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

**Next Meeting – over ZOOM:**

**Sunday, May 8, 2022**

**(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 Angles; 7 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time/London; 8 p.m. Central European Time/Paris, Warsaw).**

**THE RECOLLECTIONS (AND LIFE STYLE) OF VLADIMIR PUTIN**

**https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86180909518?pwd=bk9oTk03UnRXbThRcE5QVHV1WWNydz09**

Meeting ID: 861 8090 9518

Passcode: 522847

**Meeting should last 1 ½ - 2 hours**

***What’s the Story?* is a book club with a twist in which we read and interpret a person’s perceived important memories (the Early Recollections) as if, “strung together,” they compose a short story or literary text.**

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**PREFACE (how material was collected)…………………..**...**…………………….... 3-5**

**WHILE READING THE MATERIAL (preparing for discussion) ..…………….. 6**

**OUR “READING” (it only appears lengthy):**

**Family Constellation …………………………………………………………. 7-16**

**Introduction to Recollections ………………………………………………... 17**

**Recollections ………………………………………………………………….. 18-34**

**AGENDA/OUTLINE OF MEETING**

1. **Purpose of What’s the Story? group; Life Style “components”:**

*Family Constellation* (“Cast of Characters” – simplistic descriptions of influential family members)

*Early Recollections* (important perceived “guiding” memories)

1. **Reason for this meeting – Vladimir Putin**
2. **Quick review of main Adlerian concepts**, including:

*Holism* (interrelationship of bio-psycho-social) and *“movement”*

*Goals/purposes of behavior*

*Social influences*

*Choice and creativity and “use (of choice)” to …*

*… “Solve” the challenges/“tasks of life” such as school/work, friendship, love/intimacy* (hopefully with regard to …)

*… Social Interest* (community feeling toward the social good)

*Life Style Assessment* – *Family Constellation* (influences, perceived birth order) and *Early Recollections* (one’s narrative: those “stories” we tell ourselves and/or “hang onto” which reflect what we think of world, self, and others)

1. **READING – PUTIN’S FAMILY CONSTELLATION & RECOLLECTIONS**

Our “reading”: the characterizations and recollections/stories.

Jot down anything that you wish clarification on or anything that you don’t understand, patterns you note, and anything that seems “out of step.” For the most part, the questions we will raise to guide our group interpretation are based on the (above) intertwining concepts of Adlerian psychology

**7. Describe the reading as if they compose or “form” a story, movie, or play** (the “fact-

based” answers, e.g.:)

What’s the “story” or themes or “plots”; who are the characters; what are the location/s

**8. Interpretation**

**A comment or two on different sorts of** **questions** (“Shared Inquiry”/Great Books-type questions – factual, interpretive, and evaluative)

**9. Wrap-up – and information about next meeting**

**CHECK YOUR BIAS AT THE DOOR!**

**THE LIFE STYLE OF VLADIMIR PUTIN**

**PREFACE**

**(how material was collected and organized and what to perhaps focus on)**

The Life Style material that is presented here – Putin’s Family Constellation and Recollections – is from *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russian President Vladimir Putin*. Some have referred to it as Putin’s autobiography. It is based on a series of interviews conducted by three Russian journalists (some of which were not published in Russia). The book is credited to them -- Nataliya Gevorkyan, [Natalya Timakova](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1299339.Natalya_Timakova), and [Andrei Kolesnikov](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1299340.Andrei_Kolesnikov) – as well as Putin (as first author) and translator [Catherine A. Fitzpatrick](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/385559.Catherine_A_Fitzpatrick). It appears that most of the interviews were conducted, rather informally, around the dinner table. Per the preface, nothing has been edited; the words are all Putin’s.

The interviews were conducted before Putin became known on the world stage. Indeed, the journalists were motivated after, per the preface, the question, “Who is Putin?” “had been addressed to a gathering of prominent Russian politicians and businessmen (and) instead of an answer there was a pause” (2000, p. vii). The interviews were conducted in 2000 when Putin was a candidate for the Russian presidency – and less than a year after Putin has appointed the heretofore practically unknown Putin to be prime minister.

Yes, the material is “old,” but his descriptions of himself and family members (in Adlerian parlance, the Family Constellation), what he wanted to be when growing up, as well as his memories of childhood (Early Recollections or ERs in Adlerian-speak), adolescence, and being on the threshold of adulthood and a university student may offer clues as to what has influenced and “guided” his movements/direction or actions and personality.

Yes, personality is not “static,” but given the relative stability of the personality through the years (without this “stability,” how could we organize or make sense of our experiences and perceptions of world, self, and others?), let’s at least try some “arm-chair diagnosing” (well, Adlerians don’t like to diagnose, let’s just try our hand at some simple interpretations!

**ABOUT THE “READING”**

**(Putin’s Family Constellation and Recollections)**

The Family Constellation and Recollection material that forms our “text” was collected from responses Putin gave to the journalists’ “leading” or “prompting” questions. It is, thus, not what would be considered “pure” Life Style material: that is, it is “contaminated” in that questions are not “open-ended” ones (e.g., “What were you like growing up?”, “Relate some of your earliest memories before the age of eight or nine, specific incidents please”). The questions are more “closed” (e.g., “Did you like school?”, “Did people listen to you?”, “Why weren’t you [accepted] into the Pioneers [Socialist scouts] until the sixth grade?”). Many of the recollections are more “reports” in that they give us an idea of the context or environment in which he grew up. A clinician would have followed through to get more specific information.

**The Family Constellation section** does have Putin describing himself when growing up. However, because he and others noted that his direction or movement in life changed when he was in the sixth grade (because of the Soviet school system that places him at around 13-14 years old), I included that early adolescent material here (it was largely in response to questions about school and sports). These types of questions are more ones that a clinician might ask after getting the basic descriptions of self, sibling, and parents. Given the importance of adolescence and the threshold of adulthood – when individuals are more aware of their history and choices – I also included in the Family Constellation section his descriptions of himself up to the time he went to university. I also included here material related to what he wanted to be when grown up, the famous “occupation” question that Adler felt was central to getting an idea of how a person responds to or solves the work/occupation task. And – oh, what the hey! – I included what his wife at the time said about his personality when he proposed.

Next, in the Family Constellation section, are Putin’s description of his parents. Because the Putin family apartment was a communal Soviet dwelling in which other non-family members lived, I included here his descriptions or stories about them. I also included here his descriptions of his judo coach, from adolescence, and his grandfather, both of whom were inspirational or apparently important figures. Because Putin, when describing his father, told lengthy stories about his father’s experiences during World War II rather than relate a straightforward description, I included these stories at the end of the Family Constellation section. I put these stories here, at the end, for “flow” so that first we could first get a general, quick idea as to the familial influences on Putin in his early and adolescent development. (I don’t know whether we will spend much time on the father’s stories, other than noting their “myth-making.”)

