

WHERE IS MY COMMUNITY?

What's Armenian?

Being Armenian is more like which of the following. *Circle your answer.*

- listen or talk
- lead or follow
- think or do
- smile or laugh
- cool or warm
- give or take
- whisper or shout
- willow or oak
- today or yesterday
- strict or permissive
- politics or poetry
- tragedy or joy

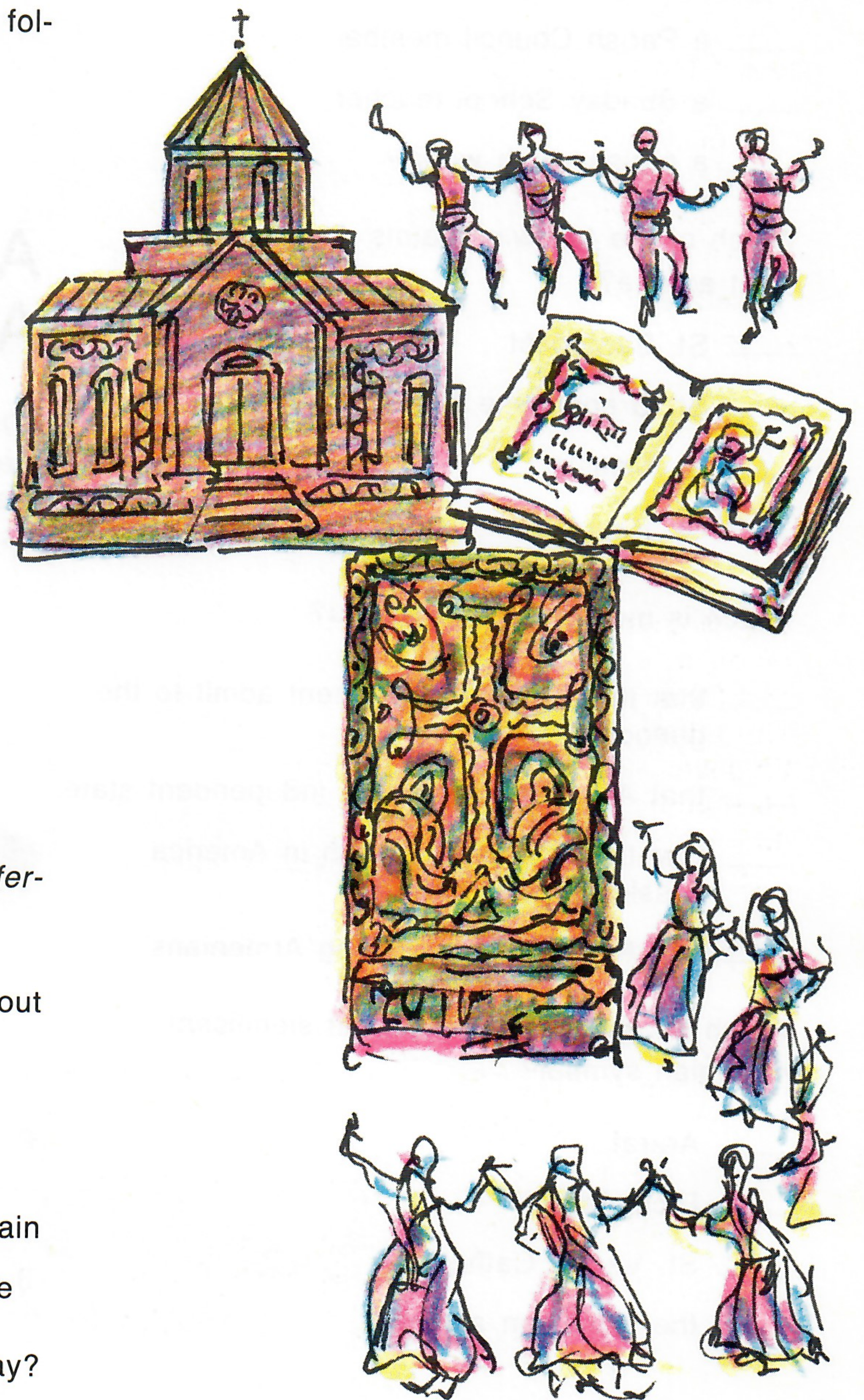
Rank the following items in order of preference.

