

Isle Ollendorff, Mother of Peter Reich Interviewed by Jacqueline A. Carleton

September 20, 1977, Part I

One of the things that always "gets" me is that people think self-regulation is the same as permissiveness. It isn't. Our ideas of self-regulation had to do with the body functions, physical functions, that they should be self-regulated: feeding, toilet training, access to all parts of the body. That was self-regulation. As far as behavior was concerned, we used, I wouldn't say conventional methods, but there were limitations. It was made clear very early that the adults have rights. That the child has rights, very definitely too, but that the adults have rights, too, that you live in a family set-up. Everybody has rights, and has to think of other people, to be concerned.

So it's not child-centered?

It's not child-centered. For instance, in the feeding, he was never forced to eat anything. But also, I wasn't one of those people who, if he didn't like what was on the table, I went out and made six other dishes, 'til he found something he liked. And if he didn't like what was on the table, there was bread, there was butter, there was fruit. You know? I mean, he wasn't pampered or catered to. If he liked what was on the table, he ate as much as he liked. Then, he was fed, still, as a small child. Then, if he liked it, he ate it. If he didn't like it, it was just too bad.

Were you very clear about exactly what you wanted to do with him before he was born?

More or less. We were more or less agreed on that beforehand. First of all, that I would breast-feed. That was one of the things. That I would not go on a very strict schedule, but would let him set the schedule, which we followed fairly consistently. He set his own schedule, actually, very early and very easily.

So did you ever feel that as an inconvenience?

No, never, it never felt inconvenient. In fact, he set his rhythm, so that he slept most of the night through. So that I fed him very early in the morning, and late at night, but there was no inconvenience. And of course, we did not let him cry. When he cried, we tried to find out why he cried, and tried to alleviate whatever was bothering him. We tried also, for instance, to include, and not to isolate him, even when he was very small, and that's one of the things I wrote, I think, in my book. When I was typing manuscripts, I used to have him next to the typewriter, that at least he could see me. Even though I was busy, and not occupied with him, he was around... the noise, he saw me, so that he was included somehow.

Sleeping. Did he sleep in the room with you?

He had his own room, definitely, in Forest Hills. In Maine, he may have been in the same room with me.

When he was very tiny, when you were breast-feeding him, then did he sleep with you?

He may have been in my room, yes. We had separate bedrooms, so he may have slept in my bedroom.

In the bed with you? Or in a separate bed?

No, not in the bed with me. Actually, I remember when we were traveling, once, and he had to sleep in the bed with me, Reich was terribly afraid that I would roll over on him and choke him, so that he was very definitely not sleeping in the bed with me. He was nearby. Actually, in Maine he had a cradle. Somebody gave us an old, old Quaker cradle, and I used to push him either back and forth, with my foot, even when I was typing.

They're made to do that, aren't they, so you can keep rocking it and go on with what else you are doing?

Yes, right.

How did you formulate this way of dealing with a child? Was it something you read, or thought about?

Well, Reich was very much concerned about self-regulation. He was very unhappy that his other children, especially the oldest one, that they had used what was fashionable at the time- a very strict feeding schedule. He found that by the time Peter came along, he had changed his ideas about the rights of children, that right of a child to have his body functions on his demand, sort of, were very clearly **formulated**. I remember the maids we had were always amazed at how easy a child he was to feed. We had household help twice a week, and who worked other days with other families, and she said that in other families, the mother would sit with the child for hours trying to get some food into the child. Nothing like that happened in our house. He was fed. OK, if he didn't like it, he didn't like it, but we didn't sit for hours trying to push food into him. As Reich always said, no healthy child would starve himself to death. If he gets hungry, he will eat. It was true. At one time, he must have been three or four...he used to go on jags, and he was staying with his sister, and she called me in desperation and asked me what to do. He wouldn't eat anything but saltines and apples, and I said "that's alright. He'll change very soon. But if he wants to stay on saltines and apples, it's very healthy food, so let him eat saltines and apples."

I remember in your first article you said he'd often eat his dessert first, and then he was more interested in the other food.

Yes, yes. We never pushed food into him. We never pushed food on him. To this day he's a good eater. He likes his food. He never had any difficulties, in his childhood, either with his digestion, or anything. He always was very well, extremely well.

Was your own upbringing at all like self-regulation?

I was breast-fed. I don't know how I was toilet-trained. That again was very easy. We more or less left it up to him. I watched him and I tried to encourage him to use a potty, to tell me that he had to go. Actually, he was at 2 and a half years toilet-trained. He would sometimes wet at night. That stopped on a train ride from Portland to New York, when I told him- he must have been two and a half at that time- "These are not our beds, and we better be careful not to wet them...." if he needs to go at night, call me. That was it. Never again had he wet his bed. It was very easy, always. I think he was not forced in any way. More or less, we waited until he was ready. He went to nursery school at two and a half years, and they said they would not take him unless he was more or less toilet-trained, and he had one or two accidents, but that's normal. But on the whole, he was perfectly alright.

How did you happen to send him to nursery school at that age?

Because we felt he needed children of his own age, and furthermore, I was working all day. Even though we worked in the house.

Were you teaching then?

No, I was working with Reich as a lab assistant, bookkeeper, and administrator. I had a triple, a quadruple function. But the fact, also, that he needed other children, 'cause he had no children in the house, nothing but adults, and so, we found a nursery school that seemed to us acceptable.

You were living in Maine?

In Forest Hills. We lived in Forest Hills first.

There weren't other children in the neighborhood?

Well, there was one boy around the corner, about two or three years old, which was too old.

That's not a whole bunch of kids.