**FOR OUR DISCUSSION AND SO WE DON’T GET BOGGED DOWN, LET’S SEE IF WE CAN FOCUS ON PUTIN’S BASIC DESCRIPTIONS OF HIMSELF, PARENTS, WHAT HE WANTED TO BECOME, AND IMPORTANT/INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES.** As you will see, I included “extraneous” material as it relates to Putin’s academics only because he noted that he became more academic minded when he saw he was going to have to change his direction regarding becoming a leader,

**Regarding Putin’s recollections**, most are obviously not what we would refer to as “pure” ERs. Because many of his recollections of his childhood are more akin to “reports” and not detailed specific incidents including, for example, his feelings or his evaluations of those incidents/situations, I included these reports. Because of, as noted, the change in his direction or movement or decisions and choices he had made when he was in the sixth grade, I included the recollections he gave as an adolescence. Because those recollections largely involved sports and choice of career, I included those recollections he related when at university – or at the threshold of adulthood and career as they largely concern the same interests. And – again, what the hey! – I included two “bonus” recollections (way too old for ERs, one might say!) that he had related about starting his KGB career (from a prompted question about the fall of the Berlin Wall; hence, the fall of the Soviet Union) and a conversation that he had after the fall, when deputy major of St. Peterburg, with Henry Kissinger.

**THERE IS A LOT OF MATERIAL HERE, SO FOR FLOW AND NOT TO GET BOGGED DOWN, MAYBE WE CAN FOCUS ON HIS RECOLLECTIONS 1 – 11, THAT INVOLVE HIS CHILDHOOD THROUGH ADOLESCENCE.**

However …

ER 13, which is very detailed, has an ending regarding consequences.

ERs 14 – 18 have to do with sports and/or judo matches while Putin was at university (reflecting winning and losing and preparation and appearing tough)

ERS 20 and 21 are about gambling and/or taking risks. In 20, after relating how an evaluation showed him as “too calm,” he relates a story in which he doesn’t gamble with his friends; in 21, the very last recollection of the interviews, he takes a dangerous risk…

**SORRY ABOUT ALL THIS MATERIAL – I HAD NO IDEA THERE WOULD BE SO MUCH WHEN I STARTED WHAT I THOUGHT WOULD BE AN INTERESTING EXERCISE!**

**WHILE READING THE MATERIAL**

**While reading the material, jot down anything that you wish clarification on or anything that you don’t understand, patterns you note, and anything that seems “out of step.” NOTE PAGE NUMBERS. For the most part, the questions we will raise to guide our group interpretation are based on the major, intertwining concepts of Adlerian psychology:**

***Movement*** – within a recollection and the whole of them and what “ties” or connects the recollections together (or doesn’t seem to fit); includes “compensatory” behavior or moving from a position of inferiority to a position of, say, mastery or superiority

***Goals/purposes of characters’ behavior***

***Characters’ actions and perceptions***

***Social influences*** – for example, challenges, gender, age, religion, race, neighborhood, others

***Choice and creativity***, including language

***“Solutions” to challenges*** such as school/work, friendship,

**NOTE REGARDING FAMILY CONSTELLATION, NEXT PAGE:**

**FOR OUR DISCUSSION AND SO WE DON’T GET BOGGED DOWN, LET’S SEE IF WE CAN FOCUS ON PUTIN’S BASIC DESCRIPTIONS OF HIMSELF, PARENTS, WHAT HE WANTED TO BECOME, AND IMPORTANT/INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES.**

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**FAMILY CONSTELLATION**

(The following is mostly in Putin’s own words – translated, of course. *Clarifications, notes, etc., in italics.*)

**SIBLINGS**

*Two older brothers (both died before Putin was born):*

*One died a few months after birth.*

*(During the Nazi’s WWII siege of Leningrad)* My second brother came down with diphtheria and died

**PUTIN -- DESCRIPTION/S OF SELF**

*Putin was born October 7, 1952; his parents were born in 1911 and married at 17*

*Putin’s descriptions of himself that are compiled here were responses to “prompted” or “leading” questions. For the most part they are listed in the order he related them to the journalists; however, please note that the book begins with Putin being asked about his father. Because many clinicians begin the collection of Life Style material by asking about descriptions of self and siblings first, we decided to do so here.*

**Question: Did you like school?**

For a time. As long as I managed to be -- what would you call it? -- the unspoken leader. The school was right next door to my house. Our courtyard was a reliable refuge, and that helped. *(Note: Putin later will compare the courtyard of his family’s communal apartment building to an airshaft.)*

**Question: Did people listen to you?**

I didn't try to command people. It was more important to preserve my independence. If I had to compare it with my adult life, I would say that the role I played as a kid was like the role of the judicial branch and not the executive. And as long as I managed to do that, I liked school.

But it didn't last. It soon became clear that my courtyard skills were not enough. And I began to play sports. And in order to maintain my social status, I had to start doing well in school. Up until the sixth grade, to be honest, I had been a pretty haphazard student.

*(Note: apparently, in the Soviet primary school system at that time, students started school/first grade at age 7; Putin started at age 8 as he says because of his late birthday; thus, Putin could have been 14-15 years old in the sixth grade. According to one of his grade school teachers, he “changed very abruptly in the sixth grade.”)*

**Question: Why weren't you taken into the Pioneers until the sixth grade? Was everything really so bad until then?**

***(Note: the Pioneers was a mass youth organization of the USSR, a kind of scouting organization for children between the ages of 9 and 15 that, aside from scouting activities, instilled a communist ideology. Most were accepted into the Pioneers in the third grade.)***

Of course, I was a hooligan. Not a pioneer. *(Note: according to one of his grade school teachers, Putin was not accepted originally because he was a “cut up.” However, immediately after acceptance he became char/head of his unit’s council.)*

**Question. Are you being coy?**

You insult me. I really was a bad boy.

**Putin’s altering his “direction”/“movement” of personality – importance of sports**

*(Note, this first description here, re boxing, is also in the ER section/ER #9:)* I got into sports when I was about 10 or 11. As soon as it became clear that my pugnacious nature was not going to keep me king of the courtyard or school grounds. I decided to go into boxing. But I didn't last long there. I quickly got my nose broken. The pain was terrible. I couldn't even touch the tip of my nose. But even though everyone was telling me I needed an operation, I didn't go to the doctor. Why? I knew it would heal by itself. And it did. But I lost my boxing bug after that.

Then I decided to go in for sambo, a Soviet combination of judo and wrestling. Martial arts were popular at the time. I went to a class near my house and began to work out. It was a very plain gym that belong to the Trud athletic club. I had a very good trainer there, Anatoly Semyonovich Rakhlin. He devoted his whole life to his art and is still training girls and boys to this day.

Anatoly Semyonovich played a decisive role in my life. If I hadn't gotten involved in sports. I'm not sure how my life would have turned out. It was sports that dragged me off the streets. To be honest, that courtyard wasn't a very good environment for a kid. *(Note: Semyonovich is also listed in the “IMPORTANT FIGURES” section of the FAMILY CONSTELLATION.)*

At first I studied Sambo, then judo. Coach decided that we would all switch to judo and we did.

