

An Interview with Kalman Hencsei

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

Kalman Hencsei is the son of a peasant who under the government of Horthy worked as a policeman in Budapest but refused to work for the Communists when they came to power and returned to farm life. He warned his son against becoming a Communist. Kalman grew up in the village of Bezered, in southwestern Hungary, where the Catholic church was very important to him, and he has now established a foundation for funding the chapel there. He went to the university and graduated in math and physics.

He intended originally to become a scientist but ended up becoming computer expert. As such he had a live-and-let-live relationship with the Communist government, but he never became a Communist party member. He eventually got a degree in economics and worked in banking and in the government ministry of finance as a consultant, a role he liked very much.

He had an unhappy stay in the United States and he is very critical of what he regards as the American mentality. He returned to Hungary and became one of three partners in an English language school whose finances he now directs.

In addition to describing his life, Kalman discusses extensively the current political and economic situation in Hungary and various social problems, including the gypsy problem.

Thomas: This is Major Thomas on the 19th of November, 2004, and I am at the Dover nyelviskola, language school, in Budapest, Hungary, and I am interviewing Kalman Hencsei, and so I think we'll begin, Kalman, by asking you first to tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about your family.

Henesei: I was born in 1945, 1st of January, in a village in the west south part of Hungary named Bezered.

Thomas: And how large a town was that?

Henesei: It's a very small village, it has a very nice history. First mansion in 1236. In 1938 the village had 1011 inhabitants, and now, sorry to say, it has about 210. Because people moved out, left the village.

Thomas: What did your father do there?

Henesei: He was a peasant, but he started in another direction, before the Second World War, in the Horthy era, he came up to Budapest, he studied to be a policeman. And after the Second World War, when the Communism started, he went back. The new regime invited him to serve them and my father told them "I wanted to serve the other regime, I don't serve you", even though he hated to be a peasant but he did and I'm sorry for him, at that time I didn't understand it but now I understand it.

Thomas: He was not a member of the Communist party.

Henesei: No, no, no. My parents used to tell me, "My son, I ask you, don't be a Communist, go to church and be a nice person."

Thomas: And that church was Roman Catholic.

Henesei: It was Roman Catholic and it was for me a big, big help in my childhood. I didn't have any friends, I don't know why, but when I got into the church I served. Without our priest, I mean, I would have died in the village. It was a great thing for me. That's why now I have, I'd like to collect some money for a chapel.

Thomas: Endow a chapel.

Henesei: Yes.

Thomas: And why do you say you couldn't have survived in the village without the church?

Henesei: Because there was nothing, nothing, it was very boring for me. I was born there, I liked my parents, although I wanted to leave the village. I don't know why I didn't find any friends there, I don't know why, and I'm sure I could

find this today. I have established a foundation for funding the chapel, and now we have a web page for this purpose, to tell about it and all those should know about it who were born in the village and went out to different parts of the world and maybe they can find this web page and maybe they join us.

Thomas: That would be wonderful. What does it mean that your father was a peasant? Did he own land--he wouldn't have owned land in the Communist regime but he worked land? That is to say, he raised crops, he prepared the soil, what did he do as a peasant is what I'm getting at?

Henesei: That's what is a big amusement, he suffered because it wasn't, they had quite big lands and....

Thomas: It was a cooperative?

Henesei: At the beginning, no. At the beginning, after the war, in 1945, he had his private land, but later on, about 1959, '60, they had to join the cooperative farm, not directly after the Second World War. Then there was something worse, worse, they had to give all the products, even wine, everything, except fruit. My mother was pregnant at that time, they had a lot of crops, everything, because they had a lot of lands, even though they had to go to buy bread in the county town, and my mother told me 30 years later I was all the time hungry and I didn't want to eat the bread, even though she was pregnant, and I went up the cherry tree, and I picked out the sour cherry because she was pregnant and she was all the time hungry.

Thomas: You had brothers and sisters?

Henesei: I had one brother, he died when he was 9 months old, and then I had a sister, she was born in 1953, she died this year, 2 months ago.

Thomas: You went to school in the village then, elementary school?

Henesei: Elementary school in my village and then I went to secondary school in Zalaegerszeg. This is a county town, Zalaegerszeg, Zala is the county, they have a very little river called Zala, we say this is the only river that goes to the Balaton. I lived in a boarding school there, it was a gymnasium. Zrinyi Miklos gymnasium, it's very interesting because Zrinyi Miklos was the leader of the Hungarian troops against the Turks.

Thomas: That is in the 17th century. And do you have any special memories of either the elementary school or the gymnasium?

Henesei: Yes, I have lots, just all my memories I collected, I put down on that page, and they are the page, I call it "Memories". I remember the old priest and my teachers and those who are the leaders of the revolution in 1956.

- Thomas: So did you study the ordinary subjects, writing, reading, math?
- Henesei: In the elementary school, yes of course.
- Thomas: And Communism? Any Marxist/Leninist theory?
- Henesei: At that time, no.
- Thomas: In the gymnasium?
- Henesei: Not very much. I was lucky in the village because at that time we had all our teachers from the previous era, I mean, they had their education before the Second World War and they planted us different things than what the Communist thinks in a very special way and we liked them. I remember that they were very cunning and very clever and I liked them.
- Thomas: And they were not very big on Communism.
- Henesei: No, no, no, they were against Communism, but that was a very interesting situation. I was very young, let's say, and I had my first girl friend, Ersika, who was the daughter of the director of the elementary school, and I went to the town hall and she was there and I told her, "Ersika, I'd like to see you in the church" and of course she came, and the Communist party secretary told the director, "How is this? Ersika is in the church", and he said, "I can't do anything, Kalman taught her and she goes because they are friends", and she was there every Sunday at Holy Service. I had some very nice experiences there.
- Thomas: Did you see however around you in the village any pushing of Communism onto people, making them do as the Communists wanted, people who became Communists, or were most of the people non-Communists?
- Henesei: 95% of the people weren't. Basically those who worked in the industry, they had some professions, let's say the blacksmiths, or some of the carpenters, who went around some in the county and were involved by chance in this kind of movement. One of them was really a nice person, Poli Bacsi, Uncle Poli, he was the oldest, he was a member of the Communist party in 1919, with Bela Kun, who was very harmful for the country.
- Thomas: In what way?
- Henesei: They were real Communists, but the new Communists were kind of different. They liked wine. They were in a way very good friends with my father, not because of Communism, because of the wine, because when they came home, the party secretary going home from the office they stopped at my father and my father gave everybody half a liter of wine, the brandy, and they tossed it down and then "Take care of this, take care of this, take care of this" and then

they went home and they were drunk and, they were not bad, they came and drank it.

