





*Nissim & Vittoria Menashe at Giza (Courtesy of the Cohenca family.)*

*Thank you to all those who submitted entries for our special event booklet with apologies to those whose entries were unable to be included before print.*



Thank you to the American Sephardi Federation for partnering with us to present this program.

# OUT OF EGYPT: בצאתי ממצרים

*Celebrating Egyptian Jewish Heritage at Shearith Israel*

**RECEPTION** | 7:00 pm | Levy Auditorium

Wine and desserts From Mansoura Bakery

**MAIN PROGRAM** | 7:30 pm | Large Synagogue

**Part A**

- Greetings and Introduction – *Rabbi Meir Soloveichik*
- Reminiscences – *Mrs. Emy Cohenca together with her children, Nevine Michaan and Philip Cohenca*
- Presentation – *André Aciman*

**Part B**

Slideshow: “Synagogues of Egypt” from the Collection of the Diarna Geo-Museum – *Eddie Ashkenazie, Research Coordinator, Diarna Geo-Museum*

**Part C**

- Glimpses of the Egyptian Jewish Community in Pre-Modern Times – *Arnold Franklin, Queens College (CUNY)*
- Short Presentations by Our Panelists – *Jeffrey N. Mosseri, Lucienne Carasso Bulow, Rabbi Albert Gabbai*

This event is dedicated to the Cohenca and Menashe families, and in honor of all of Shearith Israel’s Egyptian Jewish families.

**THANK YOU to OUR SPONSORS:** The Cohenca Family, The Shearith Israel League, and Mr. Daniel Harari

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GREETINGS

From Rabbi Meir Soloveichik.....	1
From Jason Guberman.....	2
From Rabbi Albert Gabbai .....	4

### FAMILY HISTORIES:

Yvonne Smouha Anaf .....	6
Vivette Ancona.....	10
Marilyn Naggar Baer.....	18
Jacob Bouso .....	22
Viviane Naggar Bregman .....	30
Lucienne Carraso Bulow.....	34
Jacques Capsouto .....	40
Emy Cohenca.....	44
Dr. Raphael David .....	48
Alain Farhi.....	52
Albert Gabbai.....	58
Laniado Family.....	62
Lewitinn Family .....	64
Jean Mosseri Naggar.....	72
Roberto Salama .....	80
L. Gilles Sion.....	82
Mayer Smouha.....	88

### SHORT GREETINGS:

Angelo Abdela .....	91
Daniel Harari .....	92
Larry Hasson .....	93
Viviane Acker Levy .....	94
Claude Minerbo Sasson .....	94

## GREETINGS FROM RABBI MEIR SOLOVEICHIK



In the Cairo Museum sits the *Menapteh Stele*, a victory proclamation from an ancient Pharaoh. It is also the first mention of the people of Israel outside of the Bible. “*Israel is laid waste,*” the Stele proclaims, “*and his seed is not.*” The first mention of Israel outside our scripture, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once pointed out, is an obituary. This is a striking testament to the eternity of our people.

To this I would add another profound reflection of our immortality: long after the Pharaohs of Egypt, and their empires, dissolved and disappeared, rendered into ruins in dramatic Ozymandian fashion, Jewish communities continued to thrive in Egypt itself. It was in Egypt that Saadia, one of the greatest of *Gaonim*, was born. It was in Egypt that one of the most astonishing of Jewish geniuses, Moses Maimonides, wrote his *Mishne Torah* and Guide for the Perplexed, changing Jewish law and philosophy forever. It was in Egypt that hundreds of years of Jewish lives, hopes, and dreams were recorded in *ketubot*, poetry and *piyyutim*, as testified by the documents of the Cairo Genizah. And it is from Egypt that Egyptian Jews came to Shearith Israel, lending such a wonderful dimension to the magnificent mosaic that is our community. Tonight, several weeks after we remembered with gratitude our ancestors’ exodus from Egypt, we at Shearith Israel now give gratitude for what the Jews of Egypt have given to us.

# GREETINGS FROM JASON GUBERMAN

*American Sephardi Federation*



What is the connection between tonight's program on Egyptian Jewry and the simultaneous observance of Yom HaAtzmaut? Perhaps the answer seems obvious: Jews went out from Egypt anew in what has been termed a second Exodus in the years after the re-founding of Israel. There is, however, a deeper significance—a shared history—that is just now being revealed after decades of politically expedient suppression.

Prominent leaders of the 1919 Revolution against the British occupation of Egypt and Sudan simultaneously served as members of the Wafd (liberal nationalist) party and Zionist associations. Indeed, many of Egypt's Pharaonists or new nationalists

saw the national liberation movement of the Jewish People as a kindred spirit and ally in their anti-colonialist struggle for Egypt's independence. As detailed in an article by Egyptian journalist Ayman S. Ashour ("On The 100th Anniversary of The Balfour Declaration: An Inconvenient History For Egypt And Israel," *Egyptian Streets*, 19 November 2017), the reaction to news of the Balfour Declaration "was unreservedly favorable" and Chaim Weizmann was warmly hosted as a guest of honor at al-Azhar University in 1918.

A little more than a decade later, and reflecting the enduring sincerity of these sentiments, the Sheikh

President of al-Azhar said to Pierre von Paasen, a Dutch journalist who somehow managed to be on the spot in some of last century's worst places at the right time, "... We are not interested in [Haj Amin al-Husseini's] quarrel with the Jews. We know perfectly well that the Jews have no designs on the [al-Aqsa] Mosque, but that they have very different ambitions in Palestine. They want to reconstitute their national life. That is a legitimate aspiration. We, too, here in Egypt want to rebuild an Egyptian culture. We are Egyptians first. We have nothing in common with Pan-Arabism...."

In 1925, Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed, the great liberal philosopher, professor, patriot, and Cairo University's first President, led an official Egyptian delegation to the inauguration of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem. Another Jerusalem landmark, the King David Hotel, was created by Eli Nissim Mosseri's Palestine Hotels Limited, which was financed by his illustrious Egyptian Jewish family's Banque Mosseri, the renowned Iraqi Jewish Banque Zilkha, shares sold to other Egyptian Jews and Jews abroad, as well as the National Bank of Egypt, where Eli served as a director. As

late as 1945, Taha Hussein, one of Egypt's most celebrated writers and intellectuals, was editing al-Kateb al-Misri, an influential Arabic literary magazine that was regarded as pro-Zionist.

This was all tragically to change. The Muslim Brotherhood's terror campaign of bombings (including of the Harat el-Yahud, Cairo's Jewish Quarter) and assassinations claimed the lives of hundreds, including a Prime Minister. In the subsequent sweep of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Revolution, with its waves of persecution and privations, only a small, ever-dwindling but determined community of Egyptian Jews remained and endures to the present-day.

Tonight's auspicious timing affords us an excellent opportunity to share and conserve memories, as well as to recommit ourselves to the preservation and promotion of the vital yet vanishing history of Egyptian Jews.

*Shukran'awi,*

Jason Guberman  
Executive Director,  
American Sephardi Federation

## GREETINGS FROM RABBI ALBERT GABBAI



### BRIEF ASPECTS OF LIFE IN EGYPT

How very befitting that Congregation Shearith Israel is holding an event on the sojourning of the Jews from Egypt. This leading congregation has been the home of Jews of many backgrounds and certainly of many Jews who came out of Egypt to find a new home in the USA and particularly at Shearith Israel.

When we talk of Egypt many people think of the pyramids and the sphinx and the mummy of Tut Ankh Amon. For Jews it has a memory that goes back to biblical times. The Children of Israel went down to Egypt and there they were enslaved. They came out of slavery with the help of Almighty God as we say years after year in the Haggada on Pessah. Nevertheless, Jews went back to Egypt during the Prophets' era. There an advanced civilization took place. In the course of the centuries the Jewish community became famous for producing preeminent scholars such as HaRambam, his son Rabbi Abraham and many others who were born outside its boundaries and made a name there.

In recent history after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, many Jews came from different parts of the world. They established themselves there and prospered, at the same time they helped Egypt prosper by contributing to its development in many fields. Jews rose high in all sections of Egyptian society. They even became active in politics. They became members of different academies, trade organizations and cultural events. All the while never neglecting the needs of the unfortunate in their community. They settled mostly in Cairo and Alexandria. Most sent their children to French or English or Italian schools and became the cream of the society. Their contacts with the outside world was an asset that they used very effectively for the wellbeing of the economy. It is said that in the beginning of the 20th century the only millionaires in the entire Middles East were in Egypt. Yes, one could say that life was wonderful and privileged for many of the Jews in Egypt. Their relationship with the non-Jewish inhabitants was very cordial with rarely a sense of anti-Jewish hatred.

All this changed with the rise of the Moslem Brotherhood in the 1930s and 1940s, and the pan-Arab nationalism of Nasser in the 1950s. The propaganda, the brain washings, the persecutions, the arbitrary arrests, the prison camps, the confiscation property, the mobs, all this forced the Jews to flee or to be expelled. What remained of the Jews? Today, only three old Jewish women remain in Egypt as of April 2019.

Yet, not a single Jew who left from Egypt would play the role of victim. Wherever they went they started a new life and became upstanding members of their communities. Each one will have as memory the dual remembrance: Of great nostalgia of the good life and a nightmare of the persecution. Tonight, thanks to Shearith Israel, we are gathered here to retell different aspects of that *no longer* life that was once in Egypt, not unlike the retelling of the Haggadah of every year.

Rabbi Albert E. Gabbai  
Congregation Mikveh Israel  
Philadelphia, PA



*From*  
***Yvonne Smouha Anaf***

My father Ezra Smouha was born in Baghdad. He immigrated to the United States and applied for citizenship in 1912 at the age of 20. He was a friend and business partner of Maurice Gourgey (Albert Gourgey's cousin). After several years he returned to Baghdad to marry my mother Louise Sassoon, whose older sister Rosa (Albert's mother) he had once tutored, and he had maintained a relationship with the family. He wanted to return to the United States, but Louise didn't want to move so far away from her family.

In 1924 my father's cousin Joseph Smouha offered him a job in Alexandria to work in real estate development. Joseph was born in Iraq and lived in England; he founded and developed Smouha City near Alexandria, bringing in European businesses. My father went ahead as my mother was pregnant and unable to travel; I was born in Baghdad and my mother and I came soon after. My younger brothers Mayer and Charles were born in Egypt.

Life was good in Alexandria at that time. It was a cosmopolitan city on the Mediterranean. Businesses were mostly owned by Europeans—French, British and Swiss. French was more commonly spoken than Arabic, and the city felt European. However, the situation deteriorated after 1948: Muslims began to assert themselves and to expel people with European passports, and some were arrested and interned. My husband John (Jean) Anaf was arrested soon after we were married (Jews were arrested on suspicion of having ties to Israel), and was interned for fifteen months. It was a terrible time.

After John's release it was quiet for a while. Consequently, we tried to go on with our lives. Then in 1956 the situation deteriorated again, and all British, French and most Jews were ordered to leave the country on very short notice. My brother Mayer's wife Denise's family were among those who were expelled, as were the Hazans, John's sister's family.

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*From Yvonne Smouha Anaf*

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Eventually Mayer and Denise with their baby, Eric, joined Denise's family (the Halifs). By 1961, John and I, together with my mother and brother Charles, were ready to leave Egypt. Sadly, my father died in 1955, so he was spared from having to live through the anguish that we all experienced.

After spending four months in France, our visas were granted and we immigrated in the United States. Upon our arrival in New York in 1962, we were met by my cousin Albert Gourgey whom I hadn't seen since childhood when we had met briefly. Our families joined Shearith Israel, which was the synagogue of our cousin Albert Gourgey and other Egyptians.



*From  
Vivette Ancona*



My parents both came to Egypt between the two world wars – my father from Aleppo, Syria and my mother from Lausanne, Switzerland. The similarities between them were quite extraordinary: both my grandfathers were called Isaac and both my grandmothers were called Rachel and I had an uncle Joseph on each side. Moreover, both my grandmothers were their husbands' second wives and both my grandfathers were Torah scholars, one studying with a Rav in Poland till his death and the other in Jerusalem for more than twenty years. Both families had been wealthy, but wars and other upheavals had destroyed their wealth and my parents had no family money to rely on.

My mother was the youngest of three and had come to Egypt with her brother to live with their oldest sister. Regine, my mother's sister, had married in Lausanne a doctoral student in clinical pathology, who had come to Egypt to open a medical diagnostic lab after he graduated. He was of Georgian origin but his family had emigrated to the Middle East, some to what was then Palestine and some to Egypt.

