

Shaped by the Spot

by

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Presented to the  
Department of English & Communications  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia

Yerevan, Armenia

May 18, 2021

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## **Abstract**

*Shaped by the Spot* examines the relationship between a person and a place. It aims to discover how identities are shaped based on the place attachment factor and its impact on the development of lives and identity creation. This research is conducted through a set of oral history interviews with three young Armenians who have very different backgrounds but are connected by the idea of place attachment. This capstone project concentrates on three different locations connected to each of the interviewees - Tumo Center for Creative Technologies, Vazgen Sargsyan Republican Stadium, and Artsakh. All these locations have shaped the characteristics of the interviewees, influencing their interests, and later on, career choices. The research also includes a self-discovery part of the researcher herself, examining her relationship with Tumo. The study findings are introduced via a set of creative non-fiction stories, portraying the place attachment and identity creation connection creatively, accompanied by a digital album related to the places and the interviewees.

## Acknowledgments

After a lot of consideration and a few major changes, my project is finally presented to its audience. The essential part of my project was the oral history interviews. The creative aspect took many turns, from being a podcast to turning into a documentary film and finally becoming creative writing pieces. Considering my love and passion for creative writing, it was most natural for me to express myself as a researcher and an artist through writing in my final assignment for my undergraduate studies.

For this incredible journey, I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Hourig Attarian, who always supported me and my ideas. Even though we communicated only through Zoom meetings and countless emails, I couldn't have asked for a better Capstone project creation experience without meeting each other for office hours in real life. I'm grateful for having taken her *Oral History: Collective Life Stories* course in my junior year, an experience that changed my perception of life and our reality. It made me understand people more and contributed to my self-discovery, as it unleashed the version of a researcher and a writer living inside me. I also want to thank Houry Pilibossian for helping me with the technical aspects of the Capstone.

I'm grateful to the people who agreed to be part of my project as participants and frankly contributed to the complete fulfillment of my Capstone project. Thank you to Tamar Sargsyan, who, despite the difficulties that life has put her through in the past few months, agreed to be a part of the project and helped me in every possible way. Thank you to Mariam Arakelyan for telling me about her childhood and Tumo experience with such emotion that it transferred me with her through a memory lane. Mariam has been my friend since 2014 when we met in Tumo

and continued building our friendship. I'm grateful to my brother, Norayr Zoryan. Besides being a participant in my project, he helped and supported me in the creative process and listened to my ideas and complaints, helped me in technical aspects and settings of the project.

Thank you to my support teammates Anna Ivanyan, Ani Galstyan for sharing the Capstone journey with me and supporting any aspects of questions or concerns we had throughout the way. Together, we managed to stay motivated to complete the project and exchanged any helpful information to contribute to the work. I am also grateful to Gayane Aghabalyan for being there as a mentor to us and keeping us sane while we were panicking about the project at the beginning of the semester.

I want to thank my mentor and friend Naomi Mastico, for believing in me in all aspects of my studies and supporting me throughout the different phases of completing my Capstone project. Her positive energy and encouraging words inspired me to challenge myself to do the best I can.

I'm also grateful to Heather Gluck and Alexander Kapsidelis, my creative writing instructors in the online workshop of Advanced Creative Writing, for teaching me the magical techniques and different styles of writing alongside my university classes this semester. They encouraged us to write about everything and anything, and think of our reality as stories for writing. The simultaneous writing exercises helped me open my mind's creative side and not be afraid to write. Just write.

Thank you to my Filmmaking professor Zareh Tjeknavorian, who listened to my ideas and counseled me about documentary filmmaking. His advice helped me understand factors and notions about my project that I hadn't seen before and made me fall in love with it even more. After our conversation, I realized in which format exactly I would like my research to be presented. I got reassured that I shouldn't distance myself from writing and put my true passion into my project, as it is a part of me.

I want to thank the administrations of Tumo Center for Creative Technologies and the Football Federation of Armenia for letting me shoot my interviews inside their buildings and providing all the necessary settings for the excellent quality sound and picture.

And of course, I want to thank my parents for always believing in me and motivating me to complete my project in its best way possible. They taught me to enjoy the process of learning and creating, thus telling me about the importance of expressing myself and believing in the importance of my project. They walked side by side with me throughout this incredible journey, and I can't be more grateful for their support and positivity.

## Introduction

Each human being has a unique personality. The characteristics that shape one's character are being created throughout a lifetime and are in constant change. The phenomenon of creating an individual is called identity formation, and it is the fascinating process of "finding oneself." Many factors influence an individual's creation throughout this process, even if we don't pay much attention to them and have never considered them essential. One of those factors is the person's attachment to a specific place, a space that has had a significant role in shaping one's personal and professional qualities, interests, and characteristics.

This study concentrates on exploring the connection between an individual and a place within the concept of *person, place, and memory*. It is a combination of qualitative research of oral history and creative writing. Oral history is the research study of collecting life stories and connecting narrators' stories and experiences to more profound research questions. Place attachment is a common research question for oral historians to explore, and it may vary from different types of incidents, from triggering traumatic experiences to bringing back childhood memories. Oral historians use various mediums to present their findings and narratives, and there is no limit to the creativity of making the work extraordinary and uniquely presentable.

*Shaped by The Spot* introduces the readers to the worlds of three young adults with very different backgrounds who have grown as individuals in spheres such as sports, arts, and software development. This study focuses on finding what factors within those places contributed to the creation of their interests and personal growth. Key findings and observations of the characters are presented in a series of creative nonfiction short stories with individual narratives about the participants' experiences connected to the place they are most attached to and identify themselves with. The stories are accompanied by a digital album with the

interviewees' photographs and snapshots before/after the interviews, which gives the essence of why those places are so unique for them and who they are within those places.

### **Literature Review**

Place attachment is a concept mainly within environmental psychology. It is the emotional bond to physical and social settings that help identity creation and are primarily influenced by individual experiences. To understand this concept more in-depth, Barbara Brown (2003) in her article "Place attachment in a revitalizing neighborhood: Individual and block levels of analysis" explores how the relationships between people of different backgrounds and neighborhoods are connected. The article demonstrates the key factors that influence the attachment of a person to a place. According to the study, place attachment occurs with different personality types and their long or short relationships with the specific location. The neighborhood's long-term residents, who own a house, and feel safe, have a more profound attachment to the neighborhood. "These [place attachment] bonds reflect and help cultivate group and individual identity" (Brown, 2003, p. 259). The connection between space and individual support to investigate the person's identity features and the characteristics of the space.

There are some cases when a concept, such as arts or sports, contributes to creating an attachment between a person and a place. A great example of such attachment creation and maintenance in the sports sphere is football (soccer), with its fans and athletes. A strong attachment can be created between a nation and the sport, contributing to territory marking and creating an identity due to football. According to H. Houtum, people who identify themselves with football tend to mark and claim their territory, which is seen as a strategic act (Houtum, 2002, p. 25). Those types of territories are specific to them only. As a result, a community is



shaped that shares the concept of place attachment and the creation of the same identity connected to football. For sporting events, the attendees experience satisfaction and joy due to their bond with the place.

The people-place bond is essential to people today because in modern society, 'the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes' caused 'placelessness' and a lack of authentic sense of place (Relph, 1976, Preface). In my project, I emphasize the connection between a person and a football stadium, thus exploring how sports shape the concept of identity on an individual's basis. There are many types of identities, which have been studied and presented by scholars and researchers. Some of those identity factors are associated with the place, thus, supporting the notion of place attachment and identity formation within the idea of a particular space. The types of identities have been studied in the article "Place and Identity Processes" by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996). The paper introduces the readers to the different kinds of identities and, through examples, explains how those types of identities are created. The two ways in which place has been related to identity are; place identification and place identity (Ross & Uzzell, 1996, p. 206). The first type can be considered a social category and refer to a group of people sharing the exact characterization and bond to the place. The second type argues around the idea of whether identity is more of a 'social' concept or 'place.' Place attachment study projects are based on exploring the identity types and adding new understandings of the research question with recent practical examples and individualities.

For my research on the question, I chose to explore it using oral history methodology. It is essential to keep the standards and be aware of managing the overall process of preparing and conducting interviews, working on them, and publishing them. As an oral historian, one should know the interviewee's legal concerns and rights and the interviewer's responsibilities.

Throughout the past few decades, oral history techniques took different directions, especially after the digital revolution. Thus, oral history became widespread around different corners of the world. It is crucial to know the fundamentals and emerging new oral history study methods. Oral historians hold the responsibility of building narrator-interviewee relationships while conducting an oral history project. The study of oral history also involves the questions of ethics and interpersonal relationships, which requires deep learning of the terms and practice to master it. These notions are well described and researched in the article by Yow (1995) titled “Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research.” It explains how trust is shaped between the interviewee and the interviewer and how important it is for the interviewer to understand ethical standards and norms. As a person who works with several interviewees from various backgrounds, figuring out the essential principles of making a trusting connection with the interviewees is one of this capstone project’s most critical factors.