Thomas: In what way was Bela Kun bad for Hungary?

Henesei: They sold the country. That is a new treaty called Trianon, you can't understand it. At that time they offered some process how to save the territories of the country, and they decided they didn't want to take care of this thing. What kind of politicians are they to decide they don't want to have to constitute ever? Why don't you fight for the country? They just give it to the Romanians and everybody. But it was really a terrible situation because Trianon, that treaty, is not a treaty, it was killing centers of the nation. And now it comes out again because now we have to vote on the citizenship and now the country is divided again. At that time they cut the country into parts, now that's south.

Thomas: Explain the vote. The vote is to allow Hungarians living outside the territory of Hungary to vote, is that right?

Henesei: It couldn't belong to the rights of those who have the Hungarian citizenship, it would be very important for them because they could enter the border free, it is very important for those who live in the Crimea, who live in Serbia. All these people, they're divided, everything, all this Trianon, it was a terrible thing, that the so-called educated west, it is terrible thing, never forget it. The railways go around the country 500 kilometers from the border, but the border is behind the railway because they had to go to the other countries. Who built that? The Hungarians, the Hungarians built the railways and then Romanians took everything. They fight for Transylvania, they don't want to get Moldavia because it's worse than nothing. It is the same situation as it is in Italy, the south part of Italy and the north part of Italy, A big difference in Romania, north is the educated part, they have everything, people are educated, they are urban, they have a higher living standard than in Moldavia, they are very poor, that's not their mistake, that's the mistake of the Romanian system.

Thomas: I think at least at some universities in the west the Versailles treaty, the Trianon treaty, these are now regarded as disasters.

Henesei: But nobody knows about it in the western countries, nobody knows about it.

Thomas: Well, they know about it in the universities, in the history departments.

Henesei: It's not enough for us, it isn't enough for us.

Thomas: That's right, it needs to be more widely known.

Henesei: Yes. I know a very good book, I tell you the truth I was very many times in Berkeley in their library and I find a very good book, very important.

- Thomas: Well, let's go back to your time in the gymnasium, and after the gymnasium what happened to you, where did you go, what did you do?
- Henesei: Just one thing, about the gymnasium, you asked me, did the teachers give us a really good education, that's in secondary school, that was the teacher of mathematics, who----no, I go back. At that time they had to go to building camps to teach young people how to build socialism and we didn't want to go.
- Thomas: Was this literally a camp that you went out in the country.....
- Henesei: Well, it was a kind of camp, let's say they worked in a swamp, drained the water, it was really very dirty work.
- Thomas: It was manual labor.
- Henesei: Of course manual labor, yes, and he told them, "My students came from a village, and they work at home, they know what does it mean, physical labor, no matter against socialism". And then he told us, "OK, boys, this summer you go to the whole class together, and I come with you, we spend a good summer together and then nobody can come and just force us to go to a camp". That's what we did and everything was okay.
- Thomas: He kind of created his own camp.
- Henesei: No, but we were together, the class, he came with us too, it was very interesting.
- Thomas: But he didn't teach communism.
- Henesei: No, no, no. He went to church with his mother all the time.
- Thomas: And what did you do together with him that summer?
- Henesei: You mean in the working camp? We were digging the ditches for the water, it was a muddy area.
- Thomas: It was the same kind of work that they did in the Communist camps.
- Henesei: Yes, of course, but he was nice, he came from the village too, his parents had some land too.
- Thomas: He knew you and knew your life.
- Henesei: Yes. And now I know everything, I could live in the middle of nothing or nowhere, because I know how to take care of the plants and animals, everything. And I am now living in the forest, in winter time I can tell you this is this kind or that kind of tree, everything.

- Thomas: So what happened to you after the gymnasium?
- Henesei: After the gymnasium I went to the university. I studied mathematics and physics. In Budapest. I wanted to be a scientist, I was a kind of theoretical person even though I am not very practical. I wanted to be a scientist. I was very immature.
- Thomas: What kind of scientist?
- Henesei: At the beginning I wanted to be a mathematician, because my teacher of mathematics told me "You are good at mathematics, you should be a mathematician". And my teacher of biology told me, "Ah you should be a biologist" and "Oh you should study languages because you are good at languages". And the latest I decided to be a teacher of mathematics and physics. And I wanted to be a scientist, study mathematics. I was not very bad but probably not that good as the first and it struck me and then I decided to switch, I wanted to be a scientist in physics. I started to go up to the physical institute but it's in the top of the hills in Buda and behind the hills. I started in winter time and there was big, big snow. I went up 4 or 5 times but 3 times I wasn't able to get there because they had that big snow that the bus came back and I gave up. They told me what to do? I said I don't want to do any of them. Why? What do you like? Do you think you could make an atom bomb first in a few hours? I don't know but I don't want to do and I gave up. And then I started data processing. I didn't like it very much, it was boring for me but I was good at it, I worked for the best firms.
- Thomas: This was after you got out of the university. In the university what was your work done in, what did you do your degree in, what subject, math?
- Henesei: Yes. In the data processing, it was computer, we had to write programs in machine code, numbers, oral system, and I knew everything how to do and now people just write text and binary mathematics, and.....
- Thomas: What year did you graduate from the university?
- Henesei: One thousand years ago! Exactly 1968.
- Thomas: Placing these events in time helps me to know what is going on in your country and in the world around, it places it in a historic context. That's why I ask these dates. So you went into computer work.
- Henesei: Even in Hungary it was a big development. In the beginning we had just the Russian-made computers. Computers from the socialist countries were very, very bad. We were struggling but in a way it was very, you learned a lot of these things because you had to go down to the core of the things. Next place of work was the computer education center. It was very important for me

because I had some possibilities to study abroad. At that time it was a great thing, I went to Germany, I studied there 6 months long.