My parents both went to French schools in Cairo – my mother to the Lycée and my father “*chez les Frères*” (a school run by Catholic monks). This was my father's first foray into secular education, as in Aleppo, he had attended the *kitab* from the age of two and a half. Indeed, the main reason his family had come to Egypt was for the secular education. My father stayed only about two years in “*chez les Frères*.” Given his family need, he started working at age 14 for a publishing house, where he spent decades, (leaving it only when he left Egypt), and quickly rising to the top. Without attending a single class because of his work schedule, he did his French Baccalauréat and obtained his law degree from the Université de Paris, which had an extension school in Cairo. My mother stayed in school, though she was very busy helping her sister. She too went to the Université de Paris law school extension school. She was the only woman in the class and the faculty would not answer her questions until one of the young men in

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## From Vivette Ancona

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the class said he needed the answer too! Unlike many women of her time, she had learned to drive on her brother's yellow convertible. It was his pride and joy but when my mother collided with the corner of the building in which they lived with their sister, his only question to her was whether she was hurt and he ignored the damage to his car.

My parents met on a *felucca* (boat) outing on the Nile organized by a Jewish social club for young people, called *Les Essayistes*. My parents' romance was carried on in secret for four years. No dates allowed, of course, and my father, laden with the financial responsibility for his family, did not feel he could get engaged. Their "dates" given the times, were unorthodox. For example, my mother would go to buy chicken for her sister's household in the *souk* opposite the building where my father worked. Buying chicken was not an easy affair: the live chicken had to be chosen and the *shohet* called for to kill it etc. etc. In the meantime, my parents saw each other, of course purely by chance! Eventually, my grandparents encouraged my father to get engaged, which my parents did after my mother passed her final exams. They were married two months later in the garden of my aunt Regine's house. At least four Sephardi Rabbis, besides my grandfather, officiated. I do not know whether this was usual or whether it was due to my grandfather's standing in the community or even to the fact that, given that my mother was Ashkenaz, this was a "mixed" marriage!

My parents moved in to a small but new apartment in the center of Cairo. Their windows overlooked the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities. A few years later, my grandparents moved into an apartment in the building next door. My father continued to support his siblings, until his sisters were married and his brothers self-sufficient. He supported his mother until she died a few months before he did. I was not born

for some years as my mother had some health issues. After my birth we moved to an apartment on the island of Gezira, where the front windows faced the Nile and the back windows the sports club.

Though my mother had a law degree (quite extraordinary for the time and place), she never practiced law. She wrote articles for the local French press before the war but later spent much of her time volunteering for various organizations, particularly for a school run by a Jewish charitable organization called "*La Goutte de Lait*."

My parents spoke French to each other, and to their siblings, though my father continued to speak Arabic to his mother. They had a very large group of friends and entertained a lot. Indeed, I remember my father complaining that we never sat down to a meal just the four of us (my parents, my brother and I). Their friends were of all nationalities and religions. They were, of course, very close to their families. Whenever they gave a party, they invited not only their siblings but also their siblings' in-laws. My uncle Joseph Liverant, my mother's brother, who married late, was a fixture every Friday night, walking in with gifts under his jacket for me, (my brother was not yet born). My grandmother would stay with us for weeks at a time. Since she played cards every afternoon, my mother gave card parties for her friends when she was with us. I also remember a period when my cousin Rikki and my father's youngest sister, who were the same age, came to lunch every school day. Their English convent school was close to our apartment.

Until the fifties, Cairo was a major stop on tours by performing arts companies such as the *Comédie Française* and *La Scala* opera house. My parents enjoyed the theatre, the opera and the symphony, but they drew the line at going to hear Wilhelm Furtwängler, who had conducted the Berlin Philharmonic during the war, when he came to Cairo after the war.

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## *From Vivette Ancona*

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Though my childhood was idyllic to me, the times were not always so for my parents. My father given his position in the largest publishing company of the Middle East, was quite prominent. It did not stop him from being arrested at the beginning of World War II, as an enemy alien. My father's family had gone to Aleppo from Italy several generations before as traders. My father was still Italian, and that did not sit well with the Brits who had taken control of Egypt at the time. His friends got him out after four days and he went back to work, doing business with the Brits for the publishing house. The Brits returned the favor giving him two seats on the train that was carrying the diplomatic corps out of Egypt ahead of the anticipated Nazi invasion. Their destination was India but they stopped in Palestine where they spent several months in a German convent in Bethlehem which had been evacuated by the nuns, and returned to Egypt after the

Germans were defeated at El-Alamein. During their absence, one of my father's sisters, who, recently married, lived with her in-laws, moved into our apartment.

This was not the first time my father was an enemy alien. As a baby, he was deported from Aleppo to Cyprus during the First World War. (My uncle Joseph Ancona was born in Cyprus). In the years after the creation of the State of Israel, our home was searched more than once by the police. However, these searches were conducted in a relatively civilized manner. My brother remembers my mother having coffee with the police captain in the living room while his men searched the house. The police captain asked my mother to identify her closet and ordered his men not to search among "the lady's things."

In 1948, my father's youngest brother (the little boy sitting on the grass in front of my parents in their wedding picture) was arrested and spent a year in a detention camp in the desert. Many of his friends were arrested with him and the mothers would take turns driving to the camp with home-cooked food for all the detainees AND their guards. My father arranged his release but it was only on condition that he would leave Egypt right away. I remember seeing my uncle in handcuffs at the train station on his way to Alexandria to board a boat for France. In Paris, he lived with his sister and her family, who had left earlier, in a tiny apartment.

My parents sent my brother and me to English schools in Cairo from age 5. The schools were very diverse, both by nationality and religion. Both my brother and I, as it happened, had two best friends in school: one Muslim and one Christian. We are both in touch with them to this day. As Jews we were not discriminated against in any way. The only time it mattered was after School Assembly in the morning. The Christians were required to attend morning prayer so after announcements were read and attendance was taken, the

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## *From Vivette Ancona*

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Assistant Headmaster would bellow “Muslims and Jews fall out” and we were given more time in the playground as the Christians filed in for prayers. Though my parents considered sending us away earlier, it was not till the late fifties that we were sent to England to continue our education because all English teachers had been expelled from Egypt after the Suez war. I got my first degree at the University of London. My brother, to the disgust of his very British Headmaster at his very British boarding school, turned down a place at Cambridge University to come to MIT.

My parents remained in Egypt. Indeed, for a while they could not leave as both could not get exit visas at the same time. After the publishing house was nationalized by the socialist President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, my father assumed he should go home. The colonel who had been deputized to take over the publishing house, found him packing up and told him that the Raiss (i.e. the Chief, Abdel Nasser), wanted him to stay to continue to manage the business. Of course, he stayed. So a Jew, and one who was very well known to be a Jew and very active leader in Jewish affairs, such as the Jewish Hospital and the Jewish Community Council, continued to manage the largest publishing house in the Middle East. My parents came to see my brother and me in England separately. It was not until 1961 that they managed to get exit visas together. They gave a huge party so that everyone could see that they had not dismantled their apartment, and were driven the next morning to the airport by the driver, who then took the car back to the garage to await their return. They never went back.

My parents would have liked to immigrate to the US at that time, but, as it happened, my father went to work for an Italian publishing house. Over the next twenty years, he worked his way to the top, in Milan,

and then Paris as he succeeded in turning the publishing house from a major Italian fixture to a European one. My brother and I completed our education in the US, he finished all but his dissertation for the Ph.D at MIT and got an MBA from Harvard. I completed the Ph.D in Economics at Columbia.

In 1980, my parents decided to spend a larger part of the year in New York. They bought an apartment and went Synagogue-shopping. They fell in love with Shearith Israel, and particularly enjoyed the Friday night service, to which they walked every week, hand-in-hand. After my father's death, my mother came to Shearith Israel most Shabbat mornings. One of her closest friends from Egypt, Joyce Mosseri, was a member, too, which helped. My brother was married in the Little Synagogue. My daughter was married under Shearith Israel auspices and her son's Brit and daughter's naming were at Shearith Israel. My daughter's children are twins, and our hazan, Reverend Phil Sherman, who officiated at the combined ceremony, managed to make my granddaughter's naming as consequential as my grandson's Brit. I so appreciated it.

All of my parents' descendants are Americans but the descendants of my father's siblings are in Israel and France. The descendants of my mother's siblings are even more scattered: in the U.S., the U.K., Switzerland and Australia. Fortunately, my aunt Regine's granddaughter, Yasmine Ergas, is a member of Shearith Israel. Her mother, Rikki (Rachel) Ergas, who came to live in the U.S. late in life, is buried in our cemetery.

I sit in my mother's seat upstairs and love the music and the formality of the services in our beautiful sanctuary. I also find the customs we have for *nahalas* very personal and comforting. Most of all, I love the wonderful friends I have made at Shearith Israel over the almost 38 years I have been attending services.



*From*  
***Marilyn Naggar Baer***

*The Naggar and Ades Families*

I was born in Egypt. My Mother was an Ades, my Father a Naggar. I had a brother Robert and a sister Giovanna who have both passed away. My maternal grandfather, David Ades, was born in Aleppo, Syria. At the age of sixteen he left home alone. He arrived in Marseilles, France where he sold the ends of the bales of fabric in the port. He then moved to Egypt. He bought raw cotton, sent it to Manchester to be woven into fabric which was then sold in his two large stores in Cairo and Alexandria. He spent his life between Cairo and Manchester. He had five children with his first wife Nelly who died.



My Grandmother, Gertrude Ades, was the daughter of the Reverend John Chapman who had a large Jewish boy's school on the British coast, and was associated for many years with Jews' College, London. When my Grandfather took his son to attend Rev. Chapman's school he fell in love with my Grandmother and married her. They had three girls. My aunts both married Smouhas and my Mother married Gaston Naggar, my Father.

The Naggar family were in Egypt for generations. The story goes that about two-hundred years ago a dictator came into power and decided that anyone without a nationality would be put in camps. Many European countries were appalled and issued passports. The Italians were the most generous. There happened to be a fire in the archives of Livorno so many Jews living in Egypt were granted Italian nationality. My Italian nationality was a bonus for me as it secured my professional life.

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## *From Marilyn Naggar Baer*

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At the age of fifteen when we were on vacation, we crossed the border between Italy and France. The customs officer began speaking to me in Italian. I told him “I do not understand you.” He gave me a severe scolding saying “You should be ashamed of yourself; you do not even understand your own language.” On arriving in England, which was to become our home, albeit we did not know it at the time, I learned Italian.

I went on to become a simultaneous interpreter. There happened to be a dire need for Italian/English interpretation at the European Parliament, and I was hired on the spot. I worked there for many years and I later interpreted for all the Italian Heads of State and Foreign Ministers at the G7 and G8 summits. Since I have been living in New York I have been worked as a freelance interpreter at the United Nations.



My Grandfather on my Father's side was Isaac Naggar. He had nine children. The seven boys were all stockbrokers. They had a firm in Cairo and one in Alexandria. My Father Gaston Naggar ran the Alexandrian office. They were known for their honesty and skills.

My first recollection as a child was hearing the bombs falling down on Alexandria in the second World War. The Nazis were forty miles away when they were defeated at El Alamein. Apparently they had declared on the radio that they intended to hang all our families in Mohammad Ali Square.

Despite that traumatic early experience, I had a wonderful childhood in Alexandria. We had numerous cousins with whom we played. It was a joyful time of parties, sailing, picnics in the desert and on the beaches, as well as three-month holidays in Europe every summer. We were really lucky.

It all fell apart in 1956 when Nasser decided he did not want anyone of English or French nationality in the country after he took over the Suez Canal. He certainly wanted no Jews in Egypt. Later he extended this decree to many other nationalities. He seized everyone's property and assets and that was the end of it.

We happened to be in London at the time and were warned not to go back. I am not very bitter about it today, as my childhood can never be taken away from me. However it took a terrible toll on my parents, which I deeply regret. Our family was dispersed all over the world, in England, France, Switzerland, Canada and the United States. I ended up in New York where I have a son Brandon, his wife Miriam and two grandchildren Natalie and Dylan. I was happy to join Shearith Israel as it reminded me of the S&P synagogue my family attended in Maida Vale, London. To me it feels like home.



*Ety, Joseph, David, and Jacob Bousso*

## *From Jacob Bousso*

My name is Jacob Bousso and I was born in Cairo. I always said that coming to this country was the best thing that ever happened to me, because coming here opened opportunities for me that I had never imagined possible when I was growing up as a teenager in Cairo.

We left Egypt in 1966, which was already late, considering the rising tensions, but luckily we left before the 1967 war. My friend Rabbi Albert Gabbai can attest to what happened to his family after the 6-Day War. My oldest sister had already left about a year before, right after she got married.

There was an old Turkish law that was still on the books in Egypt that said one's nationality was acquired from the father side. My mother was born in Cairo, but her father was born in Syria; therefore, legally, she was not Egyptian. My father was born in Beirut, which was at that time part of Syria. He moved to Egypt at a very young age; therefore, he was not Egyptian. So my three sisters and I were not considered to be Egyptians. None of us were officially "Egyptians;" our family's status was "Stateless." There were many of us in Egypt with that status.

