

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Hungarian Revolution Project

Personal Experiences

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EDITH CIOTOLA

Interviewed

by

Daniel Flood

on

February 26, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: EDITH CIOTOLA

INTERVIEWER: Daniel Flood

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secret police, education, church groups

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F: This is an interview with Edith Ciotola for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Hungarian Revolution, by Daniel Flood, at Poland Middle School, 7 Elm Street, Poland, Ohio, on February 26, 1976, at approximately 10:35 a.m.

Mrs. Ciotola, why don't you go back into the past when you were born, and to your childhood events in Hungary.

C: Most of the time when people ask me where I was born, or even when I have to fill out an application, I usually say I was born in Budapest, Hungary because it just seems so complicated to explain the geography of Hungary to most people. It really wouldn't make too much sense to them. Actually, I wasn't born in Budapest, Hungary; I was born in what is now Czechoslovakia. The technical name for that part of Hungary before the war was called the Upper Lands. It stretched all the way across from Bratislava to the eastern end of Czechoslovakia. I think because Hungary lost the war, as a punishment and part of their debt, that's how they had to pay it off--this part of the Hungarian Empire was given to the Slovaks. Before the war there was an area that was called Bohemia and Slovakia and after the war they became Czechoslovakia. This was right after World War II. There were some divisions even before that, after World War I, but I don't know if you want to go back that far, even to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. I think after World War I that's when they started dividing up the country. This part of Hungary where I was talking about, where I was born, there is a small town; it was near Bratislava. It had a different name. My father and my mother's family were all born and raised in this part of the country and they were all Hungarians.

After we lost the war and the Russians had moved in, this part of the country was given to the Slovaks and the Hungarians, more or less, had to flee unless they wanted to become Czechoslovakian citizens. I think the irony of this whole thing, whenever I talk about escaping in 1956, could be said that this wasn't really the first time that I escaped from Hungary because I escaped from Hungary even when I was a little child. I was six years old at the time. Before I went to Hungary to Budapest, my earliest recollections were that of the war. The war had just started right after I was born. I think that the pain and the hunger and the cruelty that had gone on left their imprints or impressions on me because to this day whenever I hear an airplane fly over, it kind of shuddered me and I can't stand it; I get scared. I remember my dad was taken; he was fighting at the Polish front. He was fighting for the Nazis, for the Germans. Hungary was forced into that situation. He was gone for the better part of three years, and then my dad came back from the war. He was a fairly big man, and he was down to 98 pounds. He had a long beard, and bugs in his head. He was telling us the horrors, that for weeks on end they didn't have anything to eat. They would go out in the field and have cold, raw potatoes and just wipe the mud off. This is the kind of horror they had to fight; it was really horrible.

- F: What about the army equipment that they had? Do you remember much about that at all?
- C: Only the stories. Now these things I'm telling you, I would naturally have not known about; I only know them from the stories that my father was telling me. I think that they were probably ill-equipped, especially towards the end of the war. They were running out of money and they didn't care about their people at all. Then when my poor father came back from the war, the war was lost. He was in a private business and he came back only to find out that everything he had had was lost. In this city that I had mentioned he had several beauty salons. They were all bombed. Everything that he had was gone. Not only that, but then he also found out that he was going to lose his country. He was going to have to leave. My family and myself then, around 1945, we left this upper part of Hungary and we had gone to Budapest. We salvaged whatever we could from our furnishings and home. We had to start life all over again. What a life that was! We were going into complete turmoil; there was a complete change of government in Hungary. I think Hungary, before the war, had more of a democratic type of government with several different parties where you could vote on a candidate. You had all these opportunities. After the Russians permitted this for a while, up to a point, but slowly they formed what I would call a coalition government. Eventually it became a one-party system; it was a Communist party with only one candidate. You could vote, but you only had one person to vote for. The person that eventually took over the government,

his name was Rakosi. He was a complete puppet of Stalin. He had dictated the Russian policy to the Hungarian people. We were supposed to have been freed. When the Russians took over Hungary we were supposed to have been freed, but what they had done was devastate the country completely to the point that . . .

The one thing that Hungary was famous for was the growing of grapes for wine. The Tokay grapes you've probably heard of in the mountains. They even took the dirt by the truckfuls to Russia because they wanted to duplicate growing these grapes because they couldn't do it in their own soil. The soldiers themselves raped and stole everything they could. Massacre was just a common thing. Hungarians themselves developed such deep hatred for the Russians, which I hate to say that I had with me for a very long time. I am more broad-minded about it right now, and I can say that the Russian people themselves aren't like it. When you're subject to something like that as a child I think it just kind of stays with you.

Going back then to the events in a little more logical sequence; I started first grade then in Budapest, Hungary with my family. My father got a job; he worked for the government. Naturally private enterprising and private business was not allowed. Everything belonged to the people; this was a people's republic, which means that nothing belonged to you; everything belonged to the government and you got exactly what they allowed you to have.

There were the tightest security restrictions on everybody. At first all your movements or wherever you went, whoever your friends were, they kept a record on it. Everybody had a personal file and record of your life and your travels and your jobs and where you lived. These restrictions on your personal freedom, I think, were the ones that eventually led to a revolution. People could put up with this type of thing for only so long, and then you rebel. You just can't stand it anymore.

F: What if anyone tried to rebel at the time when they started?

C: I think there was so much fear put into our souls, so to speak, because they had examples of individuals that did try that they had executed.

F: Was this done in front of everyone?

C: Everybody knew about it. I think the most famous one was probably the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty, the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty, because he was not a fearful person. He stood by his principles and he just completely rejected the Communist ideas and the way they wanted to subjugate the Hungarian people and they wanted to force their ideals on us. I think this was probably the greatest example of restriction of freedom of

speech, which we here in this country take for granted so much. There was no freedom of speech. This was the very first freedom that was taken away from everybody. You could not say what you wanted. If you did and you whispered . . . You didn't know who your friends were. Maybe somebody in your apartment house or your neighbor didn't like you and reported you to the officials. You could just be taken off as a political prisoner and they gave you a mock trial, so to speak. You could be sentenced to death, shot, or sent to Siberia. These were the type of things that they had done at first to keep people in line.

