

FILMMAKER FOCUSES ON SAROYAN

By Lisa Dorman-Stubbs

What began as Paul Kalinian's obsession to capture the face of Fresno's most famous Armenian on film has culminated in the creation of an award-winning documentary about the life of writer William Saroyan. Kalinian, a retired photographer and southeast resident, has recently won several awards for his hourlong film, "William Saroyan: The Man, The Writer." Kalinian previously gained recognition for having one of his portraits of Saroyan selected by the USA and USSR postal services for their commemorative Saroyan postal stamps, issued jointly in 1991.

"Now all of my dreams have come true," said Kalinian, who wrote, directed and produced the film. "Coming to America [from Lebanon], marrying my wife, getting to take William Saroyan's picture, the postage stamp and now this. This is more than I ever imagined. These are the things that make me so excited."

He will travel to Columbus, Ohio, later this month to accept three awards at the Columbus International Film Festival: bronze plaques for Recognition of Excellence in the Arts category and the Humanities category, and an Honorable Mention for the script, among the 80 documentary films.

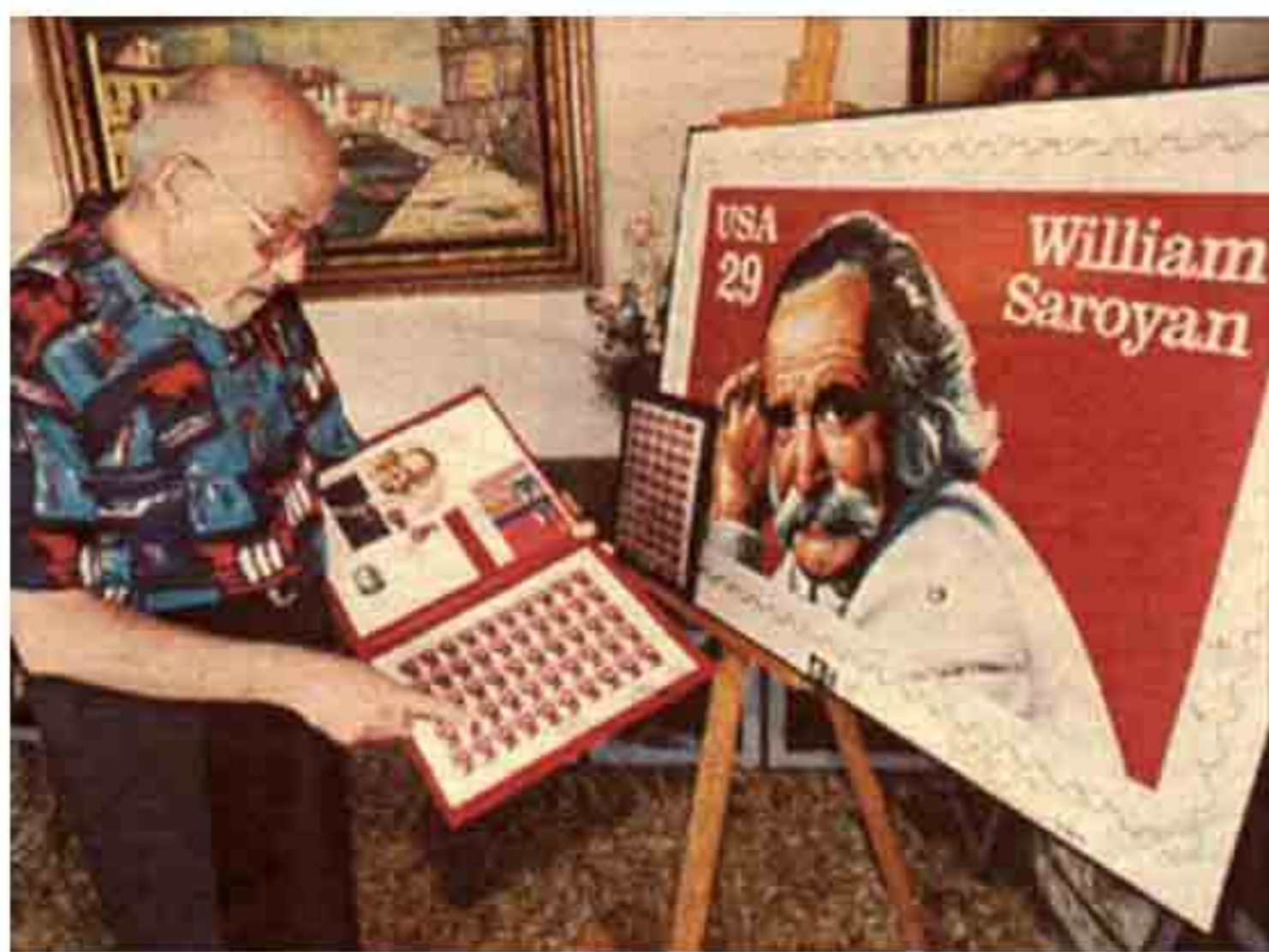
Kalinian also won the Leigh Whipper Gold Award for best documentary, among the 12 competing nations, at the Philadelphia International Film Festival in July.

