

# BOB SEMONIAN WAS THE ULTIMATE TIPSTER!

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**Tom Vartabedian**, Haverhill MA, 26 June 2016

People often ask me where I get my ideas for stories.

Most of them are self-initiated and spontaneous. They come to me during periods of insomnia. They hatch like chicken eggs when I'm in deep thought inside a church pew. Or in the shower. I have no pad or pencil while the water is running which makes it rather difficult to jot down my thought.

But others --- and I'm rather emphatic about this --- derive from you, my readership and friends, over the past 50+ years. Truth be told, stories like that Armenian science researcher who has a lake named after her in Antarctica came from someone else.

So did the Armenian Navyman who sounded the end to World War 2 per order of President Harry Truman. I received that tip from a second-hand source and was able to share these and many more stories with others, lest they be forgotten.

One such reliable contact was Bob Semonian --- no doubt the most recognizable Armenian in Watertown and Greater Boston, not to mention the entire country. For every friend, Bob seemed to have an idea for a story.

I know. He never left me off the hook whenever the two of us came together. Maybe it was the journalist in Bob that made him so reliable. As part owner of [The Improper Bostonian](#), you always found him with a copy of the magazine on his person.

In case you're from another part of the world, it's a publication worth its weight in prestige, given its content element of human interest stories. Since Bob was the ubiquitous Armenian, he just happened to have a copy with him to promote at all times.

If William Saroyan were alive and he was on the Armenian Heritage Cruise, Bob would approach the writer and ask for a photo. He would then make The Improper Bostonian appear like magic and include that in the setting. The caption said it all:

"Individuals like William Saroyan read The Improper Bostonian." No one was spared. Governors, senators, Boston athletes, musicians of notoriety. Journalists like ...

Well, you catch my drift. Bob Semonian was a self-styled promoter, whether it was this magazine, his beloved Republican Party of Massachusetts or St. James Church Men's Club where he handled the monthly programming. The man was never short of guest speakers.

Our last conversation came from his hospital bed. Cancer was taking its toll on my diehard friend and he wanted to make sure I was onboard his speakers' platform to promote my new book, "The Armenians of Merrimack Valley."

Barely audible, he had been unaware of my very own terminal cancer. We wound up comparing notes on our respective illnesses. It was quite apparent that he was in a more aggravated state. Yet, here he was, fulfilling his responsibilities with the church and embracing those he loved around him. The infectious smile was part of his persona, as if he were the candidate running for office. If you had an "IAN" for a surname, he was in your corner, whether he knew you or not.

One day aboard the Armenian Heritage Cruise, he grabbed my ear. Bob appeared out of nowhere as

if shot from a cannon.

"Boy, have I got a story for you," he exclaimed.

"I'm holding my breath. What'cha got? An Armenian running for President of the United States?"

"Not quite," he said. "But would you take a First Lady with an Armenian manicurist who's on this boat right now?"

Turns out Nancy Reagan's manicurist was an Armenian from California who had more stories to tell about the former actress than Hollywood itself.

There was no escaping Semonian on this day, unless you jumped overboard. He saw a good story and wanted someone to write it. Why he didn't take it for himself and his magazine was yet another question?

Who takes a cruise to work and write? I found myself a spot on deck with a good book and an umbrella drink, only to have him hunt me down.

He had with him the manicurist and was now bringing us together. Turned out to be a most provocative story to which I remained eternally grateful.

Go ahead and call him the perpetual networker who had a knack for not only making friends but influencing strangers. He always saw the positive side in an individual and manifested goodness.

Semonian faced his cancer with courage and determination.

I can hear him now. "Have I got a story for you? There's an Armenian up here in Heaven who says ..."

My favorite contact, Bob Semonian, passed away June 22. May he rest in peace.