Thomas: East Germany or West Germany?

Henesei: West Germany. It was very good because they had teachers from America. The lectures were in English and the environment was German so I had a chance to practice English and German altogether. And then I studied Russian because I had very good Russian friends.

Thomas: But you studied Russian in school.

Henesei: Yes, I can speak Russian very well because I had some Russian friends, the poor Russians, not the criminals, they suffered a lot from that system. At that time I learned some CDC, cooperators corporation, they were not able to make big businesses, I don't know why, for some political reasons. Siemens came.

Thomas: Is Siemens German? I know that name.

Henesei: Yes. They were very nice. Later on I had a lot of possibility to study at Siemens in Belgium. They were the first who taught data processing in the country. At that time I was responsible for examinations for programmers in the whole country, I was about 27-28 years old, it was a big job, it was very good, very interesting, I met some very important people. But I didn't feel too much about the politics, because we were in the glass house in Hungary, I had the feeling, at that time, because we had the possibility to travel abroad. Anyway, my salary was very high because, I don't know, I had the best positions, because at that time I had exams in Russian, German, English, and they paid for these examinations, 8 persons, for my salary. People did not learn the languages at that time. That was for me a big advantage because I was number one, and later my work for the data processing center for polytrading, there I worked for the deputy director.

Thomas: May I interrupt and ask one thing. You said you felt that you were in a glass house in Hungary, but you were not in a glass house because you could go to Germany.

Henesei: Yes. I meant politically, I didn't contact, I didn't know how these Communists, I just listened to them, I heard something, I heard the news, I didn't pay attention to them.

Thomas: That did not really affect your work, the politics.

Henesei: They did their work and I did my work. They did not ask me.

Thomas: They did not limit your work, they did not tell you what to do or what you couldn't do.

- Henesei: No, no, no.
- Thomas: And you could have a passport to go to Germany.
- Henesei: Of course, of course.
- Thomas: So there was no limitation.
- Henesei: For me not. I wasn't a Communist, because we had some official relationships, I went to the Soviet Union at that time, I went to West Germany. I liked to go to the Soviet Union, I tell you why, because in the Soviet Union I felt rich, I went to West Germany I felt poor. It was very interesting, I felt poor all the time when I went to western countries, very poor, very poor, like a beggar.
- Thomas: Poor in the sense that you could not buy what you saw.
- Henesei: Yes, yes. I had to save my pocket money to buy an amplifier, to buy a record player, to buy some records, we bought some records, very good records we bought because we couldn't buy in Hungary.
- Thomas: But not in Russia. In Russia you could buy whatever you wanted.
- LH: I tell you what, I bought first of all white cabbage juice, then I paid everybody, I went to a bar, nice people, I invited them, I paid everybody because I didn't want to buy just mine. I bought something, so-called radio, it was good. But they were nice people, the system was terrible but the poor simple Russians, they were very good-hearted. They were much more good-hearted than the Americans, I am not buying for Americans, I must admit. I don't like the American mentality.
- Thomas: What do you call the American mentality?
- Henesei: Egotistic and superficial. Very egotistic, absolutely. "How are you?" It was a kind of test, I thought. I didn't want to answer, but they said "How are you?" And I didn't answer that, "Good" or "Wonderful", "Hmm, I don't know". As if I had some bacterial psoriasis. It was just a test. They are not interested in you, they are not interested in you. I know, because if you have a higher level, you are not interested in those who are somewhere below. That's my feeling.
- Thomas: And you did spend time in the United States, but we'll get to that later.
- Henesei: I spent a long time in the United States but that comes much later. Okay, back to the data processing center. It was very interesting, I worked for Siemens and it was a big difference in comparison with Russian computers.
- Thomas: How long did you work in computers?

- Henesei: About 19 or 20 years, from 1968 til 1988, because then I went to America. Then before that I worked for the data processing Hungarica. I organized systems, I had to plan data processing services. And at that time I finished the university for economics for foreign trading, so I have a second diploma. Because mathematics made me narrow-minded, and economics has this open element, gave a kind of self-confidence, because I was a kind of servant, you know, and economics opened, and this was good for me. And then I worked for the bank of investment set in Hungary, and I worked for the ministry of finance.
- Henesei: That was in the government.
- Henesei: Yes, of course, everything was for the government because at that time you were able to work just for the government. All the companies were government-owned companies. And I liked these places. I didn't have high positions because I was all the time open to my bosses, I was very critical, I criticized them, the highest position was that I was the head of a department for organizing companies. Later on I worked all the time for the head of the companies, I made some studies for them, we sit down, what is my opinion, how to do, what to do, I mean economic theories.
- Thomas: It was like a consultant.
- Henesei: Consultant, consultant to the deputy director and the director. It was a very comfortable thing because you can tell your opinion and they accept or not. And it was very good because the salary was high, as high as the salary of the head of major departments.
- Thomas: And you were consultant to several departments, different departments.
- Henesei: Yes, I knew everything about their works, and I summarized the things, and then I told my opinion, I think it would be better to do this thing or that, it was a kind of development job, very good, very interesting, that's what I did for about 15 years long, til 1987 or 1988.
- Thomas: And then what happened?
- Henesei: You know Mihaly Agi? Agi came and visited us.
- Thomas: She was then in California?
- Henesei: Yes, in Berkeley. Sometimes she sent some friends, acquaintances, and I fell in love with somebody, and that was a marriage, I went to California, and it happened to Lajos because there was another lady and he married, and, I can't remember, 2, 2 ½ years in California, some in San Francisco, sometimes in the bay area, sometimes in Los Angeles area.

