



ARIT

NEWSLETTER

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Executive Director's Corner

In April of this year my wife, Arpi, and I took our tenth annual visit to Armenia and did follow-up work on several BAFA activities. We were joined by faithful BAFA supporters and were pleased to escort them to various BAFA-sponsored project sites.

We saw much progress in Armenia since our last visit. On the surface, Yerevan has undergone a metamorphosis and today, resembles many European cities—full of open air cafes, and thanks to the Lincy foundation, upgraded cultural sites and sidewalks. Sadly however, the wealth of the few has not trickled down. The stark reality is that more than half of the population still lives on two Dollars a day. As such, the plight of the people that BAFA supports has continued to deteriorate over the years.

On a heartwarming note, our visit to the reconstructed Norashen Michnagarg School was an especially happy occasion. The staff of the school honored Lorraine Caven by designating the school's sports hall in her maiden name, Siranoush Kanchelian Sports Hall.

BAFA continues to be committed to its mission to promote the health, education and welfare of the poor and most needy people of the Republic of Armenia, and to support the scientists of Cosmic Ray Division of the Physics institute.

In this issue of *ARIT*, Lina Melkonian, our behind the scene editor, reflects on

her first visit to Armenia in her article, "Armenia Needs 20/20 Vision and 100 Percent Commitment" and challenges BAFA supporters to step up their commitment to help Armenia.

Nancy Tengler in her article, "Like Being Home" and Helen Touryan Reynolds in "A Dream Come True," reflect on their visit to the various BAFA-supported Soup Kitchens and Schools. BAFA's Soup Kitchens continue to be the sole daily source of nutrition for many of the 870 retirees and orphans. BAFA's Soup Kitchens were the first ones established in Armenia, and thanks to you, BAFA donors, we have been able to operate them continuously during the past ten years.

Also in this issue of *ARTI*, Anahid Yeremian gives an update on Cosmic Ray Division's Advance Science Project, and Francois Antounian addresses the need to institute a physical therapy program for patients who undergo orthopedic surgery.

As Executive Director of BAFA, I thank each one of you for your unrelenting support of BAFA programs, and encourage and urge you to continue to help us assist our less privileged and very needy 'Hayrenageetzner.'

John Haleblian

Armenia Needs 20/20 Vision and 100 Percent Commitment

I've always had confidence in BAFA's organizational vision and its board members' integrity in fulfilling its mission in Armenia. But it was not until I recently visited Armenia that I more fully understood and appreciated the meaningful work that BAFA performs. It is quite amazing to think that one organization can actually accomplish so much and that you and I as individuals can be a part of strategic solutions that help move the country forward. It is crystal clear that Armenia needs our ongoing support and our commitment not to abandon it.

Since my return from Armenia, my mind has been functioning on overdrive, processing all of our incredible experiences, so John Haleblian has kindly offered me the opportunity to reflect on them in *ARIT*. Going to Armenia was what I had always imagined going "home" would be like. This home of my imagination was not exactly a physical place, but rather a state of being and feeling, and I was not disappointed.

Much like every Armenian visiting the homeland for the first time, I had a heightened sense of everything. But what moved me the most were: the people I met; hearing Armenian spoken at every step of the way; the Madenataran, allowing a peek into the past; the awesome monasteries perched atop majestic mountains across the land; the National

Bay Area Friends of Armenia is a tax exempt, charitable organization with the sole purpose for promoting the health, education, welfare and scientific excellence for the people of the Republic of Armenia.

Gallery of Armenia showcasing the works of Armenian artists; the National Chamber Orchestra's special concert at Garni Temple; the performance of the beautiful young men and women of Armenia's Dance Ensemble; the amazing architectural feat of Dzidzernagapert; and the sweet taste of Armenian wine.