As mentioned before, my research involves several interviews with different interviewees and a self-reflection part of a specific space. In my self-reflection part, I bring my own experience of place attachment to the research. Throughout the interviews, I focused on understanding the narrator’s key points and not adding or removing my perceptions of the question. Yow’s work helped me determine the limits and borders of my perceptions and my interviewees’ connections. The examples brought in the piece of different oral history projects make the task straightforward and precise. It also helped me calculate and be aware of the potential consequences of the interviews and be self-aware at the moment of the creating process. The author describes the interview effects that an interviewer might go through while interviewing and conducting the research. The reactions also contribute to the shaping or shifting of the study.

Transcription provides an opportunity to explore the interviews in new senses and get inspired by the narrative's ideas. After conducting oral history interviews, the audio files need to be transcribed into texts. It allows reflecting on the interview in ways that audio files don't, and that review becomes essential when working with it. The article "Voice, ear & text: Words & meaning" by Francis Good (2000) concentrates on the process of transcribing an oral history interview. According to the author, it is necessary to keep the original version and not make drastic changes; however, the editor's work is crucial. It gives the final touches to the text. It is a part of an oral history project methodology and allows us to organize the information and archive it to further research and understand different concepts.

While creating an oral history project, one of the many ways of narrating the research and the interviews is through writing creative nonfiction short stories. Creative nonfiction is a genre of writing that uses literary techniques to portray narratives that are factually accurate. It allows the writer to become a part of the story, whether about them or other characters. It makes the story more interesting by the writer's involvement, but it also contributes to the self-discovery process and gives freedom while writing. According to Lee Gutkind, "In creative nonfiction, writers can be poetic and journalistic simultaneously. Creative nonfiction writers are encouraged to utilize literary techniques in their prose - from scene to dialogue to description to the point of view - and be cinematic at the same time" (Gutkind, 2006, p. 6-7). Creative nonfiction can be a combination of different writing styles and structured like traditional narratives. This genre is usually associated with journalism and gained popularity by the name "New Journalism." The author, based on his experience in teaching and writing, composed a journal about creative nonfiction to "provide a literary outlet for those journalists who aspired to experiment with combining fact and narrative" (Gutkind, 2006, p. 8). As a writer and an oral historian, I'm

combining my studies and observations from the qualitative research of oral history and the genre of creative nonfiction to best portray the stories of my *Shaped by the Spot* project participants.

The academic sources mentioned above are essential when conducting a research study in the field of oral history. For my research, first, I concentrated on exploring the notion of place attachment and identity formation through theoretical and practical studies. Next, I focused on the techniques and methodologies of conducting interviews and working on the process after its creation, transcribing, editing, and making the narratives into short stories. The overall research study is a combination of a creative project and various aspects of environmental psychology.

### **Research Question**

This research is conducted to explore the fascinating subject of identity formation within the scope of place attachment. It articulates the central question of how a place contributes to a person's identity creation and how the bond between a person and space is created and developed throughout time. The research is specialized in understanding the identity formation experience of young Armenians raised in the post-Soviet era. This project aims to bring awareness of the research question among the Armenian community, specifically the youth.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative research aims to study the influence of a place on creating and developing a person's identity. The oral history interviews were conducted in the locations connected to the participants, except for one. The study combines a series of oral history interviews and creative nonfiction short stories based on the interview materials and character developments.

## Participants

The participants of this study are people of very different backgrounds and ages, associated with specific places that contributed to their personal and professional development. The place attachment concept unites them, and their interviews portray their experience with the connection of *place and memory*. The three interviewees have close relationships with me and were chosen purposefully. Their life stories and experience are brilliant examples for studying the notion of place attachment and identity creation. Having close relationships with the participants had its unique impact on the research and my development as a researcher.

The first interviewee is Tamar Sargsyan, who grew up in the village of Hovtashen in Artsakh, and pursued both her Undergraduate and Graduate studies at Artsakh State University, specializing in Armenian History. According to her, being surrounded by the enormous mountains and blossoming nature of Artsakh, she was raised to be kinder, more appreciative of what nature has to offer, and interested in the Armenian national and folk culture. Simultaneously with her studies, she started to teach folk dances in the village of Noragyugh in Artsakh and is a member of the only existing folk dance group "Tnjre" found in Artsakh. Her relationship with Artsakh is very strong. In her words, she wouldn't be the person she is now if not being raised in Artsakh. Her interview uncovers the lifelong experience of personal development by the opportunities and interests that she obtained while being in Artsakh, which later on contributed to her career choice and professional progress. Due to the current circumstances, it was impossible to shoot the interview in Artsakh, as Hovtashen is under the control of Azerbaijan after the recent war in September 2020. However, the interview shooting was done in nature for the participant to feel comfortable speaking about the subject. When choosing her as a participant in my research, I knew it would be a sensitive topic for her to talk

about, and I was prepared as a researcher to face the different turns the interview might take. Tamar was strong and well prepared, a trait I associate with the firm standing mountains after listening to her during the interview. Our interview was like an honest conversation between a participant and a researcher; she was very open in vividly describing details and stories from her childhood, youth, and recent years spent in the places she doesn't have access to now.

The next research participant is a rising programmer – Mariam Arakelyan, a TUMO Center for Creative Technologies student for more than seven years. She can't imagine her life without TUMO workshops, the atmosphere, and the extraordinary people. TUMO is the place that shaped her as an individual in her young adult years and gave her a broad choice of interests, passions, and hobbies. She grew up to be more independent, open-minded and developed her social and communication skills thanks to the opportunities that TUMO has provided for her. What fascinated me most is that she chose to leave her university when she was a sophomore, based on comparing the educational system and style that TUMO offered, something her university couldn't. Through my research, I discovered TUMO with its full colors through a student's eyes, and Mariam as an individual through the experience of being a TUMO student. Her experience is a clear example of place attachment and identity creation. Shooting the interview inside the building, in the cinema hall of TUMO, made Mariam feel more comfortable expressing herself, as she got emotional while speaking about her relationship with TUMO.

Mariam has been my best friend for more than six years now, and our friendship started and continued in the scope of TUMO, which later continued to be a part of our lives, even after I stopped being a student at TUMO. In the scope of my research, I also included a self-reflection part on what TUMO means to me and how it contributed to my identity creation in terms of shaping my personality and helping me to find my passions, interests, and hobbies. TUMO was

the place that shaped me to be open-minded, ready to learn new things and challenge myself in different spheres. The self-reflection part is an audio recording, recorded in the Tumanyan Park near TUMO, where we, as teenagers, used to hang out a lot before and after our classes. Mariam Arakelyan's interview materials and my self-reflection have been used in the same creative nonfiction story to fully portray how TUMO impacted us as individuals and students in general.

The third interviewee is Norayr Zoryan, my brother, who is currently working at the Football Federation of Armenia. Norayr has been very passionate about football since childhood, and due to his determination and passion for football, he shaped a career in football marketing and communication. For Norayr, football stadiums feel like home and give him a sense of freedom, passion, and liveliness. He played football throughout his whole life, no matter if the stadium was in the building yard with garage gates and disturbing cars, schoolyards, and football pitches, or real-sized stadiums. His story is included in the series as it is a wonderful example of how a place contributed to creating his identity and, as a result, influenced his professional career choice. The location where Norayr's interview was shot is the Technical Center-Academy of the Football Federation of Armenia, where he spends most of his time working and getting materials prepared for the matches of Armenia's national team. Norayr's interview is marked as a unique one, as our brother and sister relationship was put aside while doing the interview. It was the easiest one to do for me as a researcher, which helped me learn a lot from this experience about participant and researcher relationships.

### **Instruments**

For the completion of this study, I have combined oral history interviews and creative nonfiction short stories for a creative curation of the research findings. Qualitative research methodologies such as in-depth oral history interviews were used as the primary sources for the

data collection. The materials were used in the creative writing processes to create the storylines, characters, settings, and different scenes.

The interviews were conducted on separate dates in different locations. The locations were chosen specifically for the interviewees to feel comfortable in the settings. Secondary research was conducted to understand the best suitable space for each interviewee by researching information about the place and memory connections for the participants, with the help of their involvement in finalizing the places for the interviews. All three interviews were conducted in Armenian for the interviewees to feel more comfortable and free in expressing themselves. The transcription process of the interviews was also completed in Armenian. The textualization of the audio helped me as a researcher to understand and highlight essential parts necessary for creative nonfiction story writing. It also helped me in character development aspects, as it gave me the means to observe specific ways the participants talk, think, and express themselves. I traveled in time in my short stories while telling stories about their lifetimes during different periods and ages of my participants. As a writer, the oral history methodologies, including the transcription process, became a crucial part of my work, especially when working with two languages; transcribing in Armenian and writing in English.

