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# *THE LEFTOVERS*

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## ***Memories of Maury***

*Maurice Abraham, June 10, 1942 - September 20, 2019*

I first became aware of Maurice Abraham about 9 years ago. I was working on a book about the history of El Sobrante and, after collecting a lot of photos and information, much of which would not be used in the book, I began to think about what it would take to start a little historical society in our town. And as often happens when one has an idea, it becomes apparent that others have the same idea. Online I stumbled across the beginnings of a website, dedicated to the history of El Sobrante, put together by someone named Maurice Abraham. After a few emails went back and forth, we got together and hashed out our thoughts about starting an historical society, and, of course, learned about each other.

I was surprised to learn that Maury was a long-time resident of our community, and graduated, as I had, from De Anza High School. He and I had attended De Anza at the same time, though he had graduated a year earlier than I had, in 1960. But, apparently, we traveled in different circles and had not met in high school. I was impressed by Maury's knowledge of the area, his affection for the town of El Sobrante, and his love of history. He also struck me as a natural historian, always seeking the truth, and careful to back up any statement with facts, figures, and documents. And he liked to write. We could work together.

We quickly began to put together a group of like-minded local history buffs, and founded our society early in 2011; our first meeting took place in February of that year. Our first newsletter was published in the early winter of the same year, and each of the founding members contributed something about themselves. We learned the following about Maury's background:

As a four-year-old in 1946, Maurice moved with his family from Richmond to El Sobrante. He attended local schools, graduating from De Anza High School in 1960. He attended Contra Costa College, then San Jose State University, graduating with a BA in Geography/Urban Studies. Immediately following high school, he joined an El Sobrante civil engineering/architectural firm (Schelin Engineering, 435 Valley View). This began a long and successful career in community planning and design that led him in 1992 to start his own independent planning practice in San Jose.



*Maury and Jean, high school days, 1959*

In 2003, Maurice returned to El Sobrante with his wife Jean, where they built their new home of his design on part of the Santa Rita Road property he had grown up on. After becoming semi-retired, Maurice shifted his attention to his hometown, in part as a founding member of the El Sobrante Historical Society; he also became an active member of the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce. He was active in the Commonwealth Club of California, NoLabels, a national non-partisan political action group founded in 2010, a member of the San Jose State University Alumni Association and a past member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and the American Planning Association.

Maurice and Jean enjoyed time with family and friends; and they loved to travel. Since 2002, they had visited 17 countries and over 500 cities in North America and Europe. These travels satisfied their appetite for understanding the history and cultures of different world regions. Maurice always loved classic automobiles of the 1950s, and non-fiction reading, research and writing (politics, government, economics, business, science and technology, history and ancestry). Maurice was an avid photographer, and was enrolled at the New York Institute of Photography (NYIP) and had amassed a digital collection of over 60,000 travel, architectural and automotive images!



*Maury was honored by the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce as the 2015 Citizen of the Year. Here he is with Supervisor John Gioia at his installation, March, 2016.*

From the outset, we came to rely on Maury's intelligence, his calm reasoning, his careful research, and his wonderfully-written and well-researched articles. In our first issue of our newsletter, *The Leftovers*, Maury reviewed the history of the El Sobrante Rancho, and pointed out the surprising fact that most of what we think of as El Sobrante (such as the downtown) lies solidly within the boundaries of Rancho San Pablo, and not within the boundaries of

Rancho El Sobrante. In our Summer, 2012 edition of *The Leftovers*, Maury submitted a superbly-researched article on the history of the Foster's Freeze outlet in El Sobrante. And in our very last issue, Maury again outdid himself by putting together a carefully researched history of the successful acquisition of the old Adachi Nursery by two non-profit groups (which saved the site from becoming a mini-mart and a gas station). Incredibly, this last effort was accomplished just a few months before his passing; he never stopped working and he never stopped thinking about the town that he loved.

