



KATI MARTON & VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF

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LIVE from the New York Public Library

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PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening, my name is Paul Holdengräber, and I'm the Director of Public Programs here, now called LIVE from the New York Public Library. Flash Rosenberg—another applause for her. **(applause)** As you know, my mission at the Library is quite simple. You've heard me say this a hundred times. My mission is simply to make the lions roar, to make a heavy institution levitate, to provide you with an evening of cognitive theater. It is a pleasure to welcome you to this evening, then. It has been quite a season so far. Just this last week, we had Wes Anderson and Noah Baumbach, Ruth Reichl and William Grimes and Dan Barber, and tonight we have the

great, great, great pleasure of welcoming Kati Marton and Volker Schlöndorff. We will end the fall season with an evening on the Velvet Underground, with Lou Reed and others, preceded by a conversation I will have with the great Spanish writer Javier Marías.

Please consider supporting the New York Public Library. Become a Friend of the New York Public Library for a mere forty dollars. That gets you for one year very nice treats such as discounted tickets to all LIVE from the New York Public Library events. If you ask me, that's a pretty cheap date. After tonight's conversation there will be a Q and A. I ask you to keep it to rather being questions rather than making lengthy comments such as the one you hear me making now. A question—I have calculated it quite precisely—takes about fifty-three seconds. Kati Marton has agreed to sign books at the conclusion of this evening.

Tonight it is such a pleasure for me personally to welcome Kati Marton back to the New York Public Library and for the first time Volker Schlöndorff, whose films quite frankly mattered a great deal to me as I was trying to grow up. I recall the power of *Young Törless* had over me. It is rare to feel that a film does such a service rather than a disservice to a book one loves. Schlöndorff's *Young Törless* is every bit, in my view, as powerful and pungent as Musil's great novella. If you have not seen it, please do, as well as *The Tin Drum*, Schlöndorff's great adaptation of Günter Grass's novel. Since then he has worked with John Malkovich, Sam Shepard, and many others.

The publication of Kati Marton’s memoir coincides with the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is her own Cold War memoir based on her translation of the Hungarian secrets that the Hungarian secret police kept of her own family. Upon reading her deeply moving memoir *Enemies of the People: My Family’s Journey to America*, I knew I had to showcase it, for all kinds of reasons, which I would like to go into, but I think you want to hear them, but quite frankly, the story moved me deeply, having just very recently interviewed my ninety-year-old father, who when he’s asked when he will retire says he’s too old to retire. I knew I had to showcase it at the New York Public Library, and I’m very happy that this book is getting the recognition it warrants. I’m not in the habit of reading reviews, even less so blurbs in public. I do read reviews, but I don’t usually mention them in public. But tonight is an exception. I will read just one before Volker Schlöndorff asks Kati Marton some tough-minded questions. This from Louis Begley, the author of *Wartime Lies*. “Kati Marton has written a candid and courageous book about the chapter in her parents’ lives that most daughters would have preferred to leave unexamined.” Please warmly welcome to this stage Volker Schlöndorff and Kati Marton.

(applause)

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Good evening. A hard act to follow, I thought, especially when I saw the drawings, but this will almost be a courtroom drama, so the drawings will be welcome. A spy novel it has been called, a candid autobiography, or is it a book about the parents—It seems at first like a ploy of Borges or DeLillo or so—“How do I tell a story? Well, I have this brilliant idea, I will tell the story through the files of the secret

police.” But it is not invented. It is real. I mean, how, so the first question is this book being based upon files, how did you even know that they existed?

KATI MARTON: Here’s how the journey began. My father spent his last year, aged ninety-three, living with my husband and me after my mother’s death, and during that final year the Hungarian Foreign Minister came over and presented him with Hungary’s highest civilian medal for—principally for his role in the Hungarian Revolution. With that medal came a rather unusual addition—and that was a file. Just one thin file that had been taken from the secret police archives based on my parents’ prison interrogation. My father, for the entire year that he lived with us, never opened that file. And this was characteristic of the man. He simply didn’t want to go back to that dark place. He and my mother, after all, had lived through Europe’s two most nightmarish chapters, first the Nazis and then the Communists. He never opened it. When he died, I did. I opened the file, and I started reading. I stayed up an entire night reading, weeping, and it was clear to me that there had to be—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: I’m a director, I just try to figure the props—so was these transcribed things, were these letters? What was in that file, I mean, physically, or was it just a dire account?

KATI MARTON: No, it was interrogation—as you know, and some of you may know, my parents were journalists during the Cold War, the last independent reporters left behind the Iron Curtain, and, of course, their days were numbered because they were deemed to be, as the title of my book says, enemies of the people because they were

working for the Americans. At a time when most people living in the Soviet zone would rather cross the street to avoid brushing past an American, my parents were employed by the Americans, my father the Associated Press, my mother United Press, until their—and they covered all the chapters in the Stalinization of Hungary until their own arrests. So this one thin file, which was presented to my father to demonstrate that Hungary is now a new and free country and that we don't do this to people anymore. It was like, "here it is. we are a new country." Nevertheless, he did not want to look at that. I translated the file for my children. It was prison interrogation, and it was pretty rough stuff. I—because my father was so shut down about the past, I did not realize the full brutality of what he had suffered, and what he had suffered was nothing short of Abu Ghraib–style interrogation whereby for hours he was kept facing a wall while obscenities were shouted at him.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And didn't know what had become of his wife or his children.

