Seminary interview

My name is Árpád Dávid. I was born in 17. 07. 1959. Eger, Hungary. And I live there with my family (four children, a wife, and a dog).

I graduated from Eger Teachers Training College with two majors, geography and biology in 1982. Later I studied geography at Szeged University. During the last 35 years I had lot of teaching experiences at various levels of education as primary school teacher, student hostel prefect and college professor. Beside my activity at Hatáspont Tanoda I teach palaeontology at Debrecen University for twelve years. I have a PhD in geology since 2006. My main field of research within palaeoichnology is the examination of bioerosion structures. My aim to familiarize my students with the inanimate nature and help them to discover its connection to other natural and social phenomena and processes. I fond of reading, traveling, hiking, collecting minerals and fossils.

“Maybe as you know I was born in 1959 and my childhood lasted until I was 14 or 15”.

**Question:** **How was it to be a child in those times?**

“I went to kindergarten from the age of 3. There was no childcare at that time. Parents could stay with their children only for some weeks. After that, they were doing what they could. Usually, that meant that the children were with their grandparents. In kindergarten there were a lot of children, plenty of them. I didn’t like to sleep there. Our best ways of playing were the sandbox and building blocks. Also, we were not learning child songs but usually played „körjátékok”.(which is when the kids are in a circle singing or doing various tasks for fun) and in the group where the smaller kids were, we didn’t get any tea or chocolate or anything but water and these little, hard and flavorful marmalade blocks which were really difficult to chew on. After a while things changed and we got some little bit of smoked cheese to eat instead.  
In elementary school I had a really good teacher in the first grade, she taught me well how to read and write. I still like to read, and later when I was in 8th grade or 7th I realized that our family was being observed in some way. On our street there were like 15-20 children. All of them had their First Communion. So these children were on a separate list in school and there were some minor discriminations. For example the father of one of these kids was working in the Party Committee at a medium rank and they didn't let his son have his First Communion. He had his First Communion secretly.  
Switching to the middle school years, there was a subject called „The Foundations of our World view” and the teacher who was teaching this was also the principal and he was tutoring me and two of my friends on this subject. It was about the fact that there is only one class in society: the working class, all the others are unimportant.Proletarian internationalism, the only good things are what Lenin wrote down in his work in „Lenin összes”. (Which is all the work of Lenin) because everything is written there about how a socialist person should act and think and do. So communism is where everyone is equal and gets things based on the work they contribute to the country. So for the three of us there were these extra classes, 1,5h every week inside the principal’s office. When I was in Teachers Training Collage in my second year that was the last time this kind of discrimination happened to me. The head of the faculty after a practical class said „David we are watching you because we know that you are clerical.” This meant that the person is religious or there is a religious person in the family. The uncle of my father was a catholic priest. I don’t know how this person did at the end of the 80’s get this information. Most likely it was in my file, the same file everyone had in those times.

So I told you there were 3 of us with the extra classes and all of us got into high school only by the second or third round. But all of us had enough points and they didn’t tell us anything, if it’s about the lack of places, if it was simply no and that’s it. And to get this system a bit closer to you, there were many people spying on each other. For example, if there were 5-6 people gathered together, at least one of them was „reporting requirements” towards the party or the police. There is a story from the beginning of the 60’s. Two people were talking on the tram - One says - Do you know my friend what’s the difference between Hungary and China? – No, says the other – So the first one says – China is the country of smiles but what’s happening in Hungary is just laughable. After that one person stood up from nearby and asked – Sir, comrade, do you know what’s the difference between the tram and you? – No, says the person – Then the other – The tram will go on but you’re coming with me. And then that person who was telling the joke got taken away for some talk. Another: in 1973 in Budapest at the center of the MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) they were switching the electric wire system and the electricians were working there and one said – This system is bad we should change it. On the next day he didn’t go to work, he got sentenced 3 years in prison. Because they said that he was talking about the communist system not the wire system. Also if you got a letter from another country you could rest assured that they opened it and read it. Once I also got a letter with my mother from her aunt in Canada. She sent me a postcard about the Moon Landing and the letter came but the postcard was not inside anymore. This happened in 1969 or 1970”.

