

The Mongui Maduro Foundation – From the Past to the Present

We all do it from time to time. Cut out and save a newspaper clipping that is of interest. Put away an invitation or an announcement to help us remember an event in the future. Keep special magazines or newspapers or just the front page thereof which describe a historical event. We all do it from time to time. But few, if any, of us do it with the passion of Shon Mongui Maduro. Few of us do so with such intensity, except that is for Ena Dankmeijer-Maduro, *die het met de paplepel heeft meegkregen van haar vader*.

That goes as well for books on subjects of Antilliana and Judaica. Shon Mongui's interest for all that was published about his native island started when he was only about 14 years old, and was shown a copy of a Dutch publication, *Neerlandia*, which was dedicated to Curaçao. That was in 1905, and I would dare bet that not one book about Curaçao has been published in the past 110 years which Shon Mongui or his wife of 50 years, Shon Lou, and later Ena and her late husband Emiel, have not ensured can be found on the shelves of our library. And the same goes for the countless publications on Judaica which in one way or another touch the Curaçao Jewish, and especially Sephardic, community.

You are all here today because you are friends of the Mongui Maduro Library and therefore already know well our unique and special library. You probably also have read our publication ten years ago, on the occasion of our 30th anniversary, which we entitled "*The Past: A Present for Our Future*", written by a dear friend of ours and of the Library, Els Langenfeld, who left us oh, so early. And many of you will also have read our publication in 2010, at the 90th birthday of Shon Ena, which we entitled "*ENA: Een leven tussen boeken*". There is very little I can add to all of that. Permit me therefore to dwell today especially on the persons who have made our Mongui Maduro Library into what it is today.

We start, of course, with Shon Mongui. Who was this Salomon Abraham Levi (S.A.L.) Maduro? His is a somewhat difficult family tree to follow as the same names repeat themselves generation after generation. Shon Mongui was a grandson of Papa Monchi, Salomon Elias Levi Maduro, of S.E. L. Maduro & Sons-fame. Shon Mongui was born in 1891 and, after the young passing of his father,

raised by his uncle, Manchi, who never married. Manchi instilled in his nephew Mongui a love of the outdoors of Rooi Catootje. Among his uncles and cousins, Mongui counted one of the greatest philanthropists our country has ever known, Lau Maduro, who in his own time was referred to as “*Padre de los Pobres*”; one of our greatest musicians and composers, Chal Maduro; and one of Curaçao’s most successful entrepreneurs in his cousin Momón Lau (or for some, Momón Blò.) These ingredients all came together in Shon Mongui, and made of him a true Yu di Kòrsou, eager to contribute to Curaçao’s society whenever he could. And he would do so in the family’s businesses, in the Chamber of Commerce, in Congregation Mikvé Israel and as honorary consul to France and Portugal.

Shon Mongui was not to do so alone. He was joined by his wife, Rachel Louise, Shon Lu, Brandao who would preside over de *Vereniging Huisvlijt* for home industry for not less than forty years and contribute in her own way to Curaçao’s society. Through *Huisvlijt*, Shon Lu helped countless households create their own income through handcraft, art and Panama-style straw hats.

From that happy marriage came forth our Shon Ena. Her so very interesting life has been well-described by Jeanette van Ditzhuizen in “*ENA: Een leven tussen boeken*”. Reading of Shon Ena’s life, one cannot but be a bit envious of the exciting life she led as a young child on the Rooi Catootje estate and hòfi, and then as a young woman during the war years and directly thereafter. That excitement continued after she met and married Emiel Dankmeijer, and together they added another dimension to their world – that of entrepreneurship with the E&E chicken farm and later as one of the founding shareholders of what we today know as KFC. In every way, Emiel became a true partner of Shon Ena, not only in their marriage but also in E&E, in developing the entire Rooi Catootje real estate, and in guiding Shon Ena through the intricacies of stock markets – a quality that in later years would serve her, and our Foundation and Library, very well.

