

THE ARMENIAN EXCHANGE

VOL. 2, NO. 1 • JANUARY, 2001 • A PUBLICATION OF THE CAMBRIDGE-YEREVAN SISTER CITY ASSOCIATION

Outbound Exchange Group Visits Yerevan, June/July 2000



American Exchange Students with their Armenian Buddies in Yerevan, Armenian

Teens open eyes to democracy

Former Soviet Republic awash in generosity and values of local high schoolers

By Erin Clossey
WATERTOWN TAB & PRESS STAFF

In the three weeks he spent in Armenia, Watertown High School senior Vatche Arabian was whisked around the country visiting historical sites, fed a home-cooked meal each evening and taken to a club for a night of dancing in a country where there is no drinking age.

Sounds like a recipe for fun (if not disaster), but the most memorable part of the trip was the little children.

Completing the second half of an American/Armenian exchange program were Arabian, WHS junior Puzant Chouljian, Joseph McDonald, the

Webmaster and Graphic Arts/Printing Coordinator at the high school, and eight other students and five other educators from Cambridge, Belmont, Lexington and Arlington. The project, funded by the U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs through a grant to the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association, brought 10 students from Yerevan, Armenia, to the Watertown/Cambridge area in the fall of 1999 and sent 10 American students the other way from June 22 to July 11, 2000.

The purpose of the exchange is to "promote civil society" in Armenia and to teach young Armenians about values such as democracy, diversity, tolerance and volunteerism, said Joanne Hartunian, project directory with CYSCA, who also accompanied the students on the trip.

(continued on page 14)

About the Exchange Program

The Program, called "Sister School Partnership," is sponsored by the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association, Inc. with funding support from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. The goal of the 1999-2000 program is to partner two local schools, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School and Watertown High School with schools in Yerevan, Armenia. Each school hosted five students from Yerevan in the fall of 1999. Students from their schools made a reciprocal visit to Yerevan in the summer of 2000.

The Theme of the program is "Building A Civil Society", and is aimed at advancing mutual understanding between our local community and Armenia of a civil society and to develop sustainable institutional linkages that serve the needs and interests of the students, schools and their communities. The groups include a chaperone and an educator, whose program is to study education methodology. Participating students and the educator establish long-term activities and joint projects between the host and guest students. They also engage in local community service projects.

About CYSCA

The Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association (CYSCA) began as the brainchild of a group of concerned citizens of Cambridge, MA in the mid 80's who believed that a partnership with a Soviet city would promote world peace. They understood that people can build bridges for friendship, goodwill and cooperation that some times governments cannot. In 1986, Cambridge City Councilor Frank Duehay led a mission of eleven Cambridge citizens to Yerevan, Armenia, to present a proposal for what became a sister city partnership the following year. CYSCA was incorporated in 1987 as a nonprofit, under section 501, (C) (3) of the Internal Revenue code.

In the twelve years that have followed, many activities have taken place, including citizens' exchanges in the fields of education, economics, environment, music, arts, culture, medicine, school aid, youth exchanges and humanitarian aid.

Committee Members

1999 - 2000 Program

Many thanks to the committee members who worked tirelessly to make this program a success. They include:

- Jack Medzorian
Program Director
- Reverend Joanne Hartunian
Project Director
- Peggy Hovanissian
Host Family Coordinator
- Seta Sullivan
Cultural Activities
- Richard Boyajian
Field Project Coordinator
- Diane Spera
Academic Activities
- Joseph McDonald
Graphic Arts - Newsletter
- Karen Kazarosian
Watertown High School
Coordinator
- Taya Portnova
Program Administrator
- Jirair Babikyan
Transportation Director
- Yerevan coordinators
Astghine Pasoyan
Yuri Jilavian
Viger Sargsyan
Maneh Jilavian
Anna Karakhanyan
Ester Demirchyan

Our Exchange Participants

Vatche Arabian is a senior at Watertown High School. He is a filmmaker and produced a video chronicle of the October 1999 Armenian exchange trip to America and the outbound visit to Yerevan in the summer of 2000. He is



co-editor of the school newspaper and helped produce the first edition of the 1999 CYSCA-YCSCA Student Exchange newspaper. His volunteer projects include Harvard University's Cape Cod Community Service Project, taping local sports games for cable television, WHS sports management team, and Watertown Millennium Committee. He is a skilled musician playing the clarinet and bass clarinet, a member of the drama board and the audio visual department at WHS. He has a part-time database management job after school. Besides being computer literate he is a speed reader and a creative writer.

His aspirations include a career in journalism, film, communications and computers. His achievements include locating author R. L. Steine and interviewing him for the school newspaper. His interest in civil society is in the area of non-violent conflict resolution. He is a peer mediator at WHS who resolves conflict issues at his school. He believes, "in a civil society peace can be reached by talking." His father is an electrical engineer and his mother a customer service representative. His brother, Razmig is 13 years old.

Haig Babikyan, a senior at Belmont High School, enjoys volunteering at his



America youth group. What makes Haig unique is his interest in singing. He not only enjoys it, but is good at it. A mem-

ber of Belmont High School's three gold medal award winning chorus' the Choir, Jazz Choir and Madrigals, the Renaissance music ensemble. He is also a member of an Armenian youth choir. Haig's other passions include his automobile, driving and his part time after school job at Star Supermarket. He says, "I would like to learn some Armenian so I can speak to people and my parents in my native language." Haig's career aspirations are to be a computer engineer or a stock broker. He has three brothers, Armen (19), Aram (13) and Vartan (11). His father is retired and is a full time house husband and volunteer for CYSCA. His mother is a computer engineer. The Babikyan's have been a CYSCA host family since 1993.

Puzant Chouljian, a junior at Watertown High School was born in Beirut, Lebanon. He



enjoys chess and has taken karate for 10 years. He is active in the St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Sunday School and the Armenian Youth Federation. Puzant enjoys sports, helping around the house, fixing things and reading. He is a Boy Scout and considers himself disciplined. His particular interest in civil society is volunteerism and making a difference in one's community. He is interested in the field of technology and medicine. He enjoys mathematics, soccer, and track. He has participated in the "Walk for Hunger" and has helped with the town food drive for the homeless and the hungry. Puzant expressed, "I would be a great help in Armenia by getting down on my knees and doing tasks or chores around the community, not only for it to look good, but to improve the quality of life. I'm not sure if maintaining a society is harder than creating one." His father is an agricultural engineer by training and is presently a tailor. His mother is a teacher at the St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church's Nursery School. He has a sister, Sabine 18 and a 10 year old brother, Harout.

(continued on page 4)

An Unforgettable Journey

By Haig Babikyan

We walked through the museum quietly, trying to grasp an uncatchable sound, not knowing how to speak or cry. Pictures and stories filled the walls. There was a map so beautifully decorated that it could lift your heart's spirit to the next star. A magnificent country full of heritage and history was now reduced to poverty and rubble.

On the opposite wall, pictures were telling stories of families and villagers going through the most unthinkable times of their lives, yet somehow they were still able to smile for the pose. There stood an arched doorway fashionably decorated with bright colors. A peacock woven from fine, soft, pillow-like wool hung from the ceiling. Just by looking at it I knew the strong message being sent - a heavenly picture, bright, and radiant. An image of Jesus composed above the doorway with vines and beautiful flowers blossoming with the stroke of a painter's brush. There were two bright angels dressed in light blue garments, with horns spreading the word of His arrival. I had the privilege of admiring the most inspirational wall that was dedicated to a magnificent ancient culture.

I looked down, through the arch, and reality made me quiver. I felt a piercing chill up my spine, my palms became moist, and my heart started to race. Pictures of destroyed human bodies consumed the gloomy semicircular room. My stomach turned upside down like it was being devoured by the killers' uncontrollable thirst for blood. Helpless human beings dying for someone else's pleasure and greed. Men having their penis cut off then getting shot in the head. A mother lying there, barely alive,

naked, bleeding scalp where her roots used to be, holds a baby. Her son, being cradled by its mother, its skin tightly wrapped around its bones, lay dead.

Everywhere I looked torture beat me in the face. The sight made me nauseous and angry, knowing my two great grandfathers were killed the same way - executed. I stood there having an uncontrollable urge to seek revenge but not knowing how. I was too scared to move in the bone chilling silence, listening for a sound to make my spirit come to life but tranquility filled my body and soul.