- F: What was the Catholic church doing at the time? Were they trying to fight it?
- C: The leadership of Cardinal Mindszenty, I think they knew that they couldn't do very much, but they tried to at least keep the Hungarian people together and tried to let them have their religion. I think religion was very important to the Hungarians. I might add here that the whole country is 85 percent Roman Catholic. The church was not allowed to function as you know it over here.
- F: When did this actually start? In 1945 the Russians took total control . . .
- C: It was gradual; it didn't happen all at once. I think that Cardinal Mindszenty was arrested in 1949, and I think starting around 1947 and 1948 the gradual taking over of the church had taken place too. In 1949 they announced in the public school system that you couldn't have religious training for the youngsters. There weren't parochial schools in Hungary, but in the public schools there was religious training, namely Catholic catechism type of teaching because almost everybody was Catholic. That was taken away immediately. When I was in first or second grade that was the last time that I had formal religious instruction in Hungary. Before Cardinal Mindszenty was arrested, we knew, I think, that he was going to be arrested because he had warnings that if he didn't go over and sympathize with the government that he was going to be put away. As you mentioned, he was a man of principle, and he didn't. He was just completely fearless. In case anybody is ever interested in learning about his life, read this book . . .
- F: Why don't you go through the title and who it was written by?
- C: It was written by Josef Cardinal Mindszenty, and these are his memoirs. It's published by McMillian and Company. It's available in Hungarian and English. He knew that he was going to be arrested so he had said that all the youngsters that were of age were going to become confirmed at that time, as long as they were at least six years old. I had received my confirmation when I was six. I was in first grade and

Cardinal Mindszenty administered it to myself and a whole bunch of other first graders. I had seen him and very shortly after that he was arrested. After my confirmation I had never received anymore religious training except what I had gotten in the home. We would go to church regularly. The sermons were very low-key. They had to be talking about things that were really of not too much interest to the people. The priests were almost afraid to say anything. They couldn't say anything against the government. They couldn't even be too terribly religious. I think the Communist doctrine and philosophy is that there is no God. The government and the state is the God. You obey them and you live by the principles, their morality. Whatever religion teaches you is nonsense.

I remember once in third grade we had this teacher. She was highly indoctrinated and she tried to indoctrinate us. She came into class one day and she said, "Does anybody here believe in God?" Nobody said anything; they were afraid to.

F: Even the kids?

C: Even the kids. We heard these stories from my parents, what happened to so-and-so, and all the things that would happen to you. She said, "Well, I'm going to call for God and if any of you here believe that there is one then he's going to come right through the door." She stood right in front of the classroom and she said, "Hey, God, why don't you come and speak to us?" She waited and said, "Well, do you see him coming in through the door?" Of course, that didn't happen and she said that was her proof. She said, "See, there is no God. The only person that you can really believe in and rely on are the philosophers of Lenin and Stalin, and our dead leader Rakosi," who I mentioned before. This is the type of schooling that I've had up until my sophomore year in high school.

F: I was wondering about those teachers now. Back in the days when Russia was not occupying Hungary, the Hungarians probably taught themselves. What about the teachers after the Russian occupation? Did the Russians bring their own teachers to filter into the school system?

C: Some of the teachers remained the same, but they were, I think, threatened with their lives. They simply had to teach this way or they would have no jobs or they would be shipped to the salt mines. Then some of the younger teachers, who later came back to teach in Hungary, were schooled in Russia. They took them to Russia. They learned the Russian language fluently because from then on, from fourth and fifth grade on, it was required that all youngsters take the Russian language. They needed these teachers that spoke Russian fluently anyhow. That was another thing that you had no choice in--you had to take Russian whether you liked it or not. I had Russian from fourth grade on, until I was a sophomore in high school. I do not

remember a word. I hated that language so badly. Now I don't, because I see how silly it was. Just being forced to do something that I didn't want to, I wouldn't. Perhaps, I think, the Russians would have been more successful in their brainwashing of the youngster if it had not been for the parents. I heard one thing in school and I would go home at night and my dad and my mom and my aunts and uncles, they would talk about the good old days. I would really romanticize of the United States, Germany, or France; they would tell me how wonderful those people had it. They can travel wherever they want to and you can do the things you want to do. It just seemed so unbelievable because I really didn't know anything else. The war years were horrible and then I stepped right into the Communist regime. I used to have daydreams about what it would be like to live someplace else and not to have to listen to all of those terrible slogans. You could see right through it.

- F: What were some of the slogans or propaganda techniques they tried to bring across?
- C: They would have signs all over about everything belongs to the people. We love our people. We have to do certain things, such as . . . The soldier, the Russian occupation was still taking place in Hungary all the way until 1956. This was one of the things that they wanted them to do, to leave. They would say that our beloved Russian soldiers are here because we invited them to stay here to protect our freedom from our enemies. I don't know who the enemies were. It was that kind of nonsense. It was constant.
- F: How about the radio? Was there something on the radio?
- C: Word problems in your algebra book or your math book . . . Comrade so-and-so grew so many potatoes on this collective farm and this and that. It was just pouring at you. They had these great, big assemblies. You had to go out and sing the Russian hymns and their anthems. That would always come before the Hungarian songs. You had to salute their flags. They tried to get you in a frenzy, screaming about how "We love Stalin and Lenin" and all this. It's really amazing. It worked with some people, particularly, and I think this might be the case in any country, with the very poor class of people that didn't have much before. I think as a tactic they had gotten these people into key positions during the Communist party. Right away they had given them important jobs. They were the ones that were really pushing Communism. I think it doesn't sound right saying the poor class or people. I think it was people that didn't think about things, or life in general didn't have the same meaning to them as it did to us.
- F: As far as the excommunication of Pope Pius XII, he excommunicated a lot of people who were involved in the jailing of Mindszenty at the time. Did the Catholic faith falter then?

C: I think it became stronger.

F: Due to the fact the he was jailed?

C: Don't you think it's kind of human nature that when something is really forbidden to you . . . I think the people of Hungary had become more religious throughout all these trials and tribulations rather than if we would have had organized religion, and had had all those church groups and parishes such as you have here. I really don't think there is that much of an interest in religion right here.