- Thomas: You were married to an American?
- Henesei: Yes.
- Thomas: And Lajos also?
- Henesei: Yes.
- Thomas: Were you there at the same time?
- Henesei: Approximately. I think I was 6 months later.
- Thomas: You knew Agi, however, here.
- Henesei: Yes, Agi was a good friend of ours.
- Thomas: I believe she went to Debrcen, languages I think, English.
- Henesei: Yes, she studied in Debrecen., English and I think Hungarian.
- Thomas: And how did you meet her?
- Henesei: I think, it was very interesting, Lajos had a little apartment in the castle area, that for some shopping. And there was a nice tall American lady and she wanted to buy something and Lajos helped her. He is a cimbalom player, and they started to talk about, and she invited us to a concert, and then we met a boy, I don't know the name, but later on it turned out he was the first husband of Agnes. And later on there were other leads back to common acquaintances and meeting some people from Debrecen, and Agnes sent us some friends who liked the English language and we were very often together, we didn't have any beds but we had lots of mattresses. Big house, good area....
- Thomas: When did you learn English?
- Henesei: In the secondary school I studied Russian and German. I started in the '70's when I started working for data processing because, I mean, mostly the literature was written in English. I started at that time but I stopped in a way because I didn't develop my English very much, but that's okay, and then I understood literature.
- Thomas: So you knew English when you went to California.
- Henesei: Yes, yes, more than now, I forgot about it. Later on it came back, though.
- Thomas: So what did you do in California?
- Henesei: Of course it was not what I wanted.

- Thomas: What did you want?
- Henesei: I wanted to work in the offices. When I applied for a job, of course I wasn't able to get a job at that level where I studied, what I wanted to do, because Americans were better at languages. If I applied for a lower job then I wasn't able to get it because I was overqualified. Sometimes I was overqualified but I was good to be a servant in the building industry. We worked with Mexican people....
- Thomas: What do you mean, a servant? A physical laborer?
- Henesei: We laid tiles. That was terrible.
- Thomas: Why?
- Henesei: I don't like it.
- Thomas: Boring?
- Henesei: Boring and dirty and, I would have preferred to be a peasant, because I like animals and plants, but the building industry, I didn't like it. Mexicans are very interesting, but it was strange for me.
- Thomas: Why strange?
- Henesei: Different.--
- Thomas: In what way?
- Henesei: I didn't like that, my first Christmas in my life was in American, we celebrate in Hungary the Christmas.....
- Thomas: You don't?
- Henesei: That was just once, you had to finish something and then you worked there, another American custom, never in my life, never.....
- Thomas: I don't know what you're saying about Christmas in America.
- Henesei: Okay, the Christmas time, the holiday evening, we had to go out to the building site because we had to finish the bathrooms, clean the tiles, and we worked til I don't know midnight....
- Thomas: On Christmas Eve.....
- Henesei: Yes, it was terrible, I worked with Lajos and 2 other Mexicans. That's what makes America exciting.

- Thomas: Exciting?
- Henesei: Exciting, I mean ironically. And good memories, yes.
- Thomas: Because they put work before more important things, like family, spiritual things.....
- Henesei: Something like that, holidays.....
- Thomas: Christmas Eve. Did you experience the Mexican custom, I've forgotten what they call it, of going house to house to seek shelter for the babe?
- Henesei: We have it in Hungary, but no, we didn't have any direction connection with the people
- Thomas: You didn't have any experience of Mexican home life or culture.
- Henesei: No. I did one thing, Sundays I went to the Mexican church
- Thomas: Roman Catholic.
- Henesei: Yes. It was very interesting, very moving for me, it was a kind of nostalgia back to my country.
- Thomas: Were the services like Hungarian Catholic services?
- Henesei: Yes, like Hungarian, like my childhood, very nostalgic.
- Thomas: Yes, yes. And you did the tile work both in the L.A. area and in the San Francisco area?
- Henesei: Los Angeles area.
- Thomas: And what did you do in the Bay area?
- Henesei: It was a kind of try to pick up a job, because we had somebody who helped us to find. There were lots of Hungarians and we met Hungarians in the Los Angeles area. We spent just a short time in the Bay area because we were lucky to find a job. We knew somebody who worked for the building industry and he wanted us to come help--. It was all the time good to meet Hungarians when we were in California, you know. I was homesick all the time. All the time I thought I didn't have money to go to the theater, I didn't have money to, I really had to save the money because we were very poor in America.
- Thomas: So you felt poor in America.

- Henesei: We were very poor, we worked a lot, and we decided to come back as soon as we can. I was disappointed in the women too, American women are different, sorry, I mean those I met.....
- Thomas: Speak freely! But you were married at that time?
- Henesei: Yes. You know, it was very interesting, they showed more than really they were. They were sportive.
- Thomas: What does that mean?
- Henesei: Sportive, I mean, sport-like, they were there, cashier, nice lady, not like petit bonheur, not like little baby, that's what I liked, you know, and later on I was disappointed, dirty, they were dirty, I was unable to stay there.
- Thomas: The women were dirty, you mean physically dirty?
- Henesei: Physically, yes. That was wrong. Maybe I was in a bad society, maybe among a bad society, just, I don't know, they didn't take care of themselves. I don't like them, I don't talk about it. Very bad memories, I don't like them. And then later on we did move, I was at that point where I could get income, thank you, I need it. I happen to be a good Hungarian, I don't want to be a bad American. [laughter} And now as I remember, as I'm sitting here and I tell you, it was a good decision, I have everything, we have this real estate here, we have another one, a very big one, 1200 square meters, very nice, I like it, if you have time you can visit it. I like pictures, I can go and buy some pictures, very nice pictures, in America I couldn't do that. I decided good and I'm happy I did.
- Thomas: You are teaching now?
- Henesei: No, I'm not because, let's go back to that time when I came back from America.
- Thomas: I was going to ask you one question: I thought that you were teaching now and I wondered if you had ever thought about teaching Hungarian in America, like Agi.
- Henesei: No, I couldn't do it, I couldn't sit down and teach languages. I am part-owner of this school, this was established by Peter, Lajos and me when we came back from America, in 1992. I think I am good at handling money and real estate, they are teaching, they give me the money and I invest. I found this place, I found the other homes, I took care of the material things. [he knocks on wood]
- Thomas: So you are not teaching, although you.....

