

Estonia

Heleriin Jõesalu interviewed **Talvi Märja**.

Interview date: 9 August 2019.

Jõesalu: Hello, kind listeners. My name is Heleriin Jõesalu; I'm 31. I grew up in Põlva, a small town in southern Estonia. I studied at Tallinn University and earned an undergraduate degree in education specialising in andragogy and a master's degree in social sciences and communication. My work life to date has been involved in education, more specifically in the field of adult education. When I was younger, I used to do a lot of drawing and painting and I still particularly enjoy doing portraits.

Today, I am honored and glad to interview Talvi Märja, Professor Emeritus, at Tallinn University. Talvi Märja was born in 1935 and is one of the best-known andragogues in Estonia and a leader in Estonian adult education, and continues to contribute to its development, today. She was a member of the 8th Parliament from 1995 to 1999 and has also been a member of the Tallinn City Council. For her dedicated work, she was awarded the Order of the White Star Fourth Class [The Order of the White Star is awarded to persons in public service or local government, as well as for the recognition of merit and achievements in the service to the economy, education, science, culture or sport. The Order of the White Star has seven classes.], in 2003. She played top-level tennis in her youth and repeatedly won Estonian championships.

Jõesalu: Let's travel back in time, and please tell us about your childhood.

Märja: My childhood, in fact, was quite unique. I would divide it into three periods. Since I was born in 1935, as you correctly noted, there were five years before the war, so the first period is before the war, then the war years, and the time after the war. They were all very different times. I don't remember much from the first period, of course, because I was very young. But I do know that I took the first decisive step of my life and made my own decision. Hand in hand with my mother, we often walked to the bus stop, for about 700 meters or so, on a bigger road and we passed a kindergarten. The children were always playing and there was a little shallow pool. And one day, I decided to go to kindergarten, and I went to kindergarten alone. I walked through the gate. One big road had to be crossed, but I imagine there wasn't much traffic back then. In any case, I arrived happily. The kindergarten manager called my parents; we had a phone at home because my father worked at the State Printing House. So for my parents there was nothing left to do, but to take my brother and bring him to kindergarten too. And since then I know what I want and do it. I don't really wish to talk about this period very much, but, of course, the war years were very important.

I've survived three bombings, and not just bombings, but very close bombings. The first bombing was in 1941 in Järva county, where my mother was from and where her sister and brother lived on their farms. We were at my aunt's farm. It was the summer of 1941 when the Russians began to leave and the Germans began their occupation. There was a farm road that went towards the forest about half a kilometer away from the main road which was used by the military vehicles. The German planes were bombing the Russian troops. But, of course, the bombs were not always accurate, so our aunt's family and my family, mum, dad, my brother and me, went into the forest while the bombs dropped around us. But I was only five and a half years old and I wasn't really scared. I remember wearing a dark red coat and skipping along, when we went into the woods. We were there for quite some time, and when we returned, the German army had gone through the farm; the kitchen was like a pigsty, all the sheets were torn; jars of preserves were broken on the kitchen floor. So, that was the first bombing.

The second bombing was very hard. On 9 March 1944, when Russian planes bombed Tallinn [Tallinn is the capital of Estonia.], one bomb dropped into our backyard in Nõmme [Nõmme is now a district of Tallinn but it used to be a town near Tallinn.]. In fact, Nõmme was not bombed, the capital was bombed. That night it was like rockets of light, but they were more like lanterns that stayed in the sky, so the whole area was clearly visible, bright with light. And after the first avalanche, there was a break. We went to bed, but we didn't go to the basement or anywhere. Me, my brother and mother just shared the two beds amongst us. My aunt and uncle lived on the second floor, the rest of the family were in the kitchen. Then the bombing started again. Again, the lanterns were shot into the sky, my aunt came down from upstairs, and told my mother to get everybody up. My mother and brother got up, but she didn't want to disturb me, so I stayed asleep. Then a Russian plane was exactly in the German crosshairs and to fly faster, he unloaded his bombs and dropped three bombs on Nõmme, one of which fell in our garden. The explosion was so loud and because I was sleeping I got stuck underneath the rubble, due to the blast the window flew into the ceiling and it collapsed. I wouldn't remember that, nothing much happened to me, but my mother told me the first thing I did was shout to ask if she was alive. Fortunately, my mother and brother had gotten up when my aunt told them to, so they weren't in the bed. The place where they had been sleeping was completely shattered. The rest of the family was okay, too. They had been in the kitchen. They were all standing there in the kitchen when the fragments started falling, but in the entryway in front of the kitchen were all our skis and ski poles, a whole pile in that corner, and they held back those fragments. So, the house stayed intact. I have lived there all my life and still do.