And last year the film, Kalinian's first, received a finalist award out of 57 documentary films at Worldfest Houston, the Houston International Film Festival.

Kalinian said his intense desire to photograph the man he so admired was one of the main reasons he moved to Fresno from his native Lebanon in the mid-'60s.

The opportunity to meet Saroyan came in March 1976, when he was introduced to the writer through a mutual acquaintance, sculptor Varaz Samuelian. Although Saroyan was at first reluctant to be photographed, the meeting turned into a three-hour photo session, resulting in many intimate portraits of the man.

Several years after Saroyan died in 1981, Kalinian was contacted about having his photographs considered for the proposed postage stamp. Two of his images were chosen from about 300 pictures. The artist who designed the stamp combined a pose from one of the photographs with the facial expression from another.



Kalinian, whose photography was used to create the Saroyan stamp in both the United States and the former Soviet Union, shows his collection

The film not only deals with Saroyan's many successes in life, but also touches on his troubled childhood, his failed marriage (twice to the same woman) and his trouble with finances and gambling debts.

After many years of painstaking research and attention to detail, the film had its world premiere April 13, 1991, at Fresno's William Saroyan Theatre.

Kalinian said he plans to make copies of the film available to libraries and schools for educational purposes. And although he said he spent more than \$150,000 producing the film, he didn't do it for profit or fame.