We thought he should be with other children. He loved to go. He couldn't wait in the morning until the bus came to pick him up. It was one of those station wagon-busses, you know. He was very happy to go, and enjoyed it. And he found, immediately, friendships with other kids, who didn't live too far away, and he visited them, sometimes. It worked out very well.

Did you at the time see this way of raising a child as part of a larger system of ideas?

Yes. On my own, it probably wouldn't have occurred to me. Having worked with Reich, by that time, for four years, I was very much imbued with his ideas, and I saw it very definitely as a part of a larger system.

Can you explain how it connects?

Well, I mean, the idea of self-regulation and we had founded at that time the Infant Research Center, and all this was toward pre-natal...having the mother already prepared for birth...good breathing, taking care of herself in a way that would make birth easy. It wasn't easy, because I was 35 already, and it was a first child, so I was 20 hours in labor. It was not an easy birth. Actually, the moment after the birth was absolutely great, and I had a most magnificent pregnancy. I have never felt as magnificent as I felt during my pregnancy. I mean, no discomfort whatsoever, just absolutely great during the pregnancy. It may have something to do with the way the child actually then developed, but the birth was difficult.

Would you be able to outline for me what some of the most important qualities are in a person who chooses to be a parent? Not everyone does have a child...

I know. Reich always said people shouldn't have a license to marry, people should have a license to raise children, and I think he is right, because what you sometimes see, how people handle children, it's terrible. I think one of the important things, and I stressed that in my book, "Look at the child, not as an extension of ourselves, not as something to be handled for our own purpose, but like a flower that you helped to grow." This was the concept, I think, the basic concept. You do not use a child for your own purposes. You help him develop. Of course you try to get your ideas, your way of thinking, your *weltanschauung* into the child. That can't be helped. It's frightening how you succeed in doing what you don't want. For instance, I found out to my horror, many, many years later, that an ethnic prejudice I had, which I inherited from my parents, and I very consciously tried not to give it to Peter, came up one day when we talked about someone. "Did you like her?" "Well, I didn't particularly like her. I guess it's because I know she is of (this and this) background, and I can't stand that background." "How did you know that?" and he said, "I've always known that all my life." So things do get across, even if you consciously try not to get it across.

I was going to say, "How old was Peter when Reich died?"

He was thirteen when he died, but in the last year, when Peter was eleven or twelve, Reich tried to put everything on that child, to have him more or less continue, and that was an unbelievable burden. Neill at one point said, "He is Peter Reich plus Wilhelm Reich. He should be just Peter Reich." He was very worried about Peter, and so was my brother, who was a psychiatrist. They were both terribly worried. We were in England in 1956 and my brother and Neill saw the child at

that time. They were terribly worried and thought that that child was not his own. He was definitely incorporating his father. Reich tried to get too much into Peter. He tried to burden him with the work. He was only a 12 year old.

That's a hard thing for a child not to do when a parent dies, in any case.

Well, Reich was still alive at that time. I had, for some reason, perhaps because I was not as well trained as those two, I had confidence that he'd be coming out of it alright. And he did. I didn't see it quite as seriously as the other two, but he did come out. It took a long time. You read his book, and that book was his catharsis. As he said, "I couldn't have written the book if I hadn't been out of it." But in his childhood, we very definitely avoided putting our conflicts or ideas on him too much, but rather, guided him. As I said, we had very few taboos. Those that were, were very definite, and there was no doubt about it.

Like what was taboo?

Taboos were playing with fire, for one. Also, when we lived in Maine, "you must never under any circumstances go alone down to the lake." He never did. Another important taboo that Reich insisted on, very definitely, was, "you must not lie. Never. You must never tell an untruth," and when it was broken he punished him. The one time that Reich really slapped the child was when another child accused him of taking his candy, and he said he hadn't taken the candy, and the candy was sticking out of his pocket.

How old was he?

Four or five. And Reich at that time said, "I don't blame you for taking the candy, but you mustn't tell a lie." The only other time that he beat him was when he played with fire. He almost set the house on fire. But, for instance, Reich had a huge library, and was quite clear with Peter. He could ask if he wanted to see a book, and Reich told him, "I'll ask if I want one of your books, and you'll ask me if you want one of my books." When he went to nursery school, he started painting, and he started painting the hallways. So Reich again explained to him, "The house is used for work, the house is used for other people. You must not paint in the hallways." But what we did was paint his room all over with oil paint, and then gave him finger paints, and he could paint his own room all over. It was washable and he could go ahead and really enjoy himself in his own room. And I can't understand why people don't do that, because children have a tendency to paint on walls, and it's the easiest thing in the world to have one wall in the child's room...

Then you can wash it off and he can do it again.

You can wash it off and he can do it over again. I remember when Peter was sick, one time, and Neill came in and Peter said he wanted something painted and Neill painted something beautiful. Reich came in, and he said he wanted a fireman, and Reich started to paint a fireman. They were up for quite a while, but eventually were washed down.

Oh what fun. And you just used oil paint?

It was high gloss oil paint on the walls, and then we gave him finger paints, to do whatever he liked on the walls.

It would be fun for adults too.

Oh, sure it is. It was great fun for everybody. And I never understood why this isn't something people do more frequently. And it stopped the painting in the hallways. When we lived in Forest Hills we lived on a street with very heavy traffic and the bus going by, Reich taught Peter, when he played in the garden and the ball would roll out, never to run into the street by rushing with him to the curb, stopping dead, and by doing this over and over again. He realized you stop at the

curb. These were the only taboos I can think of, that were definite. Of course, touching hot stuff was the very first word that Peter learned, the German word for "hot." I said "heis." "Don't touch."

