

Interview with Dr. Samuel Ritvo about Margaret Malher, Interviewed by Alma Bond

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I shared an office with Dr. Mahler at the New York State Psychiatric Institute from 1944 to 1947. She made a strong impression on me. She expressed herself very directly and forcefully. At that time she was interested in the Tourette Syndrome, and was preparing an issue of *The Nervous Child*. She asked me to do a survey of the literature on the syndrome, which was published in the Journal. I worked independently on it. She didn't interfere, and appreciated what I came up with.

We shared an office. I was just a resident and I suppose she resented sharing the office with a resident, although I was there every day and she only came in once a week. She would come in and accuse me of taking her paper clips or moving her rubber bands. She just picked on me. I never saw her paper clips or rubber bands. I didn't know what she was talking about. My wife explained it. She said, "Don't you understand? She likes you or she wouldn't pick on you."

Once there was a terrible snow storm, and her car was stuck in the snow. I grew up in New England and was an instant savior. I think this brought me way up in her estimation.

Another time when our children were in latency, she invited us to a picnic at her place in Brookfield. One of our sons tossed an ice cube into her swimming pool. Margaret got very upset. I suppose she was afraid it would cool off the pool.

We were not close friends, in that we did anything privately with her. Our contact was mainly around the Institute. It was not an ongoing personal relationship - we didn't have regular contact. I was invited to parties at her apartment and met her husband. He was a very well-mannered, gentle man, with a neat appearance in a European way. He was fairly quiet. Everyone was quiet in Margaret Mahler's presence.

I never experienced one of her temper outbursts. I think she was just a temperamental person. She was very strong-minded. I never saw her temper go out of bounds, never saw it fully aroused. After the beginning, our relationship was fairly calm. I'm not the kind of person to bring out a temper tantrum.

I also encountered her at the Psychoanalytic Institute. She was a good teacher.

In 1950, I moved back to New Haven and after that had much less contact with her.

We both came from pediatrics, and were interested in children. Not many people in psychiatry were, at that time. She was in her late 40s then. She was not pretty, but she was a handsome woman, and had a bearing that made her stand out.

I always admired her work and was impressed with her energy, and the contributions she made to child analysis and in Philadelphia. She was a formidable influence in my life.