When we left Egypt, I was about 17. I have good memories of my childhood in Egypt. Socially, my experiences were very positive. Politically, it was a different story, but socially, I had a wonderful relationship with my friends and schoolmates who were Jews, Christian and Muslims. My sisters and I went to a French Lycée. Unlike the school system in the US where students move from room to room to attend various classes where they meet different students, the system at the Lycée was such that students remained in the same room for the whole school year (unless they needed to go to Lab or Gym), and teachers were going from class to class. As a result, one stayed the entire school year with the same school mates, and then moved with them, from year to year, and from one grade to another. So I developed very strong bonds with my friends. In fact, until today, I get together with my friends from Kindergarten who happen to be living in the Northeast and Canada. We are regularly on the phone and on e-mail, we meet in person once or twice a year and we have a great time. They have remained my very dearest and closest friends.

I socialized with a small circle of friends and relatives on a regular basis. It included Jews, Christians and Muslims. We went out together; we went to the movies, we attended parties, and we played soccer together. We basically had a good time.

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## *From Jacob Bouso*

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During the month of August, my father would take us to Alexandria. Cairo is blistering hot in August. I have fond memories of the warm days we spent at the various beaches along the Mediterranean Sea, and the dancing on the beach after sunset. We listened to music from England, France and the United States. But I also enjoyed listening to Arabic song by famous Egyptian singers; in fact, I still enjoy listening to them today.

Politically, it was a different story. Starting in 1948, antagonism and discrimination against Jews became more prevalent. Gradually, we were told that we could no longer go the Tennis Club where we had been going for years. The chances of my being accepted at a University were almost nil.

The Curriculum at the Lycée involved classes in French. Arabic was another subject, just like English was introduced later as another subject. Gradually, the government made it mandatory that all subjects be taught in Arabic and French became another subject. I was at a terrible disadvantage because, although we spoke the language fluently, we hardly spoke it at home. We had a woman who came every day to help with the housework, and we spoke Arabic with her, and that was the only time we spoke Arabic at home. However, having to study history, geography and biology in Arabic was a challenge for me. Keep in mind that there were many people in Egypt who did not speak Arabic. They were English, French, Italians, Greeks, and so on...

When I lived in Egypt, I have to say, I never felt at home because, as tensions intensified, it always felt like it was a temporary situation. It was clear that it was time for us to go. The question was where...

My father's side of the family left Egypt in the early 1950s and had gone mostly to Israel, except for one sister who went to France and who still lives in Paris. There was no contact between Egypt and the State of Israel, so communication with our relatives in Israel had to be through a third party. The news from our Israeli family were scarce.

My mother's side of the family had gone to France, England, the United States and Brazil. My oldest sister was already living in Brooklyn. The question for us was: Where should we go? Which part of the family were we going to join?

I was hoping from all the options that it would be the United States. I had seen the U.S. through the lens of Hollywood and I was just enamored with it. I wanted so much to speak English so I could understand the dialogue at the movies, but that was impossible, the actors just spoke too fast. So I had no choice but to read the subtitles. I was so driven to learn English that I went to an English school three times a week after the Lycée, just to improve my English. In my history book, I was fascinated by the chapter about American History. I thought it was an incredible story. In the colonies, people were saying, "No taxation without representation." I said these are my kind of people. Until today, I am a Revolutionary War junky. The Revolutionary War is one of the most significant events in the history of civilization. It simply is amazing how a bunch of dysfunctional pedestrians could come together and create something so significant. I was in love with this country even before I arrived here.

So where should we go? News from our relatives in the US were always more encouraging from our relatives in other places. My sister was already here. Also my mother was very close to her younger sister who was already living with her family in Brooklyn. Her sister agreed to be our sponsor and guarantor, and so we left on our journey that would end up in New York. I was delighted that they had made that decision. Immigrating to the US was very stringent in those days, and we had to

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## *From Jacob Bouso*

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go through a very rigorous process that took us through France for a period of several months, while our paperwork was being processed by the HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society). We were grateful to the French government for assisting Egyptians Jews with that process.

Now my father was very hesitant about leaving. He was convinced that things would go back to normal in Egypt again; all we had to do is wait it out. It was clear that this was not going to happen. I can understand how he felt, considering that he was already 52 at the time and he faced the challenge of having to move to another country where he hardly spoke the language. I know I would be reluctant, too. But I am glad that he came around. The fact that my sister was already here helped him come around. Otherwise, we would have still been there in 1967.

A word about my father. He was in the import-export business and had access to the customs (until he was told he was not allowed there anymore because he was Jewish). Given his position, he helped many Jewish families with the shipping of their luggage. Whenever possible, he would arrange to have as many families as possible take with them a Torah scroll from one of the Synagogues. He would arrange it so the people at the customs would look the other way and let it go through. It was his way of saving the numerous scrolls that were sitting in the Cairo Synagogues. In the 1950's there were 39 Sephardic Synagogues in Cairo alone, and at least one Ashkenazi Synagogue that I could remember. Today, it is impossible to take the scrolls out; the Egyptian government considers them to be "Egyptian Relics." Many of the scrolls are still sitting inside the arks of empty Synagogues.

We took a Torah scroll with us when we left. It made its way in a duffle bag from Egypt to France and then to the United States. When we arrived here, we had a new box built for it. One day, we walked

it to Ahi Ezer Synagogue in Brooklyn, in front of a parade of music, singing and dancing in the street, from Avenue Z to Avenue X on Ocean Parkway. At that time, the Synagogue operated from a small garage. Regrettably, one day the Synagogue caught fire, and the scroll was destroyed.

When we left Egypt, although we left whatever assets we had behind, we were lucky to have had the luxury to plan and to pack for the trip. Ety's family had to leave overnight with their clothes on their backs and had no chance to plan for the trip. Her father was told he no longer could work at "Tissue Castro," a Textile company where he had been there for years. Someone was appointed to take his position. Her family left for France where they lived for seven years, waiting for their turn to immigrate to the United States on the quota system. They could feel the pressures of antisemitism in France; Ety and her friend Annie Benzaken were the only Jewish girls at the Lycée Claude Debussy and Ety's mother was fired from her job because she asked to take off for Yom Kippur. She was told that she did not have to bother coming back if she took off. Her mother's side of the family came from Syria; her father's side of family can trace its origins to Castillo in Spain; this is how they adopted their family name "Castel."

The deal was that Jews could leave Egypt, as long as they left their assets behind. Since we didn't have much of assets, this ended up being the best deal we ever made.

When we lived in France, I went to the Lycée while we were waiting for our visa. I was struggling. The environment was very different, less friendly and less personal. My school mates were not exactly welcoming to immigrants from North Africa. They were especially antagonistic to those who immigrated from Algeria. I enjoyed living in Paris, but again, I did not feel at home; I knew it was a temporary situation. I have enjoyed Paris much more when I went back in later years, especially when I was back to visit our relatives with Ety, Joseph and David.

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## *From Jacob Bousso*

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When we came to New York, the minute I set foot on the ground, I felt at home. I had this feeling that I always belonged here. It's very hard to explain. It was strange to see all these brick buildings in Brooklyn, yet I felt at home.

Etty and I met the following year after I we arrived and we started dating. Everything was going well, my life was off to a good start, until came the draft and Vietnam. That was 1968, the height of the Vietnam War.

I was drafted into the U.S. Army. I was just getting my bearings as I was starting my new life. In those days, many people were finding all sorts of ways to dodge the draft, by moving to Canada or claiming to be conscientious objectors. I felt that I had spent too much time of my life waiting to come to the US, and I was not about to jeopardize that situation. So I went into the Army, assuming that I could not be sent outside of the U.S. because I did not have a green card. Only to find out that U.S. Military Bases everywhere in the world are considered to be U.S. soil; therefore, from the Army's point of view, I was not leaving U.S. soil. I didn't know that, and I ended up serving 14 months in Vietnam. I was lucky to come back, and in one piece. Yet, I objected to the Army about the fact that I was not a citizen yet, and that I had no green card. "No problem," said the Army, "We can swear you in without a green card."

I figured if I am going to work and pay taxes like every American, if I am going to serve the country and risk my life like every American, then I should be able to vote like every American. So I was sworn in and I became a citizen before the rest of my family; they had to first wait five years before they could secure their green card. I went to Architecture School, got married and started a family.

My introduction to Shearith Israel came shortly after Etty and I moved down the block from the Synagogue. I was walking to work one day, and

a gentleman standing outside asked me if I was Jewish. When I told him I was, he asked if I could come inside and complete a Minyan. Although the service was close to the one I grew up with, I found it to be solemn and rigid. The choir sings beautifully, but it can be intimidating and not easy to sing along. Over time, I got used to it and now I very much enjoy the services, especially the morning Minyan. Shearith Israel has managed to cater to a variety of people coming from all over the world. We met many people and made many friends who have been amazingly supportive to our family during very difficult times. After the tragic death of our beloved son David, Shearith Israel provided us with tremendous emotional support, which was very helpful and very much appreciated.

Today, we are very happy to be part of the Shearith Israel family.

I would like to express my gratitude to my parents who took the leap of faith by leaving everything behind at an advance age in their lives and starting all over again. In fact, I have a lot of respect for all those of my parents' generation who did the same thing and moved to places where they hardly spoke the language. They didn't make it about themselves; they did it to secure the future of their families. I would also like to express my gratitude to this country that has adopted Etty and I as teenagers. We both took circuitous routes to come here, but we met right here in Brooklyn; and I am so glad we did. It was a life changer for me. I love this country, I served it well, and I will forever be grateful to it.



In Memory of David Bousso



*Viviane and Gerald Bregman and their 3 children, 3 daughters-in-law, and 12 grandchildren*

*From  
Viviane Naggar Bregman  
The Naggar/Smouha (Bregman) Family*

Viviane Naggar Bregman has been a member of Shearith Israel for over 55 years. She has roots in Egypt on both sides of her family tree. Her maternal grandfather, Joseph Smouha, was born and lived in Baghdad, Iraq and later moved to Manchester, England where he married Rosa Ades, who was originally from Damascus, Syria. Joseph Smouha was sent to Egypt by the British government during World War I, and after the war, brought his family to live in Alexandria. He bought Lake Mariut, drained it, and transformed it into a thriving modern city named after him: Smouha City.

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*Rosa and Joseph Smouha*

## *From Viviane Naggar Bregman*

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Few had confidence in his endeavor. They used to say, “Mr. Smouha has gone mad. He is throwing his money into dirty water.” They were wrong. Smouha City came to constitute three quarters of Alexandria. Joseph and Rosa Smouha had 9 children. The eldest was Marjorie, Viviane’s mother. Marjorie married Albert Naggar whose family came from Cairo.

Albert Naggar was one of ten children, seven boys and three girls, born to Marie Zakai and Isaac Naggar whose families had been in Egypt for many generations. Although trained as a lawyer, he went into the stock market with his six brothers. They had offices in Cairo and Alexandria. After the birth of their oldest daughter, Rosemary, they moved to Paris, a city Marjorie always loved. Viviane and her younger brother Guy were both born in France.

During World War II, after the Nazis arrived in Paris, Viviane and her family moved to Cannes in the south of France where they lived in hiding for several years. During that period, Marjorie and Albert had a fourth child, Ariel. She died when she was only a few days old after having been given formula that was too strong by an anti-semitic doctor who was later overheard to have said, “that’s one less Jew in the world.” In 1944, Viviane and her family tried to escape to Switzerland but were unsuccessful. They spent the last and most harrowing year of the war in Annecy, near the Swiss border. Ariel, along with Viviane’s parents, are buried in Israel on the Mount of Olives.

In 1960, Viviane traveled with her parents to the new state of Israel and fell in love with the country and wanted to return. Instead, in 1962 her parents sent her to visit friends in New York where they felt confident that she would return to them in France. But their plans

were thwarted by a blind date with Gerald Bregman that resulted in a Paris wedding six weeks later. After their honeymoon, Viviane and Gerry moved back to New York where they have lived ever since. They have been blessed with three sons, Bertie, Anthony and Peter, and twelve grandchildren. After her sons had grown, Viviane turned her energy to art and became a successful art dealer, a business which she still manages today.

Viviane has several first cousins who are members of the synagogue. On her mother’s side are Jeff Mosseri and Jean Mosseri Naggar, whose mother, Joyce Smouha Mosseri, was also a member of the synagogue. She was one of Marjorie’s younger sisters. On her father’s side is Marilyn Naggar Baer whose father, Gaston Naggar, was one of Albert’s younger brothers.