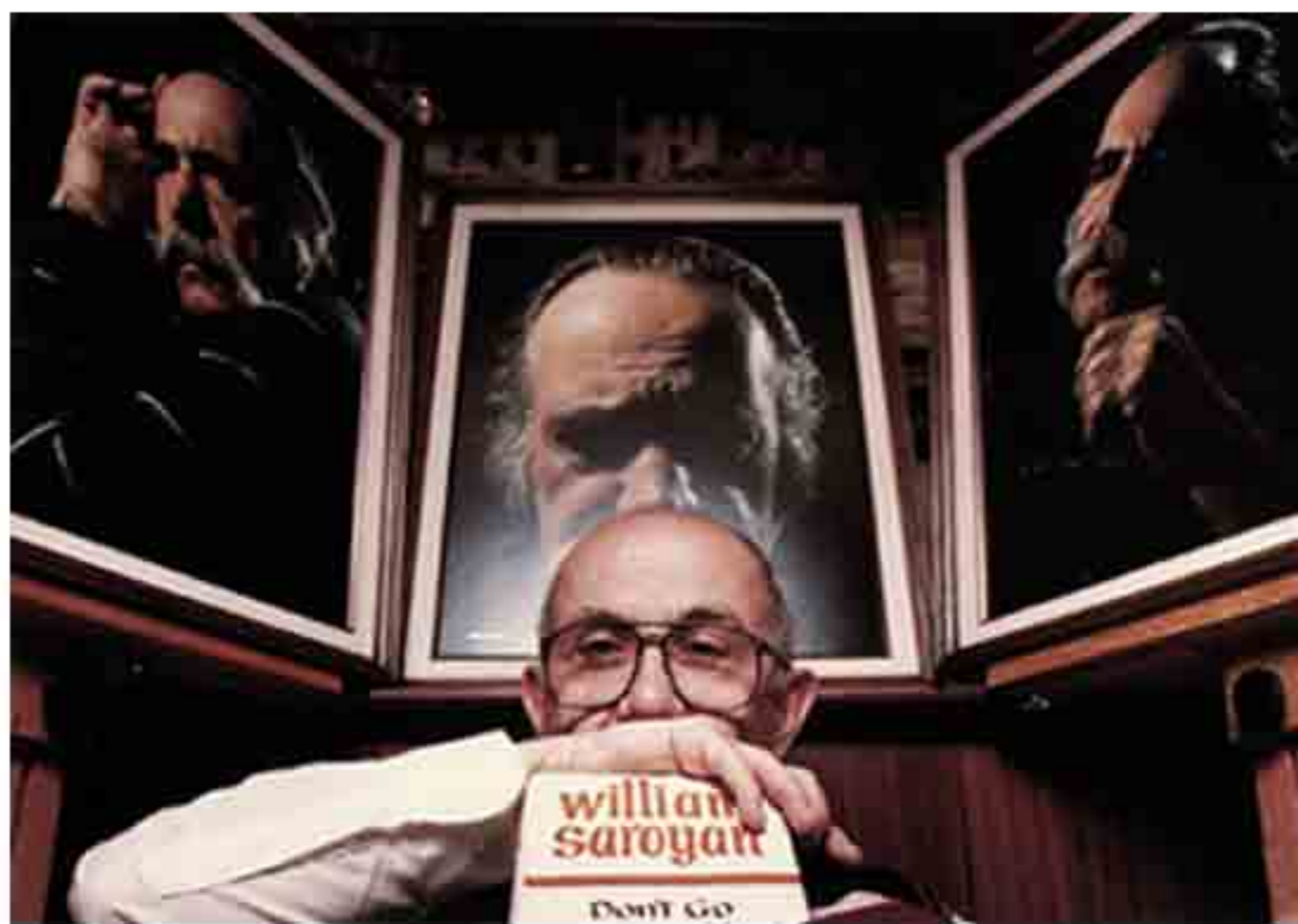
"I will not commercialize this film," Kalinian said. "I made this film because I wanted to give my respect to William Saroyan through this film and to show all sides of him to our generation and generations to come."

Kalinian is looking for backers so he can embark on another film project, focusing on the early history of Fresno from the perspective of Armenians who came here in the late 1800s.

"Now all my dreams have come true. Coming to America from Lebanon, marrying my wife, having twins, getting to take William Saroyan's picture, the postage stamp and now the documentary on Saroyan and the awards it is receiving."

"This is more than I ever imagined. These are the things that make me so excited."

Paul Kalinian
photographer



Photographer Paul Kalinian with some of his portraits of famous author William Saroyan

After Saroyan's death and a later article in The Fresno Bee describing Kalinian's experience photographing the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, Kalinian was besieged with requests to speak to various groups about Saroyan.

"That's how it ignited, this whole idea [for the documentary]," Kalinian said. He first prepared a short audio-visual presentation for audiences, which grew as he added monologue by Saroyan himself and historic scenes of Fresno, Saroyan's hometown.

The film artfully intertwines old photographs and footage of Saroyan's life with scene re-enactments. Much of the dialogue is in Saroyan's own words, while actor Mike Connors, the Fresno native who starred in "Mannix," provides the rest of the film's narration.