

Nella Modiano



This is my mother Nella Modiano. The photo was taken in Salonica in the 1920s.

My mother was the daughter of Mair Tchenio, of a prominent family from Aragon, in Spain. The family was famous because after the massacres of 1390, part of the Tchenios, or Chenillos as they were called in Aragon, converted adopting the Christian surname of Santangel. One Louis de Santangel, who was purser to the King of Aragon, provided the loans that financed Christopher Columbus' expedition to the New World. When I was a child, my mother used to tell me, 'we are Tchenio but our other name was Santangel.' I didn't understand at the time, but I remembered this when I discovered the story of Louis.

My mother was very sweet and very pretty. She was a gentle person and had a lot of understanding. She wasn't a mother that was smothering her children; she would see to it that we grew up to be human beings. She would put pepper in our mouths if we said a dirty word. She wasn't a pushy Jewish mother, not at all. Mother was running our household as well as the whole family, since Father was so busy. She would read French books. We had quite a library at home, one that the Germans took away.