- Henesei: No, I am responsible for the financial material things in this school. We have another company, we published a book, and I take care of these kinds of things. And of course I have them organizing the courses, I sit down with the teachers, and I am working on the ISO system, you know that, it's a quality system, ISO 9001, it's a quality system, international standards. In America they use it first for the army, the industry for the army, because they say that you have to follow the processes and this way you can produce good vacance, it means that it must be full of descriptions, how to manufacture a thing, that says how to do, put down the process, how to manufacture, I don't know, some machines, and later on it was borrowed for other companies, they say that your annual processes how to teach, how to get from the beginning to the middle level to the high level, there are some different learning process or teaching processes.
- Thomas: I think it's probably what in nursing we used to call quality evaluation or quality assurance.
- Henesei: This is quality assurance, these systems are international systems, and we have this now and I work in this quality system now and the registration of the language school, it takes a lot of time.
- Thomas: So tell me what happened and what were your experiences when you came back from the United states, which was before the change to the Hungary after the change, what were the differences.....
- Henesei: The differences are a lot of positives and are a lot of negatives.
- Thomas: Tell me all.....
- Henesei: Which is very interesting. I am disappointed, I am disappointed.
- Thomas: In the change?
- Henesei: After the change. Just one thing that is next to me, go back to this chapel, the chapel wasn't robbed out in the first or the second decade of Communism, it was robbed out in this capitalist era.
- Thomas: How?
- Henesei: Some gypsies. But we have to take care of gypsies.
- Thomas: They destroyed it? physically?
- Henesei: Not destroyed, they opened the door by force and they took.....
- Thomas: They robbed it.

- Henesei: Robbed it, of all the pictures. There are no pictures in the church that I saw in my childhood.
- Thomas: Where were, if I may say so, where were the police? Why was order not kept, why wasn't that prevented?
- Henesei: Yes, yes, yes, yes, why is the Hungarian state that corrupted? Where did they study it? Where did they study it? I mean, the state corruption?
- Thomas: Where?
- Henesei: From the intelligent educated western countries. Just the western countries studied how to do that, they know how to behave that way, there are not too many things, just privatize. In Hungary I thought at the beginning those who had them before the Second World War would get them back. Who are the richest? Those who were the big Communists. And now I think I should have been a big Communist, now I would be richer. I tell you a story.
- Thomas: You mean the ones who got their possessions back after the change were the Communists, that's what you're saying.
- Henesei: Yes, of course, yes, of course, you don't understand it but they are the richest nowadays, we say they were next to the possibilities. There are these different firms, who can buy it? The general director. Who became the general director? Who was a member of the Communist party.
- Thomas: I know one exception.
- Henesei: Who is that?
- Thomas: Peter Zwack bought back.....
- Henesei: Sorry, won't get it. Won't get Peter Zwack. He has a very good connection with the SDS. They even changed the taxation laws, and it was adjusted to his company, and he is not supposed to pay back the various taxes. That's all about Peter Zwack. Everybody who knew had connections, of course, and Peter Zwack is one of them. Of course. He is a member of the SDS. Of course, of course.
- Thomas: SDS stands for?
- Henesei: Free Democrats. It's a liberal party, they say it's the Hungarian Jewish party.
- Thomas: They say the Jewish party?

- Henesei: Yes, everybody not. I like Jewish people, I have a lot of friends, I mean, it's not negative, not really, it's something like that. I wasn't against the Russians, the poor Russians, I had good Russian friends even then, just understand what I mean, it isn't negative, I like them, my best friends in America were Jewish and I like them, very good friends. Just we have to know that this is this, and that is that.
- Thomas: When you first came back, however, you had high hopes, more hopes for improvement.....
- Henesei: In a way yes, in a way not, because I can't complain, because what we had, it's not, well, some good real estate things, I can't complain.....
- Thomas: Now?
- Henesei: Now. But it was from zero up. Nobody helped us. I paid for everything. I wasn't able to privatize anything, I paid for everything, everything, everything. At that time I bought the cheapest car. Everybody was laughing at us because we had that bad car, I had to save money to buy another apartment, another apartment, something for the school. But now I can buy the best coffee, we have not the best cars but we have a car, and I can't complain. I can buy nice pictures at the auction but not that pictures that some Hungarians can buy. I can buy a picture at auctions for one million forints but there are some Hungarians who can buy auction pictures for, listen to this, two million thirty thousand forints, it is a high amount of money even in America.
- Thomas: But this company, this school, is private, as opposed to state-owned. It is not a state-owned company.
- Henesei: No, it is a private company.
- Thomas: Is it better or worse to have a private company than one owned by the Communist state? Maybe there are good things and maybe there are bad things, that is what I am asking.
- Henesei: I don't know what to answer, because to organize a school this way, it's easier and we are quite flexible. We are the bosses of ourselves, this way it's good, we don't have any promotions from the state, we have to buy everything. But in reality I don't complain, I mean we are okay. I think we belong to the best of the language schools in Budapest and we are one of the biggest. And why? Because we work hard, and I'm sure that we do our best, and we are honest people, because there are some language schools who are terrible, really.
- Thomas: But you do not have to hire teachers, take teachers, in the school as employees because they have connections with the state or with the Communists, you decide. I'm trying to compare what might have been under the Communists,

that the Communists, somebody needs a job, they give them a job at the language school whether they're good or not. Do you see what I'm saying?

- Henesei: No, not really, because I can't compare, because I do not say that Communists, I mean state-owned company or private company, either now there are these kind of problems. Let's say just the auction houses. There is a state-owned auction house, the Baab, they are struggling in a way, although they have the best shops in downtown Budapest. And there is--who is a nice personality who developed the Vriland auction house, and because she has the flexibility to organize as she likes. But maybe the Baab is state-owned company because somebody would like to privatize, but the race to privatize just to destroy the company, to buy it at a lower price and then you can raise the price, that's the way of it.
- Thomas: So you really think that the economic and I guess the political situation now is not better.....
- Henesei: Better, of course, better.
- Thomas: Better how?
- Henesei: Better, because you have more possibilities.
- Thomas: And why do you have more possibilities? Because you are in charge of yourself and your company?
- Henesei: Because I can establish my company, I can invest my money, nobody, no limitations, but.....
- Thomas: So this is better?
- Henesei: Much better. But what I don't like, this corruption, I hate it. The politicians steal everything. I can't understand it. I mean, all the public services are sold by, it should belong to the state.
- Thomas: You mean what?
- Henesei: I mean the heating system, the gas system, the electric system, the water system, they sold it.
- Thomas: Transportation?
- Henesei: Now the Hungarian railroad is state-owned, they would like to sell that. And they are talking about the highway system. Some parts of the land belong to this company, I mean the railway, the British railway, belong to that company, that's why there are a lot of accidents there. And in Hungary now they would like to do that.

