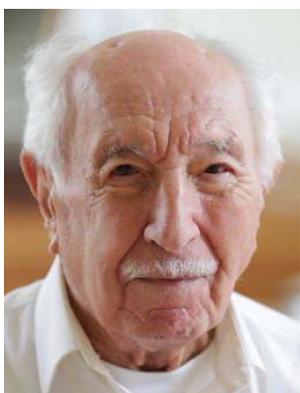


SPOTLIGHT

Bob Haig

(Member since 1955)



Photographer, 104, survived genocide, watched Ruth and Gehrig, lived the American dream by [Meg Jones](#), Milwaukee Business Journal

Photographer B. Artin Haig is known for his portraits of political leaders including Franklin Roosevelt. He turned 104 on Aug. 1, 2018.

Not many people still walking the planet can say they watched Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig play in Yankee Stadium.

Fewer people can say they snapped portraits of Franklin Roosevelt in the White House.

Though B. Artin Haig's hearing isn't what it used to be, once he gets going the memories start to flood back.

"I used to go to baseball games and I used to sit on the third base side because I liked to see them steal home," Haig said in an interview at St. John's on the Lake, where he lives.

"Babe Ruth was my favorite player and Lou Gehrig second. Babe Ruth was not only friendly, he was outgoing," said Haig. "Lou Gehrig was a very good player. He was actually a better player than Babe Ruth though Babe Ruth had a few more home runs." That's true — Babe Ruth hit 714 homers and Gehrig, whose career was cut short by the illness that now carries his name, hit 493.

Haig celebrated his 104th birthday in August. In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported there were 72,197 American centenarians, a 44 percent increase since 2000.

Born Haig Artin Kojababian in Armenia in 1914, less than a week after the start of World War I, he was orphaned at the age of 4 or 5. He saw his mother dragged away by Turkish soldiers; his father, a math professor, disappeared. His family was wealthy and among the ruling class in their Armenian village of Hadjin.

He fled Armenia and lived with an uncle in Constantinople, then moved to Marseilles, France, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, before immigrating to New York when he was around 10 years old.

There, a distant cousin owned a photography studio at West 46th Street and Broadway — Times Square. Haig wanted to photograph pretty girls and he asked his cousin, who took pictures for theater producer Flo Ziegfeld, what he needed to do to become a professional photographer.

B. Artin Haig has been a photographer for years. Haig was photographed in his studio in 1982.

"I learned photography from him. He made me study chemistry, so I knew how to mix chemicals. I would add chemicals for more contrast," said Haig.

While he was in high school, the always nattily dressed Haig worked at a grocery store for an uncle who operated a large Oriental rug business and as a messenger on Wall Street. He remembers the 1929 Wall Street crash, which led to the Great Depression. "But it didn't affect me. We still worked, but tips were not as good."

His skills as a photographer improved and eventually photography would become his life's work.

Haig moved to Washington, D.C., and worked for Underwood & Underwood, a news photography company that had studios at hotels where brides would come to get their photos taken. At that time, Haig recalled, brides would arrange for photos to be taken by two or three photographers free of charge before choosing their favorite to hire.

He also found his own bride at Underwood & Underwood — his wife, Mabel, who was known as Caroline, was a receptionist at the firm. They were married for more than four decades before she died in 1977 of lung cancer.

Though he became known for his bridal photography, Haig was also Underwood & Underwood's White House photographer, and he snapped photos of the most famous Washington resident.

Haig and two assistants always traveled to the White House early to set up lights and cameras before President Franklin Roosevelt arrived. Haig got only seven to eight minutes to take as many pictures as he could — usually around a dozen shots — before the busy Roosevelt needed to be somewhere else.

"I would talk to him and when I got a good expression I snapped the picture," said Haig.

One time, Roosevelt's French cuffs were scrunched up and Haig helped the president smooth them out.

"The next time I saw him he didn't remember my name but he said, 'Are you going to fix my cuffs?' I said, 'Yes sir, Mr. President,' " Haig said. "I was never shy to speak freely. I would say 'Mr. President, when I'm taking the pictures, I'm the boss.'"

He enjoyed taking pictures of politicians, famous actors and other prominent people. Haig can't remember their names now and no longer has their autographs because he would throw them away after a few days or weeks. Now he regrets tossing the valuable autographs.

"If he didn't like what the person was wearing, he would make them change," said his daughter, Dolores Mishelow. "He thought if it wasn't flattering, they wouldn't like it. They never complained."

He moved from Washington, D.C., to Dallas to work for Gittings, a prominent portrait studio at a time when portrait photography was big. Haig moved to Milwaukee in 1954 and bought a photography studio next to Chapman's Department Store across from the Pfister Hotel on Wisconsin Avenue.

He later opened B. Artin Haig Photography studios elsewhere in the Milwaukee area.

Haig's nickname is "Honey" because years ago one of his granddaughters heard her grandmother only call him by that name. So it stuck.

At the age of 93 he traveled back to his homeland with his daughters, but his village had been destroyed by the Turks during the Armenian genocide.

"There wasn't much that he recognized," said Mishelow. "He had never been back since he escaped at night with the help of the Kurdish people. I'm sure it was very emotional for him. I think it was exciting for him to see."

He continued taking photos into his 90s, by then using Hasselblad cameras. As his eyesight weakened, he used an assistant and had someone carry his camera equipment. He tried digital photography, but Haig never warmed up to it. To Haig, film remained the best medium.

"Photography to me is as creative as any painting can be. I feel we can make a better picture than any painter can make it," said Haig.



Editor's Note: *This article appeared in the December 17, 2018 edition of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Written by Journal Sentinel Reporter Meg Jones. Reprinted with permission.*

PLEASE NOTE: *This year we will feature the popular Spotlight series bi-monthly. The week of January 18 will profile Jon C. Rauser, Principal, The Rauser Agency. Rotary Spotlight is usually written by RCM Board Member (and its Sargent at Arms) Barbara Velez*