KATI MARTON: Well, this is the strongest weapon they had—and can you think of a crueler weapon against a man than to withhold any knowledge of his children? And of course he didn't realize that his own wife, my mother, was occupying a nearby cell in the same maximum-security fortress, so that's really how they broke the man.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: This is what you discovered and now I can understand that you went to Budapest and you wanted to have a look of what more there is and so

you have to fill out a form, you go to this building where the secret police was and then is it like the Reading Room in the Public Library?

KATI MARTON: Oh, exactly, yes.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Or is it in the basement or how—what is the location like and the files?

KATI MARTON: You—once a director, always a director. The files are in a very beautiful house that once belonged to a merchant prince.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Much better already, no typecasting with the location now.

KATI MARTON: And the room in which I awaited for—eventually they summoned me and told me I got the call from the head archivist, “come, we’ve found the files, and bring two empty suitcases.” You can only imagine my panic at that. And so I’m sitting with the head archivist in this beautiful room, as I say in the book, more appropriate for elegant musical evenings than for its current purpose and, one after the other, clerks in white coats, I don’t know, in the East Bloc, they always wore white coats, wheeling in like supermarket shopping carts—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, the dirtier the business, of course, you want to have a clean dress when you do it, in white, men in white.

KATI MARTON: So you could go from your office to the Party meeting with your suit clean. And that was a pretty terrifying spectacle, and the head archivist turned to me and said, “Yes, it’s one of our biggest files.” You know, as if I should be proud—I was terrified.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, you should be, in a sense—if your father. This all sounds very dire, but as Paul said, the movie—the movie? Yes, soon to be a movie, not by me, so I can advertise it—it is a very, very intimate story you’re telling, and it’s what they call a human interest story more than a political thing, because—so the parents had survived the Holocaust and the German occupation of Hungary, which was collaborating largely with the Nazis until then Eichmann came in to apply the Final Solution, and your parents had survived thanks to false papers, passports, and so on. Had survived, we have to add, which you didn’t know at the time, because they were of Jewish background and should have been wearing the star—

KATI MARTON: Which they didn’t.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Which they didn’t. So they survived. Now here comes 1945, and at first this is a liberation—you have made it. You weren’t born then.

KATI MARTON: Thank you.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And we know, of course, today and for many decades how these Central Middle European and East European states were hostage to the Soviets—you used the word Stalinization. But in 1945, one didn't know it, well, first of all, it was freedom. It was freedom for the first time. It was freedom of the Nazis. Your father had been engaged in the resistance against the Nazis, so he should have been celebrating, and yet here, as early as 1946, he finds himself be observed by the AVO, by the secret police, because already he didn't feel that this government was going to be the right one.

KATI MARTON: Well, no, and he didn't realize. There's so much in the files. By the way, AVO is the Hungarian Stasi, or KGB, if you will, and I think the only one that was as ruthless, as harsh, in its methods was the Stasi, as complete in its surveillance and terror, but my father first was noticed by the Soviet occupiers in 1946 when he signed on. My parents were, again, as under the Nazis, they were unfit for employment. Under the Nazis, it was because of their Jewish background. Under the communists, it was because they were of bourgeois background. Every single document in the files begins, "Of bourgeois background." So my mother lost her teaching job. My father, who was trained as an economist, had to find a different line of work, and who came along, promising a great profession, a great adventure, but the Western media? First the London *Daily Telegraph* and then the Associated Press and the United Press for my mother, because all

the Western reporters were evicted by then, and only a *crazy* Hungarian would sign up to work for the West, so there wasn't a—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Not only he signed up, he kind of, you know, it was an open provocation. I mean the way, obviously, he dressed in English tailored suits and he was very much of a dandy. He was—I mean, he did not pretend to be a proletarian all of a sudden—

KATI MARTON: No, not for a minute.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Quite the opposite, and this is how he was spotted. Of course, it is always a generational thing that the Middle European Austro-Hungarian gentleman would dress in a certain way, and this he would not give up, and this is what kind of attracted immediately besides his opinions because I think he—when the Soviets tried to interfere—tried, I mean they did interfere in 1946, as early as that, but there was not even a state probably.

KATI MARTON: Hungary was not yet communist.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: It was not yet communist.

KATI MARTON: But that's when the file on him began. By 1950, the file had grown to sixteen hundred pages.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: But here it is in 1946 he says, for the first time since Hitler, you know, somebody's interfering with our interior affairs, and this in '46, you know, when people were still celebrating that they had been liberated by the Red Army, already he pointed out. So in a sense, I mean, this was before the Cold War. He almost invented it.