F: Were there secret meetings for the Catholic groups to say mass?

C: I have not attended one. I attended masses, but all I ever remember were the Latin words which I didn't understand, and the music. They were very ornate type masses. It was just kind of kept on that level.

F: Did the Russians ever try to desecrate the church?

C: They did in one instance. I was going to tell you that they had completely torn down a church in Hungary, which I think to any religious Hungarian was just a sin that some of the old people said, "God is going to come back and punish you for this." As it happened, he did. This one church in particular that they tore down because they needed the room to erect a statue of Stalin, a great, big monument type thing; it was a steel statue. During the 1956 uprising that was one of the first things that they tore down in anger. They just broke it in a billion pieces; they knocked it down; they poured paint on it and everything else that you can imagine. They smashed his face and I think maybe that was their revenge for tearing down the church, because you do not tear a church down. It was an old church; it was a beautiful church too. I think it was unfortunate, but you can't kill religion when people really believe and have their principles. You cannot erase their beliefs from the human spirit. It's just like you cannot erase the desire for freedom and for bettering yourself. I think with me and all the other young people there was always the hope there and the knowledge that there is something better, that it can't last this way forever. I think that, in all honesty, I couldn't say that I was miserable twenty-four hours a day in my school. I had some hurray times in my school. I think without the dogma and the communist indoctrination on the school system, they had some very good ideas for the schools. The schools were highly centralized. In other words, whatever one school system taught it was the same way all over in the whole country. Required education was from grade one through eight. Everybody had to finish eighth grade. High school wasn't compulsory. One thing that I would like to point out is that you didn't have a choice after you finished eighth grade in what you wanted

to do.

F: A career was chosen for you?

C: The career was chosen for you. No matter how bright you were, if you were undesirable you couldn't go to college. If you really tried extra hard and improved yourself, maybe you went to work on a collective farm as a potato picker for a couple of years. Then you earned the privilege to attend a university. The youngsters were screened after the eighth grade according to their age, ability, and political background. I would say political background is number one. They were screened whether they were to go to an academic high school, which was called a gymnasium but has nothing to do with gym; it's a name for an academic type high school; it's a college preparatory type high school. I had gone to such a high school for two years. Our schools were not coeducational. I went to an all girl's school with a lady principal. It was a very strict school. I think their standards were very high. Academically, I learned a lot, but again, it was still the same type of pressure all the way through. And the resentment would come into that. I had a girlfriend that very much wanted to attend this high school, but she couldn't because in the war her father was a high-ranking official under the Nazi system. No matter what she wanted she had to go to a vocational school. I think eventually she became a seamstress, and that was a waste of human talent. She could do anything. She wanted to become a teacher and I think she would have been a very good teacher. She was very bright. She was a dedicated person. After you were screened then some of the youngsters went to vocational school and they had trade schools where you learned a trade. Even if you wanted to become a secretary you didn't go to a high school; they had a secretarial school right after the eighth grade which you attended for two years. They taught you how to type, and shorthand. You could go out and get a job by the time you were sixteen. The labor force, they had a lot of people working for them. There was no such thing as unemployment. Everybody worked. You worked for cooler wages. The money that you had made, I think eighty percent of it went to pay for your food. The rent was very low. Everybody was trained to do something.

F: What about the houses? Were they taken over by the Communists also?

C: Nobody had a private home. I lived in Budapest and we lived in an apartment.

F: Everything was like apartments?

C: Everything was in the apartments. I don't know in the country regions if . . .

F: The farmhouses would probably be taken over too, right?

- C: Everything belonged to the people. You could live in a house, but I think they had to pay a rent. Our rent for the apartment was very minimal; it was maybe like \$5 or \$10 a month, which would be very cheap. Your wages were so low that you couldn't afford anything.
- F: Was there anything done with control of the number of people in a family, as far as birth control?
- C: Abortion was legal even when I was there. This is another slap in the face of people that are so Catholic. Yet, women did have abortions freely. It was a poor way of birth control, but they had abortions because they had to go to work; both the mother and father worked. In a Hungarian family it was very rare that both parents didn't work. Job opportunities were very equal. There was no women's lib movement. They didn't have to because the jobs were equally divided. There were just as many physicians and lawyers and clerks and factory workers among the women. Again, they didn't have a choice. I think it was fine that they had all the opportunities to have all the careers, but maybe some of them didn't want to do that. I think it's nice to know that if you're a young lady and you want to become a doctor or a lawyer you can. You're given the opportunity. If you don't want to, and you want to stay home and raise a family, you can do that. They had day schools and nurseries for youngsters. I think a mother was given a six month maternity leave from her job.
- F: This would be propaganda techniques again to brainwash the kids at an early age, right?
- C: That's right. They were put in a nursery, in an all day nursery where the mother after her work hours would go and pick the children up. Nobody had a large family. I was an only child myself. I think among all of my friends, if they had two or three that was the largest family. There has been a decline in birth rate in Hungary for a long time now.
- F: Maybe that's due to the fact that the Russians took over.
- C: There was just no money too. I don't think they wanted to have a large family.
- F: If you had a large family the Russians would have to keep you wouldn't they, so to speak? I mean give you enough food so that you wouldn't starve.
- C: You wouldn't starve. I don't think anybody was poor. We didn't have a middle class. I think everybody was upper lower class or low middle class, whatever you would call it. There were two classes; I think the people that worked and had just enough money to sustain themselves and the so-called government people and the fair-haired boys of the government who were in these

high positions. Again, this was supposed to be a classless society, and their hypocrisy came in because it wasn't classless.

F: There will never be a classless.

C: There is no such thing. If you went along with them and you did what they told you, then you had it made. Again, here, your life wasn't too secure. If somebody else would come around and decide that such and such leader had done something in the past --they didn't even have to prove it-- out they went. Those were kind of dangerous positions also.

F: What type of a social life did you have? Did you get to move around? If you wanted to move around from town to town what did you have to do?