- Thomas: And how do the Hungarian people feel about that?
- Henesei: Very bad.
- Thomas: They do not like that idea?
- Henesei: No, no, no.
- Thomas: Can they not vote that down in Parliament, stop it in Parliament?
- Henesei: You know, they can't do that, it is very difficult. It is like America. Now you had this vote, the last time, everything depends on California, 10 persons, 100 persons that Bush won, not now, before this election, and now it means left side or right side in Hungary, but the left side is more right side than the right side. I mean the Socialist party, no, they are not Socialist in a way.
- Thomas: Are they Communist?
- Henesei: In a way, they used to be the Communists but that's what I hate. They changed. They were licking the ass of the Russians and now Americans. They should join Europe. No. I am against this Iraqi war. Why should we send soldiers to Iraq?
- Thomas: Then why don't you stop, why doesn't the Parliament, why don't the people via the Parliament stop the sending of soldiers?
- Henesei: You know why? Because now here is the 50%---50%, the 50% who had, let's say, the best education and the other education. Everybody. In American this is just 1% or 2%, this side will win or that side will win. It is in Hungary now. If the economy goes down, they panic. Next time the economy goes this side, they panic. They are changing. In Hungary the Hungarian economy depends on the world economy. That's why. Hungary is up and down, up and down. Left is right is right is left is all who can find out a better speech, how can they cheat the nation because the politicians cheat. Hungarian politicians cheat, but there are some. Somehow I feel myself Hungarian, that's why I think I promoted this. Because, Fides, you know.....
- Thomas: Was the reform.....
- Henesei: They were the reformers.
- Thomas: They wanted to reform Communism or they wanted to kick out the Russians completely?
- Henesei: They wanted, yes, but.....
- Thomas: Viktor Orban was.....

- Henesei: Yes, Orban is a good personality. He should learn something, some more, but.....
- Thomas: Someone told me that he was reform before the change and now he is very much more conservative. Is this true or not?
- Henesei: I don't know, I don't know. What is important, what about the other side, what about the other side?
- Thomas: The other side tends to be right in the United States, conservatives tend to be Republican, tend to be right, whereas---this is prejudice talking---the Democrats tend to be left, tend to be not so much for conservation of the old style but the promotion of the new politics, for example, Franklin Roosevelt, the New Deal, this was very much of a change.....
- Henesei: At that time it was, but now no big difference in America between these two parties.
- Thomas: Except that it is said-----I do not know whether this is always true-----that Bush and his government wish to change back, to remove some of the Roosevelt changes, for example, privatize part of Social Security, lower taxes, so forth. But let's not talk about America. America is very divided now but I think I hear you saying that Hungary.....
- Henesei: Are they divided? I think not.
- Thomas: No, no, no, it's very divided.
- Henesei: I wouldn't say. Hungary is very divided.
- Thomas: But you see they're both. Between Kerry and Bush, Kerry got 49% and that's very close to the middle. Bush got a little more, but that means a division. It isn't like Kerry got 20% and Bush got 80%, that was not true, that would be very, very undivided, very majority. But is Hungary divided between left and right, a close divide? I mean, are the Hungarian people sort of split down the middle, about the same amount left, about the same amount right?
- Henesei: Yes. It's the same. Just the bigger problem in Hungary that if there is a change, I mean in the government, it changes a lot of things and it takes a lot of money. It isn't like in America. It is terrible, they kick out let's say the head of major departments or they change a lot of persons who are good experts. They shouldn't. It is as if it were the end of the world, it shouldn't be. Everybody would like to put in the highest positions their own people. That's what I hate. All the time it takes a lot of money.
- Thomas: And I understand that every 4 years with the elections the parties just go back and forth.

Henesei: Yes, and 4 years is nothing, is nothing for developing an economy. It's a very bad thing.

Thomas: Is there not now a coalition government, that is to say, 2 parties not thinking the same but compromising and working together? Is that not true now?

Henesei: Yes, they do it, but everybody has, I mean, the Socialist party and the SDS. They are in a coalition. But why? I think they hate each other. But anyway.....

Thomas: But can they compromise? Can they work together?

Henesei: In a way. But the right side is, I mean let's say Orban, Fides party is very unlucky, the Hungarian Democratic Forum. This Eva, she is coming, she would like to go to the center, because, I don't like her. In a way I am very sorry for this MDF, because they kill themselves, I am sorry for them. And then that was the Independent Legal and Owners party, he was crazy. As I told you, mentally they kill each other, they split it into 6 little groups, and then you can't unite them in one force, in one party because they are just, I don't know, they discuss things that aren't important. I'm very sorry for Fides because on this side people are just twirling around, they don't know what to do, they're good people but they lost their backing, they didn't get the votes. They don't have a personality who can just organize them. That 's their big problem.

Thomas: Is that just in Fidesz?

Henesei: I mean Fidesz is okay. Viktor is a good man. He is Hungarian, he knows what to do.

Thomas: And he was prime minister.

Henesei: He was just before. I hope next time he will be again. But this new, Ferike, impossible. It's a shame that he is the minister-president, he's a shame. He's crazy.

Thomas: Is he the one who took over from Megyessey?

Henesei: From Megyessey Peter, yes. Megyessey wasn't a good thing but Megyessey had a kind of elegance. He was kind of banker, he belongs to the spies at that time against Hungarians, he was a financial minister for Kadar and in the Kadar regime he was a deputy minister president.

Thomas: Is it true he was a spy or is that just talk?

