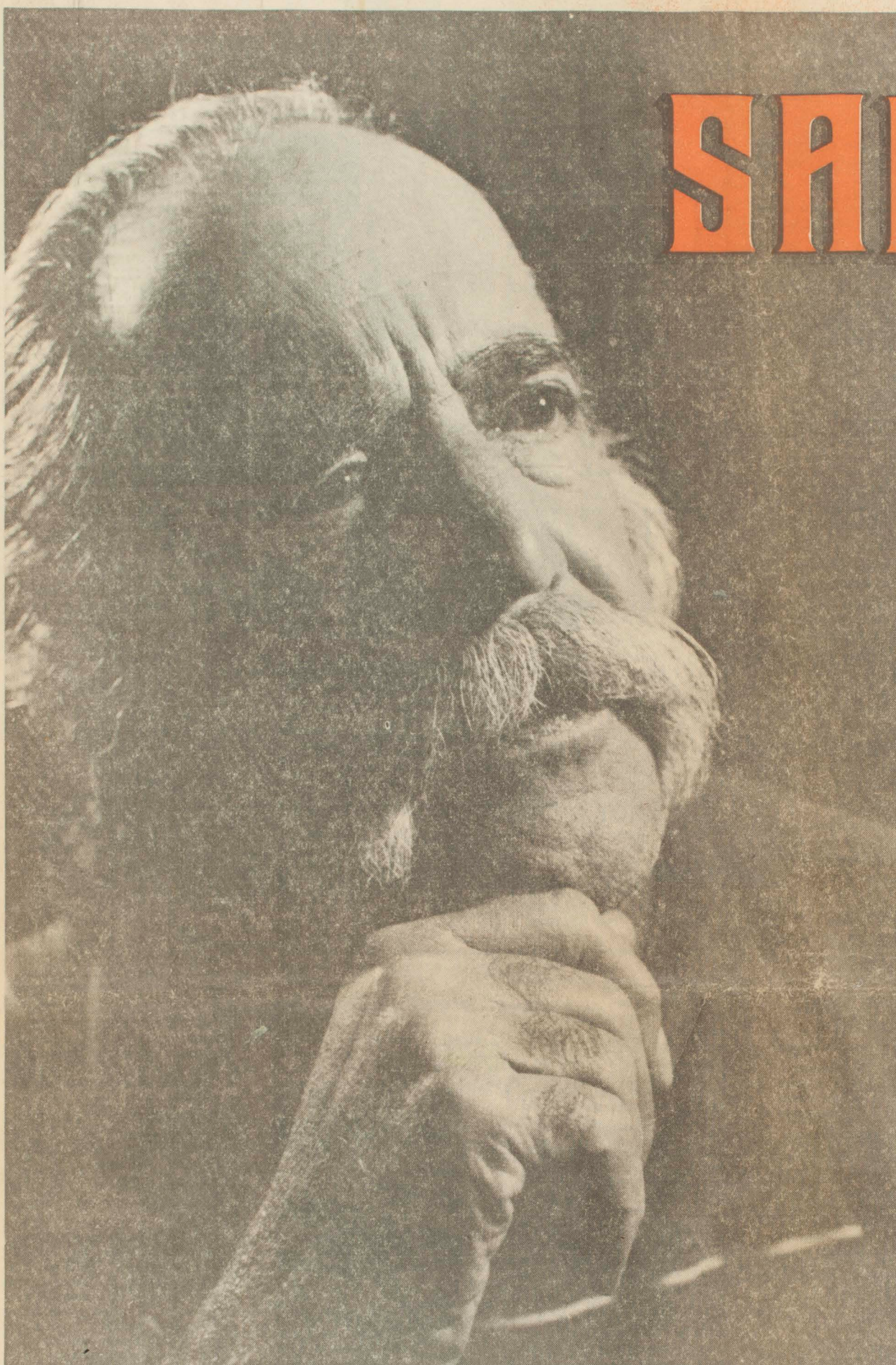




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SAROYAN

In his own words

From the program of the Berkeley Repertory Theater program of William Saroyan's "My Heart's in the Highlands," January 1981

The purpose of my life is to put off dying as long as possible.

The greatest happiness you can have is knowing that you do not necessarily require happiness.

I took to writing at an early age to escape from meaninglessness, uselessness, unimportance, insignificance, poverty, enslavement, ill health, despair, madness, and all manner of other unattractive, natural and inevitable things.

I care so much about everything that I care about nothing.

The whole world and every human being in it is everybody's business.

My superficial manners stink and my profound manners are almost as bad.

All great art has madness, and quite a lot of bad art has it, too.

Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure.

The business of polishing my shoes satisfies my soul. I am enormously wise and abysmally ignorant.

The purpose of writing is both to keep up with life and to run ahead of it. I am little comfort to myself, although I am the only comfort I have, excepting perhaps streets, clouds, the sun, the faces and voices of kids and the aged, and similar accidents of beauty, innocence, truth and loneliness.