Judo is not just a sport, you know. It's a philosophy. It's respect for your elders and for your opponent. It's not for weaklings. Everyone in Judo has an instructive aspect. You come out onto the mat, you bow to one another, you follow ritual. It could be done differently, you know. Instead of bowing to your opponent, you could jab him in the forehead.

**Question: Did you ever smoke?**

No, I tried it a couple of times…And when I began to do sports, I simply ruled it out. I used to work out every other day and then every day. Soon I had no time left for anything else. I had other priorities; I had to prove myself in sports, achieve something. I set goals. Sports really had a strong influence on me.

***(THE REST OF THIS PAGE IS “EXTRANENOUS” – PERHAPS NOT ESSENTIAL MATERIAL, BUT IT DOES GIVE US A CLUE AS TO PUTIN’S CHANGE IN MOVEMENT/CHOICES FROM “HOOLIGAN”:)***

**Question: And you didn't try karate. That was popular in those days, even though it was banned.**

We thought karate and all other noncontact sports were like ballet. Sports was only sports if you had to shed sweat and blood and work hard.

Even when karate became popular and karate schools of all sorts began springing up, we viewed them purely as money making enterprises. We, on the other hand, never paid any money for our lessons. We all came from poor families. And since karate lessons cost money from the start, the kids taking karate thought they were first class.

**Question: Did your parents encouraged you to take these *(Judo)* lessons?**

No, just the opposite. At first, they were very suspicious. They thought I was acquiring some sort of ugly skill to use on the street. Later, when they met the trainer, and he began to visit our home, their attitude changed. And when I achieved my first successes, my parents understood that Judo was a serious and useful art.

**Question: You started winning *(matches)*?**

Yes, within about a year or two.

**WHAT DID PUTIN WANT TO BE WHEN GROWING UP**

Even before I graduated from school, I wanted to work in intelligence. It was a dream of mine, although it seemed about as likely as a flight to Mars. And sure my ambitions sometimes changed. I also wanted to be a sailor, and at one point, I really wanted to be a pilot.

The Academy of Civil Aviation is in Leningrad, and I was hell-bent on getting in. I read the literature, and even subscribed to an aviation journal. But then books and spy movies like *The Sword and the Shield* took hold of my imagination. What amazed me most of all, was how one man's effort could achieve what whole armies could not. One spy could decide the fate of thousands of people. At least that's the way I understood it.

The Academy of Civil Aviation quickly lost its thrill. I had made my choice. I wanted to be a spy.

*(Note: in a later interview, he describes “The Sword and the Shield”:)*

Remember the episode in the film *The Sword and the Shield*, when the Germans are trying to recruit the Soviet officer? They say, “You think we'll let you die a hero? Here's a photo showing you in a German uniform. That's it, you’re a traitor.” *(Note: the Soviet officer was wearing a German/Nazi uniform because he had been impersonating a German.)* The Soviet officer grabs a chair and tries to hit the recruiter. Then the recruiter shoots him and says, “It was the wrong idea from the start. There was no sense in blackmailing him. Obviously, that officer’s reputation in his homeland is flawless.”

*(Note: ‘The Sword and the Shield” was published in the Soviet Union in 1965 and made into a film in 1968 – so, right around the time Putin was in the sixth grade/change in direction!)*

***THIS PAGE “EXTRANEOUS” – PERHAPS NOT ESSENTIAL MATERIAL (BUT GIVES US AN IDEA OF PUTIN’S “FOCUS”***

**ON THE THRESHOLD OF ADULTHOOD (and a bit beyond)**

**WHAT KIND OF STUDENT WAS PUTIN? (See also “Putin’s altering his direction” when he was in sixth grade [14-15 years old]).**

**Question: Was it hard to get into university?**

Yes, it was because there were 100 slots, and only 10 of them were reserved for high school graduates. The rest were for army guys. So for us high schoolers, the competition was fierce; something like 40 kids per slot. I had gotten a B in composition, but A's in all my other subjects, and I was accepted. By the way, at that time, they didn't take into account the total grade point average of the applicant. So in 10th grade, I could completely devote myself to the subjects that I would have to pass to get into university. If I hadn't dropped the other subjects. I wouldn't have gotten in.

**At university/threshold of career**

When I went to university, I started concentrating on my studies. Athletics took second place, but I did work out regularly and took part in an all the All-Union competitions, although it was just by habit really. In 1976, I became the city-wide champion. The people in our section included not only amateurs like me, but also professionals in European and Olympic champions in both sambo and judo.

**Question: Are you able to remain calm in critical situations?**

Yes, I remain calm. Even too calm. Later, 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.” 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.

**DESCRIPTION OF PUTIN BY HIS WIFE AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEWS** *(she was discussing how he proposed to her in the 1980s):*

(Putin) said, “You know what kind of person I am by now. In general, I’m not easy going.” He was being self-critical. He explained that he was the silent type; that he was rather abrupt in some things and could even insult people, and so on. He was saying that he was a risky life partner.

**DESCRIPTION/S OF PARENTS**

My parents never told me anything about themselves, especially my father.

**FATHER**

He was a silent man… had a very commanding personality.

I know (he) was born in St. Petersburg in 1911….(After WWII), he was a skilled laborer at the Yegorov Train Car Factory.

*(SEE “FATHER MYTHS/STORIES,” at the end of FAMILY CONSTELLATION, in which Putin speaks and tells stories about his father during WWII.)*

**MOTHER**

*(Putin does not talk about his mother’s character aside from describing some actions of hers in his ERs, or when he speaks of others, or in the stories/“myths” his father relates.)*

**OTHER IMPORTANT FIGURES IN PUTIN’S LIFE WHILE GROWING UP**

**Others living in the Putin communal apartment while he was growing up:**

*The Putins’ share of their communal apartment was, according to one of Putin’s teachers, about 20 square meters/215.3 square feet – or about the size of a U.S. apartment’s living room: “there was no hot water, no bathtub. The toilet was horrendous.” One can imagine that the room/s of others who were sharing/living in that communal apartment were of a similar size.*

**A Jewish family** – an elderly couple and their daughter, Hava – lived in our communal apartment. Hava was a grown woman, but as the adults used to say, her life hadn’t turned out well. She had never married, and she still lived with her parents.

*(This description, of the Jewish family, repeats in “Putin’s Recollections”/ER 2:)*

Her father was a tailor, and although he seemed quite elderly, he would stitch on his sewing machine for whole days at a time. They were religious Jews. They did not work on the Sabbath, and the old man would recite the Talmud, droning away. Once, I couldn't hold back any longer and asked what he was chanting. He explained about the Talmud, and I immediately lost interest.

**Baba Anya** *(“baba” refers to a grandmother-type or, according to “definitions.net”* [*https://www.definitions.net/definition/BABA*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/BABA)*, “especially a traditional old woman from an eastern European culture”). Also, a bit of description of Putin’s mother:*

There were other pensioners living in our apartment as well, although they weren't there long. They played a role in my baptism. Baba Anya was a religious person, and she used to go to church. When I was born, she and my mother had me baptized. They kept it a secret from my father, who was a party member and secretary of the party organization in his factory shop.