Henesei: It's okay, they say, he had a number.

- Thomas: Because I have heard that sometimes people were forced to spy and they did not actually.
- Henesei: He wasn't, please, he wasn't, he wasn't forced.
- Thomas: No, but some people were and they didn't really spy, they pretended to for the Communists so that they would not be punished.
- Henesei: But they got something for it that they had to pretend, they got something for it.
- Thomas: Well, they got safety.....
- Henesei: But they had high position.
- Thomas: Megyessey, how was he removed? Not by election.
- Henesei: Yes, it's very interesting. They had these elections, the Communist party elected the Socialist party but they are the post-Communists, they had nobody in the party who could have been elected, they invited him from outside, he was independent, Megyessey Peter, he wasn't a member of the Socialist party, he was the general director of the Inter-European Bank, a banker, they invited him to be the prime minister. I'm sure that Megyessey was a little bit hesitating, he wasn't a big speaker, all the time he made mistakes, but he was a nice person, a nice post-Communist.
- Thomas: Did he make mistakes in policy, in his actions?
- Henesei: They say that he didn't want to decide, cut back some advantages for some layers of society, and that's why, the main criticism was that he was slow, he didn't want to step, he was hesitant. That's why, Ferike was the minister of sport, he was very rich because he privatized a big amount of real estate from the Hungarian youth communist organization. His wife is the daughter of a very prominent Communist from the Kadar era. That's why he was able to get rich very early, very very fast.
- Thomas: But how did he replace Megyessey without an election.
- Henesei: The Communist party at that time was not strong, very weak, and there were some articles in the country that the government can't fulfill anything here because they're tainted. They wanted to change the world, they said that we change everything, everything will be the best possible, the living standards will go up.....
- Thomas: Who said this?
- Henesei: The Socialists and Megyessey.

Thomas: And did it go up?

Henesei: No, it went down 5%. And then they said they need somebody who is decisive, who is strong, strong-hand man. And I never thought that this man, the minister of sport, would change the minister-president. It's impossible, I mean, it's tragic.

Thomas: How did it.....

Henesei: You know what, because the Socialist party don't have anything else, they decided, they said that the younger generation should push in the first line, And they were disappointed with Kovacs because they were not very good at elections for the old parliament. I think that was about 40 to 60, very big difference, and then they said Kovacs is a good leader because in the beginning they chose Kovacs, that they should be a minister, they said, no, no, no, and then became the secretary of the Socialist party, she is nothing, she is a very bad teacher of history, he is mixed up, doesn't know what to say.

Thomas: How does one get to be president? One is elected by parliament? How is it usually?

Henesei: Parliament voted, but now.....

Thomas: But the Communists or Socialists used their influence in parliament to get Megyessey out?

Henesei: Yes, but now it's safe because 51 persons is enough. But who are present in the Parliament? 53% Socialists and SDS and they can do it, can vote.

Thomas: So it was not against the constitution, it was not illegal, it was just a decision that Megyessey was too weak.

Henesei: No, it was not illegal

Thomas: I wanted to ask about 2 problems people have mentioned to me, one is unemployment and the other is the gypsy problem. Unemployment is the result of the closure of plants mostly, manufacturing plants.

Henesei: This is just one side.

Thomas: And the other side is?

Henesei: The other side is people, they don't want to work. Believe me. I go to the village. I have found land. Nobody would come, or they ask for money that I don't have. They know, they say "Okay, I don't want to go because I go to almost as high unemployment benefits as you pay me". Really, they don't go, they don't have any demands, they are very lousy, they try to find some dirty

businesses and they can do it. We are not in America. Everything has a rule, you have a rule for everything. In Hungary, oh we shouldn't do because if we establish a rule and they stop their dirty business, they wouldn't work, oh no, leave that, we don't know about that.--

Thomas: But the state does pay unemployment insurance?

Henesei: Yes, more or less.

Thomas: Can you live on that? Is it a livable wage?

Henesei: It depends on you. People can live on nothing, other people can live on millions. It depends on the amount. People in the village, they have land, they have 2 hands, it depends on you. And they have these kinds of social promotions, social development, another one they have sometimes the black market. People should work more. The main problem is, we should have more public work. It would be very important. But it was very good before the Second World War. We had a lot to do, common public work. Let's say, you have to dig out the ditches along the north side and it would get that money from the government

Thomas: For example, under Roosevelt during the Depression, there were public works where for example artists were paid to paint murals in post offices, and buildings were built and.....

Henesei: Yes, yes, that would be good, but they don't do that. And another thing, you know, nowadays they cancelled the army, this Canadian thing, it was crazy, very crazy. I mean, people should be soldiers, yes, how do you say, now we pay for the soldiers, how do you say.....

Thomas: In the United States there's a regular army, people go in for life, a professional army, and then there's a National Guard.....

Henesei: They work for money, there is a word for it. What I wanted to tell you, in Hungary people over 18 have to serve in the army at the beginning, two years and later one year. Now, it was a crazy thing, political thing, those families who have their young little monkey at home, I mean their little young son, of course I vote for that party because they cancel.....

Thomas: The requirement to serve in the army? Really?

Henesei: Yes. But it would be very important because now young people don't have any youth organization. It was much better in the Communist era because they had that Pioneers and the young Communists, because everything altogether they learned something, how to behave, how to be polite, studies, sports, and they were busy. And now these people are free, don't know what to do, how to do, and that's why the drug is spreading, and that's why they can't work. In

the army they could have learned languages, new professions, studied how to be good members of the state or to study some culture or just some practicing, it would have been very important to learn how to handle the hand guns. A 5-year old young boy knows how to shoot in Hungary. I don't know, it's serious. If there is some national catastrophe, let's say a flood or fire, how can we find people, we are poor, they say, then we will pay for the army, we don't have money they say for that, we pay for that, the army was on the border, how can we defend the country, we don't have money for veterans, plus we have to pay for the salaries. I can't understand it.