C: I used to go and have a three month vacation in a little village near the Danube, where I learned to swim and eventually became a competitive swimmer. I learned to swim at a very young age and we could go to little vacation spots. There were also vacation places set up by the communists, like resort places that were given to you as a reward if you had done an extra good job someplace. These were free vacations. They would send you there for two weeks. You lived like a dog for the whole year, but if comrade so-and-so had produced more potatoes or whatever he had to be doing, he was sent to this place. He was rehabilitated. He was made to believe that he was in heaven. I think those places were pretty nice. I, myself, had gone. My dad provided for me very well in this respect. As I had mentioned before, my life wasn't all sour grapes because I was a good student and fortunately I was able to get into this high school. I was also fortunate enough to have a talent in a sport, which was highly regarded. I think, again, the thing that I didn't like about it was that it went back to their basic politics. They wanted to prove to the world that the communists could produce better athletes than any other country in the world because they were superior. It was all pushed down your throats so much that eventually you just kind of got fed up and burned out, and you didn't even want to do it anymore.

During my high school and some of my years of upper grade school I was part of a swim club that I had to attend regularly. We had to swim a couple of hours every morning before I went to school and after school. Then we had meets on Saturdays.

F: School lasted for how long how many days a week?

C: We had school from Monday through Saturday. The only day we were off was Sunday.

F: How many hours a day did you go?

C: From 8:00 till 1:00. Hungarians eat their main meal at noon. Then you go home. If you were too young to stay home for the rest of the day, for the afternoon, and your parents were working, then there was an afternoon school, which wasn't an organized type of school. Again, they had study hall type things and they had recreational activities. They had folk dance groups or sport clubs, and this is where you spent the day. Some kids spent their whole day in the school situation.

Homework was a tremendous amount. I was let out of school at 1:00, but my whole days and nights were spent studying because the requirements were so high. Every type of subject, whenever we had a term come to an end, we had an oral and a written examination of any topic. Let's say we had a unit, our teacher would write down titles of each unit on pieces of paper and you had to pick one. Any title that you picked, any topic from that unit, you had to go in front of a group of teachers and recite and they decided what grade you were going to get.

F: This all added up to the eighth grade year whether you would go on in high school or not?

C: This was in high school too. Even in the lower grades, the studying . . . When we were given a unit, let's say geography, to study, your teacher said you had to know four pages. That didn't mean that you had to read four pages, that meant that you had to know it by heart. If she or he picked on a paragraph, you had to recite it. When I tell you that we were let out of school at 1:00 don't let it mislead you that we had the rest of the day off because we had to spend the time studying. In spite of all the studying that we had to do I think we all had the desire for social life, believe it or not. Being in an all girl's school I think the girls there wanted to get together with the boys, and they had socials. They would have dances. Oddly enough, you would probably expect our teachers or chaperones to invite a similar high school of boys nearby, but that wasn't the case. They usually invited fellows from the university to our dances, because a Hungarian young lady who was fourteen or fifteen thought that she was too sophisticated for a fifteen year old boy. This was kind of a national trend at that time. I think that they thought the girls matured so much faster so . . .

F: I'm wondering about the boys. In retrospect, the boys had the same type of an education?

C: Yes. They had their gymnasiums, and then they also attended vocational schools. They also had technical high schools. Are you familiar at all with that term, a technical high school?

F: I don't know if it would mean the same thing to you as it does to me right now.

C: What does it mean to you?

F: Almost like business, that type of technical meaning.

C: Let's say you wanted to become a draftsman, they had schools for these people. Even for a chemical engineer they had a high concentration of chemistry in their high school. They threw all kinds of chemistry courses at you that by the time you went to college you were a real expert. I think any person that had a high school diploma either from one of the technical schools or from the college preparatory high schools in Hungary, you could say that you were well educated. They would be the equivalent of almost a college education over here. They were highly concentrated in one area where you had to become an expert in this particular area. I think that the greatest thing that we've had that I find missing here was the physical education concentration. We had physical education every day from first grade on; that was our first class. Again, it went along with the same old slogans, you had to have a healthy body and you had to have a healthy mind. You educated your body and then next you went into a math class and they educated your mind. Then maybe they had a political science type of class right after that. This is how their periods went. In high school I had physical education; I had physics; I had chemistry; I had Latin; I had Russian.

F: This was all in your first two years of high school, right?

C: That's right. I had Hungarian. I had Hungarian history; I had geography. Some of these classes weren't held every day, but all the classes were very highly demanding. If you didn't keep up with the work you were out. You just couldn't get by with D's and C's. Most of the youngsters that did get into this school would be very high achievers and they would get very high grades. I had good basics in my education, I think. The ideas behind their educational system was good. The discipline, I think, that was demanded of the youngsters in school . . .

F: The Russians filtered your system out. Seventh and eighth grade it just tapered off until you only had that select crew.

C: That's right.

F: You would not have the discipline problems possibly that you would if you had just the lot.

C: I think that's right. I think when you throw everybody in such as the free education we have here where you have compulsory education in high school for everybody, then you cannot gear your education to a certain level. You have to accommodate everybody. I think the upper ten percent will suffer. It's an average type of thing.

F: I take it that you would go for more of a homogenous grouping than a heterogeneous grouping?

C: No.

F: You don't now?

C: No. I've changed my philosophy. I think I had seen so much of that. In fact, when I first started taking education courses at the university, I went all the way with John Holt's philosophy. I don't know if you're familiar with that or not. I think I made a complete reversal and now I've found a happy medium. Sometimes I'm still not a hundred percent decided on a heterogeneous or a homogeneous. Sometimes I think a class that is just entirely of one group of youngsters, especially of the lower ones, not even the smarter ones, I think a spark is missing perhaps from their class.

F: They need something.

C: Right. They need something to work up to, something to look up to. Maybe these youngsters could become good, steady workers, but at the same time it has already been decided that they're slow. They know they're slow, and nobody is going to really inspire them.

F: Correct.

C: Then again, everything has its pros and cons. Then again, I think that the high achievers could really go much faster. I think they're the ones getting the most benefit out of that.