*The Family at Sham el Nessim Holiday at Joseph de Botton's villa in Mustapha Pasha in May 1957*

*From*  
***Lucienne Carasso Bulow***  
*The De Botton, Ardit, and Carasso*  
*Families of Alexandria*



Sham El Nessim, a Spring holiday that goes back to Ancient Egypt, was an occasion for the family to get together especially after my father Léon Guédalia Carasso and my uncle Joseph (Josy) de Botton were released from internment three months after the Suez Canal Crisis. We gathered at my uncle Josy and Aunt Viviane Nahmias to celebrate our being together again while knowing that our remaining days in Egypt were numbered. My maternal grandmother, Sol Ardit de Botton who was the lynchpin of our family was born in Alexandria and had declared that she would never leave Egypt. We all had to wait until she passed away before we would leave. In the case of my parents and me, we left in August of 1961.

My parents Fortunée de Botton and Léon Guédalia Carasso were both born in Alexandria, Egypt. So was I. Their families all came to Alexandria from Salonika in the Ottoman Empire between the third portion of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. They could all trace themselves back to Spain and spoke Judeo-Spanish. Actually, my paternal grandparents, Guédalia Carasso and Lucia (Lea) Barzilai were Spanish citizens. My grandfather was given the nationality around 1903.

My maternal great grandparents Ardit came to Egypt about 1880. The family was from Livorno (Leghorn) but some members subsequently went to Salonika. My great grandfather, Mercado Joseph Ardit was a banker and like many Europeans was attracted by the forward-looking policies of Muhammad Ali Pasha and the expected boom of the Suez Canal. My great grandmother was Signorou Angel. They had three sons, Isaac, Jacques and Albert who, I understand, were born in Salonika while my grandmother Sol, her sisters Regina and Ida and their younger brother, Salomon were all born in Alexandria. My grandmother, her sisters and younger brother spoke Italian as well as Spanish and French.

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## *From Lucienne Carasso Bulow*

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My maternal grandparents de Botton were Meir de Botton and Graziella Cohenca. I am not sure when they came to Alexandria from Salonika. I believe that my grandfather, Judah de Botton was born in Alexandria. He had two sisters, Rachel who married Salomon Orsini and Matilde who married Jacques Angel.

My grandparents, Judah de Botton and Sol Arditì had seven children:

1. Mario who married very late in life Rosine/Esther who converted to Judaism; they did not have any children
2. Yvonne who married Léon Moréno also didn't have any children; they were in some ways my second parents,
3. Odette, who married Amedeo Piperno. They were the parents of Sergio and Roberto Piperno
4. Joseph who married Viviane Nahmias. They were the parents of Gérard, Yves and Isabelle de Botton
5. Marcel who married Emma Shamaa. They were the parents of Mireille and Sarah de Bottom
6. My mother Fortunée and her twin sister Georgette who married Felix Halifi. Georgette died very young and did not have children.
7. Sergio Piperno lives in Florence and Roberto Piperno lives in Rome. Gérard, Yves, Isabelle, Mireille and Sarah de Botton all live in Paris.

On the Carasso side of my family, my paternal grandmother Lucia Barzilai Carasso came to Alexandria to join her family while pregnant with my father. My father's sister, Rachel, who was seven years older than he, was born in Salonika. I believe that my grandmother left Salonika to join her siblings and because the Balkan war was erupting. The Greeks were fighting to take over Salonika which they eventually succeeded to do. My grandfather did not join her. I found out that he

had obtained a laissez- passer in the summer of 1912 but was probably prevented from leaving because the Greeks took control of the city in September or October. He was apparently inducted into the Greek army. My cousin Luna Barzilai Rosenfeld told me that he had been wounded and walked with a limp. To my father's chagrin, his father never registered him as a Spanish citizen in the Spanish Consulate of Alexandria. My father never spoke of his father.

Both my mother and my father grew up without fathers. My grandfather Judah de Botton who worked in Tanta, I believe in the cotton industry in order to be able to support his large family, died young leaving my grandmother Sol a widow at the age of 35 with seven children. My mother and her twin sister were two years old. My oldest uncle Mario became the head of the family at the age of thirteen. My grandmother was unable to cope with the tragic situation, got sick and all the children rallied around her. My aunt Yvonne became the surrogate mother. My grandmother at first sought help from her brothers who were well off, but eventually my uncles and aunts had to fend for themselves. It was decided that the boys would go to school so they could get good jobs whereas the girls would stay home. My mother and her twin sister were mortified not to go to school.

With time, the family prospered. My uncles studied accounting and eventually founded a successful company in import and export of coal, pharmaceuticals and industrial products. My father started in the paper industry then traded in chemicals. He eventually discovered his passion: ships and the shipping business. After I was born, he obtained a ship agency. He represented Italian, Portuguese and Brazilian lines, but his main business was a Spanish liner company named Naviera de Exportación Agrícola, Madrid.

We led a very comfortable and tight family life. My parents and I lived with my Nonna Sol first in a villa that we also shared with my Uncle Marcel and his family, but eventually we moved to apartments. We

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## *From Lucienne Carasso Bulow*

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opened a door between two apartments, and Nonna Sol lived in one apartment with her “dame de compagnie” and my parents and I lived in the other one. Eventually, my Nona Carasso had to be operated from cataracts, and she moved with us. My cousins lived very close to us in Mustapha Pasha. I used to bicycle to their villa almost every afternoon. I went to movies, mostly American movies, three or four times a week.

As I was growing up everyone in the family spoke Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) although we all went to French schools and spoke French as our native language. We also spoke Italian, Arabic and knew some Hebrew. My Nona Carasso, however, only spoke Spanish or Greek. Inasmuch as I did not know enough Greek, I had to speak to her in Spanish. She almost spoke in Ladino proverbs. She had a proverb for every circumstance.

For school, I went to a Jewish school, the Lycée de l'Union Juive pour l'Enseignement which was Jewish private school. After November 2, 1956 when the Suez Canal Crisis occurred, all French and British teachers were expelled and most of my classmates left the country. The next year, I went to Catholic school, Notre Dame de Sion, where French nuns were not affected by the expulsion decree. The school curriculum changed a great deal after the new policies of the Nasser government were implemented.

My uncle's business was nationalized and a sequester took over the office. My father's agency was taken over by his Muslim shiphandler. We slowly started to liquidate everything. My Nonna Sol passed away in the fall of 1960. After I finished my school year and obtained my secondary diploma in Arabic, we left on the *MASSALLA* which transported many refugees from Egypt. My cousins had left for Paris

earlier. My parents and I went to Genoa because my father needed to be in a port. He established his business in our new large apartment while we applied for a visa to emigrate to the United States. One year later, we obtained the visa under a special program for stateless political refugees and arrived in New York in September 1962. For our first Yom Kippur in New York, we attended the downstairs service at Shearith Israel run by Rabbi Battan who was also from Egypt. It was a relief to find a service which felt familiar. We then moved to the East Side, and I started my college career at Hunter College.

After we left Egypt, my father always had his office at home, and I would help him in his work.

We tried several synagogues for Kippur but eventually concluded that Shearith Israel was home. Upon graduation from Hunter, I was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and went to Yale University where I obtained a Ph.D. in French literature. When I returned to New York and taught at Stern College for Women and York College of CUNY, I started to attend book discussions at Rabbi Marc and Gilda Angel's home. There, I met my husband, George.

After teaching for two years, I noticed that I was already repeating myself and decided to switch fields. I got into the shipping business by taking a typist job. I worked for two International Agricultural Products Trading companies. I was promoted and became the first woman maritime arbitrator in the world. I eventually was elected as President of the Society of Maritime Arbitrators, Inc.

I have had a long connection with Shearith Israel. Our children, Harris and Alessandra celebrated their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs here. I am a past president of the Shearith Israel League. One of my proudest achievements has been to produce the three CDs of the Historic Music of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in the City of New York. It was a labor of love which has tied me irrevocably to Shearith Israel.



## *From Jacques Capsouto*

Family tradition has it that the name Capsouto comes from Portugal, my ancestors eventually left Portugal and settled in Turkey. My father, Marco Capsouto, was born in Çanakkale, Turkey. At a young age he moved to Izmir, and when he was 18, he fled to Alexandria to avoid being conscripted into the Turkish army. In Egypt, he engaged in business, representing a French company that manufactured natural essences. My mother, Eva Russo was also born in Turkey and moved as a very young girl to Alexandria. My Parents met in Egypt and were married in Cairo in 1944.

After getting married my parents lived in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo. I was born in 1945 in the Jewish Hospital of Cairo, my brother Sami was also born in the same hospital 1946, and my brother Albert was born in a clinic in Heliopolis in 1956. We went to a Jewish School called *Abraham B'tesh* where we learned Jewish subjects along with secular subjects. In school and at home we spoke many languages – primarily French, Ladino and Arabic. Religiously, we frequented two synagogues, one was at *Abraham B'Tesh*, the other was the Azille deGuyere which catered to older people.

Even in my youth, I was aware of the growing anti-semitism around us. We would occasionally get into fights with local kids or get called names, it was obvious that Jews weren't wanted. This situation grew worse and worse. The final straw for our family was during the Suez war, when my father was arrested. We left Egypt after he was released leaving in 1957. At first we went to Italy, but ultimately my family settled in Lyon, France.

In France my father got a job with the company that he had represented back in Egypt. It was called *Decolange Freres*. We stayed in France for about 4 years before coming to the US. During that time I went to High school and learned how to be a car mechanic.

My parents had a big decision – to settle in France permanently, or to move to America. My mother and grandmother (Emily Russo, who had fled Egypt with us) wanted to move to America where my uncle and aunt were already living. My father and I wanted to stay in France. Ultimately, my mother won out and we came to America arriving in 1961. I was 16 years old.

We lived in Washington Heights. My language skills helped me find work. I was actually the first of the family to find a paying job. I found a job as a car mechanic with a Puerto Rican company, because I could speak Ladino and communicate in Spanish.

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## *From Jacques Capsouto*

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From my experience as a car mechanic, I went on to work for family friend who had a car dealership in Queens. Starting in the garage and back office, I eventually moved to the front office selling cars, in particular French cars like Citroen and Renault. To augment my income I worked weekends in restaurants or clubs. Speaking French was especially helpful in helping me find restaurant work. Eventually, I was working more in restaurants and clubs than as a car salesman.

In the mid 1970's I took a job at a restaurant in Soho and moved into the neighborhood. I realized that this neighborhood was under appreciated and there was great opportunity for growth. So together with my brothers we decided to open a restaurant. We started the first high-end French cuisine restaurant in Tribeca and named it *Capsouto Freres*.

Capsouto Freres became a success and the neighborhood became popular too. It was a special place with a great reputation and we became a cornerstone of the Tribeca community for more than 30 years. On September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Center was attacked, we took in students and other people who were running to escape the dust cloud that swept by as the towers fell. As the dust settled, we realized that we had food in the restaurant, so we decided to feed the first responders. We remained open and gave free hot meals to the police, fire and other responders at the World Trade Center for 17 days!

Our restaurant wasn't Kosher, but we were very Jewish. My mother, came every day to the restaurant often sitting in the front of the restaurant and greeting customers. She also supervised our Passover Seder Haggadah meals which we held every year in the restaurant. She passed away in 2003. In 2010, my brother Albert passed away from cancer. There is a small park named after him in the neighborhood. We closed the restaurant after damage from Hurricane Sandy in 2012. This ended a

very enjoyable and important chapter in my life, but by then a new chapter had opened as well.

Back in 2004, after attending a wedding of a relative in Israel, I became interested in Israeli wines. I started checking out the Israeli wine industry. By 2006 I was offering more than 23 Israeli wines at the restaurant. We were certainly the only non-kosher restaurant offering such an enormous selection of kosher Israeli wines.

At the time, the Israeli wine industry was mainly producing California style varietals; mainly Merlot, Cabernet, and Chardonnay. So, I thought I could do something different by growing French style varietals from the Rhône valley in Southern France. In 2010, I acquired 55 acres in the North of Israel. Kosher wine requires 4 years of growth before you can harvest the grapes for wine. So, 45 days before Rosh Hashanah in 2011 we planted grapes that I had brought from France. We had to calculate it out so that the 4th year wouldn't come out in a shemittah year which would have posed additional kashrut issues. Even though our restaurant in New York did not have *hashgacha*, Capsouto wines are certified kosher. I am very pleased that our wines are gaining an excellent reputation throughout Israel and America in the Kosher wine market.

Right from the beginning when we arrived in the US in 1961 we attended Shearith Israel. My uncle and aunt, Vitaly and Judith Nahum, were members of Shearith Israel so we went there too. There weren't any other Sephardic synagogues in Manhattan at that time. My brother Albert attended the Shearith Israel Talmud Torah and studied for his Bar Mitzvah with Reverend Bram Cardozo. During that time my mother became a very close friend with the Cardozo's, and remained close with Mrs. Cardozo for the rest of her life.

My life has undergone many changes from my youth in Egypt, schooling in France, moving to the US and becoming a restaurant owner for more than 30 years. Now, I have become a Vintner in Israel - I wonder where life will lead me next!



