

John Habib's Family and Short Autobiography

I was born in Detroit, Michigan on July 7, 1930, the last of eleven children, six girls and five boys, of Sasin Habib El Khoury Hannah and Mary Backus Saad Ishaq. My father was born in 1885 in a remote mountain village of the high region in Lebanon. An orphan, 15 years old, and with \$16.00 in his pocket he immigrated unaccompanied to the United States on April 16, 1900 to join a relative in Niagara Falls, New York. My mother, also born in a remote Lebanese mountain village was brought to the United States when she was 4 years old by her mother in 1896. They were married in St. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Cathedral in Detroit, Michigan on January 2, 1904. He was 19 years old and she 12. On May 18, 1904 they both became naturalized US citizens. Shortly after the marriage her mother returned to Lebanon. They were alone in a strange country with no extended family or public, federal or state, support system. Together they succeeded in making a living in different ways including farming their own land. By the time I came along, America was in a full depression and they, like many Americans lost everything they had worked for except their faith in God and in America. And like most Americans they picked themselves up and started all over.

Today, their direct progeny number in the hundreds and include medical and academic doctors, lawyers, accountants, space scientists, business men and women of diverse ethnicity and religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, a kaleidoscope of America.

They taught their children love of country and for each other and respect for others and by their example the blessings and rewards of the work ethic. I can still hear my mother's exhortation "thank God you were born in this country" when as kids, we got to complaining. There was a generation gap of almost twenty-five years between the oldest and the youngest children. Each child pitched in to help, including myself. As the youngest, however, I benefited from their cumulative sacrifices and love. There were, of course, parental arguments and intra-sibling disputes and ruffled feelings but none that eroded family solidarity, and none that survived more than a day or two.

I wanted to perpetuate my parents' memory. St. Jude's Children Research Hospital, my mother's favorite charity, dedicated a special room to their names marked with a plaque. I also wanted to perpetuate the names of my sisters and brothers. James Madison College made this possible by creating the Habib Family Scholarship for nine of my siblings. From the oldest to the youngest, Eva, humorous and compassionate. Agnes, devoted daughter and mother, Bergita, classy and astute, Jemelia, devout and fun loving, Backus artistic and warm hearted, Margaret innovative and caring, Lillian, intuitive and responsible, Joseph, my protector and Thomas, my friend. For my oldest brother The University of Michigan established The David J. Habib and Rose Wawee education/travel scholarship in his name and in that of his wife. All my siblings and their spouses are now deceased...

I have been associated with foreign affairs for more than sixty years, as a US diplomat cum national security officer, as a management consultant in Geneva and Monte Carlo, and as a professor in the University of Maryland's European Division, Heidelberg, Germany teaching American service personnel at American official installations in Europe, Middle East, and North Africa. I knew the urgent need for Americans to better understand the Islamic Middle East. After accepting Michigan State's invitation to teach as visiting professor for an academic year I became acquainted with Professor Mohammed Ayoob and his Muslim Studies program and with his research. His study, ***The Many Faces of Political Islam***, is a compelling analysis of the root causes of the turmoil in the Middle East and an outstanding example of Michigan State's contribution to the literature. For the past ten years I sponsored a scholarship in the Muslim Studies program for a student selected by James Madison College. The quality of the program is exemplified by the fact that at least one scholarship recipient now holds a sensitive U.S. Government position dealing with the Islamic World. Other recipients have written to me about their intention to work in related fields. These results inspired me to endow at least one scholarship annually in the Muslim Studies Program in each academic year in perpetuity.

I hope that that my family and friends will contribute generously to both endowments.