You write a hit play the same way you write a flop.

I have managed to conceal my madness fairly effectively, and as far as I know it hasn't hurt anybody badly, for which I am grateful.

In the end, today is forever, yesterday is still today, and tomorrow is already today.

I am deeply opposed to violence in all its forms, and yet I myself am violent in spirit, in my quarrel with the unbeatable: myself, my daemon, God, the human race, the world, time, pain, disorder, disgrace and death.

I have made a fiasco of my life, but I have had the right material to work with.

A tribute to the memory of William Saroyan will be presented tonight at 7 in the Convention Center Theater. The evening of tributes, music, readings from Saroyan's work and excerpts from two of his plays will be free to the public. A display of Saroyan memorabilia will be on display beginning at 6 p.m. in the lower lobby.

'In the time of your life, live'

By JOSEPH SUTTON

I had forgotten how dull and gray and foggy old California 99 can get in the middle of winter. I drove through the fog, passing Modesto, Turlock, Merced and Madera when all of a sudden I saw a sign: 13 miles to Fresno. That's when my mind woke up. "Fresno! Fresno is William Saroyan country."

My thoughts kept going. "William Saroyan, a first generation American writer just like me. Oh, how he speaks to me in his writings, how he has influenced me. And to think, I'm only 13 miles from where he lives. If only I had his phone number. But I have his address — the one I got from reading 'Days of Life and Death and Escape to the Moon.' I wonder if I should do it. No, he might not like it. I might disturb him. Anyway, he's probably in Paris. I know from his writings that he divides his time between Paris and Fresno. But who knows, there's a 50-50 chance he's in Fresno. Maybe I should listen to my urge and go by his house. After all, didn't he once write, 'In the time of your life, live'? Well, what's the use of living if you don't take chances?"

I got off at a Fresno exit and stopped at the first gas station. I asked the attendant if he knew where West Griffith Way was. He said it was less than a mile away and gave me directions.

Soon I was parked in front of Saroyan's two tract houses. I asked myself, "Now why would he own two tract houses next door to one another?"

I was nervous. Was I out of my mind? What was I going to ask him anyway? What could I learn from him that I hadn't already learned from reading his books?

The house on the right seemed empty. The house on the left had a light on in the kitchen. I rang the bell.

A few seconds later I noticed Saroyan with his large gray walrus mustache looking out of the kitchen window at me. He was wearing a beat-up fisherman's hat. I smiled nervously and nodded to him.

The front door opened and a husky, unshaven man of average height stood in front of me.

"Mr. Saroyan," I said, shaking in my pants, "my name is Joe Sutton. I'm a great reader of your writings."

"WHAT'S YOUR NAME AGAIN?" his voice boomed through

See Live, Page F4

'Cry of the peacock'

Fresno artist Rollin Pickford, a longtime friend of William Saroyan, did illustrations for several of Saroyan's short stories.

By ROLLIN PICKFORD

"Willie was born conscious," his Uncle Mihran used to say. Uncle Mihran kept a dress shop in downtown Fresno next to the Fresno Morning Republican. He called it Mona Lisa Fashions. You can see that art ran in the family.

William Saroyan sold newspapers on the Republican corner when he was a boy. Many years later he made the corner familiar to his readers over the world with his story of Huff, the old man who sold popcorn there from a steaming wagon.

Old Huff was really Saroyan's first mentor: "Huff and I became friends when he was perhaps in his late 70s and I was 9 or 10. I had been selling papers on that corner for about a month before we began to speak to one another.

"One rainy night he called me over to the wagon and handed me a bag of popcorn. It was very good. After that, we began to be pals. Every night when things were quiet, almost nobody in the street, we stood and talked.

"Huff, I discovered, was an atheist, but like so many small-town atheists he kept his ideas to himself and was very deeply a good man, perhaps a religious one.

"I remember that when he remarked that the human race was vicious, I did not feel that he was speaking with hatred; I felt rather that he spoke with regret, compassion and perhaps even love. He told me about writers whose books he had read — with his one eye, which itself was inflamed, watery and appeared to be on the verge of falling out of his head.

"In the meantime, from the public library I got the books he had read and began to read around in them: Ingersoll, Paine, Emerson. I read swiftly and carelessly, but I think I got what was important for me to get: That the human race is anything any of us wishes to notice and believe it is, and that it can be anything we hope."

When the publisher assigned this story to me for illustration, I felt privileged to come upon Saroyan at his wellspring.

Other stories followed. These assignments were fun to do. It was wallowing in boyhood again — walking barefoot in mud,

See Peacock, Page F4

'When you laugh, laugh like hell'

By WILLIS FOSTER

In 1934, while the New Deal was battling the gloom and uncertainty of the Depression, it got help from an unlikely source — William Saroyan.

He hardly looked like a hero. He came sauntering into the Adams-Danysh Galleries in San Francisco, hands in pockets, a wary grin on his face.

