

# *George Abdulkerim Saraf*

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It has been 64 years since my father was killed in that terrible robbery on West Broad Street that night on Friday, June 13, 1941. My mother was only 31 years and pregnant, and my daddy was 46 years. The next day would have been their 14th anniversary. That was a nightmare that I shall never forget, but time has also erased many of my memories.

I remember that my father was a very smart man and that he operated several businesses in his 46 years. He spoke several languages, including English, Turkish, Armenian, French, Greek, Lebanese, and Latin. I remember him looking at photos of his family and crying like a child as he viewed so many relatives that were killed by the Turks during the Armenian massacres.

He escaped to Lebanon and I understand that he was involved in the Armenian underground during these hellish times in his homeland. He traveled to France, and managed to escape to Canada where he had a niece who had married a Canadian who owned a fox fur farm. She died of tuberculosis.

He then went to Detroit Michigan and stayed with an Armenian friend and his family and worked there as a tailor. His name was Jack Abajay<sup>6</sup>. Later, he came to Savannah, lived with John and Mary Tabakian for a while, and then opened up his own fruit and vegetable stand on West Broad Street. I do not recall him ever talk about being in Florida.

He opened up his ice cream shop and confectionery at 1120 West Broad where he manufactured his own specialty ice creams, and customers came from all over Savannah for his triple dip cones.

We lived right above the store at West Broad and Duffy<sup>7</sup>. At that time, West Broad was the center for individually owned grocery stores. A fish market, a liquor store, a department store, a drug store – all these were within one or two blocks of my father's store. A streetcar ran down West Broad to Broughton and down Broughton Street and back. He eventually added a liquor store to the ice cream shop, and his business thrived. He would open the store at 6:00 a.m. and work until noon, and then my mother would take over so that he could take an afternoon nap. He would then return and stay open until midnight.

I remember him taking us to the movies occasionally, while mom kept the shop. Sometimes he would take us to the beach, while mom stayed with the store. When Philip, Mary Ann, Antoinette, Rose and I were young children, he would set us all atop the glass showcase in his store on Sunday mornings before mama took us to Mass, and polish each one of our shoes to a high shine. This was a very special time for us with him, as he was always so busy and we did not see him too often.

On the night that he died, mama had taken us to the drive in theatre, and about half way through the movie, Mike Gannam and Nazer drove into the theatre to bring us the terrible news that daddy had died in the store from a gunshot wound to his neck in a robbery. Mike drove mama to the store and Nazer took us home. That was a dreadful time in our lives. I remember going to sleep and wishing I would wake up and find it was all a bad dream. I can still remember the fragrance of the gardenias around his coffin that was in our living room for two days, and all the people who came to share in our grief. Mom lost the baby she was carrying within the week. Bogie, the youngest, was only 11 months old and I was 12 years old. Mom had a terribly heavy burden facing her, but she did it. And I will always remember her with so much love, because she did not put us in an orphan home as family and friends tried to convince her was the only thing she could do.

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<sup>6</sup> Have not found George or Abajay in census records or city directories for Detroit, but he did reside there.

<sup>7</sup> George purchased the house at 3710 Hopkins Street on June 21, 1938.