While working on the interview guidelines, I had decided to have separate questionnaires for each participant based on their place attachment location and experience. Later on, during the preparation, I created a questionnaire that would unravel individual stories using general interview guidelines (see Appendix B). This way, it would make the questionnaire relevant for other interviews and the scope of the place attachment and identity creation study. I plan to continue working on my series outside of this capstone project and study the qualitative research further, to uncover as many life stories as possible.



Through a previous course I had taken on oral history, I obtained the necessary skills on initial preparation stages, interview conducting, research, and curation. For that course, I worked in a group with my classmates on a project about the lives of people living in the district of Kond in Yerevan. It was a collective project called *Humans of Kond*, gathering a collection of life stories around a place. I was inspired by our experience and study of the time and decided to unite people and places around one concept in the scope of my capstone project. *Humans of Kond* made me grow as a researcher in many aspects. The most crucial part is that while working on that project, I worked with people that were strangers to me, and I had nothing in common with them. It took me a lot of time and multiple visits to get to know them better and establish trustworthy relationships as a researcher and a participant. This made me prepared to work with people close to me, which is very different from working with individuals who are not familiar with you, your behavior, how you express yourself, and how you perceive things. Now looking back, I'm glad that we chose to have a project that involved working with multiple people who wouldn't be very easy to approach at the time.

### **Creative Aspect**

The data collected from the oral history interviews was used in writing three separate creative nonfiction short stories. The overall writing process revolved around taking an aspect, a moment from the participant's life connected to the place and shaping their character development through the relationship and feelings related to that place. All three stories are part of the *Shaped by The Spot* research study and are named accordingly; "*Ladybugs Bring You Luck*" (a story based on Mariam Arakelyan's interview), "*A Kick of Football Passion*" (a story based on Norayr Zoryan's interview), "*A Single Seed Into the Soil*" (a story based on Tamar Sargsyan's interview).

The participants agreed to disclose their identities in the short stories, and they wanted to be named by their real names. However, all the other names of the characters have been changed.

The creative aspect of the project also involves a digital album where the photographs of the participants in the actual places they're talking about in their interviews are presented. This album is also created with the participants' consent (see Appendix A).

### **Artist Statement**

“Shaped by The Spot” is a project exploring the relationship between a person and a place. It is a creative journey discovering how individuals are connected to places that have significant meaning to them and their personal, professional development.

The three creative nonfiction short stories tell you about the lives of three very different people who have one thing in common; the contribution of a place to their identity creation.

As a writer and an oral historian, I present a combination of the *person, place, and memory* concept through creative writing. The narratives portray a significant part of the participants' lives that take you to the part when the spark of the bond created is slowly lit.

On this journey, you have the opportunity to travel in time and visit the worlds of the participants of the project. You will be able to anchor in the spheres of sports and understand the incredible world of football through the eyes of a 5-year-old boy. You will see the beauty of Artsakh and the implementation of Armenian national and folk culture by a curious young girl who creates her own destiny without even imagining the outcomes of her small steps and actions. And you'll witness the emergence of a lifetime of friendship and self-discovery patterns in the most creative center in Yerevan – Tumo, where a teenage girl fights her inner obstacles and opens her heart up to the world.

After reading the stories, ask yourself and go deep into finding what places influenced your identity creation. Shape your personality through traveling in memory and mind.

### **Reflections on Process**

Shaping an identity requires constant effort and attentive care. We are the ones to choose what directions to select and what to take from life's given opportunities. While external factors impact individuals and may shift us into different routes, we are in control of what to let us closer and, as a result, make them parts of our lives. In some cases, we don't even notice how our lives and interests start to revolve around those factors and how we become a part of them. One of those factors that contribute to identity formation is place attachment.

The idea of exploring the subject of identity creation through place attachment has come to me naturally while thinking of researching a specific topic for my capstone project. Since childhood, I have always associated myself with places, even those I haven't been to yet. As a person who loves traveling and exploring different cultures and people's mentalities, I became more interested in how those beautiful cities, districts, or architecture influence people's lives, from their daily life activities and life quality to more personal concepts such as developing and gaining qualities, passions, and interests as an individual.

In the scope of the course *Oral History: Collecting Life Stories*, I worked on a project where my group mates and I discovered the district of Kond in Yerevan through the life stories of people who have lived in Kond for their entire lives and continue on the mission of enlarging their families in Kond. The project helped me grow both as a person and as a researcher. I learned valuable skills for research and writing, and my narrative was a short story based on my interviewee's story from his teenage years. I fell in love with this research type and of presenting it creatively. My experience and the way I felt as a researcher motivated me and inspired me to

explore the subject that always interested me while working on my capstone. The methodologies of oral history and creative writing were the best fit for both my research and myself as a graduating student, allowing me the freedom to create and express myself best through my work.

My interviewees have very different backgrounds. When I thought of my project, these three people instantly came to my mind. They are the perfect example of how their interests, personalities, and professional career choices have been created due to place attachment. I pictured them talking about this special bond in those places instantly. The exciting part is that two of them are my best friends. The other interviewee is my older brother, who contributed to my self-development and ways that I noticed only when looking back at myself and my childhood from a different perspective. Despite the relationships that I have with them, they always stayed for me as the participants for my project through the entire working process. I was able to establish a good researcher and participant relationship. The interview process was both formal and informal in some ways. Depending on the person I was interviewing, I noticed that my use of language and how I spoke during the interview changed. It was different in ways that I talked to the participants to feel comfortable and trust me as a researcher, which helped them speak more freely and express themselves. As the interviews were conducted in Armenian, which is the native language of all my project's participants, the interviews went smoothly. The transcription process was also easy for me, as there weren't any difficulties understanding what the interviewee was talking about.

When it comes to the project's creative aspect, I initially planned to make a documentary film using the interview materials and film my interviewees in those locations. After a lot of consideration and thinking, I decided to put my real passion into my project and write. Instead of one documentary film, I wrote three separate creative nonfiction short stories based on specific

memories that my interviewees mentioned during their interviews. In Mariam Arakelyan's story, I also included parts and features taken from my self-reflection on Tumo, which is also a part of the project. It was an exciting journey, as I managed to grow as a researcher, as an interviewer, as a writer, and as a person. Did I look deep into finding the answers to questions such as how does a place contribute to a person's development? Are the participants' the ones to contribute to creating and maintaining that special relationship with a place? What aspects influence the changing/evolving of that relationship? At what point in their lives do people start realizing that place attachment is a crucial part of their lives and their identities?

As a researcher, I managed to get the answers to my research question and its sub-questions and get a better understanding of it. I also managed to develop more professional skills within myself, such as time management, more advanced creative writing, and division of work in ways that would guarantee the fulfillment of the desired result. I grew as a friend and as a sister; I discovered my beloved ones in ways that I hadn't known before. While being on this journey, I reached my creative and research goals and pushed myself enough to see my full potential in creating, working, and communicating.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Consent Form

#### **Համաձայնության հավաստագիր**

Համաձայնագիր մասնակցելու դիպլոմային ծրագրի իրականացման Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանում: Սույնով հավաստում եմ, որ համաձայն եմ մասնակցել ՀԱՀ Հոլմանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս դոկտոր Հոլրիկ Ադդարեանի (հեռ. 060 612769, Էլ. հասցե hourig.attarian@aua.am) ղեկավարությամբ Լուսինե Չորյանի կողմից դիպլոմային աշխատանքի նախագծի հարցազրույցին:

#### **Նախագծի նպատակը**

Տեղյակ եմ, որ այս նախագծի նպատակն է հասկանալ, թե ինչպե՞ս է վայրն ազդում մարդու անհատի ձևավորման վրա և թե ինչպե՞ս է ձևավորվում այդ կապը վայրի ու անհատի միջև: Լուսինե Չորյանի անցկացրած հարցազրույցը նպատակ ունի ուսումնասիրել և ի հայտ բերել վայրի, հիշողության ու անհատի մեջ ստեղծվող ու պահպանվող կապն ու խթանել այդ թեմայի ուսումնասիրությանը:

#### **Ընթացակարգը**

Հասկանում եմ, որ հարցազրույցը անցկացվելու է մասնակցի տանը կամ մեկ այլ պատշաճ վայրում, և տեսագրվելու և/կամ ձայնագրվելու է: Հասկանում եմ, որ համաճարակի պատճառով ստեղծված իրավիճակից ելնելով հարցազրույցը հնարավոր է անց կացնել Zoom կամ այլ առցանց տարբերակով: Որպես մասնակից ես պատմելու եմ, թե ինչ ազդեցություն է ունեցել վայրն իմ անհատի ձևավորման վրա, և թե ինչպես է ձևավորվել այդ յուրահատուկ կապն իմ ու վայրի միջև: Տեղյակ եմ, որ հարցազրույցի հետ մեկտեղ տեղի է ունենալու նկարահանում՝ վավերագրական ֆիլմի համար:

Տեղյակ եմ, որ հարցազրույցը տևելու է մոտ մեկ ժամ, բայց այդուհանդերձ մասնակիցները կարող են որևէ պահի դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը, հրաժարվել պատասխանել որևէ հարցի, կամ որևէ պահի դուրս գալ նախագծից: Հասկանում եմ, որ եթե ցանկանամ հարցազրույցը երկու ժամից ավելի երկարաձգել, ինձ այդ հնարավորությունը կընձեռվի:

#### **Ռիսկեր և օգուտներ**

Տեղյակ եմ, որ որևէ պահի կարող եմ դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը, ընդմիջել կամ հրաժարվել շարունակել: Հաշվի առնելով, որ ուսանողների նախագծերը ներլսարանային ցուցադրման մաս են կազմելու (կայքով և/կամ

հրատարակումներով), իմ պատմությունը և կարծիքները, իմ թույլտվությամբ, նույնպես ներկայացվելու է:

### **Մասնակցության պայմանները**

Որպես մասնակից ինձ հասանելի կլինեն ձայնագրված, տեսանկարված և գրի առնված տվյալները՝ դրանք ստուգելու նպատակով: Նախագծի ամբողջ տևողության ընթացքում, ես հնարավորություն կունենամ վերանայել ու հաստատել անգլերեն թարգմանությունը, եթե նյութը հայերեն է:

\_\_\_ Հասկանում եմ, որ որևէ պահի կարող եմ հետ վերցնել համաձայնությունս ու հրաժարվել մասնակցել նախագծին՝ առանց բացասական հետևանքների:

\_\_\_ Հասկանում եմ, որ այս նախագծի տվյալները գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով կարող են հրատարակվել՝ տպագիր կամ թվային տարբերակներով:

### **Իմ հարցազրույցի ինքնության բացահայտման և վերարտադրման առումով**

\_\_\_ Համաձայն եմ, որ **ինքնությունս հայտնի լինի**: Հասկանում եմ, որ ինքնությունս կարող է բացահայտվել այս հարցազրույցի արդյունքում հրատարակված նյութերում:

\_\_\_ Համաձայն եմ գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով այս հարցազրույցի նկարների ու ձայնագրությունների վերարտադրմանը որևէ հաղորդամիջոցով (վեբ կայքեր, և այլն):

### **ԿՎՍ**

\_\_\_ Հասկանում եմ, որ իմ մասնակցությունն այս ուսումնասիրությանը **գաղտնի է**: Ես հասկանում եմ, որ իմ ինքնությունը չի բացահայտվի այլ ցանկացած հրապարակման կամ ներկայացման մեջ, որոնք կլինեն այս հարցազրույցի արդյունքը, կօգտագործվի ծածկանուն:

\_\_\_ Համաձայն եմ, որ չնայած իմ հարցազրույցից որոշ նյութեր կարող են հրատարակվել, սակայն ոչ մի ձայնագրություն չի կարող վերարտադրվել:

### **Այն դեպքում, երբ լուսանկարներ, իրեր կամ փաստաթղթեր են նկարվել կամ սկանավորվել**

\_\_\_ Համաձայն եմ, որ ուսումնասիրություն անող ուսանողը պատճենահանի լուսանկարներ ու փաստաթղթեր նախագծի շրջանակներում օգտագործելու համար:



ՈՒՇԱԴԻՐ ԿԱՐԴԱՑԵԼ ԵՄ ՎԵՐԸ ՇԱՐԱԴԻՎԱԾԸ և ՀԱՍԿԱՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ԱՅՍ  
ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆԱԳՐԻ ԿԵՏԵՐԸ: ՀՈԺԱՐԱԿԱՄ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑԵԼ ԱՅՍ  
ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅԱՆԸ:

Մասնակից՝

ԱՆՈՒՆ ԱԶԳԱՆՈՒՆ

Ստորագրություն \_\_\_\_\_ Ամսաթիվ

Հարցազրույց վարող՝

ԼՈՒՍԻՆԵ ԶՈՐՅԱՆ

Ստորագրություն \_\_\_\_\_ Ամսաթիվ

Եթե որպես բանավոր պատմության նախագծի մասնակից որևէ պահի  
հարցեր կունենաք ձեր իրավունքների վերաբերյալ, կարող եք կապվել ՀԱՀ  
Հոլմանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս  
դոկտոր Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի հետ (հեռ. 060 612769,  
Էլ.հասցե՝ hourig.attarian@aua.am):

## Appendix B

### Interview Guidelines

#### Կենսագրական նկարագիր:

- Ի՞նչ է Ձեր անունն ազգանունը:
- Որտե՞ղ և ե՞րբ եք ծնվել:
- Ինչպիսի՞ ընտանիքում եք մեծացել, մե՞ծ, թե՞ փոքր:
- Հարազատ քույր/եղբայրներ ունե՞ք, ի՞նչ տարիքի են իրենք:
- Ներկայումս ի՞նչ մասնագիտություն/գրադմունք ունեք:

#### Մանկություն

- Ինչպիսի՞ն է եղել Ձեր մանկությունը, որտե՞ղ է այն հիմնականում անցել:
- Ի՞նչ հիշողություններ ունեք Ձեր մանկությունից:
- Ինչպիսի՞ն եք հիշում Ձեր քաղաքը/թաղամասը Ձեր մանկության հուշերում:
- Կա՞ն կոնկրետ վայրեր, որոնք Ձեզ հիշեցնում են Ձեր մանկության մասին:
- Ինչպիսի՞ն էին այդ վայրերը, ի՞նչ հիշողություններ ունեք տվյալ վայրերի հետ կապված:
- Ըստ Ձեզ, կարո՞ղ է ստեղծվել հատուկ կապ ու նշանակություն անհատի ու վայրի միջև: Եթե այո, ապա ինչպիսի՞ն կարող է լինել այդ կապը:
- Ձեզ Ձեր մանկության հետ կապող վայրերը հիմա կա՞ն
  - Այցելում եք այդ վայրերը
  - Ինչպիսի՞ն են այդ վայրերը հիմա
  - Ինչպիսի՞ն է կապը Ձեր և այդ վայրերի միջև հիմա
- Ի՞նչ ազդեցություններ են ունեցել այդ վայրերը Ձեր մանկության ընդհանուր ձևավորման վրա:
- Ի՞նչ հետաքրքրություններ եք ունեցել որպես երեխա:
- Ի՞նչ հատկանիշներ են ազդել Ձեր հետաքրքրությունների ձևավորման վրա:

#### Պատանեկություն

- Կպատմե՞ք Ձեր պատանեկության կամ դպրոցական տարիների մասին:
- Ի՞նչ հիմնական գրադմունքներ ու հետաքրքրություններ ունեիք:
- Որտե՞ղ է հիմնականում անցել Ձեր պատանեկությունը:
- Ի՞նչ կրթություն եք ստացել, որտե՞ղ:
- Ունեցե՞լ եք այլ հետաքրքրություններ, արտադպրոցական պարապմունքներ/խմբակներ:
- Ի՞նչ վայրեր են ներկա եղել Ձեր պատանեկության հուշերում:
- Արդյո՞ք այդ վայրերն ազդել կամ նպաստել են Ձեր հետաքրքրությունների ու անհատի ձևավորման վրա:
- Ինչպե՞ս է ստեղծվել այդ կապը Ձեր և տվյալ վայրի միջև:
- Արդյո՞ք դա եղել է միանգամայ՞, թե՞ շարունակական կապ: Եթե շարունակական, ապա ինչպե՞ս է այն ձևավորվել ժամանակի ընթացքում:

- Դու՞ք եք անդրադարձել ու նպաստել կապի ամրապնդմանը, թե՞ իրադարձությունների ու հանգամանքների արդյունքում է այն ձևավորվել:

### Ներկա

- Ինչպե՞ս է զարգացել կամ փոփոխվել այն կապը ժամանակի ընթացքում:
- Եկեք խոսենք ներկայից, ինչպիսի՞ն կնկարագրեք Ձեր այժմյան կապը Ձեր պատակենության տարիներին նշած վայրի/վայրերի հանդեպ:
- Ինչպե՞ս է այն ազդել Ձեր ներկայիս անհատի ձևավորվման վրա:
- Ի՞նչ հետաքրքրությունների կամ հնարավորությունների շրջանակ է այն ձևավորել Ձեզ համար:
- Ի՞նչ լավ և վատ հուշեր են Ձեզ կապում այդ վայրի հետ: Կարող եք նշել իրադարձություններ կամ մարդկանց:
- Ըստ Ձեզ, ինչպիսի՞ն կլինեիք Դուք, եթե չձևավորվեր այդ կապը տվյալ վայրի հանդեպ: Ի՞նչ հատկանիշներ չէին լինի Ձեր կամ Ձեր կյանքի մեջ:
- Ամփոփելով հարցազրույցը, ի՞նչ տվեց այն Ձեզ: Ինչպե՞ս կամփոփեք այն Ձեզ համար:

## Creative Piece

### Story 1

Tamar Sargsyan's story

Shaped by the Spot - Artsakh Experience

\*All names appearing in the story, other than the protagonist, have been changed

### A Single Seed Into the Soil

“Welcome to the first year of your graduate studies. The next two years of your life will be dedicated to the intensive study of Armenian history, and you’re going to be doing a lot of research. Don’t confuse this with your undergraduate studies; that was a joke compared to what is awaiting you. Concentrate on the topic that most interests you,” I reach the limits of my attention span after two minutes of listening to the Department Head’s introductory speech. Welcome to another two years of torture, Tamar jan.

