

What's the Story?, <https://www.whatsthestory.online/>
News of our next meeting (8/14/22)
Summary of our last meeting – Putin's Recollections (5/8/22)

1

“WHAT’S THE STORY?”: LIFE STYLE NARRATIVES STUDY GROUP

(an affiliate of the North American Society of Adlerian Psychology [NASAP])

[Scroll down for a summary of our last meeting \(May 8, 2022\):](#)

THE RECOLLECTIONS (LIFE STYLE) OF VLADIMIR PUTIN

Yes, Vladimir Putin!

You should have been there!

[Check us out!](#)

<https://www.whatsthestory.online/>

[What's the Story?](#) is a book club with a twist in which we “string together” a person’s Early Recollections (perceived important memories) into a kind of short story, applying literary methods, such as those endorsed by The Great Books Foundation, to interpret it.

(The Family Constellation section of a Life Style questionnaire – those descriptions of self and family members – can be likened to a “Cast of Characters” as those described often figure in the recollections.)

[Next Meeting: Sunday, August 14, 2022, 1:00 p.m. Central Standard](#)

[Live Life Style Demonstration and Interpretation](#)

[Zoom Meeting](#)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81474890003>

(1:00 p.m. Central Standard Time (U.S./Canada/Chicago); 2:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time/New York; 12:00 p.m. Mountain Standard Time/Denver; 11:00 a.m. Pacific/Los Angeles; 7 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time/London; 8 p.m. Central European Time/Paris, Warsaw).

**

SUMMARY (May 8, 2022)

(it's a long one!)

THE RECOLLECTIONS (LIFE STYLE) OF VLADIMIR PUTIN

Thank you, all – from Canada, the U.S., and Europe – who zoomed into our May 8, 2022, meeting in which we interpreted the family constellation and recollections – the Life Style – of Vladimir Putin. Our text was culled from what has been referred to as Putin's autobiography, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President* (2000; <https://archive.org/>. FYI, archive.org also has digitized practically everything Alfred Adler has ever written).

"All lies!" participants screamed about the material.

But if so, Putin's "lies" were consistent. And, if it all was a "fiction," that fiction – the stories that Putin (our "protagonist"!) told about himself – was, again, thematically consistent, especially with regard to goal-orientation.

Soon after being plucked – anointed! – from relative obscurity by Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first "democratic" president, to succeed him, Vladimir Putin gave a series of interviews in 2000 to three Russian journalists. The journalists had sought out Putin after other politicians and influential Russian businessmen had confessed to knowing little – if anything – about their new leader. These interviews, which comprise his "autobiography," were largely conducted over long, informal, late dinners. (Should we be surprised that the English translation was made available in its entirety to foreigners whereas the Russian people had to make do with an edited Russian version? Where are these journalists today? We're too afraid to "Google" them!)

In these interviews, Putin describes his childhood: not only what he was like growing up, but the characteristics and behavior of his parents, others who had inspired him (such as his judo coach), and even some of those tenants who, family extended-like, had shared his family's postage-size, communal Soviet-era apartment in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg. Apparently, each family had been assigned its own single room, sharing what sounds like a really disgusting toilet and a small, dark quasi-kitchen [did it even have an icebox?]).

Sounds like we had more than enough material to conduct a family constellation from which to assess Putin's influences and "guiding lines"!

"But he seems so human," one participant lamented, recalling perhaps philosopher Hannah Arendt's famous assessment of Nazi war criminals: "the banality of evil."

The recollections that Putin related – from childhood and on the thresholds of such “milestones” as adolescence, adulthood, and career – reflect not only how he had evaluated his influences –

his entitlement, mythic-like masculine guiding lines, valuing of loyalty, and the consequences from acting recklessly or venturing outside his “confines” or borders

– they inform us of how he learned from them to change. That is, Putin, in late childhood, chose to steer himself away from being the self-described “unspoken leader ... (of) hooligans” (the other kids in his rat-infested housing complex; “I was a bad boy,” he admitted) to focus and better apply his skills within a more appreciative Soviet system to become, well, another kind of unspoken leader: in academics, the communist student scouts organization, and star, loyal, observant athlete who could, with diligence, outsmart others. In essence, Putin shifted his behavior toward the same goal, living up to his name, Vladimir, which means “ruler” in the Slavic languages (despite various spellings – consider Volodymyr Zelensky).