And there was a third bombing as well. After the second my aunt told my mother, that she shouldn't stay with the kids and that she must leave. She had to get out of Estonia. And, we were ready to do it, father packed our things and my brother agreed to go. We went to Nõmme station, and the last train to Haapsalu was there. It was so full that my father and my aunt's husband's brother were on the train roof. As the train started moving toward Haapsalu, Russian planes bombed it. German officers stood in the

doorways of the carriages, telling us to get out, and lie in the ditch on our bellies, and leave our things on the train. When the planes came again, we were told to get off the train again, this time with our things, and again to lie down in the ditch on our bellies. The third time they bombed we were told not to go anywhere. Some rushed off the train, we stayed on and the train somehow crawled out of there. But we did not reach Haapsalu, the train reached Palivere. The Estonian corps were there on bicycles, which had no tires, and we stayed in Palivere for three days and then returned home. And, I have to say, that I have always been grateful that I didn't leave. I'm really glad that I still live here in my home, there are some relatives who are abroad, but I think we did the right thing staying in Estonia. So, this was the second period, the war years, where there were three bombings that I survived and saw that war at very close quarters.

When the war ended, the third period began. And it was during the third period that I started playing tennis. Later, we often wondered with my training companions, how we ended up playing tennis in the first place. And then we remembered that there was a guy in our neighborhood, who had an old racket at home and he went to Dynamo Hall and said he wanted to learn to play tennis. He took a friend with him. And then Evald Kree [Evald Kree (11.06.1918 – 05.03.1995) was an Estonian tennis player, ice hockey player, coach and sports person.], who was then a trainer and later my trainer, asked if they knew any girls too. So the boys called us, girls, too. Well, we went to try it and that's how I started playing tennis. But, in fact, during and after the war, I spent a lot of time in the countryside on my uncle's farm near my aunt's farm and close to where my mother grew up. I've worked in the fields, and when we were children we loved using the big rake. We had a signal when a meal was ready, my aunt sent up a white flag to let us know it was time to come and eat.

I had another decisive moment back there. I was twelve when I started to play tennis and for the first time I had to go alone on the train from the countryside to Tallinn. I even had to change trains in Tamsalu, because from Tapa to Tamsalu there was this narrow gauge railway. So I had to change and I had to go to Tallinn to play tennis. So I would say that my childhood ended with that and the athlete's way began.

Jõesalu: Can you tell us a little about what drew you to tennis and what about it you particularly like and enjoy?

Märja: I had a relatively short tennis career because I had a very serious injury when I was 22 and had to quit playing. I was in Moscow competing and playing mixed doubles with Eerik Kedars [Eerik Kedars (29.11.1936) is an Estonian tennis player and sportsman.], and I jumped and fell at the net and damaged my elbow. I was taken to a hospital in Moscow, and an X-ray had to be done to determine whether there was a fracture. Because it was their lunch break, the nurses were in the lunchroom eating sandwiches, and they said, “куда она спешит (what's her hurry), it's not like she's catching a train, there's plenty of time.” My arm was set in a plaster cast, and when it was removed, my arm would not straighten, then it was broken again at the hospital and reset, and to this day it does not bend, as you can see. I was 22 then and I

