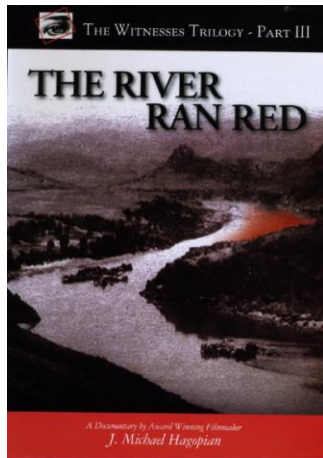


## An Interview with J. Michael Hagopian

**NAASR To Premiere *The River Ran Red* in Boston March 22.**

**By Andy Turpin**



**WATERTOWN, Mass. (A.W.) - The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research [NAASR] will present the East Coast premiere of award-winning filmmaker J. Michael Hagopian's documentary *The River Ran Red* on Sunday, March 22, at 4:00 p.m., at the Mosesian Theater at the Watertown Arsenal Center for the Arts, 321 Arsenal St.**

The 58-minute documentary film opened the 8th Annual Arpa International Film Festival on Oct. 24 at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, Calif.-four days after Hagopian's 95th birthday.

A resident of Thousand Oaks, Calif., Hagopian's hunt for Armenian genocide survivors has taken him to 13 different countries on 5 continents over a period of 4 decades. Hagopian was honored with the Arpa Lifetime Achievement Award and the Armin T. Wegner Humanitarian Award in 2006. He is also the recipient of Jewish World Watch's "I Witness" Award for dedicating his professional life to chronicling the history of the Armenian people and commemorating victims of the Armenian Genocide.

A survivor himself, as a young boy Hagopian was hidden in a well in a mulberry grove to escape Turkish marauders and later fled, with his family, to the United States, where he eventually earned a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1943.

He started collecting film footage about Armenians early on in his 60-year career as a documentary filmmaker and established the Armenian Film Foundation in 1979 with the help of several community leaders. He has made over 70 educational films. Of those, 17 are about the Armenian people, including *The River Ran Red* and the definitive film on the Turkish massacre of the Armenians in 1915, *The Forgotten Genocide*.

J. Michael Hagopian spoke to the *Armenian Weekly* about the film, the third in his *Witnesses* trilogy following *Voices from the Lake* and *Germany and the Secret Genocide*, stating of the three films, "The film [*The River Ran Red*] is about the Armenian genocide. But I realized 10-12 years ago that one film couldn't tell the whole story."

He continued, "The purpose of this film is to explore how the violation of human rights and the victimization of minority groups can lead to further genocide. Furthermore, the film demonstrates what happened in the Turkish Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 20th century conforms to the U.N. definition of genocide."

Hagopian explained, "The film is designed to make a contribution toward international understanding and good will through the meticulous presentation of historical evidence."

But of *The River Ran Red* in particular, compared to his other films on the Armenian genocide, Hagopian said, "I wanted to place the audience in the deportations, as I never have before-and at the same time to realize that this genocide did take place. It's the most emotional of the 3 films. In screen testing this film to audiences I found that non-Armenians who have seen my other films found this one to be the most hard-hitting."

Of the film's premieres and promotions, Hagopian said, "We had the local premiere in Los Angeles at the 8th Annual Arpa Film Festival. Since then, I've made a few adjustments, mostly in the sound department. The next premiere will be the east coast premiere in Boston, followed by another in L.A. supported by the Jewish World Watch organization that does a lot to support Genocide recognition."

He ended, "Beyond that, our main focus is to enter it in film festivals worldwide."

After viewing *The River Ran Red*, it becomes apparent within the first five minutes

that the film is a forty-year labor of love for Hagopian, from the moment he stands to introduce the film's narrative personally, along the Euphrates river-where so many Armenian men, women and children were left gruesomely dead or drowned during the genocide.

Much of *The River Ran Red's* footage comes from interviews and journeys to Anatolia and Aleppo, Syria, made during the 1970s and 80s. The stories the film tells are gut-wrenching in their sadness but Hagopian's form as a filmmaker stands tall in their weaving.

Stories like that of Aram Andonian, who worked as a surveillance gatherer of information from the inner circles of Talaat and Djemal Pasha so that there would be a record of the genocide for future war crime trials; or the touchingly-star crossed story of Serpuhi Papazian who was torn away from her childhood love during the genocide to be adopted by benevolent Arabs and whose family later married into that of her same sweetheart, saved by other benevolent Arabs.

Hagopian is also as objective and fair-minded as anyone can be in telling such a horrific chronicle, including survivors' testimonies of isolated kind Turks such as the survivor that recounts, "All our family were saved by a Turk-Mehmet Efendi." Conversely, he also includes the convictions of such Turkish Muslim clerics who said, "Yes, slaughter the children, too-the Koran permits." And those good hocas that said, "Moslems! It is against the law of Allah to kill Armenians!"

*The River Ran Red* is a powerful and lamenting capstone to the career of one of Armenian-America's great 20th century documentary filmmakers.