

An Interview with Judit Borzsak

Survival: Lives of Hungarians under Communist
and Capitalist Governments 1956-2006
Oral History Series

Interviews conducted by
Virginia Major Thomas
in 2004

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Biography

Judit Borzsak is currently program officer of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee of the Hungarian Ministry of Education. She has been a librarian, language teacher and tour guide, and now although of retirement age she is still working in the government higher education accreditation committee.

Because she came from the middle class, the daughter of a teacher, under the Communist regime she was not expected to go to the university and was sent to a secondary technical school of economics. But while she was there, government policy regarding eligibility for higher education changed and on the basis of her good grades she was allowed to go to the university. She wanted to teach English but was first employed as a librarian in several businesses, including the library of a technical radio factory. Later on she became an English teacher. As guide of a tour for vacationing teachers she had an opportunity for wide travel when most Hungarian travel was very restricted. Her experiences traveling in both Russia and the west were very illuminating as she compared both Muslim with Communist culture and western Europe with Hungary. But when she tried to become an au pair in England to improve her English she ran afoul of a suspicious and duplicitous Communist government in Hungary.

She has much to say about the Communist government in her native land and its terror and about the changes that came about beginning in 1989, both political changes and changes in education, the media and society.

- Thomas: This is Major Thomas on the 20th of November, 2004. I am at Csorsz u. ot (5) in the city of Budapest, Hungary, and I am interviewing Judit Borzsak, and we might begin, Judit, by asking you where and when you were born and a little bit about your family.
- Borzsak: I was born in 1946 in Germany, the 31st of July, 1946, in Germany.
- Thomas: Whereabouts?
- Borzsak: My father is a teacher, a teacher of languages, and my mother was a district nurse, and my father was a soldier during the Second World War and was teaching in a school which trained young people to be young officers. But they were not professional soldiers, just in the course of the war they were recruited.
- Thomas: They were German?
- Borzsak: No, it was in Hungary It was in Transylvania, for a few years the northern part of Transylvania came back to Hungary, according to the 2nd Vienna Agreement----it was after the First World War these agreements, you know, two thirds of Hungary went to neighboring countries----and as the Russian troops moved toward the west, the schools and population began to escape, and the school itself packed up and they began to leave to go to the west. And my mother and father were engaged then, and my father could take my mother as his fiancée. They were married in the west, in the present Hungary, en route, and they didn't stop until the Harz Mountains which became the British zone, in the course of the war, in 1944. They were there for 2 years, they left in '44 and they came back in '46 and I was 6 weeks old.
- Thomas: And what town were you born in?
- Borzsak: It was a small village and it had a name Klaustalzimmerfeld, it's 2 small villages close to each other, it had a hospital which was only for the Hungarian troops and I was born there. And I was 6 weeks old when my parents came home.
- Thomas: Was your father in the army?
- Borzsak: No, he went back to the civilian life and he went back to teach, he was a teacher of German, French and Hungarian.
- Thomas: When he was teaching these recruits, he was a civilian, he was not in the army.
- Borzsak: Yes, everybody was in the army because of the war. He wasn't conscripted but he could follow his job, his profession. After the war they were back at home, in my father's parents' home, in the village in the family home, and my father wanted to teach but he couldn't because he came back from the west

and he was suspicious [suspected]. So they didn't let him teach, only in elementary school and only Hungarian language. And he studied Russian in a summer course, so he could begin to teach Russian too and it meant that he could teach all the children. After 2 or 3 years he could get a job in a secondary school, he taught Russian there, Russian and German. And my mother, as a district nurse, also wanted to get a job but that was not possible for her for 4 years. And then my younger brother, who was born in '50, when he was 6 weeks old my mother got a message that within 2 weeks she had to go to work because there was a job in the district health center for her. Just imagine. And she had to go.

Thomas: She was ordered to go to work?

Borzsak: Yes, well she was offered a job.

Thomas: And you took it if it was offered.

Borzsak: Well, it was offered and she had to go because .

Thomas: And by that time the government in Hungary was Communist.

Borzsak: Yes, in '49.

Thomas: I get the impression that these offers, you sort of had to take, you needed the income, I guess they wanted the income, but the Communist government dictated a certain amount what kind of job you did and which job?

Borzsak: I cannot tell you if that was a dictation in this case. My mother was a qualified nurse and nurses were needed everywhere in the country. She worked, she had worked before the war so she had her report in the ministry, because she had graduated in '42, and after she graduated she was sent to Transylvania, and she was a district nurse for several small villages in Transylvania.

Thomas: I see. So, you went to school, when you started school, where? In Budapest?

Borzsak: No, in that village, which was called Monor. It's 40 kilometers to the east, from Budapest, and my father's family has lived there for 5 or 6 generations. They built the house in the 18th or 19th century.

Thomas: And you went to elementary school there?

Borzsak: I went to elementary school in Monor, and in '57 we sold the house in Monor and we came to live in Budapest. It was mainly because my grandmother, my father's mother, had another son and he lived in Budapest with his family, she wanted to move here, and the family decided that the best thing was to sell the house, but the money they sold it for was very little, and my parents could buy

a very small home very close here, my father still lives there, and I finished my elementary school in Budapest.

- Thomas: This was in '57 that you sold the house in Monor. That was right after the revolution.
- Borzsak: After the revolution, yes. During the revolution I stayed in Monor.
- Thomas: And so your family didn't participate in the revolution.
- Borzsak: No. My father didn't go up to Budapest. He came to Budapest to demonstrate, he came late in the evening....
- Thomas: This is like on October 23rd.
- Borzsak: Yes, it was the 23rd
- Thomas: Your parents were not members of the party.
- Borzsak: No, never.
- Thomas: And you weren't either, of course you weren't old enough to be.
- Borzsak: No, I didn't join the party.
- Thomas: And so you moved to Budapest. Was it a difficult time to be in Budapest?
- Borzsak: It wasn't very difficult for me because I was very literary. I always read. I could read when I was 4. So when I saw a book I just took it and I read. But my father and brother, who was 4 years younger than me, he suffered a lot, because he enjoyed life in the country, he enjoyed the poultry, he enjoyed the garden, he enjoyed playing outside, and the money we got for the house was very little so the flat we moved into was very small. And my parents, my mother got a job in the same district where we lived, she became a school nurse, which was very good because the school where we went to belongs to her district and she could supervise us all day. (laughs)
- Thomas: I had one gentleman tell me that he went to the wrong school because it was right across the street from where they lived and his mother could see what was going on.
- Borzsak: My mother was something like that, she always was watching.
- Thomas: And so then you went to gymnasium in Budapest?
- Borzsak: No, I went to a secondary technical. I went to a secondary technical because in those years it was difficult to get to upper education for children who came

from the families of the intelligentsia, the upper classes, teachers, engineers. Those who came from families who were workers, in the factory, workers, and then people from the country, farmers, and those who belonged to the Communist regime.

Thomas: So tell me what kind of school it was.

Borzsak: It was economic.

Thomas: And this is the secondary level.

Borzsak: It was a secondary school. It helped me a lot, it helped me a lot. We learned a lot of Marxist-Leninist party doctrine. What I learned at secondary school was enough to help me to get in the university.

Thomas: To admit you to the university?

