**My father-in-law, Nouri**

By Najiha Pasha

This is the former name of the writer of these memoirs, who is now living in Tel Aviv under a Hebrew name. Her son, who is also the grandson of Nouri al-Said, also has a Hebrew name and is lives on a Kibbutz of *Hashomer Hatzair*. The picture above, taken from her private album, shows her sitting side by side with Sabah al-Said, while vacationing in Lebanon, 15 years ago.

**A Secret No One Knows**

Our family, the Pasha family, was one of the richest families in Baghdad. My mother, Regina Pasha, dealt in investments of money in the different factories in the Iraqi capital, and made her living from her wealth. One of the wealthy people with whom my mother dealt was Nouri al-Said Pasha, an extremely wealthy man who already back then, 25 years ago, was one of the foremost statesmen of the country.

Once I grew up a little, my mother started relying on me in her business ventures. My role was to carry the bills due and bring my mother the money for them. I used to visit frequently the house of Nouri al-Said, bringing bills, taking money, and waiting for an answer on one of my mother’s many letters on business matters.

One day, when I was waiting for a bundle of cash the Pasha was supposed to give my mother, I saw Sabah, Nouri al-Said’s son, for the first time. Sabah was then twenty years old and served in the Iraqi Air Force. I was sixteen. We liked eachother. From time to time, when I came to the al-Said house, we used to meet. These were the happiest hours of my life. We were both young, and as young people do, we would talk about everything. Sometimes we used just to smile at each other – and stay silent. Soon we became bosom friends. And then, out of nowhere, Sabah told me that he got married – to an Egyptian girl who visited Baghdad with her rich parents.

After Sabah’s marriage we stopped meeting for a long time. I continued dealing with my mother’s complex businesses, and over time I also received from her a large sum of money so that I could start a business of my own. I was very busy. I built several luxurious palaces in Baghdad, and invested the money I got from renting them out in other profitable businesses.

The well-to-do of Baghdad would vacation in London, and there they would also invest a significant part of their wealth. When my business flourished to such an extent that I could leave it to a trustworthy family member, I decided to go out into the wide world.

**“Let’s get married…”**

In London I met Sabah again. He was studying then in Cambridge University and completing his studies in flight engineering. We met in one of the big, fancy cafes. We both were very happy at the meeting, since we were both lonely in the big city. Sabah’s wife was then in Baghdad, and he revealed his heart to me. “I love you,” told me the son of the then-Prime Minister of Iraq.

This was not a new revelation for me. Already in Baghdad we used to meet often outside the halls of Nouri al-Said’s big house and exchange whispers and sweet nothings. “You are married, Sabah,” I told him after he confessed his love.

Even as his friend, I did not forget that Sabah was the son of Iraq’s first stateman, and he would do better not become entangled in love affairs. Even though my happiness depended on it, I preferred to give up any ties between us. “Don’t forget that you are the Pasha’s son, and that you are married,” I repeated to him. “My wife will receive you into our house”, he stated decisively. The fact that he was Muslim and I was Jewish made no difference to him.

Sabah remained in London and I returned to Iraq. After a year, I left Baghdad again and went to Beirut. Then, one evening, on leaving the hotel, I heard a car horn behind me. I turned around. There, to my great surprise, Nouri al-Said was sitting inside a luxurious car. “Come, let’s have a good time together,” he said and opened the car door for me.

**Jewish grandmother**

At the end of 1939 I married Sabah. Before our marriage he revealed to me some of the secrets of his family. “My grandmother was Jewish,” he surprised me at the beginning of his words.

The story of Sabah was as if taken from one of the Thousand and One Nights stories. Nouri Said’s grandfather, named Lolo, was an employee of the Iraqi Waqf, charged with guarding one of the mosques of Baghdad. One day a tribe of Sunni Persians invaded Baghdad. The warriors stabled their horses inside the mosque. Lolo, filled with rage, left for Istanbul to tell the Sultan of the insult.

The Sultan immediately sent an avenging army, which threw out the Persian invaders – but not before they murdered Lolo’s wife and his children. But the Sultan did not forget his loyal servant. When he heard of the tragedy that befell him, the Sultan immediately sent him a new wife as a present. This was a beautiful slave girl from the Harem, with golden hair and blue eyes, daughter of a Jewish family from Romania, who was captured by Ottoman soldiers in one of their journeys.

And so, at least according to the law of Israel, we can say that Nouri al-Said’s father was Jewish, since his mother was Jewish.

**A grandson on the Kibbutz**

I was the second Jew in Nouri al-Said’s family. My life with Sabah was quiet and peaceful – up until Rashid Ali’s great revolt, at the start of the Second World War. Sabah’s Egyptian wife was very sick. She spent most of the year in hospitals and sanatoria in Switzerland. Her sons, Falah and Issam, studied in London.

Rashid Ali’s revolt took us away from Iraq. Nouri al-Said, who worried for his life and with good cause, took his wife, Sabah, his Egyptian wife who happened to return from Switzerland, and me, and we all escaped to Israel. We lived then in Ramallah, in an old family palace we had there. But after a few weeks I decamped to live in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. We were treated as political refugees and lacked for nothing.

We returned to Iraq at the end of 1941, after the English put an end to the rule of Rashid Ali. When we returned, our son, Ahlam, was born. The meaning of the names is “Dreams,” and it conveys how much Sabah loved him, and how much he loved me. Today my son bears a Hebrew name, but for me he will always be the son of my dreams. Nouri al-Said returned then to the Prime Ministership of Iraq, and Sabah was appointed as manager of the national civil Air Force.

In 1945 we heard rumours that some people wanted to assassinate me. Anonymous threatening letters were sent to our house, accusing me of announcing in 1941 to Nouri al-Said of a plot against him by some of Rashid Ali’s men. Our life became hell. We were always under a bothersome guard, for fear that the anonymous opponents would carry out their threats.

I could no longer carry on with a regular family life, and I told Sabah that I want to leave Iraq. After a few months we agreed together that we should separate.

In 1946 I left Iraq and made Aliyah to Israel, together with my son. I managed to transfer here a great part of my wealth. I arranged for Sabah’s son to live on a Kibbutz and he will study there until he goes into the army. Although his grandfather was the strongest man in a big Arab country, my son will grow up as an Israeli in every way.