



# The Fresno Bee

Final edition •

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA, Friday Morning, July 8, 1988

© 1988 The Fresno Bee 25c

## The man who shot SAROYAN

"Fresno's a good place. It's the world. How good can the world be?"

— William Saroyan,  
excerpted from a film in progress

The last time I talked with Paul Kalinian he told me how he seduced William Saroyan with an Armenian song.

Our first meeting was seven years ago, just after the famous Fresno writer died. Kalinian, a professional studio photographer, told how he won Saroyan's confidence, sang the song with him and took portraits that have since been seen around the world.

In the years since, Kalinian says, he has become obsessed with the writer, pouring thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours into a visual chronicle of the author's life and his Fresno roots.

When finished early next year, the film will include Kalinian's photographs, along with other stills and motion picture photography. It will be about 30 minutes long, will be shown on public television, will be made available in public school libraries across America and will premiere in Fresno and in Yerevan in Soviet Armenia.

Kalinian telephoned me recently because to finish the film project, it will take something besides his own obsessive regard for Saroyan, who, at first, told him, "Get lost; I don't want my picture taken."

It will take money.

"I expect it will take about \$30,000 to complete the film, to put it on 16 millimeter," he said.

Kalinian's seduction of Saroyan on March 26, 1976, was aided by Fresno artist Varaz Samuelian, who arranged for Kalinian to meet Saroyan at his home.

Kalinian won Saroyan's confidence despite a brusque challenge from the writer.

"I tripped the strobe lights and he said, 'I told you not to take pictures. Get out,'" Kalinian said.

"I told him the camera was empty and he wanted to



### Dennis Pollock

#### Second thoughts

check. I showed him the empty film case, and his face changed."

While Saroyan was not looking, Kalinian slipped in a loaded film case and proceeded to take pictures even before Saroyan sang the song "Cilicia" with him and said, "I like you, Paul. You can take all the pictures you want."

One of the completed portraits — there are 24 — shows Saroyan singing. He had asked Kalinian, who emigrated from Lebanon some 40 years ago, to sing "Tzangam Densem Zim Gilliga" — "I wish to see my native Armenia."

Tears welled in the author's eyes as he joined the singing.

Kalinian's film, which he says is 90 percent complete, includes a recording of Saroyan talking of his pride in being Armenian, his love of Fresno, the taste of watermelons, recollections of his selling newspapers, his mother's working as a fig packer and the melancholia of rain.

He also talks of "an idiot teacher at Emerson School" who told the Armenian students that their parents were using too much garlic in stews.

"I said, 'Well, hell, open your windows,'" Saroyan says.

The film is narrated by Fresno restaurateur Roger Rocka. It is rich in photographs from Fresno's past, pictures taken by Claude "Pop" Laval.

A segment, showing Kalinian's portraits, is called "I Shot Saroyan." That title came from a headline used in a story on the photo session in a magazine called Ararat.

For years, Kalinian had only his own words and his portraits, affixed to a 4-by-8-foot poster board, for presentations at scores of events. He has refined the presentation with the addition of excerpts from a radio interview, other photographs of the author and Fresno, the narration by Rocka and Armenian background music.

Next will come the integration of motion picture film, including home movies.

Kalinian believes that the warmth shown in those home movies will put to rest ill feelings that were stirred when Saroyan's son, Aram, wrote a book critical of his father.

"There is a warm atmosphere," Kalinian said. "This is a family. This is a man who loved his children and shows that."

The 56-year-old Kalinian is a man who loved Saroyan, and is showing that in his work. His obsession in recent weeks has been so great, he said, that he has sometimes dreamed of talking with Saroyan about the film project.

The dreams have been pleasant. Saroyan has not told him to get lost, he says, but seems to like the idea of the project.

