Autobiography of a Loner Tackling the Nail

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Dear colleagues, dear friends,

To make a long story short, I'm going to try to condense more than 65 years of my professional career into 45 minutes. However, I would first like to thank Larry Parish and the Committee of the History of Dermatology Society for having hit the nail on the head by inviting me to speak to you because, as the saying goes, you are never better served than by yourself.

I never had the privilege of meeting Samuel Zakon, despite my interest in the history of dermatology (I wrote 2 chapters in the *Pantheon of Dermatology* edited by Löser, Plewig, and Burgdorf [1]), and I regret not having been able to take advantage of Zakon's "quiet, pithy words as well as the tolerant twinkle in his eyes," as Walter Lotz said when he was in my position in 1985.

Let me tell you just a little about myself now.

My teenage years were blown to smithereens during the Second World War and I was saved by studying. Dermatology was a serendipitous discovery for me. It's difficult to believe that I was the last resident student of Arnault Tzanck in the renowned Hôpital Saint-Louis in Paris, which at that time was the Holy Temple of Dermatology. This first training opened many doors for me, and I was able to work with some of the most famous dermatologists in my country. However, I have always been a

loner, and this is probably due to the fact that I had to start earning a living early.

An enormous change took place in my life when one of my favorite professors, Charles Grupper, persuaded me to attend the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) meetings held in 1966 in Miami. I discovered that sharing a room with him was like being 2 students at college. He introduced me to the greatest dermatologists of this country, and many of them became dear lifelong friends. I arrived 2 weeks before the congress and visited NYU, where I met a fantastic person, Perry Robins, who by chance spoke French. He became my best friend and still is and I am proud to have been chosen as the godfather of Laurence, his son.

Every year I used to attend to the Academy in Chicago with Charles Grupper, where it was held for many years. We used to have dinner together with the best dermatologists: Marion Sulzberger and his wife Bobby, Rudi Baer and Louise, and Herman Beerman and his wife. Some years ago, at Larry Parish's request I presented some photos of these wonderful people.

At that time, 4 other dermatologists also fascinated me. The first one, Nardo Zaias, invented Nail Science. Without Nardo, this field would probably still be in its infancy, because it is a tantalizing problem, not only in

diagnosis, but also in etiology and treatment. I should here like to stress the tremendous help of Nardo who, in spite of my broken English, repeatedly invited me to his annual symposium at the Academy. He was kind to acknowledge my work in the preface of his book.

The second, Phil Frost, was only 29 years old when he presented the first clinical paper on retinoic acid. It was a historical talk. We became very close friends, and with my wife Nicole, I spent a week in his home in Miami. We were among the happy few to have been invited to the dinner he offered when the AAD was held in Miami in 2013.

The third dermatologist who deserves a special mention was Albert Kligman. He was full of excellent ideas but was sometimes quite excessive, and we had some epic arguments through the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*.

The fourth person I was fascinated by was Walter Shelley, a hard worker, who contributed a great deal to dermatology. He became interested in nails, and we had decided to write a text together. Unfortunately, he passed away too early. He dedicated one of his books, which included what should be said about his work in the *Pantheon of Dermatology*, to me. In a paper on “Transverse Leukonychia (Mees’ Lines) due to Daunorubicin Chemotherapy,” he wrote: “The fortune teller can read the future in a palm but it is the physician who can read the past in a fingernail” [2].

After having introduced you to all the people who influenced my career over the years and helped me to become who I am, I would like to tell you about the major fields in which I have always been interested, dividing my time between clinical research as director of the Dermatologic Clinic of Cannes General Hospital and private practice, the latter providing a large number of new dermatologic entities.