*From  
Emy Cohenca*

*The Cohenca and Menashe Families*



My husband, Jacques Cohenca, was born in 1922 in Alexandria. He grew up in Cairo, attending Italian, Jesuit, and French schools, ending at the Lycée Français. At home French, Italian, Spanish, Ladino, and kitchen Arabic were spoken. The cuisine was Middle Eastern and Italian. The languages were blended and the culture was multi-national. The Cohenca family held Spanish passports, tracing their heritage as Spanish Jews. The family owned a number of shops in Cairo and Alexandria: *Etablissements Giacomo Cohenca Fils*; selling lighting, radios, furniture, etc. The family would attend the high holidays at the Gates of Heaven (*Shà'ar Hashamayim*) synagogue on Rue Adly.

My father, Nissim Menashe, was born in Aleppo, Syria. At 12 he left to join his brothers in Peru. My mother, Vittoria Picciotto Segre, was born in Syria but grew up in Milan. My father went every week to Shabbat services with my brother Eddy. He was very religious. My mother was not.

I was born in Lima, Peru in 1934. When I was two my parents moved to Egypt, as their first choice, Italy, was in the throes of fascism and racial laws had been enacted. In Egypt it was the Colonial era, and my father developed a trade in cotton textiles. Every morning he would get up early,

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## From Emy Cohenca

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make himself a Turkish coffee, and walk a half hour to his office near the souk. Any customer who came to buy textiles was offered coffee with a glass of water.

Life in Cairo in the 1940s was a tossed salad of origins and ethnicities. Together my parents, me, my brother, Eddy, and my sister, Elsy, made our life. My father insisted we learn English, seeing it as the language of the future. We went to the English school in Cairo, and I remember playing field hockey in the desert, may pole dancing, and wearing a Tudor rose on my school uniform. I became prefect of York house, and Eddy was prefect of Drake house. As the school was a showcase, all diplomas were handed out by a member of the English royal family.

Jacques and I were married at the *Sha'ar Hashamayim* Synagogue in 1951 by the great rabbi Chaim Nahum, who at that time was already blind. Our son Philip was born in 1952, and our daughter Nevine in 1954. While growing up, being Jewish had always been a badge of honor; we knew that Egypt was no longer stable for people of our heritage, and planned to leave. At the time, the United States regulated immigration with quotas based on birth country. As I was born in Peru, I was able to move to America. My brother, born in Italy, and my sister, born in Egypt, would have to wait for years to immigrate. The Spanish embassy helped my family secure our papers and ship our valuables and items. My mother advised us that while furniture would be bought immediately by necessity when we arrived, non-essentials like rugs and silver were more worthwhile to bring with us. With that in mind Jacques, Philip, Nevine, and I moved to New Rochelle, New York in 1956. When we arrived, we joined a reform temple, as none of us was conversant in Hebrew.

Our family was young. We arrived ready to start a new life. Jacques founded an industrial importing company named Jason Industrial

(Jacques and son, shades of Giacomo Cohenca Fils), and I learned to raise a family in the suburbs of New York City.

Timing and circumstances in Egypt since we had left were incredibly difficult for my mother and sister. One day my father was listening to the BBC – which was forbidden at the time – and my mother and sister heard him fall. My sister ran across the landing for the Egyptian doctor, only to be told, “I don’t treat any Jews.” Later, after his passing, my father’s gravesite at the vast Bassatine cemetery was desecrated. Like so many others, his tombstone was ripped from its site and used for material elsewhere.

My mother and sister joined us in America in 1964, my sister on a student visa to go to Parsons and study interior design. My brother went to McGill University in Canada and once he had his papers, ended up in Los Angeles running the West Coast branch of Jason Industrial.

Ours is not a linear story – rather a memory museum, whose galleries are filled with recollections. Ours is a zig-zag story that conceals a single shining thread. That thread which winds through different continents, nations, and cities all over the world is our Jewish faith.

On my side of the family, the countries through which that thread winds are Syria, Italy, Peru, and Egypt. On my husband’s side, they are Spain, Salonika, possibly Turkey, and Egypt – where his family had stayed for three or four generations before we came to America.

When our children grew up, Jacques and I moved to the City, and in 1974 we joined Shearith Israel. Jacques, who died 20 years ago, would come every Saturday morning to hear the music and prayers, which were the same as in Cairo. It made him feel at peace.

Our family has grown in America. My children are married, and have raised their own children. I have great grandchildren! Our family comes together for the high holidays at Shearith Israel, remembering our culture and heritage, grateful for our good fortune.

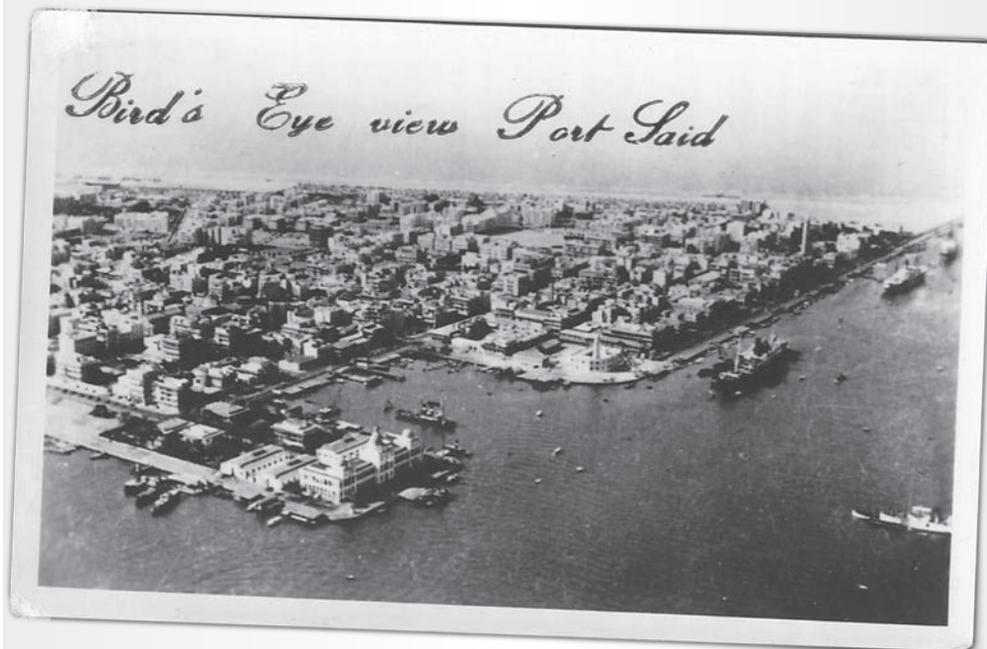


*From  
Dr. Raphael David*

*My Egyptian Heritage*

Both my parents were born in Aden and came to Port Said at the northern tip of the Arabian Peninsula as children. My father was a real estate administrator for many buildings, shops and apartments, in Port Said and my mother was a homemaker.

Life was very comfortable; my father was considered a VIP. We were part of a small thriving Jewish community. Families knew one another and were very supportive of one another. All families were French speaking,



forming a European enclave. The geographic location made for a coastal town being at the juncture of the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Canal. Café life was active and bustling as is typical of Mediterranean cities, and we were in fact on the Mediterranean coast. Many evenings my mother would meet my father in a café with friends before going to

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## *From Dr. Raphael David*

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dinner, a movie or both. We had a big beautiful public garden behind where we lived with a café, and I used to join my mother there in the afternoon and eat potato chips, 'patates frites'. There was also a gazebo and every Sunday there was a band playing in it and children in the garden.

Our family unit included non-family member who were integral in my childhood. Lea was what today would be called a nanny and something of mother figure to me. Fulla was a home caretaker who helped my mother with household duties; I can still hear my father saying 'Fulla, can to make me a coffee'. Mustafa was a doorman, but more than that – he was a key member of the family who shopped and kept me company if my parents went out... I loved him.

There was a small Hebrew School but I attended the Lyscee Francais. I was excused from school on Saturday for Shabbat. My first language, 'mother tongue' was French, followed by English at age 12 when I attended the British boys' school and later the renowned Victoria College. Like everyone in Egypt, we were exposed to several languages, such as Italian, Greek, even Maltese.

The lovely life started to change in 1948 when the Europeans and Jews were discriminated against. Some were imprisoned, including my father - all were Jews. He and several friends spent about a year in prison and released on the condition they would leave the country right away. However, my father was allowed to return to work until 1956 after the Suez war with Israel when my parents left having seen the handwriting on the wall. They were advised by my father's friend the British Counsel to leave, saying they would not be able to protect them if they stayed.

So the beautiful life ended when my parents, along with many Jews of Egypt fled to various countries. Since they were British citizens they could have gone to Israel or England and chose the latter. In London they arrived with very little money and for over a year lived in a room with a hot plate. Later they were able to get some of their money out of Egypt. They bought a house in North London which incurred income by renting numerous flats, and they slowly they rebuilt a new life.

I left Port Said to study medicine in Lausanne Switzerland, then I came to this country for post graduate training in Sinai and Johns Hopkins Hospitals in Baltimore. I went on to a position at the University of Chicago, then was recruited to New York University Medical Center. I began attending Shearith Israel for Shabbat and holidays, and subsequently became a member. From the beginning until now, I have been comfortable at the synagogue as it is comprised of members with similar backgrounds to mine.





*Family photo taken on Rosh Hashanah 1961 in Alexandria.*

## *From Alain Farhi*

*The Farhi Family in Egypt 1899-1967*

*Egyptian by birth*

*Jewish by faith*

*French by education*

*American by adoption*

My paternal grandfather Hillel Farhi was born in 1868 in Damascus to a Sephardic prestigious family whose ancestors, originally from Catalonia (ca 1302), arrived in Syria in 1731. He visited Egypt for the first time in 1899. Shortly after receiving his MD degree from London, he returned to Egypt and married Esther Setton from Aleppo. Hillel

died in Cairo in 1940 after a long career as Chief Doctor of the Royal Egyptian Railways. In addition to his private practice, Hillel was also a prolific author of religious essays, commentaries, books and articles in literary newspapers. He translated into classical Arabic the daily prayer book (Siddur Farhi) as well as the High Holidays prayer books and the Haggadah. This endeavor had finally allowed Jews of Arab countries to understand their prayers and it allowed the Arab countries to better understand their Jewish countrymen. These books remain to this day the only ones ever published with an Arabic translation.

My father Azar Farhi was his eldest son. As many Jewish boys of his generation, he was educated at a Jesuit school. In their quest for the best education for their children, Jewish families did not hesitate to send them to a Catholic parochial school. They did not perceive it as a threat to their Jewish principles and community. Azar studied law and was intending to practice at the International Courts (*Tribunaux Mixtes*). But upon graduation, the International Courts were abolished. Foreign residents in Egypt could no longer be judged according to the laws of their country of origin. Egyptian laws became the rule of the land, applied to all residents.

My father had to pivot and choose a new career. He started Peerless, a knitting factory for t-shirts, underwear and socks. With Nasser's policy of economic strangulation of the Jewish community, my father's business was nationalized in 1963. Shortly after, he was asked to lead as general manager for the conglomerate of all the nationalized knitting factories. And life went on until June 1967.

He married my mother Antoinette Harari in 1943 and lived in Garden City near the Nile. My maternal grandparents were both born in Aleppo. My grandfather Ibrahim Harari came to Egypt in the early 1900 to seek his fortune. He had a business importing British woolen fare.

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## From Alain Farhi

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My parents had 4 children. I am the eldest son. We all went to the Lycée Français du Caire de Bab El Louk, a secular private school where most Jewish families sent their children. Children of well-to-do Muslim and Christian families were sent there as well. The curriculum was rigorous and most teachers were French nationals. Wednesday afternoons were reserved for sports and boy scouts' activities when we were bused to the Méadi track and field complex. Most kids knew each other but rarely socialized after school hours because of heavy loads of homework. We socialized on Sundays-our only day off before 1957. After the October War in 1956, The Egyptian Ministry of Education took over the direction of the school. The French administrators and teachers were expelled and 50% of the curriculum was taught in Arabic a language we spoke fluently. Classmates from the Lycée have remained close friends whether they emigrated or stayed in Egypt.

Our religious education was done by our parents. Sit-down dinners on Friday nights and for the high holidays were the big events. For my bar mitzvah, rote learning was supervised by a rabbi during private sessions. During the winter, we all met for Friday night service at the downtown synagogue *Sha'ar Hashamayim* commonly known as *Temple Ismaëlia* to plan our activities for Saturday evening and Sunday.

As most teenagers in Cairo, my social life was centered around going to the movies, biking, card games, backgammon, and sports. I was an avid swimmer and fencer (saber). Every Sunday morning, I would go horseback riding in the desert around the Pyramids and the Sphinx in Giza. We had to avoid any political discussions as it would bring our parents aggravations and reprisal from the authorities, so our social gatherings were mostly spent dancing to American, French and Italian songs. I have fond memories of the

three long months of summer vacations my family took in Alexandria, a city bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

After graduation in 1961, I went to Paris to study engineering. My family (parents, two sisters and a brother) stayed in Cairo. Having kept my Egyptian passport (very unusual for a Jew after 1956), I did return to Cairo for several summer visits.

