

Interviewee: Dr. Nisio Katzenelson

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Interviewer: Professor Monica Salomon

Dr. Nisio Katzenelson was born on September 7, 1905. He was one of 4 children: 3 boys and a girl. His parents were Demetrio Katzenelson and Sonia Braslavsky. (Berl Katzenelson, one of the greatest kibbutz founders of Israel, was Demetrio's cousin.) Demetrio was born in the Ukraine, and had come to Argentina with Dr. Yarcho, a relative, at the end of the 19th century, at the age of 15. He first worked in the field of Dr. Yarcho, in the region of Gualeguaychu, learning to work the land. After the JCA established the Jewish colonies he went to the Lopez y Berro, district of Colon. He was the first Jewish farmer there. Life, jobs and production in the colony. Nisio's mother was born in Basavilbaso, Lucienville colony, and lived there until she married. Her work in the farm and abilities. Until his 10th birthday, Nisio worked in his father's farm doing all the available jobs. The school. The Spanish teacher was a Jew, Abraham Chudnovsky. One of his children was Gregorio, who became best friends with Nisio and became a dentist. The Judaic subjects were taught in another room in the same school. Nisio learned Hebrew from his grandfather, Alter Braslavsky, and also in Lucienville, Basavilbaso. In Lopez he learned Yiddish. The one family who was not Jewish, the Ferreyra family, did not send the children to school and neither were sent the children of the non-Jewish workers in the colonies. (Those workers were Russo-German.)

There was a synagogue in the colony. Nisio's father, the only Cohen there, had to recite the Priestly Blessing every Shabbat.

Games played in the colony were like "tag" that did not need any special sports equipment. The first soccer ball in the colony, an official one, was given to Nisio by an uncle who lived in Concordia. It was an event, and people came from far away to see this little child kick and run after a ball, practically as big as he was!

Religious observances, and celebrations. Nisio's family had the only piano in the area, and his sister Berta played it. She studied with a teacher in San Salvador. The school put on shows, and there were also literary evenings.

The family appreciated reading and literature. Many newspapers and other publications were picked up in San Salvador, in Yiddish, Russian and Spanish. In their home, the Katzenelson operated a petty well stocked popular library (Salgari, Verne, Stevenson,

Dickens, Galvez.) The mother also encouraged her children to pursue University careers, even though they were costly.

At age 10, Nisio was sent to his grandfather's farm in Lucienville. Grandparents. The First Agricultural Jewish Cooperative was found in Basavilbaso by Nisio's grandfather. The grandmother began the society of Ladies for Charities there too. The grandmother's name was Vita or Victoria Wulfsohn de Braslavsky. The teacher who prepared Nisio for admission in High School was Yedidia Efron (father of the famous performer Blackie.) In order to get into the High School Nisio had to pass 6 exams, equivalent to all the elementary school years, as the document of the colony school was not recognized. He did that in 2 days, in Villaguay. Both Nisio and David, son of the teacher Yedidia Efron, were admitted to the High School Fraternidad, in Uruguay, where they studied and lived, for 5 years. That school was geared to children of poor parents who were peons. Only 3 were children of Jewish colonists. Two of them were the Goldstraj brothers, both became physicians and lawyers. One of them was the private secretary of the Argentinean president Alvear. The third student was Gregorio Chudnovsky, the dentist. Nisio did not experience anti-Semitism at all during his years in the school. Also, there were no Jewish associations to join in Concepcion Del Uruguay. Nisio then moved to Cordoba, Argentina, where he studied medicine for 6 years in the Medical School there. Upon graduation, he became the first doctor in the Ubajay colony, in Pedernal, near Concordia. The years 1928 on, were of one economic crisis after another. Nisio many times did not receive payment for his services as a doctor. Somehow, though, he managed to fund the university studies of his two brothers in Engineering: one became the general manager of the Urquiza Railroad and the other became the country's apicultural specialist, known in many other countries as well... He also had to help his father because the colony did not do well. The main problem he had was with the demands of the JCA. Even though the Baron de Hirsch had good intentions, the administrators were harsh in their dealings with the colonists. Even after working it for 30 years, Nisio's father did not manage to buy his farm from the JCA. On the contrary, in a letter he received from the JCA after his father died, Nisio was threatened with the dispossession of the farm if he did not pay his father's debt in 7 days. The problem seemed to be always the payment of interests. No one gained ownership as far as Nisio knows.

Religious life in Ubajay. More about everyday life in the colony. Jewish celebrations.

After working there for 8 years, he moved to Concordia proper: he moved with his saving of 100 pesos! He married a Catholic woman and his children are Catholic.

The demise of the colonies, and Nisio's theory of why it occurred.