The high schools are very demanding and I think for the training that I've had, I'm grateful for. All the dogma and all the political nonsense I had to put up with, and the learning of the Russian that, to this day, I think I will resent for the rest of my life because nobody really has the right to tell you. You should be able to make that selection, or your family. You should at least be given a chance. Let's say maybe you weren't cut out to be college material, or you weren't that particularly bright, or let's say you were a late bloomer, at the end of eighth grade you really haven't reached your potential. Nobody really has, but some people reach it earlier than others. Maybe you need a couple more years to get yourself thinking in a more mature level, what happens to you then? Then you're putting your place for the rest of your life and you have to just stay there.

At that time a systematic indoctrination of the young people was taking place within the schools. I think they felt that if they could win over the young people, eventually the whole country will be looking upon Communism more favorably. As I will point out later on, it failed miserably because they had

forgotten the fact that all the parents and relatives that were at home were still remembering the "good, old times". I think youngsters were more likely to listen to their parents than they were to the schools. I think influence in the home is probably the greatest on youngsters.

In connection with this indoctrination they had political rallies after school. You had to attend the rallies. The rallies were also held for grownups. They had to go; they had to attend. If you dared say anything against the regime or government there was severe punishment doled out for them. All this punishment was justified somehow. They weren't justified to a great extent, but they felt that they had to give a reason. I think whenever they put somebody in jail or shipped them off to Siberia they said that they did this to get rid of the enemies of the People's Republic of China.

At that time, too, the secret police, I think, had really come into existence. It was a powerful force, a force that had put great fear in to a lot of minds. I think it was a great deterrent too from speaking your mind. The secret police . . . By the way, when the revolution finally broke out, the secret police were attacked first by the people. In this one instance I remember very clearly in my mind, one man was beaten to death and dragged out on the streets.

F: Because he belonged to the secret police?

C: He belonged to the secret police.

F: Were these people Hungarians?

C: Yes. I think I mentioned that a certain class and group of Hungarians had gone over and become part of the party. Those were the ones that were running the government and had the key posts. I think the secret police positions were paid very well if you had the stomach to do it and if you were that kind of an individual. They were traitors; they brutally arrested and had beaten and interrogated their own countrymen. It was in the jail of the secret police where Cardinal Mindszenty was tortured. Those were the people that were dealing with him. Do you have any other questions about education?

F: Yes. As far as the home environment magazines and things like this, we feel, in America, that it is enriching if students go home and possibly see magazines around. They're motivated to pick up a magazine and read and do a little bit of outside work. Did you have any magazines or periodicals in the home?

C: Yes, magazines and newspapers were available. They were all propaganda and they were all, again, promoting Communism. I think in that respect that they wouldn't have been any different than anything else that you would have received at school.

School life is taken very seriously. I think reading is a great pastime. We were reading the classics. It wasn't all the trash that they printed that we were reading. I think some of the pastimes and some of the social life included reading of good literature, going to the theatre to see plays, classics that were performed. The movies were rather restricted. They were either Russian or documentary films. A few very selected movies would come through from France or Germany and everybody went to see them. You had to wait for months to get in to see these movies. When I was still living there we didn't have a television set; we had radio. Most of the radio programs consisted of news. All day long somebody was talking and then maybe at night they would have a half an hour of music or they would have a whole opera. We had gone to the opera. Ballet was very popular. Culturally, I don't think we were underprivileged in that respect because I was exposed to fine arts. We went to museums a lot. I had gone at least once a week to the opera and to the theatre. These were some of the things, I think, that influenced my thinking later on. That wasn't forbidden at all.

- F: I was wondering... In the United States here, some of our propaganda techniques towards underdeveloped countries have been in dealing with sex to some extent. We add pictures and things like this that we would put out, and the relationship with sex, whereas the Russians, I've read that they put out a lot of propaganda techniques, but not in relationship to the body, but in relationship to food, grain, pamphlets, pictures, drawings and things like this. Instead of dealing with the American woman it's dealing with grain and things like this. The underdeveloped nations accept this better because of the primary need for the grain more so than the sex part of it. Did they have any kind of propaganda pamphlets like this? What was their relationships with sex there?
- C: I was a teenager and I think we all had a healthy attitude about sex. Sex was talked about openly. We had sex education in schools and it was dealt with matter of factly. I mentioned before that abortion was legalized in Hungary and that they discouraged large families to begin with. The fact that we didn't have coeducational schools--I went to an all girl's school--I don't think we were preoccupied too much perhaps being around boys. We had so much homework that it took so much of our time.
- F: Were there many girls that ended up becoming pregnant?
- C: I didn't know of any. I don't think that the girls that I had known were very promiscuous. That type of activity was highly discouraged within schools. I hear in China that these activities are highly discouraged and they're forbidden; they're even punished. Nobody had really talked about it. I had a lot of talk with my own family in that respect. They

pointed out to me what could happen to you if you has sexual relations with a boy; you got pregnant. Of all my friends that I had I don't think that any of them had ever gotten pregnant that they had to have an abortion. It didn't seem to be too much of a problem. There were married women that were getting abortions. Sometimes I think about that because I think that the youngsters that I know seem right now to be preoccupied with sex, and they talk about it so much.

F: Did they have cars to any large extent?

C: Not anybody that I knew of. Of course in a city like Budapest, it's a great big city with streetcars and buses. There was no need for cars, but I don't think anybody could afford it. I think if you could afford your lodging and your food and pay your rent, that was it. The government officials had cars. My dad had been in Hungary two years ago visiting and he said that there were more cars and televisions. I think that the material goods that the Americans are accustomed to right here are more plentiful right now. In fact, I think that the Russians are probably getting to be more capitalistic whether they deny it or not. They're shrewd enough to realize that it works better. That's what they had done with the state farms too. The state farms, by 1950, I think all the farms had become collective in Hungary. They failed miserably because they took the incentive away from the farmers. Slowly they started giving back small pieces of land to individuals and their production went way up. The same thing happened with small businesses too. After the war by 1950 there were no private businesses in Hungary. Everything belonged to the state. My dad said that there are lots of small shops now that belong to private individuals. Tourism had picked up in Hungary too. I think we're jumping ahead here; I wanted to tell you about these things later.

F: What about the revolution?

