

## Farris, Evelyn Zaytoun: Love Stories <sup>[1]</sup>

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### Evelyn Zaytoun Farris: Love stories

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) <sup>[2]</sup>," *News & Observer*. Published 9/12/2004. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

Evelyn Zaytoun Farris grew up in small-town North Carolina listening to love stories in Arabic and savoring the flavor of Lebanese dishes like kibbeh and koosa. Her family was part of the great Maronite emigration out of Lebanon a century ago. Fleeing religious persecution, the Maronites -- followers of a mainly Lebanese branch of Catholicism -- scattered across the globe. Many settled in Raleigh, Goldsboro and Mrs. Farris' hometown of New Bern, though nearly every small town seemed to attract at least one Lebanese family. They were the first Catholics in many towns, and many of the state's Catholic parishes have their roots in their living rooms. At her home in Rocky Mount, Mrs. Farris recalled those early Lebanese immigrants and the stories that brought them here, especially the love stories.

#### In Evelyn Farris's words:

My dad's sister Latiffie came to New Bern way before he did. If I'm not mistaken, they wanted her to marry somebody that she didn't love. That's why she left Lebanon. She was single, or she may have been married and left, I don't remember. That's how a lot of the Lebanese people started out. I don't know what his sister sold -- clothing, I think -- but they carried their packs on their backs, house to house. She was a young girl too. She said that people were good to them. They were good to her. My dad came over in 1903. There was a big contingent of Lebanese people in New Bern. They had restaurants; they had grocery stores, dry good stores. We had some who were mechanics. They did some of everything. And they really kept my mother's mother was also Lebanese. Her name was Ramza, and she loved a young man in Lebanon, but her parents wanted her to marry a man who had left Lebanon and gone to Brazil. He went over to Lebanon and married my grandmother. My grandmother had a brother in Greenville. When my mother was 15 years old, she and Sittee Ramza -- sittee means grandmother -- came from Brazil and visited him. My mother met my daddy while she was here. My mother told the story. When my mother and Sittee Ramza were getting ready to go back to Brazil, they were at the station with their bags packed and my dad ran down to the station and got their bags and told her that she couldn't leave! He wanted to marry her. My grandmother didn't go back to Brazil. Her husband was there, but she stayed with us. She was kind of strong-minded.

When Sittee Ramza came to New Bern, she learned to read and write in English, and she loved novels, especially love stories. She kept us busy going up to the library to get her books. She would read to all these ladies who couldn't read a word. These were all Lebanese women. They'd come every day and they'd sit in the living room and she'd read to them or tell a story. She'd start a novel and she'd read part of it and they couldn't wait for her to finish it. The books were in English, but some of the old ones, like my father's mother, Nasima, never learned to speak any English at all. Nasima wore the long black robes and head shawls like women did in Lebanon. She came over here when she was 85 years old, and she lived with my children used to be scared of my grandmother Nasima. They really were. They were scared of her because she dressed in those clothes, had the shawl around her head, sat there and smoked her pipe. Every time they'd come by, she'd say, "I'll tell you one thing, Nasima went to Mass every day. She'd get out in the street, out there in front of the house, dressed in those dark robes and that shawl over her head, and flag people down. She'd cry, "Downtown! Church!" She learned to pray. One day she was at church and she and another lady from Lebanon were the only two in there. Monsignor Irwin sat there and preached to them for an hour! And he knew them! They came out and said, "We couldn't understand a word he said. You know, nowadays you hear a lot of different languages on the street, but back then you didn't. These older Lebanese people conversed in Arabic all the time, wherever they were. So it made them odd. A lot of the older women never did learn to read. Later, when we lived in Roxboro, we were the only Lebanese or Catholics there, but we got along with everybody in town. In fact, in Roxboro we went to the Baptist Sunday school, and sometimes we went to the service too. Mama said she'd never read. Of course, she would always tell us if it was something different than we were supposed to believe. On holidays, like Christmas and Easter, we'd go to Durham for Mass. And we always had what we called "the cup of the virgin" that was lit in

**Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina :**  
Evelyn Zaytoun Farris lived from March 20, 1915 - July 16, 2012.

Obituary: Evelyn Zaytoun Farris. Rocky Mount Telegram, July 18, 2012.<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/rockymounttelegram/obituary.aspx?pid=15...> <sup>[3]</sup> (Accessed 3/2/2016)

#### Subjects:

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#### Authors:

[Cecelski, David S.](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

#### Origin - location:

[Craven County](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

[Edgecombe County](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

[Rocky Mount](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

#### From:

[Listening to History, News and Observer.](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

#### Years:

1915-2012

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