

HYEBRED MAGAZINE

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Stronger together

Cover artist: Anaïs Chagankarian

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A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

Dear Reader,

HyeBred Magazine's Strong Armenian Women theme was voted by you. What a perfect time to celebrate and support the strong women around us.

Within these pages you will find heart, tears, joy, and above all . . . resilience.

Thank you to Anaïs for designing a powerful piece of art for the cover of this issue.

Thank you to all the contributors. You have put your heart and soul into your poetry, art, and essays. It is an honor that you chose HyeBred Magazine as a home for your work. And thank you, reader, for your endless support and enthusiasm.

Shnorhagalutyun,

Rafaella Safarian

Founder and Editor-in-Chief



Anais Chagankerian (cover artist)

is a graduate in International Conflict Analysis and Geopolitics, a book lover and an art enthusiast based in the Paris Suburbs. Currently, she works in project management in the cultural sector. In 2017, she created an online project called Anahit of Erebuni whose overall goal is to provide a safe place where Armenian womxn can exchange about their experiences, support each other and amplify their voices and visibility in order to promote a more inclusive, equal and peace-oriented Armenian society. @anahitoferebuni
<https://anahitoferebuni.wordpress.com>

A Love Poem

Each day I walk through my city
I fall deeper and deeper
She treats me so kind
Let's me know she's a keeper

Can't fall in love with a person
But now I've got you
You'll open my heart
And tell me the truth

That I am enough
As long as I'm here
That all of my loneliness
Will hold me quite near

To my own heart's beating
As my city beats with me
To my own skin breathing
As she kisses my feet

With every step I take
On her gentle ground
With every move I make
As the mountains spin round

And hug me and my city
And hold us both together
Wrapped in gentle giants
In that cold and damp weather

I may not know love for another
But I know love for me
I know love for my city
For she decided to love me

How lucky I am
That I managed to find her
This little slice of land
Is my Bari reminder

That I have a home
Though I was not born here
That I'm not alone
That there's nothing to fear

So thank you my darling
Kirovakan
I never knew that in love
I could be so far gone

Sashka Avanyan

Born in Houston, raised in Moscow and educated in Montreal, Sashka Avanyan is a filmmaker who after studying philosophy at the University of McGill, decided to repatriate to Armenia. She now lives in the city of Vanadzor working as filmmaker and call center manager. Since moving to Armenia she is discovering her Armenian identity primarily through the mediums of film and poetry. All of her work can be found at avanyan.com

3 Cups of Coffee

An ode to my mother, Marina Khubesrian, and my mentor and friend, Suzie Abajian, who are, respectively, Mayor and School Board President of South Pasadena, CA this year and proud Armenian Immigrants.

We sit at the kitchen table with 3 cups of coffee, laughing, smiling, joking, toasting, planning, plotting, making alliances, sharpening our weapons, putting on our armor...

We laugh about the time I asked my great aunt how to say “cheers” in Armenian and she thought I said “cheese,” and now when we drink to life and family and health we say “panir!”

We smile about the time my grandmother called Disneyland, where we had gone on vacation, because no one was answering her calls and she thought we had died.

We joke about our Armenian relatives abroad eagerly reacting to every single one of our Facebook status updates.

We toast to our ancestors who passed on a responsibility to confront injustice everywhere.

We plan to honor the generations of women whose brothers were put on pedestals.

We plot to topple outdated systems and instill equity.

We make alliances with other diaspora women from every corner of the world.

We sharpen the tips of our eyeliner pencils so no one can avoid our gaze.

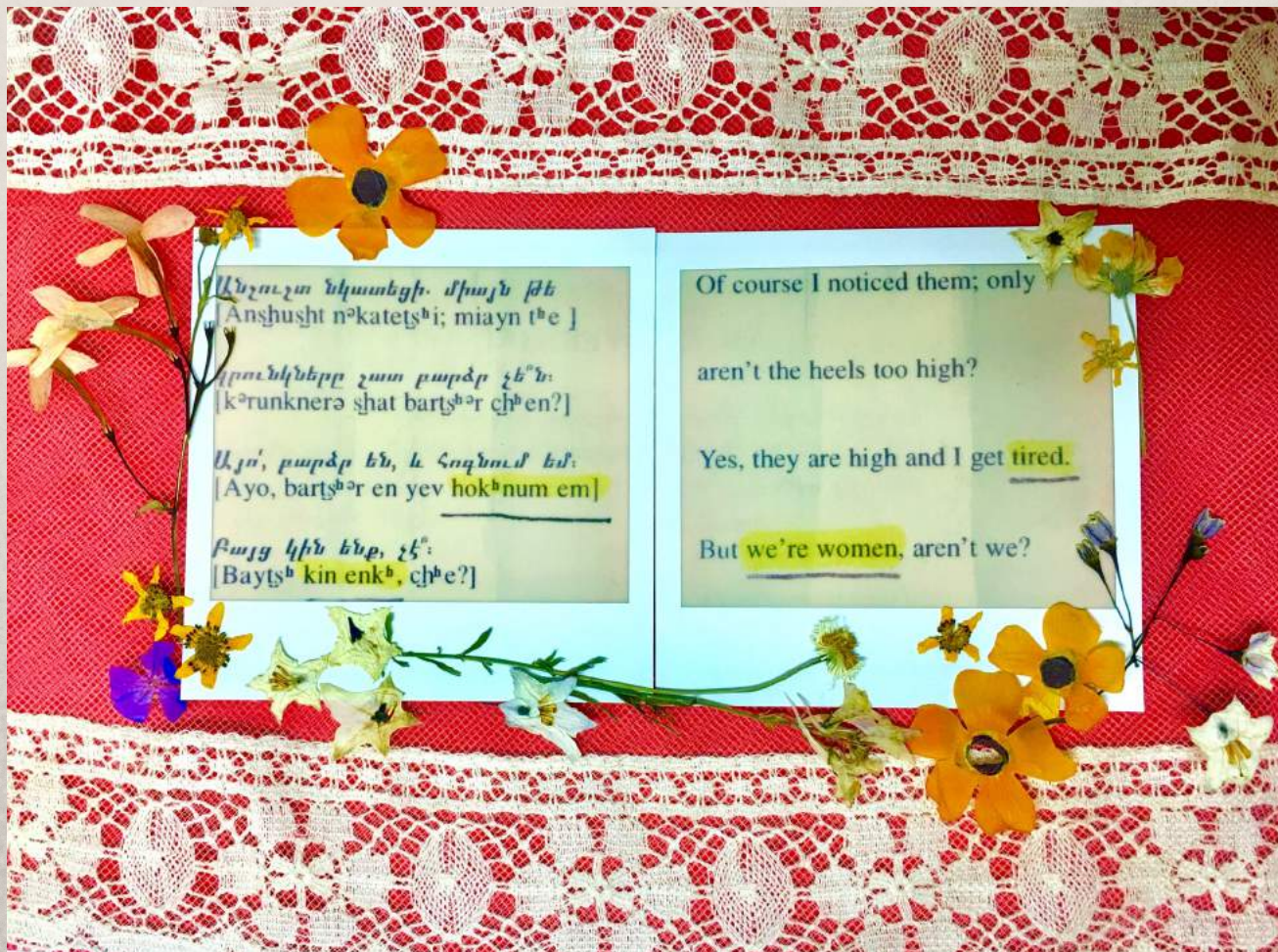
We put on our armor; our blazers, boots and golden jewelry.

And then, we flip over our coffee cups, hug and kiss, and go out and change the world.

