

To my 250 IQ friend and inspirer.
Claire Mays - Edward L. Bernays

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Uncle Sigi
by Edward L. Bernays

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Fig. 1. The photograph was taken in 1900 at a farmhouse rented for the summer by my family. The photograph includes my sisters and mother, her sister and husband, Dr. Graf, and two children. Sigmund Freud you will recognize standing up. I am the boy in front dressed in the Tyrolean costume.

Notes and Events

EDITED BY DOROTHY M. SCHULLIAN*

Uncle Sigi

Sigmund Freud often has been a victim of distortions by biographers. Typical is the book *Dr. Freud* by Emil Ludwig.¹ It describes Freud as uninterested in family and friends, destructive, void of sympathetic kindness, a self-centered man, who neither loved nor laughed.

My relations with Freud over decades affirm the opposite, that he had warmth, friendliness, modesty. They cover my memories as a boy in New York in the 1890s, his visit to our summer vacation home in Austria in 1900, my happy encounter with him in 1913, a close relationship with him between 1919 and 1930 expressed in fifty communications from him during that period, and our visit to his summer home in 1925.

Sigmund Freud was my mother's older brother. His wife, Martha Bernays Freud, was my father's sister. Naturally, they were often discussed at our nightly family dinner table. Freud, the internationally known figure, was still far in the future. *The Interpretation of Dreams* was not published until 1903.

I learned much about Freud's boyhood personality and theories from my grandmother, who always called him her golden son. I was impressed that he visited her every Sunday. I learned that he demonstrated compassion early in life. Mother told us that Sigmund, at the age of four, soiled a chair with his dirty hands. He said to his mother, 'Don't worry. When I grow up I'll buy you another chair.'

Mother told us of Sigmund's visit to the American pavilion at the 1873 World's Fair in Vienna, where facsimiles of Abraham Lincoln's letters stimulated him. He learned the Gettysburg Address by heart and recited it in English to my mother and her sisters. He also shared his love of Mark Twain with them.

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1. Emil Ludwig, *Dr. Freud* (New York, 1948).

On 4 April 1979 a program about Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), part of the series *Leaders in American Medicine* (funded by the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation), was held at the Countway Library in Boston, Massachusetts. A discussant for that program was Edward L. Bernays, the double nephew of Sigmund Freud. Mr. Bernays is considered the father of professional public relations in the United States; for his career and publications see *Who's Who in America* and the *National Union Catalog*. This is his talk about his famous uncle. It has been edited and annotated by George E. Gifford, Jr. As revealed in this paper, Mr. Bernays played a significant part in the first publication of Freud's work in America.

When my parents emigrated to the United States in 1892 with me, aged one, his family empathy was demonstrated. My two older sisters remained with the Sigmund Freud family in Vienna until my parents established themselves here some time later. My sisters always told of their stay at the Freud home with affection.

My first recollection of meeting Sigmund Freud is from 1900, when I was nine. Mother rented a farmhouse in the Austrian Tyrol for a summer vacation. Sigi and his younger brother, Alexander, visited us during a walking tour. The snapshot I still have shows Uncle Sigi in the family group, jaunty and bareheaded, in knickers (Fig. 1). I recall two friendly uncles, happy to see their sister, whom they had not seen for almost a decade, and enjoying their newly met American nieces and nephew.

More than a decade later, in 1913, after my graduation from Cornell University, I went to Karlsbad, Austria. My relations with Uncle Sigi renewed themselves as if on a continuing basis. Freud was thirty-five years my senior, but his attitudes and actions toward me showed warmth and affection. We took long walks together in the woods, talking all the way. Two incidents stand out clearly in my mind.

At lunch in a restaurant serving brook trout, guests picked their fish from a center pool in the dining room. Uncle accompanied me to the novel aquarium and quietly remarked, 'See the brook trout swimming around in the order of their price range.'

Another time, also at lunch together, he showed compassion for a housefly. I noted one on the table and raised my hand to swat it. He remarked quietly, 'Oh, let the fly take its promenade on the high plateau.'

His manner, understanding, sympathetic, and relaxed, reflected deep interest in me, as if two close friends, after a long absence, were exchanging confidences, instead of a now famous uncle, aged fifty-seven, talking with a nephew aged twenty-two, who lived three thousand miles away.

Five years later, in 1918, close relations with Freud began again. They led to the translation and publication in the United States of the first book for popular consumption on psychoanalysis by its founder, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Correspondence with Freud over a decade revealed all those basic characteristics I have noted, modesty, warmth, and affection.

At the peace conference in Paris after World War I, I was a staff member of the United States Committee on Public Information. I knew the German blockade had prevented my uncle from getting his beloved Havana cigars. I asked a member of our mission who was leaving Paris to open postwar relations between Austria and the United States to take a box of cigars to my uncle at 19 Bergasse. On his return to Paris, my colleague reported on his warm reception and brought me, from my uncle, an inscribed copy of the *Introductory Lectures* in German, delivered at the University of Vienna between 1915 and 1917.

News from Vienna after the war had been disquieting. Galloping inflation had made the Austrian crown almost worthless. Years later I learned from Ernest Jones's biography that the Freuds were then in economic straits.² Inflation wiped out Freud's \$29,000 in savings and \$200,000 insurance. He was worried that he might predecease his wife. Jones reported that Freud was providing for his entire family and relatives by treating patients.