An old lady limped into the room. Keeping her balance she walked to one particular picture. She made a cross and prayed. My group watched very curiously in complete silence. She looked up with tears pouring down her face, kissed her fingers and then reached to touch the picture of the dying, tortured man. Slowly she limped away, cane in one hand, handkerchief in the other. We stood speechless, curious, yet understanding the pain. I tiptoed after her and asked her about the sobbing. At 104 years old her brittle bones could barely support her body. She told me that was a picture of her husband killed 85 years ago by the Turkish army. I stood astonished and speechless as she walked away, but I felt a stroke of love.

We walked up the glossy concrete steps. Rain dribbled down the stairs swallowed by the drain at the bottom. Grey clouds blanketed the sky as we walked speechless from the underground building. Our group of 16 teenagers learned first hand the reality of The Armenian Genocide, the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians. Tearless from fear we walked in the bitter cold weather asking, Why?

Multi-Culturalism/ Civil Society

By Alina Sullivan,

Multi-culturalism is important in creating and maintaining a civil society. As Americans we live and interact among different cultures. We are tolerant and accepting of all people. I took this for granted until I had two Armenian boys from Armenia stay at my house for three weeks. They found it interesting when they walked down school corridors and streets and saw the different variations in cultures, skin colors and the interaction between them. They did not view this in a negative way, it was new and different for them, and they did not know how to react. They also seemed interested and impressed that I knew about the Armenian culture and language even though I am half Irish. They went home with a broader world view than they had when they first came to our country.

Multi-culturalism is important for Armenia and every other country because different cultures can learn a lot from each other. If Armenia interacts more with the rest of the world and becomes more multi-cultural, Armenia's horizon will expand and new opportunities will grow. Armenia has a lot to offer and also has a lot to learn.

Coming from a multi-cultural background being American, Irish, Armenian, and Lebanese I have a lot to offer to the theme of multi-culturalism within Civil Society and to this exchange program. I am excited about the opportunity I had in the Summer of 2000 to visit Armenia and to learn more about my Armenian culture and the country. I also loved sharing my own culture with the people of Armenia.

CYSCA extends its heartfelt gratitude to the numerous volunteers, school staff and faculty and other organizations that contributed generously to this youth exchange with financial contributions and personal services both in the USA and in Armenia. Special thanks to the USA and Armenian host families who opened up not only their homes but their hearts as well to their guests.

Media Independence

By David Prum

The aspect of civil society that I have chosen, is media independence. Media independence is about the freedom of the press, but not only press freedom. It also means that any citizen can pick up a newspaper or turn on a TV and be able to receive untainted information about what is going on in their world. People make decisions based on information available to them. If the main source of information a person has access to is propaganda or the opinion of a single, powerful individual or group, that person will assume the position given to them by that powerful entity. If this is the case whoever controls the media controls the voice of those people and there cannot be a democracy if people are the puppets of the established power, controlling the media. That is why it is so important for the media to be an unbiased relayer of information and not a tool in for a political entity.

I became interested in participating in this exchange because I think that my perspective on the world and foreign people may be distorted. I have heard a lot about faraway places in the news where terrorist attacks happen and wars take place, but always from the relative comfort of my house in Cambridge were nothing like that ever seems to happen. So I have always been curious about distant countries, and I've always half suspected that evil is not the insane, criminal, terrorist bomber but the people who paint him as insane and criminal.

What I contribute to this exchange is my commitment to take full advantage of this opportunity and overcome any difficulties or challenges with a determined and open attitude. I will do this by being enthusiastic and curious at all times when it is humanly possible for me to do so.

Our Exchange Participants

(continued from page 2)

Narreh Ghazarian is a junior at Lexington High School. Her favorite activities are listening to music and baking. Narreh is fluent in both eastern and western Armenian and is an Armenian dance instructor for children



3-4 years old and music instructor for children 6-9 years old for an Armenian children's chorus. Narreh is a member of the silver medal Lexington High School Madrigal Singers, gold medal Lexington High School Choir, and award winning Armenian youth chorus. Narreh enjoys singing, baking, arts and crafts. Although becoming a member of the madrigal singers is a big achievement, she states, "I have not yet accomplished my greatest achievement at this point in my life." Narreh is a member of the girls' ice hockey team and when time permits baby sits. She is one of four children, Aren (16), Manneh (12), Naris (11) and CYSCA host family. Her mother is an educator and member of the CYSCA Board, a volunteer for CYSCA programs and assists the CYSCA project director. Her father is an Armenian library curator, Ph.D. Candidate at Northeastern University and a graduate of International Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Elizabeth Hartunian, a senior at Belmont High School, is a member of the



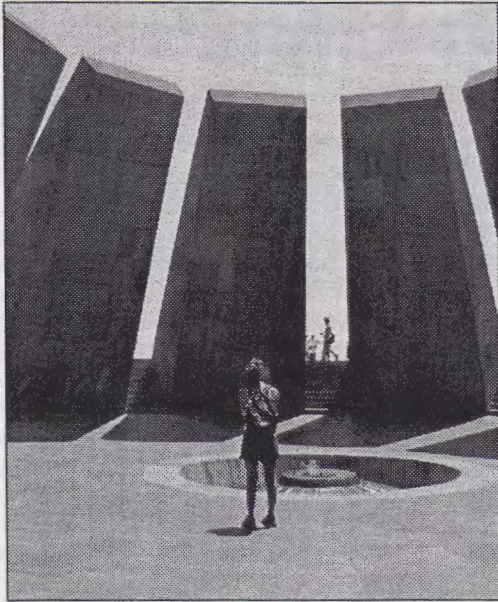
Performing Arts Company having appeared in 4 plays; a member of the Diversity and Tolerance Club, the student senate, student advisory committee, varsity indoor track and varsity field hockey team, Belmont's gold medal award winning choir, committee member of Tolerance 2000 which is a week long celebration of diversity, and chairperson of its Ethnicity Day. She is a math lab peer tutor, and a class connector, someone who makes friends with

a freshman and orients them to the school. Elizabeth takes voice lessons, enjoys singing, reading, running, sports, spending time with friends and family, and sleeping. She has a part-time job baby sitting and performing custodial services. She is an Advanced Placement History student and has received the National Archives Medal for research and won 4th place in the National History Day competition in the state of Massachusetts. Elizabeth was one of 30 students selected from her school to participate in a workshop, Empowering Multicultural Initiatives, a weekend funded by the state of Massachusetts to study race and racism. Selection was based on leadership qualities and commitment to supporting diversity and tolerance. She attends the First Church of Belmont Unitarian Universalist where she is an active member of the youth group. She was part of a volunteer work force to paint the sanctuary of an Armenian innercity church in Troy, NY and built a retaining wall. During Christmas she decorates wreaths for resale for a local charity which provides eye glasses to needy children and baby sits for free for people in need. She considers herself as having a bounding amount of energy and is personally driven. Her mother is Project Director for CYSCA and a clergy person. Her father is a physicist and computer software developer and she has two brothers, Gregory (24) and Jonathan (23). Shasa, a German shepherd, has recently joined their family and is her first dog.

Alexander Horn, a graduate of Cambridge Rindge and Latin, was born in England. He entered Dartmouth College in September 2000. He grew up in Paris and on the campus of the University of South Pacific in Fiji's capital, Suva, where he attended an international school. He states, "Going to an international school has shaped my values and outlook and made me apprecia-



(continued on page 6)



Elizabeth Hartunian at the Genocide Memorial

My Armenian Experience

Incredibly inspirational

by Elizabeth Hartunian

Before heading to Armenia I was hesitant about this experience, expecting the very worst in all kinds of situations. I think it is fair to say that Americans, for the most part, all believe that their country is superior in all ways to any other country. I at least felt this way.

Armenia was certainly going to be an educational and learning experience but I did not think it would be especially fun or that I would learn anything that would actually benefit me in the long run. While the selection process was in its height my nine comrades and I had to write essays about civil society and what we hoped to achieve while on our exchange. I, who had just traveled on an Empowering Multicultural Initiatives weekend, which was on the study and promotion of anti-racism, focused my goal on multiculturalism.