Q: **What were the children doing in their free time?**

„Well we didn’t have much free time. We had to join the Pioneer Movement. (The first rank was the „drummer-boy” from elementary 2nd to 4th; then „pioneer” between 5th to 8th). There were different events we had to participate in and we had a weekly meeting called „Őrsi gyűlés” where it was highlighted many times how good it is to be there. This was an obvious creation of the system. It was in Eger (a bigger city towards north-east from the capital), it was good that in the summer the school had a kitchen garden called „Micsurin garden” it was a small piece of land where we had to take care of the plants. We did it and everyone had to participate. If someone didn’t participate, at the start of the next school year the principal read out their names, they were misbehaving, and they became bad communists and they didn’t love their country because that person didn’t go to the Micsurin.   
 In the summer break we were ganging. Which is meant that there were 8-10 kids who went to the field or the forest just to have fun. For example many times we tried to build a dam on the stream of Eger. But the stream was always stronger. We built it half a meter tall from both sides and we were going towards the middle, and in the middle the stream always washed it away. It didn’t matter how much wood or stone we used. Or we were playing badminton.   
Also they were watching how many times we went into the library. With me there were no problems because in one summer I finished half of the books there. So one library was good for two years for me. But the librarian told the school how many times a kid visited them and what type of books they were reading. What was really big was if you had these car-cards. It was a picture of the car with all the details like where it was produced, maximum speed etc. We were playing with them for hours. Also chess and football.  
Lego was not there at the time but we had building bricks. Plus two times a week the television had nothing on it. Nothing was broadcasted. We had only one channel and then they got rid of the Friday broadcast break but it was still kept on Mondays. The time was also different, they broadcasted for example from 16:00 to 21:00 maximum. Somewhere in the early 70’s we got a second channel so we got TV1 and TV2 and that was a big thing. People were talking about it a lot. But we didn’t have every film, the ones which were against the Soviet Union or the system were banned. But we still had some, like Polish and Russian soldier movies. For example Stirlitz”.

**Q: So what was on the channels usually? And the TV was in black and white right?**

“Yes up to the middle of the 70’s they were black and white, it was a big thing to have colored television. We had some cartoons every Sunday forenoon like Foxi Maxi, it was very good and a good Hungarian show was the „Tenkes kapitánya” (historical adventure series telling tale from the Rákóczi’s War of Independence) some documentaries and talk shows, news of course and mostly that’s it. But until the middle of the 70’s they didn’t really broadcast Hungarian films and picked carefully from the foreign ones. But there were some good ones like the „Orion űrhajó” (Orion spaceship) or the „A tavasz tizenhét pillanata” (Seventeen moments of spring) which was about a secret agent who I mentioned, Stirlitz, who always beat the Germans. And once they said in the radio that in one of the textile factories in Moscow the women working there were so worried about Stirlitz that they asked the head of the television to tell them if he can cross the border (which was an end of one of the episodes) because until that they can’t work out of nervousness. We also had the series called „Az angyal” (The Saint) with Roger Moore, he was the main actor, other series were the „Minden lében két kanál” (The Persuaders) also a very funny spy tale. Or „Daktari” which is about a monkey and a doctor and their adventures. We were playing football on the street because there were no cars. Like one van per day and like two cars per week. And when people shouted in the street that Daktari is starting, the street became empty. There were also a lot of soviet films about how heroically the soviet soldiers were fighting in the Second World War. The movie called „Szállnak a darvak” (The Cranes are Flying) was played like 2-3 times per year”.

Q: **What were the favorite hobbies of the children at that time?**

„Football, card games and that’s it. Hobbies like stone painting or any handcrafting were not existing at that time. There were clubs you were free to join like modeling club or „MHSZ”( Magyar Honvédelmi Szövetség – Hungarian Defense Association) which was a paramilitary youth organization, they taught you how to shoot with a smaller gun. Of course clericals like two of my friends and me were not allowed to join MHSZ. You also had to be a „KISZ” (Magyar Kommunista ifjúsági Szövetség - Hungarian Young Communist league) member it was mandatory for everyone. This was the next step after the Pioneer Movement. KISZ had one gathering per month which was lead by a teacher in every school. In Teachers Training Collage one of our teachers was really active to encourage us to be a member of the „Munkásörség” (Worker’s Militia) which was also a paramilitary organization, and he told us why it is good to be a member. For instance getting rid of the mandatory calls from the army, because for Worker’s Militia it was only 2 per year. When you get discharged you would get the „Munkás-paraszt Hatalomért Emlékérem” (Which was a medal originally for those who fought in the rebellion of ‘56 on the communist’s side) also our children would get into higher education without any setbacks. Or we would be able to travel to other countries more than once every 3 years, and we would get our salary 100% as our pension. But he wasn’t able to get anyone into it. It was in the beginning of the 80’s. He still highlighted in his CV that the most important thing he is doing outside of his job is being a member of the militia”.

**Q: How dangerous was life in those times?**

“What do you mean by danger? – Like robberies and crimes etc. There were a little bit less of them than today or we just didn’t hear about it. If the police caught you, they were not gentle with you. First they beat the suspect then the suspect admitted the crime, so then they beat the person for committing the crime. Usually with batons. There were not many cars, also the road system was not very good so for example speeding was nonexistent. The first major highway (called M1) was built in the middle of the 70’s and it was towards the western border”.

**Q**: **Were people still using carriages?**

“Yes they were still being used in that time. My mother’s uncle was a carrier, he had 2 horses and 3 carriages and he was transporting wood, coal, furniture or grapes in harvest time. So when I was 10, I was already able to put the horses in front of the carriages. Now it seems kind of strange because you can find carriages only in museums mostly”.

**Q**: **What was your first workplace?**

“In the summer break you were able to work. My first workplace was in a book shop in Eger. I was able to work there until we got the books for the upcoming school year. The schools were giving us reservations which we had to make and also the everyday work. It was very good to work there because there were 6 workers there, all of them were girls. So I was kind of spoiled there. I did this for two summers”.