While these experiences kept me on the edge of excitement, the stark realities of Armenia's economic and social conditions always loomed in the backdrop. Armenia is a country of paradoxes. Yerevan acts and feels like an up-and-coming European city, but few are privy to such a lifestyle and poverty is rampant. Although we went to Armenia as tourists, we made every effort to connect with the locals and learn about their every day life and challenges. We were also curious to find out about their vision for Armenia and specifically asked how the Diaspora can be instrumental in protecting and preserving the future of the country. People spoke freely and thoughtfully, and offered some concrete ideas. The following were the top 10 recurring themes:

1. Formation of a committee, global in scope, comprised of experienced managers from business and industry to help craft an economic/business plan for Armenia at both the macro and micro levels
2. Expert counsel in governmental and legal affairs
3. Training of professionals engaged in tourism to assist with the establishment of sound business principles and practices
4. Preservation of the much neglected monasteries/churches (tourist attractions)
5. Teams of professionals to help revamp the educational system especially at the elementary and secondary levels and help train/coach teachers
6. Training of scientists and health professionals and support of the institutions where they work
7. Programs whereby an individual may sponsor a child ensuring his/her welfare through adulthood
8. Assistance to the elderly
9. Public works projects

10. Preservation of literature and the arts

It will no doubt take a couple of generations for Armenia to achieve a viable market economy. In the meantime, time is of essence and we cannot neglect our duty as Armenians. My visit to Armenia has convinced me that preserving our identity as Armenians in the Diaspora is critical to Armenia's long term survival. Armenia depends on a strong Diaspora. All of us must be driven by our individual instincts to preserve our cultural identity and language within, and outside of Armenia. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that there are ample opportunities for survival especially for those committed to staying in Armenia and serving as its guardians.

Armenia has grave needs and no one organization can meet them all. Armenia today needs more assistance, not less. Let's face it, developing countries can't be built on quick fixes and fundamental change is a life-long process. As such, Armenia will need our full and selfless commitment in the long haul. Like all non-profits, BAFA competes for our attention and financial support. I am convinced that if BAFA were operating on behalf of American causes, it would be touted as an exemplary organization and its programs would be showcased as best practices.

So returning to the important question at hand, what will it take to get each supporter of BAFA to make an ongoing annual pledge? How can we help BAFA grow and expand its reach and potential? How can we encourage our donors to recruit a new friend or colleague to join? Perhaps one of the answers is for all of us to visit and revisit Armenia and renew our natural instinct to preserve our precious identity and protect this tiny land that we can truly call our own.

Lina Melkonian

Like Being Home

"It was simply the highlight of my life," exclaimed my mother as we departed in San Francisco from our week-long trip to Armenia. It had been fabulous trip. There was so much to see, so much to feel, and so much to eat! We were in the capable hands of John and Arpi Haleblian

who provided us with unique insight, historical perspective and cultural empathy. To say we felt welcome in Armenia doesn't capture the deep emotion and connection we felt with our host country. It was much more than just feeling welcome—it was like being home.

Being an "odar" (half-Armenian), I required educating before the trip. John Haleblian provided me a collection of readings in order that I might have a basic, working-knowledge of Armenia's people and history. I devoured the books. Each one brought a new perspective, more facts and a deeper understanding. I would laugh and cry, and feel hope and then despair, anger and then joy. One cannot face Armenia without being prepared to weep over the collective anguish of our people accumulated over hundreds of years. Yet, as I read, I discovered one recurring and indisputable fact: Armenians never, ever give up.

No matter how great the oppression or the challenge, Armenians are a people who will persevere. It was summarized best in Don and Lorna Miller's book: *Armenia Portraits of Survival and Hope*. A woman being interviewed on the subject of the war of independence in Nagorno-Karabakh said, "Armenians are creative people, and no matter how many times you knock them down, they get back up again. You destroy their homes and village, and they get up again and build again. So that is what we will do."

The Soup Kitchens

We visited the BAFA Nor Hadjn Soup Kitchen for the midday meal. My daughter, Mary Kate, had collected stuffed animals from her classmates, refurbished them and then sent them through BAFA to the children who are served at Nor Hadjn. When we arrived, the collection of beautiful, young faces that greeted us took my breath away. They were wearing what appeared to be their Sunday best and carrying a stuffed animal to have their picture taken with my daughter. Although for some this would be the only meal they ate that day, the children and their parents first gathered to meet the BAFA team and their young benefactress, while the elderly were served.