C: In connection with education I wanted to just mention one thing. I think on the whole their ideas of teaching and the discipline that we had received, and the body of knowledge or whatever, I think that deserves some merit. I think the school systems to a certain extent were good, but my main objection and criticism, even today, is the fact that they really didn't give you any choice of choosing a career. You were so restricted. If you weren't ready to choose a career or if you didn't find yourself by the time you were in eighth grade, then you were stuck with one position for the rest of your life whether you liked it or not. These restrictions in all areas eventually led to the revolution. People just got fed up. I don't think that you liked to be told continually what to do, what your career should be. You're not allowed to speak about anybody freely. I think when you do this for people for a long period of time then the discontent will just grow.

Ironically, the revolution was not started by the older people, it was started by the younger people. That was just a complete failure as far as the indoctrination was concerned because these were the people that were supposed to be with the government and supposed to have gone with them all the way. There were small events that led up to the revolution that finally erupted. October 23rd, small groups of university students were holding demonstrations. They were demanding free speech. They wanted to express their opinions in certain areas. It seemed to me that they weren't punished. I think had the government clamped down on them right away maybe the revolution wouldn't have gotten where it had. They were given small concessions at that time and their demands became larger and larger. Finally, when the revolution did erupt in October, the major demand in the eyes of all Hungarians was just a terrible thing to still have the Russians occupying Hungary. Since the war the Russians have never left Hungary. They had said that the Russians were there to protect us from our enemies, but nobody had ever told us who our enemies were. They were just afraid that the people might start something because they never really trusted anybody. They knew deep down inside that all Hungarians hated them with a passion, and they wanted them out. One demand was that if we are free, if they call us a free country, please go back to Russia. Take the troops and go back to Russia. They wanted Cardinal Mindszenty released from jail. Hungary also wanted to become a neutral nation, just like Austria and Switzerland. Then they wanted to reestablish the multipolitical system. I think in the beginning of our interview I mentioned to you that on the onset of Communism they allowed the coalition government . . . they had the multiparties for a very short time, until slowly but surely only the Communist party remained.

F: I think that was 1947 and 1948.

C: I think it was more by 1949. It was a gradual process, but by then there were no other parties remaining. These demands, again, oddly enough, were met. Some parties were reestablished. I'm not even going to mention some of the names to you, but there were several other political parties besides the Communist party. The leader of the government, Nagy, is the one during the revolution that was the leader of Hungary.

F: He was a leader in 1953 and 1954 and 1955. He was the premier. Then they brought in a Communist head again, and then he again became premier in 1956.

C: That's right.

F: So he lost power and then came back into power?

C: That's right. He had more liberal ideas as far as the Hungarians were concerned. When the revolution exploded some of these

- demands were met. Everybody was so happy. It is a very hard feeling for me to describe.
- F: By revolution, I get the feeling that they were destroying Stalin's statue, taking over.
- C: They took over the radio station. A group of young people took over the radio station.
- F: This wasn't organized?
- C: This wasn't organized. They started broadcasting things that we wanted to hear, that Hungary was free, their demands. They were broadcasting their demands that they wanted the Russians out and we wanted to be free; we wanted to be neutral. The statue of Stalin had been destroyed by just a great, big mob of people. I, myself, attended. I was there with my father and they had knocked it down with ropes. They just literally broke it into pieces. There was nothing left of it.
- F: Was this all occurring in one day?
- C: This was occurring from the 23rd until the 30th. This also occurred before the Russians had brought some more troops from Russia.
- F: But they did have troops in there?
- C: They had troops. They removed their troops from around Budapest; they left. As we found out later, they didn't leave entirely. In fact what had happened was some of the Russian troops that were occupying Hungary, they had gone over to our side, to the freedom fighters side. They had given up their arms and they had become friends. The Hungarian Army, most of it had come over to the freedom fighters side. It just seemed like it was a unanimous thing. Nobody wanted the Russians; even the Russians themselves, some of them, were fighting for our cause. This was a relatively short period of seven days when it seemed like we had won our freedom and the Russians were going to leave and we were finally going to be able to do what we wanted to do.

On October 30th there was news filtering in Budapest that the Russians entered through Romania with new troops. Of course, nobody really wanted to believe it because it just seemed like they had given up on us, but yet when I think about it now I know that politically, for the Russians, that would have been such a defeat. They couldn't do it because all the other satellite countries would want to get away from them; they would want to do the same thing, and they couldn't afford to do it. When they came back on the 30th, slowly . . . They didn't attack the capital until November 4th; that was the morning that I woke up hearing the firing of guns. The firing started over again, the firing of tanks, and news had come to us that

these people that had come to attack Budapest--somehow somebody had seen them and talked to them--weren't Russian, they were Mongolian. They were brought from a remote area of Russia. It's part of the Soviet Union, but they're not Russian by race, they're Mongolian. Communicating with these people, they thought they were in Germany fighting the Second World War. Think of the implication of that. This was in 1956 and the war had been over almost ten years. What they couldn't do with the Hungarians--Hungary is too close to the western countries and too much is filtering in--they were able to accomplish this with a remote part of their own country, keeping people in complete darkness. They probably came into Hungary thinking they would finally see a German. All the time they were crushing the revolution. These people were ruthless because they didn't care; they were just shooting into homes, apartment buildings.

F: Tanks and everything like this?

C: With the tanks they were just marching very proudly. Everybody was just spitting at them and throwing rocks at them. The freedom fighters were trying to fight back with their primitive weapons.

F: What type of weapons?

C: Rocks, molotov cocktails. Do you what they are?

F: Yes.

C: Then they had the few firearms that the Hungarian Army had given to them. They had a few tanks too, but I think compared to the Russian or Mongolian troops they had nothing. It was like a hopeless battle. The fighting started on the 4th and lasted ten more days because these young Hungarians that were fighting were willing to put their lives on the line and they were positive that a big power like the United States was going to come to our aid. They were broadcasting frantically, crying for help, just begging anybody. Even if they didn't want to send any troops in or soldiers, just give us something to fight with. I think the only help that we had gotten at the assembly of the United Nations is that they were condemning the Soviet intervention. That was the extent of it. You could talk about this or theorize it if you're in political science what would have happened if the United States would have come to the aid of Hungary. The other day when I was talking to a group of youngsters this one girl said, "Why would the United States have helped Hungary? Hungary was fighting against the United States during the Second World War." Most people don't realize that this was against their will.