KATI MARTON: You know, there were times when I got quite upset with my parents, particularly my father, for this kind of flamboyance, because, after all, he wasn't a single guy who could, you know, a lone wolf who could take all sorts of chances. Very shortly, my older sister was born, and a couple of years later I was born, so he became a parent, a father, and sometimes I got quite worked up, because as a parent myself, you know, how could they—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: You wanted to blend in, but soon you were very flamboyant yourself, if I look at the pictures—you know, the stockings you had and the dresses—this is not exactly like what you imagine a child in a communist country to be dressed like.

KATI MARTON: No, but I didn't get to pick my clothes. My clothes were—the whole image that we conveyed to the world, and I think this was part of their defiance. And don't forget that they had just been through a terrible humiliation, a humbling, very proud people who had been humbled by the Nazis, and I think there was just this—they were in

their thirties, I think they were just determined to live life, which they had been cheated of.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: I know myself in Poland, although later in the fifties and sixties, that a way to say no to the regime was for instance to keep yourself in a certain way—

KATI MARTON: The old elegance. As if—I use that phrase in the book. They lived as if it was normal to walk through the front door of the American embassy when cameras were on them every minute. I have telephoto pictures that I found in the files, to have a weekly bridge game with the ambassador.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: All very proletarian.

KATI MARTON: And, most provocative at all, to drive around Budapest in a white Studebaker convertible. As I say, they might as well have been riding around in a rocket. At a time when there were two thousand private cars in all of Hungary. I mean, how provocative can you get?

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: I found this the most fascinating, maybe again because of being a director, is to make statements, political statements, not through arguments and debate and ideology but through a lifestyle.

KATI MARTON: But you're a father, too. Is that responsible behavior?

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: I don't say I'm a responsible father.

KATI MARTON: I have to talk to your children.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Yes, different time. But I can understand so you went to class. I mean, father from time to time picked you up with a white Studebaker. You had these wonderful stockings and dresses and Scottish shirts and whatnot. And what was the reaction of the other kids in school? Were you mobbed or did they admire you? Were you princesses?

KATI MARTON: Yeah, we felt like little princesses, my sister and I. You know, but kids like to be accepted. They like to pass kind of unnoticed. We were very much noticed and I think that—I kind of had this double live. Inside our home my parents created this little Western world with *Life* magazine always on the coffee table. That was considered, you know, subversive propaganda.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: It was even amazing that you were allowed to have it at home. I mean, foreign print?

KATI MARTON: Well, when they came to search the apartment when finally they arrested my parents when I was six, they—my mother described—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Why aren't you specific? Read it.

KATI MARTON: You want me to—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Yes, just maybe this just—so we see how it happened, because I remember it was a very vivid moment and one you would remember and one that was not in the files, but these are your memories.

KATI MARTON: No, this is my memory and this is called “The End of Childhood.” February 25, 1955. The overhead light in the room I shared with my older sister snapped on. My mother, a ghostly figure, hovered over our beds. “Children,” she whispered. I lifted my head for an instant before dropping back on my pillow. “You have to get up. They need to search your room.” Her voice, urgent and weary, was about to break. “Now.” I could just about see who *they* were, shadowy figures, five or six of them, forming a dark mass in the corner. “Get into our bed,” my mother said. As we slowly awoke, one of the searchers moved in. Like a hunter stalking big game, he sank his knife into our beat-up stuffed rocking horse. Straw spilled out of my oldest possession as my sister and I ran to the room next door and dove into our parents’ bed. We were too dazed to ask where Papa was. Or did we know somehow? *Elvittek*, Hungarian for “they took him away,” was a word I heard often as a child. I did not understand where people were taken to, just that they were gone, and not much more was said. So now my father, too, had been *elvittek*, taken away.

Now it was just the three of us. Mama kept us home from school the day after Papa's arrest. She knew that *they* would come back for her but not when. She also assumed that they would not arrest her in front of her children. Arrests were meant to proceed quietly with a minimum of fuss. She needed us as much as we needed her. Holding hands, we set forth determined to find out what happened to the man all three of us called Papa. While my eyes said, "stay with me," I commanded my mother, "*Szoritsd!*" or "tighter," as in, Hold my hand tighter. For the rest of her life, that word was code between us for love and fear of separation.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, you see, you say at some point in the book a wonderful line that your parents had been humiliated in the Nazi time and they were again now, and they did not like to talk about it, because they felt suffering always entails a loss of dignity. Somehow—and when you read this chapter I could feel that same attitude you have, which don't let it get too close. I mean, you know, this is not like a childhood memory. This is like you giving it in form of an account and this dignity goes all the way through your book, and that is why I find that probably your father should have been very proud of this book. I mean, it is not only well researched, it's well written.

KATI MARTON: Well, thank you, Volker.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, what do you think what would have been his reaction?

KATI MARTON: Well, I think he would have been, first of all, very disturbed by having all his secrets exposed like that, for such a private man. He never, for example—not only did we not know about the Jewish past, which I discovered earlier. But, for example, I never knew that they were trying to emigrate to New Zealand. That's how desperate they were. These quintessentially—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And your grandfather did.

KATI MARTON: To Australia.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: To Australia.

