



Armenian Odyssey

Madlene Minassian finds fulfillment on the homefront



Standing in front of a room full of students at the American University of Armenia in Yerevan, Madlene Minassian knew she had found her life's "Aha!" moment. "My happy place is in the classroom with my students," says the adjunct instructor of English and Undergraduate Student Council advisor. "I learn so much from them but also facilitate their growth by providing an open, secure and engaging environment." Her role as an advisor completes a circle that began with her first job at the AGBU Central Office, running the AGBU New York Summer Internship Program. "Little did I know that more than a decade later I would be an instructor at AUA, an institution in which AGBU has played a pivotal role."

Born in Iran before the Revolution and raised in Los Angeles, Minassian's Armenian odyssey began with a visit while studying public health at UCLA. Years later she met with the Armenian founders of the mobile photo editing, collage and drawing app, PicsArt. "I was infected by their passion and fell in love with the product." When she is not teaching at AUA, Minassian exercises her creative side as part of the marketing team at PicsArt, which was recently named Best Photo App for 2017 by *CNET Magazine*. With more than 350 million installs and a global community made up of more than 90

million monthly active users, PicsArt's success is helping inspire an already deep pool of Armenian tech talent.

The common thread in both of her careers is the opportunity to contribute to the success of a vibrant and exciting culture in transition. "Life in Armenia is organic, raw, and authentic," she says. "We learn to revel in the positive qualities that come as a result and constantly fight to improve the negative manifestations. There is much to preserve and much to change, and it is all challenging, invigorating and is an ultimate *raison d'être*."

Beyond being able to open her doors each morning to the majestic sight of Mount Ararat, Minassian is comforted by an environment where her children can safely roam free in the streets and where she is surrounded by a community that will greet her at the airport. "Each member of our diaspora has a puzzle piece of Mother Armenia within them. You don't have to live here to bring your puzzle piece to the table, but you do have to engage. Start with a trip that AGBU organizes or buy your own ticket and turn it into your *Eat, Pray, Love* year. Find a pen pal, or an organization you can contribute your time and knowledge to from afar. We are waiting for you and for your unique piece of the puzzle."

