

August 2020 Newsletter

LILLIAN'S AUGUST 2020 NEWSLETTER



My Big Mama, Asma Asaff



Episodes from My Family History

Two young ladies went down to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to meet the ship that would embark upon a journey from Syria (now Lebanon) to the United States of America. One was twenty-one-year-old Asma Asaff with her small baby as her traveling companion. That baby was my mother, Matilda. The other

was Athuna Asaff, Asma's teenage sister-in-law, who came to see her off.

After a tearful goodbye, Asma said, "I hate to leave you here, Athuna. Do you want to come with us?"

"Yes, I would love to go with you, but I have no money for a ticket," answered Athuna.

"Not to worry," replied Asma. "I will send word to George to wire money for you."

So Athuna came on board that day with no money and only the clothes on her back.

"We will share everything," Asma told Athuna. "You are my sister and good friend. We will take care of each other."

The family story goes that as the ship set

sail, Athuna waved to her birthplace and said, “Goodbye, you sons of bitches,” and never looked back. Asma, on the other hand, had such fond memories of Syria, that she would point to the moon and say, “Same moon that shines over the old country. Same moon.”

Asma Asaff was born in 1890 (when the figs were ripe) in Berbara, Syria, a Christian village near Mt. Lebanon. Fleeing Ottoman oppression, she came to the U.S. via Ellis Island in 1911 with her firstborn baby. Her husband, George, had traveled to America the year before to earn money for his wife and child to follow him there.

Like many immigrants in those days, Asma was illiterate. In the old country, she had learned to cook in an outdoor stone

oven, using her hands as measuring tools. In America, Asma rose at 4:00 a.m. to bake bread, singing Arabic songs while she was at it.

She crafted thick, round loaves from scratch, placing the sign of the cross on the dough before baking. Her kitchen always smelled heavenly. She also made delicious spinach and meat pies with the dough, and on special occasions, fried donuts with powdered sugar on top.

We called her Big Mama. When her first grandchild, my sister, Virginia, called her Mama, she replied, “I not your mama, I your big mama.”

Big Mama never learned to read or write and spoke broken English. The letter *p* was difficult for her to pronounce,

substituting it with the sound of *b*. One day she offered my brother's friend some peaches, saying, "You want some bitches, honey?" He knew what she meant by the fruit in her hand, but he replied, "You got any?"

Cooking and feeding people came naturally to her. She would sit on her front porch in Lake Charles, Louisiana, waiting for men from the nearby airbase to walk by. "You hungry? Come in, I give you food," she would say. Once inside, she would introduce them to her single daughters—and that's how Uncle Roy met Aunt Rosie.

When not cooking, Big Mama peddled piece goods door to door in her neighborhood. She tied her money in a handkerchief and had her own system of

bookkeeping. I went with her occasionally and got to see firsthand how smart she was. With limited English, Big Mama found other ways to communicate, but we could always taste the love in her bread.

Author's Note: One of the unexpected joys of researching this story came when I heard from David, Aunt Athuna's grandson, with whom I had lost touch. He reminded me of a trip we took together as kids, riding in the back of a pickup truck from Marshall to Dallas, Texas. He also pointed out the courage and grit our grandmothers had when they traveled as steerage passengers on that long voyage to a new land and the Blessings of Liberty promised in the Preamble to our Constitution. If not for them, we wouldn't be here today.

We the People

Theatre Action

In case you missed it, my poem "For All the Times" was brilliantly performed by Britney Wheeler in the show, We the People: Blessings of Liberty. Use this link: <https://www.facebook.com/wtptheatreaction/> to see the replay.

Suggested Reading

NEW VOICES ANTHOLOGY OF
SHORT PLAYS 2020



EDITED BY JOHN BOLEN



Muse & Ink

Soul Expressions
Through Writing

Heather Rivera, Ph.D

with Contributing Authors:
Lillian Nader, M.Ed. and
Marjorie Miles, DCH

Click on the book cover to go to the Amazon site for each book. I am a contributing author to *Muse & Ink*, and my short play, "Blue Hair & Rap," is included in the New Voices anthology.



THE EDITOR'S CORNER

"It's better to be corrected privately by your editor than publicly in a review." Lillian Nader



THE GRAMMAR GAME

Can you find errors in these sentences?

1. Some writers begin their day at 5:00 o'clock in the morning.
hint: Times of day are usually spelled out in text. With o'clock, the number is always spelled out. They begin at five o'clock.

2. She flew out on the 6:15 p.m. evening flight.
hint: The abbreviations a.m. and p.m. should not be used with *morning*, *afternoon*, *evening*, *night*, or *o'clock*.

3. She noticed a dark stain on the carpet that was right in the middle.

hint: 1. Keep related words together. She noticed a dark stain right in the middle of the carpet.

4. The Post Master General thought it was alright to delay mail delivery with budget cuts.

hint: All right is properly written as two words.

5. Did the bride say, 'I promise to obey?'

hint: Use double quotation marks to enclose every direct quotation. Use single quotations to enclose a quotation within a quotation.

Lillian Nader, M.Ed. is an author, playwright, copyeditor, and educator. She can be reached at Lnader1910@sbcglobal.net or visit her website at <https://lilliannader.com/copy-editing/>

COACH'S CORNER



Heather's Coaching Services

Dr. Heather Rivera is an Amazon best-selling author. She has authored nine books- Non-Fiction, Fiction, and Young Readers. She has a Life Coaching certificate. Heather coaches writers from dreams to book-in-hand. She can help you too. Reasonable, hourly rates. Check out her coaching services at <https://www.heatherrivera.com/lonewalkerpress/>

If you have questions for Heather about writing, send her an email at DrHeatherRivera@gmail.com and she will try to answer it in her next newsletter.

DR. MARJORIE MILES'S VIRTUAL WORKSHOP TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8



Writing with Your Muse Workshops with Dr. Marjorie Miles

Looking for creative, artistic expression? Searching for new ideas for your business or other areas of your life? Enter the Creativity Studio of Your Dreaming Mind: the place where stories, fascinating characters, poetry, and inventions live. At the beginning of each session, you will experience a brief guided daydream to unleash your muse and spark the fuse of your creative writing expression. Join us on Zoom from the comfort of your own home the

second Tuesday of each month. Save the date for our next virtual workshop:

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8 FROM 3:30 TO 5:30 PDT

Email Lillian at Lnader1910@sbcglobal.net to be added to our email list for the link to this meeting.