Sofie Armine Dreskin

is currently a student planning to study media arts and global studies. She was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA by an Armenian immigrant mother and a Jewish father. Her mother is the first Armenian woman and Armenian born immigrant to be mayor of a US city. Dreskin’s work features her multicultural heritage and is continually inspired by the strong women in her life.

Armenian Lesson




From the book 'Eastern Armenian for the English-speaking World' by Dora Sakayan.

This sample conversation from my Armenian language text book stood out to me for its cultural relevance and its humanistic tinge. I'd like to think that this is the female authors' tongue-in-cheek feminist self critique. To me this exemplifies Armenian Women's strength. The assumed and unspoken demands we to take on, physical and mental, which are often diminished. I wanted to surround this text with elements of feminine craft, art forms which are also often undervalued.

Caro Yagjian

is a fine artist and photographer based in Oakland California. A descendent of Armenians that fled the genocide for life in Massachusetts.

Instagram @Rogue_states

An artistic photograph of a kitchen scene. In the foreground, a woven basket sits on a wooden surface, filled with several ripe, red tomatoes. To the right, a clear glass vase holds a bouquet of dried, light-colored flowers. In the background, a dark-colored pot hangs from a rack against a light-colored wall. The overall atmosphere is warm and rustic.

An Armenian daughter hungers for five more minutes

by Armen Bacon

"The kitchen. La cucina, the true mother country, this warm cave of the good witch deep in the desolate land of loneliness, with pots of sweet potions bubbling over the fire, a cavern of magic herbs, rosemary and thyme and sage and oregano, balm of lotus that brought sanity to lunatics, peace to the troubled, joy to the joyless, this small twenty-by-twenty world, the altar a kitchen range, the magic circle a checkered tablecloth where the children fed, the old children, lured back to their beginnings, the taste of mother's milk still haunting their memories, fragrance in the nostrils, eyes brightening, the wicked world receding as the old mother witch sheltered her brood from the wolves outside."

Excerpt from "The Brotherhood of the Grape," John Fante (1977)

This passage. It's pasted inside a makeshift cookbook created by my mother and given to my daughter on the eve of her wedding day. Inside lives dozens of recipes, most of them Armenian – perfected in my mother's kitchen, the center of the universe, a place where time and worries always came to a screeching halt, remedied by the aroma of baked breads, delicious stews, and as she often confessed, "leftover vegetables quietly wilting on their deathbed" but somehow miraculously resuscitated by simmering chicken broth, a handful of secret spices, a few squeezes of lemon and, of course, her magic touch.

Even in death, she continued luring me in, the memory of her kitchen eternally etched into crevices of my heart. This morning, while attempting to replicate her cabbage soup, the one she liked drenching in lemon, I felt her breath on the nape of my neck – maybe a quiet heavenly whisper or nod of tacit approval.

"We must pass our stories, memories, rituals and recipes down to our children and grandchildren," she always insisted, preferring *pilaf* over potatoes, *bosturma* over bologna, string cheese over cheddar.

No matter what time or day of week, I could never refuse an invitation to sample a batch of her fresh-out-of-the-oven *gata*, Armenian sweetbread filled with *khoriz*, a harmonious blend of butter, sugar and flour. Like her mother and her mother's mother, there was no exacting recipe – they were

baked by *achkachap* (“eye measure”), although I did once stand over her shoulder with paper and pencil, a voyeur to her delicious witchcraft, trying to discreetly measure how much was being scooped into her palm – watching as she grabbed and caressed ground lamb and parsley, chopped onions and peppers, her artistry undeniable. The primitive notes (permanently stained from my ill-fated attempts), will never be a match for her culinary gifts. I remember watching her knead the dough, feeling its texture and consistency, inhaling the scent while it baked – just long enough until her nose signaled a three minute warning that it was almost ready to make its debut from oven to cooling rack.

Her kitchen was an island unto itself, a land of pure perfection, except for the time she left a potholder in the oven and had to call firemen to douse the flames. Even then, she insisted on feeding the entire crew before allowing them to leave, threatening they would insult Armenian ancestors if they didn’t at least sample the fruits of her labor.

Her pies brought joy to the heart-broken. Her chicken soup cured common colds, the heartier lentil rendition a sundry for stubborn viruses. The simplicity of her buttered noodles brought calm to the beautiful chaos and calamity of great-grandchildren entering the front-screened door. Scattering like ants, they awaited her summons to the tiny table where she dished out love-infused pasta or cabbage stew and then surprised them with warm tapioca pudding. The sight of this ritual handed down through generations made both mouth and eyes water.

I can’t recall a time ever leaving her house empty-handed. Scavenging cardboard boxes, she had a pantry full of containers – ranging from Cool Whip, Ziploc, Pyrex to Dollar Store disposables. She loved sending me home with leftovers.

“Go feed your husband,” she would say.

If I’d had a good day of writing, there was nothing better than the drive to my mother’s house where I was safe to barge in, open the refrigerator door, knowing with certainty I could find a stray serving of lemon meringue pie or fresh apple cake, the perfect reward. If plagued with a case of writer’s block, the affliction often prompting me to take the exact same course of action – heading straight to her house, calling in advance so she could whip something up to comfort my writing woes, hoping it would break the curse. No matter what the mood or occasion, the tiny altar of her kitchen table offered comfort, respite and soothing second to none.

In the months leading up to her passing, she tried teaching me how to make *kufta*. Thanks to modern day technology, I have a video of her fingers busy at work showing me the right way to “*shaghel*” the lamb, insert the “*pore*.”

When my mother fell in early November 2017, it would be the last time we would break bread together in her tiny kitchen. But the aromas would persist. She died one month later on December 15, 2017.

This was never supposed to happen. We had practiced balancing; walking slow and steady, finding shoes with just the right grip to secure her steps on carpet and concrete. Sales clerks at Macy's knew us by name. Even in her darkest hours we both thought she'd live forever, at least till 100, as she had promised on numerous occasions.

A lingering sense of betrayal haunted me for months as I rummaged through drawers and shelves, closets and cupboards – a lame effort to reconstruct her life, instant replay each nuance – keep her in the present tense.

My mother and I had shared an existential crisis, both of us refusing to admit the end was nearing. I continued buying her red Estée Lauder lipstick. She purchased new clothes. Changed her hairdo. Announced to the world she planned on someday dancing at her great-grandchildren's weddings.

Her home, the space carrying her scent and possessions but mostly her life story, remains sacred. Touching, even daring to move treasured photographs and keepsakes, especially her handmade collection of quilts, feels awkward, disrespectful – an invasion of privacy.

Gravitating to her kitchen table, the place we often sat analyzing the world, airing confessions, discussing church politics, negotiating weekend outings, my eyes fixate on her collection of ancient mixing bowls handed down from my grandmother. A few inches away is her ceramic cat filled with paper clips, pens, variegated sticky notes filled with unfinished to do's.

“Make dolma for Armen.”

The sight of her handwriting brings a smile leaving me breathless and hungering for five more minutes.

Mothers nurture our souls. They feed our hopes and hurts. This morning, Fante's words remind me how blessed I was to have been raised in an Armenian household where no matter what the crisis or concern, the kitchen table, anchored by the woman who brought me into this world, remains a forever perfect sanctuary, and indeed, protection from “the wolves outside.”



Mother and Daughter Making Kuftha
Photo Credit: Gina Taro

Armen Bacon

made her authorial debut with the powerful memoir, “Griefland - An Intimate Portrait of Love, Loss and Unlikely Friendship,” a story of two women whose words and astonishing friendship helped them survive the ultimate loss. Her second book, “My Name is Armen – A Life in Column Inches,” contains a decade’s worth of essays on family, friends, love and loss. Her third book, “My Name is Armen (Volume II), Outside the Lines,” takes readers beyond the margins of everyday life – always circling back, returning home – celebrating the resilience of the human spirit.

