the first people to arrive at the site of the accident were the two brothers. They were not professional runners, but they covered the distance to the location of the accident with the speed of sprinters, and seconds later they were in the water.

They were both equals and rivals in sports. The two brothers were the two best finswimmers and divers in the world, and it showed when they were needed most. Earlier that year Shavarsh said in an interview, "My strongest rival in sprint is my brother, Kamo." The interview was right after he had set his tenth world record in finswimming. Kamo came in second, a second behind.

The trolleybus submerged into water ten meters deep. It's hard to dive that deep without diving equipment, but the brothers had the ability to dive as deep as 30 meters. And the most crucial factor in that situation was speed.

Both brothers are world record holders in short distance finswimming. So it was just a coincidence that they were in the location of the accident in that particular moment of time. Everything else seemed carefully planned. The older brother immediately took command. "I will pull people out of the bus, you will take them from me." An instant later Shavarsh dived into the complete darkness of the water. He had to be extremely quick and efficient. Everything, every breath of air in his lungs, every move, and mental commands he was giving himself, were quick and short. Holding to the poles of the trolleybus, he kicked out one of the large side windows and swam into the bus full of shocked and unconscious people.

Shavarsh reached as many people as he could find and quickly pulled them up to the surface. There Kamo grabbed





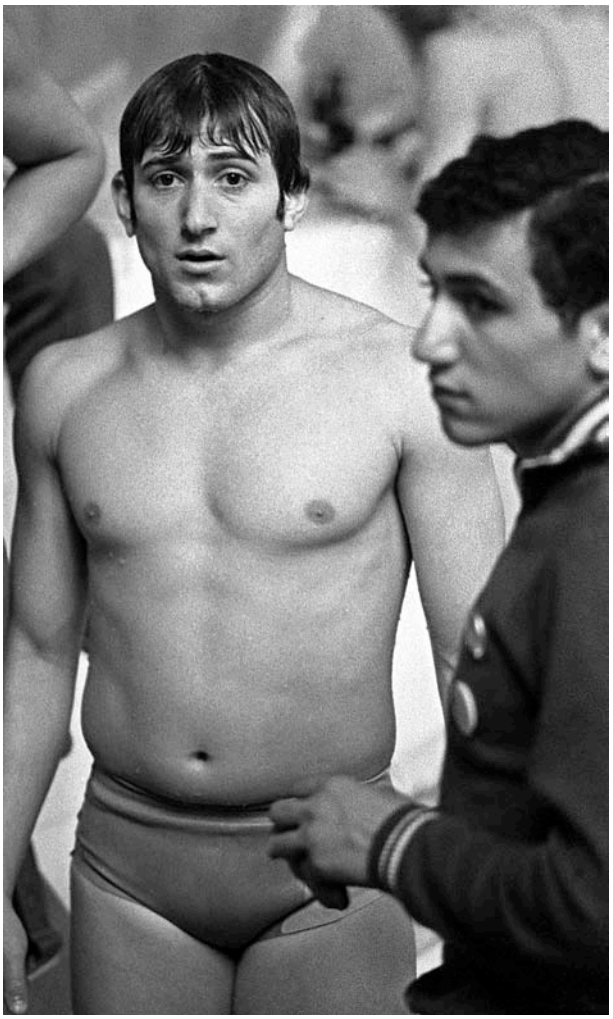
Fish in the Water

When analyzing Shavarsh's style, the finswimming experts noted that the celebrated champion is like a fish in the water when competing against worthy contenders in the lanes next to him. "The competition between equals turns sports into poetry." There wasn't a single instance when he swam with equal times in different races with his contenders that he would not win the final race. On August 17, 1973, the main USSR newspaper *Pravda* reported that Karapetian and Vladimir Kon showed equal results in the 50-meter diving race. There was an additional race, which Karapetian won. A similar incident occurred in March of 1975. The newspaper *Vecherny Leningrad* wrote that Karapetian and Stanislav Kopaigorodsky showed similar results, which were equal to Shavarsh's previously established world record time. However, in the additional race, the athlete from Yerevan was able to swim faster, beating his own world record. In September 1975, Karapetian once more became the European Champion. He was 22-years old at the time. Athletes from 16 countries competed in that championship. The French media called his success "phenomenal" and his results in the 100- and 800-meter distance race "fantastic." Experts wrote the following: "His swimming technique is polished to the smallest of details. Each stroke of his monofin is like a push by the tail fin of a big fish, which moves him quickly forward. He knows exactly how many moves he should make to reach the end of the distance. He is a master of a highest class."