How about letting him express his anger? Did you have taboos on how he could and couldn't?

No.

Could he hit you?

There was very little hitting, actually. Very little hitting of anybody. When he went to nursery school, that was one thing that upset us very much. There was one child who hit all the other children, and all the other children, who had never hit before, started hitting. We never found out why the good things aren't picked up, why the bad things are. And he used to say, "I am (this one)," and started to hit. And I said, "No, you are Peter, and you don't hit." It was a strange thing. Of course, he had to express anger. He was encouraged to cry, for instance. "Boys don't cry." Reich was very sad about this. Boys *do* cry, and men *should* cry, and *everybody* should cry. He kept on telling him, "let go, and cry." So that was, even in the letter Reich wrote him when Peter was eleven or twelve, "If you feel like crying, cry. If you are unhappy, just cry and get it out." That was very definitely encouraged, to express his feelings.

Were there areas that you felt were easier for you as a mother and harder? Would you be able to think of things? That you were a very good mother in that area, or that you had difficulty in other areas?

Well no. We were all very easy in expressing love, and in hugging, in having physical contact. Reich was very, very strict about, when Peter was beyond babyhood, that you should not be in my bed. That was a taboo that was put on me that I did not particularly like.

Why do you think he did and you didn't?

And he let Peter stay in his bed, but Peter wasn't allowed to be in my bed.

Was he jealous?

I don't know what it was. I remember- how shall I express it?- He had the capacity of making me feel guilty that normal people wouldn't have guilt feelings about, so that, at one time, Peter and I were visiting again at his sister's house at the post. They had no room and they stayed at a motel and it was unbelievably cold, and we had two beds and we each had two very thick blankets, and Peter kept saying "I'm so cold I can't sleep," so finally I said "Come, we'll put all of the blankets on one bed and we'll all sleep in one bed," which was absolutely the normal thing to do. Peter was 8 years old or 9 years at the time, and I had the most dreadful guilt feelings, which is strange, you know.

Was it his forceful personality?

I think so. It was such a strict thing. "The child must not be in your bed," you know? It gave me guilt feelings. And another thing... I prevailed, though, and I'm glad I did...that the moment the child could read, he should not be read to. "No, I'm going to read to him," because some of the books at that time- Peter was about eight, nine years old, were too difficult, maybe too long for him to read by himself, and he enjoyed being read to. And so I continued to read to him, even though he was reading by himself. I continued to read books to him for quite a while.

Why did Reich think he should not be read to?

He felt that at that point he should be independent enough to do his own reading...

How old was he then?

Eight or nine. But I continued to read to him aloud. I think Peter enjoyed it, and I enjoyed it. So there is one thing where I prevailed. I definitely continued reading.

Were there other areas where you felt you had to differ?

Not necessarily. When Reich was living in Washington, when Peter was twelve, and he was having all those difficulties, and was really unbearable, like most twelve year olds, and he felt especially that he identified with his father, his father went through all those troubles, and the world was persecuting him. We were living alone together, Peter and I, and all the anger came against me, and I absolutely felt I don't have to take it. And I decided at that time, instead of letting him go to the public school, I tried to send him to a boarding school, and Reich at that time felt he shouldn't, and "if he goes to a private school, maybe he should go to a military academy". And I said, "Under no circumstances." Well Reich was very much taken with the Air Force at that time, and things like that, and I said, "I'll send him to a Quaker school," which he eventually did go to. And Reich always said, "He is not basically a pacifist," and I said, "Well he doesn't have to be basically a pacifist."

The Quaker schools are superb in the United States.

It was a very good experience, in any case, and the moment he was away from me, at school, our own relationship improved considerably, because the anger no longer came against me, it came to whoever was out there, which was much more distributed over a large variety of people rather than against one person. Actually, it's interesting that Peter, when he wrote his book, called me one day, and he said that he was writing about the period when he was at Oakwood School. He all of a sudden realized how terribly isolated I must have been, and lonesome...It came to him at that point, and I told him "You know, I wasn't, really," because at that point, I was just starting my teaching career. I was still working for my degrees, various degrees. So between studying, and working full time, I was so busy that I didn't have time to feel sorry for myself, or even to feel isolated. But I found it interesting that at that point it occurred to him.

"Gee, what was Mommy doing?"

That's right.

Would you be able to give in general yourself an evaluation, according to your own ideals, as to how good a parent you were? On a one to a hundred scale...

I think you should ask Peter.

Gladys Meyer thinks I should interview children, so maybe I will.

I think, on the whole, I was a pretty good mother. I'd give myself a pretty good rating. I don't think I was either over-anxious...in fact, I was much less anxious than Reich, you know, over his physical well-being. I think I had much more trust in this self-regulating upbringing, that he would know how far to go in dangerous things, than Reich was. When he jumped, Reich always was scared. Or when he climbed, Reich would be scared. I trusted the ability to judge things much more.

Was Reich aware that he should have been less scared?

No, Reich was always scared about other people, terribly scared about other people. It's funny, he didn't trust their systems, even though he wanted to, he did not trust that they knew what they were doing.

Did he trust that he knew what he was doing?

I think so, I think so. I think so. But whenever we went on excursions, on long hikes, and didn't come back at the time we said, he would get into absolute hysterics...be ready to call out the marines, you know. Or, when I went out swimming-I'm an excellent swimmer, you know, and I have been all my life- he would stand there and say, "Don't go out that far."

Did he swim at all?

He swam, but not very much. But he was always scared, you know...When Peter would climb, he would be very anxious that he wouldn't fall, and things like that. I trusted the body much more.

Would he try not to let Peter see that he was anxious? Did he say, "Peter, don't climb that high?"