**Q**: **How was your first car like?**

“My first car was the one my father borrowed me. It was a yellowish-brownish. „Zsiguli” (Lada).  
It was a good car, above all doubt. It bore a lot and ate a lot. When it was old it could consume 20l for 100km. After a while we sold it off. When my two sons were born we went into Eger stream and played that we were in a boat. The water only reached up to the half of the wheels. We went back and forth. The Zsiguli didn’t get hurt nor the stream”.

**Q**: **When did you become a teacher?**

“After middle school as I mentioned. I didn’t get in higher education. But in that time you were able to go and be a teacher even without qualification. And I was a day care teacher in Poroszló (south of Eger) and I was teaching everything for junior classes. Except music and singing because even in that time I had the „voice of a cracked pot” (Hungarian expression for someone with a not so charming voice). Therefore in music classes I mostly taught them music history and let them sing their favorite songs”.

**Q**: **How did you meet your wife?**

“Suddenly she just came straight at me, and that’s it. You know if women want something they get it. Also these things I told you about, we didn’t know how bad they were because we didn’t have anything to compare the system with”.

**Q: Were there any Roma people in schools?**

„Yes I had a lot of Roma friends in school and we were playing together”.

**Q:** **Were the hospitals good at that time?**

„Hospitals. Depends on the perspective. Relatively good. At that time technology was not that advanced so many illnesses which are now easy to cure, they could still be deadly. For example pneumonia. Also every year there was the so called „Hong Kong flu epidemic” many times ending in pneumonia. We already had vaccines for some of the illnesses such as diphtheria. But, for example, one of my Roma classmate’s brother died of diphtheria because his parents didn’t vaccinate him”.

` **Q:** **What kind of similarities do you see between the old system and our current system?**

“Well between the two this is heaven. Considering what was in those times. For example you can travel freely. As I said you could travel only once every 3 years. It was good that they let us visit socialist countries more than once. In 1968 we went to Slovakia, to Tatra. On the border both the Slovakian and Hungarian patrols counted the „Algopirin” (a very casual medicine for headache) which was still in a bottle at that time. How much is in the bottle and if it’s truly that type of medicine. They checked everything, even the pages of books. Sometimes they ripped apart the newspapers. Or if they saw that you had canned food and they took some you weren’t able to say anything because then they wouldn’t let you cross the border. Also in 1968 my great grandmother was able to visit her daughter and she was paying everything for it. For the trip my great grandmother got her passport but it was not like now. She got it only for some months for example from 1968 August 2 to 1968 November 3. She also got for the trip 5 dollars from the government to use. Which of course was close to nothing.  
It’s also better that the health care is more advanced and that we can teach more freely. Furthermore if you criticized the system, you would be in prison, now it’s not like that. So considering all it’s not seventh heaven but let’s say it’s third”.

**Q**: **Where and when did you go abroad for the first time?**

“I made my first trip when I was very young, I remembered only a black and white cow which I mentioned a lot of times to my parents. But in the middle of the 60’s I went to Czechoslovakia a lot to buy things because it was cheaper, such as socks and towels. In 1972 with one of my friends and his family we went to Lake Csorba (second biggest lake in the Tatras) for one week. That was quite a big thing at that time”.

**Q:** **How much time could you spend abroad?**“There was an agreement between the two countries how much time the citizens could spend there. You weren’t allowed to get a job. And you had to leave the country at the exact same crossing where you entered. Because there was no computer system, they simply wrote it down on paper: „this person left the country this time and said will return at this time – latest this and this” and then they compared the two dates. They also checked how much money we got and if we were hiding some more. In 1978 we managed to go for an incredible trip – Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia. It took more than a one month. And it took more than one year to get all the permits and make the preparations. I was already a day care teacher at that time. And they asked the principal of the school if I work properly and if he agrees that in the summer break, when I should have been able to do what I want, go on the trip. After this he called me in to congratulate me. So I heard this whole thing from him first, that we were going. Also even at the end of 90’s they still kept the rule that after finishing your military service you weren’t able to leave the country for two years. For me because I was working in that kind of place I wasn’t able to leave the country for 5 years. In 1985 I was discharged and they let me out of the country at the end of 1989. Until then, even if I tried to go somewhere, at the border they would have told me that my name is on the list and I can’t leave the country and they would escort me home or to prison if I didn’t want to go with them”.

**Q: One last question, how was the end of communism for you in 1989?**

„At first it was strange people weren’t able to imagine that there can be more than one political party in the country. Suddenly there were like 8-10 or even more. Anyone who wanted could make a party. People weren’t able to comprehend the situation. For example if someone votes for one party will the other parties know it? In 1989 there were a lot of people on the streets with badges of different parties. And all of these informers kept making reports – this person is wearing the badge of that party – they were counting it and such. But when they were sending these reports even the people there laughed at them, that now it’s completely unnecessary”.