Hungary is landlocked right between the great powers of Germany and Russia; they were manipulated all the time. Hungary

didn't want to be with Hitler anymore than they wanted to be with the Russians. They were always sympathizing with the United States. If the United States would have helped I'm sure it wouldn't have been another Vietnam. Vietnam was split. In Hungary it was unanimous that they wanted the Russians out. The people would have been with the United States one hundred percent. Nobody wanted to risk that type of things; they didn't know the outcome of any intervention, what would have happened, so we weren't helped at all.

At the end of ten days the fighting died down and thousands of people died. About 200,000 people had fled the country. This was when my father and myself decided to leave. Somebody had asked me what made us finally decide to leave; what was it that really gave us the feeling that we wanted to go, that we didn't want to be in Hungary anymore. My father was always so highly nationalistic and he still talks of himself as a great Hungarian. I think to him it was just admitting defeat. Mostly I think my father was afraid for me. He felt when he saw the Russian troops coming in I was one of the youngsters that could have been pinpointed for participating in the revolution. He was afraid that somebody might rape me or kill me or put me in jail. I think when the leaflets were dropped by helicopter by the Russians that a new Hungarian government had been formed under the leadership of Janos Kadar-- he is the premier of Hungary right now--and Hungary once again had been liberated from the evil forces of the enemy, and to see all that garbage on paper, it had just given my father such bitter feelings that he thought that this was probably our only chance to ever hope to live in a free country. Perhaps it is true that Hungary will probably never be liberated from the Russians, unless the Russians themselves are going to be crushed, and I don't see how that's going to happen.

We decided to leave the country November 30. We left Budapest on a train; it was a Sunday morning and if I'm correct the trains were reestablished. We had to travel halfway across Hungary from Budapest to the Austrian frontier. We didn't have any plan of escape. Our only objective was to try to get to Austrian frontier and hopefully meet somebody there that was going to cross the border. All the while we were on the train, we were in danger of course of getting arrested or being asked what our business was or where we were going. Fortunately, nobody asked us. I think the government at that time was so busy trying to reestablish themselves and getting some kind of order back in the city that they let some of these people through. They knew a lot of freedom fighters and a lot of the Hungarian citizens were escaping. We had left early in the morning, and by nightfall we were in a small town near Austria. Again, this town was completely unknown to us; we had never been there and it was getting dark. We got off the train and were just hoping for the best. I don't know

what we were hoping for, some kind of a miracle. It was a bitter, bitter cold day.

F: What did you have with you? What did you take?

C: A bottle of brandy, which came in handy later on.

F: To keep you warm?

C: No, I think my dad thought that maybe he would be able to bribe somebody with it. He had some cash and he had an antique pocketwatch and several wristwatches with him. The clothing on our backs, that was the extent of it. We started walking in this little town on the street until we met a man. He looked friendly enough and he said, "You're probably wanting to escape. You don't look like people that live around here." We had to trust him because it was getting dark and we didn't have lodging; we didn't know what we were going to do overnight. He could have been part of the secret police; he could have been part of the army, anybody. My dad said, "Would you help us?" He said that he would; he had been helping people across. If we had any money to give him he would do it for a sum. He told us that he had been a forest ranger on a bordering forest for years and he knew the area really well. We didn't have anything to worry about; he would take us across without any problems. He had taken us to his home and introduced us to his wife and we spent a few hours there. The following morning, 4:00, we started out. This was still in November. It was below zero out there and walking in a pine forest in pitch dark, I was scared out of my wits. I just grabbed my father and I closed my eyes and I was walking frozen stiff hoping that nobody was going to shoot me in the back. I was imagining all kind of things, dogs howling. Dogs were howling constantly; I don't know whose dogs they were. We were walking for hours and hours and hours. I think it was 7:00 or 8:00 when it first started getting daylight. This man said, "We should be at the border by now." Then he admitted that he was hopelessly lost. He didn't know where we were. He was an old guy and he had been a forest ranger twenty years ago. The forest had changed so much that he didn't know where he was. We were walking in a circle and the entire time we were near the border somehow, but we couldn't find the right path. You know how woods are, you can get so lost that you'll never get out. We still kept walking; I was tired and crying, but at least it was daylight and it wasn't as scary as it was during the night. We were walking on this path and two soldiers were coming at us. They had their bayonets over their shoulders.

F: They didn't see you then?

C: They saw us; they were walking right at us. We were walking down this path and they were walking towards us, face-to-face.

They walked over and we didn't know whether they were Russians or Hungarians. In Hungarian they spoke to us and they said, "What is your business?" I said we were out on our morning patrol. My sense of humor didn't leave me, but then I started crying. I went into this sobbing cry. I started crying and I sat down on the ground and I told them, "You might as well shoot us because I'm not going back." At that time my father took out his bottle of brandy--these were young kids; they couldn't have been more than eighteen or nineteen; they were in the Hungarian army--and they passed the brandy around and they looked us over. They decided that they were going to have to shoot us or send us back. My dad gave one of them his wristwatch and they promised to show us to the frontier, to the clearing across to Austria. They had put themselves on the line; they were in danger too. If any of their superiors had seen them they could have been shot or taken back. Within fifteen minutes they knew the way exactly. All the time we were walking we were very near the border, but we just couldn't find it. They showed us the way; it was just like a great, big clearing in the forest. It was like two lengths of a gymnasium that was cut out. He said, "When you get there run like hell. You just go across as fast as you can because if any of the patrols see you, they can shoot you." Some people had been shot even when they had gotten over to Austria. The last thing my father did was grab a pocketful of Hungarian soil. I don't know why he even thought of it. He was kind of sentimental and he put it in his pocket. To this day he has it. He has it sewn into a little bag because he thought that we would never get back to Hungary to see our country again. We said goodbye to these people. The old man went back to his family. To this day I don't know whether he got back or not. I hope those guys showed him the way. He may be still walking around.

