

Featured Profile: Abla Shocair

Written by Debra de Bastos, Sudbury Senior Center volunteer

Abla Shocair's story is fascinating. Abla was born in Amman, Jordan, to a father who was a poet, physician and political activist and a mother who was determined to fulfill her daughter's passion for music and education. At four years old, Abla's mother noticed her daughter's musical talent and started her with piano lessons. Abla was a quick study and performed in a student recital at 5 years old. Abla is an accomplished classical concert pianist who has performed in numerous venues throughout the world, including the British Council in Kuwait. She has performed at Sudbury's First Parish Church and at the Sudbury and Lincoln Senior Centers, and is looking forward to playing on the Sudbury Senior Center's new piano this spring. Abla taught two of her grandsons to play piano and they often perform with her. Abla's concerts in Lincoln from 2015-2019 can be viewed on YouTube by searching her name.

Abla also plays the Oud (a middle eastern lute-type stringed instrument). She was gracious enough to play it for me and has participated and led groups playing the Oud at Harvard and MIT.

Abla lived her life through young adulthood in the Middle East, primarily in Amman and Damascus. She explained that prior to WWI there were no borders between different regions of the Middle East and people could travel freely through the Arab world. That was a luxury afforded her family before 1917.

Abla received a civil engineering bachelor's degree in Damascus, Syria, where she met her husband, Fawaz Kawaf, also a civil engineering student. Abla was a top student and the first woman to be admitted to the School of Engineering at the American University in Beirut where she received her master's degree in structural engineering. Abla's husband's work as a civil engineer required him to be on site at many of his projects. As a result, Abla and her husband traveled extensively and lived in numerous countries, including, Libya, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United States.

Abla has a keen interest in languages and speaks Arabic, French, Russian, English and Italian. She started to learn Italian by taking classes at Lincoln Sudbury High School and continued to study and practice Italian in an unusual way. She would travel to Amman every year to visit her parents and often flew on Alitalia. The flights often stopped in Rome or Milan. Instead of getting on the connecting flight, Abla would stow her luggage in an airport locker and spend time traveling to Milan, Rome, Napoli, Capri and Venice.

Abla has three children. Her daughter lived in South Africa for a period of time. During that time Abla took the opportunity to visit and explore that country. Her daughter currently lives in Dubai and, no surprise, Abla has made her way to Dubai on several occasions. She visited Russia in 1965, and again when her youngest son was a student there.

Abla made it her mission to educate her children about their heritage and all three children are fluent in Arabic. On her annual visits to Amman, Abla would obtain the curriculums from the

local Amman schools. Upon her return to the US, Abla would incorporate the Arabic curriculum as part of her children's education.

Abla is presently reviewing with her eldest son the translation into English of her father's biography. This biography is one she encouraged him to dictate to her. He published it into a book in Arabic and it earned the First Prize in Literature in Amman.

I could go on and on about Abla's stories of travel, music and education. To say that Abla is a fascinating, intelligent woman, with a zest for life and the challenges and opportunities it presents, is an understatement. Abla kept me engaged with her life stories, interspersed with humor and always with a smile on her face. To me, the smile is a symbol of a woman who is content with what she has contributed and learned from life experiences.

Abla has and will continue to play concerts at the Senior Center. She has lectured at the Sudbury Senior Center about her travels to Dubai, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar and is a regular participant in the Senior Center lecture series; she especially enjoys lectures on history, art and music.