"Willis, meet Bill Saroyan," Joe Danysh said to me. "Bill is a writer," Joe explained. I was sympathetic. In those days writing was a labor of love or an act of desperation. I was still convalescing from the loss of a little magazine that I had helped to edit and publish, and was working at odd assignments to supplement a token salary as literary editor of the old San Francisco Argonaut.

"Bill has a piece in Story Magazine," Joe went on, sensing my reserve. This was a positive note. Whit Burnett and Martha Foley, the editors of Story, had a reputation for uncovering literary talent. "They're going to use another one," Bill said. I decided that he might have a future.

It was hard to take Saroyan seriously at first, either as a man or as a writer. Friendly and cheerful, he always was ready with a flip remark or a smart rejoinder. The Depression had not subdued him.

Danysh and Saroyan were an entertaining pair. Joe was good at repartee, Bill was light-hearted, and the two could add life to any party, of which there were many during those first months after the official repeal of Prohibition.

Saroyan seemed to go everywhere. He might turn up at a turkey roast in the East bay, at a night-time hike up Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County, or on the university campus in Berkeley. He wanted to enjoy every possible experience.

One astute critic, reviewing Bill's first book, likened him to a small boy on tiptoe, stretching to peer open-eyed at the goodies on the dining room table.

One of his new friends, a noted art teacher and critic, remembers Saroyan spending hours in his house "pounding the piano in a distracting way." "He also brought me some very bad sketches," the friend continued, "and confessed he was trying to find out if his talents extended to music and painting. I

See Laugh, Page F4

Saroyan on film -- A photographer's dream come true

By DENNIS POLLOCK
Bee staff writer

For years Paul Kalinian had plotted the seduction of William Saroyan.

Kalinian wanted that face — more than anything in his life as a professional studio photographer — to put that visage on film as no others had.

"I wanted to show his grandeur," Kalinian said, his accent of native Lebanese sliding into French and out again. "I did not want to take his portrait. I wanted to describe his ability and wisdom."

But it was not to be an easy seduction. Saroyan had simply refused for most of his life to pose for studio pictures. In Fresno and the rest of the world, there were photographers frustrated in their attempts to capture with their lenses the rich Armenian face.

The Fresno man succeeded did it with the quiet help of sculptor Varaz Samuelian, with stubborn persistence and with an Armenian song.

Kalinian relives it, from the start, as he sits in a little waiting room off his studio on Olive Avenue:

"I came to the United States from Lebanon 18 years ago. I had always dreamed of coming to the United States and it is beautiful . . .

"I knew of this great man in Lebanon. I had read a couple of his books . . . 'My Name Is Aram' — the simplicity, and so natural . . .

"I was fascinated by his (Saroyan's) character — his broad forehead, the moustache. I fantasized about taking his picture.

"I asked several people (in Fresno) where I would find this man. They said he is here and there, all over the world. And he does not want to pose for the camera . . .

"But I never changed my mind. I said if I am good enough . . . if I can attract him . . .

"Then several years ago one of his plays was at the Memorial Auditorium. I asked the manager where I could find the writer of this play. He said Saroyan would be there (one evening of the play's run)."

Between raindrops, Kalinian loaded his photo equipment into his Ford Galaxy 500, and set out for the theater. His plan: to set up his equipment backstage, collar Saroyan and ask if he could take some pictures.

The camera gear was in readiness. The curtain rose and fell. Saroyan did not appear.

"He did not come. Everybody was disappointed. They told me, 'That's the way he is.' I packed up all my equipment and went home.

"In the next years I gathered more information about him . . . I

always had the idea I could meet this man and take his picture."

The chance came when Kalinian became acquainted with sculptor Samuelian, a friend of Saroyan's.

"I said to him, 'There is no hope. Can you find a way? I just want to be with him a couple of minutes.'"

"He said, 'I am a close friend of Willie.'"

"I said, 'God has sent you to me.'"

Kalinian is beaming as he brings years-old moments back to life.

The seduction was to be on a late March afternoon in 1976 at Samuelian's studio in southeast Fresno. It was agreed that Kalinian would set up his equipment there in anticipation of a visit by Saroyan.

"I was ready even to be kicked out," Kalinian says. "At least I could communicate two or three words in Armenian and maybe soften him."

Kalinian stands and lifts his legs in exaggerated steps to show how he had to step over boxes in the artist's studio to set up his equipment.

"We waited an hour. Then Mr. Saroyan, on his bike, was coming down the street. I have to say I was very disappointed. I had always thought of this man . . . the idea he is like God. . . (But) the clothes he is wearing, and on a bike.

"But then I was looking only at his head. That face . . .

"At first he didn't see me. Then I gave my hand and said my name. I said 'If you have just a couple minutes I would like to take your picture.'"

"He said, 'No, I don't take good pictures. I do not pose.'"

The imitation that rumbled out was gruff.

"I looked at Varaz. I was mostly shocked. But I did not leave.