practically gave up. One really important thing about tennis is that it inspired me. When something needs to be gotten from somewhere and no one feels like they can be bothered to get it, I always go because I know, you couldn't play tennis if you didn't go get the ball. It's really in the blood, just get up, go and get it. Essentially, tennis taught me a lot, and I wouldn't say that the physical aspect was the most important. It taught us honesty because we usually played without a referee. In those early years we traveled around Russia a lot, always by train. On the train we always had such nice experiences. If nothing else was happening, the trainer would say, "Today is Aino's birthday." And Aino said "no, what are you talking about?" Our trainer always wanted to let us feel that it would be like someone's birthday, it was that sense of belonging he created. To this day I am closest to this group of friends, although it was 60 years ago when I almost became a tennis champion in Estonia. We still keep in touch and we have grown up together, and tennis has had a lot to do with that. And even though I haven't been playing for a long time, as I got a little older, I tried it again, but I got a hip injury and then decided "no more". But I set the alarm clock to ring at 2am if Kontaveit [Anett Kontaveit (24.12.1995) is a successful Estonian tennis player.] is playing. So, I still get a lot from tennis.

Jõesalu: Let me come back to you saying that you were happy that you stayed, that you returned home, that you are still there, what does the word home mean to you?

Märja: Above all, of course, for me, home is where I live, and where my loved ones live, and I think the most important thing was that my mother was there.

We didn't go abroad, but one of my mother's brothers went to Brazil in the 1920s (when many young men decided to emigrate to Brazil) and I was fortunate to have managed to visit him in 1974. I had a visa for a month, and when I got there, I told my uncle that we had to go right away to check in at the registry. I asked them to put the stamp on my departure date. They asked with surprise if I didn't want to renew it, and I said no. They said I wouldn't be able to renew later, and I said that was fine, because I was going home for sure. I knew my mother was waiting and her health was not very good. Home is always home. Even my brother who was a year and a half older than me, and went to Tartu to study medicine and no longer lived at home because he worked elsewhere, mainly in Tartu. I always asked him if he'd be coming home. Because to my mind it was home for him too, he had lived there, we had been there together, it's home.

And well, that's why it's pretty difficult for me to understand those who just move here and there, when I've never moved in my life. I've lived here all my life, it's home. And I always want to return here. Things happened, for instance, there was the August Putsch [The August Coup or August Putsch took place on 19.08 – 22.08.1991 and was an attempt by members of the Soviet Union's government to take control of the country from the Soviet President and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. Estonian Restoration of Independence is celebrated on 20 August as on that day, in 1991 at 11:02 pm local time, the Estonian Supreme Soviet, in agreement with the Estonian Committee (the executive organ of the Estonian Congress) proclaimed Estonian

independence from the Soviet Union. 20 August is a public holiday in Estonia.] on 20 August 1991. I had to fly from Riga to Copenhagen that day. The plane was canceled, and everyone was told the borders were closed. I still managed to get to Copenhagen, but there we were told that the tanks were in Tallinn. The Danes said I had to stay in Copenhagen and that I would need a visa. But I said no way, let the tanks come, I want to go home. That is what home is.

Jõesalu: Do you remember the first time you travelled abroad?

Märja: Well, the question of what defines abroad has a double edge for me, in that the Soviet Union was a common homeland, even though it was made up of the separate Soviet republics. I was thirteen and a half when I first went to the Union-wide youth tennis tournament in Harkov, Ukraine. Today that would surely be considered going abroad. But at the time it did not seem so.

I travelled to the west, for the first time in 1957; it was a trip to London with an all-Union group to watch the Wimbledon Tennis Championship. It was my first real trip. Before the trip, we had to go to Moscow, first. We were taught how to eat with a knife and fork there. And then we boarded our flights. It was my first flight. It's easy to get to London these days; you board a plane in Tallinn and land at any airport there. But we flew from Moscow to Helsinki, Helsinki to Amsterdam, Amsterdam to Paris and from Paris we flew to London. But the adventure started for me on the plane from Helsinki to Amsterdam, where we were given food and coconut milk. And after drinking the coconut milk, I started to feel very sick, so that when we got to Amsterdam, my girlfriend and doubles partner Velve Tamm practically carried me off the plane, I even have some pictures. We all had to wait in the terminal for a while. And then from Amsterdam our next stop was Paris. In Paris we had a whole day before our next flight. We were taken on an excursion. We were at Sacré-Cœur Church and suddenly the rest of the group had disappeared. It was just Velve and me. Velve said they went to the church tower, and that we should go too, I said no, we should stay where we were. Velve wanted to go and I wanted to stay put. Fortunately, the group came back. We got hell for it, and were told that if anything else happened, we would be sent home.

