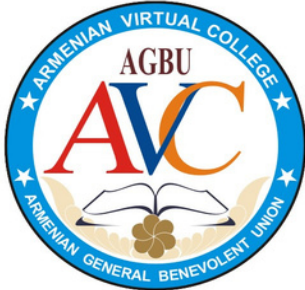


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By **Harout Ekmanian** *Azad-Hye Special* **The story of an outstanding AVC student, Maria Inés** An Argentina native, born to an Armenian father and a Spanish mother, Maria Ines started her lifelong pursuit of learning Armenian from a very young age. However, being born in Venezuela, then growing up in Buenos Aires prior to moving to California for education, and finally setting with her family in Italy, haven't helped her much to achieve that goal.

During her school years, Maria was always active in sports, spectacles, languages and arts. She used to sing in an Armenian choir and danced in a local Armenian folk dance group. She became a French teacher and later graduated in architecture and urban design.

Maria liked to learn and experiment activities as much as she loved to help people. She had her first two sons very young, but that didn't prevent her from moving to California, where she studied in UCLA, while her little boys attended school too. Later, back in Argentina she met the man who would become her husband, and she had the courage to follow him to Italy with her kids. Her third son was born in Sardinia, where she resides now.

Early at her family home, she used to speak only Spanish. Her elementary school had been outstanding, the teachers followed an audiovisual method, but they were overloaded by the official curriculum in Spanish during high school. Of course the very few hours of Armenian lessons were not enough to reach an Armenian style education. Once Maria graduated from the Mekhitarista School in Buenos Aires, she didn't have the chance to keep on practicing Armenian, because of the university, her kids and everyday life. On the other hand, while in Buenos Aires, she had other ways of practicing her culture, like cooking lessons, dance group and choir, and socializing with fellow Armenians. The lack of an Armenian community in her current town is another difficulty.

However, AVC gave her the chance to reset an order, helping her to find a system, a method to improve her Armenian language. Maria found new possibilities of practicing Armenian, writing and talking, reading and listening. She had to start from the most basic lessons because she had to restore so many "missing areas", but she already achieved incredible results according to her teachers at AVC. "I'm restoring those empty spaces, it's like rebuilding the structure," she says. "I'd love to reach a level that would allow me to follow any Armenian communication."

Maria, who is now working as an architect, is interested in land architecture, interior design and the relationship between cities and people. She also organizes field trips of her old school to Europe. "I'm happy to help my old school in Argentina, Mekhitarista, the institution that gave me the chance to have a nice instruction!" she said.

Coming from a very distinct and multicultural background, Maria had an amazing experience with AVC that attracted her to study her ancestors' language, and to gain the essence of the identity that she has long pursued.

"I adore Sardinia for its landscape, Argentina for the passion, United States for the energy, Italy for the power of work, and Armenia for its deep meanings," she said.

Website of the Armenian Virtual College: <http://www.avc-agbu.org>

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Posted by **May Terzian** on Wednesday, December 08, 2010

When I was in London recently my daughter introduced me to a man who spoke Armenian with his mother and grandmother. Because his mother died two years ago he had not had an opportunity to speak Armenian with anybody so he was "parched" for some conversation. He came over one day to have Armenian coffee with me, "like in the old days" he said. We spoke for six and a half hours non-stop, English interspersed with Armenian. I think we broke the Guinness book of records for "casual conversations."

I have many similar stories of speaking with Armenians dispersed around the world. It's amazing how we "click" in no time.

Mary Terzian (author of The Immigrants' Daughter)

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