"He started asking questions about painting, and then he saw the (photography) equipment and lights and asked about them. I told him, 'Don't pose for me. I will just take snapshot pictures.'"

Kalinian recaptures that moment in the re-telling by snapping his fingers to show how he triggered some of the strobe units.

"He said, 'Are you serious. Are you taking my picture?'"

Kalinian replied, "There is no film in the camera. I am just snapping."

"He said, 'I want to see if you have film in the camera.'"

Kalinian had anticipated the demand. He opened the back of the camera to display an empty cartridge.

"I had already decided if he's going to slap on my face and kick me out, OK."

But Saroyan relaxed as he sat at a little table.

"He put his hands on it. He said, 'Where are you from?' He got interested in me and in Lebanon.

"Just that quick, I took the empty film magazine out and put film in."

Kalinian managed to convince Saroyan how much it meant to him to be able to take a picture, telling him it was a life's dream.

The beaming smile on Kalinian's face is now a glow.

"If he had stayed 100 hours I had that much film. I told him how happy I was. . . . Then I was taking pictures . . . He claps his hands as if playing back the amplified sound of a shutter clicking.

"He said, 'You speak very fluent Armenian.' He said, 'Talk, talk, talk.'"

"He said, 'Can you sing in Armenian for me?' He asked me to sing 'Tzangam Desnem Zim Giligia' — 'I wish I could see my Armenia.'"

The 48-year-old photographer is standing. He's singing and snapping his fingers. Click. Click. Click.

"Tzangam Desnem Zim Giligia' . . . and I'm stepping like this over the boxes . . . and he's singing with me."

Saroyan remained seated at the table. But he shifted from side to side, turning, leaning forward, back. Nothing was posed. And Kalinian scrambled around the man, among the boxes and the strobe lights.

"Now, it is my time to ask questions. Before, I am working for him. Now I say, 'Tell me how you are when you are all by yourself. I want you to feel 100 percent free.' I gave him a pencil and said, 'Varaz, give me a piece of paper.'"

" . . . Sometimes I looked at his eyes, and he said, 'Why did you stop taking pictures?' And I said, 'I am waiting for the expression of how you are going to look when you write.'"

"He was giving me more

feelings. . . sometimes sad, sometimes happy and angry. . . . I was excited and he was excited, too. 'I like you,' he said."

The picture-taking went on for about three hours.

"I gave him his freedom and I was a ghost then . . . I say to myself, God, I pray for one thing, that the lab doesn't damage my film."

It was a chilly March day, but Kalinian was perspiring, sidestepping the boxes, savoring the face he'd stalked for years.

When it was over, the three men sat down to eat oranges and watermelon.

"You're a very good man," Saroyan said to Kalinian. "Why don't we take a picture together? Varaz, you too."

" . . . This was the topping on the cake," Kalinian said. "He asked me. I was the happiest man in the world."

On parting, Saroyan promised to

send Kalinian a book in exchange for the pictures.

Kalinian was never to know the expression on Saroyan's face when he did see the photographs. A week later, Kalinian delivered them to Samuelian, who sent them to Saroyan. "He told Varaz he liked them," Kalinian said.

And within a month, Kalinian received a copy of "Don't Go But If You Must Say Hello to Everybody." It was autographed by Saroyan with a salutation to "a great photographer-artist."

Kalinian calls the encounter the most exciting experience in his 33 years as a photographer.

He never saw Saroyan again after that day.

"I didn't run after him. After you go to a restaurant and you eat what you want, do you go find something to eat?"

It was the end of a feast to be savored for years.



William Saroyan is flanked by sculptor Varaz Samuelian, left, and photographer Paul Kalinian. Kalinian's photographs of the author will be displayed at the Fresno Convention Center during the tribute to Saroyan tonight.

Peacock

Continued from Page F1

eating grapes warm from the vines, lying on the grass at night looking at stars, going to the county fair.

Saroyan was helpful to me when he was in town, patiently describing Hovagim's vineyard, pointing out old landmarks or locations where they no longer stood. His gargantuan memory, his recall of minutiae, his ability to characterize in the briefest terms, almost painted the pictures for me.

It was sometimes difficult because we were dealing with ghosts of the past and often had to lean on "Pop" Laval and his giant file of photographs from Fresno's early days: The streets and wagons and early automobiles, the Republican building, the Emerson School, the original Carnegie Library, the theaters — Liberty, Kinema, Bijou (with a large sign out front, ADMISSION 5¢), Strand, Hippodrome, and the Orpheum where there was vaudeville.

One day Saroyan took me out toward the foothills in view of the Sierra Nevada to a spot where his uncle Aram had attempted to transform a dry section of wasteland into a flowering pomegranate orchard. In "Return to the Pomegranate Trees" he had poignantly described his uncle's failure. "My uncle grew poetry here," he explained, "but all the fruit rotted in a boxcar on a railroad siding in Chicago."