And while all of this was happening, Shon Mongui kept collecting books, clippings, invitation cards, menus, stamps, coins, notebooks, speeches, hundreds of documentation folders, in short much of what for him represented his island and his Jewish community. In today’s lingo, he collected Antilliana and Judaica. And when his collection could no longer be kept in the family home in Scharloo, there

was never a doubt where it would end up after Shon Mongui's passing: in Landhuis Rooi Catootje. It is here that so much of what was important in the lives of Shon Mongui and Shon Lu were united: the Landhuis and its hòfi, his collection of Antilliana and Judaica, and the elegance and majesty of one of Curaçao's old homes which Els Langenfeld describes as "being more than a historic mansion ... it is a living, breathing record of one of the island's oldest families, the Maduro's."

Els describes that Shon Mongui would often find "eminent historians knocking on his door inquiring about his archives, and with increasing frequency." Encouraged by Shon Lu to do so, Ena and Emiel were therefore soon looking into making the collection into a private library, one which anyone can visit free of charge.

Shon Ena likes structures, plans and visions, and there was not a shortage of those when it came to Shon Mongui's collection. It took about five more years for Shon Lu, Ena and Emiel, assisted by Daphne Labega, RoseMarie de Paula and Rene Maduro, to create the structure that would make what was a family hobby into one of Curaçao's true treasures. And so it was that on the 5th of March of 1974, Stichting S.A.L. (Mongui) Maduro was born.

QUESTION : How did they create a functional library from a simple Foundation?

Now there was a foundation, a collection, a building to house it in, large mahogany cabinets to put books in, but how to make it into a library? Here is where once again Ena's entrepreneurship came peeking around the corner. She learned all she could about libraries from international contacts and conferences; from libraries around the world; and from some of our best local librarians who helped her create the Mongui Maduro Library: Daphne Labega, RoseMary de Paula and Amy Maduro. To run her Library, Ena assembled an experienced staff of librarians, including Erica de Groot, Anne-Roos Reich, Louèla de Lira, and Esther van Haaren; slowly but surely also many historians and researchers became friends of the Library. Together they built the Mongui Maduro Library into what it is today: a unique private library with a collection that is generally recognized to be the largest collection of Antilliana and Judaica in the Dutch Caribbean, one which no serious researcher of the history and culture of our island can afford not to consult.

Under Ena's passion for her Library, she continued to enlarge the collection that her father had left behind and so did also the realization that the Library could not remain for long in the Landhuis. Stopping the growth of the collection and of the Library was never an option: this was the life's work of Shon Mongui and Shon Lu, and of Ena and Emiel. It must not only continue to grow, but its future must also be safeguarded.

Here is where Ena, the visionary and the financier came in again. She started at the end, the financial aspect, by ensuring through her huge generosity to the Foundation that there would always be funding available for the Library. She encouraged her Library's board to think outside the box and to help create the future of the Mongui Maduro Library as the most modern and up-to-date library in the region. And in doing so, we were not to forget the outdoors and nature which she and her family loved so well, and we were not to neglect Landhuis Rooi Catootje as an anchor and "living record" of the family.

QUESTION : What is it that drove Shon Mongui and Pepe Ena to create all this?

When I read of the lives of Shon Mongui and Shon Lou, and of Ena and Emiel, I am struck repeatedly by one thought. There are many reasons why one may become a collector of books, of clippings, and of all kinds of related paraphernalia. In the case of Shon Mongui and Ena, I believe the reason is their love for their country and for their Judaic heritage. It is this love for country and heritage that has driven them to collect so that others in their own society, but also far outside its borders, may benefit from what they have put together. It is this passion and vision that have made them create what I believe is a treasure of our Curaçao society. And it is through this treasure that they pass so much history on to us, such that we may learn and create a better future for all.

Our Landhuis was now full of books and folders and files and magazines and ordners and papers everywhere – and a vision for the future was needed in 2007. Let me pass the mike on to Henry who will tell you more of that vision of where we are today and where we hope to be headed.