Maury gave a lot of thought and attention to the new history center that will soon open in the newly-named Nancy Fahden building (the old Friends of the Library house). With the support of our supervisor, John Gioia, the little building is being restored (and will now have a toilet!). Two rooms will be used by the historical society, while a third will be shared with the Friends. The building name change was a suggestion by John Gioia, as the structure was once used as Nancy Fahden's office, and she can claim to be the first woman supervisor in Contra Costa County. John felt that she deserved some recognition, and we agree. It is also our board's opinion that Maury's memory should be honored in a similar fashion, and so we plan to name one of the rooms after him.

One of the most difficult problems facing any organization, particularly little non-profits that depend on volunteer help and citizen support, is how to ensure that the organization, and its mission, will continue when the original founders are gone. We are under no illusions that Maury can be replaced. But the memory of his passion and his devotion to the preservation of our community, will, we hope, inspire us to fill in the gap that he has left, and lead us forward into a future filled with a rich past.



## **Our board members remember Maury:**

### ***Steve James, ESHS Treasurer:***

I first met Maury as we formed the El Sobrante Historical Society (ESHS). He impressed me with his knowledge of El Sobrante and his professional experience in architectural design. He is responsible for our ESHS logo. He also, drew up professional designs for the rock wall renovation at the San Pablo Dam and the Rancho boundary markers. His energy was relentless. He was involved with the ES Chamber of Commerce and many other groups in shaping the direction of El Sobrante Valley. He will be missed.

### ***Lyle Miller, Secretary:***

The first time I met Maury, he was walking down Dam Road, taking pictures. As he walked by my shop I got curious and asked him about it. He responded, "I'm taking pictures for a project I'm working on, gonna write a book on the history of El Sobrante..." I said, really?, You know a fella named Don Bastin? 'cause he's also writing a history book. I had just given Don all my pictures to copy and use in *his* book and I told Maury he should meet and work together with Don. Not too long after that I was contacted about joining the Society of El Sobrante Historians.

### ***Roxy Miravalle, Director:***

I met Maurice and his lovely wife, Jean at one of my "Meet & Greet" gatherings which I used to coordinate. It was on March 19, 2011 at the Up & Under Pub and Grill in Point Richmond where I had the opportunity to meet him. He was one of several who came together to discuss our local history, share photos and stories of growing up here in our beloved Bay Area. He mentioned his affiliation with the El Sobrante Historical Society and shared some interesting stories and trivia. At his suggestion, I later signed up to receive the ESHS newsletters. Although I've only known Maurice for a short time, it was clear that he was passionate about his love of El Sobrante and its history. He was a wonderful, kind and caring

person, as well as a treasured fellow historian who will be deeply missed. I am grateful to have had the privilege of knowing him.

### ***Emil Munkres, Director:***

I am honored to have been able to meet Maury and get to know him over the past few years with the El Sobrante Historical Society. He has always been the biggest champion that I ever met of all things El Sobrante. Maury knew how to tell a great story and he was a great friend who we'll all miss.

## **Our final tribute to our friend comes from two people who knew him as well as anyone ever could, his daughters Marci and Tami Abraham:**

Where do we begin to describe our dad? You may know him as Maurice P. Abraham, AICP. Or perhaps you know him as Maury, from the Chamber of Commerce or the El Sobrante Historical Society, or as Citizen of the Year.



You might recognize his red and white '56 Chevy from the El Sobrante Stroll car show, or know that he grew up on Santa Rita Road, attended De Anza High School in the '50s, and returned to El Sobrante in his retirement years to make great contributions to the town. Or maybe you don't know him at all. But he was our dad, and we've been asked to share something personal with you, the readers of this newsletter.

As you may know or have surmised, our father, Maurice Powell Abraham, passed away recently after a relatively long battle with inoperable pancreatic cancer. He lived fifteen months after

his diagnosis, most of it in reasonably good health, all things considered. And fifteen months is a long time with a Stage IV diagnosis of this particular type of cancer, so we are incredibly grateful for the time we had.

But our gratitude is overshadowed by the deep and abiding sorrow that the incredible man we called “Dad” is no longer here with us. It’s hard to even come to grips with the fact. We can’t just call him when we need fatherly wisdom and advice. We can’t share a glass of wine, a bowl of popcorn, or a cup of coffee and spill our guts over our kids’ latest successes and struggles, our personal and professional joys and challenges, or the latest mystery in our family genealogy.