What do you do when someone asks about your ethnic background?

- ___ blush and run away
- ___ change the subject
- ___ tell them I'm Armenian and then explain
- ___ say that I'm as American as apple pie

How would you rather spend a free Saturday?

- ___ at a crash course on the Armenian language
- ___ at a retreat
- ___ washing cars to raise money for the ACYOA



_____ at home alone

Which would you rather do?

_____ marry a non-Armenian Christian

_____ marry a non-Christian Armenian

Which would you rather be?

_____ a priest

_____ a Parish Council member

_____ a Sunday School teacher

_____ a parish youth worker

Which of the following saints do you most admire?

_____ St. Santookht

_____ St. Gregory the Illuminator

_____ St. Mesrob

_____ St. Paul

Which is most important to you?

_____ that the Turkish government admit to the genocide

_____ that Armenia become an independent state

_____ that the Armenian Church in America missionize and expand

_____ that there be unity among Armenians

Which do you think is the most significant Armenian symbol?

_____ Ararat

_____ Etchmiadzin

_____ St. Vartan Cathedral

_____ the Armenian alphabet

MY EYES ARE INHERITED

At first you were not eyes,
nor mine.
You belonged to someone else.
You were two beauty marks
adorning a face.
In order to become my eyes
you had to suffer.
In order to remain my eyes
you have to continue to suffer.

Razmig Tavoyan
(1975)

A "QUIZ" TO THINK ABOUT

(The following questionnaire is reprinted from the Summer 1980 issue of "Keghard," a publication of the ACYOA Seniors. See discussion issues at end.)



1. Can you pronounce KEGHARD properly?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
2. Do you speak Armenian?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
3. Are you single, and still living at home?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
4. Do you live in Watertown?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
5. Do you have a large nose?

- a) yes
 - b) no
6. Does your last name end in either IAN or YAN?
- a) yes
 - b) no
7. Did you start shaving at an early age?
- a) yes
 - b) no
8. Are you always starving?
- a) yes
 - b) no
9. Do you have a moustache, or have you ever grown one?
- a) yes
 - b) no
10. Does the year 1915 have any significance for you?
- a) yes
 - b) no
11. Do you say Shish Ka Bob or Shish Ka Bab?
- a) yes
 - b) no
12. Do you know Watertown's zip code by heart?
- a) yes
 - b) no
13. Can you say, "How are you?", in Armenian?
- a) yes
 - b) no
14. Have you ever been to a *Kef*?
- a) yes
 - b) no
15. Can you name the legendary resting place of Noah's Ark?
- a) yes
 - b) no
16. Do you eat chicken and pilaf at least once a week?
- a) yes
 - b) no
17. Do you own at least one Tavloo (Backgammon) Board?
- a) yes
 - b) no

18. Do you have an oriental rug in your home?
- a) yes
 - b) no
19. Do you have hair on your fingers?
- a) yes
 - b) no
20. Do you have blond hair and blue eyes?
- a) no
 - b) yes

Give yourself 1 point for each a) answer. If you scored 1-20 points, you're Armenian!

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the attitude of the author of this quiz towards Armenians?
2. Is the quiz offensive or just funny?
3. What stereotypes does the quiz reinforce?
4. How do you feel about stereotypes?
5. How would you change the quiz?

ARARAT

We stand rooted,
eyelashes, eye to eye,
my mountain and I.

Faith, they say moves mountains
as Noah moved you into sight.