Saroyan even stood still, which was difficult for him, long enough for

me to make a quick drawing of him to illustrate the story.

The year was 1953. Fresno State College was presenting an exhibition of my work at the old University Avenue campus. The day was Sunday and the college was locked up, but Saroyan insisted on seeing the show. I phoned everyone I knew at the college and finally got a key so he could have a private view of the paintings. Looking at some watercolors of the sea, he revealed a characteristic insight: "The Monterey coast is just an extension of the San Joaquin Valley for you because you understand it in the same way."

Afterward he took me on a tour of our hometown — the old neighborhoods and houses, pointing out homes where he had delivered telegrams during World War I. His powers of recollection and graphic description were amazing. Ever since that Sunday afternoon the old houses have had a new dimension for me and my paintings of them are surely enriched by his remembrances.

Illustrations for "The Idea in the Back of My Brother's Head" led me to the modest former Saroyan residence on El Monte Way. Through the glass of its front door young William had viewed life and the peacock which lived across the street.

"You know the cry of the peacock most likely better than I do," he had written, "but in those days, when I was beginning to get ideas about the wonderful world I lived in, and the wonderful part I was going to play in that wonderful world, that cry of the peacock seemed an appropriate indication of the astonishing success

ahead. At the same time it seemed to suggest a little of the loneliness that is likely to stalk a man like that around the rest of his life. A man, I mean, who is out to do something, and far away."

The current tenants of the house on El Monte Way were startled when I knocked on that glass door and asked permission to sit on their living room floor while I painted William's early view of the world — and his uncle Gotto in a horse-drawn carriage — through the beveled glass. (William was blessed with abundant uncles; a new one seemed to appear, like a genie, in each story.)

One day Saroyan said to me, "I'm glad you're illustrating these stories. When you draw a fig tree it looks like a fig tree. When those New York artists in the tall buildings try to draw one it looks like a cherry tree or any miscellaneous kind of tree." He believed firmly in working only with what you know intimately. And work he did, powered by a robust, towering energy.

On one of his unpredictable visits to Fresno, he came to my studio on Van Ness Avenue downtown. Poking his head in the door he bellowed in that booming voice, "Anybody here?" "Anybody" jumped out of his chair at the sound and sight of this apparition. He wore a huge handlebar mustache (it was black then), dark sunglasses and a black hat pulled low over his eyebrows. He laughed and apologized for intruding unannounced. He took off his coat and hat, loosened his tie and sank into a chair with a sigh, relieved to be in off the too public street.

Our talk that day ranged over many subjects. We spoke of our

children (he was proud of his son's and daughter's accomplishments in the arts), of the problems of being parents, of our mutual love for the San Joaquin Valley and early Fresno as natives, of being born, of drugs and drinking, of painting and writing.

He had this simple advice on method: "Say you want to write a book; say it has 52 chapters. Write one chapter every week; at the end of a year you have your book. Don't try to write it all at once."

And this note on personal approach: "When I was in New York writing 'The Time of Your Life,' if I got stuck I'd just go out and walk, I'd walk all over the city. It didn't matter if it was 2 o'clock in the morning. When I came back I was unstuck. (He wrote the Pulitzer Prize-winning play in six days at the Great Northern Hotel.)

He stared intently at the paintings on the walls. "In my home at Malibu Beach the living room has a large picture window looking on the ocean. I have only three things in the room — a chair, a card table and my typewriter — no paintings. Ocean is my picture."

He had a restless, probing curiosity that wanted to find out in detail about even inconsequential things. As we talked of being born, I mentioned that my brother and sister had been born in the old flats that still stood behind my studio. With this, he had to go back and inspect the old structure thoroughly and ask innumerable questions about it and about the whole family.

The poverty and shameful discrimination that Saroyan and his fellow Armenians suffered in bygone days had not left him unmarked. I

was made acutely aware of this when I was working in the south part of town on the illustration of Emerson School, Saroyan's alma mater. This was long after it had been demolished and I was using Pop Laval's photograph of it, but working at the site for authenticity (much to the puzzlement of older Armenians in the neighborhood who would look at my painting, then look up at the empty field before us and walk away shaking their heads).

One of my longtime Armenian friends came by and began to talk with me. What he revealed that day of the ostracism and prejudice suffered by his countrymen made me understand it intimately.

Nor was it easy to be an internationally known figure. Saroyan told me of a friendship he had formed with a bookseller in Paris. "We called each other by our first names. He knew me only as Bill and we became very good friends. This went on for some months, then one day he found out that I was William Saroyan and he began to call me Mr. Saroyan and our whole relationship was changed. It is sad."

With us it was reversed. Although we had been born only six blocks apart, the noted writer's path had never before crossed mine. One day when he was visiting in my studio he said, "I'll give you my phone number." In his wonderful jagged scrawl he wrote "Bill Saroyan" and his number on my telephone pad. From then on it was Bill.

