

## Bilan d'une année d'une jeune de l'AYF

### What AYF Means to Me

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“You are Armenian and Christian – հայ և քրիստոնյա:” Words I would be reminded of every single day until the age of 10 attending my Armenian Catholic school, Armenian Sisters’ Academy. There, I learned how to speak, read and write Armenian, and was constantly reminded of those two simple pillars of my identity. Until the end of 5th grade, almost everybody in my world was Armenian, and I only knew four or five non-Armenians. After graduating from my small and comfortable private Armenian school, I was thrown into the public school environment, where in contrast, I only knew four or five Armenians in my everyday life. I was scared that I would quickly lose that part of my identity - that after just a couple months I would completely forget how to feel Armenian. It seemed I would only be “an “Armenian” for 2 weeks during the summer in Franklin, Massachusetts at Camp Haiastan, but the other 50 weeks of the year, I would be just another American kid.

The fall I began my American public school journey was the same time I joined the Armenian Youth Federation, Greater Boston “Nejdeh” Chapter at the age of 10. I knew some kids from camp, but others were complete strangers whom I would be getting to know gradually more and more at the Friday night meetings for the next six years of my life. I joined since my dad was a member, my aunt was on executive, and I thought it would be a way to stay connected with the community that I was so scared of losing. As the years went on, I kept raising my hand more frequently at meetings, attended local and regional events, until eventually, my chapter voted me as an executive member. I would, and still do, look forward to going to my meetings, because after there would be socials, where I could interact with some of my closest friends. It kept me in contact with not only the people I loved, but the part of myself I was always proud of.

The aspect of AYF which makes it a unique organization is that it brings together people with broad interests and abilities, fueling the diaspora which is so specific to us. Some of us are athletic. Others are artistic. Some are loud while others are soft spoken. However, we are all representatives of a diaspora with similar family traditions, histories, and we all look oddly alike. Through our differences, we make an effort to come together to fight for our cause. To preserve our identity that we all feel so passionately about, which for me, would have been lost without this organization. To demand recognition for a genocide that wiped out over half of our people. We fight so we feel free and safe to embrace our culture in the American society. And we fight to educate our youth about their identities, teaching them how to be leaders and give back to the community that has given them so much to be proud of.

For me personally, AYF taught me a lot about Armenian history. At seminar in 2018, I remember sitting through a lecture about Armenian women activists, which particularly inspired me. Listening about the diplomat Diana Apgar, consul of the first Republic of Armenia to Japan, and the novelist Zabel Yesayan, both who lived lives of activism and pursuing dreams similar to mine, truly has encouraged me to continue in their paths. AYF has not only taught me about leaders like these two extraordinary women, but it has provided a platform for me to be a leader myself. Hopefully, inspiring the juniors of the chapter to continue working at preserving our identity.

I joined AYF as a way to keep active in my community. So I would have more than just my grandparents to speak Armenian with. So I could dance “shoorch bar” and sing “heghapoghagan yerker” with people who know what both of those things are. However, AYF has kept me in touch with friends from around the nation. It has brought me together with so many others of the Armenian youth who I share few similarities besides a strong sense of cultural belonging, and somehow, they understand me better than anybody else. It has inspired me to work as being a leader, teaching me how to be proud of the Armenian I am and work at preserving the culture. AYF has kept me հայ և քրիստոնյա, as I promised my Armenian elementary school teachers I would always be.



I am proud to be a part of AYF because it allows me to connect with so many other young individuals that share the same desire to learn more about their culture. It also allows me to grow more in my community and to motivate and understand the meaning behind AYF.

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## 405-11: A Historic Vote

Nairi Diratsouian : Age - 19  
New Jersey "Arsen" Chapter

source : AYF

