

TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM SAROYAN

LISA ISKENDERIAN

"Now all of my dreams have come true..." Paul Kalinian

Paul Kalinian's desire to photograph William Saroyan led to their meeting in 1976 through a mutual friend. After 12 years of searching for his idol, Paul Kalinian was greeted by the legendary William Saroyan with the not so friendly words "Get lost.....I don't want my pictures taken". But this hostile beginning did not last long. This was in fact 'the beginning of a wonderful friendship'. The playwright and the photographer.

Paul Kalinian was born in Beirut, Lebanon, on February 14, 1932. Son of a Kharpertzi father and Marashtzi mother, Kalinian's family moved to Damascus, Syria, where he spent his youth and received his education. Kalinian opened his first photography studio in Beirut. In 1964, he moved Montreal, Canada and then to the United States, where he received his degree in Professional Photography and Motion Picture Production in 1967 from the New York Institute of Photography.

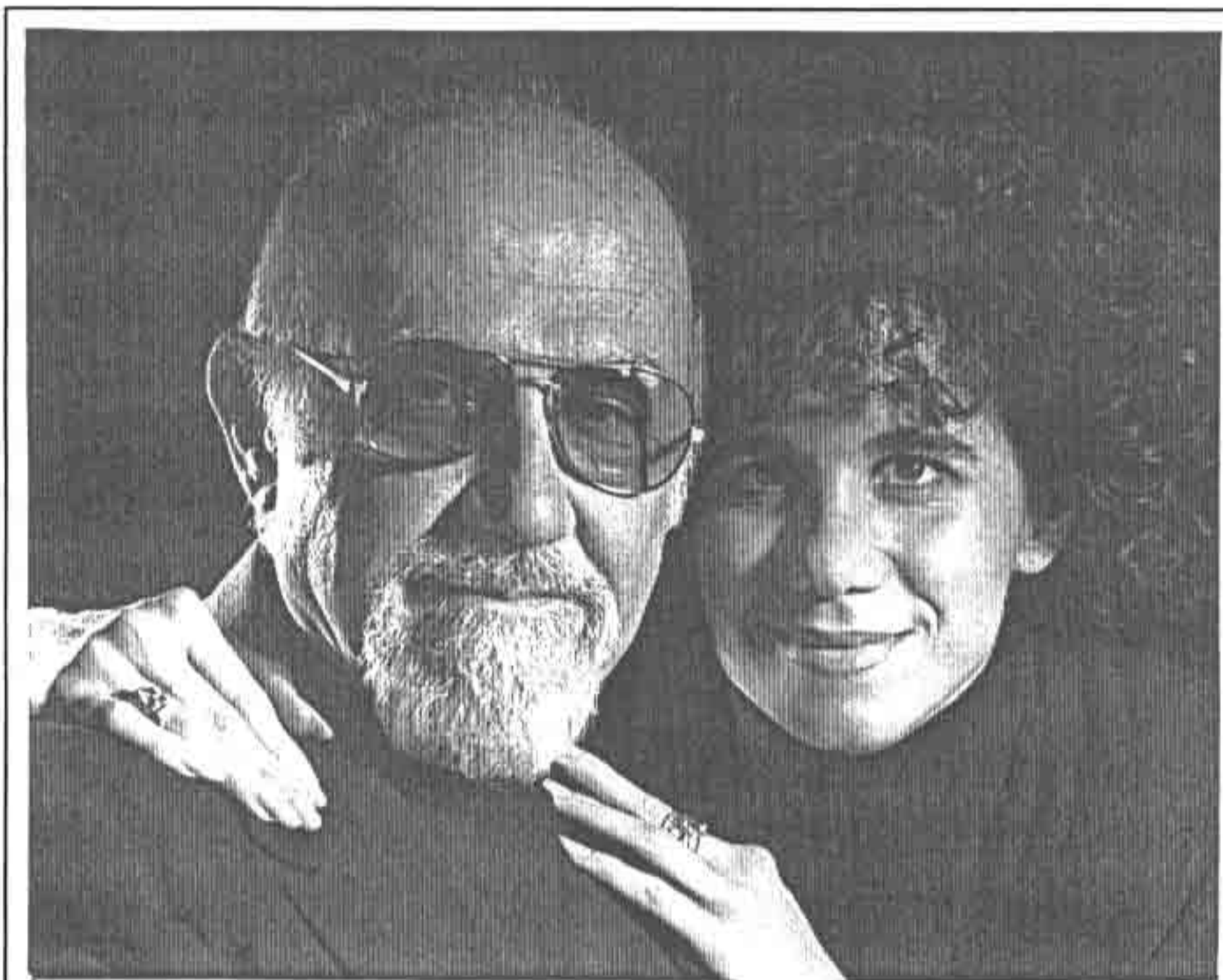
Later that year, Kalinian returned to Beirut to marry his longtime sweetheart Araxie. They now live in Fresno, California with their son Harold and daughter Susie.