*(An aside:)*

Many years later in 1993 When I worked on the Leningrad City Council, I went to Israel as part of an official delegation. Mama gave me my baptismal cross to get it blessed at the Lord's tomb. I did as she said, and then she put the cross around my neck. I have never taken it off since

**Putin’s athletic coach – Anatoly Semyonovich Rakhlin**

*(The Trud Athletic Club, which apparently Putin joined as a teenager, played a very important part in Putin’s development/movement of his character. He also would continue to practice/play there while at university – despite other athletic clubs trying to recruit him. The following is also in Putin’s “Description of Self”:)*

I had a very good trainer (at the Trud Athletic Club), Anatoly Semyonovich Rakhlin. He devoted his whole life to his art and is still training girls and boys to this day.

Anatoly Semyonovich played a decisive role in my life. If I hadn't gotten involved in sports. I'm not sure how my life would have turned out. It was sports that dragged me off the streets.

**PUTIN’S GRANDFATHER** *(on father’s side. Putin does not mention his grandmother aside from relating that family members still vacation in her family’s house in a northern village where his parents met and married at age 17)*

I know more about my father's family than about my mother's. My father's father was born in St. Petersburg and worked as a cook. They were a very ordinary family. A cook, after all, is a cook. But apparently my grandfather cooked rather well, because after World War One, he was offered a job in The Hills district on the outskirts of Moscow, where Lenin and the whole Ulyanov *(Lenin family name)* family lived. When Lenin died, my grandfather was transferred to one of Stalin's dachas. He worked there for a long time. *(Note: The Hills district is considered “Russia’s Beverly Hills,” https://www.rbth.com/travel/332318-expensive-rich-districts-moscow)*

I have a clear recollection of (grandfather) myself, because I used to come for visits. My grandfather kept pretty quiet about his past life. My parents didn't talk much about the past either. People generally didn't back then. But when relatives would come to visit, there would be long chats around the table, and I would catch some snatches, some fragments of the conversation, but my parents never told me anything about themselves, especially my father. He was a silent man.

***THIS PAGE “EXTRANEOUS” – PERHAPS NOT ESSENTIAL MATERIAL – BUT AN INTERESTING “ASIDE” -- INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES FOR PUTIN IN 2000)***

**Question: What political leaders do you find most interesting?**

Napoleon Bonaparte. (Laughs.)

**Question: No, seriously.**

De Gaulle most likely, and I also like Earhart (Ludwig Wilhelm Erhard, German chancellor, 1963-66). He was a very pragmatic person. He was the one who built the new Germany after the war. In fact, his entire conception for the reconstruction of the country began with the creation of new moral values for society. For Germany, this was particularly important after the collapse of Nazi ideology

**FATHER “MYTHS”/STORIES – BECAUSE PUTIN SPUN A NUMBER OF THEM**

*When asked about and/or describing his father, Putin instead told story after story about his father’s experiences during WWII (how might these figure in Putin’s development?)*

My father (went to the front as a volunteer). (He) was in the battlefield the whole time. He had been assigned to a demolitions battalion of the NKVD. These battalions were engaged in sabotage behind German lines. My father took part in one such operation. There were 28 people in his group. They were dropped into Kingisepp. They took a good look around, set up a position in the forest, and even managed to blow up a munitions depot before they ran out of food. They came across some local residents, Estonians, who brought them food but later gave them up to the Germans.

They had almost no chance of surviving. The Germans had them surrounded on all sides, and only a few people, including my father managed to break out. Then the chase was on the remnants of the unit headed off toward the front line. They lost a few more people along the road and decided to split up. My father jumped into a swamp over his head and breezed through a hollow read until the dogs had passed by. That's how he survived. Only four of the 28 men in his unit made it back home…

They (officers) sent him right back into combat. He wound up in another tight spot, the so -alled Neva Nickel. This was a small, circular area. If you stand with your back to Lake Ladoga, it's on the left bank of the Neva River. The German troops had seized everything except for this small plot of land. And our guys held that spot through the entire blockade (of Leningrad), calculating that it would play a role in the final breakthrough. The Germans kept trying to capture it. A fantastic number of bombs were dropped on every square meter of that bit of turf -- even by the standards of that war. It was a monstrous massacre. But to be sure, the Neva Nickel played an important role in the end.

**Question: Don’t you think that we paid too high a price for that little piece of land?**

I think that there are always a lot of mistakes made in war. That's inevitable. But when you are finding if you keep thinking that everybody around you is always making mistakes, you'll never win. You have to take a pragmatic attitude, and you have to keep thinking of victory. And they were thinking of victory then.

My father was severely wounded in the “Nickel.” Once he and another soldier were ordered to capture a prisoner who might talk during interrogation. They crawled up to a foxhole and were just settling in to wait, when suddenly a German came out. The German was surprised, and so were they. The German recovered first, took a grenade out of his pocket, threw it at my father and the other soldier, and calmly went on his way. Life is such a simple little thing, really.

**Question: How do you know all this? You said your parents didn't like to talk about themselves.**

This is a story that my father told me. The German was probably convinced that he had killed the Russians. But my father survived, although his legs were shot through, with shrapnel. Our soldiers dragged him out of there several hours later….

My father managed to survive. He spent several months in the hospital. My mother found him there. She came to see him every day.

Mama herself was half dead. My father saw the shape she was in and began to give her his own food, hiding it from the nurses. To be sure, they caught on pretty quickly and put a stop to it. The doctors noticed that he was fainting from hunger. When they figured out why, they gave him a stern lecture and wouldn't let Mama into see him for awhile. The upshot was that they both survived. only my father's injuries, left him with a lifelong limp.

**INTRODUCTION TO PUTIN’S RECOLLECTIONS**

*Yes, there are more here are than are usually collected!*

*All the Early Recollections (ERs) or recollections – however you want to term them – were responses to leading questions, which can be referred to as “prompted” or “cued” ERs. Few of them here are what would be considered “early” (before the age of 8-10), or that time when one is more conscience or aware of his/her/it/their history; however, sometimes we have to “take what we can get”! Also, some believe that bona fide ERs can include those related from adolescence and on the threshold of adulthood. I include those here – especially since Putin acknowledges a change in his direction/movement in his early teen years/sixth grade.*

*I also included recollections from Putin’s university days and when he began his career (and a couple interesting ones even after that!).*

*The recollections compiled here are in the order that they appear in First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President Vladimir Putin, (except for the “Bonus” ones which are of situations after university).*

*For the sake of simplicity and/or if you need to quickly search for a recollection, I am calling all of the ones listed here ERs (whether bona fide Early Recollections or reports/not specific incidents or anything considered “dubious”).*

***Because of the number of recollections listed here, let’s focus more on the earliest ones, ER 1 – 11 (#11 being Putin’s decision regarding university). (ERs 13 and 21, the last one he relates, are, though, “telling”.)***

*However, we may want to consider:*

*ER 13 (a trip he took with friends), which is very detailed and has an ending regarding consequences.*

*ERs 14 – 18, which have to do with sports and/or judo matches while Putin was at university. They reflect an interesting movement, regarding win (Putin barely, #14), win but lose (Putin wins against the champ but loses because of champ’s reputation, #15), lose (his friend is paralyzed in a match, #16), the importance of being prepared (#17) and appearing tough (#18).*

*ERS 20 and 21, which are about gambling and/or taking risks. In #20, after relating how an evaluation showed him as “too calm,” he relates a story in which he doesn’t gamble with his friends; in #21, the very last recollection in the book of interviews, he takes a dangerous risk.*

*The Bonus Recollections, 22 (early KGB) and 23 (conversation with Henry Kissinger), are not by any means early and should not be part of our discussion; However, you may find them interesting in light of current affairs.*

**ER 1**

***When speaking about and/or remembering his father:***

*(After World War II)* The factory gave papa a room in a communal apartment in a typical St. Petersburg building on Baskov Lane, in the center of town. It had an inner airshaft for a courtyard, and my parents lived on the fifth floor. There was no elevator. *(Note: Putin’s father was a skilled laborer/tool maker at a train car factory. The apartment, according to one of Putin’s teachers, was 20 square meters/215.3 square feet: “there was no hot water, no bathtub. The toilet was horrendous.”)*

Before the war, my parents had half a house in Peterhof. They were very proud of their standard of living. So this was a step down.

There, on that stair landing. I got a quick and lasting lesson in the meaning of the word *cornered* *(the italics here is Putin’s emphasis)*. There were hordes of rats in the front entryway. My friends and I used to chase them around with sticks. Once I spotted a huge rat and pursued it down the hall until I drove it into a corner. It had nowhere to run. Suddenly it lashed around and threw itself at me. I was surprised and frightened. Now the rat was chasing me. I jumped across the landing and down the stairs. Luckily, I was a little faster and I managed to slam the door shut in its nose.

**ER 2**

*(Immediately afterward the above recollection, Putin spoke about the family that shared the apartment. They lived on the other side of the kitchen, which was, according to one of Putin’s teachers, “a square, dark hallway without windows. A gas burner stood on one side and a sink on the other. There was no room to move around.” This ER is included in Putin’s “Family Constellation” section).*

A Jewish family – an elderly couple and their daughter, Hava – lived in our communal apartment. Hava was a grown woman, but as the adults used to say, her life hadn’t turned out well. She had never married, and she still lived with her parents.

Her father was a tailor, and although he seemed quite elderly, he would stitch on his sewing machine for whole days at a time. They were religious Jews. They did not work on the Sabbath, and the old man would recite the Talmud, droning away. Once, I couldn't hold back any longer and asked what he was chanting. He explained about the Talmud, and I immediately lost interest.

**ER 3**

As is usually the case in a communal apartment, people clashed now and then. I always wanted to defend my parents, and speak up on their behalf. I should explain here that I got along very well, with the elderly couple, and often played on their side of the apartment. Well, one day when they were having words with my parents, I jumped in. My parents were furious. Their reaction came as a complete shock to me; it was incomprehensible. I was sticking up for them, and they shot back with, “Mind your own business.” Why? I just couldn't understand it. Later, I realized that my parents considered my good rapport with the old couple, and the couple's affection for me, much more important than those petty kitchen spats. After that incident, I never got involved in the kitchen quarrels again. As soon as they started fighting, I simply went back into our room or over to the old folks’ room. It didn't matter to me which.

***RECOLLECTIONS FROM PUTIN’S EARLY SCHOOLING – NOT EXACTLY ERs, BUT MORE “REPORTS” AND/OR “FAMILY STORIES/MYTHS.” (ERs are more detailed and of specific incidents. Reports help provide context.)***

**ER 4 (a family “myth”?)**

**Question: Do you remember first grade?**

I was born in October, so I did not start school until I was almost eight years old. We still have the photo in our family archive. I am in an old-fashioned gray school uniform. It looks like a military uniform. And for some reason I'm standing with a flowerpot in my hand, not a bouquet, but a pot.

**ER 5 – A Report**

**Question: Did you want to go to school?**

No, not especially. I liked playing outside, in our courtyard. There were two courtyards joined together like an air shaft, and my whole life took place there. Mama sometimes stuck her head out the window and shouted, “Are you in the courtyard?” I always was. As long as I didn't run away, I was allowed to go play in the courtyard without asking for permission.

**ER 6** **(more of a specific incident)**

**Question: And you never once disobeyed?**

When I was five or six, I walked out to the corner of the big street without permission. It was on the First of May. I looked around me. People were rushing around and making a lot of noise. The street was very busy. I was even a little afraid.

***(Then immediately afterward):***

**ER 7:**

Then one winter when I was a little bit older, my friends and I decided to leave the city without telling our parents. We wanted to go on a trip. We got off the train somewhere and were completely lost. It was cold. We had brought some matches and somehow managed to start a fire. We had nothing to eat. We froze completely. Then we got back on the train and headed home. We got the belt for that stunt. And we never wanted to go on another trip again.

***(Then immediately afterward:)***

**ER 8 – A REPORT**

**Question: So you stopped looking for adventures?**

For a time, yes. Especially when I went to school. From first through eighth grade, I went to school number 193, which was in the same lane as my house, about a seven minute walk. I was always late for my first class, so even in the winter, I didn't dress very warmly. It took up a lot of time to get dressed, run to school, and then take off my coat. So in order to save time, I never put on a coat, and just shot out to school like a bullet and got right behind my desk.

***INFLUENCE OF SPORTS***

**ER 9**

I got into sports when I was about 10 or 11. As soon as it became clear that my pugnacious nature was not going to keep me king of the courtyard or school grounds. I decided to go into boxing. But I didn't last long there. I quickly got my nose broken. The pain was terrible. I couldn't even touch the tip of my nose. But even though everyone was telling me I needed an operation, I didn't go to the doctor. Why? I knew it would heal by itself. And it did. But I lost my boxing bug after that.

**ER 10 (Actual ER, next page)**

*(The “Family Constellation/Other Important Figures” section/s contain a long report and description of the Trud Athletic Club and Putin’s coach, Anatoly Semyonovich Rakhlin. Much of that is repeated here because it may reflect some of Putin’s philosophy and/or meaning he gave to life when growing up. It also, though, leads into an ER about karate and another coach of his:)*

*Report, important figures, sports, philosophies, etc:*

Then I decided to go in for sambo, a Soviet combination of judo and wrestling. Martial arts were popular at the time. I went to a class near my house and began to work out. It was a very plain gym that belong to the Trud athletic club. I had a very good trainer there, Anatoly Semyonovich Rakhlin. He devoted his whole life to his art and is still training girls and boys to this day.

Anatoly Semyonovich played a decisive role in my life. If I hadn't gotten involved in sports. I'm not sure how my life would have turned out. It was sports that dragged me off the streets. To be honest, that courtyard wasn't a very good environment for a kid.

At first I studied Sambo, then judo. Coach decided that we would all switch to judo and we did.

Judo is not just a sport, you know. It's a philosophy. It's respect for your elders and for your opponent. It's not for weaklings. Everyone in Judo has an instructive aspect. You come out onto the mat, you bow to one another, you follow ritual. It could be done differently, you know. Instead of bowing to your opponent, you could jab him in the forehead.

**Question: And you didn't try karate. That was popular in those days, even though it was banned.**

We thought karate and all other noncontact sports were like ballet. Sports was only sports if you had to shed sweat and blood and work hard.

Even when karate became popular and karate schools of all sorts began springing up, we viewed them purely as money making enterprises. We, on the other hand, never paid any money for our lessons. We all came from poor families. And since karate lessons cost money from the start, the kids taking karate thought they were first class.

***THE ACTUAL “ER” 10:***

Once we went to the gym with Leonid Ionovich, the senior crop coach from Trud. The karate students were working out on the mat, although it was our turn. Leonid went up to their trainer and told them it was time for our class. The karate trainer didn't even look his way -- as if to say, get lost. Then Leonid, without saying a word, flipped him, squeezed him lightly, and dragged him off the mat. He had lost consciousness. Then Leonid turned to us and said, “Go on in and take your places.” That was our attitude toward karate.

***LATE ADOLESCENCE/ON THE THRESHOLD OF ADULTHOOD – CHOICE OF UNIVERSITIES, CAREER***

**ER 11 (actually, what may seem like a few recollections “strung together”):**

My parents didn't understand this right away *(his decision to go to law school)*. My coach had gone to see them and told them that as an athlete, I could get into an institute *(note: such as the Academy of Civil Aviation)* practically without passing exams. So they tried to talk me into going to an institute. My coach took their side. He couldn't understand why I was resisting. “He has a 100% chance of getting into that Academy of Civil Aviation,” he told my parents. “And if he doesn't get into university, then I'll have to go into the army.”

It was a difficult situation. My father had a very commanding personality, but I dug my heels in and said I had made up my mind.

Then another coach of mine from the Trud Club, Leonid Ionovich, came to visit. He was a clever guy. “Well,” he said to me, “Where are you going?” Of course he already knew. He was just acting sly. I said “To university.” “Oh, that's great, good for you,” he said, “in what department?” “The law school,” I answered. Then he roared: “What?! To catch people? What are you doing? You'll be a cop. Do you understand?!” I was insulted. “I'm not going to be a cop!” I yelled back.

For a year they put pressure on me every day. That only increased my desire to go to law school. But why Law School? Let me explain:

In order to find out how to become a spy, sometime back around the beginning of the ninth grade. I had gone to the office of the KGB Directorate. A guy came out and listened to me. “I want to get a job with you,” I said. “That's terrific, but there are several issues,” he said. “First, we don't take people who come to us on their own initiative. Second, you can come to us only after the army or after some type of civilian higher education.”

I was intrigued. “What kind of higher education?” I asked. “Any!” he said. He probably just wanted to get rid of me. “But what kind is preferred,” I asked. “Law school.” And that was that. From that moment on, I began to prepare for the law faculty at Leningrad University. And nobody could stop me.

But my parents and my coaches tried, they threatened me with the prospect of the army for a long time. What they didn't understand was that the army suited me just fine. Of course, it would have slowed my progress a little, but it wouldn't deter me from my decision.

***ON THE THRESHOLD OF ADULTHOOD – UNIVERSITY & FURTHER RECOLLECTIONS OF SPORTS***

*(Related immediately after ER 11:)*

**ER 12**

The coaches, however, had more tricks up their sleeves. When I went to enroll in preparatory classes at the university. I learned that they had made up lists of athletes who were to be given priority in university admissions. I knew for a fact that I wasn't on any list. But when I was enrolling in classes, my gym teacher tried to force me to join the Burevestnik *(Athletics)* Club. I asked him, “How come I have to switch over to this?” And he said, “We helped get you into the university. So please be so kind…” I knew something was up.

I went to the dean. I walked in and told him outright, “I'm being forced to transfer into Burevestnik. I don't think I should do that.” And the Dean, Professor Alekseyev, a kindhearted, good man, said, “Why are they forcing you?” And I said, “Because they supposedly helped me, as an athlete, to get into the university, and now I must pay them back by joining Burevestnik.”

He said, “Really? That can't be. Everyone gets into this university on equal terms, judged according to their knowledge, not by some list of athletes. Wait a minute, and I'll find out.” Then he reached into his desk, got a list out, glanced at it, and asked me my last name. “You're not on the list,” he said, “So you can safely tell everybody to get lost.” Which I did.

Nevertheless, in intervarsity championships, I played on behalf of the university team, as I could do this without transferring from one sports club to the other. Still, the coaches didn't let up their efforts to recruit me. I told them a hundred times that I would not leave Trud – all my friends were there, and my first coach. I said I would never join another club. I would play for the one I wanted.

**ER 13 – UNIVERSITY: RELATIONSHIP WITH FRIENDS/SUMMER TRIP & CONSEQUENCES (also material on parents)**

**Question: Was your stipend enough to cover your living expenses?**

No, it wasn't enough. At first, my parents had to support me. I was a student, and I didn't have any money. I could have earned extra money working construction like a lot of people. But what would have been the point? I was on a construction crew once. I went to Komi *(note: region in northeast Russia)*, where I chopped trees for the lumber industry and repaired houses. I finished the job and they handed me a packet of money, probably about 1,000 rubles. In those days, a car cost 3,500 or 4,000 rubles. But for a month and a half of work, we got 1,000! So it was good money. Actually fantastic money.

We earned our pay. And then we had to spend it on something. My two friends and I went to Gagry *(note: resort on Black Sea, now part of Georgia)* on vacation without even stopping back in Leningrad. We got there, and on the first day we got drunk chasing shish kebabs down with port wine. Then we tried to think of what to do next. Where could we go to spend the night? There were probably some hotels around, but we didn't have much hope of getting into them. Late at night, we finally found an old lady who agreed to take us in and give us a room.

We spent several days swimming, tanning, and getting good rest. But soon we had to get out of there and somehow get back home. We were running out of money. We came up with a plan; we would finagle places on the deck of a steamship on its way to Odessa. Then we would take a train to Peter *(note: St. Petersburg)*, buying tickets for the top bunks in the sleepers, which were the cheapest.

We pulled our pocket change and realized we had nothing but a few kopecks left for provisions. We decided to buy some to *tushonka* *(note: italicized in text)*, some canned stew, for the trip. One of the fellows was rather careful – he had more money left over than the other, who was a spendthrift. When we told the more economical friend that he should share his dough, he thought for a minute and then said, “That canned meat is pretty hard on the stomach. That's not really the right thing to get.” And we said, “Whatever you say. Let's get going.

When we got down to the docks, a huge crowd had gathered. The ship was giant as well – a beautiful white ocean liner. We were told that only passengers with tickets to the cabins were being allowed on, and those with deck seats were not yet being admitted. All the deck passengers had little tickets made out of hard cardboard, but we had larger-sized, mixed-passage tickets that looked like the ones first-class passengers would have had.