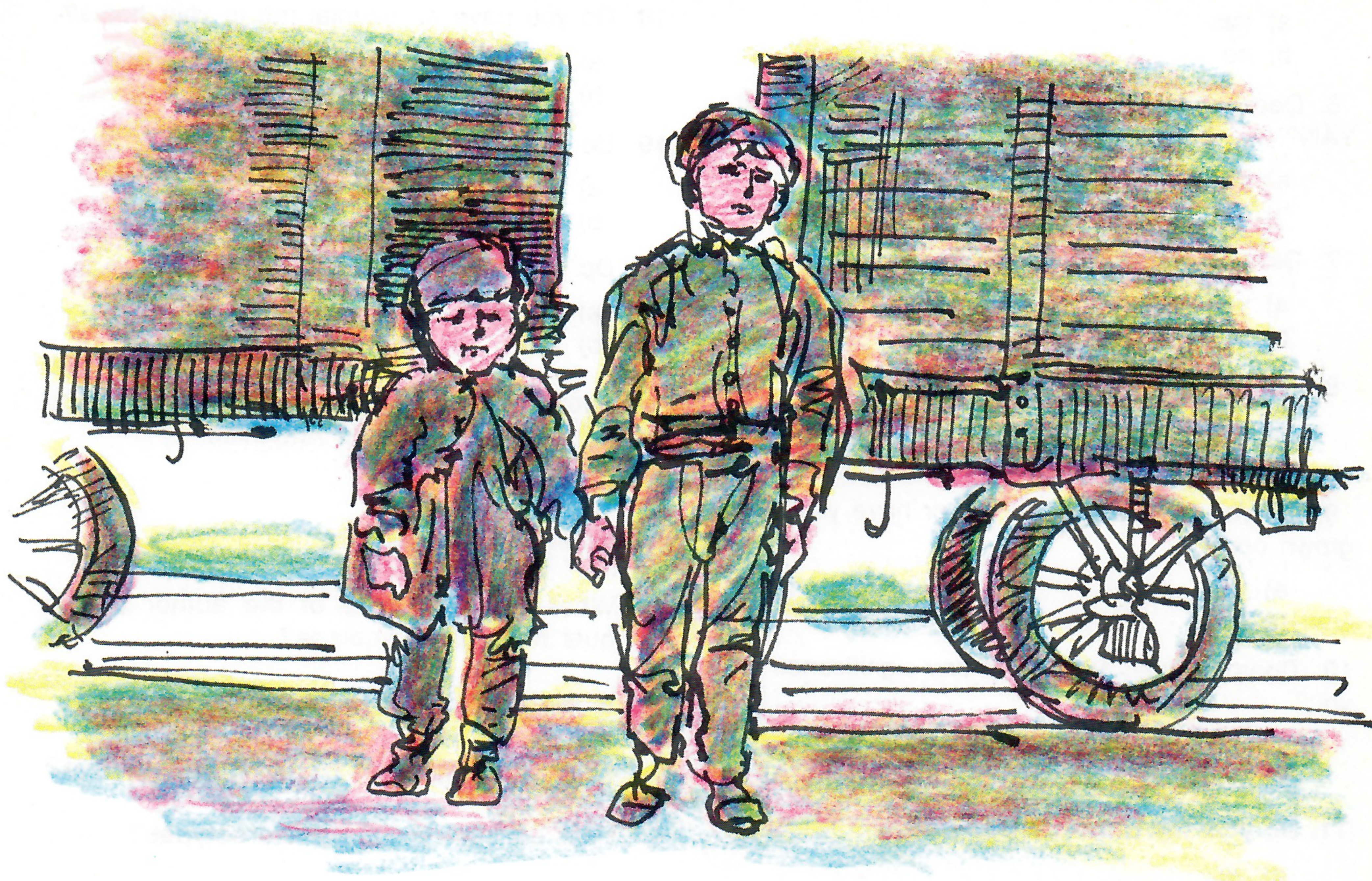
I am filled with the same fanatic
flood. And still we are planted stones.

I curse my own immobility.
Is it for nothing
this is Ararat, I am an Armenian
and we are apart.

For how long? Satan knows.
I am transient. I am mortal.
I shall pass.

And you, my mountain,
will you never walk toward me?

Kevork Emin
(1970)



OUR SURVIVORS

An actual account of one who lived through 1915.

"In 1915 I was very, very young. I had only one week of schooling when the war broke out, only one week. But it took four years before my family was deported. We lived in the city, you see, in Marzivan, in the interior, not near the shores. But our city had schools, missionaries, an American hospital — our people were educated. Therefore the massacre was much stronger near our city. And it took four years before we were deported; for four years we suffered in the city. That's why, although I was a very young child, I have seen more, by being in the city, than some other people who were deported to other parts."