No, Peter would be aware of it, I think, that his father was anxious about it...Neill wrote about that in one of his books. He wrote that when they were building the big building, and Neill was climbing up a ladder to get the view from up there, Reich was standing down there and saying, "Don't climb up there" and "Be careful." It was very strange, this fear for other people's safety. He didn't think they really knew what they were doing...And he was anxious about Peter, very anxious about Peter's health, and he did something that I think was a little tragic, although it wasn't that tragic. Peter's eyes were not very good. I hoped, and I thought he should wear glasses, and Reich said under no circumstances would he let the child wear glasses. It came to the point where Peter started having terrible headaches, and then Reich thought that those terrible headaches- he had fallen as a child- that there may be a brain tumor developing, within the hearing of the child, so that for many years the child had the idea that he might get a brain tumor with his headaches. And I had a very good friend, a child psychiatrist, who did a marvelous job with Peter on that. We found out that he didn't have any brain tumor...I had him examined by people several times. He needed glasses urgently, and he is very near-sighted to this day, but that's all there is to it.

Was he near-sighted from the time he was very little?

He was near-sighted from the time he was eight or nine, I would say. He has been wearing glasses since he was twelve or thirteen, and he wears strong glasses, but he told me his eyes haven't gotten worse...Now that may be part of the fact that he didn't wear glasses early enough. I wore glasses early enough, and I barely need them, you see. There is eye weakness in my family. There may be something in the genes, I don't know. But Reich was very definite about the kind of clothing Peter wears. He said the way you dress a child has an influence on his feeling for himself, and so we...and that is one thing that I got from Reich. I wouldn't have given that much thought to dressing a child, as I had when Reich insisted on plain colors, and good color combinations.

Oh, that's interesting. He thought it was important not to let the child run around in mis-matched...

Yes, definitely. Very definitely. He thought very bright stripes he wouldn't like. It had all to be as plain as possible. Not fancy, but not mis-matched, and not very bright, clashing colors, and things like that...

Is there some reason why not?

Well, he said...bright colors, sure, but not bright clashing colors...He felt very strongly that the way you dress is the way you feel, that a child should have a feeling for that very early...And he has it. He still has it...His wife has an awful time to get him to wear some not conventional shirts, and things. He is now getting to the point where he'll wear some not so conventional shirts and things. He's very hard to please. He has a very, very good conventional taste. It is funny, you

know, how these things go on. But that is something that I definitely followed, and I could see the reason for it. It was fun too, I mean. It was not difficult.

Have you read other things about child-rearing? Were there other things that influenced you besides Reich's ideas?

Well, I discussed with Neill, about childhood...

Was his child older than yours?

No, younger.

But he had of course been around Summerhill...

But otherwise, no, I didn't.

But how about as Peter was growing up? Would you discuss problems that you had with him? Things besides what you had with Reich or Neill?

Well, I discussed things with Gladys Meyer. Erica is two years younger than Peter, and there were the Tropps around.

Which Tropps? Both?

Yes. And I talked with my brother and sister-in-law. My sister-in-law was house-mother at Neill's for the small children. She met my brother in '48 at Neill's.

He's the one that's a psychiatrist?

Yes. He died four years ago. My sister-in-law had very definite ideas. She had three children. They all went, either to Summerhill, or to Kilquhanity, in Scotland; she had very definite ideas about raising children. She and her first husband are very good friends of Neill's. They were very much influenced by Neill. She had very definite ideas about child upbringing, and so, I talked with her.

Is she still living in England?

She is quite a woman. She has a very strong Scottish accent. She is a pure Scot-raised in Paisley and related to Rob Roy McGregor—and she is quite a woman. She is really a remarkable woman.

Really, part of the fun of doing this dissertation has been meeting people. I'm interested in children, but...

Kristie, of course, has very definite ideas on child upbringing, and the grandchildren love her, and are very fond of her, and she is to a certain extent bringing up some of the grandchildren because they live in the same house, and the parents are busy. Ilona is fifteen now, and when she comes home she is with Kristie.

A.S. Neill's wife...

Ena is still carrying Summerhill.

Do you know her?

Oh yes, I know her very well.

'Cause I'd also like to interview her.

Yah. She is carrying on Summerhill. I may see her when I go. I wrote to her and said...I haven't seen her for a couple of years...and said when I come next time I would like to see her.¹

After you come back, I can write her and use your name?

Oh, you can always use my name as reference. She knows me well enough. There's no reason not to.

Oh good. I do plan to try to go to England...

Well, you know...there is Leila Berg, who has written children's books, and was very much influenced by Neill. She has written several children's books, and has been very much into self-regulation. She has been very much influenced by it. And you know that book, "The Rights of Children" by Paul Adams and my brother? They wrote that together.

What is your brother's name?

Robert Ollendorf. "The Rights of Children."

You know, I think there's a very recent book out by that name. I was confused. That must have been quite a while ago.

Well, it's about five years ago, I would say, that that came out.

And the other author is Adams?

Paul Adams. He is a child psychiatrist in Louisville, Kentucky. He is head of the Department of Child Psychiatry, and he and my brother worked together a great deal, with autistic children, and they wrote that book together, on the rights of children. He's a great guy, Paul Adams.

Oh really?

Yes. He's very good, very good.

There's a book by Margaret Ribble called...

Oh, that is an old one. When I had Peter, somebody gave me that book.

It's been reprinted just recently.

So you see that was a book I read. It was called "The Rights of Infants," or something.

Did you review it for one of the Journals? Somebody did.

No, somebody did, but I didn't. I only wrote about self-regulation, and then I wrote reports on that, administrative reports, until I wrote the book.

