

CHILD INTERVIEW CODE NO. CH-25 M
Date of Interview: Sept. 30, 1957
Place: N.Y.C.
Interviewer: Mrs. Varga

I. CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Adorable young boy. Slender figure, sweet face with a mischievous smile, sparkling brown eyes, brown hair. Extremely lively, restless, always provocative, indicating even an ~~xxx~~ excessive nervousness. He is very bright, but takes it for granted, without any sign of self-content. He loves girls, has most of his troubles with his parents and teachers because of that.

Parents were very hard working, eager to get ahead. Father as a headwaiter belonged to a higher worker's class. Both of the parents engaged in the entertaining business, the whole family had an easygoing tendency.

Father took active part in the revolution.

CH-25-M

II. PERSONAL INVENTORY

1. Age: 12
2. Sex: Male.
3. Religion: Roman Catholic
4. Respondent is from Esztergom. He spent most of his life at the same place.
5. The 5th grade was started in the autumn of 1956 in the Red Star Public School in Esztergom.
6. Mother is 41, father 42, living with respondent in the U.S. Brother is 19, sister 18. Two of his grandmothers and one grandfather are living in Hungary.
7. Respondent lives with parents, brother and sister in Manhattan in a 3-room apartment with kitchen and bathroom. He attends the 6th grade of public school on 78th St. Father works for a butcher, very heavy work according to respondent. Mother is a cleaning woman.

Here respondent adds that his father would like to go back to Hungary and open a restaurant that his grandfather had previously in Transylvania, which was confiscated by the Communists.

III. THE SCHOOL SITUATION

A. Can you tell us something about your school in Hungary?
What were your subjects?

"Our subjects were arithmetic, reading, writing, singing, drawing, gymnastic, Russian and geography."

How many Russian lessons did you have weekly?

"We had two Russian grammar lessons weekly, and we had reading every day, mostly about Russian subjects. We read Russian folk tales, and also about Stalin, how he liberated Hungary, how the Russians rebuilt the Hungarian bridges. Nobody ever believed these things. We were very bored with the Russian reading hour, and hated the Stalin stories. However, ~~we~~ we liked the ~~folk~~ folk tales. If we got a reading assignment in the Russian language, nobody ever read it at home. I myself could answer even so, because I could remember when the teacher read us the story in advance. The Russian grammar was easy. Everybody in the class knew it, even the worst student. Besides these silly stories about Stalin, etc., we had no other indoctrination."

Which subjects did you like the most?

"I liked arithmetic and Hungarian reading. Arithmetic I knew always; this was why I liked it. This was the easiest for me. I like it here too in the American school. Reading class I liked because I like to read in general. There were good books. I took many books from the library of the Pioneer Movement."

Which subjects did you like the least?

"I didn't like drawing. I am not good in that. Whenever we had to paint with water colors, everything around me was full of paint, including myself."

Tell me something about your teachers now.

"How did you like your teachers?"

"Our school was in Petofi Sandor St. The name of the school was before Szent Imre. I mean before 1945. At the beginning our Director was an AVH man, but he was removed and later on we got a strong Communist Director who almost died during the revolution because he didn't want to let the crowd in to take down the Red star from the school."

XHow about your other teachers?

"We had women teachers and men teachers as well. Almost every subject was ~~xxx~~ taught by a different teacher. Our form master was ~~xxxxx~~ a very nice person -- a lady around forty. She

taught the Russian language and arithmetic. Hungarian grammar and reading were taught by her husband. They were not Communists. Our lady teacher learned the Russian language from the book just as we did. We mostly had teachers from the old times who were teachers before the Communists took over."

Did your teachers treat all children equally?

"Yes, they did. They didn't ~~sk~~ give special privileges to any of the children."

Did you have any Communist teachers?

"Our leader in the Pioneer Movement, our Director, and the gymnastic teacher were Communists."

How did you know that they were Communists?

"Everybody knew that. But we thought so ourselves, because those who were Communists were so wild. Once I got such a slap on my face from the Director that I turned around my own body, only because I chased the girls around."

Whom did you like the most among your teachers?

