

Grandma's House

By Phyllis Helen Saraf Tabakian McShane - 2000



Karam Gannam and Annie Abraham
Front steps of their home on Hopkins Street

I remember - oh so many years ago. They were the Depression years, and our family of six lived above my father's confectionery and ice cream shop on what was then a main street in Savannah.

There was a grocery store on one corner, a fish market on another, a drugstore on another and a Robbins Clothing store on the other. A streetcar ran down the center of the street and our play area was the sidewalk that ran in front and down the side of our store.

Oftentimes, my mother would take my brother Phillip and me (we were the oldest at seven and eight years of age in 1937) on a long ride on that rumbling, rattling streetcar. Then we would walk along a dirt road about two miles to my grandmother's house, which we called "going to the country". We would be so excited because we would have the run of their big farm, Billy goats and cows to play with, chickens to chase and feed, tomatoes to pick from vines, and collard greens to gather for dinner – and the pure and exhilarating fresh air to breathe.

My four uncles – Anthony, Nazer, George and Michael – were exciting to be around. They lived in a very simple frame house with a front porch and swing out front. From the front porch, we would walk into the living room. The walls were wood siding, as they were throughout the entire house, and the floors were oak boards.

The living room had an oriental type rug, which covered most of the floor. Then there was a long hallway which led to the main living area, dining room, kitchen and bedrooms. The dining room had a fuel oil heater and a linoleum-covered floor and it opened into two bedrooms, one on each side. An open archway led from the dining room into the linoleum-floored kitchen where there was a huge iron stove in which wood and coal were placed to cook the most delicious meals of my memory. A small free-standing cabinet held grandma's few simple dishes and a shelf over her sink with attached drain board held glasses and cups. Her workspace was an enamel topped table and her large round kitchen table.

Grandma was always preparing tempting desserts and meals for us. She would have six apple pies already baked and my favorite – banana cake, the taste and flavor of which I have never tasted since. She seemed to always be preparing good delicious dishes such as lamb stew and stewed okra and tomatoes and fresh lima beans and collard greens and rice made with fresh chicken broth. She could fry the crispiest, crunchiest chicken and make the lightest biscuits and corn bread on



George Gannam, Phyllis & Phillip Saraf
Gannam Farm circa 1932



Philip Saraf, George Gannam, Phyllis Saraf

that iron cooking stove. And the smell of coffee as it brewed with the wood fire flaming under it was an aroma so stimulating to the senses.

My grandmother prepared her own breads, churned her own butter and had little or no conveniences to help in producing the magical things that came out of her kitchen. That iron stove not only kept the kitchen warm during the cold winter months, but it helped to heat the dining room, too. The fuel oil heater also heated the dining room, but the rest of the house was really cold. That is why the door to the hallway leading back to the living room was always kept closed in the winter. It was frigid going down that hallway, and the living room was like an icebox (we didn't have refrigerators then, only huge blocks of ice in an enamel cabinet to keep our perishables cold). The dining room and kitchen was the center of all activity. We played cards and checkers there. My grandfather read his

newspapers there and played solitaire. We ate there and talked and laughed and my uncle built his little airplane models there and they did homework at that dining table. Grandma and grandpa drank coffee there in the evenings and all of us ate freshly churned ice cream that grandma and my uncles churned up with cream from the milk that came from their cows. The dining room was an all-round family room, although they were not called that back then. It was simply the dining room. How I recall those warm, simple, happy moments at Grandma's house. Would that all children could experience the simple pleasures and joys that only a grandmother in a time that I lived could provide.