

Teaching from the Heart  
A profile of teacher Anahid Joubanian

By Nayiri Arzoumanian

St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School teacher Anahid Joubanian moved from Beirut, Lebanon to Kuwait City in 1966, where she took on her first teaching position in an Armenian school built two years prior. Over the next 20 years, Joubanian taught kindergarten through the third grade in Armenian language and history, and math, and saw the school expand from 35 children to over 850. On moving to Boston in June 1986, she was hired by St. Stephen's, and continued to teach kindergarten through third grade for 12 years, after which she focused solely on her kindergarten students. She closely followed the instruction of her own three children, now adults, and says it was natural to bring that motherly instinct into the classroom and to her students.

In the class of four to six-year olds, Joubanian teaches Armenian history mostly through pictures, from the stories of past heroes, including Sassountsi Tavit, to the story of New Year's and Christmas. The children learn on average one new Armenian letter every week, so that by the end of the year, they know at least 32 of the 36 letters of the alphabet. On Mondays, they recount their weekend in Armenian, then they attempt to draw it in their journals, after which Joubanian writes their narratives below their drawings—that is, until mid-January, when they must draw and write. "The children really try and like to learn. They like the Armenian portion of their day." Joubanian and an American teacher switch off during the day instructing half the class in Armenian and English, respectively. "They have the drive and the will to learn, and to read and write," she says. "It really is a pleasure to be their teacher."

Since 1986, the school has undergone significant changes, with greater funds to spend on new books and supplies, including desks and chairs nonexistent for teachers 20 years ago. Many teachers have left, and new, younger American teachers have filled their spots.

She wants to see the school grow to include students up to the eighth grade. "They say that maintaining a school in the US is difficult," she says. Yet, "the school is essential if a community wants its children to be raised in an Armenian setting."

She would like to thank the parents for the sacrifices they have made for the school—not only financially, but in terms of time and effort, as well as dedication.

During last year's graduation performance, one student recalled Joubanian, their kindergarten teacher, saying, "She teaches from the heart."

Reprinted with permission from The Armenian Weekly (December 25, 2004-January 1, 2005)