My Remembrance of William Saroyan
MARYLOU BAGDASARIAN

When William Saroyan was a young lad, he attended Sunday School at the First Armenian Presbyterian Church. My father, Haigos Bagdasarian, was the superintendent of the Sunday School. At this time, the church was located on Fulton Street. This building was later destroyed by a fire and in 1942 the congregation built a Spanish-influenced church building on the corner of First and Huntington Blvd. The present campus was built in 1976.

In the 1980s, William Saroyan and our common cousin, Harry Bagdasarian, were always invited to my brother and sister-in-law’s (George and Marian’s) home for Thanksgiving dinner.

There was Bill with his large bushy mustache, loud voice, and interesting stories seated at the table with our family members. He always took command of the conversation and everyone listened in awe.

During the meal, he would always give an unexpected person a gift of one of his autographed books. Naturally, the person receiving the book had to be related to his Sunday School superintendent. He said that those were some of his happiest times spent at the church.

Bill would keep us entertained from the salad course to the dessert and coffee course of the meal.

After having lunch with my family, William Saroyan would go for a walk along the ditch bank on the ranch near George’s house. George said that every time Saroyan would see a wild flower, he would pick it. He loved wildflowers in his backyard when he lived in Fresno. The weeds were knee high, but he loved to see the flowers among them. By the time the men returned to George’s house, Saroyan had a bouquet of wildflowers which he explained were flowers of “God’s garden.”

When Bill and Harry left the party, everyone noticed how quiet it was. The young members of the family were busy thinking about who would receive the autographed book next year.
Our family was very happy to host William Saroyan and our common cousin, Harry Bagdasarian, for several Thanksgiving dinners.

NOTES
1 Harry Bagdasarian’s father, Dickran, was married to a Saroyan and was an older brother to Haigos Bagdasarian. Harry Bagdasarian’s brother, Ross, was the originator of “Alvin and the Chipmunks.”