I have always been submerged in a culture that is completely and always different and new. America is a giant salad where all different kinds of people live together, and they mix well together, yet they still retain their own ethnic identity. I am 100% Armenian, and I am American, yet I am the same as my Irish, or Italian friend because I am an American. Armenia on the other hand can be

compared to a bushel of tomatoes, all the same. 98% of the population of Armenia is Armenian. Everyone in their culture is homogeneous, which we all expected but seeing everyone look nearly the same was really a giant culture shock. We stuck out like sore thumbs, and we got stared at, some of us could blend in better but everyone knew we were Americans. American people have this superior notion that they are from a higher culture, but in some sense I have never met a culture as proud as that of the Armenians. We were all constantly reminded by children of the great Armenian conquests and achievements. The Armenian people have so much nationalism, that I don't feel present in American life. We attended the opera where small children sat intently amazed by the orchestra and the conductor, while our older teenagers had a lot of trouble paying attention to the music and the effort of the musicians. The Armenian children all knew the poetry and the artwork of their Armenian writers and artists. Find an American teen who can do that with American writers! This reminded me of an English class discussion where we tried to think of America's national authors and though we came up with the romantics my teacher emphasized that the way Americans judge Thoreau and Emerson is not equivalent to the way other countries cherish their great intellects. This was more than evident in Armenia. The Armenian people appreciate life and their culture so much; perhaps it is because they have experienced intense trials and awful times; times that bring about this sort of intense nationalism.

The Armenian people were outstanding because of the love they have for their country and their country alone, it was constantly fluid throughout the entire country from the city to the village. This form of nationalism is absolutely impossible in America because everyone here has their own ethnic identity and every American's history is different. The unity of the Armenian people in ethnicity, culture, and history is inspiring, and also made me wish my country had that type of connection. Armenia in this sense is completely different from America and seeing that first hand was not only a culture shock but was incredibly inspirational.

Lake Sevan

By Puzant Chouljian

Armenia is in the Southern Caucasus, which is an area slightly larger than Maryland. This landlocked republic is bordered by Georgia to the north, Turkey to the west, and Iran to the south. Armenia is covered with a vast amount of lakes and rivers. The largest lake in Armenia is Lake Sevan. It is a large alpine lake on the Armenian Highland, which is surrounded by extinct volcanoes and is known as Armenia's pearl. It has an elevation of 6,200 ft and an area of 480 sq. mi. The lake's greatest depth, located in the northeast section of the lake, is about 272 ft deep.

A project was started in the 1930s to divert Lake Sevan's waters to the Hrazdan River for irrigation and to generate hydroelectric power. By the end of the 1950's a series of power stations had been built on the river, and nearly a third of the lake's water had been drained away. At that time the project was abandoned, since there were other sources of power and water. A new water management project, developed in 1960, envisioned the stabilization of Lake Sevan's water levels by restricting water use to extreme cases and by constructing a tunnel to divert part of the Akhuryan River to the lake. After 18 years of construction (1963-80) the tunnel, measuring about 30 mi, was completed, and the lake's level began to stabilize. From 1981, when the tunnel started operation, to 1986, the lake's level increased slightly. The tunnel was closed for repairs in 1986.

When CYSCA went to Armenia this past summer, we found some interesting observations, one was that not many buildings and houses were built around the lake, the lake took different colors, a Monastery was built next to the lake in the 9th century, many kinds of animals rested next to the lake, and the sand was full of gravel which made walking difficult. Another important factor was when in the past twenty years the water level of Lake Sevan decreased, an island was formed. The lake is of course fresh water and usually pretty cold, except in the summer when it is warm, and a perfect time to swim and relax.



Getting Around in Armenian

By Alexander Horn

Transportation in Armenia's capital city, Yerevan, is very good and easy to manage. This is especially useful because Yerevan is a spread out city, which means that walking is not necessarily the best way to get around. Transportation in Armenia is quite cheap, especially if compared with the Boston area. The Metro stations were lavishly decorated, with chandeliers and were very spacious as well as deep and cool.

Our group, got around for the most part in hired buses, which eased the business of moving around the city and surrounding areas. Trips to outlying places tended to be on the long side, but were full of memorable occasions that are still priceless. Even within the city our transits added a dimension of fun, in that maneuvering a large group by public transportation can be quite an event.

The minibuses, which we used fairly frequently, were an experience in and of themselves, especially when seventeen people were crammed into their limited space. This occurred quite often, but as there were only people from our group in the minibus we viewed it as bonding. In some respects the journeys in these small vehicles fostered some good conversations, and helped to bring a large group together. For this reason our trips always had a degree of excitement to them, even if it was not evident at the time.

Our Exchange Participants

(continued from page 4)

tive of diversity." Alexander's family spans 3 continents; Africa, Europe and North America. He has lived in 5 countries and has attended school in Fiji, France and the US. His greatest achievement is within a period of 18 months, he had to adjust to the French, Fijian and American educational system. When he was 5 and living in Paris he remembers hearing the Armenian singer Charles Aznavour sing, "Armenie," which as he says, "pleads to the international community for assistance in getting the country back on its feet after the earthquake." "Ever since then," he continues, "I have thought about the struggles Armenia has gone through, and of the resilience and proud nature of the culture." He was a member of the National Honor Society and the French Club at CRLS. He plays the guitar and enjoys cycling, cricket, rugby, soccer, handball, movies, and trying new foods from different world cultures. He has worked part-time as an assistant to the director of the Longfellow Community School and has volunteered at the Central Square World's Fair. Alexander's interest in civil society is multi-culturalism. "Being able to accept diversity is an integral component of a complete citizen. Respect for the differences amongst cultures can bring people together by fostering positive sentiments." I would hope to contribute to an understanding of the theme and to the exchange by bringing a deep commitment to the appreciation of human difference, and of the many peoples and cultures of the world. His father is an English professor at Harvard University and his mother a Ph.D. candidate in multi-culturalism. He has a 20 year old sister Jessica and a 22 year old brother, David.

Suzanne Spera is a junior at Lexington High School where she is on the track team and is interested in environmental protection. She states, "The protection of the environment will be a critical goal of every civil society in the 21st century. In the new mil-

lennium no civil society will excuse another country's careless behavior with respect to its environment." She enjoys movies, shopping, travelling, concerts, skating, and spending time with friends. Suzanne is a five year gold medal winner in synchronized skating. Presently Suzanne is teaching ice skating in Belmont to Down Syndrome children. During the holidays she dresses up in character costumes on ice to entertain children. She has volunteered at Winchester Hospital as a messenger and at City Youth, an organization which helps inner city communities. In addition, she is a yearly volunteer at her school fair. Suzanne is enrolled in honor classes and is a high achiever. She has always admired Anne Frank and her courage during the Holocaust.

She comments, "I respect her positive outlook and her great faith." Her mother Diane is the US educator for the outbound group and her brother, Tom (17) is an exchange student. Michael (11) is at home with their father. He is a businessman.

Tom Spera is a senior at Lexington High School where he was a tutor for the



METCO program which busses children from the inner city into the suburbs for education. Tom enjoys basketball, American football, track,

concerts, computers, photography and sporting events. In addition to volunteering at the school fair each year, Tom helps teachers set up their rooms in August for start of school, and has volunteered at the Winchester Hospital as a messenger. Tom has a strong interest in world issues and in current events. His research on the political and economic struggle of Russia as it faces its transition to a democratic and capitalistic society is currently being published at the request of his history teacher for historical documentation. Tom's interest is in democracy and the role it plays in creating civil society. "The principles of democ-



(continued on page 8)

Memories of Armenia

By Diane Spera, Teacher
Garfield Elementary School

As a schoolteacher, I am very grateful to have been selected to travel to Armenia with the CYSCA exchange program to promote the theme "civil society". My experience was one that I shall always remember fondly. From the moment I spotted majestic Mount Ararat from the airplane, I knew that this would be a memorable trip.

A highlight of my trip was visiting the Ayntap village and school, located about 90 minutes from the City of Yerevan. We arrived at a very attractive school renovated last year by a generous benefactor. Many spoke English and they wanted to test their knowledge of our language with any American willing to listen. Fourteen talented children performed an entertaining, interactive musical program where we tested our skills at solo Armenian dancing. We proceeded to walk through a well-kept village where we noticed chickens, goats, cows, and a bull grazing by the dirt roadside. We met some very interesting and friendly people, eager to share their lives with us. In fact, one elderly woman beckoned me towards her sprawling, two-story home to show me her vast, award-winning flower and fruit garden. She then frantically told me in broken English, Russian, and Armenian that her cow was about to give birth any minute and would I like to see this event take place. Naturally, I accepted this unusual invitation and we quickly ran to the barn (located next to her living room!) just in time to see the newly born calf.