While she lists William Saroyan as her literary hero, she credits her mother and Armenian roots, her heritage and family as the true inspiration for her writing.

poetry & art by Ani Luspanyan

Իմ հայեր

My Armenians

ինձ սխալ մի հասկացել

Don't get me wrong

իմ սիրտը Հայաստանի սարերում է

My heart is in the mountains of Armenia

իր լեռներում

Its valleys

իր լիճերում

Its lakes

իր ճարերում

Its trees

իր ծաղիկներում

Its flowers

իր բնության մեջ

In its nature

Բայց իմ սիրտը ցավում է

But my heart hurts

Իմ մայրենիում ես ազատ չեմ

I'm not free in my motherland

Ես չեմ կարող ազատ սիրել

I can't love freely

լացել

Cry

խոսալ

Speak

իմ ձայնը լռվում է

My voice is shut down

Հայաստանում

In Armenia

Բոլորը ապրում են ուրիշների քյանքով

Everyone lives in another's life

քննադատում ու խեղդվում

Judging and choking

ուրիշների տրված դերի մեջ

In someone else's role

Ես ուզում եմ իմ հանար ապրել

I want to live for myself

սիրել

Love

խոսալ

Speak

առանց մտածելու թե ով է ինձ իր աչքով անիծում

Without thinking of who is damning me with their eyes

Իմ հոգին

My soul

պետք է պայծառ լինի

Needs to be radiant

և

And

այստեղ

Here

իմ կրակը մարում է

My fire is being put out

Հայաստան

Armenia

Ես քեզ անչափ սիրում եմ

I have immeasurable love for you

Բայց, երբ որ շրջապատված եմ իմ ընտանիքով

But when I'm surrounded by family

Ես մենակ եմ ինձ զգում

I feel alone

Սա իմ նախնիների երկիրն է

This is the world of my ancestors

Իրանց սուրբ հողը

Their holy land

Բայց ես այստեղ օտար եմ

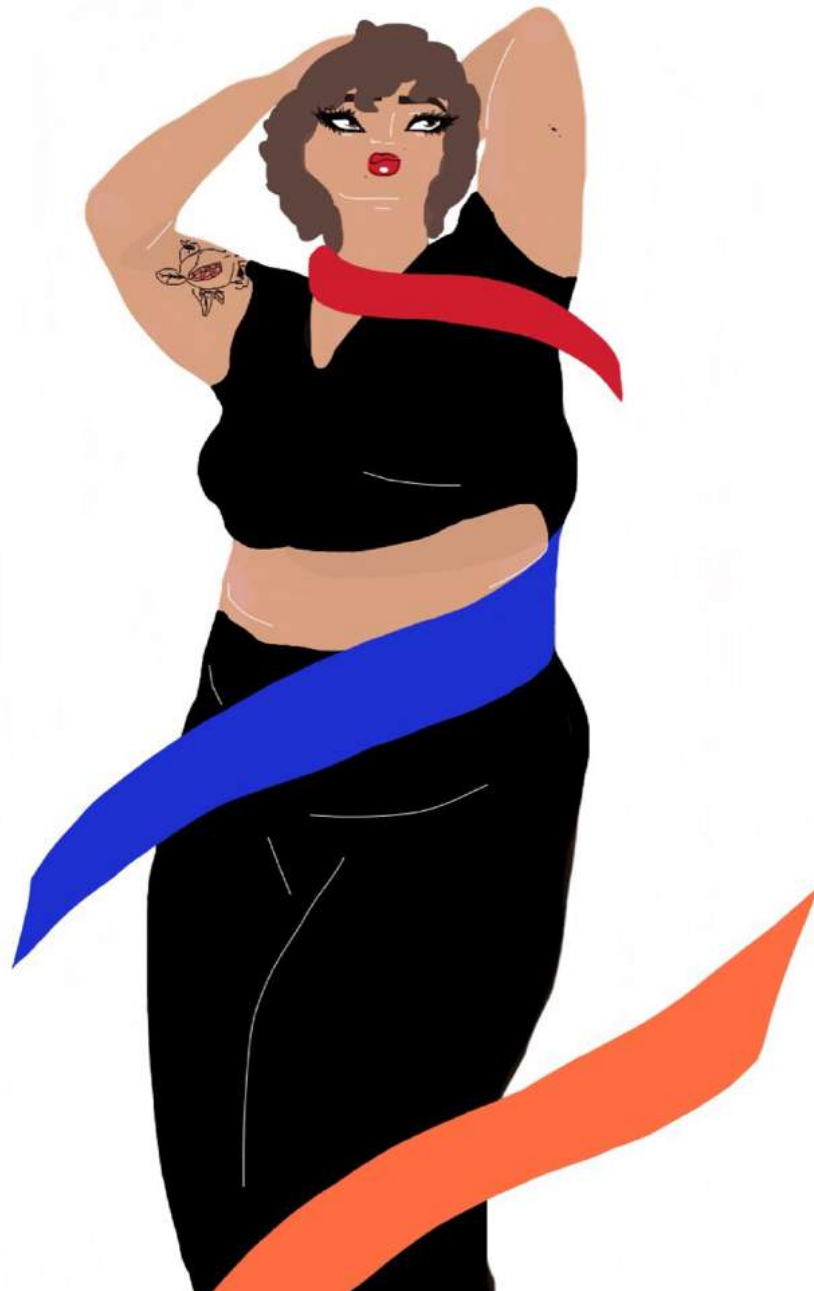
But here I'm a stranger

Note from author Ani Lusparyan:

This Winter 2018, I went to see my family for the first time in 14 years. As I was leaving I wrote this poem. This is my love letter and goodbye. Thank you for the memories Armenia. Thank you for all I grown and learned there. Thank you for everything. I will never forget you. The good and the bad, I understand now. My roots, my family, my history, everything. At this moment in time, I can't live in you. I know I would suffocate. I know there is strength in vulnerability, but to be a queer femme in Armenia is painful. It would hurt me too much to live there. I wasn't free. However, I came home to Los Angeles more proud of myself and who I am. Thank you opening my eyes in ways I didn't expect. Thank you for the tears, laughter, and pain. Thank you for letting me be a proud member of our diaspora. See you another time. I love you. This poem is written in Armenian expressing these exact feelings and a response to all the people who asked me while I was there, "Do you like our Armenia? Would you live here?" I wrote this poem as a strong feminine energy leaving my mark in Armenia and entering Los Angeles feeling whole, for the first time in a long time.



ARMO FEMME RESISTANCE.



Ani (Alik) Luspanyan

is an Armenian non-binary queer creative based in Los Angeles, California. They have had a passion for art since they were a child and have grown to do freelance work. They use their voice to uplift marginalized communities and promote emotional reflection on the self and community through various forms of art (poetry, painting, and sculpture). Ani's main influences are the world and the people inhabiting them; they value human complexity. Ani is currently attending California State University, Los Angeles as an undergraduate in hopes of earning their degree in Liberal Studies (LBS) and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS).

The background of the page is a stylized, painterly representation of the Armenian flag, featuring horizontal stripes of red, blue, and orange. The colors are blended and textured, giving it a dynamic, artistic feel.

Mothers and Daughters: Women Leading Armenia's Nonviolent Resistance Movement

by Araxie Cass & Kristin Anahit Cass

In Yerevan, Mother Armenia looks proudly over the city, brandishing her sword and strength to protect the capital. As one of the country's paramount symbols of national identity, Mayr Hayastan stands as a reminder of the central role women and mothers have always had in Armenian society. From the days when we worshipped Astghik and Anahit to the female fedayeen of the first republic and the Artsakh war, women have always been on the front lines of Armenian survival and progress. Most of us, whether in Hayastan or in the diaspora, can point to mothers and grandmothers who centered and held together our families and communities to survive violence, trauma and dislocation, and retain our identity today.