We finally arrived in London and the image of when we landed has remained before my eyes ever since. London was so beautiful and all the big roads and streets in the city that the plane had flown over had lanterns of all different colours; yellow, red, green, it was fabulous. Some images stay with you, and when I think of London, I see that picture right away. So that was my so-called first 'real' foreign trip.

Jõesalu: And how old were you then, I know you mentioned the year...

Märja: It was summer and I was 22, about to turn 23 in autumn. So, there was nothing before that. In London, of course, we were very well received, visitors from the Soviet Union, and then Perry [Frederick John Perry, also known as Fred Perry (18.05.1909 – 02.02.1995) was a British tennis and table tennis player and former World No.1 from England who won 10 Majors including eight Grand Slams and two Pro Slams single titles, as well as six Major doubles titles.], who was the owner of a big company, gave me the first lipstick of my life. And that was another meaningful connection to that trip.

Jõesalu: Very interesting. This might be a bit of an abstract question, but still, was Europe something you were already aware of as a child?

Märja: Certainly not, absolutely not. Let's just say that knowledge of Europe basically came to us from Finnish television, and on the other hand, maybe it came to me through sports. At the tennis competitions I met other nationalities, such as Finns, who came to Estonia. At that time, we couldn't play outside of the Soviet Union yet. But in Moscow, where we had our competitions, players from other European countries came, but these were specific people from specific countries in specific competitions. But Europe as such, unfortunately not.

Jõesalu: But when you went to England, arrived in London, was there, some sort of feeling perhaps?

Märja: Oh no, unfortunately not. It was interesting that we were immediately contacted by Estonians who had left during the war. It turned out later that we also met a war criminal there, I don't know if he was called that, but in any case, he was a wanted man and we didn't know. Once we were taken to somewhere and asked if we knew where we were. We said we didn't know, and after that we were always looking behind us to see if anyone was following us. I thought maybe I would somehow get in touch with my uncle. I even wrote to him, that "hey, it's your poor cousin here", which the Estonian ex-pats encouraged me to do, saying that since I had an uncle there, why couldn't he support me? But at that time we failed to make contact. So yes, Europe and European awareness, came much later. And I have to say, it came to me, not through sports, but through adult education.

Jõesalu: Glad to hear it. But we haven't gotten there yet ...

Märja: Yes, we'll get there. But I've to say I have witnessed some amazing events. I was leaving on the 20 August 1991, and then on 6 September 1991, when the Soviet Union and Gorbachev officially recognized Estonia as an independent nation, I was abroad again. This time, I was in Switzerland, at a big event. Back then Estonia was poor and we could only go when we were invited and all our expenses were paid. Since then Europe has become meaningful for me.

Jõesalu: Did you enjoy going to school?

Märja: I really wanted to go to school. I wanted to go with my brother, who is a year and a half older and later my mother told me that I stayed in bed for two days crying under the blanket because I was not allowed to go to school. But my mother felt that two children can be very different, and maybe they learn differently, and if they are in the same class, who knows what quarrels and troubles there might be. And, of course, my mother was very right, because my brother was terribly thorough, he learned very thoroughly, and I think he remembers everything he has ever learned throughout his lifetime. He studied to be a doctor and was a surgeon. But I studied differently, for instance, when I was in college, just before the exam, there were three days and three thick books that I read and learned quickly, and when the exam was over, it all went out of my head. I didn't keep to myself.