As an animal lover, this was a glorious site for me to see and I felt honored that she wanted to share this with me.

From here, the village people anxiously wanted to show us the ancient ritual of baking lavash bread. In 100-degree weather, two elderly ladies sitting in a tiny room over a fire pit effortlessly showed us this unique process. Afterwards, we were all treated to a feast of homemade wine, lavash bread, herbs, goat cheese, and the sweetest tomatoes I have ever tasted in my life!

All of the people here were so hospitable and friendly. I felt a genuine sense of community and there appeared

to be strong attachments formed between the families and the teachers. I shall always remember the beautiful children, their devoted parents and grandparents, and the glimmer of hope in their eyes as they conversed and spent a memorable day with us.

Yerevan was a safe city as I noticed unattended children taking the subways and autobuses, which were large vans; cheaper than taking taxis.

Another interesting experience was meeting the Mayor of Yerevan. We received a warm welcome where he stated how happy he was with the CYSCA exchange program. Our group was very curious as to why teachers had not been paid since last February. He explained that the economy was sluggish during the summer months and that they would be getting a paycheck soon. Were we surprised to learn that the next day, all teachers in Armenia were paid for the month of February, a mere \$10.00 to \$12.00! How long would it take for teachers to get paid for the entire school year?!

I shall always remember with fondness the very special eight schools we visited and all of the warm, hospitable people we met. The numerous ancient churches, the rebuilding of the earthquake zone, and the well-kept orphanage filled with beautiful children will always hold a special place in my heart.

I found myself very comfortable in Armenia, and I greatly admire these unique people and their happy, jovial dispositions. They have experienced so much pain and hardship and yet, they love to congregate in small groups at the many neon-lit cafes to laugh, joke, and discuss politics as well as their daily happenings. The Armenians love their country and they are very proud of their rich heritage. Many people told me repeatedly that they value their precious freedom the most and they would go to great lengths to protect it.

I look forward to returning to Armenia in the future so that I may visit a country not struggling to remain independent in the aftermath of Communism, but rather to see a rich, thriving country with a bustling economy, and communities practicing democratic principles while living in a civil society.

Love and Commitment to Armenia

By Tad T. Sudnick
Science Teacher
Cambridge Public Schools

This is a short addendum to my report submitted on the "Water As A Resource" curriculum that I employed and the Educational system of Armenia that I observed.

I spent a lot of my time during the exchange with my host Hmayak Avagyan and his family and with my exchange group as we visited schools, other places of learning and historic and natural sites of interest. I could divide my experience into two realms: my life at home with my host and his family and my life with the exchange students, teachers and adults on our daily excursions to schools and sites of interest. There were three Armenians that I would like to focus on - Hmayak and Anya Avagyan, my home hosts and Sona Mkrtchyan, a teacher who led some lessons with our students and who joined us on some of our excursions in Armenia. What impressed me about these three people is their love and commitment to Armenia.

I'll begin with Hmayak and his wife Anya. Hmayak is a researcher who has recently discovered an early detection mechanism for some cancers. This new breakthrough has catapulted him and his research team into instant international attention. He had traveled to America with an environmental group that CYSCA hosted this past spring and enjoyed this stay very much, but confessed he much prefers his home in Armenia. He said he appreciates his deep friendships in Armenia. He was surprised to see that in America, people often do not know who their neighbors are. In Armenia, neighbors are like family. Every evening Hmayak's

(continued on page 11)

A Citizen's Role In A Democracy

By Thomas Spera

A true democracy depends on its citizen participation in free elections, the media, education, and other unique civil liberties that democracy offers. A democratic citizen plays the most important role in a true democracy. Without the will of an individual to participate, true democracy cannot evolve and flourish. Unlike communism, or totalitarianism, the principles of democracy allow the citizen to have an influence on the future of their country. It is imperative for the democratic citizen to be aware that he or she possesses the ability to make a change in their country. There are of course social differences in society that limit the power that an individual has to make a change, but one has to understand that no matter how high or low they stand on the "social ladder," they still have an influence in the future of their country. By uniting with their fellow citizens and standing up for something they believe is moral and ethical, there is almost a guarantee that their voice will be heard. This is where the true beauty of democracy lies; within the power of the individual to stand up and be heard by their government, without facing brutal punishment, and by being able to live a humane life with guaranteed rights that are never to be taken away. In a communist or totalitarian society, an individual is not guaranteed any rights and faces death or jail time for speaking against anything that contradicts the principles of their controlling government. For a civil society to thrive successfully, the people of the society must have the God-given right of freedom, and democracy is the key to possessing this essential right in society.

I am pleased that I was chosen to participate in this exchange program because I relish the opportunity to witness the Armenian society through their struggle in creating a successful democracy. I was interested to see how the Armenian people adapted to the exact opposite form of government under which they have lived for most of their lives, and witness democracy take hold in a former communist ruled country. I feel that I was able to contribute democratic principles to the exchange, by sharing my life experiences in my country and explain how morality and human ethics have played a major role in my life and my society.

Our Exchange Participants

(continued from page 6)

racy allow the citizen to be aware that he or she possesses the ability to make a change in their country. I am interested to see how the Armenian people adapted to the opposite form of government under which they have lived for most of their lives and witness democracy take hold in a former communist ruled country. I feel I can contribute democratic moral principles to the exchange by sharing my life experiences in my country and explain how morality and human ethics have played a major role in my life and my society." He has a part-time job valet parking sports cars at a golf club. He would like to have met the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr, because he shares, "I respect that he took risks in life to defend what he believed in." His 11 year old brother, Michael is at home with their father and 130 lb. golden retriever, Cheerio. His father is a businessman.

David Prum, known as Max, is in the 10th grade at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. The youngest member of the group, he would someday like to own his own production company and become a film director. Max's interest and focus in civil society is on free and independent media and he comments, "Media must be an unbiased relayer of information and not a tool for a political entity." His accomplishments include swimming 6 miles when he was 11 years old, making him the youngest person ever to finish the "Purple Albacross Race." He enjoys sport cards, writing stories, snow boarding, reading, drama, videos, computer games, and going to the movies. Max's community activities include volunteering in a neighborhood clean-up event, children's day camp and community after school program. He comments "What I can contribute to this exchange is my commitment to take full advantage of this opportunity and overcome any difficulties or challenges with a determined attitude. I will do this by being enthusiastic and curious at all times when it is humanly

possible. Max has a 10 year old sister, Hannah. His father is a private investigator and his mother is a housewife.

Alina Sullivan, was a senior at Arlington High School and is now enrolled at



Bentley College since last September. She is cited by her AHS mathematics teacher as being quick in calculus and original in problem solving.

Alina is a Teen Ambassador of AIDS Action in Boston. Multi-talented, Alina is an accomplished gold medal award winning pianist and is also a four year member of the St. James Armenian Youth Choir, their Chorale and the Arlington High School Chorus. She volunteers as a pianist for fund raisers and performs at nursing homes for its residents. She is a member of Armenian Christian Youth Organization of America and Armenian Youth Federation. She is a 4 year participant in Walk for Hunger. Alina has a part time job at Bertucci's Restaurant and Pizzeria, Filene's Department Store as a sales associate and a teacher at the Sahag Mesrob Armenian School. Although she excels in music and math she feels her greatest accomplishment is "climbing my way up from an Armenian Saturday school graduate, to a teacher's aid, to a present day Armenian Saturday School teacher." Alina's mother, Seta is on the CYSCA board and they are a CYSCA host family. Her father is a mortgage broker and her sister Gina is 12.

Jonathan Baring-Gould, Art Specialist at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS), grew up in Alaska and by choice has not eaten red meat or chicken for over ten years. He is a talented ceramics teacher and an artist in his own right. He is creative, dedicated to his work and is eager to engage in multiple approaches to teaching and learning. He serves as a guide and mentor to his students. In 1999 he travelled for 10 days in Africa with five students. The CRLS student population comprises

(continued on page 10)

The Churches of Armenia

By Vatche Arabian

The Armenian Church is one of the most important parts of the culture of Armenia. Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity in 301 AD. During centuries of rule by other countries, the Armenian Church maintained its sense of identity. While Armenia was under the rule of the Soviet Union, the head of the Armenian Church, the Catholicos, was considered the most important representative of the Armenian people. While the Soviet Union was officially atheist, authorities allowed official recognition only to Armenian clergy. A visitor to the country's many churches and monasteries will be exposed to beautiful architecture, art, and the people of Armenia. Almost every Church and Monastery in Armenia has its own specific historical background, such as St. Ejmiatsin and the monastery of Khor Virap.