Putin's childhood pals, however, refer to him in the diminutive, as “Volodya.” And, yes, we made wry comments about behavior that overcompensates for the diminutive: for example, was Putin really joking when to the question, “[Which] political leaders do you find most interesting?”, he laughingly responded ...

... “Napoleon”?

But what were those memorable moments or opportunities and turning points that convinced Volodya to use, on the threshold of adolescence, “my pugnacious nature (that) was not going to keep me king of the courtyard” in a different, ahem, more socially acceptable manner (given the culture)?:

Sports, particularly judo, which he stuck with after trying boxing and getting his nose broken (sports offered Putin a supportive community and way to advance himself and venture beyond that airshaft-like courtyard of his youth – without being reprimanded by his parents!),

and ...

... Occupation-wise – a boyhood fantasy!: spy books and movies that “amazed me ... how one man's effort could achieve what whole armies could not. One spy could decide the fate of thousands of people.”

Ah, the advantages from choosing or solving the question of occupation when young! (Click on the link, provided toward the end of this summary, for the cinema series that inspired our famous future spy.)

In short (more about “shortness” later!), we surmised that Volodya:

Had felt entitled, or spoiled

Born in 1952, Putin appears to have grown up, psychologically, as an “only child,” his two older brothers having died in each of the previous decades (one brother died in infancy in the 1930s, the other in childhood during the WWII siege of Leningrad). His parents, who had married as teenagers, thus had become parents in their forties which, in those days, was considered grandparent-age.

Most of the other tenants of the communal apartment whom Putin described also were elderly or grandparent-age, and affectionate toward him. Apparently, Volodya could go freely between his one-room apartment and, at least, one other family's (an orthodox Jewish one).

And that car – his beloved ZAZ “people's car”! – that his parents had gifted him when he was a university student. (His mother had won it in a state lottery. [ZAZ is a diminutive – think Chevy/Chevrolet – of a Ukrainian manufacturing company.]). Now, who in the Soviet Union in those days had a car unless one was “special” or a celebrity or government official! As Putin relates,

Money was tight in our family, and to give the car to me was absolute madness. We could have sold it ... settled our family budget. But my parents decided to spoil me. ... I lived the good life in that car.

(For a photo of Putin and another famous politico with a model of that ZAZ-zy car ... continue reading!)

Mythologized his masculine guiding lines

Despite admitting, as the Russian journalists pointed out, that his father rarely spoke about himself, Putin probably discussed his father's WWII battlefield exploits more than any other subject (including that ZAZ-zy car!). How many times had his father survived onslaught after onslaught as a soldier in the NKVD (Stalin's secret police)? (According to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NKVD>, the NKVD was involved in political

repression, even executions; during WWII, it was employed to “prevent the retreat of Soviet Union army divisions ... to stem the occurrence of desertion ... [and] raise troop moral via brutality and coercion.” Say, what?!

His father, though a laborer at a train car factory, headed the workers' communist union there.

And though his paternal grandfather was only a cook, that cook had a long career cooking for ... Lenin, then Stalin when those two Soviet commissars – heads of state! – lived in what is known as Moscow's Beverly Hills! (So much for glorifying the proletariat! Some Wikipedia sites note that Putin's grandfather was not just a cook but a personal chef.)

Valued loyalty

The value of being loyal – or committed or sacrificing to a cause – was reflected in story after story that Putin told about his parents, sports or sports club, and when he started intelligence/espionage work. For example:

The relationship of his parents. When hospitalized in WWII with “severe wounds,” Putin's father snuck his hospital rations to his starving wife so she could have a better chance at surviving – despite entreaties by the medical staff, when they discovered this, that he was endangering his own health. (Putin's father's injuries caused him to walk with a limp for the rest of his life.)

Putin's lifelong respect for his mother's (and another grandmotherly tenant, Baba Anya's) Christian beliefs (but, ssh!, don't tell Daddy who's involved in communist union activities!).

As a child, Putin defended his parents – no, protected them! – against other tenants in “petty kitchen spats” (it must have difficult to share that tiny kitchen). He couldn't understand why his parents told him to “mind (your) own business”!