We can’t possibly share everything about him, but perhaps we can help you to just....*imagine*.

Our dad was the kindest, gentlest man we have ever known. He was our friend, our mentor, our helping hand, and our rock. He was there for us relentlessly as we lived our lives and grew into the women we are today. He taught us by example to be strong, loving, honest, and kind. He taught us to be independent, to think critically and differently, and not to be afraid of looking inward and making deep personal change. When we were small, he talked to us as people, not as children. We knew our place, but we always felt heard and understood. He never got angry with us, never raised his voice -- he spoke. We had discussions and he guided us with peace, loving-kindness, and sound advice.



He was fun and silly when we were young, forever playing Marco Polo in the pool and chasing us

under water to our fear and delight (Above, Maury with daughters Marci (left) and Tami). He let

us draw on his bald head with magic markers and dress him up silly. We had crazy food fights and pushed each other in the pool....HE made the biggest messes!! Our family vacations were always to Disneyland, and we delighted in his maniacal laughter as he tried to make the Matterhorn a scary ride!

Dad treated our pets like people, too. The dogs were always with us on vacations and they took up the whole back seat, or the bed while we “slept in” on Saturday mornings and watched cartoons. He almost always had our parakeet, Cory, sitting on his arm or his head while he was drawing plans for work. Cory never missed a guitar session, as Dad would strum away with that silly bird perched on the neck of his guitar.

Our dad was the mastermind designer and builder of decks, pantries, and other additions to our homes -- and might we add that those were always perfectly level, square, and bulletproof. He was talented yet humble, never seeking glory for his accomplishments. He loved designing, planning, and building...the ideas just flowed from the passion he had. The number of napkin sketches that we watched turn into reality would blow your mind.

He cared about everyone around him, and it never occurred to him to inherit the racism or sexism that was all too common in previous generations. He treated young people as the adults he knew they could become and elderly people as the wise individuals he knew them to be inside. He believed in equality and embraced diversity with every bone in his body. He looked past externals, struggles, and shortcomings, saw the person inside, and believed in everyone to be their best.

Dad had a sense of humor that never quit. He was the king of goofball practical jokes (which, of course, we had to repay in kind) and had a pun ready for just about any occasion. Even in his last weeks, as he grew more tired and struggled to stay engaged, he would listen to our conversations so quietly that we might have thought he was asleep...but then he would open his eyes and make a wisecrack to set us giggling.



He was a true “dreamer” in the best sense of the word. Although he didn’t participate actively due to being a young husband, father, and professional, he came of age during the civil rights and anti-war era of the ‘60s. He imagined a better world where people are not bound by possessions and self-righteousness, but by peace and unity.

These, and so many more, are the memories we will treasure. We can only wish that you knew him the way we knew him. He was a truly gifted, selfless, and loving soul, and the best Daddy two little girls could ever wish for. There are no words to express the deep loss we feel, but we hope that by sharing a bit of the man who lives in our hearts, a part of him will live on in yours, as well.

~ Marci & Tami Abraham

**Please Note:**

***A memorial service will be held this Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, at 2 pm, at the Elks Lodge in El Sobrante. The Rev. Dr. Melinda McLain of the Mira Vista United Church of Christ (now part owner of the old Adachi property) will lead the service.***

**A Good Day for Stroll—Sunday,  
September 15**



The 26<sup>th</sup> annual El Sobrante Stroll took place with a certain smoothness that seemed to indicate that we’re getting pretty good at this. With all the stuff that could go wrong, beginning with shutting down a main thoroughfare, we have a right to expect problems. But if there were any, they were not apparent.

We had a good day. I love the parade, and the horses and their riders take the show for me. This lady with her prancing steed could have come right out of the Rancho period.

As usual, we met a lot of new neighbors, and without too much arm-twisting, we managed to sell 20 books (though one was of Rodeo, while another was of Richmond). And we added 20 new members to our society. Incredibly, Maury planned to be at our booth on the 15<sup>th</sup>. It says something about his grit and determination that he even considered joining us. That was Maury.