Armenian narratives remain largely male-dominated, citing "traditional" values, but our history shows that there is a strong tradition of women leaders essential in creating the community that we have today. In Artsakh and the border region of Tavush province, the two Armenian regions under immediate military threat, women are not only defending through the army, but are leading a powerful movement of nonviolent resistance. Working in computer science, theater, human rights, agribusiness, farming, culinary arts, and other spheres, women are banding together to make Armenia a safe and prosperous place to live. Without their efforts, there would be nothing left for the military to defend, and they are not held back by the restrictions placed on them.

In Armenian and other societies, age-based stereotypes arise to restrict and hold down women. Young women are seen as inexperienced and childish, while old women are stereotyped as unchanging and inactive. The leaders of Armenia's non-violent resistance movement are women of all ages who use their different experiences to support and uplift each other like mothers and daughters. These generations of women are taking control of their own narratives and defying expectations to lead their communities into a liberated and peaceful future.

In Artsakh, women have not only suffered from discrimination and poverty, but also from the violence and destruction of war. The scars of this conflict are still visible in ruins, cemeteries, and bombed-out buildings around the country, but they stand next to the trappings of creativity and development. In Stepanakert, the nation's capital, the Artsakh Information Technology Center (AITC) opened in 2015, providing space for new tech and other businesses, as well as education for the next generation.



Lilit Soghomonyan works in the AITC, programming and administrating for her new Jigsaw web design company. Still in her final year studying mathematics at Artsakh State University, Lilit co-founded Jigsaw six months ago with a group of her classmates from Tumo's technology education program. Even in its early stages, the company is thriving, working on orders from companies inside Armenia, as well as from Russia.

"Two years ago Armenians were looking to Russia," she says. "But now they are looking to us."

Women are an essential part of Artsakh's development as a tech center. Artsakh's minister of education is a woman, as are the head of the state university, the head of the AITC, and Lilit's entire university math class. Lilit works in concert with the strong community of women around her, complimenting her own development by educating the next generation of Artsakh's tech specialists. She teaches in three different technology education programs, both in Stepanakert, and in underserved rural areas. Coming from Gandzasar village herself, Lilit is passionate about educating the next generation in all areas of Armenia.

"Tech will push Artsakh forward," she says.

Development in Artsakh is especially critical given its precarious political situation. Zhanna Grigorova was deeply involved in the country's politics for twenty years as a journalist, foreign ministry employee, analyst, NGO employee, and participant in peacebuilding activities. By the early 2000's, however, she felt burnt out and frustrated.



“I saw that I couldn’t use my knowledge, energy and time well. I spent a lot of time but got no result. I am idealistic,” she said. “My dream was to be a philologist, but at that point it was too late to begin scientific work, so I listened to my soul. One time I was meditating on it, and it was like a vision or a dream of what I will do--I must give my knowledge to the young generation. So I met the rector of Mashtots University. I saw her and I went right up to her and asked her to put me in the university.”

Zhanna began teaching European literature, and in her work she noticed that written literature didn’t seem to interest people as much anymore. She began thinking about what she could do to engage people, and eventually had the idea to put on a play with her students. Their first performance was about the Stray Dog Café, a group of writers and poets in St. Petersburg who felt marginalized by mainstream aristocratic society, and formed an underground group shortly before the Russian Revolution. The show was a success, and for the past five years has put on eleven shows naming her theater troupe Stray Dog in honor of their inspiration.

The Stray Dog theater troupe performs in Russian, a testament to Artsakh’s history of Russian speakers. Zhanna herself is a repatriate from Russia and believes strongly in the power of language learning, especially in a largely mono-ethnic country like Artsakh.

“The more languages you know the more you develop and open your mind,” she says.

Zhanna also loves theater because of the transformative power she sees in theatrical education. Especially since she recently started a second troupe with younger children, she has seen her students' behavior change as they learn to act, becoming more open and free to express themselves.

“To develop a state, the people need to develop,” she says. “You must open your horizons. It is not only petroleum or gold that builds a state; the people must develop good music, theater, and culture.”



In the border regions of Tavush, as in Artsakh, women are looking to a variety of areas to create their own resistance. In these border towns and villages, civilians, schools, and farms are constantly under Azerbaijani fire. The Azerbaijani government's twenty-five-year campaign of terror and violence has disrupted people's lives and wreaked havoc on the economy, but many people refuse to be driven out of their homeland, and are looking for new and innovative ways to improve their standard of living. They are not launching a military campaign to counter Azerbaijan's fire, but instead are resisting by proving that despite the Azeri government's actions, they own the land and will continue to live and thrive on it.

Agriculture is the center of the economy in these rural towns and villages, and resistance leaders recognize it and work with the existing skills and resources to develop the region. The Center for Community Development (CCD) in the border town of Noyemberyan, just out of the range of fire, is one organization leading this push for development. Hasmik Azibekyan is the leader of the CCD's

majority-female team using the people's skills, knowledge, and resources to innovate in ways that will allow them to produce better quality products more efficiently. Some politicians and others in Yerevan and abroad advocate for the abrupt abandonment of traditional farming ways, but as natives of the region, Hasmik and her team know the strength and beauty of this way of life and are looking to progress in their own way.

The CCD is currently in the process of building a dairy, employing local workers to create a cooperative where farmers will be able to take their milk to be made into cheese and butter. In a region where many do not have the resources to do this, and some are prevented from doing so by military threat to their farms, this dairy will have a major impact. They plan to sell products in Armenia as well as exporting to Russia and using the town's strategic place along the Yerevan-Tblisi highway to invite tourists in with a tasting room.

Hasmik is a powerhouse, leading the CCD's many projects including regional job fairs, promoting tourism, and producing quinoa to sell to the ministry of defense. They bring in money from USAID and other organizations, but keep the focus common to many Armenian organizations on creating sustainable and self-supporting development projects.

"The border does not have to hold back our economy," she said. "In Noyemberyan, it is very calm and safe, so if there is opportunity people can come back from Yerevan and Russia. We want to be an example to people. If they want to have success they need to work."

This movement of strengthening the border towns is already beginning. Though many people are still forced to leave their homes to find work, others have come to create opportunities for themselves in this land. Nune Azizyan moved to Noyemberyan when she got married, leaving behind her job as an economic manager in Yerevan. She saw an ad for a 3-D modeling class on Facebook, and always eager to learn new things, she applied. A few years later, she and her former teacher run a business selling painted lamps and vases made through a combination of technological and artistic skill.

Nune also cares deeply about the environment, one of the most striking features of Noyemberyan. The town is nestled into a beautiful landscape of green fields and forested mountains, sustaining the people's way of life, and bringing joy at the simplest glance around. When Polymetal mining company announced plans for a destructive strip-mining project in Noyemberyan, she knew she had to act.

"I was pregnant at the time, so I couldn't go out and protest. But I started a petition and collected 300 signatures. We presented it to the municipality, who told the company no, we want to develop eco-tourism instead."

Motivated by her success, Nune acted on her promise, founding the Noyemberyan Tourism Center, a small organization that distributes information, and organizes guides and events. She also continues



to participate in the region's extraordinarily active environmental protection movement, and recently helped to produce a video urging people to stop littering, and is working with her fellow activists on other ways to engage their community in serving the environment. She and her peers see Noyemberyan as a beautiful place that they love and support, and use their example to show others why.