And what was it you saw, Mrs. A.? What were these things you saw as a very young child?

"People didn't want to leave the city. They knew that if they left the city, they would be killed. I saw how they tied people to the cara-

vans, I have seen it; they used to tie people to the caravans and, by beating the people, move them. I was only four or five years old but I have seen that by beating the people and by tying them to caravans, they moved them out from each section of the city."

The will to bear witness, says Terrence Des Pres in "The Survivors," a testimony of survivors, is rooted in a strong need to make the truth known. As our survivors' heirs, we are the logical listeners to that truth. Yet we find it, very often, something to be forgotten, a repulsive horror not to be rehashed. It is easier to remember and mourn our martyred dead in silence. The testimony of our survivors is used for its shock value, the three gentle words, "I have seen," to instill dread.

"I have seen how they killed the Armenians, the children, the men. They went from house to house, and whomever they found they killed. They took all the young girls — the Turkish people of the city had joined the army and this

was their chance to take everything we had. When you open a basket of bees, many bees, what do you hear? What happens, what do you hear? All their voices — many voices. The whole city was crying, girls, women, everybody, crying, shouting from every house because the Turk was going in and doing anything, everything, to the girls, the women, killing the men . . . ”

The collective scream of a nation is heard in the testimony of every survivor. Why should we listen to this again? Why should we, year after year, feel the pain, the rage, the fear, the ultimate frustration of the helpless listener? Some of us even feel anger or annoyance at having to hear these events described again. The important thing, we say, is not what has passed, but in what lies ahead, in our future. We have heard enough. We have heard the scream, the cry, of the dying. I often wonder if this is all we have heard, this scream of the dying. It is easy to forget, while listening to the accounts of blood and death, that what we are actually hearing is the voice of the living; the survivor.

“I didn’t know what I was doing, but I ran out of the house. I had never even gone out alone before. But I ran out and found my relatives’ house. How did I find that house? But I did, and I found my brother, and he found a way to be free of them.”

We listen to the account of a child running instinctively to safety; we hear the voice of a survivor telling us, as all survivors do consciously or unconsciously, of the will to live, to survive.

The will to live is an instinctive one. I have always been fascinated by my grandmother’s account of one incident during the massacres. The Turks were invading the village, Gemerek, and reports of the horrors they would inevitably bring with them had long preceded them. My grandmother and her sister were alone in the house. As the Turks advanced, her sister took poison, and died in my grandmother’s arms. Having heard this story many times, I finally asked her one question that I had never been able to come to terms with in my own mind. Knowing what was in store for her, knowing that her chances of survival were so slight, what was it that prevented her from taking the same poison, and dying along with her sister? The simplicity of her answer (which I always imagined would be a revelation) stunned me:

“Hokin ainkan anoush eh . . . ainkan anoush

eh . . . ches kider.”

“Life (the soul) is so sweet . . . so sweet . . . you can’t imagine.”

Evidently I couldn’t imagine, because I had to ask. But what I did know is that on that day, from the lips of an elderly, frail woman, came the strongest argument for life, strength and will that I had ever heard. Each of our survivors testify by their very being that even in the midst of death there still is life. And behind the testimony of each, the same voice can be heard, stating with the same eloquence — “Life is precious.” We need to hear that voice and to remember the testimony of our survivors, for as one of Des Pres’ survivors states:

“I have not told you of our experiences to harrow you, but to strengthen you . . . Now you may decide if you are justified in despairing.”

Questions For Discussion:

1. As a member of the Armenian community, do you feel you are the survivors’ heir? Why or why not?
2. How do you feel when you hear or read about the genocide? Are you angry? Horrified? Indifferent? The past is gone, let’s go on with our lives?
3. How did the two sisters react to the advancing enemy? How do you feel about their reactions?
4. How do you think we should remember April 24, 1915?

THE ARMENIAN SPIRIT

How can I define the soul, the Armenian spirit, I have asked myself, amused by the question all the time while the soul itself escapes my grasp of words, soaring with its wings trailing glory as I ask sadly still:

What is spirit? What is soul?