I stare at the faces of the people who got accepted in the Armenian History department of Artsakh State University (ASU) and wonder how many of them actually care to learn about our culture and spread its richness. The sun rays hit my face through the Soviet-style windows, and I look outside to see the wide cityscape of my tiny Stepanakert. The peaceful town welcomes the new group of students coming from Artsakh villages to study at ASU. A few years ago, I was one of those freshmen students who left my village of Hovtashen<sup>1</sup> in the Martakert region and moved to the capital of Artsakh. I studied Armenian history for four years, and now, by fate’s little trick, I’m going to teach the subject I know best at the school in my hometown. My parents were very proud of me when they received the news: their daughter educates the little ones of

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<sup>1</sup> Hovtashen is a village in the Markatert region of Artsakh, which is under Azeri control after the September 2020 war.

Hovtashen about the rich culture and history of their nation. When it comes to me, I don't know why, but there's this gut feeling that keeps me distant from getting emotionally attached to that reality. I mean, yes, I love our history, and I love my village, but it's the plain traditional way of teaching that I'm supposed to use that makes me feel demotivated. I wish the faces sitting next to me in this room agree on revolutionizing the education system we have in Artsakh. Studying Armenian history and culture should not only be about memorizing facts and dates from the textbook. We have a cultural heritage that needs to be widely spread and hold on to. I'm so glad Samvel came to enlighten us with his idea of creating a folk dance group. Who would have thought that a young man from Yerevan would initiate and contribute to a creation of a folk dance group with a few young individuals from the villages of Artsakh interested in learning about our culture? He suggested we name the group after the 2041-year-old tree called *tnjri* in the region of Martuni in Artsakh, as a symbol of eternity and strength. Besides being symbolic, his strategy also worked, as we attracted a lot of people simply by our name and then by our mission. Imagine having multiple folk groups, with members of different ages, who would gather together to sing and dance Armenian folk songs and dances. One day, we will enlarge our group and give everyone opportunities to get closer to their roots and ancestors.

“Tam, switch your phone off. It keeps vibrating,” I hear my friend's voice, who I know from undergrad. I take out my phone and see multiple texts and calls from Samvel. More are coming in—it's the same text over and over: “I'm outside, come out now.” He calls me again, and I look out the window to see his car parked right at the entrance. The professor is still talking about how coming to this program is the best choice of our lives and what excellent professionals come out of this department. I look at her, then at my ringing phone, and dare to raise my hand

and ask permission to go. To my surprise, the professor believes my story that I have a work emergency.

“I have the most sensational news for you. You have officially been offered a teaching position in the village of Noragyugh<sup>2</sup> in Askeran!” I look at Samvel as he brings the news to me. I wasn’t able to get a job for months, and now two opportunities come into my way and both teaching jobs in village schools?

“Wow. Thanks! Are you the one offering me the position?” I try to make a joke and wonder how to tell him that I’m about to refuse the offer, as I have a group of students waiting to meet their new history teacher in Hovtashen in a couple of hours.

“No, well, yeah, I recommended you when the school principal offered me the position. And she liked you!” I still don’t understand a thing and wonder how to reject him.

“That’s great! But I’m starting a job today at Hovtashen, also teaching high school history. I can’t do both, right?” Samvel explains that this new opportunity is extraordinary and a unique teaching approach, which I doubt, considering the teaching methods in Artsakh, haven’t changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

“You won’t be teaching Armenian history in Noragyugh. You’ll be passing on the cultural knowledge and values we have in our group ‘Tnjre.’ You’re going to teach folk dances!” This is even more confusing. First of all, I didn’t know the education system added national dances into its curriculum. Secondly, I’m a new member of our folk dance group, so why would he recommend me for this? ‘Tnjre’ is like a family to me. When Samvel founded our folk dance group, I was a bit shy to join his initiative, as it was something very new to the people living in villages and even Stepanakert. We never had a group that would teach Armenian folk dances and

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<sup>2</sup> Noragyugh is a village in the Askeran region of Artsakh, which is under Armenian control after the September 2020 war.

songs in Artsakh. My sister convinced me to let go of my fears and take the invitation. Ten months have passed since that day, and I can't imagine my life without my fantastic group mates and, of course, folk dances.

“Samvel, isn't there anyone else from 'Tnjre' to take this responsibility? Let's be real, you know I can't do this. Plus, I can't reject my job in Hovtashen. It's going to be my first day at school today. What would my parents say?”

We arrive at Noragyugh in less than half an hour and go straight to the school. As we approach the building, I call my parents to tell them the news. They both shout into the phone speaker, wishing me luck and telling me not to worry about the job in Hovtashen's school. They would handle it, they say. After all, the school principal is our neighbor, and my dad always helps them with the tree planting in their yard. Not the reaction I was expecting, but I should've known my parents would support me in anything.

The school principal of Noraghyugh gives me the already prepared contract, and I sign it after carefully reading it. They offer me a full-time position as a folk dance teacher, and I get informed that this school is one of the very few in Artsakh to open folk dance groups. I see that the school principal, a middle-aged woman with a soft smile and kind brown eyes, is looking at me the whole time. I feel like she's expecting something, some reaction, or a word exchange, but I don't get what I'm supposed to do in this kind of situation.

Samvel says that he has crucial duties in Stepanakert before leaving for Yerevan and leaves us alone in the principal's office. Her soft smile and comforting glance guide the awkward silence. After a while, she says, “Tamar jan, thank you for taking this offer; it means a lot to me and for the school. After our first meeting back in February, I kept thinking of getting folk dance and music more integrated into our school and the kids' lives. I was certain I had to do

everything in my power to start this course in the new academic year.” She smiles even wider and gets up to get a glass of water from the wooden table nearby. “You don’t remember me, do you?” She waits for a few seconds and continues, “We’ve met before. A few months ago, in Khantsk<sup>3</sup>.”

My memory flashes back to the cold but lovely winter of Artsakh. We had received an invitation from the Ministry of Culture to perform at the *Tonrahats* Festival. The festival was organized for presenting and selling different types of bread from the regions of Artsakh. Our ‘Tnjre’ folk dance group was only three months old. Still, we had already managed to get famous and gain popularity in the community, given we were working on the foundations of our national identity through our rich cultural heritage. When Samvel brought the news, we immediately thought of the fact that we don’t have *taraz* or national costumes, which are necessary for presenting folk dances. Luckily, the Ministry helped us, and we managed to get ready properly.

It was freezing outside, but the warmth of the people’s hospitality and the scent of delicious bread made everyone’s hearts melt in comfort. The festival was organized in the schoolyard of the village, where we successfully presented ourselves, despite the cold. When our performance was over, I decided to get separated from the group and go inside the building for some warmth. It was my first time in Khantsk village; I’d heard people from the Askeran region were amicable. It was time to check it out. The school of Khantsk wasn’t in excellent condition; it required renovation. As I wandered through the school halls, I heard sounds of folk songs coming from a small classroom on my right. I entered to find children in colorful national costumes dancing Armenian dances. A woman clapped and nodded along to the beat. I watched for a while as the children danced and sang folk songs, and I felt a sudden warmth inside that the

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<sup>3</sup> Khantsk is a village in the Askeran region of Artsakh, which is under Armenian control after the September 2020 war.



young generation was familiar with our heritage. They needed some training and knowledge about what they're dancing and singing, but in general, I felt like 'Tnjre' would have new members joining in the upcoming years. I approached the woman and decided to start a conversation.

She introduced herself as the person who had brought the children's group to the Festival and said they were from a different village in the Askeran region. I nodded, and we started talking about the importance of holding festivals like this, especially in Artsakh. I thought of the last time I met a pleasant and cultured middle-aged woman like her and shifted my focus on the group of children singing, who already started to confuse and mess up the words of a very famous Armenian folk song.