Borzsak: While I went to the secondary school they changed the system, and they said that first of all your results in the secondary school and your results in the entrance examination give you the merit to get into upper education. And that's how I could apply and I could enter.

Thomas: And learning, having learned and studied Marxism-Leninism was an additional help in getting into the university?

Borzsak: No. We had lessons in Marxism-Leninism in the university and I didn't have to learn very much, because I had learned it before.

Thomas: Did you learn it in elementary school too?

Borzsak: No, no, it was only in the secondary school, because it was an economic, it was political economy, capitalism, imperialism, and socialism.

Thomas: So then you went to the university.

Borzsak: Yes, I went to the university of arts, the faculty of arts at the university of Budapest, and my subjects were English language and literature and.

Thomas: And when did you enter?

Borzsak: It was in '70. I had my final examination in '68 and I applied in the same year but I wasn't admitted in that year and I had to wait til the year ahead, and I had to go to work.

Thomas: What did you do?

- Borzsak: I went to work in the central library of the university of economics. A friend of my father worked in another big library in Budapest and he helped me to get there. And it was a very good school for me because it was a very good library and the director was very good, and it was very interesting.
- Thomas: So actually you learned some librarianship before you ever got there....
- Borzsak: I got practice.
- Thomas: And so when did you graduate from the university?
- Borzsak: Oh I was wrong with the numbers, I'm sorry. I had the final examination in '64, and I got to the university in '66 and graduated in '70, no, '65, I got to the university in '65, yes, from '64 to '65 I worked, and from '65 to '70 I was at the university, I graduated in '70. It was so long ago!
- Thomas: It seems a long time ago. And so what did you do when you graduated from the university?
- Borzsak: I went to work as a librarian. I wanted to teach, I wanted to work in a school where I could teach English and be a school librarian. It is much more difficult now because in those years you could be sure that you would get a job. But that special sort of job was only in the country, 60 kilometers from Budapest....
- Thomas: You mean a job where you could teach English and be a librarian.
- Borzsak: Yes, that's where they were looking for an English teacher and librarian, it was in Szekesfehervar, which is 60 kilometers from Budapest, but I was married by then....
- Thomas: When did you marry?
- Borzsak: In '68. And my husband was a journalist, in a central news agency in Budapest, and he thought that he would be sent abroad as a correspondent, and he told me you don't have to care about, you don't have to look for a job in teaching, you must find a job somewhere in Budapest, because in one or two years we will go abroad and you won't have to work because wives don't work when they are abroad with correspondents. So I gave up my hopes to be a teacher and I went to work in a library, in the technical library of a radio technical factory.
- Thomas: The library of a radio factory?
- Borzsak: A radio technical factory. I didn't understand anything. (laughs) I didn't understand anything about electronics or physics, but I met very good

colleagues there, very intelligent and open-minded engineers and I still have friends from there too.

Thomas: So they helped you, they taught you.

Borzsak: They helped me, yes. (laughs)

Thomas: And how long did you work there?

Borzsak: I worked there for 4 years. My son was born in '72 and my husband divorced in '73. And I went to work in another library in '74 which was much closer to my interest and to my home. And it was a library of management training for the building industry. You know, it was in the middle '70's, when the regime, the leaders of the regime, wanted that the new generation was trained according to the new economic strains because it was very important to them and they needed new, well-trained managers in every branch of the economy. They established management training schools in every branch. And thanks to the boss in the university economics library, she rang me and told me they are looking for a librarian for this new institution and it was much closer to my home and so on and I went to work there.

Thomas: And you knew a little bit more about that subject.

Borzsak: And it was much closer to my interest, and economics, of course, and it was very interesting. And language teaching became more important, I mean, teaching English, and as a librarian and teacher of English I could teach there. They were grown-up people who understood Russian, but they needed, badly needed German and English, and teachers came there and gave courses.

Thomas: Did you actually teach courses?

Borzsak: And I could actually teach there, yes.

Thomas: So you had classes in English.

Borzsak: I had classes, it was in my job, I didn't get extra pay for it because it was in my job.

Thomas: Part of your job. And you liked that?

Borzsak: I liked that

Thomas: Did you like it better than being a librarian?

Borzsak: I liked being a librarian. I'm very lucky, I'm very lucky, to have 2 nice jobs. That was my 3rd job. I gave up this in '80, when my son was in the third form. In those days, in Hungary, most of the mothers worked of course, and

teaching was in the morning and in the afternoon there was caring after the children whose parents worked. .

Thomas: That is when the mothers worked, which was most of the mothers worked, is that correct?

Borzsak: Yes, most of the mother worked. They simply had to work because the pay was so low.

Thomas: And the afternoon child care, that was free? The mothers did not have to pay for the afternoon care of the children?

Borzsak: No, no. But it wasn't very reassuring, that the children do their homework there and they are looked after carefully.

Thomas: So perhaps it was not very good child care?

Borzsak: It was not, it was not. I lived in the Buda apartment nearby and next to the school there was a big rock on a hill between the blocks and my son told me that they were allowed to go there and climb there, and it wasn't safe at all. So then I had an opportunity to go teach English at the Medical University and it meant that I didn't have to send him to child day care but after teaching he could come home.

Thomas: He could come home because you were there, and you had time.

Borzsak: Yes. And I had holidays, I could be with him, otherwise I would have had to send him to child day care and I didn't want that.

Thomas: What did you do on your holidays?

Borzsak: We had a little cottage near Budapest close to the Danube and we went there.

Thomas: So you spent most of your summers in the country.

Borzsak: In the country, yes, and I could travel. I could guide. I was a guide. There was a teachers' club which organized tours for teachers to the west.

Thomas: To the west? What years are we talking about? the '70's?

Borzsak: It is the '80's now.

Thomas: Now it is the '80's, and so then you could then go to the west, which means....

Borzsak: I was in France and Germany, in the Netherlands, England and Italy. For 6 year, I traveled 6 years. Every year I could travel abroad.

- Borzsak: And you were the guide.
- Borzsak: I was the guide with 45 people in a coach.
- Thomas: And this was the teachers' union tour, so to speak.
- Borzsak: Yes.
- Thomas: How did you get to be the guide?
- Borzsak: I was one member of the group, and I went to meet with the group, and the guide and his wife, we became good friends, and they couldn't speak English, and they asked me to help them, but the boss of the club didn't let them help me, but he gave me another group.
- Thomas: And you could speak German?
- Borzsak: No, no. A little French.
- Thomas: And so you mostly went to those countries, not so much to Germany.
- Borzsak: I went to Germany, once I went to Austria, Germany and the Benelux countries. Once I went to Paris plus London, once I went to France and northern Italy, and the last time was to London.
- Thomas: Now was travel to the west allowed all the time? Before the '80's? Was it allowed in the '70's and '60's and '50's?
- Borzsak: The first thing you could travel to was socialist countries. I remember my mother went to the Tatra Mountains for 4 days in 1965 (?), that was the first time, it was Czechoslovakia. She gained her passport.
- Thomas: But that passport could take her only to the socialist countries.
- Borzsak: You had two sorts of passports, first you had the red passport which would let you go to neighboring countries, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria. With the blue passport you could go to the west.
- Thomas: What did you need to go to Russia?
- Borzsak: You couldn't go to Russia as an individual. There were organized trips, packaged tours. You could go on a packaged tour, and if you went on a packaged tour I don't know if you need a passport at all. I never went on a packaged tour to Russia. I'm sorry, I'm wrong, I went in '71, we went to central Asian federation countries of Asia, central Asian republics, Uzbekistan, Kazakstan, Turkmenistan.

