


TAPE INDEX KN-99-5-C1

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

Interviewed by by Kathy Neustadt, 11/17/99 (2nd interview--taking photos of needlework)

at her home: 

Transcribed 1/20/99

[Also KN-99-3-C1+2, KN-99-5-N, and KN-99-3-FN]

14 Marash embroidery pattern: 4 steps (photo #3). Talked with a friend about authentic Armenian food. Pattern made from corn starch, flour, and water (photo #4). My mother knew how to do it, but easier to have someone else do it. If you don't know how to do the stitching, the pattern won't mean anything. Peasant work: coarse, not delicate, but lots of colors (photo #5). I love the single color (photo #6): "this is my character, really." The real thing: handspun cotton threads, dyed at home: her grandmother's (who would be 150 years old): she gave it to her daughter, who gave it to me--and I'm planning to do something with it (photos #7 and 8).

185 Comforter top, made for Anahid as a baby (photo #9), made by her mother. Cradle strap (photo #10), even though she didn't sleep in that kind of old-fashioned cradle. I have my own children's first blankets: I gave to them though they don't take [a relative whose new wife is using the old cradle]. Coverlet made by her mother (photos 12 and 13); pattern is a repetition (not something her mother designed, but chosen). The different patterns have names, just like the rugs have separate names.

305 Embroidering before she was married (always had to have something to work on): cross stitch piece (photo #14). She chose the hardest pattern. Old piece--many hundreds of years old--part of a bridal costume (photos #16 and #17). My sister wanted me to fix it after she had washed it in a washing machine.

367 My mother's work, putting together papier maché, made from a batter by her mother, with stitching: to keep the pieces from getting lost. (My mother is lucky we can sit together and talk about all these things; don't have that with my daughters.) Table cloth (photo #20) made by a woman famous for her needle lace (my mother knows how to do it, but she doesn't have time): she was 85, and this was the last piece she was going to do: for me. It has never been washed.

450 [Other topics: oud played in America is more Muslim than Armenian; trying to contact friend who is a music specialist. Some art, some music is bad]

492 Some rugs aren't great: we say "neither a dog nor a wolf." If something is modern, we accept that, but something traditional has an internal standard. This rug here isn't as well made as others, but I like it-- Music is really something: my god, they can do things out of this world. What man has created! And is still creating!

534 [Ireni returns: we talk about coffee] The 98 year old grandmother used to drink coffee in huge cups; she'd drink it at 3 in the morning, and it had to be filled up to the very top. In summer, she'd come to our house to stay, right next to my bed--she'd wake me to get her coffee (I was 15ish), and she'd complain that it wasn't hot enough or full enough. She always called me, because my sister would simply refuse to make it for her. She thought I should be up at 3, working: "What girl can sleep after 3 in the morning?" [Ireni talking about different ethnic women]---chitchat

674 Damascus, machine-made work (photo #20). Etc. Never taken pictures of my work: I should have--like the repair work on the big hole ("no one could have done it; no one"). 720 End of TAPE 1, Side 1

TAPE 1, Side 2

3 .. [about repair] I just said I can do this. You have to know who you are. Sometimes the rug is not worth it; I tell people that I can do the repair, but it will be brand new and the rest of the rug will be dead. It won't affect the

value if the rug after that. Charge by the hour for some work: overcasting, edges, fringe (even though they can be different, I still know about how long it will take). Most people appreciate my work and the money isn't a problem. Usually people who have the rug appreciate the value of the work [with some exceptions: the only insult of her immigrant experience--there may have been others, but I did not take it like that]

116 When first here 30 years ago, kids' teacher suggested we speak English at home: I said, do you hear my accent: is that how you want her to talk? Amusing experiences. [Story about birthday cake she had ordered]. Brother has Arabic accent in his English; mine is more French; my sister's is more New York

222 Tapestry repairs: not the same as rug repairing. Like a person restoring a painting: need to be fond of the work not to destroy it--a color that is off will destroy it, standing out badly. Sometimes replace the warp. (Some flat weaves of tapestry look like a kilim.) Learn about the age of pieces from the woman who she is working for [282 nothing]

304 Long process involved in doing the pattern making (very few people still doing it); used to send to Syria for the patterns (those women have probably died by now, though). A rug she is working on [telephone interruption]

363 Authentic Karabagh rug, from 1927 with the name of the person who made the rug. Armenian rugs don't usually have flowers and straight lines and right angles: their borders are like that--~~starting to be like Europeans~~. Rose frangii--the roses of French things--very rare; I'm patching this rug for myself (this is the way it came). As we say, the carpenter's door is always tied with a rope--my own rugs needing repaired. Very Armenian colors (photo #25); Karabagh is its own style. Usually smaller in size, because they tend to work them in their own houses, making them for themselves. Fine rugs would be put on walls as well as floors. Armenian girls would usually have made one rug at least that she has made. The patterns are unique. Some rugs are very complicated. Girls could be taught by anyone, because

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everyone knows: a mother, an aunt, a grandmother. I'm not talking about now--before.

440 I've never done a rug. I always bothered my father to give me a loom at home. We went to school, that was the biggest thing. He had all these people working for him, making rugs--the poor people do that; not for his daughter. I still have not given up--I keep asking George-- but the thing is where. My mother didn't make rugs either; she did embroideries (there are lots of other embroideries that i haven't even shown you). My mother can do anything/everything; I bet if she sits, she will make a rug--god, she's different. She made my baby comforter into a cover this year so it won't be tucked away and not used. We put our brains together and want to see what we know (she even wrote the recipe down of amounts). [Doorbell rings]

500 These skills--I haven't heard anyone who knows about the pattern-making, and not many who embroidery. A group of Armenian women in Lowell, organized through Linda Carpenter... Won't have cheese for another 2 weeks (in summer, they always have it) [telephone information]

540 Curd cheese: traditionally, people did make their own, but I never did. My mother didn't make her own either because it was so plentiful, so she bought it. When you are a curious person, you want to know how everything is made--like the batting for a comforter. We have the tuffing of wool (we don't use acrylic). In Lebanon, there's a special person you call to stuff your comforters. After many years, I need to wash them, but there's no one here to turn to. So I had to figure it out, to remember how it was made. So then I undid them. I washed the wool; but how am I going to get this dry? I figured out how to do it in the dryer. For this type of brain: if someone can do it, I can do it, too. I was so happy as if I had given birth to something. I called my husband at work to tell him how happy I was to have figured out how to do it--he could have cared less.

618 There is something else that's within a person (not better or worse)--that's born with you--that is like this. I think my daughter's daughter may be like this, may be like me. My daughter throws everything away whereas I still have a little telephone book in my purse where my daughter used to

draw when she was bored during church. I showed it to my granddaughter, and it is a whole universe for her. My daughter throws out my granddaughter's toy carriage, but my granddaughter and I are saving it for her children. It's like a chain of life: otherwise, what is in life. You can always buy another carriage--10 carriages, if you want--but that's not the point. People throw rugs out, also; I cannot believe that someone will throw out such a thing. [garbage issues] Our trash is always the smallest.

705 A friend in Lexington who had chicks for her son; he's now 23 and she still has chickens. She has eggs (and I do), and gives the birds to feed the homeless when they're old... 721 End of TAPE 1, Side 1  
End of Interview