Despite more prestigious clubs wanting to recruit him once he had proved himself athletically, Putin has shown an almost lifelong loyalty to the “low status” sports club that he had joined in late childhood/early adolescence. (Despite his father's standing at the factory's communist union, Volodya was not considered one of the elites; in fact, his invitation and acceptance into the “Pioneers,” the communist youth scouts organization, came years after most other kids had already been invited

and accepted [remember, Volodya had first been a “hooligan”]; Volodya, however, soon outpaced his peers, becoming head of his school’s local Pioneers group.)

Putin put his loyalty and respect for the Soviet system above himself when, at university, he allows an old champ to be declared the victor in a championship judo match that Putin contends he had really won.

He adherence to rules or laws – or, rather, that others should follow rules: in university/sports recruitment, sports training, and at work. For example, Putin uncovers the “tricks” (his description) that other clubs had used in their attempts to recruit him (they lie); during his first intelligence or espionage job and later when the Soviet Union collapses, he is shocked when other officials do not follow so-called legal protocol; and In one of the longest stories/recollections that he related, he describes the outcome or consequences of a trip he and friends had taken while university students. When the friend who had been responsible for their attaining difficult and possibly illegal passage on a ship home to Leningrad by passing off their “big”-size tickets as legit, this friend – the mastermind! – was forced to suffer the consequences of not eating because he had hoped to find food onboard that was more edible than what Putin and their other friend had brought (onboard meals proved too expensive). Not sharing, Putin said, “was cruel, of course, but it was also fair.”

Consequences

The majority of Volodya’s childhood recollections concerned the consequences from acting recklessly and/or going outside his confines or borders or space:

He runs and escapes from the “huge rat” he recklessly corners – after being surprised and scared when that rat “throws” itself at him;

When he finally asks a grandfatherly fellow-tenant in their shared apartment what he has been chanting (“I couldn’t hold back any longer [from asking]”), Volodya “immediately loses interest” when the tenant “explains about the Talmud” (Jewish law);

He defends, as mentioned, his parents to other tenants in a kitchen spat in their shared apartment and is “completely shocked” when his parents, “furious ... shoot back with, ‘Mind your own business’”;

He ventures outside his housing complex without permission – in two back-to-back recollections (!): in one (on May First, “International Solidarity with Workers Day), he is a “little afraid”; in both instances he is punished;

He tries boxing but gets his nose broken (and never fixes it: “Why? I knew it would heal by itself”) ...

... then discovers judo. (One of our meeting's participants explained that a strategy of judo is to use an opponent's strength to your advantage. How did he know that? He Googled it!)

Now, these childhood recollections don't exactly scream “unspoken leader ... (of) hooligans” but, rather, “don't get involved”!

However, as mentioned, Volodya wanted to be a leader and there is a shift toward that goal in his stories from late childhood through his adolescence and university years. These recollections show him observing how strength or the appearance of strength wins or intimidates. For example (some of the following recollections have already been cited):

His mentor-coach, in one swift judo move, takes down a more elite karate instructor who had denied Putin's sports team access to mats;

He learns how more prestigious clubs use their status: employing tricks and lying to recruit him (they fail);

He follows his friends who gain first class passage on a ship by feigning to have the required big-size tickets;

Though he believes to have won a judo match, he accepts the loss because, well, the contender is the world champ (standards or appearances should be upheld! [This opponent will later “drink heavily and be murdered on the street.” Wow.]);

A friend who he convinces to try judo becomes paralyzed and dies after a match;

He witnesses how another's menacing appearance can quickly stop arguments or fights or, rather, those who dare incite a fight ...

Hey, sounds like *ADLERIAN PSYCHOLOGY 101*: from perceived inferiority to perceived superiority!

(An aside, re inferiority-superiority: Remember Putin's admiration for similarly short-statured Napoleon and his acknowledgment that for him to become a more, ahem, traditional leader – and a spy! – he must shift his focus, which he does in late childhood/early adolescence, onto academics and sports [or those pursuits that would help him gain admittance to law school, a pre-requisite of sorts for later intelligence/espionage school – or so he learns when as a ninth grader he daringly approaches the KGB Directorate to learn how “to get a job with you.” What we haven't mentioned, inferiority-superiority-movement-wise, is that – similar to his having been accepted late by the communist scouts but, overcompensation-wise, quickly becoming their leader: Volodya also started primary school late, a good year behind other neighborhood kids because of his late birthday.])