Drug Adverse Events and Contact Dermatitis

When I met Rudi Baer, he was already aware of the most frightening event I had described in a French journal, as he had summarized it with Al Kopf in the *Year Book of Dermatology 1964–1965*: “Risk of Amaurosis during Local Treatment of Alopecia by Injectable Corticotherapy” [3]. I reported a case with transient loss of vision and added 2 other cases that I had collected in France with permanent blindness of 1 eye. I explained that the route of the particles of corticosteroid was using an anastomosis reaching the ophthalmic artery. It should be noted that when I was using a filler, 40 years later, 1 of my patients

presented an arterial embolization of the middle forehead caused by Zyplast II, but fortunately no scar was left. In addition, 2 years ago, I published a paper in the *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology* on “Proximal Nail Fold Intralesional Steroid Injection Responsible for Hoigné Syndrome” [4], combining dorsal pain, dyspnoea and headaches, anxiety, panic disorder and dire fear within the 2 min following the injection. Who has said that dermatology is easy sailing?

I was likewise interested in photoonycholysis and described the different types in a first paper published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, and some years later, I added a new type with subungual bullae.

I was also one of a few to write a paper on “Contact Dermatitis Restricted to the Face from Detergent Vapors” [5]. This may explain why the king of contact dermatitis, Alex Fisher, proposed that I should write two articles with him, one about paresthesia without sensitization [6] of acrylic nail and another one on Koebner’s phenomenon of the nail unit [7]. Following this, I was responsible for a chapter on occupational nail disease for Robert Adams’ book [8], all the different editions of Kanerva’s texts [9], and a chapter on nail dermatitis for Jean-Marie Lachapelle and Howard I. Maibach [10].

Cosmetology

I was fortunate to meet Earle Brauer in NYU. He was medical director of the Revlon Research Center and subsequently became vice president of Revlon. He introduced me to the new world of nail cosmetology. We wrote a special chapter together for the two first editions of Baran and Dawber’s text [11], and when he passed away he was replaced by Doug Schoon, equally well known in this field. Nardo Zaias and Phil Frost, both convinced that I wrote better English than I spoke, asked me to contribute to their respective books in this field [12].

Cosmetic dermatology being a hot topic, the idea struck me from out of the blue that a book on the subject was required. This time, Howard I. Maibach joined the party. If you give me the liberty of transforming Howard I. Maibach’s initials HIM into “Human Interactive Machine,” I must say that the machine is excellent and terribly effective. Working with him is more a pleasure and a satisfaction. He is so efficient, knows the most competent people in each field he deals with, and the work moves forward fast. For those who know him well, he is an exceptional partner and wonderful friend. Our book

Fig. 1. Nail malalignment.

Fig. 2. Onychomatricoma.

Fig. 3. a Nail degloving. **b** Nail degloving.

was a success, and the publisher had to print new copies. By the way, the 5th edition of *Cosmetic Dermatology* [13] will be published soon, and incidentally, I am still honorary president of the Society of Cosmetic Dermatology.

Mycology

With the help of Rod Hay, I supplemented Nardo Zaias' classification of onychomycosis published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* [14]. The number of questions the reviewers asked was unbelievably high, as you can imagine.

Nail Surgery

Over the years, nail surgery and different nail conditions became an invasive interest for me, as the more you search, the more you discover. It was time for me to create the European Nail Society, which I served for a while as founder president. From the very beginning, I thought that surgery was indispensable to manage the nail, and I was very lucky to have been able to work for many years with Henry Bureau, from Marseilles, a famous plastic and hand surgeon, and in the States with George Popkin. This permitted me to become the second president of the ISDS after Perry Robins. Around this time, I wrote a book on nail surgery with Ed Krull, Elvin Zook, and Eckart Haneke

[15], a chapter on nail surgery in the last edition of Epstein and Epstein's *Skin Surgery* [16], and in the 2 latest editions of Fitzpatrick's textbook [17].

I would just like to mention that, at various times, I have described congenital nail malalignment (Fig. 1), acquired malalignment, surgery of the proximal nail fold, a treatment for nail thickening in Darier's disease, etc.