"I liked a woman teacher in the 4th grade. She was a very beautiful teacher from the old times. She taught a very good friend of my father when he was a boy. She was very kind and always very just with us. She helped us to learn and stayed with us if we didn't understand something. She taught arithmetic. We always brought flowers for her and decorated the classroom. This was dangerous, because the Director prohibited. It was a state law or something like that. We weren't allowed to bring any flowers or gifts to the teachers. If they got anything from the students, the Director charged the teacher with blackmailing the children. This was told to us by this lovely teacher who said it once to a few students who were reliable when we brought her a beautiful gift ~~sk~~ at the end of the year -- a Chinese ball with candies. Then she told us that she wasn't supposed to accept any gifts, only flowers from the fields which were picked by ourselves."

And which of your teachers did you like the least?

"The Communists I didn't like. They were so rude. In the first grade we had a Director whose wife didn't know any Hungarian -- just a few words. She was a Russian. I hated her."

Tell me something about your friends now. Who were your friends?

"My best friend was a Jewish boy who lived next to us. I met him on the beach first, and we started to fight. This is how our friendship was born. Later we went to the same school, and ever

since, when we quarreled he was absolutely unhappy. I had another boy as my friend, whose father had a bar nearby. This was confiscated later on, but his father was allowed to work in his former shop. I went to the religious school with this boy, and we became friends there. In the 5th grade, all three of us were in the same class."

What did you do together with your friends?

"My ~~mother~~ brother brought home swords from the ~~im~~ theatre, and we played with those. We went to swim together with those boys and also we went after girls. There was a small boy with whom we always did different kinds of mockery. We ragged him, because supposedly he was a Communist. I heard that during the revolution his father was trampled to death by the revolutionists because he was the assistant of the Russian officer in the city. We always beat this boy whenever we had a chance. We tried to do it so the girls would see our heroism. We once saw the boy sitting in a jeep with his father. I was once in their apartment. They had a beautiful apartment -- pictures and furniture. This boy always praised the Russians. He told us that he would show us when he sat in the tank of the Russians. There was another boy, a Czech boy, who spoke perfect Russian. We didn't like him. He was too fat and always wanted to show off with everything that he had. He always fought with everybody. They lived with his parents in a house for officers. His father was one of the commanders of the Hungarian army in Esztergom. If there was a celebration, always the father of this boy had to have speeches for the Russians. I disliked only these two boys, who were surely Communists."

Were there any children at school who were looked up to by all the others?

"The best student in the class was a girl, and I was the second best. But the others didn't look up to us as if we were great or better. They only liked us, and the teacher liked us too, and if a supervisor came to class, we were called out to give the answers all the time, because our teacher knew that we would give a correct answer."

Let's say there are two children of your age. One of them is the son of a man who once was a lawyer, but who is now a common laborer. The other is the son of a man who was a common laborer ten years ago, but now is the manager of a factory. Which of them would you rather have as a friend?

"I would have as a friend the first one, whose father became a worker. I would never make friends with the children of somebody who was a cobbler and became a leader, even if they weren't Communists. The children of such people are just the same; they want to become big from smallness, from nothing."

Did you have religious instructions at school or elsewhere?

"We had a chance to attend religious class. But many parents of those children who attended religious class were dismissed from their jobs, or degraded. Therefore I myself had to stop going to the religious class after the 4th grade. At the religious school once, the priest slapped two boys in their faces. After class, these boys told the Director about it, and we never saw the priest again. Somebody else came to teach us from next time on.

"After I left religious class at school, we started to attend religious instructions at home. ~~My brother went to the 6th grade, a priest came to our home. He was paid by my mother and all three of us children attended his lessons.~~
* Since my brother went to the 6th grade, a priest came to our home. He was paid by my mother and all three of us children attended his lessons."

B. Did you tell your parents what happened in school?

"Not everything, because my parents were at home only very seldom. They didn't even see each other. When my father arrived at 9 P.M. my mother was already gone. She had to leave the house at 8:00 P.M. for night work. Therefore, usually we didn't have a chance to talk to them."

Was there anything you definitely didn't want to tell your parents?