By the way, are there any writings that are unpublished that are floating around, by Reich or by Neill on children?

¹ Ena died in 1997. Zoe has run the school since 1986.

No, I think everything is published that Neill has written.

When you were bringing up Peter, would friends or relatives, in Forest Hills or Maine, notice that you were bringing up Peter differently from the way other people did?

I think so. People would notice it, but not terribly. For instance, I remember when he was tiny and I used to put him into the baby carriage down to the village, and I used to not smother him in blankets and things, and when it was warm, I would put all the blankets back. When I would come out of a store I would find the blanket all over him. People would come and feel sorry for that poor child. I remember one occasion, some relatives came and brought some candies, and I let him take the whole box, and they said, "Won't he eat all of the candies at the same time if you let him take the whole box?" I said, "No, he will eat what he likes and that's it." Actually, I think he took two pieces, and then offered it to everybody. He would not- again, he knew how much he could eat. I trusted him.

And you knew that his body knew that...

I trusted him enough to give him that whole box, and I knew it wouldn't do him any harm. He would not go overboard with it. But otherwise, I don't know. I didn't see too many relatives anyhow. I was pretty much cut off from them.

Actually, one thing I meant to ask you was what your upbringing was like, what your family was like...

When I married Reich, he made it very clear he married me and not my family and he had absolutely no conflict. I had a couple of cousins, whom I like very much, here in town and I was always very close as a young girl, and he met them. He was a physician, and he liked him quite a bit, but it was a very formal contact, just once or twice in all the years, and he met my other relatives once, and that was it. He had nothing to do with my mother, who was alive at that time, and didn't write to her, had no contact with her. He had contact with my brother, they were corresponding, because my brother was aware of Reich's existence even before I was aware of Reich's existence. My brother was a very active Socialist in Germany, and every Socialist in Germany at that time knew about "The Mass Psychology of Fascism," and about Reich. My brother was always interested in psychiatry, so he knew about Reich before I had any contact with Reich, and he corresponded, somewhat, with Reich, about psychologic questions. But later on, my brother went and had orgone therapy, and then training, in Norway, with Dr. Raknes, and worked in England as a psychiatrist, and used orgone therapy, his own adaptation.

I was asking you where you were brought up.

I was brought up in Eastern Germany. My father had an advertising agency and was publishing newspapers. I was trained in the advertising agency as an apprentice. I learned bookkeeping and was married once in '32, really because we didn't want to get married but we decided something is going to happen and we might as well get married, which turned out to be very lucky, because my first husband was an ardent pacifist, and was very much on the "Wanted" list of the Nazis and had to leave very early, and I, of course, had to leave with him. We went to Paris. I spent six years with him, and then I got divorced. We were married just three years.

What year was that?

We left in '33, and I got divorced in '35. I came to America in early '39. I met Reich through a Socialist friend of mine who was his laboratory assistant, whom I had met in Paris through our contact with the Socialist student, and met Reich through her, September, October '39...

What sort of work were you doing?

I was working here...in Paris, I worked for the American Joint Distribution Committee, and when I came here, I started to work for the Allied Jewish Appeal as a file clerk, which was a dreadful thing, absolutely dreadful, but I knew everyone, I was glad to find some work, and it paid fairly well. Then when Reich offered that I work with him...he needed some help as a secretary and in the lab, so I very gladly accepted that and started to work in the lab. I did all the bookkeeping and all the administrative work, and then I went to the lab assistant's school, in N.Y. to get a little bit more of the traditional lab background, traditional lab techniques. Then I kept on working with Reich fourteen years. I could do a little bit of everything. I could do lab work, administration, the household...

How did that work, working so closely with your husband?

It worked well. It was, in a way, not that close, because Reich spent a great deal of time, first of all, writing, training people; he had a great number of people who came for training-physicians and social workers and teachers. So it wasn't that close, you know. We didn't see that much of each other.

So it wasn't like sharing an office or something...

No. I was downstairs, he was upstairs, and I worked in the lab, of course under his direction, but very much on my own, later on. So that worked out alright. In fact, it worked very well, and of course I could...it worked well with the child, too, because the child was in the house. I felt always I was very lucky because I did not have to give up working to be a mother, you see. And Reich tried to spend some time with the child. And he did. They were very close, very close.

That same advantage worked for him, I'm sure, in that he worked at home.

Right. So he could see the child.

If you hadn't met Reich, how do you think you would have raised Peter differently?

It's very hard to imagine, you know, very hard to imagine. I probably would have been much more traditional, in many things. I know that...I was very upset when I stayed with some friends who were compulsive about cleanliness, even before meeting Reich. I said, "When I have a child, I will not be obsessed with these things." I'm sure I would have been fairly easy, because I...especially with punishment, because I always resented having been punished by my mother, very strictly, and having been brought up by my mother, very strictly, I resented that very much, and I would not have continued that.

SEPTEMBER 18, 1978, PART 2

Last time we were talking about what sorts of hopes or expectations you might of had of Peter as a child and I think you were telling me, you said something very nice about Myron Sharaf.

Yeah.

And that's all I remember.

Yeah. That I always thought that if Peter grows up to be like that, that I'll be happy, you know. Well, they are still very good friends, very close friends and I'm happy with the way he is doing what he is doing. He was studying when I saw him last in graduate school.

I think he had just gone back to graduate school.

Well, he is in his last year now, enjoys his studies, is writing, is working.

When he was little, did you have, do you remember what you expected he would be like, or what you hoped he would be like when he grew up?

No. I had no definite ideas, absolutely none.

Would you have cared if he wanted to be a, I don't know what, a ditchdigger or...