Toward the end of his recollections from his university years, Putin begins to focus on the benefits of sticking to an intense physical training regimen – and the hazards to it from drinking and gambling (which his friends are wont to do!). However, whereas others gamble and lose ...

... when Putin does decide to gamble (by giving his friends money for it), he wins.

The very last recollection that Putin relates – again, from his university years, and at the very end of the interview/autobiography – sees him driving recklessly in his ZAZ-zy car toward a truck coming in the opposite direction, which endangers both himself and passenger, his long-time mentor-coach from his early judo years. Because that truck's cargo of

hay smelled delicious ... I reached out the window to grab some straw. The car suddenly swerved ... my rickety (car) went up on two wheels. I almost lost control ... We really should have ended up in a ditch, but fortunately, we landed back on all four wheels. My coach sat there frozen, speechless. (Only later when) he got out of the car did he look at me and say, “You take risks.” ... What drew me to that truck? It must have been the sweet smell of the hay.

This last recollection is as a kind of bookend to Putin's first recollection in which he, as mentioned, acts recklessly by driving a huge rat into a corner (yes, Putin uses a “driving” metaphor – or at least in the translation). But when the rat lashes out at him, Putin “luckily (is) a little faster and manages to slam the door shut in its nose,” barely escaping.

Obviously, Putin's recollections show a movement – or progression – from childhood through adolescence and university: from being fearful to not fearful, from his acknowledgment that to become a more acceptable and traditional leader (Soviet-style) he needs to change his focus

and behavior. His continuing to take risks or chances pays off – or he will survive them, even if just barely.

(Regarding more instances of Putin taking chances, we haven't gone into much detail about how, for example, he doggedly questioned the KGB Directorate when in the ninth grade to learn how "to get a job," nor how he found out about the tricks or lies that other sports teams used in their attempts to recruit him [he slyly questions a Dean].)

Putin's recollections, especially those from his university years, compelled us to give him an I-phrase: "When others take chances, gamble or act recklessly, they lose, but when I do, I win."

Putin's awareness of needing to "better" himself, which includes his decision to become a more acceptable leader and spy – and his pursuing activities to reach that goal/s – also was reflected in how he used the results of an apparent personality assessment:

When I went to intelligence school, I once got an evaluation, where they wrote the following as a negative character assessment: 'A lowered sense of danger.' (I remain [too] calm ...) That was considered a very serious flaw. You have to be pumped up in critical situations in order to react well. Fear is like pain. It's an indicator. If something hurts, that means something's wrong with your body. It's a sign. I had to work on my sense of danger for a long time.

Our [What's the Story](#) discussion of Putin's influences or guiding lines and the choices that he made – regarding his position with respect to others; his recollections that reflected his perceptions of world, self, and others; his decision to switch to a different path to reach a similar goal/s – could only be described as "skimming the surface." Obviously, we did not interview him. The questions that the journalists asked were more leading (e.g., "Do you remember first grade?", "You never once disobeyed?") than the type of open-ended questions that would have prompted more "self-directed" or subjective responses, such as those that comprise most basic Adlerian Life Style questionnaires (e.g., "Describe yourself and siblings and parents when you were growing up," "Relate a handful of early recollections/specific incidents before the age of eight or nine" [or before one develops a more heightened, conscious awareness: in other words, one's first and lasting impressions], "What did you want to be when growing up?").

However, given Putin's current role and actions on the world stage, the material collected from these interviews – published over twenty years ago (!) – appears to have been prescient. It speaks of the stability of personality and, yes, we can argue, the validity of using an Adlerian Life Style-type instrument to assess and "measure" personality. That Putin decides on the thresholds of adolescence and adulthood to shift his focus but still reach his admitted goal/s of taking risks and being a leader speaks of the need to ask for recollections from these stages (which many Adlerians already do). Putin's later recollections show how his guiding lines and

choices prepared him to meet those especially anxiety-provoking challenges that are associated with, for example, physical change and self-acceptance, heightened pressure for self-direction, closeness, and career.

And, yes, during our meeting we raised the issue that if we did not know our “client’s” name, would we have drawn the same conclusions.