KATI MARTON: But they just—there was so many secrets. The fact that he never talked about—the fact that he had cellmates. He was in prison for almost two years and he always had cellmates, and the cellmates were, of course, working for the secret police, turning in information that would be useful in breaking my father. Some of them were really villainous characters, but he never mentioned that. He even edited out of the family history great chapters of great courage, as for example that he had been part of the very small anti-Jewish, I mean, sorry, anti-Nazi underground. Never mentioned that. I think, well, he had a relationship with the wife of a British diplomat.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, that you can understand he didn't mention.

KATI MARTON: Yes, yes. On the other side, my mother, who was a very jealous woman, then had a revenge affair with—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And all this you discover in the files of the AVO.

KATI MARTON: Pretty much, pretty much. I had a hunch about her relationship, because there was this *very* handsome, *much* younger man who was, who became our most faithful babysitter, **(laughter)** and, by the way, the woman who was paid to be our babysitter turned out to be—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: To be the spy.

KATI MARTON: To be the full-time spy. She was—it's lucky for her that she's no longer alive, because I would have enjoyed exposing her.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: It seems you didn't like her also because the way she taught you French was very stern and very severe.

KATI MARTON: But my French, you'll agree, is pretty good.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Your French is excellent, yes, she did a good job on that.

KATI MARTON: No, I didn't like her because she preferred my sister—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: I see, I see.

KATI MARTON: Who was much better behaved than I was. But I think the habit of secrecy was so deeply ingrained in that generation who went through these terrible chapters that, you know, even once we got to America they just weren't capable of being open, and when I would ask my father, you know, the most basic questions, or my mother. "Do I look like my grandmother?" Because I've never seen a photograph of my grandmother who perished in Auschwitz.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Which you didn't know, you were told that she died in an accident.

KATI MARTON: No, that she died under the rain of bombs, as so many did.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: That kind of accident.

KATI MARTON: Entirely plausible. I—her eyes would fill up and that would end the conversation—you know, how could I—so, you know, one of the great things about writing a book like this, other than the catharsis, is that I'm meeting people who. I'm

on—as you know, I’m on a book tour. I’ve been to seven cities, this is obviously my favorite stop, happens to be my hometown. But the other day a lady stepped forward when I was giving a speech in New Jersey, who said that she had been on the transport with my grandparents and gave me a very detailed description of grandparents who I had never had a physical description for, so that was kind of the last missing shard. But I think one of the reviewers said, I forget which one, that this book *really* is about surveillance, a subject that you know a great deal about.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, it seems like the whole second half of the twentieth century—I don’t know—it was like, it was all paranoia. It’s you know these secret services and all these files, because this is like picking them up at school, going to ski. You know, this is not about state secrets, this is the most banal, they were great anthropologists, and someday, you know, in a few centuries, that may be a fertile source, but it is all this paranoia, you have to know everything about the enemy, whatever that is, you know.

KATI MARTON: Why did they need my artwork?

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Your artwork collected. But then this paranoia, you know, spread over, because once your parents were in the United States, they were released after all, they got a passport to leave Hungary. They did not—let’s take it step by step, sorry. And then I come to the paranoia of the FBI and of Hoover which is really—seems to be—because your parents could have left Hungary during the

October/November '56 revolution, when hundred thousands went over to the Austria, so the first question is why didn't they leave? First answer is because they were covering a good story.

KATI MARTON: The story of their life!

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: On the other hand, they had just been released from prison after two years, so wouldn't have the first thing be, you know, take your kids and leave?

KATI MARTON: That would be my first move, yeah.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: So they had a good story.

KATI MARTON: They, yeah, for the rest of their lives, they—first of all they won every major journalistic prize for their coverage, which was brilliant and very brave, and it was to collect those prizes the following year that we came to America, not intending to stay, but suddenly my very brave mother just ran out of gas, just ran out of nerve, and she just said, “That’s it, we’re not going back. I’m finished with Europe. We’re staying here.” At age forty-five she was pregnant with my brother, so I think that added to her desperate need for the security that America offered.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: So they escaped this paranoiac universe—because six months—they don’t escape, they are allowed out. Six months after the revolution has been crushed, which they covered, all of a sudden they are given a passport to the free world, which everybody was longing for, so which is inexplicable—is it to get rid of these critical minds? But they could have just put them in prison again as well. So they, of course, raised suspicions arriving with this passport, you know, to the free world in America, and, of course, everybody would say, I mean, “these must be spies,” and now the new files start in Washington. Is this what happened?

KATI MARTON: That’s what happened. I applied for—under Freedom of Information Act I applied to get the FBI file on the family and I was told, “Forget it. That will take you ten years.” Well, it didn’t take ten years. The file arrived just as I was wrapping up the rest of the book.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: So you had a third act.

KATI MARTON: Yes, so, and the third act is that as we were settling into—we had become our full Americanization, oblivious to the fact that J. Edgar Hoover considered my parents figures of concern.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: This was the McCarthy era, of course—

KATI MARTON: Well, this was already the sixties, this was already the sixties—this went on until 1967. Meanwhile, so we had FBI agents following my parents, but at the same time the Hungarians hadn't given up on them, because they started noticing my father was making a name for himself, as he was the AP's chief diplomatic correspondent, so his byline became well known, so they figured, "Well, we might as well see if we can bring this guy around again."