I was very impressed with the Nor Hadjn operation. It was clean, efficient and orderly. Generous helpings were

served and the staff provided the meal in a manner that preserved the dignity of those in need. The environment felt more like a restaurant and these hungry, proud people were served as guests. It was a poignant scene. For approximately 50 cents per day, a meal is served that provides nourishment and sustenance to a



Papken Hagopyan the Manager and His Wife Tarigo Tallakyan the Cook of Nor Hadjn Soup Kitchen

once industrious and productive segment of the population. **I encourage you to set aside 50 cents each day to provide hope and life to Armenians, young and old, who find themselves in this unfortunate position through circumstances out of their control.**

The Schools

The next day we visited two schools: Melik Kyugh Michnagarg School and Norashen Michnagarg School. Melik



Melik Kyugh Michnagarg School Student Praying the Lord's Prayer

Kyugh was first on our tour. This school had received New Testament Bibles and school supplies that Mary Kate had

donated and delivered through BAFA. Our first stop was the first grade where we were greeted by beautiful little Armenian faces. A young girl stood up and delivered a flawless welcome speech that she had memorized, thanking Mary Kate for the Bibles and school supplies. I was struck by her poise. Later her classmate (in the picture) volunteered to recite The Lord's Prayer to us.

The 8th grade class we visited spoke of the Bibles too. They thanked Mary Kate for sending them and allowing them to learn the truth. The teacher told us the Bibles were used as textbooks. There is so much more we can do for these schools and these children so eager to learn.

Because electricity is scarce the children wear their coats in class. There is nothing decorating the walls but chipping paint. Available light from the windows illuminates the room and old wooden tables serve as desks. There is no bond measure that can be passed by the voters to ensure smaller class rooms or better gym facilities. This is education in the raw—a few books, a teacher, and minds eager to learn—impressive!

BAFA provides breakfast for first through third grade children. The principal and the lower grade teachers told us that this has greatly improved the performance of the young children who used to come to school hungry. There is so much yet to do for our young friends in Armenia. I challenge you to search your heart to determine how you might be able to help on a regular basis.

Our trip to Norashen Michnagarg School took a considerable amount of time on a pot-hole ridden dirt road. Top speed was 10 miles per hour and we crept along swaying from side to side to avoid the plentiful holes. Despite the difficulty and inconvenience, the school is visited regularly by the BAFA team on site.

At the risk of sounding redundant, we had another memorable visit. My mother, Lorraine Caven (nee Siranoush Kanchelian) has been written about in previous BAFA newsletters describing her work to raise money for the re-building of this school which was destroyed in the Spitak earthquake in 1988. Unable to come for the official opening ceremony last year, the Norashen officials decided she needed a ceremony of her own during our visit. They outdid themselves.

A plaque of dedication was hung outside the gymnasium and a brief ceremony conducted thanking her for her contribution. Then the festivities began. The children had prepared songs and original poems to perform for us. I don't speak Armenian but I was enchanted by each performance. I was told that the subject of each performance was "Hayasdan." The music was haunting and uplifting. The poems were delivered with confidence and emotion. It was a truly memorable experience, and I have simply run out of adjectives to describe my feelings.

Mary Kate once again delivered Bibles and had the opportunity to meet the children her age personally. My mother had the pleasure of seeing the school that had been an important part of her giving for so many years, now completed and occupied with these beautiful, eager children. We left better for the experience and with a desire to help more. It is one of the most fulfilling things I can think of to help people who are so eager to join in and help themselves. They simply need a little something to work with.

As we drove back to Yerevan I stared out the window thinking about how we could help more. It had all become personal. At each turn and twist in the road Mt. Ararat loomed in the background. It is magnificent to behold and the ease with which it rises to its height of almost 17,000 feet, gives off a surreal image that is impossible to erase from your mind. Much like the Armenian people I mused—strong, magnificent and rugged.

As my mother said, going to Armenia is the trip of a lifetime. Thank you, BAFA.

Nancy Tengler

A Dream Come True

Armenia—a dream, come true! I finally made it! Two years ago 14 members of my family traveled to Armenia, including six of my siblings. I was the only missing link. In April of this year, an opportunity came up, which I eagerly seized, to see my ancestral land, to hear the sounds of my mother tongue (although in the Eastern dialect), to see at once a needy and vibrant society, to drink in our culture—dance, music, art and theater.