"Noyemberyan is not only a place where people live in fear," Nune said. "We have things to show here."

Armenian village life is looked down on and considered unimportant by some, but people involved in the non-violent resistance movement know that the country starts at the borders. Many Armenians live in these villages, and instead of simply following the same industrialization process that has left many towns in the United States and other countries desolate, some Armenians are carving out their own path to a better village life.



Ruzanna Gadalyan lives in the village of Aygedzor in the border region of Tavush. Her husband was part of the wave of men forced to go to Russia to find work every year, but, left to her own devices she is a pillar of strength, creating a good life for herself and her children in the village. She is skilled in traditional farming and culinary practices including growing and drying fruits, making wine, and cooking Armenian sweets and other dishes. She received a sewing machine from a Fund for Armenian Relief program a year ago, and started working immediately, becoming one of the program's proudest success stories. She makes bed linens and clothes that she sells in her village and other villages. In addition, she makes and sells dolls around the village, and at events like the region-wide Honey and Berry Festival that showcased the region's beauty, food and crafts this summer.

Ruzanna has passed down her drive and creative energy to her daughter Astghik, a student in hospitality and tourism at Yerevan State University. Astghik is motivated by a deep love for her village and the natural beauty surrounding it.

“I am a big nature lover,” she says with a smile. “It is in my soul. This village is very hospitable; if someone comes here they need to eat and drink and see the area.”

Astghik plans to come back to Aygedzor when she finishes school and help to make the village a tourist destination. She plans to start the Berry House, a charming B&B where tourists will experience true Armenian hospitality, and get to see and participate in traditional arts of making jam, juice, wine, and other products. She has already begun her work, taking tourists who happen on the village on hiking excursions to see Aghjka Kar, a natural landmark immersed in local legend.



Women are igniting change in many different fields and regions in Armenia, but issues like domestic violence and discrimination remain pressing problems. Gayane Hambarzumyan and her daughter Liza Matevosyan run the Women’s Resource Center (WRC) in Shushi, Artsakh. This center is a branch of the larger Women’s Resource Center organization based in Yerevan, but in the small community of Shushi, still recovering from the wounds of the War for Independence, resources are scarce, and the obstacles can be daunting.

Gayane and Liza are working to end domestic violence, which affects so many women in Armenia and Artsakh. The WRC does trainings, distributes information, and offers shelter and services to women who are victims of domestic violence. They are a strong and efficient team, ready to take on any crisis that comes their way, but they also don’t let the immediate problems shift their focus away from long term solutions.

The center does a variety of activities to create a more open, peaceful, and feminist environment. They run a creative club for young women where they talk about shame, and provide a safe space for women to speak openly about taboo topics. They also do film screenings with discussions, and workshops about violence and tolerance. They teach women and men how to diffuse all levels of conflicts: inside the self, between people, group to group, person versus group, and finally conflicts between states. Their work is closely tied in with Artsakh's national situation and the non-violent resistance and peacebuilding movement that is helping to build and support the country. In Shushi, as well as Martakert village, an area near the border that has been severely affected by the war and continuing violence over the last twenty-five years, they do trainings on how to build a peace culture. They also focus on Martakert, running a self-help psychological group, and a feminist oral storytelling group.

Gayane and Liza's WRC is deeply involved in community building and support activities, but they also engage in public activism. On November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, they do a march on the main Azatamartik to Shahumyan streets in the capital of Stepanakert, making themselves visible and distributing information. From this day to March 8, they do a variety of actions, including raising awareness on World AIDS Day and volunteering. This culminates in March 8, which is International Women's Day, which in Armenia often takes the form of a celebration of women and motherhood. These celebrations often emphasize traditional gender roles and stereotypes for women, but the WRC is reclaiming this day, celebrating it as a day to thank suffragettes and feminists and continue their struggle for equal rights.

Often overlooked and written out of their own histories, women remain an essential part of Armenia's national struggle and victories. The women of the current non-violent resistance movement take their place in a long line of mothers and daughters including Zabel Yesayan, Mayrig Sose, and countless other iconic female figures. They take inspiration from and continue the positive aspects of their traditions, while incorporating new Armenian and international ideas for innovation. They are pioneering a new form of nonviolent resistance, one that reaches into areas as diverse as farming, advocacy, and technology and coheres around a unified national and community identity. Their work is essential to the survival and success of the Armenian nation, and shows the importance and power that a unified and energized Armenian community can have.



Kristin Anahit Cass

is an Armenian American photographer based in Chicago. Her work is animated by her concern for social and human rights issues. Through photography she explores issues both personal and communal. A graduate of the University of Chicago, Cass trained as a lawyer, which informs her commitment to social justice. With a background in art history and design, Cass believes in art as a medium for change. Her work in Armenia on the Borderlands Under Fire project is a finalist for the 2018 Dorothea Lange-Paul Taylor Prize.

Araxie Cass

is an Armenian American student of creative writing and near eastern languages and civilizations at the University of Chicago. She co-founded Rebirth Armenia to share stories the country's stories of survival and resistance on rebirtharmenia.com. She has also published *Defenders: Stories from Armenia's Border Villages*, based on her experience an Armenian region under military threat in 2017. Her works on themes from music to travel to food and memory have also appeared in *Pilgrimage Magazine* (2018), *We Told This Story from the Margins* (2015), *A Record in Space* (2016), and *I Just Like the Way it Sounds* (2017) 826CHI publications. In addition, she has been published in *Potluck Magazine*, *McSweeney's* and *The Chicago Reader*.

Mothers Who Raise War Gods, Part 1: The Art of Carcass Dragging

poetry by Arthur Kayzakian

Sahakanush knows her son will be good. She reads his tea leaves.

Each night she pulls three tea bags from a jar, extracts dry minted plants

and scatters them across her den's wooden floor. Some nights she mixes peppermint, pomegranate white, dragon well, jasmine, and a spicy blend of masala chai.

She brews a hot cup, watches steam swirl into the air and disappear.

Sahakanush calls it skywriting. Anything resembling smoke helps her fall asleep.

Her son will be good: In the future he chops men off their war elephants. Blood spurts on his lip, his crotch bulges. In the leaves she is not proud to see death captivate him.

When she sees something she doesn't like, she brushes her hair mumbling
litanies

under her breath while looking in a mirror. She meditates on its shine, long
black

strands falling on her face like silk curtains. She likes the way
he grips the metal plate of his enemy's vest and pulls the body across the soil—

vultures gathering behind the trail of blood it leaves behind.

Mothers Who Raise War Gods, Part 2: The Khan

and when The Khan sits on his throne waving travelers away with a brush of his hand

laughter rumbles from his belly

causing ripples through the sunlit sash wrapped around his waist

sometimes he weeps to the sound of a violin

and sometimes he sinks his teeth in a chunk of meat

but when a merchant scarred in a dark quilt enters the marble hall

to justify why he cannot pay his taxes

he kneels before the white-stoned steps

a shrill voice shakes out of him, *we have no money my lord*

gently The Khan grazes his knuckle against his cheek

at six he clutched his mother's hand as they strolled through the market

he saw a beggar dressed in raw patches of cloth sagging off his body

standing by a hut with strings of fish hanging from a line

and when he hollered *slacker!*

his mother stopped—lowered toward him—

thwacked him across the cheek with an open palm

she looked deep into his eyes until his shock softened to tears

for this The Khan despises poverty, and men who ask for money remind him

of how he carries the force of his mother burning in his cheek

Sahakanoush's Warning

One day a traveler from another land, shackled in rustic clothing, may ask you, does water flow in your country too?

Does air cost money in your country too? In a world of wrists swirled with diamonds, if we do nothing, we will be as bloodless as the reflection of light, we will become like art, unanswerable and restless.