It was shocking to see.

Thomas: Why?

Borzsak: Because, because I didn't know very much about Muslim culture. I knew that they were people whose culture was Muslim, but it was soaked in that Communist ideology, that nationalism, the Soviet Union is for the peace of the world, and so on, and so on, you know. And we flew first of all to Moscow, then we flew to Dushanbe, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. And you met a different world. The Muslim world was just burning behind this Communist pressure.

Thomas: Was it, as it were, hidden, kept hidden, they didn't express it.

Borzsak: They didn't express it. They were wearing their own costumes but they lived a European way of life, which was pressed upon them. But their soul didn't take part in it.

Thomas: And how did you know that?

Borzsak: I didn't realize it then, but when the changes came, after '90, and I remembered back those days, I realized it then. I was a young woman with my husband and a big company, we went together, very nice people, and there were these tea houses, Asian tea houses where you sit on the floor or very very low, flat bed, there is no carpet only the wood, or the wood and carpet, and you sit this way as the Turkish do, you know [she indicates crossed legs position], and there are no women, only men. And I walked in, [laughs] in trousers and a blouse, and sat down, and I remember their eyes, how shocked they were. They didn't say a word, they didn't stand up and go out, they were just sitting and sipping tea. But I think if they could have done, they would have dropped me from the highest tower as they did in the '50's, actually. I still feel it.

Thomas: So a western approach or a western custom was offensive to them.

Borzsak: Yes, certainly. I wouldn't say it was western because it was, well, it was western.....

Thomas: You were a woman in trousers and a blouse, that's western, I think.

Borzsak: Yes [laughs].

Thomas: You knew when the changes came after '90 that, did you hear about or were aware that western customs were thrown off, they stopped practicing western customs in central Asia?

Borzsak: They went back to the Muslim customs.

- Thomas: Those became the culture of those countries after '90, so that was what told you that under Communism all of this was still there, and strong.
- Borzsak: Yes, it was still there. 50 years of Communism couldn't do anything.
- Thomas: Did you find the culture or the life in those countries under Communism, indeed in any of the countries, Poland or Slovakia or anywhere you went, did you find the life very different from that in Hungary? Was it pretty much the same or poorer or richer.....
- Borzsak: Under the Communists?
- Thomas: Yes.
- Borzsak: Hungary was better off because of '56. It was such a shock for the regime that the people were so much against them that they stopped having the very strong terror that they had before. Before '56 it wasn't only the terror it was the property too. After '56 Hungary began to open to the West, very slowly of course. Before '56, you know Hungary was an agricultural country, and Hungarian farmers or peasants, it is their relation to their land, it is something very extraordinary.
- Thomas: Close.
- Borzsak: Very close, very close, and after the Second World War land was divided, land was given to them, and after a few years it was taken back, and they were pressed into the corporate, they didn't work, and after '56 they let people have a little piece of land of their own, and it turned out after a few years that the income produced in the small owned farms was bigger than the income from the corporate lands, because there was no incentive in the cooperative but at home there was.
- Thomas: They were motivated. Was it just in the economic sphere that things changed after '56?
- Borzsak: After '56 they let you travel, very slowly, but they began, first there were the red passports, then there came the blue passports. If you had relatives or friends in the West, they could send you a letter of invitation in which they stated that they would give you accommodation and they would give you money and you had permission to leave the country for 30 days. It was called the 'invitation passport'. And later came the 'tourist passport'. Every third year you were allowed to buy \$70 from the national bank, and for \$70 you could go to the west for 30 days, and just to mention that people went for 30 days and didn't use the \$70, and they took camps and they took food with them in cars, and they could see what was going on, and they came home, and the regime had to open it, because people came home and very many people stayed out.

- Thomas: So they would come home and ask or demand what they had spent in the west.
- Borzsak: It was those years when the regime or state began to take loans from the west, because they didn't want to raise the prices, but the economy was very inefficient so they took loans to make things work.
- Thomas: Did you go west at that time?
- Borzsak: I wasn't allowed.
- Thomas: Why was that?
- Borzsak: It was a stupid thing, it was very interesting.
- Thomas: Really.
- Borzsak: Yes, because in '64 I graduated from secondary school, I had a place in the university in the next year, I had a job in the library, and I thought I would go to England as a babysitter, and I would improve my English. I found everything about the bureau for au pairs abroad, and I got registered, everything was arranged. And I began to correspond and I got sent a letter from a very nice family in London: the husband was an internist, and they needed an au pair. And I had to get a letter of invitation and the letter of invitation was from Germany. You know, I asked for my passport and that I was going to Germany to visit the friend of my parents who sent me a letter of invitation. But when you are getting your application for the passport with any sort of letter of invitation you got a, we call it a 'window', a stamp into the passport which said you can travel to Europe for one year, you could stay for a year, wherever you wanted.
- Thomas: Even though the letter of invitation was from Germany....
- Borzsak: Even though the letter of invitation was from Germany, I got a stamp for Europe.
- Thomas: Very interesting.
- Borzsak: Very interesting. So it was arranged that on the 6th of January I will go, I will travel to England, to this family.
- Thomas: From Germany?
- Borzsak: No, from Budapest. Then at Christmas I got a postcard from this German family. It was just a postcard of politeness, saying Hi, Judith, we are glad you will travel, I hope you will have time to visit us on your way to London, and how stupid I was, I told my parents that I would go to the minister of interior's office, and I will get my passport a little beforehand. And I remember it was

the Monday after Christmas, and my mother came with me, and it was a very cold day and very windy, like yesterday, and it was a long street with the ministry at the end of it, a very long street, and we were struggling with wind, and my mother said, "I don't think we really should go, that you need to go to Germany", and I said, "No, I want to go to Germany because they are very nice people, they sent me this letter of invitation".

Thomas: But you already had arranged to go to England, right?

Borzsak: Yes, but I didn't have the passport. So I went in, and I told him----it was only me who had to go to the clerk, and he asked me why I had come and I told him I had this application for a passport and I would like to leave sooner, earlier. "How do you think that you ask for a passport to Germany and you plan to go to England with that?" That was the question. And I told him I have friends. And he said, "You say you want to go to London. Why do you want to go to England?" "Because I am going to be a teacher of English and I would like to practice my English and I go to a family and I help them." "So you want to work? Don't you think your parents can get imprisoned in Hungary if you illegally work abroad? It was like a Kafka novel. There I was with my 18 years of inexperience [laughs], and he didn't say anything and I didn't get a reply for 3 months. They didn't send me anything. In March or April I got a letter from the ministry which said, "Unfortunately your application cannot be fulfilled for the time being." And when I came home with my mother there was a letter waiting for me, a very elegant letter, from the Grand Hotel in Margaret Island, Budapest, and it was in Hungarian, I can't remember the name, but it said, "Dear Miss Borzsak, I am the patient of the internist in London where you are going to be an au pair from next January, and I came to visit the tombs of my relative in Hungary, and he asked me if I could see you. Could you come and meet me at the Grand Hotel tomorrow afternoon?" You can imagine the surprise: he was a very nice gentleman, he was Jewish, and he got to England during the war, but his family disappeared, I think in camps, and he had no living relatives any more, only tombs and memories.

