

Zoryan Institute's Oral History Testimony of Armenian Genocide Survivor Comes to Life on the Big Screen

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, June 14, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Aurora's Sunrise is an animated documentary about the life of Aurora Mardiganian. At only 14 years old, in 1915, Aurora faced the horrors of the Armenian Genocide. Within a year, witnessing the deaths of everyone in her family, Aurora had lost everything, and was sold into a Turkish harem. With extraordinary courage and luck, Aurora escaped to America, where her story became a sensation. The Zoryan Institute's objective with this film is to bring its oral history testimonies to life on the big screen, through animated documentary films, to relay the stories of the Genocide survivors to the younger generations, and to empower young women and girls to represent their communities in the face of great adversity and violence.



Aurora's Sunrise Annecy Film Festival Poster

In 2015, during the year of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the [Zoryan Institute](#), signed a partnership agreement with [Bars Media](#) of Armenia to produce the animated documentary based on its testimony of Aurora Mardiganian.

This film is directed by Inna Sahakyan, and is produced by Bars Media, led by Vardan Hovhannisyan, Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion & Artbox Laisvalaikio Klubas, with the financial partnership of Eurimages, the Zoryan Institute Armenia & the National Cinema Center of Armenia, and with the contributions of the Lithuanian Film Center, ZDF/ARTE, Public TV Armenia, and LRT. Aurora's Sunrise was made possible with the academic contribution of the Zoryan Institute Armenia, based on its oral history archives (filmed by the Zoryan Institute on January 29,

1984).

The Zoryan Institute is thrilled that 40 years after the launch of the Armenian Genocide Oral History Project, which collected testimonies across 4 continents, the great-grandchildren of survivors can now experience life before, during, and after the genocide through a film that seamlessly blends footage from the Zoryan Institute's original live interview with Aurora and the brilliant animation of Bars Media and their German and Lithuanian co-producers, along with scenes from the 1919 silent film "Auction of Souls" (film starring Aurora Mardiganian, prepared by Near East Relief).

Great credit goes to the Zoryan Institute's founders and staff at the time (early 1980's), who contextualized and carried out the Armenian Genocide Oral History Project, collecting over 3000 hours of oral history testimony from over 780 survivors in their 70s to 90s. The project was a significant financial undertaking, with the audiovisual equipment alone costing the equivalent to nearly half a million USD in today's dollars, and employing a work force to conduct interviews, in cities across Europe, the Middle East, and North America. A questionnaire with over 100 standardized questions was utilized, developed by a multidisciplinary ZI team of experts, that allowed the Institute to extract information on social, economic, political, and cultural practices before, during, and after the genocide to capture commonalities and patterns across the testimonies. Since launching its Armenian Genocide Oral History Project, the Institute has worked continuously and systematically to protect, digitize, and index its archival collection to ensure the quality of the footage is maintained and usable for films like Aurora's Sunrise.

Now, 40 years later, the Institute's dream of utilizing the enormous power of film to connect future generations with their universal history and raise awareness about the phenomenon of genocide has become a reality with the generous support of the Friends of the Zoryan Institute. In addition to initial cost of the Oral History testimonies, Aurora's Sunrise film had a budget of over USD \$1,000,000.00.

This is only the beginning of making these invaluable stories of Armenian Genocide survivors known. Ongoing transcription and translation efforts currently underway in partnership with the American University of Armenia, will make these stories more accessible to scholars, filmmakers, authors, institutions, and schools around the globe who wish to use these stories, as source materials for education in edifying the tolerance and understanding needed in today's world now more than ever.

The world premiere of Aurora's Sunrise, is taking place at the prestigious [Annecy](#) International Animated Film Festival in France this week, a week-long global festival that brings together the biggest names in animation.

The Zoryan Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness on issues related to human rights, genocide, and diaspora-homeland relations through scholarship.

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