



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT OF THE MONTH

### MAX BOUDAKIAN

*Central Council member Arsen Yelegen interviews WWII veteran and former ACYOA Central Council chairman Max Boudakian about his time on Central Council, relationship with the Armenian Church, and serving his country. Max is currently retired and resides in Rochester, NY with his wife, Lita.*

**AY: Tell me a little about yourself and your family.**

**MB:** My parents' ancestral village was located in Gesaria in Western Armenia. My father, Minas Boudakian, migrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1912, moved to the U.S. in 1917 and served in the U.S. Army during WWI. My mother, Gadarine Topjian, was 9 at the time of the Armenian Genocide. She was the sole survivor of a family consisting of her parents, brother, and sister. My parents were married in Marseilles, France in 1924. I was born in 1925 in New York City. In 1942, I graduated from Stuyvesant High School, a school noted for its science programs which influenced my professional career. In 1943, at the age of 18, I was drafted to serve in WWII.

**AY: Tell me about your time serving in WWII.**

**MB:** I served in the U.S. Army from December 1943 through January 1946. I landed in Normandy in late July 1944 and was a member of a machine gun squad with the 29th Infantry Division (116th Infantry Regiment) in France and Germany. At the age of 18, I was wounded during the siege of the major naval base in Brest, France. I was flown to England to recuperate. I rejoined my unit in November 1944 and participated in several campaigns until VE-Day (May 1945). I was fortunate to survive other close brushes with death. In retrospect, surviving the war gave me a gift of 72 years to develop whatever potential I possessed. Such gifts included the opportunity to earn a higher education. I received my B.S. in Chemistry from the City College of New York in 1949. I then went on to receive my M.S. in 1950 from the University of Michigan and my Ph.D. in 1955 from Purdue University, where I specialized in organic chemistry.

**AY: How did you get involved in the Armenian Church and ACYOA/Central Council?**

**MB:** In the mid-1950s, I was working in Niagara Falls as a chemist for Olin Chemicals. St. Sarkis Church was established there and needless to say I became a dues paying member. In 1957, I was a delegate at the ACYOA General Assembly in Boston. There I made a successful bid to have the 1958 General Assembly held in Niagara Falls/Buffalo. I served as Chair of the Planning Committee for this highly-successful Assembly. My wife, the former Lita Hampar, was also an ACYOA member. We were married in 1960 at the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs in Bayside, NY. We have been blessed with 3 children (Sara, Carl, and Martha) and 7 grandchildren (Nicholas, Theodore, Andrew, Derek, Noor, Arev, and Nina). At the 1960 ACYOA General Assembly in New York City, I was approached to run for the Central Council. I strongly resisted running because of my professional commitments and raising a family. In the end, I decided to run and later served as

Chairman (1962-63). Working with dedicated colleagues on Central Council was a good experience. One of my duties was to travel to various chapters in the New York/New England region. It was an eye-opener to visit the pockets of Armenians whose presence reflected the initial settlements of Armenian immigrants to this wonderful land of America.

**AY: Are you still involved in the Armenian Church now?**

**MB:** Yes, very much. I was a founding member of the Armenian Church of Rochester in 1985, and have served as Secretary since then. I am committed to maintaining an Armenian presence in Rochester. However, it is a challenge since there aren't many Armenians in this area. We're fortunate to have a core group of local church leaders. I have served as Chair and Co-Chair of our annual church picnic since its inception. In 2015, I chaired the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Committee along with my wife, Lita. My Armenian heritage also plays a big part in other phases of my life. I was the Chair of the Rochester AGBU from 1973-79 and have been a member of the Society for Armenian Studies since 1995. Since retiring in 1991, I have written many articles with Armenian themes for Ararat Quarterly, such as *Serendipitous Mystery of Christophoro the Armenian* (1993) and *The Armenian Adventures of Frank Merriwell, 'All-American Boy'* (2006).

**AY: Any words of advice to our current generation of ACYOA members?**

**MB:** That is a very good question. When the ACYOA was established in 1946, the members had a direct connection with the generation that survived the Genocide. Demographics are changing now. Still, we must not deny our Armenian heritage. Get involved with internships sponsored by numerous Armenian organizations. That experience will develop relationships with widespread elements of the Armenian community, both from the U.S. and overseas. If you haven't done so already, travel to Armenia. It will have a lasting impact on you. You are following in the footsteps of your ancestors. Today, there are more opportunities than ever for youth to reinforce their Armenian heritage.



Max Boudakian is awarded the French Legion of Honor by the French Consul, Pascal Soares.

Credit Veronica Volk / WXXI News