Thomas: So he had come to Hungary to visit the tombs of his relatives.

Borzsak: Yes, and when he thought he would get a permit to come to Hungary maybe they told him, "Listen, there is this young lady coming from behind the iron curtain, would you be so kind as to see...."

Thomas: If she's okay!

Borzsak: "...if she can use forks and knives!" [laughs]

Thomas: Did you know by then that your application had been turned down?

Borzsak: No, no I didn't, I didn't.

- Thomas: You didn't know! So what did you tell him?
- Borzsak: I told him that of course I would like to go, and my parents and I were all satisfied, he was a very nice man, and I was satisfied....
- Thomas: Everybody was happy except the government.
- Borzsak: Exactly, exactly.
- Thomas: In spite of the fact that that window, that stamp, said you could go anywhere in Europe, they didn't mean it.
- Borzsak: Exactly.
- Thomas: You could only go exactly where you were invited.
- Borzsak: Yes. But it was my fault because everybody did that, you know, it wasn't me who found it out, it was all my friends, for example....
- Thomas: They got around the government but they didn't tell the government that they were doing this.
- Borzsak: Yes, yes.
- Thomas: So you did not get to go west until the '80's.
- Borzsak: No, in '70. I married in '68 and in '70 we applied for a tourist passport and my husband and I went to England for 2.5 weeks. It was a surprise that we received the passport: two freshly graduated young people who could speak languages...we were suspicious enough to expect that we would be refused.
- Thomas: And you were just going as a tourist, that was your only purpose.
- Borzsak: Yes, we went to London, but most of us were teachers of English and we studied the culture and the history and language and we were there for 3 weeks, no, 2 ½.
- Thomas: And your husband was a journalist?
- Borzsak: Yes.
- Thomas: And what was life like as a journalist under the Communist regime? You had, did he have to present the news as a Communist?
- Borzsak: Very little, After all, he translated it from English and German and Russian and French, to Hungarian. He worked in the central news agency which

received the news from the other news agencies in the world and they translated it and gave it out to Hungarian newspapers. So it was centralized.

Thomas: And he would give a literal translation.

Borzsak: Yes, sure, it was a translation job.

Thomas: Did he also have some power or some say over what was published? And what was not?

Borzsak: No, no, no.

Thomas: He just did the translation and then it went on to whomever....

Borzsak: Of course they were very very informed. Everybody knew that they were informed. But it was for the office to say, those few hundred people who worked there, they were over those who knew things differently from the world. But they were quite happy.

Thomas: What do you mean, knew things differently from the world?

Borzsak: They received their news from the world.

Thomas: They knew everything that was going on.

Borzsak: Exactly, yes. You couldn't get Time or any western papers then.

Thomas: So those people that translated knew what was going on but some of that never got in the newspapers, some of the stories about what was happening never got in the....

Borzsak: [laughs] Yes.

Thomas: That's what I'm trying to get clear. I see. So back to the traveling, when did you first go west?

Borzsak: In '70. To England.

Thomas: What was your impression? Did you have any strong impression of anything?

Borzsak: Yes. My first impression was that this is a country where there wasn't war.

Thomas: There wasn't war.

Borzsak: Because there were no signs of poverty and war. We had signs of war. The castle was in ruins in Budapest.

Thomas: From '56.

- Borzsak: No, from '46, from '44, from the war.
- Thomas: From the Second World War.
- Borzsak: From the Second World War. It was guarded by soldiers, you couldn't go up.
- Thomas: But in England, the war damage from World War Two had already been repaired.
- Borzsak: Yes, yes, it was repaired.
- Thomas: What other impressions did you have?
- Borzsak: Of course it was impressive to see democracy working.
- Thomas: What did you see?
- Borzsak: There were the elections in those days. I can't remember, I think it was the Labor party and I can't remember who was the other, but it was on a big screen in the streets. Of course I knew about it, I knew there were different parties, but in Hungary there was only one party [laughs] so there wasn't much choice. It was interesting, it was interesting.
- Thomas: What else?
- Borzsak: I cannot tell you anything else because we didn't drive to the edges of the world. We went to the obligatory museums and parks and Oxford and Cambridge, and we had long talks with our landlady, who was a Hungarian Jewish lady and she told us about the situation, how she left Hungary and how she met her husband who came from Yugoslavia, and they met in England, but he died by then when we were there, he died in the '50's.
- Thomas: When did she go to England?
- Borzsak: Under the Second World War, and she told us that in '56 her sister from Hungary rang her and told her that the borders are open and what should they do, and she told them to come to England because it was a tolerant country. I never forget that.
- Thomas: What is your religious affiliation?
- Borzsak: I'm a Calvinist. But we had everything in the family. Mostly Roman Catholic and Calvinist because that's the two main religions here.
- Thomas: So when you finally did get to go to other countries in the west....
- Borzsak: It was not before I went to

- Thomas: What kind of impressions did you have then of the other countries?
- Borzsak: Until that time I could go to England twice because I received grants for summer courses.
- Thomas: To study English.
- Borzsak: Yes, to study English, and both times I could stay in London. What you asked me about my general impression....
- Thomas: Not just England but....
- Borzsak: Everywhere, yes. I used to say that it took me many times to see that even the rubbish is different. I think it is because of the Communist, yes, the Communist regime settled the class oppression that people stopped dealing with things that did not belong strictly to their small circle. That was the main idea of the regime, that you don't have to care about anything because we care about things.
- Thomas: We take care of it.
- Borzsak: We take care of it. You just take care of your small home, your small cottage, that's all, what you have behind your gate. And you can see that in the country, you can see beautiful houses surrounded by rubbish, because it is not mine.
- Thomas: Are you saying that the government did not take care of the environment?
- Borzsak: They didn't take care of the environment and they didn't take care of many things. It was very, it was very expensive to keep up the regime. The army took up money and those who served the regime needed a lot of money, that's why they didn't have money....
- Thomas: You mean the leaders....
- Borzsak: The leaders, yes....
- Thomas: They got a lot of money.
- Borzsak: They got all sorts of allowances, because they had to be bought.
- Thomas: Bought----bribed.
- Borzsak: Bribed.
- Thomas: You mentioned the difference in rubbish. Are you talking about the countryside outside the private home or estate or yard or whatever, was

different, you saw uncared for areas in Hungary that in other countries were tended or cared for?

Borzsak: Yes, exactly, yes. You could see that it was important that everything should be cared for.

Thomas: You would see this just driving through the country....

Borzsak: Just driving through the country.

Thomas: Or driving around the city, too.

Borzsak: Yes.

Thomas: It was more orderly, more cared for, more kept up, more upkeep....

Borzsak: Exactly, exactly. And people were much more caring about each other in the street, when you met them in the street. When I went out with my friend's child in the pram, people came up to me and smiled at me and smiled at her. At home nobody [laughs] smiled at me much.

Thomas: You mean in the western cities----country too I suppose----they were friendlier?

Borzsak: **Yes**, in a way they were friendlier, but it is very interesting because even if they were friendlier they didn't get close. In Hungary in the street you can be not noticed at all but you find friends who are really caring about you and for whom you are very important.