The dawn is dark here. It was not always so. The night whistled with the chitter of birds flocked in the trees, and when rain fell, we listened to the hush of water.

Soon, the rain will flush the land and rinse the bloodied roads. The unrelenting road of bones.

A note from the author:

The line "does water flow in your country too?" is adopted from Henri Michaux's "I am Writing to You from a Far-off Country."

The line "bloodless as the reflection of light" is adopted from Rita Dove's "Aircraft." The original line is "Reflection is such // a bloodless light."

The line "The dawn is dark here. It was not always so." is adopted from Henri Michaux's "I am Writing to You from a Far-off Country." The original line is "The dawn is grey here, she went on to tell him. It was not always like this."

Arthur Kayzakian

is an Iranian-Armenian-American diasporic poet, a teacher and an MFA graduate from San Diego State University. He is also a contributing editor at Poetry International and have served as an editor at The B-Side literary journal. He is a recipient of the Minas Savvas Fellowship, and his poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from several publications including Taos Journal of International Poetry & Art and Pacific Review.

Smooth. Shiny. Hairless.

by Savannah Yaghsezian

I sit cross-legged in denim shorts on the scratchy floor of my first grade classroom. My friend with translucent hair turns to me and asks, “Why are your legs hairy?”

My legs, my arms, my face, my stomach. Those are just parts of my body I list in a song that rhymes, but now they’re something else. Something I don’t want to sing about.

Smooth. Shiny. Hairless.

I raise my arm in my sixth grade class. Did anyone see?

I’m so happy it’s winter. I can wear jeans. I can wear long sleeves.

I should get bangs. It’ll hide my eyebrows.

I’m not allowed to wear makeup yet, but maybe my mom will let me put a little concealer over my lip.

A boy in my class tells me I remind him of a woolly mammoth. I wonder if their fossilized skeletons still have traces of their thick, coarse hair.

Smooth. Shiny. Hairless.

I walk down the cramped hallways at my high school. Boys and girls mash together as the bell chimes. They wilt at the thought of having to spend an hour apart.

I never get too close, but not because I don’t want to. I can feel the familiar sting behind my eyes at the thought of a boy pulling off my top and seeing I’m not

Smooth. Shiny. Hairless.

Pulling off my pants and realizing I'm not

Smooth. Shiny. Hairless.

As a twenty-two-year-old, I've learned to say:

"It's just hair!"

I've made friends with people who say:

"It's just hair!"

I've fallen in love with people who say:

"It's just hair!"

I still use a razor. I still use a string to pull out hairs on my face. I still double-check the mirror before I go swimming.

But sometimes I wear shorts when my legs feel prickly.

Sometimes I don't touch my eyebrows for a few weeks.

Sometimes I don't even notice the shadow on my arms.

Sometimes I don't care that I'm not

Smooth. Shiny. Hairless.

Savanah Yaghsezian

is half-Armenian on her dad's side, which is where she gets her thick, dark hair from. Despite thousands of mispronunciations of her last name, Savanah is very proud to be a strong, smart and creative Armenian woman. She wanted to write a piece about female body hair because she believes it's something that should be normalized -- it's just hair! Savanah is also recent graduate of Arizona State University and currently works as a social media specialist. When she's not working, she's either reading, furiously journaling, listening to true crime podcasts, or browsing through the latest fashion magazines.

of smells and sounds

poetry by Nareh Ayazyan

the unsolicited sadness in
my mother's eyes
has always reduced me to silence.

this is a *veradardz* after all,
only in reverse,
and only as a whiff of rosewater.

exile is painful and we'll return someday,
but while the sound of church bells soothed
my mother's heart like a balm,
I listened to the birds instead.

the song of a partridge

this is a happy story.
a handsome partridge kept company
to a girl that never had to think about God.

it sang her songs of foreign lands,
where to see the sun rise,
all you had to do was to open your eyes.

it brought her tokens – trinkets of all sorts,
in promise that one day, the whole wide world
would open for her alone.

tell me, the girl demanded, *tell me more*.
tell me again what freedom tastes like.
tell me that these invisible chains can't bind me.

but this is supposed to be a happy story,
so here it shall end.

generational

my hands are nothing like my mother's,
whose, in turn, are nothing like my
medz mother's.

I could never quite shrink mine
into bones that did not belong to me,
but one thing I did make sure
to make mine alone.

the sound of any sewing machine
now invites the scent of lavender oil
and freshly brewed *soorj* to coil around my being,
like a pure spirit, drunk off a fair fountain of old.

memories of wrinkled fingers,
adorned with rings of gold,
and the sound of *arevmtahayeren* that
drips from my heart like a sweet song.

song after song, she gave me.
life upon life,
dream upon dream
that I heard, and devoured and sought.

until I couldn't hear anymore.
I was the dream.

Nareh Ayazyan

is a Linguistics and Foreign Languages graduate from Yerevan, Armenia. She comes from a *polsahye* family, a fact that is commonly mentioned in her works. When she isn't writing or studying Japanese, she does freelance translations, teaches at a language center and volunteers at the local Japanese cultural and educational center.

Aunt Seda

by Aris Mardirossian

My cousin, Alan, and I approached the iron-framed, glass door of the large Istanbul apartment building. After a search that proved to be far more difficult than expected, we were tired and eager to finally reach our destination. Could this really be the building that we had sought after? We checked the number posted next to the door and released a mutual sigh of relief as it matched the apartment number that we had been searching for. I stood beside the door as Alan pressed the doorbell. As his finger released from the button, we both waited in suspense for a sign of life from the other side. After what felt like an eternity, we heard the beautiful sound of a buzz and click come from the door, wiping away any final doubts that this was the correct apartment.

We walked through the iron frame to find a dimly lit staircase before us. Though I had expected to see blemishes and signs of wear on the walls and stairs of this old apartment building, I was surprised to see the fine details that the original builders had left. The staircase was wide and made of marble with a large banister winding upwards to the top. The worn artisanal bones of this beautiful staircase paired against the slight smell of hallway garbage created a beautiful microcosm of melancholy that Istanbul is famous for. Though the building was old and displayed its wear from decades of neglect, I could see the beauty and greatness of what it once was.

We climbed the stairs until we saw a door propped open and awaiting our arrival. Though it was open, we still gave it a knock, not wanting to startle our elderly relative that lived inside. Aunt Seda smiled as she rounded the corner and shuffled to the door. It had been over a decade since Alan and I had seen her last, and frankly, she seemed much shorter now than how I had remembered her as a small child. I hugged her after Alan, crouching down to this little lady that stood below my chest level. The years showed a face slightly different than how I remembered her as child, but one key feature was left unchanged. As I looked at her, I realized she was wearing the same large circular glasses that I had last seen her in at my grandmother's house long ago. I am fascinated by the way a familiar smell, sight, or old song can trigger a flood of memories from the depths of our minds, and how these small but powerful triggers can remain dormant and untouched for years before they are reactivated.

As we spoke with Aunt Seda, my eyes remained fixated on the details of her glasses, rediscovering a childhood impression in the way her lenses disproportionately magnified the size of her eyes. It was as if I was looking at her during our last goodbye, and for a moment, the vivid details of this scene came flooding back to me:

I was now looking up at her as she bent down to kiss my brother, sister, and I goodbye. We stood on the lush green lawn of my grandmother's house. It was warm outside and my grandfather's front garden of carefully pruned rose bushes were in full and glorious bloom, but I remember the grass was long and tickling my ankles. Since we lived in the same cul-de-sac as my grandparents, my dad normally cut his parents' lawn, but it seemed that he hadn't yet gotten around to it in this particular memory.