When I approached them, they stopped singing, and I felt a group of surprised eyes looking directly at me. I smiled and thought of something to say. "You are doing a great job, guys. Do you know the origin of any of these songs or dances?" They all shook their heads at the same time, and I knew I'd grabbed their attention, "Well, it is essential to know what these songs mean, why our grand-grand-grandfathers danced these dances specifically, how they emerged. Everything has a deep meaning in our rich Armenian culture. Our culture goes centuries back! Do you love our history?" They nodded, and I started to tell some of my favorite highlights from our history directly connected to the emergence of our culture. After a while, a girl with deep blue eyes spoke up, "How do *you* know all of this? We never learned anything like this in school."

I smiled at her and decided to take a seat, as we were going to be there for a long, long time.

“When I was little, like three years old, my father would gather us around the candlelight in the evenings and would tell us stories about our kings and our brave commanders. He also taught us some of the songs I know today; we always sang in the evening, you know. One day my father’s friends came to our house and sang songs about the war, about our fallen soldiers... Do you know the song ‘*Khnusits Galov?*’<sup>4</sup> It’s a popular song now, but in fact, my dad’s friends sang it back in the ’90s for their fallen friend Abo, who was from their military division.” There was dead silence and a lot of curiosity floating in the classroom. Even the woman was listening to me carefully, and none of us were aware of the freezing cold. “Oh, wanna know the first song that I learned? My sister taught me this. It’s called ‘*Kuzim ertam sarn im Sasun.*’<sup>5</sup>” There were positive reactions and nodding in the room; they were familiar with this song. “Yes, my sister and I used to sing it all the time; our neighbor would yell at us sometimes for the non-stop singing.” The children laughed so hard; I wanted to laugh with them at the memory of it.

We sat in the room for about an hour, and I also told them about our dance group and how Samvel gathered us together around the idea of spreading folk dance and music heritage in Artsakh. After all, we’re the only existing group on the whole of Artsakh land.

I look at the principal as she hands me a glass of water and smiles with a wide smile. “Yes, yes, I recall our meeting. Wait, were those children the students of this school?”

“I was so amazed by your speech back then, and I reached out to Samvel. He suggested you be a teacher in our school. He said he had other duties in Yerevan as well.”

“Yes, he is from Yerevan actually but spends most of his time in Artsakh. This place really pulls you and calls everyone back, even if they’ve been here only once.” We sit in silence for a bit, and I take a sip of the cold water. Her phone rings and she picks it up to talk. I process

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<sup>4</sup> “*Khnusits Galov*” is an Armenian military folk song.

<sup>5</sup> “*Kuzim ertam sarn im Sasun*” is an Armenian folk song.

the things that I have just heard and try to connect the dots while traveling back in time. If only I had known what February had in store for me in September. Life is extraordinary with its adventurous surprises. I met these children in the village of Khantsk. Who would have known I would be teaching the little ones who inspired me to reassure myself that what we do in 'Tnjre' truly matters for the future generations of Artsakh?

You never know what trees you might be planting when dropping a seed into the soil.

## Story 2

Norayr Zoryan's story

Shaped by the Spot - Stadium Experience

\*All names appearing in the story, other than the protagonist, have been changed

### A Kick of Football Passion

“Be home as soon as the sun starts to set! Don't be late than that, plus we have to practice one more time the new words you learned in Russian for your next class!”

My mom's shouting as I'm rushing to get my sneakers tied up neatly, so they won't bother me during the game. I take the ball from our corridor hall shelf and close the entrance door behind me.

The boys are waiting for me outdoors; they have been screaming my name a couple of times already, and my grandma kept telling them from the window that I'm on my way out. My grandma likes to watch us play from the window, and I love having an audience applaud me when I score goals, but sometimes it gets too overwhelming, as I need to behave well all the time. After all, I'm playing outdoors, and the whole concept of playing outdoors is feeling your freedom and having your territory marked.

“Dude, we've been waiting here for like a whole eternity; what took you so long?”

“Oh, come on. You don't even know how to count the time, Davit. It has been seven minutes since we decided to play. Plus, if you wanted to play football, you know you should've waited as long as it took me to get ready.” It's true. They all have to wait for me to play football, as I'm the only one in our neighborhood who has a ball. And playing football is the daily activity that we do with our neighborhood boys. We all wear our favorite football jerseys and battle for

hours to establish the championship title. I wear my favorite football club's jersey, which is the legendary FC Bayern of Munich. They play like masters of their job, like ninjas. My jersey is the black one with white stripes; it's the second jersey, not their main one. But still, my dad got it for me, and honestly, I would wear it all day long. But no, you need to wear 'proper clothes' for going to primary school classes. This is where I get my freedom to wear whatever I want.

The yard of our building consists of concrete ground and old rusty garages. It's inconvenient to play here, as cars usually pass and disturb our game, and our goal gates are constantly changing because of the parked cars in front of the garages or the opened gates of the garages. We always dream of playing in the stadium nearby. It's like an actual stadium, with white lines and proper goal gates; even the territory is larger. Next year, I will ask my parents to get me admitted to that school near our building to play in their stadium during the breaks.

We play a fair match of football, of course, my grandma watches us from the window, and I score three goals in this match! Our team wins, and we decide to change the teams for the next game to make things more spicy and adventurous. Minas kicks the ball so hard that it flies high and lands in the school territory during the game. Usually, we don't argue who gets to go to get the ball back, as the rule states, "whoever has dropped the ball gets the ball." But last time, Minas had a bad encounter with the school principal, so he prohibited him from getting near the school. Davit and I decide to solve the problem in a mature adult way and do rock, scissors, and paper, where, unfortunately, I lose with a pair of scissors.

I knock on the door, and the school guard approaches to open it. I'm on excellent terms with him, he knows me by name, and I always make sure to speak politely to him. It happens very frequently when we accidentally throw the ball in the school's yard, more specifically, the stadium of our dreams. Why wouldn't they let us play there? The school hours are over; we

won't be bothering anyone; we just want to play in a proper stadium. I've asked the guard a few times for permission to play, politely, of course, but he has rejected me each time.

He opens the door with my ball already in his hands. He must've seen it crossing the brick wall separating our yard from the stadium. Without a word, he gives me the ball and closes the door. I'm surprised he didn't say anything, then I remember that it's Friday. He has invited his friends over, and they are having a drinking party again, I bet.

As I walk back to our yard and think of a better stadium, I think of tomorrow. The grand day has finally arrived! My father is taking me to an actual stadium to watch our Armenian National Football Team's match with Ukraine! It's a vital game, as it's part of the 2004 European Qualifiers, and if we win, it decides our fate in ways that I can't even explain. I don't understand all the logic behind the Qualifiers yet, but my father says that there are a few upcoming games we need to play, and if we win, we'll play with even more national teams! And if we get lucky, we might become the champions of Europe! I've collected the flags of all the European countries, and I'm studying the map, so I'll know where each country is situated and in which country our team is playing.

"Hmm, you're back soon. Has he gathered with his drinking buddies again?" Minas asks as I put the ball on the ground, "Yeah, probably. He didn't even say a word to me! Okay, let's play; we can't waste time talking." We play for a while, and then I hear my mum calling my name. I have lost all sense of time again; I haven't even noticed how it got so dark outside. I take the ball, say goodbye to my friends, and go home to eat my warm soup for dinner, which is good for your health, as everyone in our household says.

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“Norayr, did you take your jacket? You’d better wear it now, it might get colder when you get there, it’s evening time, and it’s already autumn.” My mom has been giving lectures on how to behave, what to wear, and how not to leave dad’s side, as a vast public might be gathered in the stadium.

“Don’t worry, mom. Dad and I have everything under control; we’ll be just fine.” I say and look at dad, who winks at me while tying his shoes. “Dad, you surely have the tickets with you, right?” He smiles and nods. I’m very nervous but excited at the same time. I’ve watched hundreds of football matches on TV and played in our yard. I’m aware of all the game rules and techniques that are considered to be excellent. And this day will be marked in history, as Norayr is going to the Vazgen Sargsyan Republican Stadium for the first, but certainly not for the last time. If everything goes well today, and mom and dad are convinced, I’ll never miss any of our national team’s games in the future. My parents think that it’s not a safe place to take children to, but I’ve seen many kids with their parents on TV attending football matches. Why shouldn’t I? I know they won’t let my sister go, as dad says there is a lot of smoking and cursing men, and that’s not an appropriate place for girls. But as for me, I’m a grown-up already; I’ll be attending school next year! Parents think we’re kids only when it’s suitable for them.

The enormous white lamps light up the Republican stadium and its surroundings. There’s a huge crowd waiting for their tickets to be checked, and we’re standing in the middle of the line. Dad was right; there aren’t any girls in the audience, but there indeed are men with cigarettes and packages of sunflower seeds. We enter through the gates and walk around the stadium.