Whatever. I wouldn't have cared. I mean whatever he felt. I didn't think he would want to be a ditchdigger! But if he had wanted to choose arts or science, I wouldn't have cared. For a while he was very much interested in geology. I didn't care. Somebody told him it wouldn't be a good idea for a Jewish boy to do that.

To do geology?

To go into geology because most of that had to do with Arabic oil and...

Oh.

So, he was interested in that and I think he still is interested in formations and things like that but he wasn't that interested that he had to do it.

What field is he in?

Public health. He is really more interested in concerns for people and...

Than rocks!

Than rocks. Right. Right.

When you were bringing Peter up this way, were there many other people practicing self-regulation?

Oh, there was a group around Organomic Research Center, more or less tried to...physicians...

Would you even vaguely be able to estimate how many children might be involved or how many families?

I don't know. It's very hard, maybe 10 to 15, something like that at least that we knew about.

And then eventually were there more families of patients also?

I would think so. I really wouldn't know.

You didn't work that much...What would you say would characterize a self-regulated child, let's say up to the age of four. How would a self-regulated child be different from other children?

I think he would be very outgoing, the main characteristic outgoing, accept people, accept things as they came along, easy to get along with, not terribly shy and in a way I would say daring. I have a picture, for instance, of Erica Wolfe and Peter running in and out of water and you know without any inhibitions and fears. Outgoing, friendly. It's hard to say, it was a long time ago, you know, thirty years ago. It's a long time.

Had you yourself had very much psychotherapy before Peter was born? Or anything at all?

I had, in my whole life, about six weeks of psychotherapy before a major operation and that was all.

Oh, in preparation for the operation.

Yes. That was all...not that I would have hesitated to have any if I needed it; I never felt the need for it.

It never came up as an issue.

No. And of course it would have been more or less impossible for any student of Reich....

Was Peter planned?

Yes. He was planned.

Why did you decide to become a mother at that time?

I was 35 and I figured that I wouldn't get pregnant very fast, it was growing very late and I definitely wanted a child, was desperate for a child and very much wanted a child. Reich already had two teenage daughters.

How old were you and Dr. Reich when Peter was born?

Well, I was 35 and Reich was 12 years older.

About 47.

47.

Do you remember how you felt when you found out you were pregnant?

It was very strange. We were in Maine and I had really strong stomach cramps. I ate like a horse and all sorts of things and never had any stomach cramps but evidently when I bent over for a long time I started to get these cramps and I didn't realize. There was a local nurse who knew, and, I met her in the street and she looked and she said, "oh, you must be pregnant". And I said, "how do you know?" She said, "you look like it" and I said, "I wouldn't know" and she was right. It was really incredible. She said she can see it on the sixth, seventh week already when a woman was pregnant. She had a sixth sense for it somehow. She was right and I felt afterwards as healthy and as well as I have never felt in my life. Throughout the whole pregnancy. I felt just absolutely great. Fabulously well.

So you didn't have any disturbing psychological or physical symptoms.

None. The delivery was difficult but the moment it was over I felt great again.

Were you awake during the whole thing?

No. They gave me some sedative. I was more or less awake but I could have gotten up the next day but of course, at that time they wouldn't let you get out of bed for 10 days.

10 days, that is?

Because that was a rule at that time and I could have gotten up right the next day...I felt marvelous.

What sort of preparations did you make for the baby coming home?

Well we had a room for Peter. We bought some secondhand baby furniture which I painted very carefully. And I did some knitting and I nursed the baby. I used the nipple funnel on my breast and I didn't have any difficulties at all.

The funnel?

They are like a tin funnel wrapped in steel wool and covered with cotton: a little accumulator on both nipples and never had any trouble whatsoever.

Was that to make the milk come?

No, it was to prevent the nipple from getting soft.

Oh, it keeps it from cracking. Did you use it for very long?

Well, I used it right from the beginning and I used it momentarily, after a while it's strong enough. And I nursed him for about 6 months.

How did you, on what occasion did you stop?

Well, I think the milk had more or less stopped because I was working the whole time.

By now you were back in Forest Hills?

We were still in, well, we took the child up to Maine when he was eleven weeks old and we stayed there until September of 1944 and I nursed him still a while in Forest Hills.

Was anything else unusual happening in your life around the time that Peter was born?

No.

Do you remember when you first saw Peter? Did you see him after he was born?

I saw him right after he was born. It was very funny because the nurse said she has rarely seen a baby who looked right after birth so much like his father because he had tiny little black curls and he had very deep bruises under his eyes and very red cheeks, very very red and of course Reich's complexion was very red and he had rings under his eyes. Actually he looks more like me.

I was wondering if he had your bright eyes. You have such beautiful eyes.

He has my bright eyes. They were difficult to see because he wears glasses. He's very nearsighted.

That's right.

Can you describe the living and sleeping arrangements with Peter? Were you in the same room?

Well, he had his own room, a crib, sort of a crib, in Maine we actually we had a little cradle for him. As he got older he had a child's bed. I had painted it. It was a wooden bed.

He never slept with you.

No.

That meant that you had to get up to nurse him?

Yes. But he was a very good child. I had to nurse him in the evening, late at night, late in the evening and in the morning. He always slept through and I never had to get up much. That was one thing that was marvelous. Almost from the beginning he slept through.

Did he sleep a lot during the day?

He did but not for too long.

You were working quite hard the whole time

Yes. Yes. And we had help and then when he was 2 ½ he went to nursery school.

Do you remember what was the most difficult (gap) was there anything that was difficult?