I stood obediently and received the kiss from this woman who, I had been told, was our relative from Turkey. Besides the fact that she was visiting and staying with my grandmother, this was the only context I had of her. Though I was young and had no concept of the world, I understood that for some strange reason, I had family that lived all over it, and Turkey sounded like the most interesting of these places. Did people in Turkey only eat turkeys? Was every day Thanksgiving over there? I imaged that these are the same questions that every Armenian-American child thinks when they first discover this oddly named country. It is only later that this jovial country name becomes tainted with a dark and violent history.

Emerging out of my flashback, we walked inside Aunt Seda's spacious Istanbul apartment and took a seat on the couches inside the living room. Light flooded through the large street-side windows into the room illuminating the details that surrounded us. On the coffee table in the center laid a mountain of variously colored books. Focusing on the covers and titles, I was impressed by the realization that they were written in Armenian, French, Spanish, Turkish, and English. Above the room's literary mountain, old black and white photographs of Aunt Seda's family lined the walls. My eyes moved clockwise around the room, discovering faces both familiar and unfamiliar among the family members of the colorless photographs. Soon my eyes came upon a wall empty of all but one frame. Within the wood frame and sepia toned photograph stood a young woman looking confidently into the lens. Though her dress and style were modest and conservative, she possessed a true poise and elegance rare in today's culture of smartphones, selfies, and Instagram.

“It’s Aunt Seda,” Alan said. Stunned, I looked at the picture more closely. Though much younger than the auntie that greeted us at the door, the woman in the picture still possessed the same key features. Alan was correct.

Aunt Seda sat down between us as her cat, Sarma, simultaneously jumped into her lap. After sufficiently updating her on the health and well-being of our shared family in the United States, we began the conversation that we had been anticipating since embarking on our journey to Istanbul. We explained what we had unearthed about our grandmothers’ migration pattern through Turkey, and how the trail seemed to end in Istanbul. Aunt Seda nodded her head and explained to us that Aristakes Karakashian (our great-grandfather) and his sister (Aunt Seda’s mother) were all born in Istanbul. They were the descendants of a long line of Bolsahyes (Armenians from Istanbul) that had been living in the city for over a hundred years.

Years prior to our visit to Istanbul, Alan had discovered an article and radio reporting published in Iran. Strangely, it discussed the history of the Karakashian’s migration and exit from Istanbul. As the massacres of Armenians were mostly concentrated in the villages of the Turkish interior, many of the Armenians in the western-watched city of Istanbul were spared, Aristakes’s family being among the lucky ones. Following 1923, things cooled down enough for Aristakes to study medicine after his military service was completed. In becoming a doctor for the Ottoman Army, he and his growing family were stationed in different parts of Turkey where his five daughters would be born.

While traveling with the army, Aristakes also performed medical treatments for the Kurdish and Turkish villages along the way. He even managed to save the life of a village chief’s dying child. This act of medical heroism would soon come to Aristakes’s salvation when he was caught helping Armenian orphans cross the border into Soviet-Armenia while stationed in the region of Erzurum. As the story from the Persian report goes, he was in jail awaiting a death sentence when the chief whose child he had saved heard of his arrest. The official released him to repay the debt but told Aristakes that he and his family would not be safe in Turkey anymore. It was this event that caused them to flee the country that had been his family’s home for generations and begin a new life in Iran. Until now, no family members knew of the history well enough to confirm this story, but as we told Aunt Seda of this discovery, she confirmed it to be true.

It was near lunchtime now, and Aunt Seda suggested that we go out for some tea and food. Alan and I agreed, feeling hungry after our long and stressful journey to find our auntie’s apartment. We offered to call a cab, but Aunt Seda quickly shot down the offer, saying the restaurant was right around the corner. With her cane in hand, our elderly auntie shuffled

steadily out of the building. I was amazed to see this woman in her 90s move about the streets with such confidence and velocity. Though smooth sidewalks laid on either side of the roads we travelled, Aunt Seda preferred to walk on the uneven cobble stones in the center of the street. When cars or trucks would approach us on these single-lane narrow roads, Aunt Seda would simply move closer to the side and allow them to pass within inches of grazing her stylish trench coat. Here Alan and I were, walked behind Aunt Seda and trying to form a barrier between oncoming vehicles and our elderly auntie. Not once did she pause or falter, and not once did she lose her calm and collected forward gaze. A person viewing our party from ahead would have surely found the contrast between her tranquility and our panicked faces to have been quite amusing.

Finally, after a much longer walk than “around the corner,” we arrived at a little Turkish café and found an open table. Still cautious of being identified as Armenians, Alan and I spoke English as we resumed our conversation, but we were surprised to find our Aunt responding back in Armenian. Noticing Alan and me looking nervously around the room, she assured us that it was okay to speak Armenian in public in the center of Istanbul. Once again, we were finding the common western narrative of Armenians living in a dangerous and racist Istanbul to be far from the truth.

As the conversation continued, Seda brought up an unknown point about *Bolsahyes* that both Alan and I found very interesting. In the days prior to our great-grandfather living in Istanbul, the dowries for the hands of *Bolsahye* brides (originally a Greek tradition but embraced by Armenians) were some of the highest in the city. While many Armenians, being successful doctors, artisans, and business-owners, could afford this price, those who could not were forced to take a less expensive route and marry into other cultures. One can take this information in a few different ways as the concept of dowries are viewed differently amongst global cultures. While they may be a sign of serious commitment to a marriage, giving some wives a cushion in case things go wrong, my American upbringing has instilled an inherent discomfort with the practice. Putting a down payment on a wife would feel too much like buying a new car. But regardless, I still relish in the pride that Armenian women were considered the most beautiful and desirable women in Istanbul back then.

We drank tea and ate *su boreg* for nearly an hour, talking and learning more about Aunt Seda, our shared family, and life in Istanbul. As our time in the café came to an end, we were thankful that she agreed on letting us call a taxi for the way back. Based on our prior walking experience, Alan and I preferred not to test fate again with our elderly auntie against oncoming traffic.

Arriving at the apartment once again and preparing to say goodbye, Aunt Seda left us with one final clue on the history of our shared family. She told us that she believed Aristakes's baptismal information could be found in the archives of the Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul. Alan and I looked at each other, excited at the prospect of our ancestral breadcrumb trail seeing new life and decided then that we would be paying the Patriarch of Istanbul a visit.

Aris Mardirossian,

23 from Washington DC, is a recent graduate from the University of Delaware in Mechanical Engineering. As a staff member and Waterfront Director at AGBU Camp Nubar for several years, being Armenian has always been an important part of his life. But recently, Aris has become more curious about his Armenian roots, striving to learn more about his family history and culture. After graduating, he decided to participate in the Birthright Armenia Program which sends diaspora to Armenia as volunteers. There, he discovered new details about Armenia and Armenian culture which he wrote about it in his blog found at www.LavashLife.com. After returning from Armenia, Aris has been searching for every opportunity to continue his cultural discovery. He continues to share these moments in his blog.

