

Interview with Monsieur Guy NOUCHI in Bordeaux, France November 10, 2011

1 hour 6 minutes 14 seconds

Guy Nouchi was born on March 29, 1932, in Kenitra (Port Lyautey), Morocco, 40 kilometers from Rabat. His parents were originally from Algeria. He was the 5th child in a family of 6, 3 boys and 3 girls. His father, Samuel, fought in WW I. His mother, Adziza Nouchi, née Hamiache, was from an Algerian family which had obtained French citizenship as early as 1855. The family spoke French at home and they kept kosher.

His father opened a grocery store and brought his 9 younger brothers and sisters to Morocco so they might find a way to make a living. He went bankrupt because he was so generous with his family. He also helped the Spanish Republican refugees, to whom he extended credit.

Samuel entered the French administration, supervising public works. He was sent to Souk el Arba ("The Market of the 4th Day", which was Wednesday), 80 kilometers north of Kenitra in 1937 - 1938. During the war, starting in 1939, his father was called up to serve since he was in the French army reserve.

When the Vichy laws came into effect, his father was forbidden to work. However, the French civil service still needed him and sent him the papers and affairs that needed to be attended to so he could work at home. However, the *Milice* was spying on him and soon, he had to stop working at home, too. The local government administrator, a Monsieur Boniface¹, gave Samuel Nouchi the right to sell coal. He went into the mountainous region of the Rif, near the Spanish border, and came back with the coal, which he purchased from the Arabs there. Guy remembers going along for several days.

Guy attended the secular French public school because he was French (his father, like other Algerian Jews, had French citizenship). There were Jewish and Muslim schools in Souk el Arba, too. The director of the school allowed the Nouchi children to stay on, although Jews were supposed to be forbidden to attend French public schools. He was probably a Gaullist sympathizer.

Guy and his younger brother were sent to the local rabbi for their religious education. They soon abandoned these studies and did not want to attend because the rabbi struck students with a small bullwhip.

He remembers the three days that it took for the Allies to take over Morocco in November, 1942.

After Morocco was liberated, Samuel Nouchi was reinstated into the French civil service and he asked to be employed in a city where there were schools for his children. He was sent to Salé², outside of Rabat. The family settled in the *medina*, the Muslim part of the city. The boys traveled to Rabat on a little boat.

In 1949, the family received government lodging in Rabat, and his father moved to the city.

¹ This is the man who organized the American invasion of Morocco, according to Mr. Nouchi.

² There was a famous saint in Salé, venerated by both the Jews and the Muslims, Saint N'Kaoua.

Guy mentions that there was a latent anti-Semitism among the Catholics with whom he attended school. He played basketball with the AS Salé, which was composed of 98% Muslim players. They won the national championship twice. He was also in a team that won a volleyball championship.

Guy continued his studies at the *Lycée Gorau* of Rabat. He passed his baccalaureate exams and even continued scientific studies at the Faculty of Sciences of Rabat, affiliated with the Faculty of Bordeaux. He became an assistant professor rather quickly. He had studied math and physics, but there were no courses in chemistry. In 1955, he transferred to Bordeaux to continue his studies.

His parents remained in Morocco well after the country became independent in 1956. His father waited for an assignment on mainland France. He finally was sent to Beziers, with an apartment provided for civil servants, in 1963.

At the age of 27, Guy could no longer postpone his military service. However, he wanted to avoid being sent to Algeria, where war was raging. He stated that his address was in Morocco, where one of his brothers was living. The local army recruiting center needed soldiers for one of the 10 French military posts still held in Morocco. He was sent to the military base in Fez and after only two months, he was to be transferred to the Faculty of Sciences as a “coopérant”³, but this did not work out.

He explains how he met his wife, Annette. Her brother, Marcel Benhamou, the leader of the French literary movement OULIPO, of which Georges Perec was one of the most famous members, was a friend of Guy's brother at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in Paris.

French law which forbids soldiers to marry women who are not French while abroad for military service. They got around this by first marrying religiously at a synagogue in 1959. The Moroccans recognize religious marriages. Then, they had a civil marriage performed in Meknès. Later, they could be married at the French consulate in Meknès, so that Guy could take his young bride back to France with him.

“L'optique molecular” is his scientific specialty – the study of matter with light, which can include visible and invisible light, even infra-red rays. Mr. Nouchi started the interview by stating that he created and directed the most important laboratory in this discipline in France. (Claude Cohen-Tannoudji, one of his friends, won the Nobel Prize for his discovery in a related field.) His laboratory perfected an instrument which could measure certain micro-emissions. After various posts, he retired in 1998.

His three children live in Paris. One of his sons specializes in television advertising. His daughter finished her PhD. in science in Los Angeles.

Unlike other families interviewed in Bordeaux recently, only his youngest sister, who he qualifies as always having been rather “mystical”, immigrated to Israel. It seems that the transition from life in Morocco to France, for both his parents and siblings, was not as difficult as it was for other Jewish families from Morocco.

³ When military service was compulsory in France, soldiers were sometimes could chose to be sent to former overseas colonies or dominions and assist these countries with scientific or technical expertise.