"I kept it a secret only if I beat someone, or if somebody fought with me. I was beaten up once because of a girl. We children had some secrets once in a while. I once heard my brother whispering with one of his friends about some ~~leaflets~~ leaflets, some underground movement. This was before the revolution, and they got some leaflets or papers from Austria, so far as I could make it out. You see, it just occurs to me that my father was so busy that once, for instance, he didn't even know where I went to school, what kind of school I went to, and he asked me about it."

C. Did you ever talk about what happened at home when you were at school?

"My parents never talked in front of me. If they had a little chance to talk to each other, they always sent me to bed, and we had a very thick door. I couldn't hear what they talked about."

What sort of things were talked about in school?

"I talked in school only to one of my friends, but we talked about such things as where we went with our parents, what we did at home, or the previous day. However, we never talked about what our parents mentioned at home. He never told me anything like that either. During the revolution, everything was changed. At the beginning, our parents politicized openly in front of us, until the bitter fights started with the Russians."

Did your parents warn you not to talk about something at school?

"No, my parents didn't warn me, but as I told you, I didn't hear much of what they talked about either. But I would never have told it to anyone if I heard. They only mentioned to me that what I heard at school about Hungarian history was all changed around. Everything was set against the Germans and the West. I heard from my brother that he learned those things differently before Communism started, and I remembered a little bit from that time when he learned aloud. My Our teacher, who was the form master, the nice lady, always put in one or two stories, little parts into her explanations of history, from what we understood, how to take the events. She also mentioned to us somehow, not directly but indirectly, when she learned she learned those things differently. Sometimes she just explained how it was before. It didn't harm her, because nobody in our class ever talked about it in front of somebody else. She never said anything anti-Communist. She only compared all the time how they learned in the old times the same thing that we were now learning differently."

D. What did you do after school hours?

"Most of the time, we went to ride a bicycle, or I went to my friends' houses to play. We never learned. We only did our written assignments quickly, but we never read, for instance, what was a reading exercise. We read novels instead. But we could answer the questions even so, because we remembered what the teacher explained previously."

What kind of books did you read?

"I read Jules Verne, Hungarian folk tales, Robinson Crusoe, I got those books from my brother. We lived in the house of an old Hungarian colonel. He took our family into his apartment because the Communists wanted to deport him, and this way he could stay in one of his former rooms. I always got books about expeditions, which I loved, from him."

Did you go to the movies? What other amusement did you have?

"I went to the movies almost every day. I saw all the films. I am a very gay fellow. Whenever my parents went anywhere, I went with them. I like very much to carouse. Once here, in New York, we went to a party, where we stayed until 6:00 o'clock in the morning, and then we got up at 6:00 o'clock the next afternoon."

Did you do any sports?

"I tried every sport -- swimming, soccer. I was very good in gymnastics, high jumping, rope climbing, ping pong, ice skating, etc."

What did you play with the other children?

"In Hungary, it wasn't easy to get a toy. For instance, a toy gun cost 200 forints. A cleaning woman had to work for two weeks in order to earn that money. Therefore we mostly played things which didn't require any toys. However, even so we loved to play with balls. In the summer, I went twice for vacation to my grandparents at Nagyvarad, which was in Romania. "

Did you participate in the Pioneer Movement?

"Everybody had to participate in the Pioneer Movement. It was compulsory. It was automatic to ~~xxxxx~~ become a member, together with the registration. In 1950, the son of a company director was removed from school because he didn't want to register in the Pioneer Movement. There was another boy who was the son of a mailman. He was allowed to drop his membership, first of all because he couldn't pay the fee, which was 1 forint a year, and secondly, because they lived too far on the outskirts of the city. He got permission to stay home. But I guess they were also happy not to have him. He was a bad boy. The first day at school he smoked a cigarette. The Pioneer Movement was a lot of fun. We had a certificate, and if we showed it, we could borrow a football, play guns. There were quite good performances -- movies, we could play pingpong. I also went ice skating with my Pioneer certificate, but I had to pay a little fee besides. The performances were quite well done. There were either folk dances, or, once, a Polish magician visited us. We never saw any movies about the Russians, but the movies were mostly about our school subjects. I guess there was quite a lot of sense in that. I liked it. There was no political indoctrination. Only at school we were involved in politics. For instance, we had to stand up for ten days in a row because of the anniversary of Lenin's death. We had a great demonstration on the birthday of Stalin. That is true that all the celebrations were arranged by the man who was the leader of the Pioneer Movement. When I attended the 1st and 2nd grade, this Pioneer Movement leader was a very rude man. He always sent reports about us to our parents for the smallest thing, and we could never get the highest marks from him. He just didn't give them to anyone. A boy committed suicide in our class because his parents told him that if he didn't get a five mark, he would be thrown into the river, and then the boy jumped into the river himself. I don't what was really the background, but anyway, this is what happened."