Thomas: But you found that strangers in the western countries were also caring.

Borzsak: Yes, but I think it was in the '80's. I can tell you, I know it's changed a lot. So it is cold there too. In the '80's it was different, we were like E.T.'s for them, they didn't know where Budapest was, they would mistake Budapest and Bucharest.

Thomas: And what else impressed you in the west?

Borzsak: Where else? I was in France, of course in Paris, and I was in the Netherlands, and....

Thomas: What were BIG differences, very noticeable differences between those western countries and Hungary? Were there any? Maybe there weren't any.

Borzsak: As I told you, first impression, everything was cared for and....

- Thomas: The people's attitude. Anything else? I have heard people say, for example, people have told me that they noticed very much the abundance of material goods. Maybe they were just people who were shoppers or consumers, different people notice different things. Did you notice things like that?
- Borzsak: Of course you noticed it, but I couldn't care less. You could get anything in Hungary, if you needed to, if you had money and you had patience, you could bribe people and get people to bring you things from abroad. I was never crazy about those things. It was good to go and see the abundance and go to the department store and look around for hours but I didn't care about that.
- Thomas: Someone else told me that they were very impressed with Paris because it was so light, I guess at night, and Budapest was so dark. Of course now when I come to Budapest there is such illumination of beautiful buildings, it's not dark now.
- Borzsak: It is not dark anymore, but then it was dark, and lights went dark at ten p.m. Life has its schedules, and we had our schedules.
- Thomas: Tell me something about what happened with the change. I don't mean multiple parties coming into existence as opposed to one party, unless you want to talk about that, which is fine. But I mean what other things, how was your life personally affected, what changed for you and what----go ahead.
- Borzsak: Basically, I can tell you that I wouldn't have dreamt that I would survive until this regime. We didn't know how lucky it was. It was such a secret, it was kept so secret that we didn't know that it was going to fall, so it was a real surprise, a real surprise that it collapsed. If somebody had told me in the '80's that that would happen I would have laughed. I hoped very much because I hated it, I didn't like it because it was everything bad, it was dictatorship.
- Thomas: Let me go back a minute and then we'll come back and pick up on this. I think one thing you said earlier I meant to follow up on was after '56 there wasn't the same terror, I think you said that, that changed, the terror didn't decrease or cease. What specifically kind of terror are you talking about?
- Borzsak: Yes. When I said that I meant that it became more refined, the terror became more refined.
- Thomas: What do you mean?
- Borzsak: They let us as I told you about the farmers, that was one thing, the other was the passport and the opportunity or possibility to travel abroad, once in 3 years, and the letter of invitation to do that. I remember my husband who studied English and Russian and graduated in 1968 received a copy of Orwell's '1984' and he liked it so much that he wanted to translate it (just for his own sake, I mean he did not go to publishing houses or the like). And his

teacher from the University (teacher of English literature) who was on very good terms with him advised him not to do that, because I know somebody who had tried to translate "Animal Farm" and was sent to prison. So people began to talk more open but your hearing became very delicate to hear the real news behind the words and we learned to read behind the lines.

Thomas: This is what happened after '56.

Borzsak: Yes.

Thomas: Whereas before there would have been no attempt to read behind the lines or certainly no attempt to translate "Animal Farm". You wouldn't have even thought of trying. So getting back to the change....

Borzsak: There is one more thing. After the change a lot of documents became open, became published, documents about how people were persecuted after '56. You might have heard the name of the young boy who was 16 and who was in prison after '56. Mansfeld Peter. He took part in the revolution and was imprisoned and they waited until he became 18 and hanged him because they couldn't hang people under 18.

Thomas: Was he given a trial?

Borzsak: Yes of course he was given a trial and he was kept in prison for 2 years and then he was hanged. In '65 I was in secondary school and going to balls and I was going out with boys and I didn't know about this. It was crucial.

Thomas: Crucial why?

Borzsak: Because, thinking back, these young people who did this wonderful revolution were suffering so much and the others didn't know about it and those who knew didn't talk about it

Thomas: So that didn't come out until after the change.

Borzsak: Exactly. The terror became more delicate. It was hidden. It was clever.

Thomas: But you did not expect the change and so you were not so aware of non-violent but nevertheless anti-Communist opposition. I'm talking about like underground papers and parades that were perhaps not....

Borzsak: Parades were not allowed.

Thomas: Parades were not allowed or demonstrations....

Borzsak: The trade union gave up the right to demonstrate or parade.

- Thomas: What do you mean, they gave it up?
- Borzsak: They decided, they said that in Hungary or in this regime, this wonderful regime, we don't have any reason like you remember to go out and demonstrate for anything because we have such a wonderful government which takes care of everything. [laughs] There were no parades. Young people sometimes around the 15th of March which is the anniversary of the 1848 revolution, students tried to organize something, but there were many plainclothes policemen around that many of the students were arrested, later sacked from the university. I could read papers of course, there were opposition papers, and I read them, my colleagues and I read them.
- Thomas: These were the so-called underground press.
- Borzsak: Underground, yes.
- Thomas: So you were aware there was opposition, you just didn't....
- Borzsak: Yes, yes, yes, I know names, of course, and I knew there were gatherings, but I never go, I never went. I didn't have the time, I had my child and I had my work.
- Thomas: You were surprised, I guess, you knew about those things but you didn't think it was going to change. So you were surprised when the change came.
- Borzsak: It was a surprise to many.
- Thomas: And were you by any chance at the ceremony, I think wasn't it July 16th or 15th....
- Borzsak: The 16th. I was in England, unfortunately. I was in school.
- Thomas: The ceremony for the reburial of Nagy Imre. Did you hear about it there?
- Borzsak: Of course. I listened to it on the radio. There were 2 school mates, in their room.
- Thomas: Did they have it on television?
- Borzsak: They didn't have a television.
- Thomas: So you never saw the television.
- Borzsak: No, no, unfortunately.
- Thomas: And what did you think about that?

- Borzsak: Oh it was very exciting, it was very exciting.
- Thomas: And when you came back....
- Borzsak: When I came back it was a different country. I went over, to England, on March 15 and I was there for 6 months. By then my son was sixteen years old and my ex-husband who was working in Paris as a correspondent of his news agency took him there to attend a secondary school in Paris. And it gave me the idea that I could go to England (30 years later than planned) to improve my English, and that's what I did, I went as an au pair, an old au pair. [laughs]
- Thomas: Wonderful! And did you enjoy that?
- Borzsak: I did, very much. And I still keep in touch with those people, we are very good friends, since then they were in Hungary twice and I visited them several times.
- Thomas: And so when you came back it was a different country. In what way?
- Borzsak: There were several parties, there were several parties. There was the round table conference when the communist party and the new parties sat together to discuss the changes. It was very exciting. And there were the first elections in '90. Unfortunately by now people are bored and turn away, but those days everybody was interested and discussing things and new people came into light and it was wonderful.
- Thomas: And was it different to discuss things in public, before you had not discussed?
- Borzsak: Not in public. Only with people you knew.
- Borzsak: What else was different about it? How do you think it has gone since the change? Life of all kinds, in Hungary, I mean, political, economic, personal, whatever?
- Borzsak: I wouldn't have thought that it was going to be so difficult.
- Thomas: Difficult in what way?
- Borzsak: It's like you dig a hole, and first there is dirty water that comes up, and very slowly comes clean water, and it takes time, ten years, twenty years, thirty years, and we are not prepared to wait for that, we are not as a nation or a country or a population, we are beginning to get tired of the difficulties.
- Thomas: And what are the difficulties?
- Borzsak: There are difficulties in the economy.