Kalinian has photographed people from all walks of life. His works have been published in more than a dozen books numerous international newspapers and magazines, posters, brochures, award-winning year books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, calendars and many other publications. His works are on display in government buildings, museums, theatres, churches, schools and libraries.

Due to his memorable encounter with William Saroyan in 1976, Paul Kalinian was able to take a number of character portraits of the Writer. One of these photographs was selected by the USA and the USSR Postal Services for their commemorative Postal Stamps, jointly issued on May 22, 1991.

Paul Kalinian's brief friendship with the literary genius, William Saroyan, had a big impact on his life. This friendship also led to the development, and completion of the documentary film "William Saroyan: The Man, the Writer". The documentary is a stunning portrayal of the life and times of William Saroyan. Its charm, humour and educational value are exceptional. Paul Kalinian has now adopted all Saroyan's values and behaviours as a humanitarian and philosopher. Kalinian comments "Saroyan's spirit is still in me". Until today, Kalinian rides around Fresno, California on his bicycle just as his idol William Saroyan had in the latter years of his life.

"The film is a labour of love" says Mr Kalinian. It was entirely produced with his own financial resources. It took Kalinian more than six years of research and painstaking attention to detail to complete this film. It was finally completed in 1994 with the assistance of his wife Mrs Kalinian; his son Harold, the film's Technical Engineer; and his daughter Susie, the film's Co-producer and Film Project Co-ordinator.



Paul Kalinian with daughter Susie

Kalinian's purpose in making this documentary is to promote 'a knowledge and understanding' about William Saroyan's life. It can be used for educational purposes for generations to come.

On its completion, the documentary has already earned Kalinian five prestigious awards in the USA and Canada.

In April 1994, Paul Kalinian received the Finalist Award for "William Saroyan: The Man, the Writer" from the 27th Worldfest-Houston International Film Festival. In June 1995, the film was presented at the Nouveau Festival International du Cinema, in Montreal, Canada. In July 1995, Kalinian received the Leigh Whipper Gold Award for Best Documentary Film from the 18th Annual Philadelphia International Film Festival. In October 1995, he received two Bronze Plaque Recognition of Excellence Awards in the divisions of Arts and The Humanities, and an Honourable Mention Award for Script Writing, from the 43rd Annual Columbus International Film Festival.

Sydney witnessed the premier screening of "William Saroyan: The Man, The Writer" on the 9th June, 1996, at The Roxy Theatre, Film Australia. It was a very successful evening. The film proved to be very informative and entertaining for the audience. It ended in a warm applause and Mr Kalinian was welcomed to the stage at the closing of the film. He said a few words in English and Armenian and answered audience questions. We were happy to have amongst us special guests Ms Jarkka Sypka, Ethnic Affairs Adviser to Premier Bob Carr and Mr Stepen Kerkyasharian, Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

The film's success in Sydney led to a second screening that was held on the 23rd of June 1996. Mr Kalinian again attended with his wife, Mrs Kalinian. The previous weekend Mr Kalinian was busy screening the film down in Melbourne.

The AGBU in Australia has sponsored Mr Kalinian in coming to Australia to promote this film. The AGBU hopes that this will see the beginning of an array of such projects to be promoted and encouraged by the Armenian community in Australia.

When I spoke to Mr Kalinian by phone a couple of weeks before his arrival in Australia, I asked if he had any advice for the youth of today in pursuing a career in photography, media or film production. He replied "First of all, you've got to have a passion or love for something. I chased him (Saroyan) for 12 years, many people discouraged me. I never listened to anybody. If you want to do something, anything, your heart has to be in it.....I also wanted to give something to mankind.....my dream has now come true".

(Excerpts from the Biography of Paul Kalinian are indented)

During his visit to Sydney, Paul Kalinian had interviews and talkback sessions with Elizabeth Taric for SBS Radio's World View program, Rosemary Sorenson for ABC Radio's Arts Today program, as well as Armenian radio programs. Kalinian's visit was also covered by both local and Armenian press coverage.