IV.

Now tell us something about your family. What did your father do, and your mother?

"Before the war, my father was a ~~mx~~ waiter in my grandfather's restaurant in Nagyvarad. After the war, he became a headwaiter in the largest hotel at Esztergom. It was really very funny. You know, whenever some visitors, some guests came from abroad, we had to lend our fancy white tablecloth to the hotel, and our fine laces. In Esztergom, in the whole city there were altogether eighty pieces of silver forks and knives, spoons, etc. Wherever there was a banquet, one restaurant had to lend the silver to the other, and the manager always had to watch it. Once a small silver spoon disappeared, and they searched in the whole hotel for this spoon. It went on for days. It was a great scandal.

"My father made, after the war, only 400 forints a month at the beginning. This was not enough, therefore my mother went to work too. First she was a helper in the kitchen of a restaurant. Then she became a bartender, and finally, she was the cashier. My father didn't like her to work there, because the people always fought late in the evenings. They beat each other. My mother made 600 forints. Later on, my father's salary went up to 1000 forints too. But even so, it was difficult to make a decent living on that money. My mother always tried to make some more money as a cashier. Whenever people asked for brandy or something, she gave a little less, or she charged a little more, and this way she always could make a little side money."

Where did you live, under what conditions?

"We lived in the middle of the city. There were family houses around us. We lived in a house which belonged to a former colonel, as I told you before. It was a big house, with more than five rooms, and the Communists wanted to take it away from the landlord. Therefore he took in three families. We ourselves had a great kitchen. It was very cold in the winter, and we had a very small room with five beds in it. It was crowded with beds. There were two beds for my mother and ~~x~~ my father. I slept in the middle which was very uncomfortable, because I had to sleep on the board, which was very hard. My sister and my brother had two beds, and my grandmother lived with us. When I complained too much about the hard board, then finally they put an old sofa into the kitchen for me. Besides the beds, there was a table in the room where all three of us studied our lessons. Our landlord, the colonel, with his wife, his son, his daughter and her husband and the little baby of the young couple, lived in such a tiny room that whenever I had to go to their room to fetch water, because that was the only running water faucet in this part of the house, I had to walk sideways among the beds to carry the water, the room was so crowded. All these people cooked there and smoked all day long,

They
so it was just terrible, this little room. I didn't have enough money; they had almost no money. They ate a pound of meat for two days, those five people, but they had a lot of books. The whole room was crowded with books. There was one toilet in the house which was used by everybody. The other family in the house had a very comfortable, nice apartment. They had the bathroom, which the woman used as a laundry room, a wash room, because she took care of the laundry for the army. They were Communists, and this is why we couldn't use the bathroom, or have any water in our place."

Who did the housework? Did you help?

"My grandmother lived with us, and she did the housework. I helped sometimes, but most of the time she sent me away. She didn't like my help. However, I cut wood for her. We had a stove, a wood ~~burning~~ burning stove, for cooking. My grandmother took care of me when I came home from school. She fed me. I was the first one who arrived home, then my sister and my brother, later on my father and my mother came home. My poor grandmother, she had to warm up the food every time repeatedly. My mother worked in two shifts, once at night from 11 P.M. to 6 A.M., and once during the day. When she worked at night, she earned 100 forints per night once in a while. She did it for a month, but then it was prohibited because the people went to their bar at night and they didn't go to work the next morning."

V. REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

A. Have you been rewarded at school for good work?

"If we got a good grade at the end of the year, then we were given books. My brother also got money once -- 200 forints."