- Thomas: An example?
- Borzsak: Many people became jobless.
- Thomas: Why?
- Borzsak: Because the economy was ruined.
- Thomas: How did it become ruined?
- Borzsak: Factories closed down.
- Thomas: Why?
- Borzsak: Because their products were old-fashioned and they worked for the Russian market and it went dead. The factory I first went to work, and I worked there for 4 years. It worked for the Russian market, only for the Russian market, and my colleagues told me that one day they got a telegram from the Russian partners that they could not pay for the goods. The leaders could not pay the salary and the other day half of the people were sent away. The leaders who knew it was going to happen and had money could buy some parts of the factories/workshops/cooperatives, but those who didn't know and didn't have the money became the losers of the changes.
- Thomas: But when the leaders would buy it, could they not rehire?
- Borzsak: No, because they couldn't go on with the production and the state pay, because they had to change.
- Thomas: They had to change the quality.
- Borzsak: The quality, the quantity.
- Thomas: So it was mostly the factories going out of business that caused the loss of jobs. And what else was difficult?
- Borzsak: It was the same with the cooperatives.
- Thomas: The farming cooperatives. But those must have just ceased to be.
- Borzsak: They ceased to be, but people who received land didn't receive machinery. And they didn't have the money to buy machinery. They farmed without. The third was the inflation, which was very high.
- Thomas: Is it still high?

- Borzsak: It is, but it's better. Just today it was on the news that from next January the energy prices go up 20%. The whole population, or a large part of the population is disillusioned because in this time it is very good that we have several political parties but they quarrel so much that it seems they are not interested in the country, they are just interested in their own power. You can say it about each side, it is true of all sides.
- Thomas: But isn't there a coalition government now?
- Borzsak: A coalition of the left.
- Thomas: Both parties in the coalition are on the same side, so they agree in general and differ only in small details.
- Borzsak: Exactly.
- Thomas: Is there a feeling, I would guess, that the different parties don't know how to deal with the problems?
- Borzsak: It's difficult to say that because I'm such an outsider, and I don't know how to deal with the problems. What I see is that those who are there cannot deal with the problems.
- Thomas: You don't see anybody dealing with the problems.
- Borzsak: Exactly.
- Thomas: Do you see anybody making suggestions?
- Borzsak: There are suggestions, there are suggestions, but they are not listened to.
- Thomas: You don't listen to the suggestions?
- Borzsak: No, those who have to listen to the suggestions, they don't, and they deny people on questions and the population is just not interested, which is unfortunate.
- Thomas: Is the population divided in their opinion in the way they can't even have a discussion, they just argue or quarrel, or are they genuinely not interested, they don't care?
- Borzsak: There is quite a large part which are not interested. And there is a smaller part which is very much interested, they always talk about politics and argue in the family and among friends, and they just reorganize and collapse and reorganize again and are very much interested, but there is a big part which is indifferent.

- Thomas: But how can people be indifferent when there's inflation and people are out of jobs....
- Borzsak: They are disillusioned, they don't believe that any party could help.
- Thomas: So what do they....
- Borzsak: They don't go out to vote.
- Thomas: They don't vote.
- Borzsak: They don't vote. There were elections last weekend for the European parliament and it is not good that 44 stand aside.
- Thomas: That's correct. Do they feel hopeless?
- Borzsak: There is very much hopelessness.
- Thomas: That is really kind of the ultimate of disillusionment, that you lose hope and you simply don't do anything and this prepares the way for trouble, as we know from past experience in European history.
- Borzsak: There is much hopelessness but I hope very much that in the 24th hour there will be something which brings up the common sense from people and they will decide they should do something.
- Thomas: When the change came and people were surprised, they did not realize it would be so difficult?
- Borzsak: No, not at all. The moderates the first election very, very moderate, they were losing so much, they lost the next elections surprisingly much, the left side won almost 70% in the next election.
- Thomas: Why did the conservative, right, moderate lose?
- Borzsak: Because the population was not prepared for how difficult it was going to be, and they were not told, and when the problems came, the opposition, (the members of the previous nomenclature, who call themselves social democrats but basically they root in the Socialist Party of the communist regime), which was always very clever, indoctrinated them that the other party or new government is no good, that they don't know how to fix the problems and we know how to fix the problems, that was their slogan.
- Thomas: And did they?
- Borzsak: [laughs] No, and they lost again, and then came the 2nd right wing, and they lost again, and now the 2nd left wing, and so....

- Thomas: It's like a teeter-totter, up, down, up, down.
- Borzsak: Exactly.
- Thomas: Is there any leader or any group of people who tell the country it's going to have to endure blood, sweat and tears, the way Churchill did? Is there anybody?
- Borzsak: The first government, the prime minister of the first government, said that. Antall Jozsef. He said that but not loudly enough and not often enough. He was a very well-read and very well-informed historian. Unfortunately you know he became ill and died in his 3rd year.
- Thomas: What has happened to Viktor Orban? I know he was prime minister at one time but I wondered---he gave such a stirring speech at the funeral and I wondered if he gave so stirring a speech at that point if he had given further stirring speeches to, you know, as it were, give the people heart, give them courage, urge them on. Has that happened?
- Borzsak: Yes, he was prime minister between '89 to 2002, and he became much more relaxed and .
- Thomas: And the Communists were out, the Russians were out.
- Borzsak: Yes, the Russians were out. I think that he was very right when he said that in the fifth---you know there were 4 coffins at the reburial and the 5th was empty, the unknown victim, and he said that in the 5th coffin is our future, our future lies in the 5th coffin. And he meant his own generations' future when he said that and he was very right.
- Thomas: What do you think becoming a member of the European Union is going to, the difference that is going to make, how will that affect Hungary?
- Borzsak: I voted for the European Union, but the only reason was that, because I wanted to express that Hungary belongs to the traditional European values and not to the Asian values of the eastern union that were pressed on the country in the past 50 years.
- Thomas: And earlier.
- Borzsak: And earlier. For the last 500 or 600 years. We are in the middle of big roads, Hungary, and it would be a good place for everybody, if you read our history. But I don't think that a big organization, such a big organization like the European Union, can do good to small details.
- Thomas: You don't think so.

