



Maggie Azmikaelian listens to interviewer's questions.



She describes the emotional reunion with her family.



Staff photo by Duffy Coffman

"It's a chance to start a new life."

Armenian starts new life here

By Amy DeVour
Of The Print

Maggie Azmikaelian had lived in Tehran, Iran, all her life. But like many other Armenians living in Iran, she and her husband, Gerra, decided to immigrate to the U.S. three years ago.

Maggie, visiting here on a tourist visa, brought her two children into the U.S., enrolled them in schools in the Clackamas County area, and returned to Iran to help her husband finalize the paperwork needed to complete the immigration. Her son, now 8, and her daughter, now 14, lived in the care of Maggie's mother, Zaghik Galestian, who is a C.C.C. student.

Routinely, the Azmikaelians filed for their immigration papers. Then, not so routinely, the revolutionaries in Iran took

52 American citizens hostage. All visas were either frozen or cancelled, and the couple was separated from their children. Not until a year and half later, shortly before the hostages were released, would the couple see their children again.

Regarding the hostage situation she reflected, "I couldn't believe it, it was so very serious." Like so many others, Maggie and her mother watched the television anxiously for word of the official release of the hostages. Maggie stated she was very relieved and felt somewhat ashamed about the situation, but pointed out, "It was the government's doing, not the people themselves."

Maggie, a former secretary for the National Oil Company in Iran, called her children every week during the long separation. Maggie recalled

that they showed little emotion during the long months apart. But when Maggie and Gerra walked off the plane at the Portland Airport last Friday, they were greeted by anything but veiled emotion. "My daughter was crying but my son just laughed and laughed." Maggie's mother and brother were also there to welcome them.

Her brother, an American citizen, helped a great deal in securing the visas. It was two months ago that Maggie received

a telephone call from her brother, saying the immigration papers had been sent to Frankfurt, Germany. The elated couple flew to Frankfurt and then to the U.S., arriving last Friday.

Maggie recalls life under the Shah as "content." "Everything was good, there were no problems." When asked whether the decision to immigrate would have been different if they hadn't had children, she answered, "I don't know, we only thought in terms of the

children." She stated further that they wanted good schools for their children that they had not found in Iran.

Maggie would like to go back to school and learn more English. She also plans to return to work after she and Gerra get reacquainted with their children.

Maggie said the most important reason she likes the U.S. is the security it has to offer. "We feel safe here," she related.

"It's a chance to start again, a new life!"

New machine shop teacher

Twenty-five years of machine shop experience truly qualify machine orientation instructor, Jim Burrows, to teach.

Burrows is teaching in place of Ernie Whisenant who is on sick leave.

The 40-year-old Scotsman really enjoys teaching and feels positively about his students, commenting, "I think I have a

very good rapport with the students." Besides substituting for Whisenant, Burrows also has his own machine orientation class. He believes his teaching methods are approximately the same as Whisenant's, although he has never met the man he is replacing.

Burrows has lived in the U.S. for 19 years and began his apprenticeship at the young age of 15 in Glasgow, Scotland. He has been

teaching at the College for three weeks and will probably continue teaching Whisenant's class until the end of winter term. "So far I've enjoyed it," he said. His very rich Scottish accent hasn't proved a problem, either.

The former Army Reserve sergeant is married and has two children: Burrows' mother, father and brother still live in Scotland. Although he has

many Scottish and American friends in the U.S., he yearns for his friends in his own country. "It's not the place I miss, it's the people," he said.



Jim Burrows

Photo by Brenda Feltman
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