Yerevan has 4 surviving Churches within the center of the Capitol. One of those Churches is the Sourb Sarkis Church. It was built in the mid-15th century. It was damaged during an earthquake in 1679 but was restored a few years later. Additions to the church took place in the 1840's and 50's and was finally rebuilt one last time in 1969. The Church inside is quite beautiful.

The monastery of St. Ejmiatsin is the oldest Church in Armenia and was built in the 4th century immediately after the adoption of Christianity. It is located in the City of Vagharshapat in the Armavir province. St. Ejmiatsin is also where the Catholicos resides. The St. Ejmiatsin Cathedral was built on the spot where St. Gregory the Illuminator (Grigor Loussavorich) saw a revelation of Jesus Christ, who told Grigor where to build the Church. Located below the altar and accessible through the Museum in the back of the church you can see the Pagan Temple that existed during the time of Grigor Loussavorich. Also located in the museum, is a piece of Noah's Ark, and the spear that one of the Roman guards used to pierce the rib of Jesus Christ following his crucifixion. The St. Ejmiatsin Cathedral was rebuilt many times, and a trained architect



Church at the Monastery of Khor Virap

would be able to identify the distinctive masonry of the periods. In the beginning of the 19th century, the interior of the Cathedral was decorated by a painter named Nagash Hovnatanian, his work was restored in the 1950's.

Located in the Ararat province, is quite possibly one of the most significant historical and architectural monuments - the monastery of Khor Virap. Khor Virap is built on a hill where according to Church legend, was located the municipal gaol (jail), where by the orders of King Tiridates III they threw St. Gregory for professing Christianity. St. Gregory spent 13 years in the gaol (a pit). During this time he was fed by the King's sister, Khosrovdoukt. This legend also intertwines with that of the legend of Gayane, Hiripsime and the Virgins. Gayane, Hiripsime and the Virgins had fled to Armenia from Rome. Hiripsime turned down the courtship of the Pagan King, remaining faithful to her Christian beliefs. Hiripsime, Gayane, and the Virgins were executed upon the orders of the King. After the execution, the King fell very sick, and his head began to resemble a pig's snout. Khosrovdoukt dreamt several dreams that the King could only be cured by St. Gregory, who was in the gaol. They pulled him out, and St. Gregory healed the King through prayer. As a result, King Tiridates III converted to Christianity, and made Christianity the official religion of Armenia in 301 AD. The gaol where St. Gregory resided for over 13 years is preserved next to the chapel.

The monastery of Sevan was built in the 9th century, although it was then located on an island. In present days because of the lower water level, it is now on a peninsula. In this monastery three churches were built, cells for the monks, and auxiliary structures. Two of the

(continued on page 16)

Hearing Impaired School Project

By Narreh S. Ghazarian

On April 30th I called Ms. Marge Torosian, a deaf woman who has grown up in Massachusettes. I had never talked to anyone who was deaf before, so in a way I knew that this conversation would provide me with a new outlook in life. For one hour I talked to Ms. Torosian. I asked her many questions about her life and her current status in life.

Ms. Torosian is a woman with an interesting story. Marge was raised in Everett, Massachusettes. She graduated from Everett High School and got a job in John Hancock where she worked for thirty-eight years. In 1986 Marge came home with a headache. She decided to go lay down for a while and when she woke up she realized that she was no longer able to hear. For Marge this was a very confusing situation. How could she possibly lose her hearing from laying down. She didn't know what was happening. She tried to speak in a loud voice so she could hear herself but it didn't work. Once she had realized that her hearing was gone forever she focused on trying to get things back to normal. Marge decided to learn how to lip read, since she already knew how to talk. She returned to her job with a few changes "thank God for computers" she said. Computers have helped her in many ways throughout the years.

Ms. Torosian is currently living alone and working at a department store, "I am very happy with how they treat me" said Marge. There are two agencies that have been especially useful, one is the TTY (the telephone service that we used), and the other is the closed captioning. Marge has never been to Armenia, but she hopes that the people there have the deaf equipment that individuals in America are fortunate enough to have. This interview has taught me to live each day to its fullest and never take anything for granted because you will never know how and when things may change.



Civil Society: Government and Instability

By Alexander Horn

The current political problems in Armenia, since independence from the Soviet Union, are not unfamiliar to me. On the 27th October 1999, a group of armed men burst into the Armenian parliament and opened fire, killing prime minister Vazgen Sarkisian and a number of MPs. One of the gunmen was recognised as a journalist. Twelve years earlier in May of 1987, when I was not yet four, armed troops entered parliament in the Fiji capital, Suva, detaining the newly elected Labour Prime Minister and the entire cabinet. This coup d'état was orchestrated by Fijian nationalist Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who put himself in the seat of power. Over the eleven years and three elections since the coup the Labour party has made gains, without any adverse reactions. I would hope and expect that the political instability in Armenia will resolve itself in due course, as it did in Fiji.

Our Exchange Participants

(continued from page 8)

50 countries where Jon says, "each individual is able to draw on their own cultural traditions in projects and the resulting work is rich and varied and creates a meaningful educational experience for everyone." In 1980 he drove through rural and urban communities in Czechoslovakia. He says of that experience, "Though communication was difficult because we had limited common language, I enjoyed my interaction with everyone I met. Visiting Armenia gives me an opportunity to begin to know one of the oldest and richest cultures in the world, one which is renowned for its artistic traditions." He plans on documenting Armenian art during his trip for classroom use. Jonathan will teach photography to the Armenian and American exchange students. They will do a photograph essay on civil society which will be exhibited in Cambridge and Yerevan. He will review applications, evaluate the qualifying exams and will assist in the selection of the October 2000 Armenian exchange students, educator and chaperone. Jonathan plays the Southern African thumb piano (Kalimba) and the kazoo.

Joseph McDonald is the Webmaster and the Graphic Arts/Printing Coordinator for Watertown Public Schools. He was one of the host teachers during the exchange in October 1999 in US and helped students produce their first newspaper. He is interested in architecture, sculpting, astronomy, soaring, and photography. He is a scuba diver and is presently training to be a pilot. He is a caring and inspiring teacher whose interest in the exchange is "to work with both the Armenian and American students to create a newspaper and web pages thereby fostering better communication between the two countries." He has travelled to Bonaire with the science department to study marine biology through lectures, hands on workshops, tours and scuba diving.

Tad Sudnick, is one of the most talented science teachers at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. He has fought hard to maintain excellent intellectual opportunities for students of all learning levels. He has demonstrated success in teaching students of all abilities and interest

levels in a heterogeneous class. Tad has been involved in CRLS/Russian student exchanges for over 10 years. He has a working knowledge of Russian, has hosted Russian teachers and has travelled four times to Yaroslav and St. Petersburg, Russia. He participated in the 1999 Armenian student exchange trip to America. He is a coach of the State Champion Science Team and has brought a science team of 20 students to National Competitions after they won the Massachusetts State Championship in 1992, 1994, and 1999. Tad's college roommate was Armenian and he looks forward to his visit to Armenia. He shares, "I am a support teacher in a world history course and would love to share what I have learned about Armenia as the first Christian nation." He likes to read and swim, and plays the piano and accordion. In Armenia, Tad will teach the students how to conduct water quality testing experiments. They will report their results to Cambridge City Hall, the water municipality of Armenia, and US Government. He will review applications, evaluate the qualifying exam and will assist in the selection of the October 2000 Armenian exchange students, educator and chaperone.

