

# Photographer remembers a famous Fresnan

By Allen Burnett

Neighbors

Fresno photographer Paul Kalinian will never forget the first time he met William Saroyan.

"He told me to get lost," said Kalinian. "He asked who I was and said 'I don't want my picture taken,' and that was it."

Thirty minutes later, after earning Saroyan's trust, Kalinian was sitting, talking and taking photographs of the famous Fresno writer.

One of the photographs that Kalinian took

on that March day in 1976 was selected by the United States Postal Service to be used as a postage stamp. The stamp was released in 1991 in the United States and the Soviet Union.

"One of the reasons I am in Fresno today is because of William Saroyan," said Kalinian, 61. "I wanted to meet him and to photograph him."

"But I never, never, ever realized that some day the U.S. Postal Service would select one of my portraits to put on a stamp, as well as on a

USSR stamp. I guess that stamp is part of history now, since there is no longer a USSR."

Abiding by the Saroyan philosophy, Kalinian didn't accept any money for having his work on the stamp. (Saroyan did not accept money for his Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "The Time of Your Life" and refused to accept an Academy Award for his screenplay of "The Human Comedy.")

"All I asked was that they send me \$500  
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worth of stamps," said Kalinian. "The money was not important."

If money was important to Kalinian, he would have never attempted to create his documentary, "William Saroyan: The Man, The Writer."

Kalinian spent years of research and his life savings to make his movie, which he said is his tribute to Saroyan. The 63-minute film will be shown April 17 at the St. Paul Armenian Church in Northeast Fresno.

Kalinian wrote, directed and produced the movie, which made its debut in Fresno in 1991.

"What I did was highlight his life, his philosophy, his childhood memories of Fresno, his feelings on this country and his ancestors," Kalinian said. "I borrowed a lot of money, and part of it's still not paid for."

"But I don't worry about that

as long as I accomplished something that I have dreamed of all my life."

Kalinian first started reading Saroyan's books when he was a youngster in Damascus, Syria. As an aspiring young photographer, Kalinian dreamed of one day taking photographs of Saroyan.

Kalinian came to Fresno in 1964 and opened his own photography studio, which is still located on Olive Avenue. After several missed opportunities, he finally got his chance to take photographs of Saroyan 12 years later in a friend's studio.

"My friend called me and told me that William Saroyan would be at his house," Kalinian said. "So I took all of my camera equipment and set up in his small workshop."

"When Mr. Saroyan walked in, I was playing with my lighting equipment, and when he saw the

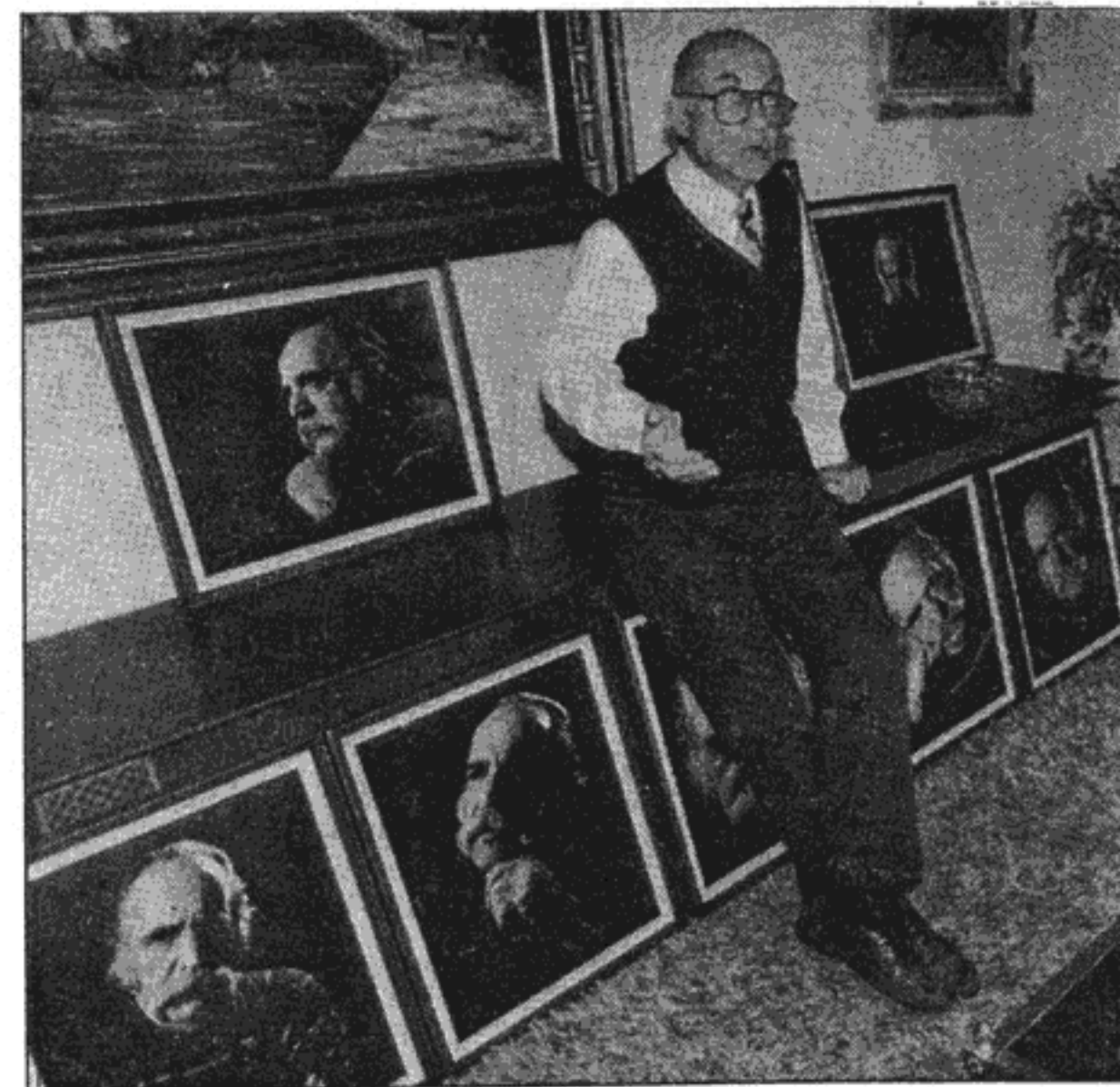
lights flashing he became really angry. I tried to explain to him that I didn't have any film in the camera."

When Kalinian finally convinced Saroyan that he was telling the truth, Saroyan asked Kalinian if he knew the words to an old Armenian song. Kalinian knew the tune and enough of the lyrics to convince Saroyan that he was sincere about Armenia and his respect for the famed writer.

"After that, he was a changed man," Kalinian said. "He started singing the song with me and even had a tear in his eye."

"The next thing I knew we were talking, and I was taking pictures."

Saroyan later sent an autographed book to Kalinian. Along with the autograph, Saroyan wrote that Kalinian "was the best photographer in the world."



Terry Pierson -- Neighbors

Paul Kalinian and some of his work featuring William Saroyan.