Whatever else Bill Saroyan was, he was real — real artist, real friend — and without pretense. He could also be thoughtful, understanding,

quickly generous. Two years ago when I told him I was going to Paris, he immediately said, "Use my apartment — if you can stand it!"

Bill liked to return home at the harvest season to enjoy the grapes, peaches, watermelons, figs and other delights that our rich valley offers. Of Fresno weather he wrote, "But oh! the weather there, the heavenly weather there in the spring, the summer, the autumn, the fall, the winter — the hot sun and the heavy rain, the new green of spring and the fire-golden of fall: The farmer's weather of Fresno, in which I lived and became a part of the human race. The last thing I shall forget is the weather there."

In that first story I illustrated, Saroyan mused, "Well, I was born there, if that helps, for birth is into the world, into the unresolved and unresolvable universe, into the entire dynamic mystery of living matter, and not into a town." Yet he came back to that town to spin out his final tale, returned at last from that "unresolvable universe."

A few months ago I ran into Saroyan at the county library, a haven he frequented, often buying used books by the armload to fill his library, the other house on West Griffith Way.

"You working?" he asked in a stentorian tone that woke up all the readers and sleepers within earshot.

"Yes," I admitted, "haven't learned any better. How about you?"

"I'm still writing," he said. "The public thinks all American writers over the age of 60 are dead, but hell, I'm not."

Not while the human race endures.

as possible to be wholly alive, with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough."

Saroyan was offering his readers a prosperity of the spirit if not of the pocketbook. People liked his message. "The Daring Young Man" went into six hard-cover printings, followed by a paper-back edition a couple of years later.

His success was not just with the general public. Saroyan was given serious attention by the country's leading literary critics. Clifton Fadiman wrote about him in the New Yorker, William Rose Benet in the Saturday Review. The influence of Sherwood Anderson on his writing

See Laugh, Page F7

Laugh

Continued from Page F4

came forward, hesitantly, to the sound of growing applause. He tried to excuse himself for not speaking, but the audience would not let him go so easily. "Read something," someone called out.

Bill opened his book and began reading, randomly. The applause was frequent and friendly, and he began to enjoy it. Realizing that I had become excess baggage, I left the platform. When Elder offered to introduce Bill to the second session, I went home.

This was the beginning of the love affair between Saroyan and the public. His openness, good humor

and flippancy delighted everyone, including reporters. He made good copy. Long before Mohammed Ali adopted it as his theme, Saroyan was boasting "I am the greatest." He said it with a deprecating grin that did not offend anyone.

I substituted for Bill one more time. The Fresno chapter of the League of Western Writers asked him to come down for a local-boy-makes-good appearance. Bill felt uncomfortable about it and asked me to represent him.

I had lived in Fresno for about a year after graduating from college. It did not seem like the same place Bill wrote about in his stories. The San Joaquin Valley of his childhood was thickly populated by Armenians and Assyrians, but I wondered where

they had been hiding when I lived there. I had heard about a poor, foreign community on the edge of town, and I knew of a restaurant named the Omar Khayyam (run by Bill's uncle, as I learned later). But generally the Armenians were not visible to me nor, apparently, to the writers' organization. Saroyan did not consider himself to be its favorite son.

Before leaving for Fresno, I asked Bill if he had any message to send to them. At first he refused, explaining, "I don't like that kind of organization," then he added: "Tell them I send them warm greetings and hope every one of them writes a great novel first thing in the morning."

I be typically Saroyan I

conveyed it to them near the close of my talk. It dampened any applause I might have anticipated.

That talk also marked my last direct contact with Saroyan for many years. He may have been offended by reports of the lecture in the Fresno paper, which headlined that "Saroyan Pictured As Naive Youth By Critic." The fact that I had used the phrase to defend him against charges that he was a "sophisticate posing as a naive youth," or that I had urged readers to buy his book so as "to be in at the christening of a literary prodigy" did not balance his sensitivity to any kind of criticism. From the day he took off for New York and national attention he ignored most of his early friends in San Francisco.

Considering the state of the economy, commercial success for a volume of short stories in 1934 was remarkable. The Depression was still near its rock bottom. It was the first year of the dust bowl, identified by enormous black clouds of topsoil that blew across the Midwest from North Texas and Arkansas. Father Coughlin in this country and Adolf Hitler overseas were filling the airwaves with hatred and racial epithets. The Ku Klux Klan was riding high, and the Lindbergh kidnapping trial was dragging toward its ignoble ending.

Into this gloomy atmosphere Saroyan came as an evangelist of hope and optimism. "Enjoy life while you can," was his message. " . . . learn to breathe deeply. Try as much

as possible to be wholly alive, with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough."

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See Laugh, Page F7

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Old Huff was really Saroyan's first mentor: "Huff and I became friends when he was perhaps in his late 70s and I was 9 or 10. I had been selling papers on that corner for about a month before we began to speak to one another.

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pictures.
The camera gear was in readiness. The curtain rose and fell. Saroyan did not appear.