Shavarsh Karapetian had just completed his usual 20-kilometer warm-up run when he saw an unbelievable sight – a trolleybus plunging through the air.

the victims and pulled them to the safety boat. On that boat was their coach Liparit Almasakian, who was an expert scuba-diver and rescuer. He helped people to recover once they were in his hands. As for Shavarsh, he would take a big breath and dive in for the next victim. His only thoughts were, "I can't waste any second. Save! Save as many people as possible." He could not rely on anyone else, because no one else there knew how to dive to that depth. Some people tried, but did not succeed. Kamo himself could have tried to dive a couple of times, but then the rhythm of the two rescue teams would have been disrupted, and they would have lost the most important thing in this situation, their sense of security. Shavarsh was plunging underwater knowing that if something happened to him, Kamo would be there to help. Moreover, Kamo was taking each person not from the surface, but underwater. He already knew where to expect his brother, so he swam in his direction. And since he was less tired, he swam the last distance to the surface much faster than his



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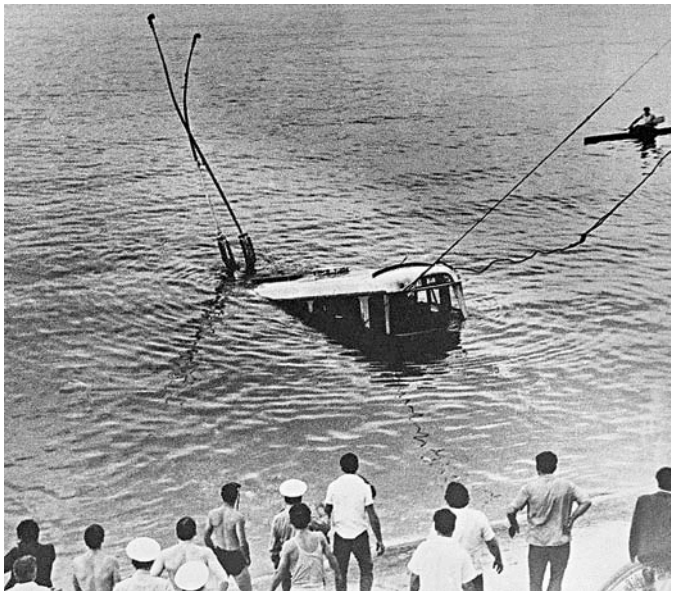
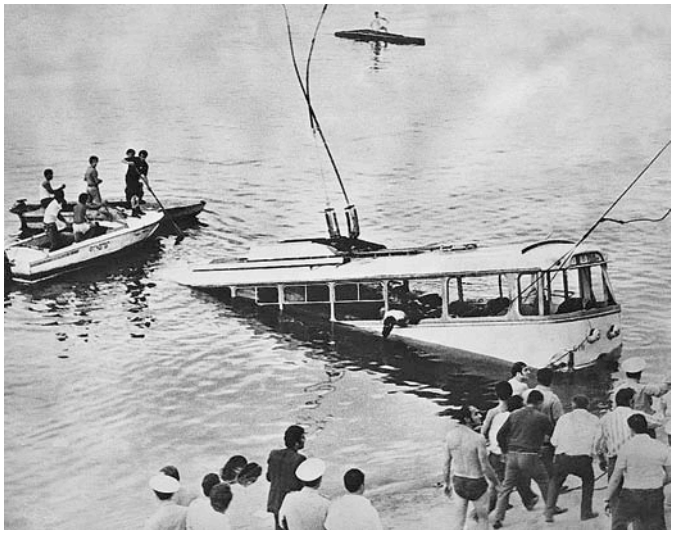


brother. Those were the seconds they won, seconds the price of which lives were saved.
In the meantime, their father was watching them from the crowd on the shore. Each time his older son submerged, the father held his breath until Shavarsh appeared on the surface again. Later Vladimir said, "That day I died many times, but I also resurrected just as many times."
Once Shavarsh came up to the surface to restore his lung ventilation, it became obvious that his body was completely cut and bruised by the sharp edges of the shattered window glass. But he dived in again. It took him 40 seconds each time to bring up the next injured victim, but this time a minute passed and he did not appear. Kamo dived in after him, 30 more seconds passed – no sight of either of them. Already thousands of people gathered on the shore watching the rescue operation. They stood there holding their collective breaths. And only when the two brothers appeared on the



