

# Spotlight

## Grad Student teams with father for award-winning Saroyan film

By Katie O'Brien  
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When writer William Saroyan said, "The only Works that count are the ones that reach people," one might think he had Susie Kalinian and her father Paul in mind.

Susie Kalinian a graduate student at California State University, Fresno, was the film project coordinator for the award-winning documentary "William Saroyan: The Man. The Writer."

"I was basically involved with the areas I knew about," she said of her part in the filmmaking process.

The film is an hour-long documentary that depicts the life and works of the renowned author and playwright, William Saroyan.

It took over six years, complete and involved many hours of restoring aged photos and excerpts from Saroyan's own voice recordings.

Kalinian, a professional photographer, and his daughter decided to enter the documentary in Worldfest Houston, the Houston International Film Festival in April last year. The film won the finalist award.

"It was the first documentary film my father had done and it ended up winning the finalist award, and we were so pleased and so happy that we thought, OK now that we've received international recognition let's see what else can happen," she said.

The film went on to win the Gold Award for best documentary at the Philadelphia Film Festival in July this year. She said, "Just a week ago, we were notified it received the bronze plaque in the Arts and Humanities division of the Columbus, Ohio Festival and also an honorable mention for script-writing."

She said the film was a result of a dream that my father had since he was a young boy growing up in Beirut, Lebanon. "He came to America in search of Saroyan. He wanted to take portraits of him," she said.

Paul Kalinian eventually did get his photos, but not without much dissent.

The images of Saroyan that Paul Kalinian captured have now become quite famous. "Nothing was done with anything in mind," she said of the photos taken by her father.

Following Saroyan's death in 1981, two of the portraits that her father took were chosen the artist who designed the commemorative stump.

"What happened was that after William Saroyan died, people found out about the portraits my father had taken of him and they wanted to hear his story and see the work. So my father put together a short slide-show presentation, using his own voice as the narration, that briefly explained how he was able to capture Saroyan with his lens," she said.

She said this caused even snore public remand for the story, so eventually her Father said 'Okay, this can be improved,' and spent countless hours researching and corresponding with the William Saroyan Foundation in San Francisco

"Essentially, that's where I came into assist. I did all the correspondence while my father spent time going through the archives

Since she has no formal background in filmmaking, she relied on her experience in the local theater arts. "I was involved with script research, makeup, costume design and casting. I also worked on the monologue direction of Mike Connors, the narrator in the film Connors; a Fresno native, starred in the TV series "Mannix" during the 1960s. "Most of the reenactment scenes were done in Fresno except for one that showed a man traveling in, a train, and that was done in Portola," she said.

"One particular scene we did involved Saroyan's family when he was a boy. The man who was supposed to play Saroyan's father was unable to control the horse and buggy in the scene, so we had to use the actual owner of the horse and buggy. This presented another problem, since Saroyan's father had black hair and this man had blonde. I just solved the problem by dyeing his hair right there on the spot," she said.

She said the casting was Busy. Many people were happy to donate their time and in some cases, gave permission to use their property in certain scenes.

"I love my dad and I think he's a remarkable man. We are both perfectionists, and that's actually what's unique about our relationship. We play off of each other in finding solutions," she said. She added that they exchanged ideas and comments and did have the occasional disagreement but overall, we complement each other."



Paul Kalinian with daughter, Susie Kalinian

When asked if she had the opportunity to meet Mr. Saroyan, she replied, "Only in my sleep My Father would spend many late nights repairing the old voice recordings that Saroyan had made for a local radio station many years earlier. Over and over I would hear that man's voice until I just fell asleep. I felt like I knew him."

She said she didn't have any plans to make another film.

"No, that will never happen, I personally don't have the technical background to be a director and producer really, if the opportunity were to arise, I would like to work on another documentary with my father-. Possibly a humanitarian, perhaps Elie Wiesel." Elie Wiesel is a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

For now, she said she will remain here at CSUF, where she is pursuing her master's in biology. She plans to continue to apply to medical schools, as she aspires to be a primary care physician.

Although father and daughter spent more than \$100,00 of their personal funds producing the film, both agree that the film was not made for commercial use

"It was made for generations to come, to immortalize the legacy of the man." Paul Kalinian said.

Currently the film has not been released on video tape because of fund-raising purposes. The Kalinians would like to donate any proceeds the film might acquire to an organization of their own choice.

However, both father and daughter do plan to make copies of their documentary available to libraries and schools for educational purposes. It is their hope that the legacy of William Saroyan as a renowned writer, playwright and Pulitzer Prize winner will remain alive for generations to come.