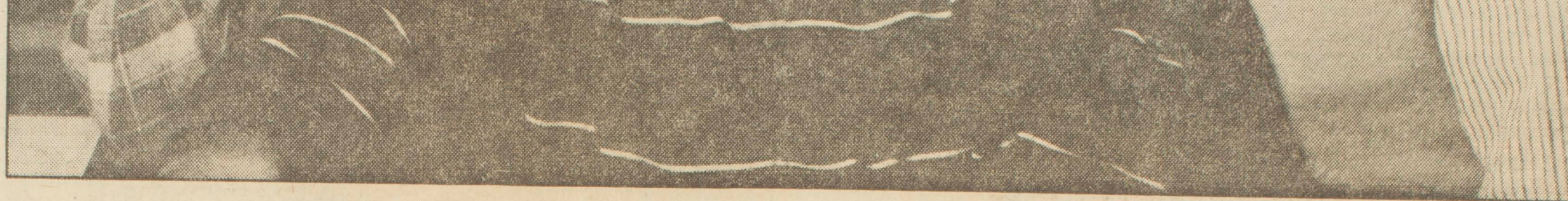
"He did not come. Everybody was disappointed. They told me, 'That's the way he is.' I packed up all my equipment and went home.

"In the next years I gathered more information about him . . . I

in the camera. . . just snapping."
"He said, 'I want to see if you have film in the camera.'"

Kalinian had anticipated the demand. He opened the back of the camera to display an empty cartridge.

"I had already decided if he's going to slap on my face and kick me out, OK."



William Saroyan is flanked by sculptor Varaz Samuelian, left, and photographer Paul Kalinian. Kalinian's photographs of the author will be displayed at the Fresno Convention Center during the tribute to Saroyan tonight.

Peacock

Continued from Page F1

eating grapes warm from the vines, lying on the grass at night looking at stars, going to the county fair.

Saroyan was helpful to me when he was in town, patiently describing Hovagim's vineyard, pointing out old landmarks or locations where they no longer stood. His gargantuan memory, his recall of minutiae, his ability to characterize in the briefest terms, almost painted the pictures for me.

It was sometimes difficult because we were dealing with ghosts of the past and often had to lean on "Pop" Laval and his giant file of photographs from Fresno's early days: The streets and wagons and early automobiles, the Republican building, the Emerson School, the original Carnegie Library, the theaters — Liberty, Kinema, Bijou (with a large sign out front, ADMISSION 5¢), Strand, Hippodrome, and the Orpheum where there was vaudeville.

One day Saroyan took me out toward the foothills in view of the Sierra Nevada to a spot where his uncle Aram had attempted to transform a dry section of wasteland into a flowering pomegranate orchard. In "Return to the Pomegranate Trees" he had poignantly described his uncle's failure. "My uncle grew poetry here," he explained, "but all the fruit rotted in a boxcar on a railroad siding in Chicago."

Saroyan even stood still, which was difficult for him, long enough for

me to make a quick drawing of him to illustrate the story.

The year was 1953. Fresno State College was presenting an exhibition of my work at the old University Avenue campus. The day was Sunday and the college was locked up, but Saroyan insisted on seeing the show. I phoned everyone I knew at the college and finally got a key so he could have a private view of the paintings. Looking at some watercolors of the sea, he revealed a characteristic insight: "The Monterey coast is just an extension of the San Joaquin Valley for you because you understand it in the same way."

Afterward he took me on a tour of our hometown — the old neighborhoods and houses, pointing out homes where he had delivered telegrams during World War I. His powers of recollection and graphic description were amazing. Ever since that Sunday afternoon the old houses have had a new dimension for me and my paintings of them are surely enriched by his remembrances.

Illustrations for "The Idea in the Back of My Brother's Head" led me to the modest former Saroyan residence on El Monte Way. Through the glass of its front door young William had viewed life and the peacock which lived across the street.

"You know the cry of the peacock most likely better than I do," he had written, "but in those days, when I was beginning to get ideas about the wonderful world I lived in, and the wonderful part I was going to play in that wonderful world, that cry of the peacock seemed an appropriate indication of the astonishing success

ahead. At the same time it seemed to suggest a little of the loneliness that is likely to stalk a man like that around the rest of his life. A man, I mean, who is out to do something, and far away."

The current tenants of the house on El Monte Way were startled when I knocked on that glass door and asked permission to sit on their living room floor while I painted William's early view of the world — and his uncle Gotto in a horse-drawn carriage — through the beveled glass. (William was blessed with abundant uncles; a new one seemed to appear, like a genie, in each story.)

One day Saroyan said to me, "I'm glad you're illustrating these stories. When you draw a fig tree it looks like a fig tree. When those New York artists in the tall buildings try to draw one it looks like a cherry tree or any miscellaneous kind of tree." He believed firmly in working only with what you know intimately. And work he did, powered by a robust, towering energy.