On June 6, 1967, my father, brother and our Farhi relatives were spared the automatic round up of Jews by Nasser. My future father-in-law was summarily expelled as he held an Italian passport. During the 6-Day War, my family hunkered down and left in July abandoning all of their assets. After a sailing from Alexandria to Marseille, they arrived in Paris to wait for a US authorization facilitated by the HIAS to immigrate as refugees. On February 29, 1968, we landed at Idlewild airport in freezing weather and were driven by my maternal uncle to Brooklyn in his huge American car to start our American life.



In December 1974, Jeannine Toueg and I were married at the Spanish Portuguese Synagogue in a ceremony officiated by the late Rabbi Louis Gerstein (z'l).

Jeannine's parents Maurice Toueg and Sarina Sabbagh were both born in Egypt with their ancestors arriving at the turn of the 19th century from Iraq and Aleppo respectively. A description of her mother's apartment and life in Cairo at that time can be found in Lucette Lagnado's book, *The*

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*From Alain Farhi*

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*Jeannine parents' engagement photo in 1945.*

*Man in the White Sharkskin Suit.* Jeannine and her family left Egypt in June 1967. As Italian citizens, they resided in Milano for a few years before immigrating to NYC. Maurice Toueg owned a construction company in Cairo and imported textiles in Italy.

In 1988, we were posted overseas, returning to the US only in 2005. We (re) joined Congregation Shearith Israel in 2010 as we were often in Manhattan for the Jewish Holidays.



Jeannine and I have two children: Philippe and Sabrina and three grandchildren: Hannah, Theo and Nico. Philippe and his wife Libby live in San Francisco; and Sabrina and her husband Adam live in Brooklyn.

The photo above was taken recently in Florida. Pictured from left to right are: Theo, Philippe, Jeannine, Sabrina, Nico, Adam, Libby, Hannah, and Alain.



*From*  
***Rabbi Albert Gabbai***

*A Personal Story*

To tell my personal story in Egypt is really to tell the story of many of my coreligionists. I was blessed of being born a Jew to parents who came from different backgrounds as were many Jews who came to Egypt beginning in the nineteenth century. I am one of ten siblings. It was wonderful to be part of such a large family. Our father was born in Baghdad to a family of rabbis and learned sages (the name Gabbai goes back to Talmudic times. In the Talmud tractate of Sanhedrin it says “Kol Gabbai Kasher,” every Gabbai is honest). As a child, my father came to Egypt with his family, like many others, to find fortune there. He traded in silk shirts. Our mother came from a family originally from Leghorn, Italy. They met in Egypt. Like many of the Jews in Egypt our culture was French (and Italian, and English and Greek). Her mother, my grandmother, was born in Salonica, Greece. Her family spoke Spaniolit (Ladino) and many of her sisters married in the Ashkenazi community.

So, we were sent to French school, the Lyçée Laique (secular) Français or the Collège de la Salle (French Catholic school). Just imagine: An observant Jew, in a French Catholic school, in a Moslem country! The majority of the students were Jews but we made friends very naturally and easily with all, Jews, Christians and Moslems alike. We had a wonderful easy life with a lot of privileges.

When Nasser’s Pan Arab nationalism swept the whole Middle-East life became very difficult for the Jews. Like many others we started leaving Egypt. First four of our brothers left and went to the USA where they became US citizens. Although the Egyptian government was very happy to expel us and kick us out, they made our life miserable by giving us a hard time to get out. (Prevalence of contradictions in the Arab world.)

When I was in high School in June 1967, we were supposed to get out that summer. We were Just waiting to be granted an exit visa,

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*From Rabbi Albert Gabbai*



which were so coveted and yet so difficult to obtain. When the Six-Day War broke out my three brothers and I were rounded up by the secret service and put in a prison camp. (Thank God they did not touch the women.) They would not tell our mother of our whereabouts.

Three years passed, until under pressure from the outside, we were let go. We were taken from the prison camp directly to the airport, inside a plane and flown to Paris. (From extreme confinement to extreme freedom!)

It was about a year later, when I arrived in New York, on a snowy night in January. I still remember the melody played at the Kennedy airport: "If I were a rich man..." It was a dream come true to finally arrive in America and be reunited with my family.

When I became a student at Yeshiva University, I went to the Library to look at the micro films of the New York Times to see what was going on while I was in that horrible hole for three years. I discovered (a bit not surprised) that there were constant demonstrations at the Egyptian delegation at the United Nations in New York demanding the release of the Jews in prison camps in Egypt. I was not surprised of these demonstrations by our fellow Jews because as the Talmud says, "the Jewish people is like the human body, if a limb hurts, the whole body hurts." No doubt that we can say that this effort contributed to our freedom.

Blessed be the people of Israel. *Am Yisrael Hai.*

*Rabbi Gabbai was the Assistant Hazzan of Shearith Israel from 1983-1986. He has been the Hazzan and Rabbi of our sister synagogue, KK Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia since 1988. We are most pleased that he could join us for this evening's event.*



*From*  
***Renee Laniado Guilmette***

*The Laniado Family*

My grandfather, Solomon (Sam) Laniado, was born in Cairo in 1886, and was one of 8 children. His parents immigrated to Egypt from Damascus and Aleppo, where the Laniado's were chief rabbis in the 1700 and 1800s.

I'd like to claim them as relatives (have no proof back that far) as their first names were mostly Solomon and Saul, which are still present as

our family names! My grandfather also had Italian citizenship, and I have a copy of his military exemption from Livorno Italy (issued in Cairo).

I assume the family moved to Cairo in the mid 1800s but always kept Italian citizenship that they used to travel abroad, and helped them when they had to quickly leave Egypt.

The family was comfortable in Egypt. The children went to school in the morning and were home by noon for lunch and siesta. The men spent the late afternoons in the café's playing backgammon. I learned to play backgammon on my grandfather's inlay wood set he brought from Egypt, and it remains a treasured piece in my household. The children had swimming lessons and the family vacations in Alexandria at the beach and traveled within Egypt to the pyramids.

Sam left Egypt when he was 17 and traveled to South America to sell cloth as a travelling salesman. He went first to Brazil, but was in Haiti by 1913. He traveled back and forth to NYC where he met his future wife, Fannie, who was working for one of his clients. Solomon came from Haiti to NYC on a first-class ticket so he could avoid medical examination as his glaucoma would have denied him entry.

Sam settled in NYC with Fannie and joined Shearith Israel. They were married in 1921 by Rev. Dr. Pool, who also married his son Saul Laniado to Helen in 1946. And our family has been proud members ever since.

Sam spoke at least 7 or 8 languages. In Cairo they spoke French in the house, but Arabic on the street. My grandmother always liked to joke she was frustrated because he talked Arabic in his sleep and she couldn't tell what he was saying!



*From*  
***Lawrence Lewitinn***  
*The Lewitinn and Green Families*



**Lewitinn** isn't a typical Sephardi name because, in fact, the family came from Eastern Europe. My ancestor, Nathan Levitin (that was the name back then) was born in Voronezh in southwestern Russia in 1846. After being forced to serve in the Russian army for 25 years—as many Jews were in those times—Nathan went to Romania, where he met his wife, Marguerite (Miriam) Landes, and then moved to Egypt. By 1892, they had three children, Cecile, Aron, and Isaac Moïse. Unfortunately, Marguerite died shortly after her third child was born.

Cecile married Joseph Misrahi while Aron married Joseph's sister, Fortunée. The two Misrahis were children of Ezra and Sarina Esther. As for Isaac Moïse, he left for France together with their father, Nathan, who became a silversmith in Paris. When Nathan died in 1912, Isaac Moïse moved to the United States where he eventually took up painting, changing his first name to Landès in memory of his mother. As one of the leading founders of “The Club” in Greenwich Village, he helped to create the intellectual and social environment that led to the New York School of Art and Abstract Expressionism. Some of his works were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, which owns a few of his pieces. Elements of his childhood in Egypt, including his color choices and the inclusion of Jewish themes, often found their way into his art. Thus it can be argued that modern American art has at least some Egyptian Jewish DNA.

Aron Lewitinn (as he would spell it) and Fortunée Misrahi had four children: Albert Aharoun, Michel, Victoria Miriam, and Simon. Aron died in the late 1940s and his wife survived him by well over a decade. Michel died as a young man without any children. Victoria and her husband, Yehuda Katz, moved to Israel, where she died in 1996. Simon and his wife Caroline also moved to Israel, where he passed away in 2011.

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## *From Lawrence Lewitinn*

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Meanwhile, Albert married Sarah Amiga, who was born in Alexandria in 1912 to Syrian Jewish immigrants Nessim Amiga and Farida Dayan. Albert and Sarah's had ten children: Fortunée (Yeh), Jeanette (Benzaken), Fernande, Michael Victor, Rachel Madeline (Algazi), Nessime Moïse, David, Marc Albert, Henri Aaron, and Solomon. Fernande and Henri unfortunately passed away when they were little children.

An electrical engineer, Albert helped introduce television technology to Egypt. The Lewitinn's stayed in Egypt until after the Suez War. At that point, the situation became difficult for Jews. My grandparents, Albert and Sarah, took their then unmarried children with them to Paris by way of Cyprus, where they lived for about a year (Rachel, with her husband Jack Algazi and their children, remained until the Six Day War). As he was a Freemason, Albert was able to get the family sponsored by a lodge in Baltimore. The family arrived in the US in 1959. Albert became an engineer at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and developed machinery that made many types of open heart and kidney surgeries possible. Sarah passed away in 1971 at just 59 after a bout with cancer. Albert moved to Atlanta, where he died in 1989.

Marc spent his younger years traveling the U.S., living in places like Ohio and California, sometimes spending time on American Indian reservations and gaining a pilot's license. In 1964, visiting family in Paris, he reconnected with a friend from Egypt, Felix Green. Visiting Felix at his parent's apartment, he once again met Felix's sister Ondine. They stayed in touch by letters and phone calls and were married in Paris in January 1968.

The precise origin of the **Green** family is uncertain. It's believed they came to Egypt sometime during the 1500s or 1600s from Iraq. According to British Foreign Office documents from the 1920s, some suspect their name was originally Gherein. What is known is that they became one of the most prominent Egyptian Jewish families. As the story is told, sometime in the 1800s, two Green brothers got into an argument, with one going to Alexandria while the other stayed in Cairo. Greens can be found in many positions of leadership in the Jewish communities of both cities. For example, there was a synagogue named for the family in Alexandria while key members of the B'nai B'rith Lodge and the Association de la Jeunesse Juive Egyptienne in Cario were also Greens, many of whom were descended from Yacoub Cattau.

One Green family member, Yacoub, had a son named Aslan (Turkish for "lion;" his Hebrew name was Yehuda). Originally in the marble and stone industry, Aslan made a vertical move into the funerary business. According to folklore, when someone in the Jewish community died, people would shout from their windows to alert Aslan Green since telephones were scarce in those days.

Aslan's wife, Adila Talmid, had Tunisian origins and together they had five children – Vita Haim (my grandfather,) Yaakov, Bertha, Yvonne, and Nessim. It was said that at a young age, Vita was knocked unconscious after a door hit him while at school. His parents, desperate for a miracle, pledged to donate oil every year to the gravesite of Rabbi Yakov Abuhatzera, who was buried in Damanhur, about 100 miles northwest of Cairo. Their prayers were quickly answered.

Vita, became a poids plume (featherweight) champion amateur boxer with the Maccabee club in Cairo, facing fierce opponents from places like Italy and other parts of Africa. He even had some fans, one of whom found him years later when he lived in Paris and had him autograph an old newspaper clipping of one of his matches.

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## *From Lawrence Lewitinn*

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At the Maccabee club, Vita met my grandmother, Fortunée Albouker, a member of Les Basquetteuses, a Jewish women's team (four years ago, their team photo was part of an exhibit at Israeli embassies worldwide). Both were also members of He-Halutz Ha-Tzair, a pioneering Zionist group affiliated with the Maccabee organization.

Fortunée's father was also named Vita Haim, he moved to Cairo from Turkey during the Great War, supplying shoes to the British soldiers stationed in Egypt. His wife Rivka Darmon's family came from Algeria to Egypt with the French Army to protect the Suez Canal. Rivka's maternal uncle, Marc bey Bialobos, was a prominent industrialist who had a hand in building the railroad between Cairo and Alexandria (my grandmother would later recall being able to ride that train free with her mother when she was a child.) Vita and Rivka Albouker had seven children. My great-grandfather died in the early 1920s. This left Rivka to face the hardship of struggling to care for her large family; My grandmother would sometimes run off to the cemetery and beg people entering it if they would bring back her father.