It looked like a relay race: Shavarsh passed the rescued people to his brother, Kamo in turn passed them to his coach on the boat, and the coach lifted them to the emergency personnel.

surface again did a sigh of relief pass over the crowd. Later, people learned what had happened underwater. A passenger, although unconscious, instinctively clutched to the feet of the rescuer, obstructing his movements.
The only thing to do in this situation on the part of the rescuer is to relax and stop any movements, then the drowning person will let go of the rescuer. That's exactly what Shavarsh did. But each time he'd let go, the victim clung to his legs yet again, so Shavarsh had to start all over. Precious seconds were lost and the struggle became physically draining.
When the eighth and ninth victims were rescued, a line of ambulances was waiting on the shore. Doctors immediately provided first aid, CPR and a direct shot of adrenalin into the coronary muscle. Next, the injured were rushed straight to the hospital. It looked like a relay race: Shavarsh passed the rescued people to his brother, Kamo in turn passed them to his coach on the boat, and the coach lifted them to the emergency personnel on the shore.





← The ill-fated trolleybus, pulled out of the water

In about ten minutes, the Karapetian brothers rescued 12 people.

Soon Shavarsh saw the cranes, equipment, militia, and the firefighters' squads trying to pull the trolleybus out of the water. It took them some time to hook the cables and pull out the bus. Too much time. Thus, overcoming pain and exhaustion, he dived in over and over again. And, again in complete darkness, he tried to pull up the next motionless body. He pulled for several meters before he realized that something was wrong, that he was pulling up a passenger seat. "A human life could have been saved instead," he thought with remorse.

In spite of Shavarsh's determination to save them all, time was working against him. No matter how fast he rushed, people were dying inside. It was crucial to pull out the bus. So it was decided that he would help to attach the cable to the trolley. He had to break one more window, get into the passenger salon holding the metal cable, swim to the other side and get to the surface, pulling the heavy cable with him. Just as the dreadful trolley bus slowly appeared on the surface, gushing out dark water in all directions, Shavarsh lost consciousness.

It turned out he was much better in the water. As soon as he got out, he felt cramps in his legs. The abrupt temperature changes – running a distance of 20 kilometers, which heated up his body, then the endless submersions in cold water did the damage.

Shavarsh was bedridden for 45 days. He had pneumonia and blood infections and a fever that lasted for a month and a half. All those days and nights his mother Hasmik was by his bedside. The thermometer showed 40 degrees Celsius most of the time. He gained consciousness only on the 46th day. He touched his legs and was astounded to discover that his strong muscular legs felt thin and weak. He tried to get up, but couldn't. He asked his mother for a mirror, but she refused. He did not insist when he saw her tears. He could not understand what was going on for a long time.

The Karapetian brothers pulled more than 25 people out of the water, but only 20 were brought back to life. Many of them visited the Karapetians at home. They were told that Shavarsh was ill, but recovering. Many other rescued people learned that they were saved by the Karapetian brothers and their coach Liparit Almasakian only much later.

It was not surprising since people were brought to the hospital in an unconscious state. Even the doctors were not aware that all these people were saved by just one person with the support of two others. They were confident that people had been saved by a massive rescue operation executed by a team of professionals.

Then there's that photograph in the special investigation commission's file: a trolleybus coming up from the water. On the shore, several steps away there is a young man in a swimsuit, Shavarsh Karapetian. Examining closer, you can tell that he could hardly stand on his feet. Seconds later, he would fall unconscious.