Anyhow, we were on the Austrian side and walking . . .

- F: When you went across no one spotted you?
- C: No one spotted us, no gunshots, nothing. It was prime time too. It must have been around noon by then and anybody could have been alert. They could have seen us; it was a clear, cold day.
- F: After you finished getting across that clearing what happened in Austria?
- C: It was the very same type of forest. We figured if we got lost we were free and we would just starve to death, freeze to death, and be free. The Austrians were expecting us though. So many people had come across that we weren't walking more than fifteen or twenty minutes when we got picked up by the border patrol, Austrian patrol, a motorcycle with the little sidecar. They had taken us into a town a few miles from the border to

an American Red Cross station that gave us first aid. They took our statistics. They knew why we were there, but they wanted to know the circumstances under which we escaped, my father's occupation, our ages. They had wanted to know what we were planning to do and where we were planning to go. From the very beginning I wanted to come to the United States. My father wanted to stay in Austria because he thought that he would be close enough that he could come back if a change occurred. We spent one night at this Red Cross station. After that we were taken to a small town near Vienna. It was a mountainous region, very beautiful motel type of setting. It was sponsored by different religious groups and Red Cross. They had a lot of clothing, very good food.

These are just my feelings, but I think perhaps the Americans felt that since they didn't help us in the revolution they went out of their way to help the refugees that had left the country. They didn't put any restrictions on entering the United States. That wasn't the case with us; they let thousands of Hungarians within a few months into the United States.

F: You went on ship across the ocean?

C: No, we flew from Vienna. I think it was in March or April then. We had spent several months in Austria. I think it was mainly administration of trying to place all these people. There were so many people that they couldn't take you all at once. The treatment was excellent. They had provided us with some language classes. Not everybody wanted to go to the United States, some had gone to Austria, and others had gone to Australia, South America. Most everybody, I think, wanted to go to the United States.

Our journey to the United States had been relatively hectic. I think just like the whole escaping from Budapest, everything seemed so smooth and easy up to this point that something had to go wrong. They were flying the Hungarians in World War I airplanes, these fight bombers. They weren't in very good shape.

F: Did you have a seat in the plane?

C: Yes, they had seats put in. The engines died out when they were up in the air, a couple of them. One caught on fire. From Vienna to New York City where we finally landed, it took us two weeks. We would have been here sooner on a boat I think.

F: Two weeks in an airplane?

C: Two weeks. We went to England and then in England, when they took off, the next day their engines caught fire. They had to come back to England. We started out again and we were halfway across the ocean when something had gone wrong again. To this day I didn't find out what because the next thing

we knew we were at the Azores Islands in an Army base, a United States Army base. All these soldiers were marvelous. They took really good care of us. We were there four days. They sent for another airplane. They sent this airplane back to Vienna and they took all of our passports and papers with them. We had to wait until they sent them back to us again.

From the Azores we went to New Foundland and then when we woke up there it was a blizzard. One day we were in this nice balmy weather and the next day it was snow and blizzards.

From there then we came to the United States and spent two weeks at Camp Kilmer.

F: Where is Camp Kilmer at?

C: It's in New Jersey.

F: So you came in through New York?

C: Yes. It's near New York. I don't know if we took off to Youngstown from New York. We didn't fly to Youngstown, we took a train. It was from New York City. We had a guide with us all the time. While we were at Camp Kilmer for two weeks, again, we were taken care of by the Army.

F: What were your expectations before you actually landed in the United States?

C: I was tired. So many things had happened to us I didn't have any. I was scared too, a little bit. I think deep down inside I knew we were here and we were finally free, but it was still unknown.

F: Coming off of the plane what did you see first? Was there a vast difference from the life you lived before?

C: I think what had really struck me, they had put us on a bus when we got off the plane. There was a bus waiting for us to take to Camp Kilmer. It was at night. All the billboards really impressed me with all these signs that, at that time, I couldn't read. Everywhere on the highways that is all I had seen, the cars and the billboards and no people. When you're in Hungary, as we mentioned before, not too many of us had cars. Everybody was out on the street walking. You used your foot and your leg power an awful lot. Here you were in the United States and everybody was stashed away in little cars. You never saw anybody. You had gone for miles and there were no human beings around, just billboards and cars. I was happy. I think it was very optimistic. From Camp Kilmer they had decided that since I was here with my father--a teenager without my mother--the Youngstown area would be a good place to grow up in, which was fine. They thought that the opportunities for working were good and it was

similar to the climate where I was raised.

F: What was your dad's occupation?

C: My father is a licensed beautician but mostly he was running businesses. I told you he had a business before the war; he had several of them. That's what he has right now in New York City; he has a beauty salon. When we came to Youngstown this Hungarian Church had helped us; they gave us money and lodging and they helped my father to get his license.

F: Most of your experiences were where people ended up helping you?

C: Everybody was helping us; it was fantastic. I don't think I'll ever forget that. We didn't encounter any hardships. I enrolled then in March of the following year at Ursuline High School. I still didn't know how to speak English very well because I spent most of my time up to this point with Hungarians.

F: Where did you live in town here?

C: On the north side.

F: Whereabouts?

C: On Custer Avenue. It's all torn down now; there's a freeway. A Hungarian priest from St. Stephen's Church had rented a house for us. They furnished it completely. They paid our first month's rent. They had taken my father with an interpreter to the board of cosmetology and had gotten his license and they got him a job at McKelvey's. I started school. Other than being just really lost, I think when I first arrived at the train station--you had asked me what my feelings were--in Youngstown I felt lost and alone and scared. I felt like here we are in this great, big strange city. I can't speak the language. We don't know anybody. They were natural feelings. They didn't last very long. Everybody was really so nice and helpful. It really didn't matter. I think my father and myself are still very hopeful that some day the Hungarians will become free and they get the freedom that they so justly deserve. I think more than any other people in this world. If you ever study the history of Hungary you know that throughout the centuries they had freedom fights in 1948 and they were always striving and always wanting to become free. I think some day maybe it will come.

F: I hope so. I would like to thank you very much for coming in today, Mrs. Ciotola, and sharing these experiences with us. Thank you again.