Fortunée and Vita Green were married in January 1944 and he put up his boxing gloves to open a small store. They had a honeymoon in Eretz Yisrael, visiting Vita's aunt and taking in pioneering life—that is, until sleeping in a barn proved impossible since neighing donkeys kept them awake at night. They had a daughter, Ondine and a son, Saad Felix. However, this period of time was difficult for Jews.

By the late 1940s, only 5,000 Jews were Egyptian citizens. Some 30,000 were foreign citizens and the majority—about 50,000 Jews—were stateless when measures were taken to squeeze “foreigners” from their perceived influence in the economy. The Company Law of July 29, 1947 required that 90% of all employees had to be Egyptian citizens.

At that point, thousands of Jews applied for citizenship. It was nearly impossible for most people—Arabs, Jews, or Europeans—to fulfill the requirements of the law and become citizens. To produce the necessary proof, my grandfather and great-grandfather made rubbings of the tombstones of their ancestors going back far enough to prove they were established in Egypt for over 100 years.

Yet Egyptian citizenship was not enough to keep them from suffering at the hands of the government. Shortly after Egypt and its Arab allies attacked the nascent State of Israel, My grandfather and many other Jews were arrested and held for months at Huckstep, a former British air base outside of Cairo. During their internment, Jews took pity on their guards—many were poorly paid and poorly fed—and set up vegetable gardens for them. When Fortunée was permitted to visit, she brought cakes for the jailers. It turned out to be lifesaving. Once, when Muslim Brotherhood inmates who were also interned there rioted with plans to slaughter the Jewish prisoners, the guards intervened, citing the charitable treatment they received from the Jews.

After his release from Huckstep, Vita tried to resume his life in Cairo but frequent arrests and harassment of Jews made it even harder. For Ondine, this harassment would stop for several months, but only because she contracted malaria and needed to recuperate. Later in life, she would often visit Dr. Cohen, the man who treated her, until he passed away a few years ago in Florida.

Two more daughters were born to Vita and Fortunée in the mid-1950s—Brenda Rebecca (Didia) and Clementine (“Nancy” Tabache)—but after the Suez War, staying in Egypt was just about impossible. The Green family left in December 1957. All of Vita's siblings and all of Fortunée's sisters went to Israel, but my grandparents joined the Albouker brothers in France. They settled where they could: Garges-lès-Gonesse, a banlieue outside of Paris, where Ondine went on to study bacteriology.

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## *From Lawrence Lewitinn*

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My parents were married in Paris in 1968. The newlyweds joined the rest of the Lewitinn family, which had trickled into Brooklyn, joining other Sephardi Jews in the Midwood neighborhood. My mother worked at a laboratory in Mount Sinai hospital. But, after her first son, Albert Philip, was born, Ondine left the lab to take care of her home in Brooklyn. A few months before her second son Lawrence Victor was born, her entire family moved to the United States, and moved just a few blocks from her. In 1980, Marc and Ondine moved to Tenafly and just a few months later, their daughter Sarah was born.

Since he had a small shop on West 72nd Street, Marc was sometimes invited to help make a minyan at Shearith Israel by Dr. Charles H. Kremer, one of the most persistent Nazi-hunters in America and a member of the synagogue. Through this connection my parents became members of Shearith Israel in 1984.

Throughout the years, my father joined Dr. Kremer and Simon Wiesenthal as an activist with the American Committee to Bring Nazi War Criminals to Justice. In the early 1980s, remembering his own experience in Egypt, Marc was the founder of the Falasha Freedom Foundation, which brought to light the persecution of Ethiopian Jews. The organization put pressure on the Israeli government to finally take action as it did in 1984 with Operation Moses, the mass rescue mission that saved the lives of several thousand Jews.

My parents, siblings, and I are all still members of Shearith Israel. In 2014, I married Robin Monheit. Our son had his berit, and our daughter was named here at Shearith Israel. In keeping with Egyptian Jewish tradition, we named our children Marc Asher Victor and Aurélie Ondine Jane, so the names of our Egyptian Jewish ancestors will remain alive for future generations.





*From*  
***Jean Mosseri Naggar***  
*The Mosseri, Smouha, and Naggar Families*

When I was 19 years old, I left my home in Egypt, permanently blown into a larger life and wider world by fierce winds of change. A mere footnote to history, the Suez crisis of 1956 is little known in the larger world, and less remembered. But the shock waves it created uprooted my family, scattered hundreds across the world, leaving them with no support systems, few possessions, and a history no-one understood. It decimated the deeply rooted, ancient Jewish communities of Egypt, some 80,000 strong and centuries old. In a climate of profound stress and fear, we Jews had instantly become the enemy.

My father's Mosseri family had made their home in Egypt for some 200 years. Prosperous merchants in Toledo, Spain, they fled the Spanish Inquisition of 1492 and settled in Livorno, Italy, leaving behind their comfortable lives for an unknown future. From Livorno, they traded across the Mediterranean for several generations, until one branch of the family, led by the first recorded Nessim Mosseri, moved to Cairo, Egypt and settled there in 1750.

The growing Mosseri family became firmly entrenched in the multilingual multicultural Jewish communities of Egypt, bringing their European sensibility to bear on the culture and institutions of their new home, becoming influential journalists, jurists, bankers, and financiers, leaders in the thriving Jewish community of Cairo. Their many achievements enabled them to undertake the construction of synagogues, and the establishment of hospitals, schools, orphanages and community centers.

My great-grandfather, Nessim Mosseri, had a short life, but accomplished much. Among his many achievements, he built the *Sha'ar Hashamayim* Synagogue in Cairo's Rue Adly, and married Elena Cattaoui, daughter of another ancient and respected Egyptian Sephardic family. Nessim Mosseri was instrumental in establishing the Tribunaux Mixtes, a unique legal system based on Napoleonic law, presided over by judges from the

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*From Jean Naggar*

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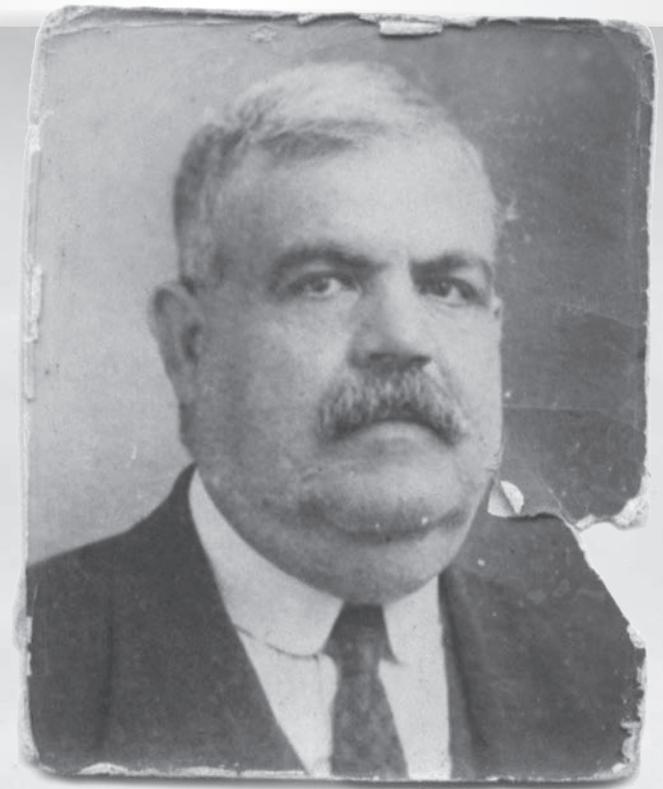
Hague and elsewhere. This unique judicial system was the only court of private international law ever to exist.

Elena and Nessim had a son, Joseph Nessim, my grandfather. When my grandfather, Joseph, was ten years old, legend has it that a holy man came to the door of his parents' house, and Elena offered him food and shelter. He told her that if she wanted more children she should sleep one night on a slab of the ancient Maimonides synagogue and should name her next son Eli, after him. Yes, this is legendary, but it is an indisputable fact that in the years that followed, great-grandmother Elena gave birth to ten more children, one a year. The boys, except for Joseph, were all sent to England for their education.

In 1987, great-grandfather Nessim established two financial institutions for his large family. The Banque JN Mosseri Figli, an investment bank, was run by his two eldest sons, Joseph and Eli. Across a narrow passageway, a commercial bank, the Banque Mosseri, housed the younger sons. Sadly, handsome blue-eyed Nessim died in his early forties, and it was Elena's distinctive dark Cattai eyes that passed down the generations to my brother, Jeff Mosseri, and my grandson Yaniv Naggar, among others.

Along with financing palaces and other real estate for the royal family, Joseph and Eli Mosseri financed the building of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The Khedive of Egypt had wanted to make my grandfather, Joseph, his Minister of Finance, but settled on awarding him the title of Bey when Joseph Mosseri refused to renounce his Italian citizenship and become Egyptian, a decision which was to have beneficial repercussions on his children and grandchildren when Egyptian Jews were expelled without passports or possessions as a result of the Suez crisis.

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## *From Jean Naggar*

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Lady Emma (Aghion) Harari became the representative of the Jewish community at royal functions, and was later succeeded by her younger sister, my grandmother, Jeanne (Aghion) Mosseri. As lady-in-waiting, in great elegance and much bejeweled, Granny Mosseri attended royal functions at the Egyptian court, (where her son, Nessim, was royal counsel), for many years.

My father, Guido Mosseri, ten years younger than his older brother, Nessim, was the late-life child of Joseph and his wife, Jeanne Aghion Mosseri. They moved out of the family home in the Rue Fouad and built a mansion in Giza, across from the banks of the Nile, with a small synagogue in the garden. My father, a cultured, charming man with literary sensibilities, much humor, and many languages, completed legal studies, but at 23, his beloved older brother died, and his father died six months later. Staunchly shouldering his responsibilities, he abandoned his legal career and took over the running of the Banque JN Mosseri Figli. In February 1937, he married a daughter of Joseph

Smouha, Joyce Smouha, whose red hair, musical talent, and engaging vitality brought him much joy. In 1956 he was summoned to government offices on Joseph Mosseri Bey Street (so named in honor of his father) to receive an order of expulsion for himself and his family. An ultimate irony.

Segueing to 1962, I married Serge Naggar. We were both a long way from our childhood homes in Egypt, where I could have seen Serge's grandmother's house where he grew up, from the roof of my grandmother's house in Giza, where I lived until the Suez crisis. We married in Geneva Switzerland and I moved to Manhattan, where Serge was then working for IBM. My parents introduced us to Shearith Israel, where Rabbi David de Sola Poole and my father knew each other, and where Victor Tarry welcomed us with open arms. I looked around me during services and felt at home. I saw faces that seemed faintly to echo so many of the faces of my childhood.

Shearith Israel has been an integral part of our lives now for 56 years. My mother, Joyce Smouha Mosseri moved to New York after our father died. She was a faithful member of Shearith Israel and an active participant in League events along with my brother Jeffrey Mosseri, until she left us in her hundredth year, in 2013.

Our children all attended the Hebrew School, and for years, Serge instituted and ran the annual Sephardic Fair, where our family of all ages helped at the booths. Our first outings with each of our three babies were to Shearith Israel. Our sons, Alan Joseph and David Jacques, had their Bar Mitzvahs there. Our daughter, Jennifer, was the first girl to celebrate a Bat Mitzvah in the small synagogue at Shearith Israel. She later helped out in the administrative offices, and then taught in the Hebrew School before attending Cornell University. She and Michael Wertz were married at Shearith Israel. She now presides over the 40-year-old literary agency ([www.JVNLA.com](http://www.JVNLA.com)) that began in a corner of our living room, when she was 12.

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## From Jean Naggar

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Our eldest son Alan moved to LA in the late nineties. He married Michele Rose in 2013. He managed musicians, acted in commercials and movies, directed, and produced, and most recently headed up the Interact Theater.

His generous and kind heart and booming laugh are sorely missed by the many friends and colleagues he mentored through the years. His loss to his family is beyond words. He died in late December 2017.

Our son, David, married Karen Benchetrit in Paris in 1992. His eldest son, Ari Naggar, had his Bar Mitzvah at Shearith Israel just before their family moved to Seattle for David to begin working at Amazon, where he is a VP, head of Kindle content, self-publishing, and print, world wide.

Our seven grandchildren hold the key to the future, but I held the key to their past, to a time before economics, politics and war blew entire families, like thistledown, across the face of the world to forge a future in foreign soil. So I wrote a memoir, *Sipping from the Nile, My Exodus from Egypt*, to give my children and grandchildren a glimpse at a past from which they have been forever excluded. It is available on Amazon if you would like to read it.

This summer will see the publication of my first novel, *Footprints on the Heart*. Centered in New York City and rooted in the Egyptian experience, it fulfills my childhood dream of growing up to be a novelist.