Art by Anna Muradyan



Hatz III (Bread III)
Oil on canvas, 36"x48", 2018



Hatz V (Bread V)
Oil on canvas, 36"x48", 2018



Khorovatz II
Oil on canvas, 36"x48", 2018



Dolma
Oil on canvas, 56"x48", 2018



Tun (Home)- Installed
Reduction Woodcut, each 16” x20”, 2018

Anna Muradyan

Bay Area native Anna Muradyan can be found napping on her couch contemplating the subconscious meanings of her dreams. Muradyan earned her BA degrees in both Studio Art and Psychology at UC Davis, and is currently studying for her MA in Art Therapy at Notre Dame De Namur University. Her subject matter includes depictions of her Armenian heritage, defined by abstract figures going about everyday Armenian domestic scenes, specifically eating dinner on a busy dining room table. Growing up isolated from her culture, Armenian food had always been a way she felt connected to her heritage. Muradyan uses color theory in order to make complementary color choices liven up the figures; these color choices are extremely saturated. Figures are painted in a myriad of long or short brushstrokes, layering bands of color in order to keep details ambiguous whilst building depth and form. With this lack in detail, these figures may be under the theme of the Armenian culture, but still show that these domestic scenes are everyday things that anyone of any background can relate to, which was something Muradyan always wanted; she has always wanted to find a way to relate to you.

<https://www.annamuradyan.com/>



My Sister. My Hero.

by Kayla Adanalian

"Timing really is everything..." I think to myself as I glance down at my sister's watch. It's actually my watch now, but it's only been on my wrist for a month or so and it's still taking some getting used to. I know, "getting used to" sounds silly when speaking of something as seemingly menial as a watch. What makes it so significant is that it's the most beautiful thing I've ever owned in my 26 years on this earth and it has nothing to do with the stunning and elegant style or even the face full of diamonds. No, it has nothing to do with any of that and everything to do with the woman who wore it before me – my sister.

I've always believed those who spoke about the importance and significance of timing were, in some way, either being dramatic or trying to prove something to themselves that wasn't so. My skepticism may have been born out of a lack of faith, lack of patience, or even jealousy that timing hadn't worked out for me as it seemed to be working in favor of everyone around me. Now, I am the one imploring others to keep their faith and trust that God's timing, as cliché as it sounds, is everything.

Timing. Is. EVERYTHING.

Timing brought me my best friend.

Perfect timing brought me my sister.

God's timing brought me my second mother.

She is my inspiration. She is my center of gravity. She is my anchor. She is my saving grace. She is my hero. She is the strongest human being I've ever known.

As I stare down at my wrist, I watch the hand slowly tick by each number. 3... 4... 5... and all the way back up to 12 — I finally snap out of it and am transplanted back to reality. But it catches my eye too often to stay here in the present for all that long.

It's my own personal time machine; a time machine that takes me back to times and places timing itself decided I wasn't ready to be part of.

I think of all the times this seemingly insignificant object has seen my sister through. It was hers and now, through her grace, it is mine. It transports me back into time and into places that, in some ways, I feel as though I have no right to be. The power such a small object has to take me back to times and places that I was never part of seems odd and almost intrusive, as though I am unworthy — her engagement, her wedding, the loss of a sibling, the birth of her first child, and her second, and her third and fourth. Even more so than the times it has seen her through. I think of the times it has seen her see others through. It's all right here, now I carry it with me — I carry her with me. I am not alone. Her strength is now mine.

Her strength is the most powerful force on this planet. Her strength is a lifeline to all those who are blessed enough to cross her path. She so generously gives of her strength to those who are struggling to find their own. That is who my sister is — a woman so strong she will brave the storm of another, even while in the eye of hurricane.

This watch on my wrist is not just a reminder of the things my sister has been through or the milestones she has celebrated. It's a reminder of that woman holding others up in the eye of a hurricane. Most importantly, it's an inspiration to live every single day trying to replicate the poise, passion, and borderline perfection of who she is as a woman. She isn't just a good person or someone who appears pleasant on the surface because she greets you warmly as she passes you in the aisle of the grocery store. No, she is one of a kind selfless. She is equal parts ferocity and elegance. She is as fun as she is sophisticated. She is so steadfast and dependable you'd have a hard time believing she'd ever need to be dependent herself. She is a sanctuary for the lonely, the broken, and the forgotten. She will readily rip her own heart in half to make room in it for those who've had their own hearts broken by much less than what she's been through in her own life. She exemplifies strength in its most selfless and purest form.

She is beauty. She is selflessness. She is an angel walking among us.

She is strength.

She is a light so blinding that some shield their eyes to it because they aren't strong enough or good enough to open their eyes to her light. I look at my watch and thank God each and every day for taking His perfect time bringing me through life in a way that made me worthy of the ability to see the light that she is, because without it my world would be dark.

Lord, thank you for her strength for it now is mine. Amen

My sister. My hero.

Kayla Adanalian

is a 26-year-old Armenian woman, proud to have been born and raised in Fresno, California. The daughter of Linda Adanalian, to whom she dedicates all that she does in loving memory. She believes nothing is a coincidence in this life, only revelations of fate. An untrained writer, she uses her ordinary words in this issue to express her gratitude for the most extraordinary sister--the strongest Armenian woman on the planet.

Instagram @kayadanalian

Mother Armenia

poetry by Mikayla Arsenian

Mother Armenia
She stands in Yerevan, Armenia
The land I call home
With her sword in hand
She represents loyalty, peace, and strength

One century ago
Turkey attacked my nation
My people were raped, skinned, beaten,
burned, separated, displaced, and murdered
While my people cried for help – the world went silent

To this day, Turkey denies the Armenian genocide
They stole our land
They burned our churches and villages
They killed my people

Mother Armenia
I hear you cry at night
I hear you plead for justice

Mother Armenia
I see the pain in your eyes
It is same pain I see in my grandfather's eyes
This pain has been passed down for generations

Mother Armenia
I promise...
Our stories will be heard
Our language will be learned
Our traditions will be passed down
Our culture will never be forgotten

Mother Armenia
We will fight
We will receive recognition
We will heal all of our wounds

Seeds



We are the seeds of our ancestors.
We are alive.
We are present.
We are breathing.

We are the seeds of our ancestors.
We use their stories to grow;
To blossom from the ashes.
To stand with resilience.
To use our voices that were buried in silence.

We are the seeds of our ancestors.
We carry the suffering of our people in our veins.
We hear their cries within the Earth.
Their sacrifices will be remembered.
Their wisdom and strength is embedded in who we are.

We are the seeds of our ancestors.
Our people fought to save our culture.
We are here to share our stories,
speak our native tongues,
pass down our traditions.

Our wounds are deep, but we will heal.
We will rise up.
We will blossom.

Note from the Author

For Mikayla, her Great Grandmother, Arshalouis Shahinian-Arsenian-Mahserejian, is the definition of a strong Armenian womxn. Arshalouis faced some of the most unimaginable experiences in her life, but she always remained resilient and strong despite any barriers. Although Mikayla never had an opportunity to meet her Grandma Arshalouis, she has a powerful spiritual connection to her. For many years Mikayla has struggled with her connection to her Armenian roots because of the Westernized assimilation that has affected her family. However, while Mikayla is discovering her roots with the help of her spiritual guiders, she has found the power in reclaiming her Armenian identity by writing poems that honor her ancestors, especially Grandma Arshalouis. That being said, her two poems, "Mother Armenia" and "Seeds," were inspired by Grandma Arshalouis because of her strength and endless love for her family.





Mikayla Arsenian

is a third year student at Western Washington University. Currently, she is working towards her Sociology/Social Studies major and Education & Social Justice minor to become a high school teacher. She is the granddaughter of Hovhannes (John) Arsenian and great-granddaughter of Arshalouis & Bedro Arsenian. Mikayla has devoted her life to honor her Armenian ancestors by overcoming generational trauma that is associated with the Armenian Genocide. In her personal discovery, poetry has opened the doors towards her healing process. While researching the motherland, she found Mother Armenia as a symbolic symbol to our community. Mother Armenia represents the bravery, strength, and loyalty of Armenian womxn that have always fought for their families, land, language, and culture. According to Mikayla, we must always honor the womxn that came before us because we carry their legacy within our mind, body, soul, and spirit.