I had heard and read so much about this mountainous, landlocked country, rich in history yet deprived of so much, oppressed for decades, persecuted, forced into dependency and lacking initiative. But, I saw signs of hope, the sounds of construction, new restaurants, hotels and rebuilding of earthquake devastated cities. There is progress thanks to the efforts of organizations like BAFA lending a hand to the most destitute. I was eager to see the work BAFA is doing and visited Norashen Michnagarg School, which BAFA has helped reconstruct, replacing the dilapidated building used for the last 14 years. We were warmly greeted by excited and curious students and staff. We saw a clean, bright new building, providing a safe, comfortable learning environment for these children, who are the hope and future of Armenia. Dressed in their best, the students put on a performance for us with songs and the recitation of original poems.

I was also eager to see the soup kitchens BAFA supports. We visited the one in Nor Hadjn, and again, met bright, cuddly children, holding stuffed animals donated by a loving teenager. They all wanted their pictures taken and I happily obliged. They posed somberly, but broke into cheerful smiles when they saw their images in the viewfinder of my digital camera. We visited with the elderly, who profusely thanked us and asked God's blessings for health and long life. It was at once joyful and heartbreaking to see orphans, single mothers and the elderly so grateful for so little. As a 30-year public school teacher, I was often troubled by how much was wasted, including uneaten lunches ending up in trash cans that could feed the world. I couldn't help contrast that plenty with the one meal-a-day, served five days a week in these soup kitchens, without which these children would go hungry.

We visited several other schools, including one for the disabled. Here again, the children ran to us with open arms. We hugged them and tried to make them feel valued and loved, even for the very short time we had with them. I felt burdened by the immensity of the need, but also hopeful that there are caring people represented by BAFA and others, who are alleviating some of the suffering. Much more needs to be done, but I am

optimistic that conditions will improve. Armenians have suffered centuries of conquest, massacres and genocide, but have survived. I believe they will not only survive, but flourish. They are a hard-working, resourceful people and when given the means and opportunities, will transform Armenia in time. We, in the Diaspora, need to be part of that transformation.

I left the country with conflicting emotions. On my way to the airport, Ararat suddenly appeared in all her majesty. She had shyly hidden from view during most of my stay, appearing only a few days on its own terms and time, hiding its centuries of mystery. I felt she was bidding me goodbye while urging me to return. I do hope to return someday and celebrate with my people the rebirth of a new and invigorated nation.

Helen Touryan Reynolds

Consistent and Continuous Excellence Cosmic Ray Advanced Science in Armenia

The scientists, technicians, students and support personnel of the Cosmic Ray Division (CRD) in Armenia continue to exhibit excellence in the face of tremendous difficulty. Difficulty comes in many forms for our brothers and sisters in Armenia. For some, it is a question of physical survival—where will the next meal come from? For many, it is a question of future outlook—will our children get an education that assures them a good chance at life? And yet for others, it is a question of hope of rebuilding—will we be able to pass on a sustainable and growing country, called Armenia, to our children?

The latter two questions, educating the youth and advancing scientific excellence to aide in Armenia's future self-sufficiency, are the primary challenges of the CRD. These are not easy tasks by any means, and the Diaspora's involvement with the CRD through our financial, moral and practical support, is a big part of the equation.

The CRD staff and their visionary head, Prof. Ashot Chilingarian, continue

to hold on to their main objectives to be among the top in the world in Cosmic Ray research, develop practical and marketable applications from their research, and help Armenia strive for independence from aide in order to move towards the day when Armenians in Armenia can solve their own social and economic difficulties. That day will come, but it will just take time—at least a generation. We want to thank all of you, our tireless supporters, for staying the course, for not giving up and for not bailing out before the job is done.

The following is a quick update on the CRD accomplishments since our last *ARIT* issue.