On one of his unpredictable visits to Fresno, he came to my studio on Van Ness Avenue downtown. Poking his head in the door he bellowed in that booming voice, "Anybody here?" "Anybody" jumped out of his chair at the sound and sight of this apparition. He wore a huge handlebar mustache (it was black then), dark sunglasses and a black hat pulled low over his eyebrows. He laughed and apologized for intruding unannounced. He took off his coat and hat, loosened his tie and sank into a chair with a sigh, relieved to be in off the too public street.

Our talk that day ranged over many subjects. We spoke of our

children (he was proud of his son's and daughter's accomplishments in the arts), of the problems of being parents, of our mutual love for the San Joaquin Valley and early Fresno as natives, of being born, of drugs and drinking, of painting and writing.

He had this simple advice on method: "Say you want to write a book; say it has 52 chapters. Write one chapter every week; at the end of a year you have your book. Don't try to write it all at once."

And this note on personal approach: "When I was in New York writing 'The Time of Your Life,' if I got stuck I'd just go out and walk, I'd walk all over the city. It didn't matter if it was 2 o'clock in the morning. When I came back I was unstuck. (He wrote the Pulitzer Prize-winning play in six days at the Great Northern Hotel.)

He stared intently at the paintings on the walls. "In my home at Malibu Beach the living room has a large picture window looking on the ocean. I have only three things in the room — a chair, a card table and my typewriter — no paintings. Ocean is my picture."

He had a restless, probing curiosity that wanted to find out in detail about even inconsequential things. As we talked of being born, I mentioned that my brother and sister had been born in the old flats that still stood behind my studio. With this, he had to go back and inspect the old structure thoroughly and ask innumerable questions about it and about the whole family.

The poverty and shameful discrimination that Saroyan and his fellow Armenians suffered in bygone days had not left him unmarked. I

was made acutely aware of this when I was working in the south part of town on the illustration of Emerson School, Saroyan's alma mater. This was long after it had been demolished and I was using Pop Laval's photograph of it, but working at the site for authenticity (much to the puzzlement of older Armenians in the neighborhood who would look at my painting, then look up at the empty field before us and walk away shaking their heads).

One of my longtime Armenian friends came by and began to talk with me. What he revealed that day of the ostracism and prejudice suffered by his countrymen made me understand it intimately.

Nor was it easy to be an internationally known figure. Saroyan told me of a friendship he had formed with a bookseller in Paris. "We called each other by our first names. He knew me only as Bill and we became very good friends. This went on for some months, then one day he found out that I was William Saroyan and he began to call me Mr. Saroyan and our whole relationship was changed. It is sad."

With us it was reversed.

Although we had been born only six blocks apart, the noted writer's path had never before crossed mine. One day when he was visiting in my studio he said, "I'll give you my phone number." In his wonderful jagged scrawl he wrote "Bill Saroyan" and his number on my telephone pad. From then on it was Bill.

Whatever else Bill Saroyan was, he was real — real artist, real friend — and without pretense. He could also be thoughtful, understanding,

quickly generous. Two years ago when I told him I was going to Paris, he immediately said, "Use my apartment — if you can stand it!"

Bill liked to return home at the harvest season to enjoy the grapes, peaches, watermelons, figs and other delights that our rich valley offers. Of Fresno weather he wrote, "But oh! the weather there, the heavenly weather there in the spring, the summer, the autumn, the fall, the winter — the hot sun and the heavy rain, the new green of spring and the fire-golden of fall: The farmer's weather of Fresno, in which I lived and became a part of the human race. The last thing I shall forget is the weather there."

In that first story I illustrated, Saroyan mused, "Well, I was born there, if that helps, for birth is into the world, into the unresolved and unresolvable universe, into the entire dynamic mystery of living matter, and not into a town." Yet he came back to that town to spin out his final tale, returned at last from that "unresolvable universe."

A few months ago I ran into Saroyan at the county library, a haven he frequented, often buying used books by the armload to fill his library, the other house on West Griffith Way.

"You working?" he asked in a stentorian tone that woke up all the readers and sleepers within earshot.

"Yes," I admitted, "haven't learned any better. How about you?"

"I'm still writing," he said. "The public thinks all American writers over the age of 60 are dead, but hell, I'm not."

Not while the human race endures.

Laugh

Continued from Page F4

came forward, hesitantly, to the sound of growing applause. He tried

and flippancy delighted everyone, including reporters. He made good copy. Long before Mohammed Ali adopted it as his theme, Saroyan was boasting "I am the greatest." He

they had been hiding when I lived there. I had heard about a poor, foreign community on the edge of town, and I knew of a restaurant named the Omar Khayyam (run by

conveyed it to them near the close of my talk. It dampened any applause I might have anticipated.

That talk also marked my last direct contact with Saroyan for many

Considering the state of the economy, commercial success for a volume of short stories in 1934 was remarkable. The Depression was still near its rock bottom. It was the first

as possible to be wholly alive, with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough."