

FIELDNOTES KN-99-3-FN

Interview with Anahid Kazazian, Armenian needle craftswoman (embroidery, rug repair, etc.; also cook, raconteur, and general culture broker).

11/3/99

Fieldworker Kathy Neustadt

at her home: [REDACTED]

[See also KN-99-3-C1&2, KN-99-5-C1, and KN-99-5-N]

Anahid is a wonderful person. Yes, she's a fabulous craftswoman (she knows tons about rugs and textiles and needle arts, and can make all of them), an ebullient raconteur, a wonderful cook: she is a folklorist's dream. But she is also a wonderful person: articulate, thoughtful, warm, full-hearted, philosophical, and generous.

Having said that, I can only add that there's nothing she wouldn't be able to do, in terms of demonstrating, teaching, and the likes. She's done it before (I met Anahid first at the Smithsonian Festival, MA program, in 1988; he had done Lowell, the Groton Oktoberfest, Holyoke--she calls herself a "Festival junkie"), and she's really good at understating what is special, what is interesting, and what needs to be communicated--and how.

In addition, her mother--now over 90--is a remarkable woman in her own right. She defines industriousness: her hands are never idle; she was working on one thing or another every minute I was at the house during this interview (stitching, repairing, then after lunch, cutting up lamb for shishkebab). She has lots of knowledge about needle arts that no one else seems to have (like how to make the paste that is used to make the patterns on velvet for the marash embroidery, among other skills). I would love to do something more with her--maybe a video project of some kind. I know she speaks some English, but we didn't really have a chance to speak directly. She lives on her own but pays extended visits with Anahid from time to time.

Anahid and I talked quite a bit about cooking. Some foods she mentioned beyond what's in the interviews: preserved eggplant, a million thing using walnuts, including using the fruit (walnuts dipped in warm grape syrup--they could only remember the Turkish name for them but don't want to use it); grape and apricot pastes, like fruit roll-ups. Grape syrup is

another major cooking element: i.e., fried eggs with grape syrup! mixed with water as a drink, for pudding (with corn starch). "When you are in difficulty, you create things."

We made plans to make some Armenian cheese--pulled, "string" cheese, which requires cheese curd that Anahid gets from a store in Malden, which only has it irregularly during the winter. As it turned out, we couldn't get it one week when we planned on it, and then she got it when I was away for a weekend (it requires a quick turn-around). I am hoping we will be able to do this together soon. She also mentioned a pulled sugar treat, which a friend of hers makes who is a very good Armenian cook--I'm hoping to extend the contacts out from Anahid (although I'm sure there is no one more accomplished in terms of textiles).