Our three granddaughters are 18, 19, and 21 years old. I glance back from my 81 years to my 19-year-old self and see how life has surprised me. But my beautiful Egyptian childhood furnished the planks to build the raft of exile on which Serge and I sailed together, to rebuild our lives and family so far from where we began.



In Memory of Alan Joseph Naggar



## *From Roberto Salama*

### *The Alexandria, Egypt; Livorno, Italy; and Cochabamba, Bolivia Connection*

Many Egyptian Jews, especially from Alexandria, had a connection with Livorno, Italy. Jews from Tuscany began settling in Egypt already in the early 19th Century. Our family's connection to Italy is documented starting with Salomone Salama who lived in Alexandria together with his wife Mira in the 1830's. But his marriage certificate, was registered with the Commune de Livorno, as were the birth and death certificates of his sons and daughters, including my great –grandparents, Lazzaro and Elena Salama.

My grandfather, Umberto Salama, lived in Egypt, but he too had an Italian connection, having served in the Italian Army during World War I. He left Egypt in 1933 for Venezuela. Unfortunately, he died at



an early age in 1938 leaving my grandmother Claire Anzarut, a widow with three young sons. After WWII, they moved from Venezuela to Bolivia where my grandmother's relatives, the Anzarut and Attie families (originally from from Syria,) had settled.

My father Ricardo and his older brother, Lazaro remained in Bolivia. They went into business and had families of their own. Their younger brother (my uncle) emigrated to the US in the early 1960's. My brother, David, and I later left Bolivia to study abroad.

The synagogue in Bolivia where we grew up was built and financed by an Alexandrian Jew named Isaac Antaki. The Antaki's had come to Bolivia from Kobe, Japan where they owned a successful textile business importing cotton from Egypt and exporting silk to Europe.

Bolivia has always been a safe haven for Jews. Even though the community is very small now, it once numbered close to 8,000. Included above is a picture of the synagogue built by Isaac Antaki in Cochabamba, Bolivia, The synagogue was inaugurated in 1947.

My wife, Jadranka (Adrienne) and I came to New York in 1979. We have two children, Jessica and Allen. We became members of Shearith Israel and our children went to the Talmud Torah, studied with Rabbi Hayyim Angel and with Rabbi Ira Rohde, and had their bar and bat mitzvah celebrations at Shearith Israel, where we are still members today. Allen is now a Senior in college and Jessica recently made Aliyah to Israel.



*From  
L. Gilles Sion*

*The Sion Family*



I was born in Cairo in 1956, just a few weeks before Egypt's Suez War with France, the UK and Israel erupted. Although my father's family had been in Egypt for more than a century, within six months we had joined a second exodus of Jews from Egypt, as we made our way, first to North America, and then to Switzerland, for a new life far from Cairo's muezzins and minarets.

My father, Elie Sion, was born in Cairo in 1923, the last of eight children, one of whom had died in early childhood. His father, Léon, was a lawyer, born to a proudly French family that had emigrated to Egypt from Algeria, then a département of France. One of the scions of the family had supplied jute bags to the French engineering company that excavated the Suez Canal in the mid-nineteenth century.

My father's mother, Latifa Sourour, had emigrated to Cairo as a child from Beirut, and married my grandfather, much to the chagrin of

*(continued)*

## *From L. Gilles Sion*

*(continued)*

my grandfather's siblings, who as French-Egyptian "grandees" looked askance at poor immigrants from the Levant. During the hot Cairo summers, the family vacationed in huts in Ras-el-Bar, where the Nile delta met the Mediterranean, and traveled through Palestine to the mountains of Lebanon.

My grandfather died at 49 after a short bout with typhoid fever, leaving my grandmother to care for her seven children, with the help of my father's older brother Marcel, also a lawyer, who practiced in the so-called Mixed Courts (which adjudicated disputes involving foreign nationals in Egypt). Like most good Jews in Cairo, my father and his siblings attended Jesuit schools, where the language of instruction was French. He excelled at math and eventually enrolled in the engineering school of Cairo University. On graduating, he joined the Tractors and Engineering Co., which served as the Egyptian distributor for York, the US air conditioning manufacturer.

My mother, Jeanette Kamri (who everyone knew as Jean), was born to a modest family. Her father, Ovadia (Albert), had emigrated to Egypt from Urfa, in what is now southeastern Turkey. Legend has it that he walked to Beirut, where he caught a steamer to Alexandria because, he had heard, the streets of Egypt were paved with gold (another goldene medine).

Her mother, Latifa Dayan, came from a family of Aleppan Jews who had also emigrated to Cairo for economic reasons. After my uncle Henri was invited to study at the Rabbinic Seminary of Rhodes, my mother was offered a scholarship to attend the Lycée Français of Cairo, and, not to be outdone by her brother, persuaded my observant grandfather to let her attend the secular school, where classes met on Saturdays.

Her mother died when she was in grade school, but even after her extended maternal family emigrated to Palestine, she persevered, earning the French baccalauréat in math. She learned English and then Spanish, eventually joining the marketing department of TWA, the US airline, which after the war had established a regional headquarters in Cairo.

My parents were introduced by a mutual friend at the famed Groppi, a Swiss establishment where the well-heeled European community of Cairo sipped tea and coffee amidst fresh French and Italian pastries. Quite the modern couple, they married in Paris, where my mother had been stationed with TWA, and eventually moved into an apartment in the Zamalek neighborhood of Cairo, not far from the Gezira Sporting Club, where old English colonialismé still reigned.

They lived what by all accounts was a charmed life, but after Gamal Abdel Nasser's coup d'état in 1953, they knew their days in Egypt were numbered. In December 1956, after US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had strong-armed the French and the British to withdraw their troops from the Suez Canal, an Egyptian police officer knocked at our door to serve expulsion papers on my father, a French citizen. Although not expelled as a Jew, when my father reported to the local town hall, the civil servant looked at his papers and, in disbelief, exclaimed "French ... and Jewish?"

That expulsion order sent my father to North America to look for employment with York, the company whose equipment he had been distributing in Egypt. He was offered a position to do the same in an unlikely locale – the Bahamas. Leaving behind all belongings except for the few family jewels that could be sewn into the hems of dresses, my mother and I joined him in Nassau, where we lived for 18 months before my father found a position in New York.

*(continued)*

## From L. Gilles Sion

(continued)

For the next few years, extended family arrived from Egypt, all looking for a new life in America; at one point, my parents told me, there were seven people living in our one-bedroom apartment in Bayside, Queens. In 1961, my father was asked to open York's first office in Europe, and we moved to Geneva, where I spent my childhood and my parents lived most of the rest of their lives.

For many years my parents had a love-hate relationship with their Egyptian heritage. They spoke French but resorted to Arabic to intone their favorite love songs or to “discreetly” insult a bad taxi driver.

While inveighing against Nasser and cheering Israel's military successes, my father would spend his evenings listening to records of the legendary Umm Kalsum, and no dinner left him quite as satisfied as the *béléhat* (torpedo-shaped meatballs) and *fassulia béda* (white beans) he grew up with.

My mother, who shed the telltale rolling r's of Egyptian Jews to adopt the proper French of the local genevois, took to saying that her birth and upbringing in Egypt was a “geographical mistake.” And yet, with time, both reconciled themselves to their past, eventually returning to Egypt, with me, on more than one occasion after Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in 1978.

In the late 1980s, coming full circle, my father established an air conditioning manufacturing joint venture just outside of Cairo with one of his former business associates. On his last return to Egypt in 2008, not long before his passing, we could not pry him away from lively conversations, over obligatory cups of Turkish coffee, with his former colleagues and friends.

My heritage had also come full circle in 1981, when, during a year of graduate study in Brussels, I met Lina Ajami, whose mother's maiden name, Dayan, was the same as my maternal grandmother's. Lina's family had followed a similar peripatetic path, from Aleppo, to Beirut (where Lina was born), to Israel and finally to Belgium. Distant cousins, it seemed, we quickly bonded, and were married in 1985 by Rabbi Marc Angel at Shearith Israel. We, too, use Arabic to insult bad cab drivers (though, we have learned, that is a more perilous proposition today in New York City), but also to keep secrets from our children, Elliot, Jake and Jessica, all of whom have been to Egypt with us and my late father, and have sworn to learn the language so we can no longer keep those secrets from them. And no Shabbat dinner is complete without the *béléhat* and *fassulia béda* that my father loved so much.





*From  
Mayer Smouha*

Both my parents were born in Baghdad. My father, Ezra Smouha, left as a young man for the United States where he spent a dozen years before returning to Baghdad in the early 1920s. His purpose was to get married to my mother Louise Sassoon with whose family he had a close friendship. Meanwhile, his uncle Joseph Smouha, had relocated his family from England to Alexandria, embarked on the creation of Smouha City.

My father settled in Egypt and we eventually lived in a villa in Smouha City where my siblings and I spent our preteen and teen years. It was carefree living and we enjoyed going to good schools and had many friends.

After World War II ended, I went to study engineering at London University, as many of my friends went to study abroad. Upon returning to Egypt I found it hard to find employment in my field. Through connections and recommendations I finally managed to find work in a metal factory. It was founded and managed by foreigners. As soon as the 1956 Suez war broke out, all French and British nationals as well as Jews were dismissed, and the business was sequestered by the government.

I was married in 1955 to Denise Halifi. She came from a large family of Tunisian origin. Her father had a successful insurance business, but since the family had French citizenship at that time, they were expelled and all their property confiscated. They had had a good life in Egypt and used to have many family gatherings, and this came to an abrupt end. They had to seek asylum in France and eventually came to New York. I was able to remain in Egypt until our departure in 1958, since I had an Egyptian passport which I had to relinquish. With help from HIAS we applied for immigration to the United States and were able to remain in Paris temporarily as refugees. At that time visas were granted on the quota system and there was a waiting period of several years. My cousin Albert Gourgey, who sponsored us, worked very hard through the intervention of senators and congressmen to expedite approval, and finally after fourteen months our visas were granted. In retrospect we can say that was the best thing that ever happened to us.

On our arrival we lived in Manhattan, where many Egyptian Jewish families lived, and they all used to go to Shearith Israel. We have maintained a connection to the synagogue to this day.

# GREETINGS

*From Our Friends and Supporters*

## GREETINGS FROM ANGELO ABDELA

Thank you for reaching out to me about Shearith Israel's event honoring the heritage of the Jews of Egypt. As you know, I was born in Cairo where the Jewish community was a cosmopolitan, flourishing wide tent accepting all Jews because they were Jews. I came to the United States in the 1970s and was a 15-year active member of Shearith Israel. It is in its sanctuary that Brigitte and I got married. We resigned our membership in 2012 after the departure of Rabbi Hayyim Angel as we were concerned of a distancing from the Sephardic tradition and of the spirit of inclusiveness fostered by him and his father with whom we are close. Still, It is good to see the synagogue embarking on this project. Celebrating the heritage of Jews coming from the Arab countries is a worthwhile endeavor. I will not be in the U.S. at the time of this event and wish you all a wonderful evening.

Best regards to you and my friends at Shearith Israel.  
Angelo Abdela



## GREETINGS FROM DANIEL HARARI

My grandfather, Elie Harari was the president of the Eliyahu Navi Synagogue. I look forward to the Out of Egypt event on May 8th. Here is a picture of my grandfather (in the center with the fezat) from Purim 1959.



## GREETINGS FROM LARRY HASSON

My parents, Claude Isaac Hasson and Mercedes Rachel Ciprut were married in Alexandria in 1944. They left Egypt in 1957 and settled in France. My son and daughter in law now live in New York and hope to attend the program on May 8th.



## GREETINGS FROM VIVIANE ACKER LEVY

I was born and raised in Alexandria, Egypt; I left at the age of 17, went to France and eventually settled in the U.S. where I had a successful career as a French educator in the NY / NJ area. Since my retirement I have concentrated on researching and lecturing about Egyptian Jewry. For the past ten years, I have led a group of former Egyptians from Alexandria and Cairo (*AAHA-Amicale Alexandrie Hier et Aujourd'hui*) and we usually meet twice a year for lunch. Through this group I have met many of the Egyptian families from Shearith Israel. I am sorry that I will not be able to attend on May 8th. But I look forward to participating in future events at Shearith Israel.

## GREETINGS FROM CLAUDE MINERBO SASSON

I am so pleased that Shearith Israel is honoring the history of Egyptian Jews. I was born in Cairo and when we came the United States we moved to Queens but we always tried to attend Shearith Israel since it felt like home to us. Later when I moved to Manhattan I became a member of Shearith Israel. Unfortunately, my health is now poor and I am unable to contribute a longer family history. I truly hope that I will be able to attend the event in May. I still have a photograph of my bat-mitzvah class in Egypt, with all the girls dressed up in special white dresses. Thank you for reaching out to me and for making this event.



*Eliyahu haNabi Synagogue, Alexandria –  
Photo courtesy of Larry Hasson*