“See, Norayr, this is the place where a lot of vital matches have taken place. See that building outside the stadium? That is a police station. They take everyone there who doesn’t behave properly during or after the game. Sometimes people get drunk after the game, and a

fight might break out between the opposing teams' fans. But don't worry, we won't be seeing that scene today, I hope." We walk a bit more and decide to take our seats as the teams start to practice before the game. The pitch is so big and so green; it's like entering a set from paradise. Well. I haven't been to heaven, but this definitely counts as a part of it. At least in my paradise, it does.

We take our rusty orange seats and wait for the game to start. I see small figures running on the pitch and passing the ball to each other. Our team is playing in red, and I know all the numbers of our players. I look forward to seeing Artur Petrosyan's play especially; he has excellent technique. Imagine if he scores today! The stadium is full already, and everyone is clapping as our team is getting ready for the start of the game. As soon as the game starts, the Ukrainians score. This is not a promising start to a successful match.

Watching a game from a stadium is a different experience, an extraordinary one. Everyone seems so close; you feel like a part of the game, and whoever's watching it on TV is missing the real essence of the match. When the fans shout, I shout. When they boo, I boo with them. When my dad whistles the loudest of the whole audience, I silently watch him, as I don't know how to whistle. I need to practice and master the skill of whistling for the upcoming games and encourage our team to do their best. Maybe they'll hear my whistles and screams and get to know me specifically as a true fan of football. My thoughts are interrupted by a vast wave of applause and screaming, and I watch our team scoring a goal. Artur Petrosyan scores, after all. When only a few minutes are left at the very end of the game, the tension is very high. We are losing the game to the Ukrainians; the score is 1:2. Thanks, Artur, for that goal you scored; otherwise, we would've been left with nothing but a weak reputation. I can't believe the first game I ever see in person is going to be a defeat. I thought my presence in the stadium would



change the team's playing techniques significantly. I shout at the top of my lungs for them to feel the burning energy we're sending them as loyal fans and motivate them to score again.

Some despair and some hope are floating in the air among the fans. Some have left already; some of us are still waiting for a miracle. That is it about football; as a faithful fan, you never lose hope, and you never give in to the idea of desperation. Everyone is on their feet; some are covering their mouths, some nervously smoking. My dad is also watching the game intently, and if I were gone missing from his side, he wouldn't even notice, I bet. But I wouldn't, as I'm also watching the game with awe and nervousness. And then the stadium falls silent. Armenia has earned a penalty kick, and our faith is about to be determined. Albert Sargsyan is standing in front of the Ukrainian gate, and not a single sound is heard. Albert does a small run, approaches the ball, and kicks so hard that the force of the goal shatters the Ukrainian gate. The stadium roars, and rays of joy are spread through the whole city of Yerevan. I feel like everyone in the capital can hear us and share our happiness. It's almost a victory! A draw, in fact, but not a loss. A draw is also a type of glory. At least that's what I think. Who could score at the very last moment of the match? Only our mighty team. Imagine what kind of miracles might be awaiting us in the future. I should tell the boys about this game and the stadium experience. But I won't tell them about the techniques I saw today; they'll experience them through my game when we play tomorrow in our yard.

"Did you like the game?" My dad happily asks as we walk out of the stadium gates and march with the crowd. "Yeah, Dad. It was incredible! And the stadium is enormous; I wish we could play there instead of our yard. Even the school stadium seems nothing compared to the Republican Stadium!"

My dad laughs and holds my hand tighter as a group of singing men passes us. “Dad, the police station seems to be quiet; there aren’t any fights or accidents today, are there?” My dad laughs even harder and says, “No, son, there aren’t any fights today. The game ended in a draw; both fan sides are equally happy or equally disappointed. There’s nothing to fight about.”

### Story 3

Mariam Arakelyan's story

Shaped by the Spot - Tumo Experience

\*All names appearing in the story, other than the protagonist, have been changed

#### Ladybugs Bring You Luck

“Kids, give your ID cards to Tatevik; she needs to see who's absent and who's present. Take your seats in front of the tablets; I'll be back in a few minutes.” I look as our workshop leader leaves the A2 room, and we are left with Tatevik, Zatik's assistant. Zatik is the best workshop leader I have had in the few months I am at Tumo. When I heard I was selected to be in the Drawing I class group I was so excited that I was scared and sleepless for the next three days. It's our fourth class already, still four to go. I enjoy drawing, but mostly on paper. It's a bit odd to draw on tablets, and as I'm not very used to it yet, I sketch my assignments on paper, then copy them to the tablet. I've mastered Photoshop, which gives more freedom to creators, especially with color palettes.

I go back to my seat, and with a loud burst of laughter, Vahan and Lilia enter the classroom. I met them during this workshop, and they are inseparable. They wave at me, and I wave them back. They approach the seats next to me as if knowing that I was desperately waiting for them to arrive in class.

“Hey, Mar, give me your ID card; I'll take it to Tatevik with mine,” Lilia winks at me and walks straight to Tatevik with their Tumo cards.

“Mar? How’s life? And where’s your other half? Hasn’t she arrived yet?” I shake my head and look towards the door, “Don’t worry, she must be stuck in traffic. Helen is usually late on Tuesdays.” This time I nod to Vahan, and still, I haven’t said a single word.

“Guys, guys, there’s a movie screening today! And they are screening “Hotel Transylvania!” It’s a popular animated movie about vampires and monsters; I haven’t seen it on the big screen yet. We *have* to go watch it,” Lilia rushes towards us and makes her puppy eyes, so we agree to her suggestion. Vahan rolls his eyes, “We have given our IDs already; what do you want to do? Steal them? You know, Zatik won’t believe that we all have invisibility cloaks and are in the class listening to her with our cloaks on.” I giggle at Vahan’s joke and look at Lilia for her reaction.

Instead, Lilia waves in the direction of the door, and I turn left to find Lusine and her friend Karina standing at the door. I look at Lusine’s hands to see what book she’s holding today, as she always has a new book with her. It is *Catching Fire* by Suzanne Collins. Again, a book in English. Karina and Lusine also met during our workshop, and somehow, I don’t know how, but Lilia and Lusine found things in common and became friends as well. Lilia loves watching anime films; Lusine doesn’t even know who Naruto is. She must be living in an isolated world, as Naruto is the greatest character ever made in the history of anime, and the whole city quotes him and practices his fighting techniques. Later I found Helen hanging out with Lusine too. She seems friendly, but I don’t know how to react to her friendliness and random questions.

Lilia invites them to sit next to us, and I feel a sudden pressure to say something. Lilia interrupts my thoughts by saying, “So what do you say, guys? Are we going to lose this chance of seeing a cool movie?”

As expected, Lusine instantly reacts to whatever's happening, "What movie? You guys are going to see a movie?" Lilia nods and smiles from ear to ear. I look up at the movie poster Lilia's talking about, and it seems to be an interesting one with excellent animation and interesting characters. I gather my courage to speak, "I've heard good things about this movie, I also would like to see it. But we have a class now, and Zatik will be here any minute; we can't escape from the classroom with Tatevik watching." I was so concerned with what others would say that I didn't notice Helen entering the room and sitting next to me. I say hi to Helen, and other than that, she stays reticent, just like I would, for the rest of the discussion. Lilia and Vahan argue whether to leave the classroom or not, and Lusine and Karina are whispering to each other. I look at my screen and regret talking at all.

At that moment, Lusine stands up and approaches us so that only we would hear her whisper. "Guys, let's wait for Zatik to come, and then we'll go - " Vahan interrupts her. "What? You want her to see us, so then we can't escape *at all*? Whose side are you on?" Lusine rolls her eyes and adds, "Can you let me finish, genius? Let's ask her to leave this class now, see the movie, and then we'll come on Friday with the other group, as a makeup class for this one. What do you think? I'm sure she'll be convinced if we tell her compellingly."

This girl doesn't even like monsters or vampires; she told us herself during the infinite discussion she and Lilia were having during the previous class. Why does she care so much about us seeing this movie? And how did she come up with this negotiating technique? Knowing Zatik, she would never agree to it. It's not a coincidence she received the nickname Zatik, "ladybug" in Armenian. She is small in height and very cute in appearance. You wouldn't tell that she is a teacher, she looks like a student herself, and with all her traits combined, both physical and personal, the other workshop leaders named her after the ladybug beetle. Ladybugs

seem to be small and harmless creatures at sight, but very few people know that they are predators who can bite you very painfully. And Zatik is known for her harshness and strict character. My grandmother always says if a ladybug sits on your palm, it brings you luck and happiness. Hopefully, it's about all types of ladybugs, not just beetles.

