

INTERVIEW INSPIRED BY: THE LIFE STORY INTERVIEW (Dan P. McAdams, Northwestern University)

Project: E-MOTION - potential of hypersensitivity (2018-1-PL01-KA201-051033)

Name/nickname: B.Z

Age: 67

Gender: Female

City/Country: Lublin/Poland

Vocation: Pedagogue

Initial comments

This interview will concern the history of your life. I want to ask you to play the role of a storyteller who talks about their own life, to create a story about your own past, your present and what you expect in the future. Your story should tell how you are similar to other people, and how unique you are as a highly sensitive person.

The purpose of the interviews is to collect and organize various life stories of highly sensitive people. The interview will consist of several parts.

The interview begins with general things and comes to details. I think you'll enjoy taking part in the interview. For most people it is a positive experience.

I. LIFE CHAPTERS

I want you to start with thinking about your life as a book that contains a story about your life. All stories have their characters, scenes, plots, heroes and villains. A longer story may consist of several chapters. Think about your life as a story that has at least a few different chapters. What are they? Give each chapter a title and briefly describe its general content, as if you were to briefly summarize the action of each of them. There may be as many chapters as you want, but I suggest a minimum of two or three chapters, and a maximum of seven.

Chapter 1. *Childhood*

I think about this period with great affection. I've got a lot of beautiful memories from this period. I guess, like everybody at my age thinks about the memories from the childhood with great sentiment I think now I idealise a bit my childhood now. It was not easy time, after all. I was born right after the war. Everything was difficult, everything was missing. But it was also a time when the little things made people happy.

Chapter 2. *School*

We lived with my parents in a small village, the school was in village nearby. At school, there were a lot of students in one class, not like nowadays that there are around 12 students in a group. Electricity was just entering the countryside. As a child, I still studied with the kerosene lamp. Electricity brought a great joy. I remember school very well. To this day, I remember many of those times, I remember the names of my friends, some of them are already dead.

Chapter 3. *Adulthood*

Adulthood is the time of my studies, my first job, marriage, and the birth of children. It was a very hard time but at the same time a lot of things had happened then. Even as an adolescent girl, I knew that I had to leave the house quickly and become independent. I had known who I wanted to become just after the high school. I managed to get the University to the study programme I chose. The period of study was intense with work. I had a modest life back then.

My parents were not wealthy, so supporting my living in the city was a huge cost for them. I tried to live modestly, but I still remember a lot of sacrifices from that time. It had no money almost for everything, books, cinema, clothes.

But it was not a big problem for me and my peers at the time. We were all in a similar situation. The friendships made during this period have lasted for many years. I keep in touch with several people until today.

I met my future husband when I went to my first job. After a year of acquaintance, we got married and a year later our first son was born. The following years were spent on raising children, as a daughter was born soon. I returned to work after the maternity leave, like most women at that time. The children were looked after by a nanny and then they went to kindergarten and school. I remember this time with sentiment. I remember how I trembled for children who were sick a lot and suffered from childhood illnesses. It was also a difficult time in my marriage. My husband did not help me much with the children.

In those days, it was not so popular for a man to raise young children. There were also no amenities like today. I tried to be the perfect mother, wife and housewife. But many women thought so then. Today it is different, women give themselves the right to rest, time for themselves. In those days, the woman was under a lot of pressure.

Chapter 4. Maturity

For me, maturity is the period in my life that I am in now. Now I have more distance, the children are adults, they have their own children. I already know that I can afford to rest, time for myself. I also learn to say no, which was difficult for me before. I try to maintain relationships with people who motivate me, who want to achieve something and avoid those for whom old age is a time of complaints and passivity. I try to be active, be socially active. I enjoy it a lot. And I even infect others with whom I work. I can't stand the time when nothing happens. I rest more than before. I have learned to listen to my body.

II. KEY MEMORIES

Now that you have sketched out the outline of the chapters, I would like you to focus on a few important memories from your life story.

Memory # 1

Childhood – me and family

The most enjoyable childhood experience is playing with the father. I might have been three or four year then. Mom was a strict and demanding person. Dad was cheerful, happy. He was always able to cheer me up. I think he understood me more than mom. I was also more willing to tell him about my troubles. And although he was rarely home and spent little time with us, she had more patience with us.

The most difficult childhood experience was an accident I had as a child. I fell down the stairs and broke my arm. I will never forget the horror of the hospital crying mother. The hospital made a terrible impression on me. I was afraid then that I might die. Today I'm laughing at it, but then I was terrified.

I think that even as a child I was more fearful than my peers. I experienced everything more than they did. After them, things flowed easier. I remember being weepy. My mother reminded me of this many times. She called me a crybaby. But I also loved to imagine something. I could sit in my room for hours and play alone. Everyone was surprised that I could play alone.

I was a hardworking child and I always tried very hard to meet expectations. I guess I was such a "good girl" type. I participated in school plays, I remember singing in the choir. If I could change anything, I wish I could not worry about everything the way I did then. Maybe it would be easier for me to live. Today I don't think it was worth experiencing everything like that.

Memory # 2

Education: school - study

I liked school very much. In the first years, I went to school in a neighboring town, on foot. I still remember the way to school. I liked learning. I liked learning about new things. I was lucky

4

with teachers. They were real teachers by calling. They had an approach to children. And although they were strict and demanding, they encouraged me to work. I was very proud when they praised me. I was a bit of a teacher's pet. They liked me very much. I was polite, hardworking, and careful. I didn't like cheating or combining. I remember that when I forgot my work or drawing one time, I cried and did not want to enter the classroom. Parents were also pleased. They often said they wanted me to learn well. The parents were poor. They wanted me to get an education and therefore had little prospects. What would I like to change? I don't know, I would like to learn a lot, for example, I would like to know foreign languages. I don't remember much from school.

Memory # 3

Professional work

My first job was not my dream job, but I was still overwhelmed with pride when I went to work right after graduation. Finally, I had my first money of my own. I felt very grown up and independent. I felt that this was a new stage in my life. Even though my first job was very stressful for me, I was very proud. I had a demanding manager. Today, when I think about my professional work, I know that I was very involved. Only after retirement did I understand that now I am calmer when I do not have to do anything anymore, no one judges me, I have no pressure. What am I proud of? Probably the most because I was a good, maybe even a very good worker. I have never let my employers down. I even received prizes, bonuses and distinctions. I guess I could get along with people too, or so I was told. I was often chosen to lead teams. I also held managerial roles.

Memory # 4

My family, friends, loved ones

In relationships, I value loyalty the most. I was lucky enough to always have someone I could call my friend. Not all relationships from my childhood or adolescence survived to later years.

But it just so happened that there was always someone close to you at school or college. I have contact with some of them until today. I cannot judge if my relationships are different from those of other people. Authenticity was important to me, I did not like pretending or posturing. When someone let me down, betrayed my trust, I ended this relationship. I don't think I'm a very social person. Usually I avoided loud games. But I liked small meetings. In relationships, it was very important for me to support my friends. More than having fun together, I enjoyed being able to do something with or for my friends. I enjoyed their successes and helped them come out of the holes. Probably the most difficult thing is always when people separate ways.

Memory # 5

My inner world: privacy – hobbies – interests – dreams

Only now, after retirement, do I have time for myself. Before, when the kids were little, they were busy all the time. Then professional work. It happened somehow that I was often given some additional tasks, I held managerial positions.

The garden is making me busy nowadays. I have never thought that gardening is suitable for me, but it gives me great pleasure. I rest in the garden. I think that after years of very intensive work, now the garden relaxes me. In addition, the garden is demanding, requires patience, regularity and persistent work. The effects are visible only after years of care. This is a task for the patient and persistent.

I also like reading, listening to music, I like my children and grandchildren. I help my daughter raise her children.

III. THEME

Looking back on your life as a story with chapters and scenes extending into the past and into the imaginary future, can you distinguish a theme, an idea or a thought that runs through this entire story? What is it?

It is very difficult to define what can be called a life – motif.

I tried to live my best life, in harmony with my values, in harmony with people, actively. Of course, I made mistakes, as did everyone. From today's perspective, I know what could have been done differently, but I didn't know it at the time. I think everyone does.