Diane Spera, who teaches at the Garfield Elementary School, a magnet charter school in Revere, Mass where over 40 different languages are spoken, has created "a positive environment filled with proactive, enthusiastic learning." She has taught in Armenian private day schools in both New York and California. Her teaching goal is to design projects that challenge her students' thinking and engage them in learning. She states, "I believe that a classroom should serve not only as a place to learn, but also as a comfortable setting where children can learn from each other's diverse cultural backgrounds. Practical strategies can be implemented to meet the needs of diverse learners who ultimately can become a community of learners who are responsible and caring." She is proficient in piano and recorder and been a piano accompanist for mixed chorus' and has travelled to Japan as an exchange participant. Her

(continued on page 12)

Armenia - A positive impact

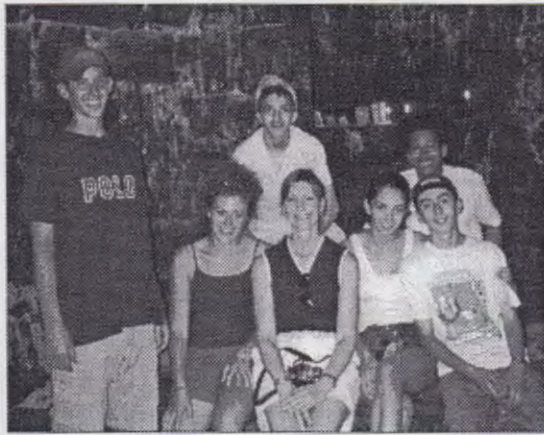
By Suzanne Spera

When my mom first told me about the CYSCA exchange trip to Armenia, I was not sure if it was something that I would really want to do. However, after seriously thinking about it, I figured that many of my ancestors came from this country and that it was an important part of my heritage. So I decided to apply for the exchange with the attitude that if I do not get accepted, I would have nothing to lose. When I found out that I was accepted, I was happy but I still could not believe I was going! I was very apprehensive because I had no idea what to expect visiting a country that was once dominated by Communism for over seventy years. I was nervous that maybe my host family would not be able to understand English. I also did not know how safe it would be and if water or electricity would be readily available.

Even during my first day in Armenia, I was still more nervous than excited about this trip. However, after a few days of living with my host family, a husband and wife who were both physicians, and their two daughters, ages 16 and 18, I quickly began to feel more comfortable because of their warmth and hospitality; they treated me like their third daughter.

Frequently, my Armenian buddy Ani and I would walk around the famous Opera House in downtown Yerevan and stop at one of the many cafés to socialize with her friends who were extremely interested in learning about a teenager's life in America. It was refreshing to see hundreds of people hanging out and having a good time with each other. Coincidentally, we met up with other exchange students and their Armenian buddies; we all had happy times together.

In Armenia, I noticed that everybody dressed up when they went out. I discovered that the majority of women had limited wardrobes, consisting of only three nice outfits. These outfits were worn continuously, where in America, our closets are full! Women dressed very fashionably, in fancy silk dresses and high heels; they were rarely seen in



*Visiting the gaol (jail) at the Monastery of Khor Virap
Back Row: Puzant Chouljian, Alexander Horn
Front Row: Thomas Spera, Suzanne Spera, Elizabeth
Hartunian and Gor Zakarian*

shorts. I was surprised how some could even walk! The men were also dressed neatly in nice pants and dress shoes, never seen in Nikes!

After returning home around ten thirty at night when it was just starting to get dark, my host mother would always offer to cook me a full-course dinner.

She would speak in Armenian, and then try to speak in broken English, saying "do not be shy, when you are in my house you are my daughter!"

Fortunately, we always had electricity and water was not a problem, except for two days, where we did not have any water. This was not an inconvenience because the bathtub was always filled with water just in case the water was shut off. What I was not prepared for was the concept of force flushing! The Armenians have adapted to their water situation and they do not seem to be troubled by this hardship, although I was sad to learn that many Armenian households do not have water on a regular basis.

The most important memory of Armenia that I will never forget is all the people who were so kind, loving and respectful toward me. I felt as if I were a true member of my host family and that they had known me all my life. I have made many lasting friendships and I hope to go back to Armenia someday to visit all the very special people that made such a positive impact on my life.

Love and Commitment to Armenia

(continued from page 7)

house had neighbors and friends passing through it. Hmayak and his wife had said that this deep commitment to their friends got them through their most difficult times – and Armenia has had some incredibly difficult times.

Hmayak's wife Anya is a professor of Russian Language at Yerevan University and helps her students a lot. While I was there she had a student visit for extra help because he was struggling. I do not know of any American University professors who would do the same. Hmayak and his wife are committed to their friends and the future of Armenia and that's what I find most admirable about them and Armenians in general. Hmayak's new discovery has brought him financial gains and he told me one night that he employs thirteen people who are able to support their families. At one dinner party with several friends Hmayak pointed out a couple who considered moving to America where their son is a very successful computer programmer at Microsoft. He said that he and his wife are doing everything possible to keep them in Armenia. Hmayak and his wife feel very strongly that the professionals and intellectuals of Armenia have a commitment to their country to stay. I admire this quality very much.

Sona Mkrtchyan is another individual who exhibits such commitment to her country and its future. She is a schoolteacher who probably has not received a paycheck in months. But that does not deter her from her work and goals. She joined us on many excursions and is a font of knowledge about Armenian culture and history. She was able to provide great details about the history and customs in the Armenian churches. Her true talent lies in teaching. She taught an interactive lesson with us at the deaf and dumb

(continued on page 13)

Creating a Civil Society

By Vatche Arabian

Part of creating a Civil Society is resolving conflicts without violence. In my school there is a program called Peer Mediation; I am a "Peer Mediator," we are taught that violence is not the way. The only way to fix something is to resolve the conflict by talking about it. We bring the two (or more) people into the same room, and two mediators ask each side their view of the situation. We talk about what they did, how it made them feel, then help the people come to an agreement. If this doesn't work, we go into private sessions, and finally come back together. This is a great lesson in creating a civil society, because peace can be reached by talking.

When two bodies can't agree on something, they fight, trying to get each other to listen. But when you fight, the anger builds up and causes the bodies to fight to make the people think like they do. Most wars are fought over differences of opinion. It is your right to be different, no one can be told exactly how to act or what to do. Peer Mediation, helps people work out their differences, make an agreement, and stick to it. In schools, this works well. Although Peer Mediation is not an alternative to suspension (in the case of a fight) it still helps people work out their differences.

I want to interact with the kids in Armenia, and tell them about where I come from as well. I hope to maybe encourage them to visit the United States just as they encouraged me to visit Armenia. I hope to be able to bring a camera and document my trip as well as create a little "mockumentary" about my trip to show to the public here in the United States.

Our Exchange Participants

(continued from page 2)

community activities include being a girl scout troop leader. As an educator, Diane will visit schools and the academic system and prepare a report for the US Government. She will review applications, evaluate the qualifying exam and will assist in the selection of the October 2000 Armenian exchange students, educator and chaperone. She is the mother of three children; Tom, Suzanne, Michael and guardian of 130 lb. golden retriever. Her husband is a businessman.

VOLUNTEERS

Richard Moses Boyajian, a CYSCA host family, is a certified beautician and barber by trade and owner/operator of a barber shop. His avocation is woodworking, carpentry, restoration and painting. He enjoys camping and hiking in the mountains of Montana. He is an avid bike rider and walker. In May he organized a 22 mile bike-a-thon in memory of his brother, Nishan. His life long dream has been to visit Armenia. He was active in the CYSCA 1999 Armenian student exchange to Boston as a volunteer. This trip realizes that dream. He says, "I'm so happy to be able to visit Armenia. I want to do something constructive to help my mother land. I don't want to go as a tourist. I appreciate CYSCA giving me this opportunity to volunteer." As a volunteer, Richard is covering his own expenses on this exchange. As Field Director of this exchange while in Armenia he will supervise the volunteer activities in Armenia; painting school classrooms and planting trees as well as teach health education and barbering skills at the Abovyan Colony for boys.

Seta Sullivan, is a member of the CYSCA Board, and Administrative Assistant and teacher at the Sahag Mesrob Armenian School, Watertown. She and her husband, Jim, have hosted a number of CYSCA exchangees. She will teach classes while in Armenia and will coordinate shopping, meal preparation and

youth volunteers who will prepare lunch at an orphanage. She states, "I have always wanted to visit my homeland. Through CYSCA I have created a new bouquet of friends. Now I know I will visit Armenia as an Armenian going to her homeland and welcomed by a big group of wonderful people I could call my adoptive family." As a volunteer Seta has covered her own expenses for this trip.