- Borzsak: No, no, it's too bureaucratic on the top, and by the time the direction, by the time it gets to the details it loses its pointing and it is so much changed every time that it loses its aim.
- Thomas: And that would mean that Hungary would not profit, would not be able get the benefit that ought to come with membership in the European Union?
- Borzsak: I hope they will.
- Thomas: What do you think those benefits would be or should be?
- Borzsak: It's always said since we joined that such a lot of money can be drawn, can be gained, can be given or can be ours for different purposes.
- Thomas: You mean borrowed by Hungary?
- Borzsak: Not borrowed, but you apply for by certain projects, and then.....
- Thomas: We were talking about the possibility of funding for projects in Hungary that would improve the situation.
- Borzsak: I think that it is such a large organization by now that it is very far from the original object. It could be anti-American or a different, to become something like America, that would be the original object when they began.
- Thomas: You mean like a United States of Europe.
- Borzsak: A United States of Europe, yes.
- Thomas: I believe that the countries, this is correct, the countries of the European Union do not give up so much of their autonomy, their freedom, their privileges....
- Borzsak: They try not to do this, yes, that's why they cannot become a United Nations of Europe.
- Thomas: And you think there's so much bureaucracy now in the European Union that by the time an idea is conceived and put into play, by the time it gets to working it's, what we say, watered down? Is that a fair....
- Borzsak: Something like that, yes. We don't know, it's at the beginning in Hungary.
- Thomas: How has it worked in other countries of Europe? Has it improved their....
- Borzsak: The only thing is the difference in Ireland and Portugal, it's changed a lot, because they are much better off now than they were before.

- Thomas: And this is much better off economically?
- Borzsak: Economically, yes.
- Thomas: And Poland?
- Borzsak: Poland and Hungary became members of the European Union at the same time. Poland and the Czech Republic are much better off now than they were. They are the last to join.
- Thomas: Why are Poland and the Czech Republic better off?
- Borzsak: It may be their leaders, I don't know.
- Thomas: More clever leadership?
- Borzsak: Yes.
- Thomas: What does Hungary in your judgment really need? More western investment?
- Borzsak: No, it's not investment. It would be at home, there should be more responsibility for the condition and real needs of the country and not their own power. I work for a secretariat, its name is Hungarian Accreditation Committee, it is the accreditation body for higher education in Hungary, it is involved in the quality of higher education.
- Thomas: That would be universities, colleges, not gymnasium.
- Borzsak: That's right. And we work in an office block. And when there is a change of government, a new secretariat moves into this office block, and [laughs] there is a repainting and redecoration of the offices. It is not about that!
- Thomas: Is there a replacement of personnel?
- Borzsak: And they replace all the personnel, every 4 years there is new personnel. And there is no civil service.
- Thomas: There's no civil service?
- Borzsak: There is civil service but it changes every 4 years. [laughter]
- Thomas: So that actually the personnel are political appointees, they are appointed according to their politics.
- Borzsak: Yes.
- Thomas: And so what happens to higher education?

- Borzsak: Higher education has a big change now in Hungary, because 10 or 8 years ago, 6 years ago, I don't know, several European ministers of education signed an agreement a few years ago in which they stated that the higher education of their own countries will be restructured. In Hungary in the old higher education system we had colleges and universities, and once you began to study at a college you finished and you could attend the university but there was no possibility to change from a college to a university.
- Thomas: You couldn't transfer.
- Borzsak: You couldn't transfer. And this new system is based on transfer study, a transfer of courses, a rearrangement of courses in Hungary.
- Thomas: Just in Hungary?
- Borzsak: Not only in this country, but in the different countries of Europe. In Hungary the minister of education makes every higher education institution change its system from the old one into the new. It is a great effort and you do not know whether it works or not. In Germany, for example, only some part of German higher education institutions change according to this new system.
- Thomas: And some don't.
- Borzsak: And some won't, and they see how it works. And if it works [laughs] they change the rest. In Hungary they changed the whole system, in 2 years, at once.
- Thomas: Really. In 2 years. Is it chaotic?
- Borzsak: Absolutely. [laughs] Absolutely.
- Thomas: Will the different countries recognize each other's diplomas?
- Borzsak: That is the object, recognize and promote the students to be mobile, to begin here and finish there and so on. Of course it involves other things too, because students have to speak other languages and have to have the money to travel there.
- Thomas: Well, the speaking of other languages would be a requirement, I would think, before you could go, say, from Hungary to the Sorbonne, let's say, you couldn't be admitted unless you spoke French.
- Borzsak: And Hungarian students don't speak languages at all, very very little.
- Thomas: Foreign languages are not taught at the lower levels, the elementary and secondary?

- Borzsak: They are, but the efficiency is low.
- Thomas: Why?
- Borzsak: Firstly, because of the teachers, because the teacher as a professional is so lowly rated by the authorities that the salaries are very low, teachers don't go on to teach, they go to other jobs, and those that stay are partly not the best teachers or they cannot trouble with the pupils, because families are collapsing these days, 40% of marriages break up, and children come from broken families, and they don't have a chance to learn at home how to behave, how to honor, how to respect, not only your teachers but your friends, your playmates, and there is a hopeless anarchy in some schools....
- Thomas: The students misbehave, they are unruly, they are not disciplined....
- Borzsak: They cannot be disciplined because they don't have the understanding of respect.
- Thomas: The teachers would have to spend all their time disciplining them and not teaching. So you're saying that teachers are not highly valued in the society and therefore highly paid.
- Borzsak: They are among the least paid professions.
- Thomas: And there is not protest against this from the people?
- Borzsak: They don't have unfortunately, they don't have enough interest. They are not clever enough to express their interest.
- Thomas: The teachers?
- Borzsak: Teachers, yes.
- Thomas: The teachers don't have a union?
- Borzsak: They have, but even the union is not strong enough.
- Thomas: It's not well led?
- Borzsak: Maybe it's not well led. Unions were servants of the Communist regime, and now they are not respected at all.
- Thomas: Well, if you don't call it a union, if you call it a teacher's organization....
- Borzsak: There are new unions, and there are those who have faith, but nobody thinks it's important, or the people for whom it would be important don't think it's important.

- Thomas: Education is the future.
- Borzsak: Exactly. Education and health, and they are in the most difficult situation in the economy. The social democratic/liberal government wants to privatize hospitals, that is to sell them to private companies, which means that the state admits it doesn't have the money to keep up hospitals and the whole system, and this means that those who can afford can have suitable services and those who cannot afford can't. It is serious.
- Thomas: It sounds extremely serious. What does this do to your accreditation work? Has your work changed since the change, become more difficult because of the change in attitudes....
- Borzsak: I came to work in accreditation after the changes. There was no accreditation before. I came to work here in '93, and for the moment it seems that accreditation survived all these changes because of the agreement that accreditation was needed, accreditation is admitted to be important because of the compatibility of diplomas.
- Thomas: Between countries.
- Borzsak: Between countries. That's why I am not afraid of becoming jobless in the near future. On the other hand, I'm 58, I'm retired, I work full time but I'm retired.
- Thomas: How does that work? I don't understand.
- Borzsak: It's very interesting. Retiring age is 62.
- Thomas: For everything?
- Borzsak: Everybody, but....
- Thomas: Excuse me, was that set up under the previous regime?
- Borzsak: No, it is since the change, since '94. Before '94 it was 55 for women and 60 for men. In '54 they changed it to 64 for everybody. But those who were close to retiring age then had the opportunity that after 55 they could retire if they had a certain amount of years behind them, and for me, I needed 37 years and I reached it last year so I retired. But if my job could take me and wanted to take me and wanted my job I could have it, and that's it, if my job wants me to work. But any moment they can say, thank you very much, you know.
- Thomas: But you are paid for what you do.
- Borzsak: I am, yes, I am full time, full pay, and I will get my pension.
- Thomas: That's a little unusual, isn't it?