Because the U.S. government has a history of compiling personality profiles of world leaders, we wondered “Who the (blank) in the government today – or even five, ten, twenty years ago – has been – or has not been – assessing Putin?!” (See “* Hitler Aside,” at the end of this article, for a note about the U.S. government’s long-ago personality assessment of Hitler when he was enemy number 1.)

Surely, our government has access to better and more confidential material than we!

If Putin’s intentions were not that obvious (remember one participant lamented “but he seems so human”), his direction – the path he was following – should have raised some **red flags ...**

... but hope springs eternal and politics make strange bedfellows, as these photos illustrate:

Putin with Baby Bush and a model of that beloved ZAZ-zy car:



https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/wp-content/uploads/Bush_Putin_and_ZAZ_car.jpg

Now, who would you want behind the wheel?

With the barrage of news – the war in Ukraine, the January sixth insurrection, the constantly mutating/adapting corona virus, the daily mass shootings (no, massacres!) by too many unhinged, disgruntled white males who, on the threshold of adulthood, need to over-over-compensate for their very inferiority feelings – have we already forgotten about Baby Bush's big "Freudian slip" of May 18, 2002, in which he declared, when discussing Putin:

Russian elections are rigged. Political opponents are imprisoned or otherwise eliminated from participating in the electoral process. The result is an absence of checks and balances in Russia and the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq – I mean of Ukraine. Iraq, too – anyway.

Perhaps you remember that informal beer poll conducted during the 2000 presidential election in which, to measure likeability and perhaps electability, more respondents said they'd rather have a beer with Bush than contender Al Gore. Ah, yes, "he seems so (more) human."

Here's the duvet bedcover/blanket that former Italian leader Silvio Berlusconi gifted Putin on his birthday in 2017 (scandal plagued Berlusconi has been called "Italy's Trump before Trump"). Note the images of the coliseum and the Russian Orthodox Church. Whom would you rather cuddle with:



https://static.euronews.com/articles/392370/1000x563_392370.jpg

Here's another overcompensating "screw" (on sale at a kiosk right outside my parents' senior residency in AZ):



Movie Night! Here are links to the spy series, *The Sword and the Shield*, that inspired Volodya (or would you rather watch *Star Wars* or a Marvel movie? Pop culture reigns!):



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4f-9REDLyZE&list=RDCMUCEK3tT7DcfWGWJpNEBdWog&index=1>

What's the Story?, <https://www.whatsthehistory.online/>
News of our next meeting (8/14/22)
Summary of our last meeting – Putin's Recollections (5/8/22)

13

<https://youtu.be/4f-9REDLyZE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6Ct6EnGk40>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=844cLSXa20c>

*A Hitler Aside: during WWII, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the predecessor of the CIA) tapped Henry Murray, the creator of the still popular Thematic Apperception (personality) Test (TAT), to assess the personality of Adolf Hitler. Murray predicted that Hitler would ...

... bring down Germany, along with himself, rather than surrender.

"Duh, yeah!" high ranking officials probably said, in hindsight, "Tell us something we don't know!" They probably had already forgotten that Hitler had already spelled out his goals and worldview in his mid-1920s memoirs, *Mein Kampf!*

But who pays attention?*

**

"WHAT'S THE STORY?": LIFE STYLE NARRATIVES STUDY GROUP

(an affiliate of the North American Society of Adlerian Psychology [NASAP])

NEXT MEETING:

Sunday, August 14, 2022, 1:00 p.m. Central Standard

Live Life Style Demonstration and Interpretation

Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81474890003>

(1:00 p.m. Central Standard Time (U.S./Canada/Chicago); 2:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time/New York; 12:00 p.m. Mountain Standard Time/Denver; 11:00 a.m. Pacific/Los Angeles; 7 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time/London; 8 p.m. Central European Time/Paris, Warsaw).

Les White

leswhitechicago@gmail.com

<https://www.whatsthehistory.online/>

What's the Story?, <https://www.whatsthestory.online/>

14

News of our next meeting (8/14/22)

Summary of our last meeting – Putin's Recollections (5/8/22)

(Thank you, Amy Lew, for suggesting our May 8th topic (Putin's recollections. They weren't hard to find, <https://archive.org/>).