So yes I really wanted to go to school. And in my youth I went to different schools. I started school in 1943, during wartime and only got through the first half of the first grade because our school became a German army hospital. When we went back to school, we discovered that the stone floors had been badly damaged, and I fell and tore my knee open. I held my hand over it and went home. It was about one and a half or two kilometers. And to this day, I still have the scar from that school.

So, I have another very important memory from this first school that I graduated from in 1950. And all my life since, I have wondered if this behavior was correct or not. My maiden name was Väli and I was last on the student list. After the quarter term exam, given by the headmaster in I think it was mathematics, he picked up a sheet of paper, and announced that he would read everyone's grade aloud. He began to read, when he reached me, he said Väli: five. And then he asked if everyone had a fair grade. But I knew I had more fours. I probably had one at quarter term. I raised my hand and said my grade should be four. "Yes," he said "that's right". Well, the lesson was about honesty, on the one hand, but on the other hand, I wonder was it right for the headmaster to test a student in that way. What if I hadn't said anything? Four was the grade, the certificate read four, and he just read five out loud. But I have remembered that all my life, you see. No matter the consequences, always be honest.

In 1951, I went to High School 10, or Tallinn Nõmme Secondary School as it's known today. Nowadays it is debated whether or not it is still necessary to take three examinations at the end of grammar school, but at the time the number of exams corresponded with the number of the grade. Seventh, seven exams, eighth, eight, ninth, nine, tenth, ten, and, only in grade 11 was there one exam less. You graduated from high school with ten exams. I remember so many good stories about these exams. In eighth grade, we had a math exam in the big hall, all classes were there together. I really liked math and I knew math. I don't remember how many assignments there were. I did one assignment. The teacher, a very old man, was walking around; he looked and said "you have the wrong answer". I looked around to see that others were finishing and leaving the hall like the boys from the older classes including he, who later became my husband, who was already in the tenth or eleventh grade. Everybody was leaving and saying "Talvi doesn't know math. Talvi can't do a math assignment." I looked again, and thought "no. No, I won't change my answer, because I'm right". The teacher came again, and said "you are wrong". Finally, the teacher sat down at his desk and did the assignment again and it turned out that mine was right and his was wrong. Only two students got fives on that exam, me and the weakest student in our class, she was sitting behind me and copying my answers! You have to fight to the end, if you believe you are right. Quite clearly, I am that way and will be to the end.

And then I remember some stories especially about the two final exams, so-called "maturity exams". The first one was history. I had to give dates of events and I did it randomly. And that is another example. There was a Commission of three people, and the question was how do they listen? Because I knew, if you speak loudly, clearly and confidently, they will not listen to what you are saying. Our class monitor sat down and held his head with both hands and was thinking "what is she doing?" But I got a five.

And the last exam we had was chemistry. Altogether we had six oral exams and four written. Now, can you imagine what were the numbers of my exam tickets [Exam tickets – In Soviet Time there was a system that before each exam the students got nine exam tickets with questions and themes to prepare. And on the exam you picked one of the tickets.], what I finally got? Nine, nine, four, four, nine, four. And what do you think I learned especially hard for the last exams, of course the themes and questions of nines and fours were very clear to me. I studied these hard and it was so great to pick my tickets, my mouth went to my ears (*laughs*). The teacher asked me “what is it?”. I said everything is okay. But there was another moment in this story I remember. I had to make one last experiment in my chemistry exam. I did it and put it on the stand, but by the time I got ready to answer, it had changed color. And I saw that was not right, and I was thinking “for heaven’s sake”. But the teacher realised it as well and said, take it out of there. It had turned blue.

But actually I did so much sports that for the whole month of September I was always at camp in Georgia. But at school I still studied well and got good grades. But then there was another time, the director talked to me and said that unless I became a member of the Komsomol (Communist Youth Organization), he would no longer allow me to compete. I went to see our school's leader of the Komsomol, my classmate Hilja Tombu, and complained. Hilja went to the director and said no one should be coerced into Komsomol, it must be inner will and personal desire. And I didn't join the Komsomol.