The Gold Fish

Fifty days later Shavarsh finally stood up in the hospital room. On the 57th day he walked out of the hospital. Two months later he resumed his training sessions in the swimming pool. At the end of the third month, right before the New Year, he was at the training camp in Tsakhkadzor. In mid-March he decided to participate in the USSR Cup. No one knew the reason for his long absence. ▸



During that time many international competitions took place. But the name of the much-celebrated athlete was not on the list of champions – or even the participants. I thought that perhaps the guy had just gone the distance, burned out, did his best in sports and left. Star athletes are like meteorites: a flash, a bright tail of the falling star, and then… they vanish without a trace. No one knew at that time what had happened to Shavarsh. The media remained silent for the next five years!

Neither did anyone know that the pneumonia had left scars on his lung tissue, and each breath caused him pain and severe coughing. Shavarsh was hiding it not only from his close friends and family, but also from himself. He longed to go back to the competitive sport, eager to win again. And more than anyone else, he came to the realization that this was the end of his sports career. He was hoping that in that last competition he would be able to compete with two of his adversaries for the championship, Anatoly Sergin and Anatoly Karazaev. However, the drawing set up the participants differently.

The scoreboard indicated that the world record time for the 400-meter swim with an aqualung was three minutes, 11.1 seconds. These statistics were repeated several times by the announcer, who also said that Sergin and Karazaev were the favorites to win because the celebrated champion Karapetian did not appear to be in athletic shape. After all, he had not participated for the last six months.

Shavarsh was concerned; the draw separated him from Sergin and Karazaev, which meant that he had to compete against his own time. He was also afraid to swim the distance in equal time with them. If that happened, he wouldn't have the stamina to compete in an additional race. However, nobody was aware of his physical and mental state before the start – the last start of his swimming career.

> On the last turn, it became obvious that there would be a new world record. As the swimmers reached the finish line, the board showed a new world record: three minutes, 09.5 seconds.

The first race was led by the one of the most experienced sprinters in the world, Sergin. In the last few meters, they swam to loud cheers. All eyes were on the clock, which showed that he was beating the world record. When his time – three minutes, 11 seconds – appeared on the board next to the three minutes, 11.1 seconds of the world record, fans jumped



Shavarsh Karapetian

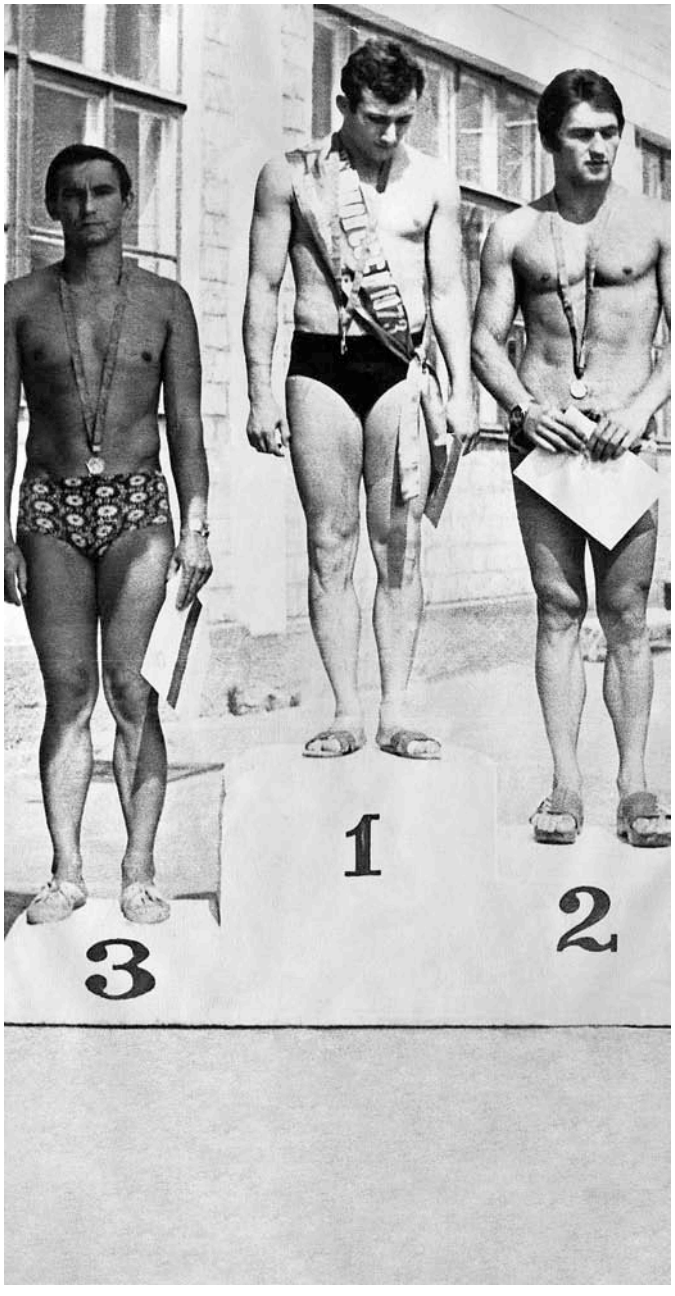
- Born on May 19, 1953 in Kirovakan, presently Vanadzor.
- Seven times USSR champion, 15 times winner of the USSR Cup, 11 world records; 17 times world champion, 13 times European Champion.
- Received the "Fair Play" honor by the International Olympic Committee.
- After retiring from competitive sports, he moved from Armenia to the United States, and then in 1993 to Russia, where he started his shoe repair store "Second Breath."
- Currently the Honorary President of the Russian Association of Underwater Swimming.
- The junior competitions in diving are named after him.
- In 2007, the charity organization Shavarsh Karapetian Foundation was established.
- A main belt asteroid discovered by Nikolai Chernykh in 1986 was named "3027 Shavarsh" in Karapetian's honor.