- Borzsak: It is absolutely unusual [laughs].
- Thomas: And you have not had trouble since the Bologna agreement or accords, you have not had trouble with accreditation?
- Borzsak: No, no, because it is regulated by the Higher Education Law. Hungarian Accreditation Committee gives advice to the Minister of Education on questions concerning the quality of higher education in Hungary. The minister can take or can refuse HAC's advice.
- Thomas: And it would be the minister who would present it to Parliament to make a law, is that correct? Is that the way the system would work? If you suggested a change to the minister and he agreed that would be helpful, then what does he do?
- Borzsak: He could either help----I'm afraid I didn't understand your question.
- Thomas: If the minister accepts a recommended change, can he simply decree that the change happen?
- Borzsak: No, no, he takes it to the government and the government takes it to the Parliament.
- Thomas: And it would have to be passed as a law in the Parliament.
- Borzsak: Yes.
- Thomas: So that would bring any recommendations you might make, if accepted, into the political arena. It would be in other words influenced by politics in the Parliament, by the political parties, by which ones would support and which ones would not. What I'm trying to say is, your recommendations to take effect would have to become involved in politics, would be politicized. It isn't as if the minister is a professional educator who can just by, up to a certain point, make decrees, proclaim that this is the way it is going to be.
- Borzsak: What we advise is on the basis of quality. What we take care of is the quality of education.
- Thomas: Quality.
- Borzsak: That what's we see, the quality of the teachers and the quality of the whole thing.
- Thomas: How do you determine the quality?
- Borzsak: It's difficult, but the committee has certain and it tries to collect all those aspects of education which are important from the point of the quality of the

education. They agreed about how many full professors you need, how many, what sort of infrastructure you need, what sort of library you need, and we consult a lot of experts, we give the materials to different experts and give opinions and then we get the opinions and other experts see the opinions and they say something, so it is difficult but it tries to give an opinion which is....

Thomas: From people with knowledge....

Borzsak: Yes, from experts.

Thomas: So how do you feel about the change? The change in Hungary in '89 and '90 and since?

Borzsak: '90. I'm glad about it.

Thomas: It's better for all of the difficulties?

Borzsak: Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Thomas: In what way? Why?

Borzsak: Because it is not dictators, you have your own choice, and that's the most important.

Thomas: And so the major difference from the dictatorship would be having choice. Also not having terror.

Borzsak: Dictatorship and terror go together.

Thomas: You have to have terror to have dictatorship, otherwise people will not do what you want. They want the freedom themselves and to make them stop they use terror.

Borzsak: Yes, they go together.

Thomas: I wanted to ask you about the press. Do you think the press is more free now than it was in the old regime?

Borzsak: Well, of course, it is more free because more political opinions can be published.

Thomas: And are they?

Borzsak: They are. The trouble is that those who write do not always have the necessary responsibility, and the people who read these articles do not have the necessary information to criticize, to judge.

- Thomas: What do you mean by responsibility?
- Borzsak: The responsibility, I can't tell you the exact expression, it's from the Bible, the responsibility of those who can write, who know how to write, the literary people's responsibility.
- Thomas: Are you saying that some of the people who write these articles do not give different points of view, they just give one point of view, their point of view, and the readers do not have the critical judgment to see this, to recognize a particular point of view is being presented to them?
- Borzsak: Yes, and the population at large is not qualified enough to read an article written by qualified people. There are the popular presses, they are different, and there are very few qualified people writing in them.
- Thomas: The popular presses of the kind that have mostly scandals and sensational information, not necessarily accurate.
- Borzsak: Exactly.
- Thomas: The papers are privately owned?
- Borzsak: Yes, I think. They are not owned by the state.
- Thomas: They are owned by families or by chains. Are they owned by Hungarians?
- Borzsak: No, there are German companies and---I don't know.
- Thomas: Is there much reading of foreign papers, the London Times, the good French papers, the New York Times, the Herald Tribune, are those read much in Hungary?
- Borzsak: I think that among the people who can speak the language and whose job requires it, they do.
- Thomas: Is the internet widely used?
- Borzsak: Not as widely as it could be. They are the last thing to come here, there are not so many PC's.
- Thomas: You do not have one?
- Borzsak: I have in the office but I don't have one at home. When I am working I have one, but of course at home I don't have time to use one because I have to work. [laughs]

- Thomas: Is there much communication in your field, I mean do you use the computer often at work?
- Borzsak: Yes.
- Thomas: Radio and television, those are privately owned?
- Borzsak: There is state-owned radio and state-owned television but they are different channels. Two channels are state owned and the rest are private.
- Thomas: So you would have different opinions....
- Borzsak: Yes, you can have different opinions on the private television and on the radio as well, there are private channels on the radio too.
- Thomas: Is there what we call public radio and public television which has minimal money from the government, just a small amount, a small amount from corporations, the majority of the money comes from people who give to the TV or radio because they want to see high quality literature and
- Borzsak: I think that our main stations are like that.
- Thomas: They are, they are public supported....
- Borzsak: Public supported, I think they are, but I don't know exactly, there are always quarrels about it, too, between the parties, because there is a supervisor committee whose members are sent by the different parties, and they will describe how many people will be sent to this committee, that's why I think that this is like what you say about....
- Thomas: So there is a committee which supervises the public television....
- Borzsak: The Parliament parties send people to this supervising committee.
- Thomas: That doesn't make it exactly public radio or television if the supervision by a government party....
- Borzsak: Not the government, not the government, the Parliament party....
- Thomas: The political parties....
- Borzsak: But in those parties who work for the Parliament.
- Thomas: Yes, but it's not the same as being completely....

- Borzsak: I don't know about it, maybe I'm wrong, maybe you should ask someone who is more informed about it, because I rarely watch TV, what I listen to is only the main news early in the morning and it's only the classical music station.
- Thomas: Where do you get your news? Where do you find out what is going on in France or in your own government or....
- Borzsak: Well, I listen to the news on the radio at 5:00 and 6:00 in the morning and that's enough for me. And the weekends, every second week, as I told you my father lives near here, he's almost 90, and every day we go to visit my father and he subscribes to a paper, and every second week when I go to him I read the paper. Every weekend I get a paper. But I don't have the time to read so....
- Thomas: If you're listening to the radio or TV at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning what stations are you listening to? Is it the public....
- Borzsak: The public radio, I listen to the public radio.
- Thomas: And you feel like you get a fair....
- Borzsak: Yes, yes, the public radio is a fair....
- Thomas: Different opinions and different points of view.
- Borzsak: Yes.
- Thomas: So you feel like the information dispersal is fairly good, fairly free and open and multiple opinions.
- Borzsak: Yes it is. You can find different, you can find every opinion. The problem is that what I told you before, those who write and those who read.
- Thomas: And also the motivation of people to listen. If you're discouraged, depressed, hopeless, you don't listen, maybe.
- Borzsak: That's a problem, yes.
- Thomas: But you're glad that it happened.
- Borzsak: I'm glad and I'm worried, because it would be nice if it could speed up everything. I know it takes time, we haven't finished it.
- Thomas: And of course, you know, we say---and it's true---in the United States that freedom needs constant vigilance, you have to watch all the time, you take your eye off the ball and the game is simply lost. So it's not easy anywhere. It's really not. Thank you very much for your time.