Thomas: Is it not possible to help the unemployment problem by having people go in the army? I ask that because in the United States often people who have no profession, no work to do, they're not trained to be teachers or doctors or anything, they don't have work to do, and they want to live, they want to have a salary, they join the army, they become soldiers, and they can live on the salary they get from the army, and unfortunately if there's a war they get sent to Iraq or wherever, but if there isn't a war they have a lot and they have a chance to learn and advance to become, but the government doesn't want to do that in Hungary?

Henesei: Yes, of course they want to. But I think the level of their brain isn't that high of these people. They are too young. I'm talking about 18 or 19 year old people.

Thomas: But that is the age in the United States when these people go in the army. They take them young at 18 or 19, and this sort of becomes their career, their work for life, unless they quit.

Henesei: I agree with you, that's why these 2 years would be very important for these young people who finish the secondary school, they can't find a job, and they don't know how to behave themselves because sometimes they are delinquent, sometimes they are impossible, even though I can see those who come and join our classes, sometimes impossible.

Thomas: But the government does not have the 2 year requirement any longer?

Henesei: No. That's bad.

Thomas: What were they thinking of?

Henesei: You know, because the young people are unemployed. In the army, 2 years, it was very important, they could learn, they could prepare for a job you were talking about, then next step, okay, you can be a professional soldier.

Thomas: That's very interesting. Then the other problem is the gypsy problem. What basically is the problem?

- Thomas: We were talking about the problem with the gypsies. What is the problem with their being here?
- Henesei: It's very difficult, really difficult question. It is very difficult to solve this problem. I think the main problem is the poverty of the country because they need a lot of money. The beginning of the thing should be the kindergarten, these young gypsy children should start their life in the kindergarten.
- Thomas: I understood from the secretary of education----he spoke in Berkeley----I thought he said that a law had been passed that gypsy children had to go or were required to go to very early kindergarten and before, like 4 years old, 5 years old, 6 years old.
- Henesei: Yes, but we don't have money. We don't have enough kindergartens. In the Communist state we had a lot of kindergartens. Now who can go to kindergarten, who can put their son or daughter in it because now you have to pay for it. In that time it was free.
- Thomas: It is not paid for by the state now, there's no law, they don't have the money.
- Henesei: They have to go to the elementary school but it's late. Because now I had a teacher who is a British citizen and works here for an elementary school. He is dying for a program. Just some weeks ago a gypsy family beat the teacher, they ran into the room of the teacher, maybe because their daughter was very untidy in the room, and the teacher sent her out to the corridor, and she went out, the teacher wanted to open the door, and maybe it was by chance the little girl was listening, and he beat the little daughter with the door, and they thought that the teacher wanted to beat their daughter, and it was really a scandal. And another thing, that they are, sorry to tell, very rough, very uneducated, a different temper, and in the primary school they are really terrible. I was sitting on the bus, it happened to me, and I was listening to boys talking, one of them was a gypsy, and another was a Hungarian white or I don't know how to call him. And the gypsy, they were talking about work and money and salary, and the gypsy told me, "I don't want to have any job where I can't get minimum at least 300,000 forints", it's really a high amount of money. And the other one said, "What about 150?". "No," the gypsy told the other one, "I know the way how to get this amount of money even without work". Just some days ago even the British man who is a teacher just told me the story: sitting in the metro, a man was sitting next to him wanted to set the mobile telephone, and there was a laptop next to him on the seat, and the door opened, the gypsy jumped to him, grabbed the telephone and ran away with the laptop, and in a minute nobody was able to do anything. You go around main roads, there are a lot of Hungarian men about, 80% gypsy girls offering themselves for sexual services, prostitutes, and they are very uneducated, really it would be very important to help them, but the children because in the elementary school it's late because the family life is very often broken. I don't know what we can do, but you can help them with social benefits because, I

don't know, they drink it up, or I don't know. Of course they can't find jobs because they don't have training, and they can't queue up as it is expected of you if you are in a normal state life, no, they can't, they don't want to, no. They think they can find some other solution to live on, they sit out and they sell their paprika and tomatoes in the underground and police come sometimes yet the police can't send them away because, I don't know why.

Thomas: Do they have permission, that is to say, a license to sell?

Henesei: No, no. Where do they get this? Do you think they grew them up? No. I'm sure they stole this, or got them on the black market of course. It's really bad.

Thomas: What is the government doing to help the situation?

Henesei: To help the situation they are just trying but they can't, because you can't give money to those people who can't handle their money. You know the example, I think it's just a kind of popular story, that if somebody could collect the money from everybody in the world, from the rich people and from the poor people, and they give the money equally to everybody, in 10 years the money would go back to those who had the biggest amount of money, because some people like the money and know how to handle it, and the other people they don't want the money, they want just to drink and eat and from everything the maximum, the best and most expensive, and tomorrow will be somehow.

Thomas: Is the gypsy population large?

Henesei: Very large, and the biggest problem is they are multiplying very fast. I mean the whole population of Hungary is getting less. I'm not sure, but I saw some statistics that said that the Hungarian population, I mean the white population, is going back by 5 or 8 persons and the gypsy population is growing by 8, 10, 12 persons. And you have to take care of them. And of course there are some white people are against this. But mostly the gypsies. I understand this because they are poor and they like to live. Of course they can see the television, they can see the good cars, they would like to have it. They have money, they can buy it. But how can they get money? Of course they can work, not illegal work. How? Hard to find out. With money, the state can't help, even though if they had a lot of money, money, it is like putting money in a jug that has a hole in it, you could give them a lot of money, it wouldn't help, you should start in kindergarten to teach them how to behave themselves. You can give them a house, there were a lot of houses built for the gypsies, what did they do, they destroyed and they put the furniture on the fire. Just one example. I went home to my village, the neighbor village, there was a house, I knew that peasant family in my childhood who used to live there, it was a really nice house, now a gypsy family moved in, you can't imagine, everything is around the house, bad cars, chairs, terrible, as if you were in a madhouse, the tiles missing, the walls are not light but dirty and just

collapsing, and they are sitting in part of the house just having a cigarette and talking and laughing.....

---- LOUD RUMBLING

Thomas: What is that? Is that thunder?

Henesei: I hope so.

Thomas: What else would it be?

Henesei: I hope, I hope, not any accident, I hope.