

Written by Phylis Saraf Tabakian McShane for her children in 2001.

[Information in brackets added by web master]

Mary (Abou-Zain-Eldeen*) Abraham and John Tabakian were married in Manchester, NH either in 1918 or 1919. John was born in Celicia, Armenia on July 15, 1883 and she, in Mount Lebanon, Syria in 1893. According to John's naturalization papers from Boston, Mass, dated April 24, 1920, when he was 36 years of age, he immigrated to America from Alexandria, Egypt aboard the Saxon. His last foreign residence was Aleppo, Syria. He arrived in the port of New York on Nov. 15, 1912. [12 September 1912?] He was a tanner by trade, was 5'11" tall and weighed 185 pounds. He and Mary resided in Manchester, NH. Mary had two brothers, Charles and William Abraham.

William was married to Mary Ganem of Manchester and had [at least three children: Sadie, Edward, Charles] one child, Sadie. Sadie had a child, Lila, with her husband, Najeb Succar. William died at the age of 47 on March 16, 1932 of a heart attack. Mary passed away at the age of 104 [SS Death Index indicates d.o.b. 26 March 1890 and death 22 February 1997] and Sadie passed away last year at 87 [SS Death Index indicates d.o.b. 13 June 1911 and death 19 June 2001]. Lila lives in Southington, CT with her husband, Nick Bourjaili, and her two sons.

Charles was the father of Helen, Flora and John. They were all in Massachusetts when I last heard from them. Charles was killed in a train-car accident in Methuen, Massachusetts at a young age [Comparing 1930 census and newspaper article, he died around 14 June 1936 at the age of 38 in Lawrence, Massachusetts].

I do not have any information on John's relatives. [Possible relatives.]

Mary Tabakian had five pregnancies, and only George, survived. She was 28 and John was 38 when he was born on October 28, 1920 in Jesup, Georgia in Wayne County, where his father operated a restaurant. Then they moved to Savannah when George was five years old, and his father opened a restaurant as well as a fruit stand on River Street and West Broad St. (Later, he opened a liquor store and bar in the same building). George attended Marist School for boys in Savannah run by the Marist Brothers. He attended Savannah High School on Washington Avenue. He played football for four years and then attended Middle Georgia College, came home and worked as a draftsman at Southeastern Shipyard and then he joined the Navy in 1942 after the start of World War II. He served for 3 ½ years, was stationed at Charleston, SC and attended Officers Candidate School on the V12 Program at Georgia Tech. He did not pass his Calculus exam, so he was sent to the US Naval Training School in Bainbridge, MD. He was assigned duty between France and England and was in the Normandy Invasion serving on the LST55 as Quartermaster and Signalman. His rank was QM3C. His ship brought troops and equipment to the invasion area and transported dead and wounded from France to England. He received medals for the American Area, the Victory World War II medal and the European - African Area and one Star. These were given to George, Jr. to preserve and remind you all that your father and grandfather was a brave and honorable man. He received an honorable discharge on March 3, 1946 and reenlisted in the Naval Reserve on March 1947, where he served until his honorable discharge on May 1953.

Upon returning home from active duty, he went into the ice cream manufacturing business with a Greek fellow named Simon Eades on Montgomery and 43rd Street. After a couple of years, he opened a wholesale tobacco and candy business on Montgomery St., one block north of Victory Drive on the east side of the street, where he manufactured his own candies, mainly peanut brittle and peppermint sticks, bon bons and fudges.

On February 14, 1949, John Tabakian died from heart problems and emphysema, just two months before April 23rd when George and I were married in Sacred Heart Church in Savannah. I was 20 on April 1st and he turned 29 the following October 28th. His mother, Mary, lived with us on Montgomery and 44th Street in a rented house until her death in April of 1952 of diabetic complications and congestive heart failure. At the time I was pregnant with Cindy, George was 3 years old, and Kathy was 2 years. Both John and Mary are buried in my mother's and father's lot in Bonaventure Cemetery.

