



FRESNO PACIFIC  
UNIVERSITY

# FPUScholarWorks

---

**What's in a name?**

Author(s): Lucille Gahvejian.

Source: *Pacific Journal* 9 (2014): 93-94.

Publisher: Fresno Pacific University.

Stable URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/541>

---

FPUScholarWorks is an online repository for creative and scholarly works and other resources created by members of the Fresno Pacific University community. FPUScholarWorks makes these resources freely available on the Web and assures their preservation for the future.

## What's in a Name?

LUCILLE GAHVEJIAN

To my pleasant surprise, William Saroyan related very strongly to the name “Lucy.” It was in fact the name of his beloved Armenian grandmother, Lucien, a form of “Lucy.” Upon learning that my first name coincided with that of his grandmother, it, among other things, helped to form a continuous bond between us. This affinity for the name “Lucy” carried on in his own family as he named his only daughter “Lucy” as well.

I first became acquainted with William Saroyan through his books, many of which covered his life and times in Fresno's Armenian town. I grew up in this same community around the corner from his San Benito Street home. In fact, my childhood friend lived in the Saroyan home long after young William left to move to Oakland.

Later while residing in Sacramento, I went to a book signing party honoring Aram Saroyan, the inspiring and favorite uncle of William Saroyan. Aram had become a well-connected attorney, and a wealthy business tycoon of the first order, with a similar family gift for writing. Aram, was tall, charismatic, and spoke with the same booming voice that I came to experience upon meeting his nephew, William Saroyan.

My first meeting with Bill came in the early 1970s when he moved back to Fresno. At the time, I was hired as the secretary of the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church in Fresno, a facility fondly referred to by Saroyan as the “red brick church” in all of his writings.

One weekday, Saroyan stopped for a visit at the church and introduced himself. Upon learning my name was Lucy, I magically became like a close relative. His visits became frequent, and I recall quite clearly how he would arrive on his favorite mode of transportation, the bicycle, travelling a distance of over five miles from his home west of the Old Fig Garden area.

As he entered, he would bellow “Lucien!” with a voice that was as clear and loud as our famous church bell. His storytelling in person was so very mesmer-

izing that he held me captive with every sentence. He loved recalling his time spent at Emerson Grammar School, Longfellow Junior High School, and his Armenian heritage.

The church's choir director in the early 1930s was the talented and flamboyant, Paris-born and educated, Professor Kalfayan. The professor had talents and a reputation that overshadowed his church title. He so impressed Saroyan that he was portrayed in Saroyan's book *Don't Go, But If You Must, Say Hello To Everybody*.

The Saroyan clan included many cousins throughout the Fresno area. Among his cousins, were George and Marion Bagdasarian, who would include William Saroyan at holiday gatherings. At these affairs, Bill Saroyan was totally unguarded and would gather up the children and spin colorful, masterful stories for their entertainment. He truly relished these moments to unwind and commiserate. My family and I were privileged to be included at these gatherings.

Years later, Marion and I planned and directed the now famous Emerson and Longfellow school reunion. From near and far they came. On the guest list were celebrities like Mike Connors (born "Krekor Ohanian"), the actor, who was born in Armenian Town. William Saroyan was in attendance and had been invited to make a presentation.

Many of the old teachers from both schools were there to recall school events and student hijinks during their school days in the 1920s and 1950s in the Armenian town community.

Saroyan was the first speaker, and he proceeded to tell us bluntly what little regard he had for teachers and education. Following Saroyan, Mr. Charles Johnson, principal of Emerson school, remarked that even though Mr. Saroyan had stated his dislike of teachers and education, "we would like to think that we had something to do with what he became." Although Saroyan was not happy with this statement, he was well behaved as this event was fully covered by the Fresno Bee and local television stations.

It still amazes me to think that this story and my friendship with William Saroyan evolved from having been named Lucy by my dear parents.