What is essence? Idea? What is being?

What is soul that comes as a cloud unseen, but felt as mist?

Sometimes it is a fragrance of roses or a haze of petals covering the sky’s face, immense and immeasurable Armenian soul.

What exactly is Armenian soul, Hyoo hokee, I ask, and think I see it before me half buried in wet earth, like the soldier dug into his battlefield without feeling mud. I salute it through clay then kissing the tired but sacred Armenian soul.

Vahan Tekeyan

Session 4—Where Is My Community?

Key Concepts

1. Our ethnic background is an important part of who we are.
2. Being an Armenian and living in America is a unique experience which is reflected in many different ways.
3. The Armenian genocide is a part of our recent history and something about which we should be knowledgeable.

Objectives

Students will

1. Share their ethnic background.
2. Examine what it means to be Armenian.
3. Analyze their feelings about being Armenian.
4. Read and reflect upon accounts of the genocide.

Background for Teacher

Our roots, where we come from, are an important aspect of our identity.

This session will deal with the question, "Where Is My Community?" and focus, in a general way, on what it means to be Armenian. Encourage your students to express their feelings, both positive and negative.

Procedure

1. Opening prayer.
2. Review homework. (Students were to read "Letter from a Father" in their texts and write a reply.) Have someone read the "Letter from a Father" aloud. Ask for volunteers to read their response. Check to see that everyone completed the assignment and make comments. Ask students how they felt while writing their replies. Did they identify with the father or the son? Do they know anyone else in a similar situation. (10 min.)
3. Say: "Last week, we talked about our families. Today, we're going to talk about our larger family—that is, the community—the Armenian community of which we are a part."

Ask students to pull out their Family Tree. Discuss: "How many of you have someone on your family tree from another country who came to live in the

U.S.? Which country were they from? Why did they come to the U.S.? What relatives do you have living in another country now? Have you ever met them? If so, are they Armenian the same way you are here in America? How are they the same or different?" (Go over all the questions on the Family Tree in this manner.) (10 min.)

4. Mention to students that in the first session a few weeks ago when they completed the "I Am" exercise, most students wrote, "I Am Armenian." (This will probably be true.) Ask: "Just what do you think that means? Discuss: What things do you do that are "Armenian?" As students respond, make a list on the blackboard. It might look something like this:

- Foods we eat
 - Way we dance
 - Language we speak
 - The church we attend
 - Special days such as April 24, January 6, etc., we observe
- (15 min.)

5. Ask students to complete the "What's Armenian?" exercise in their texts. (5 min.)

6. When completed, ask students to share in pairs. When sharing is completed, ask how the answers were similar and different. Why were they different or the same? Were you surprised at how the other person responded? Ask for answers to a few of the items and discuss. (10 min.)

7. Read the *Quiz* together in class, having different students read each question and respond. Go over the "Questions for Discussion": What is the attitude of the author of this quiz towards Armenians? Is the quiz offensive or just funny? What stereotypes does the quiz reinforce? How do you feel about stereotypes? How would you change the quiz? (10 min.)

8. Ask students why 1915 (mentioned in the quiz) is an important date for Armenians. (They should know this; if not, tell them.) Ask them to read the genocide account in their texts on page 16. Divide the class into groups of four and ask them to answer the questions listed in their texts. (20 min.)

9. Have each group report on their answers.

10. Have volunteer students read aloud the Emin and Tekeyan poems on pages 15 and 17. Discuss the poems using these questions:

"Ararat"

- In "Ararat" what does the mountain mean to the poet?
- What does the poet mean when he says, "I curse my own immobility?"
- Where is Ararat located?
- How do you feel about Mt. Ararat?

"The Armenian Spirit"

- What is the Armenian spirit or soul to Tekeyan?
- Why does he compare it to a "soldier dug into his battlefield without feeling mud?"
- Why do you think he refers to the Armenian soul

as "tired" and "sacred?"

(10 min.)

11. *Homework.* Ask students to write an essay on "What it means to be Armenian."

12. Closing prayer.