

# Now Embarking: An Artistic Interpretation of the 1947 and 1949 Armenian Repatriation

by Hazel Antaramian-Hofman

*Editor's note: We are pleased to bring this project to the attention of NAASR's members.*

I was born in 1960, Yerevan, Armenia, but spoke little Armenian and what I did speak was Western Armenian. As a young child, I always wondered why I came from such an exotic background when my father was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and my mother from Lyon, France. Only after years of hearing stories did I realize that I was the product of two Armenian diasporan repatriate children, who were compelled by their father and mother's Hayrenik to leave one cultural and ideological ground for another.

The 1947 and 1949 repatriation movements uprooted many Armenians from diaspora countries to the land of their forefathers. But where they were heading was to a "Sovietized" Armenia under Stalin. It was a migratory event complete with personal and spiritual dispossession, and cultural contrasts. As an artist and the daughter of repatriated youth, I want to document and artistically interpret the culture shock, loss of freedom, and the ideological turmoil that shaped this historical time in Armenia for the "akhbars".

I have just begun this artistic historical journey. Thus far I have collected over 30 black and white photographic images of repatriate children and families taken in Armenia from 1947 to 1966. I plan to use these pictures to interpret cultural and economic issues through drawings, paintings, mixed media, and installation art. I have also been collecting short anecdotal stories that help narrate chronologically the circumstances and emotions of the people during these times. I am interested in collecting more, so if you are a repatriate or know of a repatriate who is interested in my project, please contact me at hazelantaramhof@yahoo.com, with "repatriate project" in the subject line. I would be pleased to discuss my project with you in greater detail.



## NAASR Works with Arlington International Film Festival

by Betty Athanasoulas

The inaugural Arlington International Film Festival was held at the Regent Theater in Arlington, MA, from October 6 through 9, 2011. The Armenian community was represented by *Finding Zabel Yesayan*, a documentary by Lara Aharonian and Talin Suciyan. As a festival team member, I had the privilege of participating in the conversations about the mission of the festival. The recurring theme was appreciation of the diversity of Arlington and the surrounding communities. The festival offers a unique opportunity for cross-cultural education by promoting understanding of the many cultures represented in our town. The festival is a means for recognizing that such diversity enriches our community.

I owe Marc Mamigonian and Nancy Kolligian of NAASR a debt of gratitude for facilitating the process of soliciting *Finding Zabel Yesayan*, which was selected for inclusion and

screened on October 7.

Several members of NAASR and the Armenian International Womens Association (AIWA), who had collaborated on a screening of the film at NAASR earlier in the year, attended the screening.

My knowledge of Armenian culture and history has been acquired informally over the years through Nancy Kolligian and Adrina Goshgarian Kletjian, my former Spanish students and now friends of many years. Their personal stories of their own experiences in their ancestral lands have fascinated me. What has impressed me the most is their passion to preserve their Armenian heritage and deepen their knowledge of Armenian history and culture. My eagerness to learn more and my strong belief in the festival's mission moved me to include an Armenian film. The festival organizers, April Ranck and Alberto Guzman, gave their enthusiastic support to the idea of having the Armenian community represented in the festival.

*Finding Zabel Yesayan* went far beyond being informative and enlightening. I was moved by the narratives that evoked a deep respect for Yesayan as a human being who had to endure many personal hardships and by her accomplishments as a scholar, a thinker, and a writer. I found the discussions of her literary works particularly engaging. I hung on every word from the different speakers but was frustrated at times because I did not have the background knowledge fully to comprehend the historical and political references. The documentary reinforced my wish to increase my knowledge and understanding of Armenian history and culture.

*Betty Athanasoulas was the Outreach Coordinator to High Schools and liaison to the Armenian community for the 2011 Arlington International Film Festival. She is currently teaching ESL to international employees at Biogen Pharmaceuticals. Previously she was a Spanish teacher at Needham High School.*