On my return to New York I opened an office as a consultant in public relations. I urged book publisher Horace Liveright,³ one of our clients, to publish Freud's book *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.⁴ He consented. Freud was to receive fifteen percent royalty on a four-dollar volume. I cabled for authorization to translate and publish the volume; he cabled the authorization.

In 1920 most publishers did no promotion. But Liveright, a maverick, would promote the book, I knew. He had engaged our firm for that then novel purpose.

I thought an introduction by a distinguished American psychologist would add prestige and promote sales. I wrote G. Stanley Hall,⁵ President of Clark University, which had given Freud his first honorary degree. Hall, founder of the *American Journal of Psychology* and President of the American Psychological Association, graciously consented. Today Clark University boasts of the Freud connection.

Our organization handled the translation and promotion of the book. It became a success. In 1921, Freud wrote me that he rejoiced 'in the success of the book. . . . I am deeply touched by your unselfish zeal in this matter which can have brought no profit of any kind to you and simply meant a kind desire of yours to assist me, your uncle, in these hard times.'

I continued to send royalty checks. In August 1923, he wrote me saying, 'In truth you are the only one of my relatives who has ever, or at least since many years, done me any service.'

My wife, and professional partner, and I visited his summer home, the Semmering, in 1925. After our visit, at my suggestion, he accepted the headship of an international psychoanalytic foundation to start collections for a scientific fund for the promotion of psychoanalysis. The *New York Times* ran on 14 July 1925, under a Vienna dateline, a report entitled 'Dr. Freud to Head World Foundation.' The foundation, the story said, was to be devoted to 'psychological

2. For information on Freud's economic straits see Ernest Jones, *The life and work of Sigmund Freud*, edited and abridged by Lionel Trilling and Steven Marcus (New York, 1961), pp. 349, 351, 353, 385, 397.

3. Horace Liveright (1884-1933), New York publisher and producer, in 1917 formed, with Albert Boni, the publishing firm of Boni and Liveright. They published the Modern Library series. When Mr. Boni retired from the firm, Mr. Liveright was left in command.

4. *A general introduction to psychoanalysis* by Sigmund Freud, LL.D. Authorized translation with a preface by G. Stanley Hall, President, Clark University (New York, 1920). This book went through nine editions from June 1920 to November 1921. Ernest Jones (n. 2) referred to Bernays's effort in publishing Freud's work on pages 81 and 397.

5. Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: the psychologist as prophet* (Chicago, 1972), p. 409.

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knowledge along Freudian lines and combat the fake psychoanalysis said to be rampant in the United States.' Regrettably, the American public was not yet ready to contribute funds to such an endeavor, and we abandoned the effort.

Freud's modesty was demonstrated when I wrote him that Belle da Costa Greene,⁶ librarian of the J. Pierpont Morgan Library, asked me whether she might buy some of the Freud manuscripts. He wrote me, 'I would not object at all. I cannot imagine what the value of such manuscripts might be and I am quite willing to turn them into tangible assets, should a connoisseur turn up.' He closed realistically, 'But of course, it would have to be worthwhile, if only for the sake of prestige.'

The exchange of our letters showed his warmth and feeling. He signed his letters 'With kind love and thanks for your interest. Your uncle Freud,' 'With affectionate regards,' 'With cordial greetings for you and Doris [my wife],' or 'Love to Doris, Affectionately your Uncle Sigi,' or 'Give my best love to Doris, Your old uncle,' and, referring to our newborn daughter, another Doris, 'I hope your little one gives you much joy.'

I close with a characteristic letter he wrote me on 10 August 1929. I had suggested to Liveright that he publish Freud's autobiography and passed on to Freud his offer of a five-thousand-dollar advance. Freud's response follows:⁷

This proposal is of course an impossible one. An autobiography is justified only on two conditions. In the first place, if the person in question has had a share in interesting events, important to all. Secondly, as a psychological study. Outwardly my life has transpired quietly and without content and can be dismissed with a few dates. A psychologically complete and sincere life recital would, however, demand so many indiscreet revelations about family, friends, adversaries (most of them still alive) with me as with everyone else that it is precluded from the very outset. What makes all autobiography worthless is in fact its lying. Besides it is really an example of our American editor's naiveté to believe he could get a hitherto decent man to commit such an outrageous act for \$5000. Temptation would begin for me at a sum a hundred times as great and even then the offer would be rejected after half an hour.

On 14 May 1931 we celebrated Freud's seventy-fifth birthday with a party at the Ritz-Carlton in New York to which we invited psychoanalysts and others interested in Freud. Dr. William A. White made the address of the evening. We sent a cable to Freud which read, 'Men and women recruited from the ranks of psychoanalysis, medicine, and sociology are assembling in New York to honor themselves by honoring, on his 75th birthday, the intrepid explorer who

6. Belle da Costa Greene (1883-1950) was Director of the Pierpont Morgan Library. Herbert Cahoon, present Curator of Manuscripts, writes that 'As an acquisition librarian she was always interested in adding important manuscripts and books to the library. I think it was in this spirit that she spoke to Mr. Bernays rather than for a specific interest in Freud. We have no manuscripts of Freud in our collection.'

7. This letter has been published in Ernst L. Freud, ed., *Letters of Sigmund Freud* (New York, 1960), p. 391, letter no. 244.

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