In January 2004 the European Space Agency (ESA) signed a memorandum of understanding to include CRD in its network of space research scientific organizations. In March 2004 the EU Cooperation for Science and Technology's Electronic Space Weather Alert Network (COST E-SWAN) added the CRD in Armenia to its network of organizations. While these two accomplishments do not mean immediate financial rewards, we do hope and expect that in future years these partnerships will result in funding opportunities. One thing is for sure, these two recent CRD accomplishments make for very compelling additions to the list of justifications that Armenia will use for its bid to be included in the European Union.

CRD is very active in its collaborative efforts with all its partner organizations. Prof. Chilingarian continues to receive invitations to share the expertise of the Armenian group at various space research planning meetings such as the one this July in Paris, France – COMMISSION for SPace Research (COSPAR), and the NATO workshops on Space Weather research.

There is good news on the education front as well. CRD has a brand new Ph.D. student, Mr. Artur Reymers. Artur's area of concentration will be the "Development of New Data Analysis Methods for Space Weather Research and Forecasting," under the advisorship of Prof. Chilingarian.

CRD also continues to fulfill its social responsibility within Armenia to the best of its ability. This spring CRD equipped the little secondary school in the village

of Antarat (just below the lower research station on Mt. Aragats) with a Pentium I PC that became available as we continue to upgrade the CRD fleet of computers. In the near future, CRD also hopes to equip a small science laboratory in the



Artur Reimers, the new CRD PhD student with his advisor, Prof. Ashot Chilingarian at the CRD headquarters in Yerevan.

Antarat School with some equipment which will become free as we make much-needed upgrades to the CRD laboratories.

The recent contract awarded by the International Science and Technology Center in October is now in effect and everyone at the CRD is working diligently on it. This contract brings CRD half way to meeting its goal of becoming completely independent of aide. I hope that we, in the Diaspora, can be proud and feel rewarded for the continuous and accelerated progress that our support of the CRD accomplishes.

CRD is one of those "Help them to fish for themselves." projects for Armenia, and we ask you to continue your involvement to the finish line. Prof. Ashot Chilingarian, the scientists, technicians, students and support staff of the CRD in Armenia and BAFA's support committee for Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division, thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your ongoing generosity and partnership.

We extend a special thanks to all those of you who have made your contributions to the CRD this year, already bringing us half way up to this year's needed assistance for the CRD from the

Bay area. But the year is only half over and we hope that the other half of our CRD friends will come through with their support during the second half of this year.

Together, we CAN move mountains!

Anahid Yeremian

Spearheading a New Physical Therapy Program

I am pleased to report that BAFA's Medical Projects have made significant strides in the health care arena. Our BAFA trained orthopedic surgeons from Armenia have returned and are working according to the medical standards they adopted at UCSF. Today, they are delivering to their patients, the Armenian citizens, comparable level of medical care that we receive in the US. However, in order to sustain the health care these professionals provide, we need to continue sending them materials and implants. Since patients in Armenia do not generate enough income to cover the purchase of supplies, it is imperative that we step in.

Upon the recommendation of one of our physicians, we would also like to expand our medical reach to include a physical therapy program to help rehabilitate the injured following orthopedic treatment. Of course, this sorely needed program will require both equipment purchase and personnel training.

So the next time you make a donation to BAFA, please consider earmarking "Medical Projects." Your contribution will not only help enhance medical services, but will continue to encourage and motivate our dedicated health professionals.

As always, I thank you for your past and ongoing support.

François Antounian



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Yes: I wish to make a Tax-Deductible donation to B.A.F.A.

Dear Bay Area Friend of Armenia,

To support the health, education and welfare of the people of Republic of Armenia, BAFA is continuing its major Soup Kitchen program; and is actively enlarging the number of schools it supports.

As we look to the future, we are also expanding to projects, which reverse Armenia's brain drain. We have added the Cosmic Ray Division in Armenia, an advanced scientific organization of world-class caliber to our list of projects. These are programs that make a real difference in the lives of many.

The key to implementing any, and all of these projects, depends directly on your financial commitment. If you wish to make a separate contribution specifically to one, or more of these projects, please mark the box below and return the form with your tax-deductible contribution to the Bay Area Friends of Armenia.

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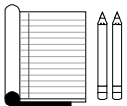
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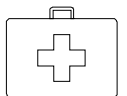
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