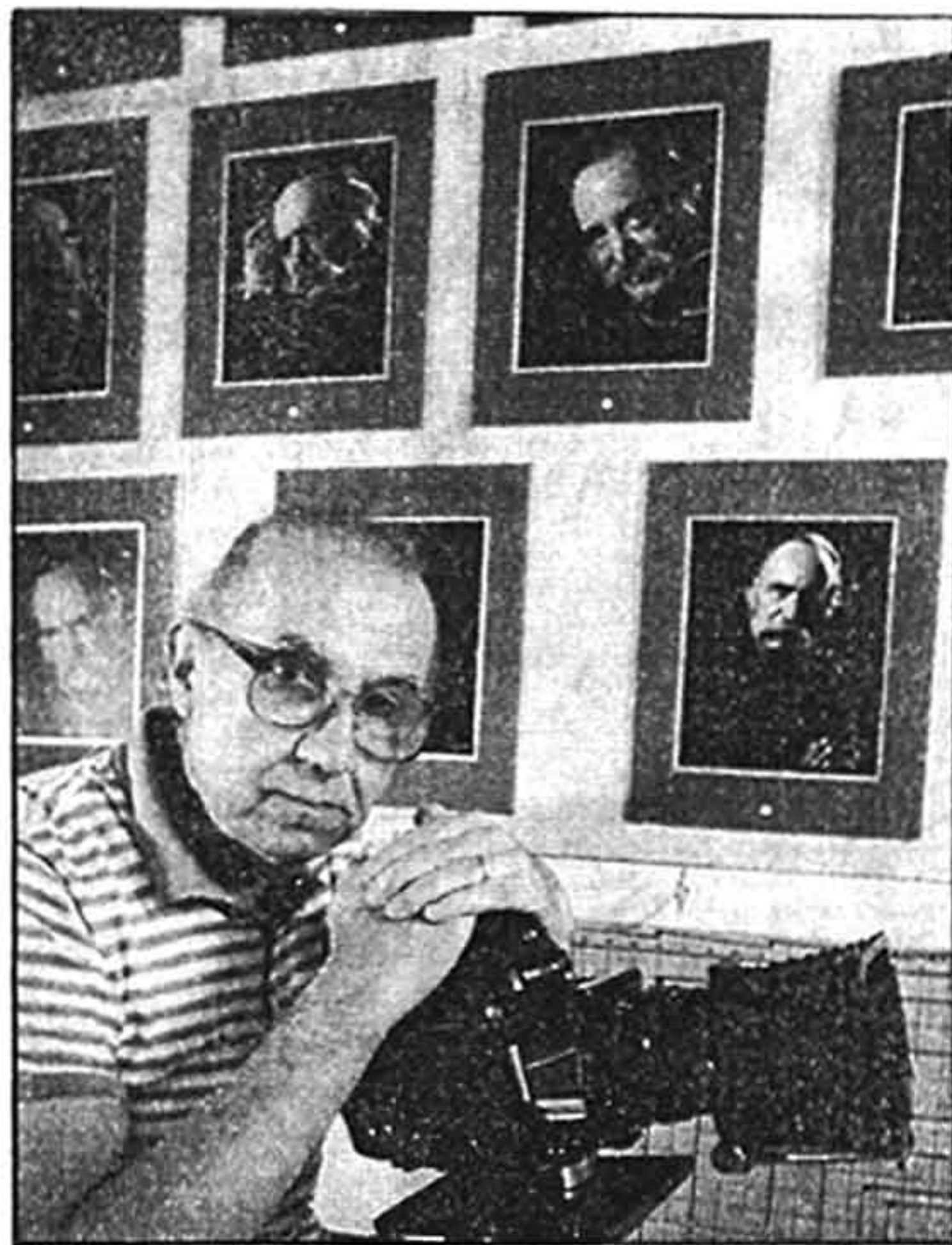
For years after the picture-taking session, Kalinian displayed only one of the Saroyan pictures at his studio.

It was only after the author died that he began to display the others. He said he has received no money for their subsequent use or for the talks he has given.

"This man was a genius," he said.

Media Outreach Inc., a non-profit organization, and the Fresno Metropolitan Museum are sponsoring the William Saroyan Film Project. Donations may be sent to Media Outreach Inc., William Saroyan Film Project, 1543 E. Olive Ave., Fresno, CA 93728.

**SECOND THOUGHTS** appears every other Friday in Tempo. Dennis Pollock is a staff writer. Write to him at the Feature Department, The Fresno Bee, Fresno, CA 93786.



Paul Kalinian says his photos of William Saroyan have led to an obsession.

Fresno Bee photo/Michael Penn