up from their seats in celebration. Then it was announced that Karazaev would swim in the same lane in the second race. From then on the excited audience remained standing. It was an extraordinary chance to witness two world records happening in the same lane. Each splash of the monofin closed the gap between the swimmer's time and the world record.

On the last turn, it became obvious that there would be a new world record. As the swimmers reached the finish line, the board showed a new world record: three minutes, 09.5 seconds.

Shavarsh Karapetian had to start in the third race. He also had to swim in the same lane as the two previous competitors. His main concern was his breathing. He was afraid his lungs would fail him, and he would start coughing, or that an allergic rash would spread all over his body. It had happened frequently after September's incident. Allergies prevented him from spending a long time in the water, which was ironic for a man who was called "The Gold Fish" by the media. However, history has known many such incidents. Beethoven lost his hearing, the famous Russian artist Vrubel – his eyesight, the world record champion in high jump Broumel, broke his leg, and now a superstar swimmer could not spend a long time in the water. After just 400 meters, he suffered an allergy attack. There was only one solution – to pass these last 400 meters as quickly as possible. Shavarsh swam faster than ever. He didn't hear the noise of the audience. He didn't even hear Kamo, who knew better than anyone else about his brother's supreme abilities, but also knew his health problems.

So when Shavarsh touched the wall of the lane, Kamo jumped into the water. He noticed the red spots on his shoulders and knew Shavarsh would not be able to get out without help. The brothers hugged in the water. Finally, holding close to his brother, Shavarsh gave in to the asthma attack. The noise from the audience didn't stop. Fans tossed flowers into the water. Shavarsh could not understand what was going on. He didn't know yet that he had set a new world record: three minutes, 06.2 seconds. It was his 11th world record, his last one, and the world celebrated with him. He was honored by the millions, but especially by those 20 people whose saved lives became the highest of the Karapetian brothers' achievements. ■