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Oh, they might have thought, "I mean, if the Americans think they are spies indeed, so let's make them spies," you know.

KATI MARTON: So can you imagine? You have these two sets of goons circling each other.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: So in the years in Washington and they observed by the FBI and pursued by the Hungarians, who tried to recruit them.

KATI MARTON: And you know what ended it finally? The man who was charged with recruiting them, and, by the way, you may well ask yourself by what rationale could two people who couldn't be forced into serving as agents in their own country, why in Washington? You know, I came to the conclusion that these people really aren't all that bright. **(laughter)** You know, they just do their work, they just figure if you open enough envelopes, if you listen in on enough conversations, follow people down enough dark alleys, you will find that one little thing that we all have that we don't want known.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Either they were financially stressed, or they were unfaithful, or I mean you have to find a weakness so you can blackmail them into—of course, easier in Budapest under Soviet rule than in Washington.

KATI MARTON: So the way the thing was called off, this whole charade, was that the man in charge of it defected, and he was debriefed by the FBI—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Soon followed by the ambassador.

KATI MARTON: Soon followed by the ambassador. So the lid was blown off the attempt to—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: But you as teenagers, you were never aware of any of this.

KATI MARTON: Totally—I was always in love, I was always learning the new dance steps, I wanted to be the all-American superstar.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: So the father you discovered through the files—was very different from the one that you remembered, or did he all of a sudden explain the one you remembered?

KATI MARTON: A different—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Or did you understand him better?

KATI MARTON: Yes, more, more. I wanted to dedicate the book actually to the secret police, originally, thanks to whose relentless pursuit of my parents has restored my parents to me and in a way it did. My father was a very reserved gentleman. The Anglo-Saxon model was his role model, and obviously I don't take after him.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Fortunately.

KATI MARTON: I think I take more after my mother, but at any rate—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: But he would write everything in his AP reports, but he wouldn't tell the family.

KATI MARTON: And I didn't know how much he loved me. And this is the thing that I owe the files, is that one of his most treacherous cellmates says, "If Marton is still holding on to any secrets, the only way to get it out of him is to threaten his wife and even more his children."

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, bless this bastard.

KATI MARTON: Inglorious bastards. And, of course, among the surveillance—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: This must have been a fantastic moment—

KATI MARTON: Yes, it was.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: When you read this. Was that in Budapest or was it in the files over here, the first one?

KATI MARTON: This was in Budapest when—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: By the way, did you keep reading them in that building, or you brought them in these two suitcases to your hotel?

KATI MARTON: I filled the suitcases.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And you worked in Budapest or you brought them—

KATI MARTON: I started in Budapest, ironically in the same building where they were hidden by Christian friends during the war. That building is now one of Europe's greatest hotels, a Four Seasons, and so, you know, there was a kind of a symmetry there, too.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Did you call your sister when you found out that your father really loved you and would have done everything to save you?

KATI MARTON: Yeah, but you know my sister's so—she's my superior older sister, very critical of me, and didn't like this project at all. She, by the way, now loves, *loves* the book, but she would not—she would not, she thought this was a bad idea.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, you cannot write about your own family without making enemies.

(laughter)

KATI MARTON: No, so don't try this at home.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: You start your first chapter with a line, “Children cannot fully know their parents,” and you come back to it in the last chapter.

KATI MARTON: Well, I think that's true. I certainly didn't know they were as brave as they turned out to be, I didn't know they were as reckless, in both love and professionally. I didn't know that my father tried really hard to commit suicide twice in prison, but I mean not just kind of spontaneously but over months collecting sleeping pills. I found that to be very shocking, to think that he would miss—you know, children

are entirely self-centered, to the idea that he would miss seeing his children growing up, becoming professionals—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: But also he would have done it to save his dignity somehow.

KATI MARTON: Yes.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: That is, when I think of him, you know, it's this dignity, always dignity, which would—I mean to the point of repressing, of showing your feelings and everything. So now you saw the other side and he had had these feelings, and that must have been very reassuring. Now, as to the image of yourself, did that change through working on this? I mean, first of all, did you recognize yourself in the way you were depicted in the files, and how did it change you to write it?

KATI MARTON: Well, I was a little kid, I was a feisty little kid, so I guess I had the early makings of the person I became. I certainly, growing up with these two parents, I certainly never wanted to be anything but, like them, a reporter, and I see the beginnings of that, and certainly the trauma of that separation from them, which we really didn't know how long that would go on, you know, because nobody talked about—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: You wouldn't expect a revolution to happen just to free your parents, and yet that's what happened in a sense. That was the purpose of the revolution.

KATI MARTON: I think I—no, really? Are you sure?