Below we see three of our board members who manned our booth, plus my wife, Clementina Diaz. From left: Steve James, Emil Munkres, Clementina, Lyle Miller. Board member Roxy Miravalle was also with us, but left before we thought to take a group picture.





## Historic Rancho Boundary Line

You are standing at the point of the blue arrow, which lies on the border between the San Pablo and El Sobrante Ranchos. Both grants were made by the Mexican Government to members of the Castro family in 1834 and 1841, respectively. On your left is the San Pablo Rancho; to your right is the El Sobrante Rancho. The line runs along the ridge separating the valleys through which run Appian Way and May Road. As you can see, much of what we think of as El Sobrante, including the entire downtown, lies within the boundaries of the San Pablo Rancho.

Below is the old San Pablo Creek Road, now San Pablo Dam Road. To the right is Appian Way.

California & Nevada Railroad, which ran along San Pablo Creek

Exhibit paid for with the generous support of the members of the El Sobrante Historical Society. Installation courtesy of the Contra Costa County Public Works Department.

The names on the map represent land-owners. Some of them may be familiar, such as Amend and Clark (now road names), and Wilkie, whose name is attached to a local creek. The numbers represent the acreage of each property.

From a County map published in 1894

As part of the sidewalk work taking place along the Dam Road, the ESHS will be installing two interpretive exhibits, roughly between Clark Road and Milton Way. They will show the location of the boundary line between the

**Have dinner, a good time, and help out a sister historical society!**

***The money raised will help to establish a museum in the historic Faria House, 2100 San Pablo Avenue***



## New Acquisitions:



We are indebted to board member Emil Munkres for finding this beautiful old Foster's Freeze sign, which may have been used in the Foster's shop in El Sobrante in the early 1950s. Here is Emil's description of his find:

*I first noticed this vintage porcelain-enamel sign in mid-August while I was at a friend's welding shop in Rodeo and had to walk through a gravel side yard a few times. It seemed like every time I went by, I had to step on this sheet of metal. So I stood the thing up and lo and behold, there on the other side was this beautiful old Foster's Freeze Menu board! Dave Vick, owner of AAA Welding in Rodeo, isn't sure where this sign originally comes from. Over the past 35 or 40 years, he has created and installed many metal signs and artworks all over the Bay Area. During that time, Dave had also collected a number of older, local porcelain-enamel signs. Years ago, some of his employees would bring in old signs that were picked up from local garage sales and flea markets. This particular Menu board appears to be an original "Foster's Old Fashion Freeze" display sign that would have been provided by Foster's to original early franchisees in the late 1940s to early '50s.*

For a history of the Foster's Freeze in El Sobrante (where this sign may have originated), written by Maurice Abraham, click the following link:

[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/86b85f\\_ab83e618a67b434885b03847d70c3105.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/86b85f_ab83e618a67b434885b03847d70c3105.pdf)

**We have many more new acquisitions which we plan to cover in our next issue.**

*The Leftovers* is published quarterly. Articles for publication are encouraged, as are comments. See e-mail address below.

*The El Sobrante Historical Society is a formal nonprofit organization, and donations may be tax-deductible. We are dedicated to the preservation and display of the history of the community of El Sobrante. We depend on our members and local residents for the information, artifacts, and photographs that make up the society's collection. Become a member and help out! It's free and simple. Just visit the website, at [eshist.org](http://eshist.org).*

Visit us on **Facebook**.

### Mission Statement

*To promote the awareness and appreciation of El Sobrante Valley history through preservation and education, and chronicling of the community's heritage for current and future generations.*

### ESHS Board of Directors

**Donald Bastin:** Acting President; Historical Researcher and writer. Newsletter editor.

The position of Vice-President is currently unfilled.

**Steve James:** Treasurer; Membership and Communication Secretary; Researcher/writer.

**Lyle Miller:** Secretary; Community Liaison; Researcher/writer.

**Roxanne Miravalle:** Director; Historian and Writer; Genealogist

**Emil Munkres:** Director; Historian.

**Visit us on-line at:**

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**Questions, Comments, and other communication? Send to:**

[ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM)