



DR. GERTRUD BONDY

A Personal History

WINDSOR MOUNTAIN SCHOOL, LENOX, MASS.

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This is the Fiftieth year that Windsor Mountain School is in operation and the Eighty-first year of my life. So I thought that this would be the right time to look back at the life of the school and at my life, the time to look at what it has meant to the people that have lived with me and have been part of it. I had a beautiful and rich life, full of teaching and learning, but I must be brief, otherwise, I could write a book.

Year after year, I have talked with children and have tried to help them to grow up. I have learned as much from them as they have learned from me. I have lived with them through the thorny times of their lives and I have empathized with them. We understood each other and had a deep communication. In our communications we forget that I am old and they are young; we just understand each other on a common level and we trust each other. That I have learned in my life has become part of my personality and I use it like a carpenter uses his tools to enlarge his person without thinking how to use them.

My study of Psychoanalysis has helped me in my work as a part of my-self without using therapy as it is generally understood. Writing is not my way of expressing myself and of communicating; my way is talking and listening. But this might give a picture of what I have to tell. I think that the main part of my personal work is to give the young people a feeling of security and of being accepted as a person. Very often that feeling helps me to overcome the difficulties and the resistance of being helped from an adult.

DR. GERTRUD BONDY

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I was born on October 7, 1889 in Prague, Czechoslovakia. I spent my childhood in a comfortable home. I went to a private girls' school and later on I had private lessons in which we studied mostly in literature. I spent a great deal of time studying piano. I started to learn music when I was six years old and for many years it became my main interest. My father was blind and much of my time was spent playing for him. I had an older brother and sister. My mother was devoted to the care of my father and we children took turns

reading to him; much Philosophy and much of my knowledge and interest in Philosophy and reading was started at that time and has remained with me. We had many social evenings in which everyone had to speak about certain philosophers, writers, and artists, and there were many lively discussions about philosophy and the politics of the times. Besides that I had a very active social life and many friends and they, too, had an influence on my way of thinking and seeing life. When I was seventeen my father died, and this changed my life very much. I lost the joy in my music. I still practiced the piano for six hours a day, but my real enjoyment was not the same any more. Shortly after that we moved to Vienna. My sister had married and lived in Hamburg. My mother remarried shortly after that. At first I continued my life in the same way, but then I decided to study medicine, of which I had dreamed all my childhood without really being able to do something about it. I gave up my music, locked my piano so that I would not be able to play and devoted all my time to my medical studies.

A very happy and active time started. I first had to pass my Matura (which is the main exam to enter the University) and then I entered the University in 1914. In August the outbreak of the first World War found me in Alt Ausee, a place where I had spent much time during my first years of life and which I loved very much. A very happy vacation ended abruptly, I went back to Vienna, many of my friends had to go to war and it was the beginning of a terrible experience. My mother and I worked as nurses in a children's hospital because all the other nurses were needed in the War and in the Soldiers' hospitals. I had at this time started my medical studies. My mother did not approve of the idea at all. I had to do most of my studies secretly at night. But it worked out and I enjoyed my studies very much. Every day seemed to me like a new discovery. At that time we had two years of preclinical studies and then three years of clinical work. During the clinical years I already had to do the work of a doctor as the need for doctors in Vienna was critical. During these years I heard the lectures of Professor Freud and that was the beginning of my interest in psychoanalysis and psychiatry which later on was to become my chosen profession.

During all these years I had a very deep friendship with my late husband. We had many common interests and endless discussions. Though he lived in Hamburg and I in Vienna we managed to see each other often. In 1912 we traveled with my married sister and her

husband and a group of young people in Italy. We spent three months in Rome studying history of art and looking at all the interesting places. We had the most wonderful time and learned very much. After that Max Bondy joined the youth movement in Germany. They had groups of students in Freiburg and in many other German Universities. They rebelled against the kind of life that existed at that time among the adults and in the students' world. In many ways this rebellion was very much the same as the student rebellion is today. They fought the hypocrisy of the adults, who often led a double life. The students in Germany at that time had their fraternities in which dueling and drinking were their main interests. The groups under the leadership of Max tried to replace this way of life by organizing mountain climbing, hiking groups, and reading groups. It became a very large group and they had meetings in which they decided to educate people to real truthfulness to oneself and others, to mutual understanding and in this way build a new and more sincere society. If I described all their ideas it would be a book in itself and I must satisfy my readers by giving these ideas in a short description which does not give the real picture of this lively and inspired youth. When World War I began most of these young people had to go to war. At first they believed that they were fighting for a just cause, but soon they became disillusioned. Many of them died in the war and only a few lived to carry on their ideas. Before the war we had dreamed about building a school in which these ideals could be fulfilled. Max and nearly all his friends had enlisted and were at the front. In September, 1916 Max and I were married. After a short trip to the Alps we returned to Hamburg because we received the news that my husband's brother was killed in Rourmania and we felt that we should be with the family. Just a few months before my husband's mother died and this second blow was hard to take. After a short stay at home Max had to go back to the front and I went back to Vienna to continue my studies. In 1918 our oldest child was born and Max came to Vienna. During his stay in Vienna the war ended. After a short stay Max then went to Erlangen to finish his Ph.D. in History and History of Art. I

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followed Simon with the baby. We rented a house and both studied and worked. During this time we had many meetings in our house with new and old friends, many discussions, much music. Out of these meetings

the idea of having a school in which all our ideas could be worked out came up again. My husband's father bought a place for us. It was a hotel called Sintelhof. We started the school with the son of the former owner, who had been educated in a school with some related ideas. The school soon had students who very enthusiastically helped to build it up.

My second daughter was born in 1921 and shortly afterwards I went to Vienna to study with Dr. Rank. We moved the school to a place called Gandersheim. We rented a former hospital and the school remained there from 1922 to 1929. It was very difficult for me to prepare everything so that Max and the students could move to Gandersheim. Although my father-in-law sent me the necessary funds to live and prepare the new school, the money lost its value before it arrived because of the German inflation. It was difficult for us to obtain food and all that was needed, however, we finally succeeded with our preparations and Max then moved to Gandersheim with some of the students, and we started the school again. During this time we enrolled students from England and other foreign countries and with this foreign currency we were able to support the school. Finally the German Mark was stabilized and we had an easier time. The Gandersheim school began to become well known and we succeeded in making it a beautiful community where we could fulfill our educational ideas. We had good teachers who understood our ideas and helped us make our dream a reality. Dr. Otto Reckendorf came to us in 1926 and taught mathematics and science, and his wife, Edith, taught Art and Weaving, both were a great help to us. I took care of the houses, did all the buying, etc., besides working with the children. Max did all the administration work, taught History, History of Art, Latin and Philosophy. We had lively discussion groups in the evenings and for the first time in any school read Dr. Freud with the children. This was a courageous undertaking at this time since Freud was still attacked from all sides. Every Sunday Max gave one of his morning speeches which were one of the high points of the school. Many philosophical, religious and educational questions were discussed with the students. In the afternoon the students met in groups with the teachers and discussed the things he had said. Theater, chorus, orchestra and dancing were very much a part of our life.

The arts of all kinds were very lively. We performed some Shakespearean plays, Stravinsky's Story of a Soldier, and many other plays. One of the teachers wrote plays; for the younger children which were a

great success. It is difficult to describe in detail the life we had and the many accomplishments. These years were really the beginning of our school and it has developed to what it is now.

In 1924 our son, Heinz, who is now the Headmaster of our school, was born. In 1929 the place at Gandersheim became too small and we had to move to Mtlarrienau, which was a big farm we turned into a school. We had some wonderful years there in which the school came to its full development.

When the school was in full bloom Hitler came to power in Germany. From then on it was very hard to continue the school as all our ideas went in total contradiction to all that Hitler stood for. But we tried to continue for awhile and succeeded with many difficulties. The majority of our students had learned so much from the school that they did not become Nazis, but it was very hard for them to live under the Nazi regime for the next few years.

Max at first thought that the Hitler time was a passing phase, but I did not believe it and started a new school in Gland, Switzerland, on the lake of Geneva, with the help of one of our alumni. We took some of the children with us and soon had children from Czechoslovakia, and Austria when Hitler started to be a threat to them. In April, 1937, Max decided to give up the school in Germany because he felt that it was hopeless to wait for Hitler's fall. He also brought some children with him whose parents were against the Hitler regime. Many Jewish children also came. Many horrible things were happening in Germany, many of the parents of our children were persecuted and were put in concentration camps. It was a very hard time for us, but the children learned mutual consideration and understanding. When we felt that a big European War was inevitable, we decided to go to the United States. Harald Ihruschke, the alumnus who helped us start the school in Gland would stay there and continue the school, and we would exchange students from America. My son-in-law, George Roeper, who also was a former student, went to the United States first to find a location to start a school. We followed with our children and found a place in Windsor, Vermont.

The beginning in this country was very difficult. We had received permission to come here and get started through some parents of English and American students. But we could not take much money out of Switzerland and at first had no students but Heinz, the daughter of our cook, and the daughter of the German writer, Carl Zuckmayer. I had to visit and talk with many people to get the school started. I t

was hard because in Europe :Max and I were known as educators, but here we were without background and had to start from the beginning: Fortunately we met some people who really were interested in our educational ideas .and · this was a great help. Dorothy Thompson who I lived in Barnard, Vermont was a friend of Carl · Zuckmayer and she helped us. Through her we met Dorothy Canfield-Fisher who became a very dear friend to us. We soon started to get ·students and I found that many American people showed much understanding for our work and were courageous enough to send their children to this very new and different school. With their help and the help of young teachers who agreed to ,,,,ork for room and board because they were enthusiastic about our ideas; we succeeded so well that only after one year the place in Windsor, Vermont became too small and we had to move the school to :.Manchester, Vermont to a very beautiful property which we rented. Dorothy Canfield-Fisher and the Walter Hards, who were both writers and had a bookstore in Manchester, came very often in the evening and gave speeches for the students and contributed to the life of the school. In the summers we had camps in which the Sterbas from Detroit, both very well-known analysts helped us by sending children and also contributed very much to the life of the camp.

In :.Manchester the school grew very quickly. Our life was very similar to our life in .Europe. It seemed that the same ideas that were new and revolutionary there were also new and revolutionary here. My oldest daughter and her husband, both graduates of our school, joined us in the first year of the school in America. They left us in the second year as they were offered a small nursery school in Detroit by Dr. Editha Sterba. This was the first daughter school of our school. In the years that followed they became extremely successful and the small nursery school grew into the Roeper City and Country School, which is now a famous school for gifted children and has 650 students. We also grew very quickly. The war broke out and our son had to go into the Army. He had been one of the first graduates of the school in this country and a student at Swarthmore at this time. He was in the American Intelligence.

In 1945 Heinz came back from the war and we met in Boston. He had gone through many terrible experiences and some exciting ones. One of them might be of interest because it shows how much the school had influenced the students. One of Heinz's jobs after the war was to screen German officers to find out how guilty they were of the Nazi atrocities. He met a young Count von Harnstorff. Two of the

Bernstorffs' sons had been graduates of the school in Germany and one of them was now a Captain. The officer that Heinz met was a cousin of theirs. He asked Heinz, hearing that his name was Bondy, whether he was Max and Gertrud Bondy's son. Then he told him that he had a message for Heinz from his cousin Bechtold, with whom he was in Stalingrad. Bechtold said that he wished Max would know that he never became a Nazi and that he had tried to influence his troops in his ideas and told them what he had learned in Marienau. It was wonderful that this message actually reached us. Bechtold was killed in Stalingrad shortly after this talk with his cousin.

In 1944 the buildings in Manchester became too small for the growing school and we had to move again. We bought property in Lenox from a New York banker, Mr. Winthrop, and the school has been here since then. In 1951 my husband died and my son, Heinz, became Headmaster of the school. From the beginning he and I worked very well together. Heinz had been Assistant Headmaster in the last year before Max died and had no difficulties in taking over the school. He soon was able to do a wonderful job. Heinz's personality is very different from my husband's, but they worked for the same goals and their educational ideas were very much the same. They both gave their full personality to the school and the education of the children. The fight against hypocrisy, against thoughtlessness and inner laziness, for learning to listen, to communicate and to help each other to be sincere to oneself and others, to learn to trust oneself and others, is still a big part of our aims. In 1965 Jan Wiener came from Czechoslovakia with his family and joined our staff. He has contributed very much to our life here and the intellectual development of the students.

Adolescence is a time of no-man's-land. It is a very stormy time of loneliness and of seeking the goals and aims of life. The young people now have a hard time finding them and we try to help them. The problems are still the same as they have always been only the solutions that the young people are trying to find are different. Some believe that the answers are in taking drugs, others in drinking or in a thoughtless and superficial life. Other generations have sought other remedies for their troubles. But we are not here to judge but to help them to find better ways of living a happy life. Max and I have devoted our lives to this task and so has Heinz. It is a hard job but we often have the joy of seeing success and seeing people grow up in a richer and better life.

VeT}' often the small difficulties of everyday life seem to overshadow

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our real work so that many young teachers get disappointed because it is a slow and tiresome job. But we cannot forget that our main task is to help the children find themselves and a right way of living. Many of our teachers and students know that and help us in our job. The student government which educates the children while they are trying to help to educate the others is one way of our education. Mr. and Mrs. James Hall have been at the school with Mr. Quentin Labelle for twenty-five years and have helped us in our job and we are grateful to them. Many of the teachers who were here a much shorter time have taken an important place in our work and we owe them much for our success in fulfilling our aims with the students.

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