My friend who had refused to chip in for the canned meat said, “You know, I don't like the look of this. I don't think it's going to work out. Let's try to get on right now.” I said, “It's awkward, let's just stand here and wait our turn.” He said, “Well, you can stand around if you want. We're going to get on.” So they went to board the ship, and of course I ran after them.

The ticket-taker asked us what kind of tickets we had. “We have the big ones,” we answered. He waved us on.

So we were led on board the ship with the first-class passengers. And then the foreman or somebody else yelled, “Are there any others for first class?” The crowd on the dock was silent.

He asked once again, “Are there only deck passengers left?” The crowd, hoping they would now be allowed on, cried out excitedly, “Yes, just deck passengers!” To which he shouted, “Raise the plank!”

They lifted the walkway, and suddenly panic broke out on the dock. People were furious. They had been deceived. They had paid money, and now they weren't being let on the ship. Later they were told that there was a freight overage and that the ship was full.

If we hadn't gotten on board when we did, we would have been left standing on the dock. And we didn't have a single kopeck left. I don't know what we would have done.

So we settled into some lifeboats, which hang out over the water. And that was how we got home, as if we were lying in hammocks. For two nights, I looked up at the sky, and I couldn't take my eyes away. The ship sailed on, and the stars seemed to just hang in there. Do you know what I mean? Sailors may be used to that, but for me it was a wondrous discovery.

That first evening we ogled the cabin passengers. It made us a little wistful to see how wonderful their lives were. All we had were the lifeboats, the stars, and the tins of *tushonka*.

Our thrifty friend didn't have any canned meat. He couldn't hold out any longer, and went to the restaurant. But the prices there were so high that he quickly came back and said indifferently, “Well, I suppose I wouldn't mind scarfing down a little *tushonka*.” But my other friend, who kept strictly to the rules, said, “You know, you should worry about your stomach. It's not good for you.” So the thrifty guy starved for a day after that. It was cruel, of course, but it was also fair.

**ER 14 – 18; UNIVERSITY/SPORTS**

I became a sambo master black belt after entering university, and then a judo master two years later. I don't know how it is nowadays, but back then you had to collect a certain number of victories over opponents of a certain level, and to place in serious competitions. For example, you had to be among the top three in the city or get first place in the All-Union competition for Trud.

*(The ERS 14 – 18 were related one after the other:)*

**ER 14**

I remember a couple matches vividly. After one of them. I couldn't even breathe, only croak. My opponent was a strong guy, and I had used up so much energy that I just wheezed instead of inhaling and exhaling. I won, but only by a slim margin.

**ER 15**

And then there was the time I lost to the world champion, Volodya Kullenin. Later he began to drink heavily and was murdered on the street. But in university he was a fine athlete, really brilliant and talented. He hadn't started drinking when I fought him. We were competing for the city championship. He was already world champion. Right away, during the first minutes, I threw him across my back – and did it gracefully, with ease. In principle, the match should have ended right then, but since Kullenin was world champion, it wouldn't have been right to stop the fight. So they gave me some points and we continued. Of course Kullenin was stronger than me, but I fought hard. Under the rules of this martial art, any sort of crying out is considered a signal of defeat. When Kullenin twisted my elbow backward, the judge seemed to hear me make some grunts. So Kullenin was declared the victor. I remember that match to this day. And I was not ashamed to lose to a world champion.

**ER 16**

There was another match I'll remember for the rest of my life, although it wasn't one I took part in. I had a friend in university whom I had talked into joining the gym. First he took judo, and he did quite well. Once there was a competition and he was fighting. He took a jump forward and landed headfirst on the mat. His vertebrae were dislocated and he was paralyzed. He died 10 days later in the hospital. He was a good guy. And to this day, I regret talking him into taking judo…

Traumas like this were quite frequent during the competition and matches. People would break their arms or legs. Matches were a form of torture. And training was hard, too.

**ER 17**

We used to go to an athletic center outside of Leningrad on Khippiyarvi Lake. It's a fairly large lake, about 17 kilometers wide. Every morning when we got up, we ran around the lake first thing. After our run, there would be exercise, then training, breakfast, more workouts, lunch, rest after lunch and then workouts again.

We used to travel around the country a lot. Once we went to a match in Moldavia, in preparation for the Spartakiad competition of the peoples of the USSR. It was horribly hot. I was coming out of our workout with my friend Vasya and wine was for sale everywhere. He said to me, “Let's toss back a bottle of wine each.” “It's too hot out,” I replied. “Then let's just relax,” he said. “Alright, alright. Let's get some wine,” I said.

We each took a bottle, went back to our room, and flopped down on our beds. He opened his bottle. “It's too hot,” I said. “I'm not going to.” “Really?” he said. “Okay, have it your way.” He gulped the bottle straight down. Then he looked at me. “Are you sure you aren't going to have any?” “I'm sure,” I said. So he took the second bottle *(note: Putin’s bottle)* and knocked it back. He put the empty bottles on the table, and instantly he was out like a light. There he was, suddenly snoring. I really regretted not drinking along with him! I squirmed and squirmed. I couldn't hold out any longer, and poked him. “Hey, you. You're snoring, stop it! You're snoring like an elephant.”

That was pretty much the exception. We didn't party much, because drinking made the workouts that much harder.

**ER 18**

There was this one huge guy that worked out with us. His name was Kolya. Not only was he gigantic, but he had this incredible face. He had a massive jaw that jutted forward and a huge overhanging brow. One night some hooligans started picking on him in a dark alley, and he said, “Guys, calm down. Pipe down for just a second.” Then he took out a match, struck it, and held it up to his face. “Just look at me,” he said. And that was the end of the accident of the incident.

**ER 19 – A REPORT/PUTIN’S “ZAZ” CAR THAT HIS MOTHER WON**

**(SOME INFO ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUTIN AND PARENTS)**

Once my mother was given a state lottery ticket, instead of change at a cafeteria, and she won a Zaporozhets car *(note: Soviet Russia’s “peoples car,” known as “ZAZ”;* [*https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Putin\_with\_his\_1972\_Zaporozhets.jpg*](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Putin_with_his_1972_Zaporozhets.jpg)*; though “Z” is a symbol for Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, painted on buildings and tanks, it is not based on his beloved car. The current “Z” appears to symbolize two “7”s stacked together, one upside down, representing 77 years since the end of WWII).*

I was in third year of university and we couldn't decide what to do with that car for a long time, since we were we were living very modestly. I had just bought my first coat when I came back from working construction, a year after the vacation with my friends in Gagry. This was my first decent coat. Money was tight in our family, and to give the car to me was absolute madness. We could have sold it, after all, and gotten at least 3,500 rubles for it. That would have settled our family budget well in advance. But my parents decided to spoil me. They gave me the Zaporozhets. I lived the good life in that car. I used to drive it everywhere, even to my matches.