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: I'm not sure. Günter Grass once told me, you know, private stories are not interesting—people's stories, everybody has stories. It becomes epic only the moment that all of a sudden history with the great age comes in and throw them off and they have to make a decision and then all of a sudden it's not private anymore, it's epic, and this seems to be, I mean, if this was a three-act play, you know, three, four times, you know, it's the arrival of the Nazis, it's the liberation of Hungary and it's the Russians, the Stalinization, and then it's the Hungary revolution in '56 and then it's the arrival in America. And each time you have to redefine yourself completely, and that's what makes it fascinating. When you come to America, and you've been living more or less in the American embassy or in the American media, and in the newspapers and in the novels and everything your parents told you about, what—did reality meet your expectations?

KATI MARTON: Well, my first view of America was rather disappointing, because we landed at a refugee camp, a hastily assembled refugee camp on the New Jersey Turnpike, not exactly my fantasy of America.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: No Liberty Statue.

KATI MARTON: No, and the first few days in New York were really—we were followed everywhere by photographers, because we were this kind of picture-postcard refugee family, you know, the adorable little girls, the attractive parents who came to get these awards, but we had no money, and we would have these scenes at Macy's and so on—where my mother would, I don't know why she took us to Macy's when she had no intention of buying anything—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Window-shopping.

KATI MARTON: Window-shopping, and we would always end up crying, my sister and I, because, oh my God, after—you know, you have to understand that in the Budapest of our childhood, you know, everybody wore—you know there were two varieties of coats—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Of gray.

KATI MARTON: Yes, two varieties of gray every season, and suddenly to have this dizzying abundance—the supermarkets, oh my God, and to have no money, that was a bit harsh, and I didn't understand why we couldn't live like everybody else.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Because the strange thing is, when you were in Budapest your father earned dollars and they went a long way in a socialist country, and now you come to the country of the dollar and you don't have any.

KATI MARTON: Yes, that seemed totally unfair.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: When—I was again trying to find out, to come back about your father's attitude right at the end of the war, there were people going—emigrants coming back to Europe, I don't know, they had a choice going—in Germany, they had a choice to go East Germany or West Germany, and a lot of them went East Germany, because they thought was going to be the better state, this was the antifascist state. They saw the good sides of communism. None of that ever occurred as far as you can see these files from—Hungary must have considered themselves an occupied country, the very moment it was freed it was occupied.

KATI MARTON: Yeah, and, of course, the more, let's say rational people, because I don't think my parents were entirely rational, you know, packed up and went, like my uncle went to Australia immediately. In a way my parents put us through this terrible decade, and it was a terrible decade, because in part it was an act of vanity, I think, you know, to be the last foreign correspondents reporting for the West. You know, they knew that they were playing historic roles, and now that I've read all their stories—because that too was in the files—they really provided what there was of actual news coming from

that terrible part of the world. They really were responsible for that and I think that gave them, while the going was good, that gave them great satisfaction.

I think it's not—it's not always easy to be the child of exceptional people and I do think that—you know, people who feel that they have the opportunity to play for history, to play a part for history, and I think at some level, they were consciously doing that—definitely in my father's case. You know, he was a very—he had a certain sense of himself, which—when he writes in this absolutely heartbreaking letter that he writes on cigarette paper and smuggles out. He thinks his cellmate is about to be freed and offers to take a letter out to my mother and to the American ambassador, so my father falls for this really transparent trap and writes a letter to my mother urging her to divorce him, marry, you know, any, the marine at the U.S. Embassy, anybody, just get the hell out of the country, take the little girls, and “have them forget me.” Now, what kind of a thing is that to—you know, that reduced me to tears.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Of course, now so far as a child you had only seen the façade and the way he behaved and this was now the courage behind it. He was helped, or you were helped, by a few Americans in the embassy. Now you are married to an ambassador. But ambassadors are—have been apparently very influential in your childhood and were great, great models.

KATI MARTON: The first American I ever met, and I thought they would all be like that, and they weren't, was the American ambassador in Budapest, who's one of the real

heroes of this story, because not only did he keep my parents' story alive with the State Department and put a lot of pressure on Dulles to take steps to—and Dulles did, yet another revelation for me. Dulles banned travel to Hungary while my parents were held, non—so no tourism to Hungary. But then once my parents were arrested, this same ambassador, whose name was Christian Ravndal, I'm sorry he's no longer with us, he took it upon himself to visit my sister and me in our absolute misery, because again—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Because you were, you had to go to another family who took you in—

KATI MARTON: Strangers.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Because the first family didn't want you, the second family took you in, and then here comes the American ambassador, you know, with his car—

KATI MARTON: In his beautiful Buick with the Stars and Stripes flying—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: But it was a way to protect you, I think, because, I mean, the more known you were, and the more it was shown that there was this solidarity from the American side, the less, I mean, they were depending on relations with the West as well, and the fact of hindering tourism already, I mean, these were the devices they needed, you know.