B. Were you ever punished at school?

"Yes. If we did something wrong, then we had to stay at school in the schoolroom longer. If our lesson wasn't finished, or we broke a window, or something like that, first of all we had to pay for the damage, and then the teacher sent a report of unsatisfactory conduct to our parents. This was very bad, because my parents were very strict with me, and I got ~~the~~ punishment at home for that. But we were never punished physically at school."

C. Were you ever punished by your parents?

"Yes, if I talked back. I went fishing sometimes, and I didn't go home on time. For instance, once I came at nine in the evening. Then my mother beat me up with a leather belt. My father beat me only once, when I refused to go home from the playground. My father took a bamboo stick and drubbed me soundly. In general, my mother punished me physically, but quite often, because I was a bad boy, and also fresh. If I look back on it, I was drubbed regularly at least twice a week. But my father only scolded me, which was worse than the punches of my mother."

VI.

Now let me ask you a bit about the revolution.

A. Can you tell us why the Hungarians started the revolution?

"The Hungarian revolution broke out because of many things, because everybody was always afraid of the AVH, that they would come at night and take the people. Whoever had anything before 1955 -- a house, or land -- had it taken away. Whoever was an officer was afraid of deportation. Many people had to go to the mines to work as forced laborers. There was misery and poverty all over the country. Whoever had a little more money was taken by the AVH and questioned, where did he take the money from. My father was taken to the AVH too, and he was beaten so hard that his tooth was punched out and his nose was broken."

Who told you these things? Why do you think this was the reason?

"Nobody ever told me. I just thought this was it."

What impressed you most during the revolution?

"When my father stood on the top of a bus and gave a speech to the people, because many people in Esztergom didn't know that there was a revolution at all in Budapest. I was with my father on the top of the bus. After a while, my mother asked me to come down. I didn't want to, but finally my father sent me down. I liked the situation so much. However, I had to go home with my mother. Later on, the bus was attacked by the Russians, and my father could hardly escape. Within a few days, we got a message from Gyor that forty Russian tanks were approaching our city, and then many people gave up the revolution and went back to the side of the Communists. Otherwise, nothing much happened in the city. I wasn't afraid, because we only tore down the big Red stars. Once the Party secretary at the Communist headquarters didn't want to give the key to the people. Therefore the crowd wanted to beat him, but he ran away. We found the Russian flags and we cleaned our shoes with these flags. Later on, after the revolution, the AVH came to our house looking for my father. However, he was told at his working place that this would occur to him. Therefore he escaped to Miskolc where his brother lived, and when they returned together, then we escaped from Hungary."

VII.

What would you like to be when you grow up?

"I wanted to be an actor, but my parents didn't like it. They want me to become a doctor."

Why did you want to become an actor?

"I don't know. At school I always took part in plays, in performances, and I always had to recite poems. I liked it very much. I like to work too, but it is so pleasant that to be an actor doesn't need so much work. However, my parents told me that it was such a gigolo's life. It is not for a real man."

A. Tell me now, what is a good father like?

"A good father is one who doesn't spend his money, but brings the whole amount home and gives it nicely to his wife. And especially, ~~he~~ doesn't spend his money on women. A good father has to fulfill the wishes of his children once in a while. He has to understand that a child is a child. You know, in our city there was a boy who was 18 years old, and he was already a father. He had to pay alimony for a child."

What is an ideal teacher like?

"An ideal teacher should explain the subject, especially what the essence of the subject is, and not only give the assignment to the children without any explanation. He shouldn't be rude, but strict. He should be able to teach well and to understand his business."

What is a good mother like?

"A good mother should know her children well. Last but not least, she shouldn't ~~deceit~~ deceive her husband, because then I would beat her. If she has a child, she should understand how to bring the children up, how to handle them, not only take it for granted that she has two or three children, but cannot make a difference among them, as it was in the old times with my grandmother, who had twelve children."

What are the three worst things a child can do?

"To lie, to steal, and he shouldn't think of girls under 16."

What are the three most important things a child should be taught?

"He should be polite, he should care about school, and his mind shouldn't always be some place other than on his work, and he should be able to forget other people who caused him trouble or harmed him."

What are the three worst things one can say about someone?