I was a pretty wild driver, but I was terrified of crashing the car. How would I ever repair it? *(SEE ER 21, the last recollection Putin related in his interviews, for more about this car and Putin’s driving.)*

**Question: Once you did get into an accident, though. You ran over a man.**

It wasn't my fault. He jumped in front of me or something….Decided to put an end to his life…. I don't know what on earth he was doing. He was an idiot. He ran off after I hit him.

**Question: They say you chased him**

What? You think I hit a guy with my car and then tried to chase them down? I'm not a beast. I just got out of the car.

**ER 20 – TOWARD END OF UNIVERSITY (Gambling)**

*The ER is prompted by Putin’s relating that his evaluation in intelligence school had him as “too calm,” that this may prevent him from having a “sense of danger” (in FAMILY CONSTELLATION section)*

**Question: Are you able to remain calm in critical situations?**

Yes, I remain calm. Even too calm. Later, 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.” 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.

**Question: Evidently you aren't a gambler?**

*(The ER:)*

No, I'm not a gambler. Toward the end of university, we went to military training camp. Two of my friends were there, one of whom had gone to Gagry with me. We spent two months there. It was much easier than the athletic camps, and we got really bored. The main source of entertainment was cards. Whoever one went to the village and bought milk from an old lady. I refused to play. But my friends didn't. And they lost everything quickly. When they had nothing left, they would come and plead for money. They were real gamblers. And I would ask myself, “Should I give them anything? They’ll just lose it.” And they would say, “Listen, your few kopecks won't save you any anyway. Why not just give them to us?” And I would say to them, “Alright. After all, I have a lowered sense of danger,” and hand over the cash.

Boy, did they make out like bandits! They couldn't lose for winning. And we went to buy milk for the lady every night.

**ER 21 (ACTUALLY LAST RECOLLECTION PUTIN RELATES IN INTERVIEW/S; CONCERNS THE CAR HIS MOTHER WON AND GAVE HIM)**

**Question: You’ve never committed any thoughtless stupidities or wasted time and trivia (?)**

I have done stupid things and wasted my time.

**Question: For example?**

Okay, once I was driving with my senior coach from Trud, to a base outside Leningrad. I was in university at the time. A truck with a load of hay was coming from the other direction. My window was open, and the hay smelled delicious. As I drove past the truck on a curve, I reached out the window to grab some straw. The car suddenly swerved … Whoops! The steering wheel turned, and we were headed toward the rear wheel of the truck. I turned the wheel sharply in the other direction, and my rickety Zaporozhets *(note: people’s car)* went up on two wheels. I almost lost control of the car. We really should have ended up in a ditch, but fortunately, we landed back on all four wheels.

My coach sat there frozen, speechless. Not until we pulled up at the hotel and he got out of the car did he look at me and say, “You take risks.” Then he walked away. There was some stupid stuff like that. What drew me to that trunk? It must have been the sweet smell of the hay.

**BONUS RECOLLECTIONS!**

*PROMPTED BY QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS JOBS AFTER UNIVERSITY AND ARMY (and before he got known on the world stage: that is, before being president of Russia)*

*In First Person, these “late” recollections are related before ER 21:*

**BONUS ER 22** *(when a young KGB employee)*

At first, they assigned me to the Secretariat of the Directorate and then to the counterintelligence Division, where I worked for about five months.

**Question: Was it like you imagined it would be? What were you expecting?**

No, of course it wasn't what I had imagined. I had just come from university after all. And suddenly I was surrounded by old men who had been in their jobs during those unforgettable times *(note: mid-late 1970s)*. Some of them were just about to go into retirement.

One time a group was drafting a scenario. I was invited to join the meeting. I don't remember the details. But one of the veteran agents said that the plan should be followed in such and such a way and I piped up, “No, that's not right.” “What do you mean?” he said, turning to me. “It's against the law,” I said. He was taken aback, “What law?” I cited the law.

“But we have instructions,” he said. Once again, I cited the law. The men in the room didn't seem to understand what I was talking about. Without a trace of irony, the old man said, “For us, instructions *are* the main law.” And that was that. That's how they were raised. And that's how they worked. But I simply couldn't do things that way.

And it wasn't just me. Practically all my peers felt the same way. For several months, I went through the formalities and knocked off some cases. I was sent to agent training for six months. Our school in Leningrad wasn't too exceptional. My superiors believed I had mastered the basics, but that I needed some field preparation. So I studied in Moscow, and then came back to Petersburg for about a year and a half. For about half a year in the counterintelligence Division.

**Question: What year was this?**

What year? It was at the end of the 1970s. Now people say that was when Leonid Brezhnev was beginning to tighten the screws, but it was not very noticeable.

**BONUS ER 23** *(with Henry Kissinger)*

*(Though asked about the fall of the Berlin Wall, most of what he relates is when he was duputy mayor of St. Petersburg.)*

**Question: Did you suffer when the Berlin Wall fell?**

Actually, I thought the whole thing was inevitable. To be honest, I only really regretted that the Soviet Union had lost its position in Europe. Although intellectually I understood that a position built on walls and dividers cannot last. But I wanted something different to rise in its place, and nothing different was proposed. That's what hurt. They just dropped everything and went away.

Later back in Peter *(St. Petersburg)*, I had a very interesting meeting with Kissinger, and he confirmed what I already thought. There was a commission called the Kissinger-Sobchak Commission *(note: Anatoly Sobchak was a Soviet and Russian politician, the first democratically elected mayor of St. Petersburg, and a mentor to Putin)*, found to develop St. Petersburg and to attract foreign investment. Kissinger came to our city several times. Once I met him at the airport. We got into a car and went to the residence. On the way he asked me where I was from and what I was doing. He was an inquisitive old fellow. He looked like he is nodding off to sleep, but in fact, he sees and hears everything. We spoke through an interpreter. He asked me, “Have you worked here long?” I replied that it had been about a year. “Where did you work before that?” asked Kissinger.

“At the Leningrad city council,” I replied.

“And before the Leningrad city council?”

“At the university.”

“And before the university?”

“I was in the army before that.”

“In what troops?”

“Well,” I thought to myself. “Now I'm going to upset you, Mr. Kissinger.”

“I worked in intelligence,” I said.

“Did you work abroad? He asked calmly.

“Yes,” I said, “in Germany.”

“East or west?”

“East.”

“All decent people got their start in intelligence. I did too,” said Kissinger.

Then he said something that was completely unexpected and very interesting. “You know, I'm very much criticized for the position I took regarding the USSR back then. I believe that the Soviet Union should not abandon Eastern Europe so quickly. We were changing the balance in the world very rapidly, and I thought it could lead to undesirable consequences. And now I'm being blamed for that position. People say, ‘See, the Soviets left and everything's normal. You thought it was impossible.’ But I really did think it was impossible.” Then he thought a while and added, “Frankly, to this day, I don't understand why Gorbachev did that.”

I had never imagined I might hear something like that from the lips of Henry Kissinger. I told him what I thought and I will repeat it to you right now. Kissinger was right. We would have avoided a lot of problems if the Soviets had not made such a hasty exit from Eastern Europe.