KATI MARTON: And also the *New York Times* played a big role. The *New York Times* front-paged the story of their arrest, their sentencing, their freeing. There was even an editorial in the *New York Times* calling for their freeing, so their colleagues really came through, but I think, you know, you alluded to the fact that of course my parents would be suspect to the likes of J. Edgar Hoover given that they were given—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Well, all of a sudden here they get a passport and they can leave—

KATI MARTON: But I think the reason—I try to explain why that was, and I think that the reason was that the Americans had made it so clear that they weren't going to, because my parents were so high-profile and such clear friends of the Americans that they were going to keep making noise about this, and that it really wasn't in the interests of the post-revolution Hungary to throw them back in jail, and they were nothing but a pain to the regime, so far better to get rid of them, and eventually, they figured, "if we need them, we'll find a way to get them back," which is what they tried to do. You know, with the time-tested, you know, surveillance, surveillance, surveillance, but, you know, blackmail.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: I'd like—I mean, I'm running out of questions, but I'd like to hear more of you. And I mean you read this one description very vividly, "The End of Childhood," but where they came to arrest your father. But I thought that there's

another episode that is like an Italian neorealist movie, like a Rossellini, when your mother is gone, I noted it's on page 118, and, I don't know, it struck me that this is where you were closest to the—you know, we've been talking about your parents, your parents and politics, but this is a very intimate book about your childhood. You can—it calls for a second volume, which is growing up in Maryland.

KATI MARTON: Paul, is it okay?

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And then we'll open the floor—

KATI MARTON: Just because you want to hear more from me, I don't know if they do—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Yes, I do.

KATI MARTON: Okay, well, you're the director. In the late afternoon of June twenty-third, our doorbell rang. Entirely—oh, I just have to say, this is four months after my father's arrest. So the state in its generosity gave my mother four months to figure out what to do with us. So this is now—my father was taken in February, this is now late June. Our doorbell rang. Entirely absorbed in my long-awaited playdate with Zsuzsi Kalmar, the older girl next door, I waited for my mother to answer it. Zsuzsi and I were cutting up an old dress of my mother's, which we planned to turn into doll clothes. It was not by chance that Zsuzsi had chosen that afternoon to visit me. We only learned much

later that she had been enlisted to play a small part in my mother's arrest, keeping me occupied during its smooth execution. At the time I was excited to have this serious older girl's company, and reluctant to get up and answer the door.

After the second ring, I did. Three men in workers' overalls peered down at me. "We came about the meter," one of them lied. "Your mother had rung. Please get her." I had a feeling they weren't who they said they were. Even to a child's eyes, these men did not belong in those too-clean overalls. But I was eager to return to Zsuzsi. Now I wonder. What did it feel like for those secret policemen to be masquerading for a child? Did they feel anything at all? Were they the fathers of little girls? "Mama," I called out, but by the time she emerged from behind her closed door, I had already returned to my room and to Zsuzsi.

When some time later the apartment seemed strangely quiet, I peered out. "Mama!" I called, "Mama!" No answer. The apartment was empty. I had never before been alone in a place that just months before housed three generations—my grandparents, my parents, and us children. I had never before noticed how the floorboards in the dark foyer creaked. As I rushed from room to empty room, I was aware of my heart pumping for the first time in my life. My mother was gone. How could she have left without calling out my name, without kissing me? Crying and calling out "Mama?" I ran down the three flights of stairs that led to the street. My sister was sitting on the curb, crying, her bicycle lying next to her. She had seen the men in overalls holding our mother above the elbows, shove her into the back of a Mercedes, but the car had pulled away before my sister could get

off her bike. So we sat there, the two of us, and waited. For the first time in our lives there was no one to comfort us, and I really have no memory of what happened next.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Thank you.

KATI MARTON: Thank you.

(applause)

Q: Just a question—when you got the shopping carts full of files—did they actually give you the originals, or were these copies?

KATI MARTON: Copies. They kept the originals.

Q: I didn't think they'd give away historical documents like that.

KATI MARTON: No, no, no, and it's open to future historians, those files. They very kindly copied—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: What about your childhood drawings, could you take the originals or only copies?

KATI MARTON: No, those are of great historic value.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Oh, great, very good.

Q: Hi. To me this is really fascinating, because I went through some of these things, admittedly a much more soft-core version in the eighties. My father was a dissident in Hungary, that's where I'm from, and so I remember when the police would come to our house and search our house and such things would happen and we were followed by the police, I mean, nothing as awful as in the fifties, obviously. But I was really not comfortable talking to anybody at school about it, or sharing it with anybody, even with my friends. So I was wondering how you dealt with that.

KATI MARTON: I think I made the same call as you. I mean, I was a little kid, but I knew there were certain subjects not to talk about outside the home. And once in a while, I slipped up, like when we were told at school to bring our favorite toy in one day in kindergarten, and I took in a little wind-up monkey that did this amazing dance, and all the kids dropped down on all fours and, you know, in Hungary there was one kind of teddy bear available in the toy store.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And you had gotten this through the embassy.

KATI MARTON: Yes. So I was summoned to the headmaster's office, the principal's office, because she wanted to know—it was so obviously a piece of Western technology.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Decadence.

KATI MARTON: And I had been given that monkey by my, the woman I called Aunt Ruth, she was the press attaché in the embassy, Ruth Tryon. And I really felt like I was going through an AVO interrogation of my own when I had to reveal her name, and my parents were pretty upset with me for taking that monkey, so I think sometimes the show-off got the better of the politically astute kid and that was one of those, but mostly I didn't talk about it, but then my parents dressed us in these Western clothes—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: And drove a white Studebaker.