"That somebody doesn't like his parents, that he doesn't fear God, and that he is two-folded."

VIII. SPECIAL SECTION

A. Who do you think are the three greatest people in the world?

"Kossuth, Washington, and ~~Sam~~ Columbus."

Who do you think are the three greatest people in the world today?

"Adenauer, Bulganin. You see I saw him in a film and I liked him; and Eisenhower."

Who do you think is the greatest living Hungarian?

,"Paul Maleter and Imre Nagy."

B. Now we would like to give you a few names of famous Hungarians. Can you tell us a little about each of them?

St. Stephen: "He was a saint and a martyr. He was born at Esztergom. I saw the room where he was born."

King Mathias: "After he was released from prison, he went to the isles of the Danube, and there the people elected him for a king."

Francis Rakoczi the 2nd: "He wanted to liberate the people from under the Hapsburgs. He went to school in Vienna and the Austrians wanted to educate him for themselves, but he came later on to Hungary. He saw the misery, and how the Hapsburgs exploited the people. Then he went abroad and organized an army, came home to Hungary to fight for the Hungarians. He died abroad and his remains were brought back to Hungary later on."

Sandor Petofi: "He was a great Hungarian poet who offered his whole life and his poetry for liberty and the War of Independence."

Louis Kossuth: "He was the leader of the revolution in 1948. He was an excellent orator. The people believed in him. He could win the people's hearts over. His revolution almost succeeded, but the Russians came in then too, and defeated the revolution. We were told about this by our old teacher -- you know -- the one who always compared the old and the new history. He told us about Rakoczi too, and we could figure out that the Russians were always a malediction for Hungary."

Istvan Szechenyi: "He was a great Hungarian count. From his money the Tisz (this is the second greatest river in Hungary) was regulated. (This was very important for the Hungarians in order to prevent floods. Interviewer's Note.) This was told us too by our nice teacher."

Ferenc Deak: "He was a great Hungarian during the revolution of 1848."

Teresia Maria: "She was a king."

Gabor Bethlen: "I heard his name, but I don't know more about him."

Michael Tancsics: "He was liberated from his prison during the revolution in '48. The youth pulled his car in place of the horses, they were so overjoyed at his liberation. The people loved him."

George Dosza: "He was a great leader of the peasants during the time of the crusaders, but Dosza told the people they shouldn't go to fight with the crusaders in foreign lands, if we have enough trouble in our own country. He organized the people against the lords, the rich. At the end, he was burned alive with a burning iron crown on his head."

Nicholas Horthy: "He marched into Hungary during the war, and then he became the governor of the country. I heard about him at home, and I once read an article about him in a magazine."

Joseph Mindszenty: "He was a real great Hungarian. During the revolution, the people liberated him from his prison, and they wanted him to become the president instead of Imre Nagy. But he said it wasn't possible, because it was against his mission as a priest. Then he went to the American Embassy."

Imre Nagy: "He came after Rakosi was dismissed. He became the Minister-President, but I don't know whether he was really a Communist or not. Now he is in Romania some place. Anyway, he didn't want the Russians to come to Hungary, and he asked help from the West, but in my opinion, this wasn't the real thing to do. He should have ordered a general mobilization from 20 to 50 years old. In this case we could have driven out the Russians. It would have been much better than asking help from the West, which didn't come anyway."

IX.

What strikes you as being completely different in the U.S. from Hungary?

"The working conditions are completely different, because here they pay much more for the work, and it's different too that we can eat more here."

What are the things you like most about the U.S.?

"I like the fact that we don't have to learn so much. There are more toys here. The children have much more right, and the parents are not allowed to beat the children. But this is not very good according to my opinion, because the parents understand what should be done with the children, and the children don't understand what should happen to them."

What are the things you disapprove of in the U.S.?

"That the children at school are like animals. They laugh in the face of the teacher, and tell him 'You are a fool' and they don't obey at all. I don't like the fact that the people are not cultivated. They are modern, but they don't have culture. They don't go to the theatre, whereas in Hungary this was on a much higher level. There are American children who don't even know who Washington was. I don't like either that they are not polite. They don't offer their places on the subway or the bus if older people get on."

THE END