This interest in nail surgery allowed me to discover or highlight several interesting conditions, which finished in a book written in collaboration with Rodney Dawber [18], consultant dermatologist in Oxford. This wonderful guy interested in hair and nail was a past student of the great Arthur Rook and the nail man Peter Samman. Our book reached a 4th edition in 2012.

Chromonychia

Concerning nail coloration, I divided leukonychia into true, apparent, and pseudo-leukonychia, the latter devoted to keratin granulation of the nail enamel and to superficial onychomycosis. We have described new types of red nails. Incidentally, I was surprised to note that yellow nail is not the privilege of Samman and White syndrome and can also be observed in lichen planus. Pigmentation of the nail and the surrounding tissues is still a subject of passion. I described longitudinal melanonychia resulting from nail biting, and toenail rubbing, SLE, lichen planus, and linear seborrheic keratosis. This led me to write a paper 20 years ago with Paul Kechijian on "the pseudo or

false Hutchinson's sign" [19], which we are currently revisiting with Beth Ruben and Luc Thomas.

I was the first to describe the worn-down nail syndrome as "the bidet nail" in women affected by a unilateral nail disorder characterized by a triangular defect of the fingernails with its base at the free edge of the nail. All these women displayed an obsessive behavior toward excessive genital hygiene which resulted in injuries of the 3 middle fingernails caused by the constant friction against the porcelain of the bidet while cleaning their genital area.

Miscellaneous

I described some new tumors of the nail apparatus, onychomatricoma (Fig. 2), color clues for malignancy, multiple facets of Bowen's disease, and pseudo tumor of the nail matrix following partial nail loss was described in 2002. But the most surprising nail disorder I have ever seen is certainly the "nail degloving syndrome," which I published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* (Fig. 3a, b) [20].

I felt frustrated not to be able to explain my concept of bone-dependent nail formation in other words, "no bone no nail," which appeared in the *British Journal of Dermatology*. However, 20 years later, the same journal published a paper written by Seitz and Hamm: "Congenital Brachydactyly and Nail Hypoplasia: Clue to Bone-Dependent Nail Formation" [21]. They had discovered the gene!

I have always been deeply involved in psoriasis, and I suggested a new classification of peripheral psoriatic arthritis, which was presented in Finland as a poster at the Nordic Congress in Tampere 3 years ago. I also devised a scoring of nail psoriasis some years ago, which has been validated in a number of countries. Recently, the team of Nijmegen improved it, and this scoring called N-Nails

appeared in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* in 2014 [22].

I will not bore you by quoting the list of the 37 books I have authored, plus the 70 chapters in various books and the 500 articles which have appeared in the most important journals over the years.

For those who would like to improve a foreign language, some of my books have been translated into 8 languages.

I have had magnificent masters, and as I always loved working and still do, I am always pleased to transmit my knowledge to the next generation.

David de Berker from the UK, who worked with Rodney Dawber and myself, Phil Fleckman, Marc Holzberg, Nat Jellinek, Marcel Pasch, Bianca Maria Piraccini, my son Bertrand Richert-Baran, Beth Ruben, Adam Rubin, Avner Shemer, Luc Thomas, Phoebe Rich, and Dimitris Rigopoulos have joined the International Nail Team which already has its pillars: Ralph Daniel, Antonella Tosti, and Dick Scher.

Before finishing, I would like to pay tribute to two dear friends, Eckart Haneke, a German who helped me forget the war, and once again Perry Robins, who became as dear as a brother even though we have always been separated by an ocean, too huge for two poor swimmers.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my wife Nicole (my better half) who, over the many years we have spent together, has helped me tirelessly and supported me in all my projects. I must also thank the AAD which granted a foreign loner dermatologist the honor of directing a symposium on nails for 4 years and the ADA which welcomed me with open arms.

I will conclude with a quote from Arthur Conan Doyle: "What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence. The question is what you make people believe you have done."

Thank you all for listening!

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