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Rev. Joanne Hartunian, a teacher of secondary school students, and an ordained member of the clergy for over a quarter century, is chaperone for the exchange and has developed the curriculum for this exchange according to US guidelines set forth by the Department of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This is her third trip to Armenia as a CYSCA chaperone and this time Project Director as well. She states, "Being part of the education, value and citizenship development of young people through these exchanges, as we continue to work towards developing and building a civil society in Armenia and maintaining it in America, is an honor and responsibility which I accept with pleasure in my commitment to human rights and civil liberties. Civil society is the necessary framework through which a group of people function harmoniously to allow the majority within the society to prescribe policies while protecting the fundamental human rights of every citizen." She is married to physicist and computer software developer Dr. Nelson Hartunian and they will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary in September. She is the mother of Gregory (23), Jonathan (22), and Elizabeth (17).



Abundant thanks as well to the CYSCA Program Committee and Joseph McDonald for his untiring efforts in producing this second issue of the "Armenian/Exchange"

Fond Reflections of CYSCA's School Partnership Program

By Jon Baring-Gould, Art Teacher
Cambridge Rindge & Latin School

In the early summer of 2000 I traveled to Yerevan, Armenia with the Cambridge Yerevan Sister City Association. I think back to this time fondly and remember all the wonderful people I met and was lucky enough to get to know. While in Armenia I started friendships which continue to grow even though we are on opposite sides of the earth.

I was asked to go on this program as an educational consultant. One aspect of my job was to look at the Armenian school system and report back what I found. Is it working? What are its weaknesses and strengths? How can it be improved? What similarities and differences are there in the Armenian educational system in comparison to the U.S. system?

Is the Armenian school system working? That is a very hard question to answer. Are students learning? Absolutely. Are students reaching their highest potential? Probably not. According to the head of secondary education for Armenia, 75% of all students who start first grade graduate from secondary school. In order to graduate a student must pass a series of rigorous examinations so it is safe to say that those students who graduate are well educated in Armenian and Russian languages, math, science, and the humanities. If three quarters of the students in Armenia are literate at the end of their education then the school system is working as well as if not better than our school system is.

What are the weaknesses and strengths of the Armenian school system? The only thing that is keeping the school system going is the teachers and administrators who are working in the schools. These people are dedicated to education in a way that we in the U.S. can't even begin to understand. Teachers salaries are extremely low. No person can live on twenty American dollars a month so in order to be a teacher one must feel an overwhelming need to follow this career path. Those who have chosen to become teachers must have some other means of support: a spouse able to earn a livable wage, a parent or

family which is able to support them, or the teacher must have some other type of job which pays much more than teaching so that they are able to afford to live.

Another strength is the relatively large number of students who are able to go onto college. There are 16 state universities and 84 private universities. Combined they service around 58,000 students. There are around 1.7 million people living in Armenia, so the university system is able to accommodate around 3.5% of the population. That may not seem like very much but when you consider that roughly 10% of the population is of college age the university system is able to accommodate nearly one third of these people. Out of the 170,000 people who are able to go onto college what percent of them actually want to? The fact that a country that has no economy to speak of and has only recently restored power and water to its capital city is able to provide higher education to any of its citizens is remarkable.

For over seventy years Communism and socialist ideas were at the forefront of education. Now Armenia is trying to create new generations of free thinkers. The country has started to teach civic education starting in the second grade in order to begin the process of reforming how students think. Civic education includes but is not limited to foundations in democracy and the theory and practice of democratic learning. Civic education is just beginning and is only offered in 10% of the secondary schools throughout the country.

The greatest weakness of the Armenian school system is funding but more funding is not necessarily the best way to improve their educational system. There is an enormous amount of money which is wasted by administration. I am sure that much of this is due to years of working under the former soviet system where hierarchies developed based on political positions.

Aside from financial considerations the Armenian school system could improve their curriculum. An emphasis is put on language, math, and science

(continued on page 16)

Love and Commitment to Armenia

(continued from page 7)

school using literature and a wonderful conversation ensued among the Armenian and American students. She is also involved as a teacher trainer for a new curriculum on Civic Education in Armenia. Her curriculum, which she developed in the United States with other Armenian teachers, involves an interactive approach and she observed that students who traditionally don't succeed in school do well with this new approach. It is her goal and the goal of the curriculum to educate children so that they will take active roles in the betterment of their city and country. One of the major efforts is to get the person to see far beyond just his/her needs and to function with the friendship and collegiality that someone like Hmayak or Anya exhibit. Working together and supporting each other during the building of a brighter future for the country of Armenia is the goal of Sona, Hmayak, Anya and many other Armenians. They each have their own special and unique way of reaching that goal. Their energy and vision are admirable and unforgettable.

It is important in our exchange program to avoid tantalizing or visiting Armenians with our material wealth and easier lifestyle. These easily visible features of our society do not guarantee happiness or a better understanding of our nation and ourselves. Armenia has much to be admired, applauded and emulated. I think the program that CYSCA, Mr. Jack Medzorjian and Rev. Joanne Hartunian create recognizes this concern and effectively creates a very educational experience where Armenian students are proud to be Armenian and will want to work hard toward its successful future.

Greetings From YCSCA

By Yuri Jilavyan, Director
Yerevan-Cambridge Sister City
Association - Yerevan

Happy New Year. Best wishes from the Yerevan-Cambridge Sister City Association (YCSCA) to you and your families and all the best in the coming Millennium.

I am Yuri Jilavyan, Director of YCSCA. I have been engaged in the youth exchange program since 1994, when the first group of Armenian youth visited the USA. I know all the students (American and Armenian) who have participated in this program. The important thing is that not only do these students make relationships and friends, but their families do so as well. It's very exciting to see the positive effects of this relationship.

I have visited the US three times since 1991. During my first visit I began to study the education system of the US. After my second visit I established the first high school in Armenia, which is now called "Edu Complex Knights of Vardan". Now there are many high schools in Armenia, which are established based on my high school. So my visit to the US was a very important step for the Armenian educational system. I also have many students who are alumni of CYSCA Youth Exchange programs. Their participation helped them develop their English, which is essential today. All of them can use the computer and Internet very easily.

These youth exchanges are very important in developing knowledge of democracy for the students especially from our side, as well as for their cultural development. I am grateful to the US government and CYSCA for giving our youth such a wonderful opportunity to shape their lives. Special thanks to Jack and Eva Medzorian, Reverend Joanne Hartunian and all the many other CYSCA and YCSCA volunteers for their important role in making this program happen. We look forward to youth exchanges and sister school partnerships being an ongoing program.

Teens open eyes to democracy

(continued from page 1)

As part of the trip, the American students visited an Armenian orphanage, where they distributed to the children stuffed toys they had collected. They also gave money and planted trees at a nursery school, acts to signify that democracy is taking hold in the country.

"These were kids who really needed help, and we were helping them. It was a nice feeling," Arabian said.

People in Armenia were generally very friendly, warm and caring, said Arabian, but the idea of volunteering one's time or possessions to those less fortunate had not caught on there as much as it has in the United States, Arabian said.

There is a movement in America, whether widespread or not, to relieve homelessness, he said, but homelessness and extreme poverty are taken more for granted there. One homeless person in the capital, Yerevan, to whom Arabian gave his leftover lunch one day, broke down and began thanking God for the gesture, he said.

"We took the first step of exposing them to what a civil society is," Arabian said.

In addition to visiting the orphanage and nursery school, the students spent a day at a school for the hearing-impaired, where they learned about Armenian sign language and were treated to a performance by the hearing-impaired kids. They attended lectures and gave talks at seven high schools in and around Yerevan and tested the water in Lake Sevan along with the Armenian students.

Ten students out of 30 applicants were chosen to take part in the exchange through a competitive application and essay process, said Hartunian. Those heading the program were interested in taking American or "Americanized" kids of any ethnic background who wanted to share not just democratic ideals, but also what it means culturally to be a kid in America, she said.

"The goal of the project was to take an American child to Armenia, not to take an [Armenian-American] child back

to the motherland to discover their roots," Hartunian said.

Initially, that is a large reason Puzant Chouljian applied for the program. An Armenian born in Lebanon, Chouljian said he wanted to see where his people came from and how it compared to Lebanon.

It was somewhat similar to Lebanon, he said, but worlds apart from the United States. The first day he was in Armenia, he was very homesick, Chouljian said. But everyone there – kids, adults and strangers – were so friendly that by day two, he was cured.