It wasn't. I remember when he was first eating solid food, that the woman we had in the house (we had household help) was amazed at the ease with which feeding was accomplished. I wasn't sitting for hours coaxing the child to eat. When he didn't eat, he didn't eat, I mean it was no big thing, you know, it was very easy.

Did you and Dr. Reich completely exclude him when you were in the bathroom, when you were going to the bathroom, or having baths, or were you rather casual about letting him wander in and out?

Absolutely casual about it. I don't remember how it was handled.

What if the child just wandered in?

He wouldn't.

Just wouldn't. It wouldn't be set up that way.

No it wouldn't. Never, as far as I know, it never happened, it couldn't. I think impossible.

How about Peter's own sexual play. Do you remember seeing him masturbate?

He probably did. I don't remember how it was. I think Reich told him not to do it in public.

And how about nudity among the family?

Reich was always conscious of this skin condition, very much concerned about his privacy.

But you were somewhat more relaxed?

I think I was more relaxed. Reich was rather strange that way so he did not want me to have the child in bed with me. It was such a taboo, that he should not sleep with me even as a small child and I remember once with Pete for Thanksgiving we were staying in a small motel and it was unbelievably cold and we each had the very same blankets and Peter kept asking me, "I'm so cold and I can't sleep." And so we finally decided to crawl into bed together and put the two blankets together and we both had guilt feelings about it.

Do you have any idea what that was about?

Well, he had those feelings. So he was absolutely adamant that the child never sleep with me. On the other hand *he* took the child in bed.

That must have been annoying.

It was. It was. It certainly was.

Do you remember Peter having sexual play with other little children?

Well, I know that he discussed that with his father. He did not talk about it with me very much but he at times felt that his father was pushing him into sexual play. He was not quite ready. I know very little about that.

Like at what age?

I don't know. Do you want to talk to Peter about it? Because that was one aspect of his life that he very little discussed with me, talked to me about. He discussed it with his father. Reich was always aware of when to talk to him about it but I wasn't. I was out of the picture about that somehow.

And idea why?

No. I don't know.

Or that somehow it's better for a boy to ask a man?

Maybe. Maybe. But I think that Reich was very conscious of this in the child and Eva felt that she was to a certain extent punished for such concerns.

Do you remember Peter getting angry when he was very small?

He would get angry. I don't know. I know that he made a very cute face.

What if he got angry with you? Would he yell at you, or hit you?

No. I don't remember that. I know I occasionally struck his hand. Reich had punished him only twice, but I almost had to run out of the room.

But how about when Peter got angry. How would he express it?

I don't remember. He did not have tantrums. That I know. He never had them. But if he did it couldn't have been very serious. I remember one angry outburst puzzled us when he went to nursery school a child was very destructive and all the other parents complained that their children had special enjoyment out of this child behaving in a destructive manner and it puzzled us how the children who are usually not destructive take that aspect and imitate it instead of the other way around. We couldn't quite understand it but otherwise he was not a destructive child.

Not with other children?

He would not, he wasn't very destructive and easy to be reasoned with.

Did you feel free to express your own feelings to Peter when you were angry?

Oh yes. Yes.

And how about when you were sad? Would you let him see you cry?

Oh yes. He was aware, he would know I was upset.

You didn't attempt to hide a lot of your emotions?

No. No.

Are there any emotions that should not be expressed in front of a child?

No.

Do you remember how you handled table manners?

Well, he was eating with us from a very young age. Reich was very conscious of table manners and he tried to impress them on him.

I think you talked about this.

I think he picked up enough so that to this day he eats with the knife and fork, European style, because that's the way we eat and that's the way I eat to this day. I wouldn't change. He eats that way too. I was taught very strictly by my parent's good table manners. Now they differ, of course, from American table manners. In America, when you eat with one hand, you have the other hand under the table. You must never, under any circumstances have your hand on the china. So, I mean these are things that are taught to you in early childhood. Now, I didn't teach Peter that much, I wasn't that strict. But he learned to behave himself.

Did other people ever notice that Peter was raised any differently?

I don't think so. I don't think so.

How did you handle whatever needs you and Dr. Reich had for privacy? Were there times when you just wanted to be alone?

Oh well, I mean Reich's teaching, I mean people coming into the house, and he had to learn very early that there are times when the parents are not available. Period. That he cannot, under any circumstances disturb or walk into the room when patients are there. When I was working he was not supposed to interrupt except in an emergency. He was quite aware very early that there was such a thing as, this is my time and there is nothing you can do about it. You have your time and there was enough contact and enough time for him all during the day so I don't think he was in any way deprived of contact but he was aware that there were very strict privacy rules.

And how about his privacy?

Well, I don't know whether he was aware of it or had any special need for it. An interest in reading came about very early. Reich had a wall-to-wall ceiling library and there was a corner where there were some books Peter could have, and he had his own little picture books. Reich explained to him, "These are my books, if you want any of them, you ask me. These are your books and if I want any of your books, I will ask you," and that was very strictly adhered to. And he had in Daddy's library, there was one corner, there were picture books and he was allowed to take those. On the whole he knew this is yours and this is mine, you know, you ask.

Were you concerned with the kind of school or what were your concerns with the kind of school Peter went to when he was very little?