KATI MARTON: Yeah, so, you know, that's what I mean that they weren't fully—they weren't careful, they were a little too busy being resisters themselves too. Thank you.

Q: I'd like to say thank you for a beautiful book, and particularly the father/daughter—I've got my own daughter here, such a special moment, but I'd like to actually ask you about your father's political views, which I just couldn't seem to get a grasp of. I mean, I could see that he was not a communist, that was clear, but was he a European socialist, was he a Goldwater Republican—

KATI MARTON: Definitely not.

Q: Was he a British—do you have a sense of where he was on the political spectrum?

KATI MARTON: Yes, he was virulently antifascist, anticommunist. He was a Democrat. Like so many of his generation, he thought Kennedy was wonderful. I think he would have been enchanted by Obama and what Obama represents for America, because my parents were extremely open, tolerant—there was not a racist bone in their bodies, I am happy to say. They were liberals, I would say, in the best sense of the word.

Q: Hi. It seems like there are many of us in the room perhaps who have a similar story to tell. My parents left Hungary in 1969—they escaped, and I was the government's blackmail, I was left behind, so it was a very touching chapter in your book when you had perhaps a fear that they would leave—or that they would send you and remain behind, which was wonderful—a wonderful book. I have two questions—how difficult is it to get these AVO files, if one were to go back, I mean, is it just a matter of filing a Freedom of Information or calling someone or how do you—

KATI MARTON: I would say that that you need to go yourself, and that it's always better to do things in person that are that meaningful, and then you have to be very patient. I had the help of a Hungarian lawyer who knew his way around for my first visit, and then the head of the archives called me and said, “come alone for the second one,” which, you know, gave me a sleepless night, because by then she had seen all these potentially painful revelations, including, which we didn't really get to the fact that—when they were released, they were released with strings, that they still had to keep reporting to their secret police minders for a while, so things like that. But I stray from

your question. I think that if you really want this, and, first of all, you have to steel yourself, because it isn't me alone that's opening a Pandora's box, so will you be, people have found terrible, shattering things.

Q: Milan Kundera.

KATI MARTON: Kundera, Günter Grass, Hungary's most eminent filmmaker—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Istvan Szabo.

KATI MARTON: Szabo, a wonderful man, turns out that he too was working—

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: In order to get into film school.

KATI MARTON: Yes, he was informing on his classmates.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Yes.

KATI MARTON: Terrible, terrible. So when I found that one piece of paper among the thousands where it says that my father did not implicate a single other Hungarian, that was like the clouds parted. I grabbed that piece of paper and ran to Kinko's and had it laminated (**laughter**) so that I wouldn't lose it, and it's still tacked to our kitchen bulletin

board. So, but, you know, there's no telling what you'll find, so it really depends on how much you—

Q: Is there a particular government office that you approach?

KATI MARTON: Yes there is, yes there is, yes, and it's in the phone book. It's right off the Andrassy út, if you know where the House of Terror is, appropriately, it's one block from there.

Q: Thank you.

KATI MARTON: Well, good luck with it. I took too long answering.

Q: I have not as much as a question as I would like to compliment you to take the courage to delve into your past, and I would very much like to acknowledge the insight that Mr. Schlöndorff is showing. I was born in Budapest in 1933 and I lived through the whole period, and my sadness with all the things that you have mentioned and sort of brought to life here, which I think is very informative for a lot of people that don't know the history that well, that I and my wife visited the House of Terror, Andrassy 60, and the most shocking experience that I had in all my life it started out in the mid-thirties during the Hungarian regime, which already started to be Nazi-influenced and then the Nazis completely taken over and then slowly the communists in '46-'47 and they'd been

overpowered in '48, from an election that started off in '46 with 17 percent and by '48 they have complete—

KATI MARTON: Control.

Q: Power. That many of the people that were occupying that building, or the so-called people in charge, that have tortured the people are almost the same people through the last ten to twelve years' time, from 1935 to 1950 and continued with almost no change. The bosses were changing constantly, but the people who executed the torture, almost, were always the same people.

KATI MARTON: Yeah, so they switched uniforms.

Q: They switched uniforms, and nothing really—we haven't seemed to learn anything, we haven't progressed anything, and today the Nazi party in Hungary is demonstrating with thousands of people and really are yearning back from that same regime of torture.

KATI MARTON: Well, I hope it doesn't come. I'm happy to tell you that this book is going to be published in Hungary, this spring, and my last one, which is *The Great Escape: The Story of the Nine Budapest Jews Who Changed the World*, that continues to be a best seller. So I'm doing my bit as a truth-teller. It's a subject that Hungarians don't love at all, to talk about what they lost by losing the Jews, but the book has had a lot of success. I'll be interested to see how they receive this one, because my parents aren't the

only Hungarians who didn't like to face the past. Anyway, thank you for your comments,
thank you very much.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you very much.

KATI MARTON: Our pleasure. Volker, thank you very much.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF: Yes. Thank you, thank you.

(applause)