George sold the candy business and went to work with the Metropolitan Planning Commission as a draftsman and designer with the City of Savannah in 1950. Then he went with the Central of Georgia Railway as a surveyor and civil engineer for 8 years until it merged with the Coastline Railway and laid off all the engineers and many hundreds of employees. At the time we were living on 2324 East 40th Street. We moved to Augusta when Michael was 9 months old in 1963. George went to work with Patchen and Mingledorff Engineering Firm and later with Jones and Fellers, Engineers. Charles was born in Augusta in 1966. We finally moved back to Savannah in 1972 to 12447 Largo Drive, and George went to work with Hussey, Gay and Bell, Engineers. He had open-heart surgery in 1974 and just two months prior, had hemorrhoid surgery. While in Augusta, he had to have ulcer surgery. George was an avid fisherman, a perfectionist in any and all his work. He served as Lector at St. Francis Cabrini Church and was president of the Surveying and Mapping Society of Savannah. He worked with Hussey, Gay and Bell until his death on February 13, 1983 at 62 years of age of colon cancer that had spread to several organs of his body. His company flew a flag at half-mast for several weeks after his death to honor him, and presented me with a framed picture of the flag in front of their office building. It was a deeply

touching tribute and one he truly deserved, for he continued to work in a weakened, painful, and deteriorating condition until just 3 weeks before his death. He is buried at Hillcrest Abbey East on Wheaton Street in Savannah in the Rose Section 280B, Space 1 – 8481.

I will now try to give you a brief history of myself. I am the oldest of 8 children born to Mary Gannam and George Saraf of Armenia when my mother was only 19 years old on April 1, 1929. She and daddy had married in 1927. Mary, daughter of Karem and Annie Gannam, was born in 1910 in Manchester NH where her parents had settled after embarking at Ellis Island in 1905. She, Anthony, Nazer, and George were all born in Manchester. When Mary was 9 years old, they moved to Savannah, where Michael, the youngest, was born. They lived in a small shack on 53rd and Hopkins Street where Grandpa Gannam farmed and later opened a grocery store to serve the millhands of Reynolds and Manley Lumber Company, which was just down the street. Connected to the store was a simple frame house of two bedrooms, one bath, a kitchen with a wood stove, and a living and dining room, all with wooden walls and floors and heated by a space oil heater. Very cold in winter and very hot in summer, they survived.

All my uncles served in World War II. George, who was in the Air Force, was the first Savannahian killed at Pearl Harbor during that sneak attack by the Japanese in December 1941. My grandmother died from grief and depression leading to a stroke in 1943. A memorial honoring George has been established in Benedictine Military School from which George had graduated. My mother died at age 90 in Sept. 2000, Nazer passed away in 1991 following heart surgery, Anthony died in 1997 from heart complications and Mike is 78 now and is fighting bladder cancer. [Note: In September of 2003, Mike passed away at the age of 80. He died of kidney and urinary tract cancer.] He was an attorney with a thriving practice in Savannah.

According to his passport, my father was 24 years of age when he headed for New York. He received his Naturalization in Detroit, Michigan on April 12, 1926, when he was 30 years old. He had seven brothers and sisters and he was the youngest. He went to Canada when he first arrived in this country and worked as a tailor. He later went to Detroit to stay with his Armenian friend, Jack Abajay. Then he came to Savannah and worked with John Tabakian in his restaurant before opening his own restaurant and later an ice cream business and confectionery. He was a very shrewd businessman and he spoke seven languages. He was educated in Armenia and Lebanon and France. On Friday, June 13, 1941, as he worked in his confectionery, four black men, (never caught) shot him in a robbery, allegedly on the 14th anniversary of their marriage. I was only 12 years old and Antoine was 9 months old and mom was pregnant with another child, which she lost. The children are Phyllis, Philip, Antoinette, Mary Ann, Rose, George and Antoine. Mom was married a year after my father's death to Harold Beecher of Savannah. They had a child, Iris.

I attended St. Vincent's Girls Grammar School, Sacred Heart Grammar School and St. Vincent's Academy in Savannah. I was an A student throughout and won a 4 year scholarship to St. Vincent's and another 4 year scholarship to Mount St. Agnes college in Baltimore in 1947-48 as well as a \$300 Elks Award for outstanding student. I used this to purchase college clothes and luggage. I only used one year of my scholarship award, however, because I was very worried about my mother, and felt she needed my help at home with my brothers and sisters. I am forever grateful for that one year of college, as it was a wonderful learning experience for me and a great opportunity that I would never have had otherwise. My mother could never have afforded to send me. I had planned to major in Journalism and maintained honor roll status all year. When I returned home, I went to work for Armour and Company as a comptometer operator in the night Shipping Dept. processing sales orders for delivery the following morning. After several months, I went to work with my husband to be – George – as office manager in his candy and wholesale business until we were married.

*Lila Abraham Bourjaili stated on 4/24/16 that "Abou-Zain-Eldeen" was a nickname that had nothing to do with her true name or her family. Similar to the way we call Antoine Saraf – Bogie.