Armenia's Soviet past lingers, said Chouljian. Armenians who struggled to find a word in their native language would sometimes fall back on Russian terminology, he said. And sentiment toward democratization varies.

"It depended on the people. I felt they didn't mind if it was communist or not," Chouljian said.

Whatever their ideology, Chouljian said one of the most striking features of Armenian culture was its friendliness.

"There were lots of kids on the streets, just hanging around with their buddies, and they were very social. They'd come up to you and ask, 'What's your name? Where are you from?'" he said. "I had fun, and I want to go back. I miss it."

As part of the grant, the students from both sides of the exchange must complete an international project together – this group is publishing a two issue newspaper – and must maintain contact for at least one year via e-mail, accessible in Armenia through computers supplied by the grant, Hartunian said.

Before the American kids returned to American soil, there were e-mail messages waiting for them from their Armenian friends, Hartunian said.

"They communicate with each other like they were next door. It's so heartening to see them do this," she said.

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Water As A Resource

By Tad Sudnick, Science Teacher
Cambridge Ridge and Latin School

My name is Tad Sudnick and I had the great opportunity to join the CYSCA family in the capacity as a teacher/chaperone on the Year 2000 exchange trip to Yerevan, Armenia. The lesson I taught focused on water and where it is found. I first had the students brainstorm where water comes from. We essentially agreed that there are seven major resources of water. I then asked the students to rank the seven sources of water on earth according to relative abundance. After the students gave their hypothetical rankings, I disclosed the true percentages of each resource. The students were surprised to see that rivers compose the least amount of water compared to all the other sources and ten times less than that of atmospheric water!

Seeing the percentages of these water sources written on the blackboard is one thing, but I devised a way in which the students could visualize the relative amounts of water from the seven categories: freshwater lakes, saltwater lakes, rivers, all subsurface, sea ice and glaciers, atmospheric, and all oceans and sea water. I had a one liter bottle and blue food coloring and filled up a liter bottle with tap water, colored it and told the students to imagine that ten of these were the world supply of water. Using the percentages of each source and operating with the assumption that the world water total was ten liters, we created a model of what the various sources would look like relative to each other. It turns out that the oceans and seawater would occupy all liters of the water except for 2.8 milliliters from the tenth liter. The other six sources of water would share the 2.8 remaining milliliters! The Armenian students were invited to measure out the appropriate amounts of blue colored water and place them in a small plastic dish. We lined up all seven of the amounts and saw with our own eyes how dramatic the relative distribution was. The students were astounded to see that of all ten liters of water, all the water from all the rivers of the world comprised a very tiny drop that actually evaporated within twenty seconds (further proof of the absence of humidity in the Armenian summer air!).

Looking at the relative amounts of the seven sources of water, I then posed the question "Of these seven sources, which are drinkable for humans?" When the students pulled aside the drinkable sources they realized that less than one half of one percent was drinkable water! I then posed the question. "Knowing what you now have learned, what do you suppose was the purpose of this lesson?" Ultimately the students would answer that of all the water on earth, a very tiny percent of it is actually available to humans. Therefore, we need to be very careful not to pollute those few and precious sources of our available drinking water. We then brainstormed ways that humans have polluted water in the environment. This conversation functioned as a segue into the water testing kits.

The water testing kits were furnished by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority Education Department, particularly from Meg Tabacsko and Neil Clarke. Each kit consists of eight tests. Our exchange students (Armenian and American) were able to perform seven of the eight tests. Seven water tests were performed on three samples of water. The samples were: water taken from the faucet of school #172, water collected off an environment vessel (with the help of Vilik Sargysan) from the lake Sevan at depths of 3 meters and 10 meters. The seven tests included: Temperature; pH; Total Dissolved Solids (TDS); Turbidity; Nitrates; Dissolved Oxygen; Coliform Bacteria presence.

I talked to the students about all seven of these tests and what implications they had on measuring the quality of the water. Implications for sustainability of aquatic ecosystems were also discussed. The Armenian and American students then broke into two mixed groups to perform the seven tests on the water of School #172.

The only noteworthy or unusual results from the water testing of the school water were:

There was an unusually high level of total dissolved solids in the school #172 tap water. One group obtained a figure of 9250 parts per million and the other group corroborated these results with a reading of 9625 ppm. This confirms the presence of a lot of ions in the water at this school. Their water is obviously very rich in minerals, which is often in the



Taking water samples on Lake Sevan

forms of ions in water. Such ions may include Chloride, sodium, potassium, calcium, fluoride ions.

There was an unusually high amount of nitrate ion in the water. This agrees with the above result of high amount of ions in the water.

The presence of some form of coliform bacteria. Our tests do not reveal exact quantities, but the fact that our purple indicator fluid turned yellow within hours indicates a rather substantial amount of coliform bacteria. It is important to note that this does not mean that this was necessarily fecal coliform bacteria. There are many sources of coliform bacteria.

The only noteworthy or unusual results from the water testing of the Lake Sevan water were:

The Total Dissolved Solids values were very low, zero for the 10 meter sample and 230 for the 3 meter sample.

There was a detection of coliform bacteria but it took days to show up in the test vial, which would indicate very little presence (especially when compared to the school water). Possible contamination of the test vials could have happened. But I am not totally surprised by the possible presence of coliform because we saw lots of cattle in the water of Lake Sevan not too far from the test site.

The pH values at both depths were quite high: 9.1 at 10 meters and 9.0 at three meters deep. This indicates water that is somewhat basic. Lake water is typically not that basic.

In conclusion, it was a pleasure to share some information about water as a resource with the Armenian and American students. They worked well together on an important environmental study that I hope will continue and broaden with future exchanges.

The Churches of Armenia

(continued from page 9)

three churches are still standing, the church of Soub Arakelots, and the church of Sourb Astvatsaltsin. The two carved wooden doors from the Sevan monastery are great examples of the advanced art of woodwork, and are preserved at the State Historical Museum of Armenia.

The Armenian people will be commemorating the 1700th anniversary of the adoption of the Christian faith in Armenia in the year 2001. The Armenian Apostolic Church is building a Cathedral of Grigor Loussavorich (Gregory the Illuminator) in Yerevan, which upon its completion, will be the biggest church in Armenia.

The Armenians Christian faith is very important to the Armenian culture. Converting to Christianity is quite possibly one of the most important events in Armenian history. Along with many other things in Armenia, the Churches had the greatest effect on me. I was amazed by the historical background, fantastic architecture, and the relics of a great past. Armenia has a very unique history of its churches, church architecture, and religion, a history that should never be forgotten.

Fond Reflections of CYSCA's School Partnership Program

(continued from page 13)

while the courses that we consider electives in the U.S. take a back seat in the Armenian educational system. Subjects such as dancing, singing, the arts and sports are all taught in after school clubs. These clubs are given no money what so ever and rely on sponsors to support them financially and parents and teachers to volunteer their time to run these programs.

The importance of electives is overlooked by the Armenian educational system. Electives keep children in school by offering them alternative ways to succeed. Through electives the student is able to develop self worth and self esteem in ways they might not have been able to in their core classes. Focusing on the core education also doesn't take into consideration the many different learning styles of these students. As a result many students don't feel successful in school and end up dropping out while the ones who do finish are not as well rounded as they could or should be.

There is one great similarity between the Armenian and U.S. educational systems. They are both underfunded and as a result the system and children are suffering. While in Armenia I was lucky to sit in on a teacher

who gave a lesson to some Armenian and American students. Narine Khondkaryan's lesson about Facing History and Ourselves was one of the best lessons that I have ever witnessed. I wish that I could have had her as a teacher for an entire year instead of just one class, for the insight that I would have gained would be priceless. After the lesson I found out that Narina was going to quit teaching because she couldn't afford to teach anymore. So here is a teacher who is incredibly skilled at her job and is no longer going to teach because she doesn't make enough money to live on. It reminded me of two teacher friends that I have at home who also quit teaching because they aren't able to live off their teaching salaries.

In closing I would like to say that I felt the exchange was an extremely worthwhile experience. I believe that any time a person is able to express and communicate ideas to other people then their time is well spent. On this trip I not only learned a great deal about Armenia's education system but I also learned much more about the Armenian people themselves. If given the opportunity to participate in another exchange program I would definitely accept.

Cambridge Yerevan News
Cambridge-Yerevan Sister
City Association
P.O. Box 382591
Cambridge, MA 02238

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