Well, I mean we were concerned with finding a nursery school where they were not restrictive, they would not force him to eat. There was a very nice nursery school teacher... in the school... and we had a long talk with her about the fact that we did not want Peter to be forced to eat anything that he does not like. If he doesn't like it, doesn't eat it, just forget about it. He won't starve and they were, I mean the toilet and things, we were aware that they expected him to be

dry but we also said we don't want any pressure any way. They understood that and later on we, when he went to elementary school, somebody recommended a sort of so-called progressive school in Jamaica. He didn't like it very much and he didn't learn to read. He was five and we expected him to learn to read. He was terribly frustrated in that school and when we moved to Maine and he went to that very small Maine primary within in 6 weeks he learned to read. They had the old-fashioned method, it made sense to him, and he read, and became a voracious reader. And then he went to public school and both Reich and I thought that public school, decided on especially the public school in Maine in that small village in Rangeley because all the children went there from all strata of society, whatever you have there, from the poorest ditchdigger's son or daughter to the professional people, you know, so we thought that was a good democratic way of doing and so he went to school there through fourth grade and then we moved to Arizona and he went to public school there and when he came back he stayed with me and he went to public school and liked it. And then, when Reich went to prison Peter became very obnoxious as his whole feeling against the world came to me. And I said, I don't have to take that and I decided to send him to....

I guess everybody who wasn't in prison with his father got it?

Well somehow. Somehow. The world treated his father badly and I am part of the world, he was angry so I decided to send him to boarding school. I, at that time was very close to the Quakers and I decided to send him to boarding school and he did go to for four years and when we had the interview he said he knows that I want him to go to this school but his heart will end up in public school. It's alright and he ended up with everybody saying that there is such a change. I mean he became completely identified with the school. His concern for people is still very great; his professional goal's in that direction. He is glad he went to this school. He enjoyed it. Some of the teachers had a lasting influence on him. I'm glad I sent him there.

Do you remember how he handled money as a small child or whether he was given an allowance?

He was given an allowance and he, I'll tell you a story how he handled money. He had his heart set, he somehow he was in the cowboy stage, he had often a holster with a pistol even though we were against arms in that sense, we got them. And he wanted the two gun set and Reich said, you just want the one gun set, you want me to give you one two gun set, you save your money and buy it yourself. And this is one of the nicest stories. I can show you the thing, I still have it because he saved enough money to buy the two gun set and he went into the store to buy it and he saw a bracelet and he thought it was so beautiful and he wanted to give it to me. And he bought the bracelet. And then he came and he sent a letter to us and he mailed it and so he didn't have much money left and he bought one of those things...

A compass?

A compass also for his daddy because Daddy likes to work with these things and of course had no money left for the two gun set but that bracelet I still have. I'll never give it up. It came from Rangeley, it has a little sign of Rangeley on it, it has a cross on it and it has something else on it. Beautiful. Of course he got the two gun set eventually anyhow but I thought that was in a way characteristic of how he saved and he wanted to save and is how he wanted to spend his money. I think he's handling money very well. When he went to college and went abroad for his junior year abroad I put the, I mean we had very little money, and...

Where did he go to school?

Bates College. I put the money for the junior year abroad in a bank account, a French bank account, and I said this is the money for the year and there isn't any more. If you can't handle it, you must come back and it's too bad. He spent the whole year in France and he did a lot of

jaunts: Switzerland and Germany, Greece, Israel, where he worked for a while and he came back and still had \$200 in the bank, which I think was pretty good.

And you really thought it was just about enough to get him through?

Yes. I thought it was just what I would have spent. I mean he has earned money when he knew that we were low, to say the least, so when he was 14 he started to have a half scholarship and when he was 14 and 15 he worked for the summer. And he worked one summer in Texas and he worked one summer in Colorado, carrying rocks for a geologist, and he worked one summer for *Time Magazine* in New York. He has had practical experience doing these things. So he knows what money is all about. He handles it well at this stage...And again, he was aware from a young age, 14 or 15 what the family money situation was like.

You were supporting both of you from then on, weren't you?

There was some money from Reich but not very much and he was aware of it, I mean he knew exactly what the financial situation was, which I think is possible to do.

Actually that's about all the questions I have to ask you. You know, something you said a while ago intrigued me. You said, when I asked if you'd ever had any therapy, needless to say most of the people I interview are first generation. The next generation, so they tend to be patients and you said, of course it would have been difficult for any of Reich's followers to ever have had any, would you ever, if you'd ever had felt a trauma in your life, would you consider any other kind of therapy?

I don't know. I haven't thought about it.

I didn't mean it quite so narrowly as just for you.

Well, before my operation I saw Dr. Baker and it was difficult for both of us because I felt I wouldn't be quite open.

This was after Reich died?

No. It was six weeks and that was it. I don't know. I know very little about psychotherapy but I think if I trusted a person I wouldn't care what kind of therapy, just a need to talk to somebody and I was lucky in that I had at the most difficult two difficult times that I had people I could just talk to. Gladys and I are close friends, we both needed to talk and we had both more or less the same background, so that was a catharsis for both of us to talk. It was a pleasure. I think it was nice.

Had Dr. Wolfe died?

Dr. Wolfe had died and the other time was when I had the difficulties with Peter and just at the time when Reich was in prison and just after he died and I had a very good friend who was a child psychiatrist but who was a friend who I could talk to openly and again, I didn't get anything except a sounding board, where I could talk without necessarily being told things or being advised things. It was just that I could get it out of my system and I was lucky that I had it both times when I needed it and at this point if I need to talk I talk to Peter.

That's nice about having grownup children, isn't it?

Right. Right. And I can talk to Peter and I can take, I mean Peter doesn't hesitate to be very frank and tell me what may be wrong with me, you know, and I can take it from him. Sometimes I almost think he treats me like a peer, which is rather funny but I value his judgment, which I think is good judgment and since we are very alike, very much alike, he can understand some of my

difficulties, you know, that I may experience in a relationship with other people much better than anybody else because he may go through the same difficulties because we are basically very much alike. So it's nice to have somebody that I can talk to.

Thank you for time. I really appreciate it.