While the others are still discussing approaching our workshop leader, I look at Helen, sitting quietly and texting someone on her phone. I look at my screen, at the movie poster, and see that it is screened in English. All the movies I have watched were in Russian or Armenian, until coming to Tumo. A few times, I went to a movie screening to avoid class and group meetings with our coaches, but as I didn't get anything from the fluent American accent, I always ended up feeling insecure. The fact that "Hotel Transylvania" is in English reduces my desire to see the movie, especially with a group of new friends. What would they think of me if there is a joke and I don't laugh because I don't fully understand what they say? Lilia and Vahan know English somewhat, Lusine even reads books in English, understanding a film won't be a problem. And Karina is a friend of Lusine, so she must know English pretty well too.

When I look to my side, I see that Zatik has returned and Lusine is talking to her. The room is dead silent as Vahan and Lilia sit while holding their breath. The room is already full of students, and Tatevik is closing the classroom door, so no one from the outside can disturb the class. I look as Lusine is still talking to Zatik, and Helen is still texting someone on her silver phone. Sometimes I wonder if a good way to start a conversation with her would be to send her a text saying that you're willing to talk to her. Maybe she is shy, the way that I was when I first started coming to Tumo, but times have changed, we have changed as well. After all, I convinced my parents to bring me to Tumo to experience new things, learn valuable skills, and challenge

myself to become a better version of myself. I'm the only child from our neighborhood to come to Tumo.

Lusine is smiling and showing a thumbs up, which means that probably her plan worked. She is talking to Tatevik now, and Lilia and Vahan are whispering among one another. Vahan turns to me and asks if Helen and I are leaving the class with them. I look at Helen, indecisive myself, and ask her whether we should go or not.

“No, thanks. I barely understand English,” Helen says without getting her eyes off the phone screen. “But this is a chance for you to learn, to develop your listening skills. Come on, I'll translate for you as much as I can,” I am surprised at my own motivational words and wait for Helen to agree. Instead, she shakes her head and adds, “You're not that good in English either; you always ask questions to Tatevik about the Photoshop tools that are in English. How are you going to understand a whole movie?” I frown and feel something massive shift inside me. I get up from my seat and follow my friends, who are already standing next to the door, waiting for me.

The cinema hall is filled with students, and we find a few seats in the back rows. The movie is about to start when I notice that Lusine has our ID cards with her. I want to ask her why she is keeping them, but the coach switches the lights off, and the movie begins. We watch the film in silence, and I am surprisingly feeling relaxed while enjoying the movie. The subtitles help me understand the movie's whole concept, but the language is not that hard to understand. We laugh at the jokes, and Lilia takes cookies out of her purse and passes them to all of us. I love the chocolate cookies that Lilia's mother bakes; she brings them to Tumo regularly, especially when we have workshops. I take two, then three cookies, and enjoy my time fully.

“See, this is the best part. The vampire girl realizes that the boy is not a vampire, but a human being,” Lusine whispers in my ear as I nod to her and smile back. Of *course*, she’s seen this movie before. Does this mean that she was lying to Lilia, saying that she detests vampires and all kinds of monsters? Why is she holding our ID cards, anyways? Am I the only one noticing the oddness of her overall behavior? She reads all the new books; she watches all the latest movies. I have known her for half a month, but she has already told us about all the news in the movie world. Now she is sitting next to me, and I have to say, I have never seen someone more approachable than her. She loves talking, and she finds conversation topics with everyone. She always asks me for help when drawing characters on Photoshop layers, and I find it fascinating how she’s not scared to talk to strangers. We are still strangers, after all. I still can’t decide whether I want her as a friend or not, but she was the one to inspire me to ask questions to Tatevik, our teaching assistant.

The movie’s ending comes so soon; I didn’t even notice how these two hours passed. As we walk by our A2 classroom, Lusine suggests we say goodbye to Zatik and thank her. We all go inside, and she speaks on behalf of all of us. Zatik smiles and nods her head, “I hope you enjoyed the movie, guys. But you should know that you have to bring extra five sketches of your character’s positions by Friday. Enjoy your homework too!” Zatik waves at us and gets back to the other students. I can’t believe we experienced the force of Zatik’s harshness. Five sketches in two days! Especially after missing today’s class, this is going to be a tough homework assignment. But our movie screening was definitely worth it.

We all laugh together as we walk towards the bus station. It’s already dark outside, as the sun sets earlier these days. This is one of the few times that I walk to the bus station with other people. I usually prefer walking to the metro alone, as the walk in Tumo park is so pleasant, and



it gives me time to think and daydream. Now, I wouldn't be anywhere else but with my newly made friends, with whom I find more things in common day by day. Helen is not with us, though. She wasn't in the classroom when we entered after the movie. I thought she would've waited for us, at least. She is a loner, just like me. But what works differently in our cases is that I am open to self-discovery and take challenges that might otherwise make me fearful at first, courageously.

What bothers me most is the mystery of our ID cards. As we walk, I look at Lusine to catch her facial expression. Why was she holding our cards throughout the whole movie? Why did she offer to let us all out with her card while we had our own? I wait for her to say something in that regard, as we're already approaching the bus station. And all she does is laugh at Vahan's jokes. To my surprise, Lusine and I are walking next to each other, and Lilia and Vahan are guiding us from the front.

"Lusine, can you please give me my ID card? I don't want you to lose it," what a smart thing to say, Mariam. It's your card; she shouldn't be the one having it. And in case of losing it, you are the one to lose your card, not some other girl. Speak with more confidence!

"Mar, your cards are with you," Lusine says and smiles at me. She is looking straight into my eyes. My mom says that if a person looks you in the eyes without blinking, they are lying. Speak up, Mariam! Say something.

"Lusine, I know you have our cards; I have seen you with them in the cinema hall and on our way out of the building. Why wouldn't you return them to their true owners?" I am surprised by my own strict voice but remind myself not to act very harshly. Lusine smiles with the same wide smile as I get confused by her mild reaction. This girl is hiding something. I bet she is trying to get us into trouble. If we don't have our ID cards, we can't enter the Tumo building. If

we can't enter the building, we will miss the class. If we miss the class, we fail the workshop. If we fail the workshop, bye-bye opportunities at Tumo! Bye-bye friends!

While my anger boils and I try to find ways of expressing myself politely to Lusine, Vahan pulls me by my jacket and tells me to run, as bus number 54 is about to leave from the bus station. I run with them, and we barely make it to the bus. I take a seat next to Lilia and look out of the window. Lusine is smiling cheerfully and waving at us. I wave back and slightly smile. The bus takes me home to Kayaran. The street lights of Yerevan light up the city in this dark weather. As I look outside the dirty window, Lilia sighs, "Our ID cards! We forgot our IDs at Tumo!"

Vahan frowns at her. "Oh, come on, you probably have it in your purse; you wouldn't be able to leave the Tumo gates without it." Lilia starts searching her bag, and I remember where our cards actually are, but Lilia doesn't let me speak and says, "Oh really? You're certain that your card is with you right now?" Vahan raises his eyebrows and starts searching his pockets. I speak up to save the situation as people start looking at us on the bus. "Guys, Lusine has our cards. I remember she had our cards in the cinema hall, and she let us out of the gates. We forgot to take our cards from her." Lilia and Vahan stop their mini-panic, and Lilia adds, "Well, I hope she comes to Friday's class. She better be there; we need our cards!"

"She'll come; she was the one to suggest we have a class on Friday," I speak up in Lusine's defense and look out the window again. Honestly, I don't even know why I should trust this girl and have faith in her. Maybe she won't even come on Friday. You never know what to expect from someone until you truly get to know them.

Our bus reaches Kayaran, and as we get off the bus, I can't stop thinking about our Friday makeup class of Drawing I. We will meet again with our group and find new adventures

in our new home called Tumo. If Lusine brings our cards with her, of course. If not, her face will be revealed, and the mystery will be solved. Zatik and the Tumo administration will believe us if she doesn't show up to class.

My mom greets me with a big hug and tells me to wash my hands and get ready for dinner. I take my leopard patterned sneakers off and go to my room to put my sketches on my desk. Then I check the pockets of my black jacket before taking it off, just like my mom taught me to do, and find something flat but thick in my right pocket. I take it out and see my, Vahan's, and Lilia's ID cards in one stock. My eyes widen as I feel guilt rising inside me. Did Lusine put the cards in my jacket's pocket while we were leaving, assuming I would give them to the kids?

And I didn't even bother to check my pockets or my purse when Vahan and Lilia were searching theirs on the bus. The roles have changed, and now I'm the one whose presence is wanted on Friday.

I think of accusing Lusine of being two-faced and feel guilt here too. On Friday, when we all gather, maybe I should suggest we eat together at the cafeteria. It will ease the tension. Plus, I've dreamed of eating that toasted sandwich for months already.