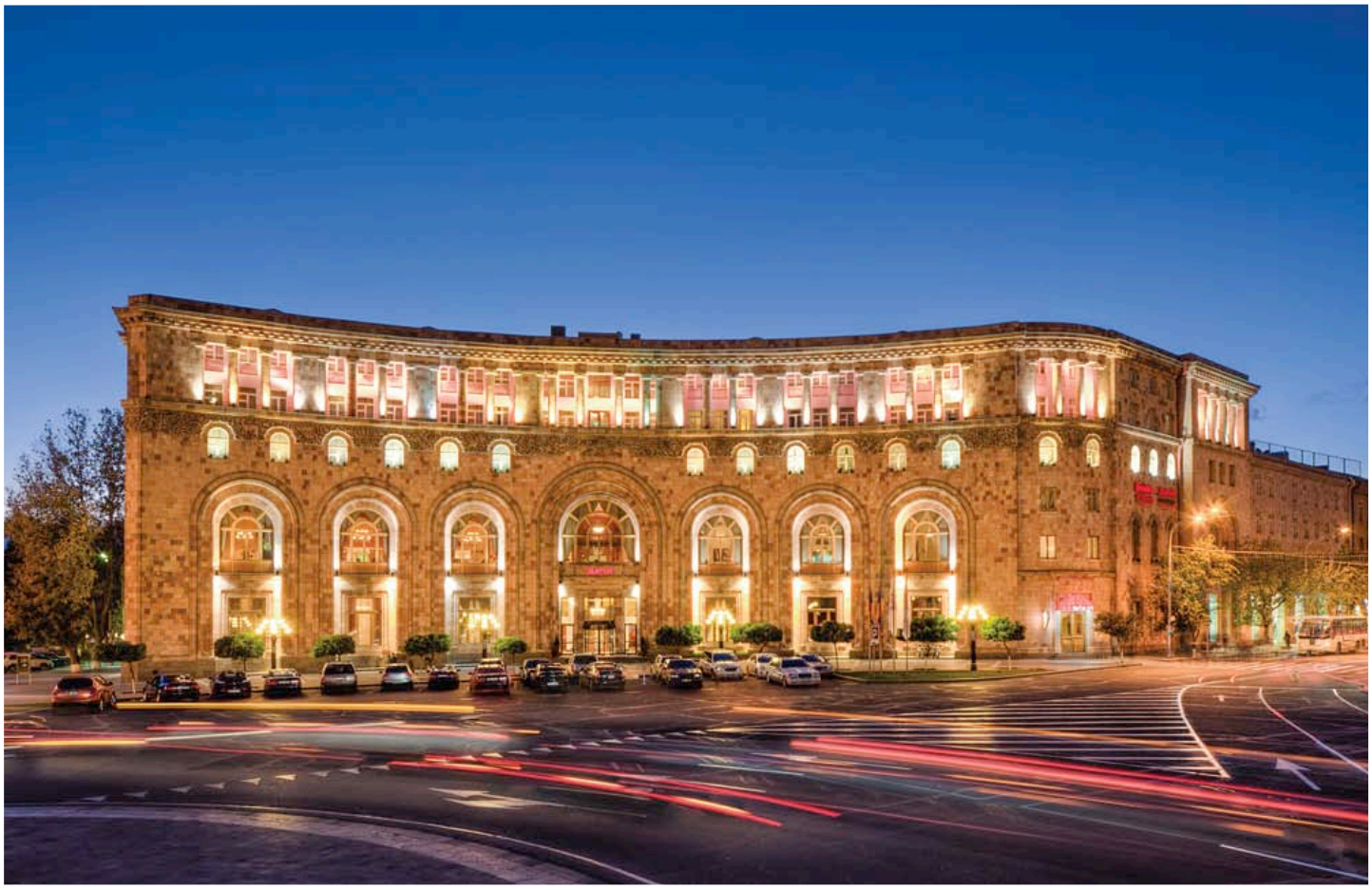


club* — ակումբ *[a-koomb]



Tennis Club

Generations of tennis players were raised on the courts of the Orange Fitness and Tennis Club, formerly known as Hrazdan Courts. The complex has six clay and three hard surface courts as well as two indoor courts, one of which is universal. Volleyball, basketball and football can be played there in all seasons and weather conditions. The fitness center also includes modern sports facilities and a swimming pool for a variety of fitness classes, as well as lodging accommodations. Originally developed in the 1970s, the Orange Fitness and Tennis Club is in the area of the Tsitsernakaberd Park, in close proximity to the largest stadium in Armenia, Hrazdan Stadium with a capacity of 58,000. The location of these sports complexes is hardly coincidental. They are built around the same hill where the Memorial to the Victims of the Armenian Genocide is located. While the Memorial's 44-meter stele symbolizes the national rebirth of Armenians, the cultural and sports complexes in the vicinity embody the nation's youth, healthy lifestyle, sports and athletics.



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