So, those are some moments from my school years. But we can continue on to talking about my time at university.

Jõesalu: Yes, how did that choice come about?

Märja: Actually, I have only ever studied with distance learning and I wrote my dissertation long distance as well, I just didn't have the opportunity to be a full-time student. The choice was made simply because there was nothing else for me to study. My father died when I graduated high school, my mother was left alone. My brother studied medicine in Tartu. There was no chance that both children could go to a university full time, so I had to study by distance learning. I missed a year, almost completely, because in the beginning there was no physical education at the University of Tartu and physical education was my choice since I was playing tennis and already had been accepted for a coaching position or as an instructor. So, this was the beginning of my working life as well. So, I went to study physical education, and perhaps, maybe otherwise, I would have chosen to study something else. But those were the circumstances at the time, I remember very well that I did my ski exam on Kääriku with my brother's skis and boots. The boots and skis were four sizes too big and I bought my own ski boots and skis when I got married. So that is how I came to study physical education.

And then I was a trainer for a long time, and then, well, let's just say that chance has played a huge role in my life. I have never aspired to a more senior position or a leadership position, or to the Parliament or elsewhere, but then something happens,

and there I go. As a tennis instructor I had a very good student who, accidentally one day, struck me in the head with his racket while training. I went to the trainer's room and saw that I had a big scary bump on my forehead. I combed my hair to the side a bit to hide it and went back down, and he said, oh that hairstyle is just right for you. He was not sorry, and I thought "I have to study psychology, otherwise I won't know how I'll deal with him". My trainer, Evald Kree, said I should rather go for a postgraduate course [Postgraduate course (called aspirantuur) is a form of postgraduate studies, that was used, for example, during the Soviet era, in Russia and elsewhere. During this postgraduate course the research student could get a scholarship and other facilities for research work. During the postgraduate studies a dissertation is prepared.] and do that. And I said "no".

Back then the University of Tartu took students who already had a higher education degree but wanted to have another immediately into the third course. So we didn't have to take all the general subjects again. At university, people used to say "if you had your diploma in your pocket and still came to study, you were cracked in the head". Nobody talked about lifelong learning back then. So I went to study psychology and it was distance learning, again. The first time I'd been a distance student, because we didn't have a permanent living arrangement, we had to sleep in the basements of the university buildings. But when I was studying psychology, I didn't want to do that, and I thought about the nice Park Hotel, and even though they didn't accept students, we still secretly lived at the hotel. And then again, I thought, no, I can't, it was my sense of honesty again. I went to the hotel director and said, "I'm a student, and I know I shouldn't be here, but maybe you can let me stay because I don't want to live in the basements anymore". And she allowed it.

When I started to write my dissertation, there was a problem, because it was not possible to defend psychology in Estonia at the time. And the supervisor had to be a full doctor (Doctor of Science), so PhD Ülo Vooglaid [Ülo Vooglaid (29.08.1935) is an Estonian social scientist, educator and politician. He has been a member of the parliament in three configurations, including in the first after Estonia regained its independence. Ülo Vooglaid is Emeritus Professor at the University of Tartu.], who was a lecturer at the university, could not be the supervisor. Ülo Vooglaid and Marju Lauristin's [Marju Lauristin (7.04.1940) is an Estonian social scientist and politician. She was Estonian Minister of Social Affairs from 1992 to 1994 and was a member of the parliament. Lauristin is Emeritus Professor of Social Communication at the University of Tartu. In the 2014 European parliamentary elections she was elected to the European Parliament with 26,871 votes.] supervisor, Professor Jadov, who was the director of the Institute of Sociology, and had been sent from Moscow to Leningrad, became my supervisor. So, I wrote my dissertation and worked at the Department of Labour and Management Systems at the Ministry of Light Industry [Later it was named Mainor.]. And then when I went to Leningrad, then called the A. Ždanov Leningrad University, to find out whether I could take the exams and defend my dissertation long distance, I was told there was a long waiting list. But when Kuzmin, the head of the department, heard that I was a Soviet Union champion athlete, he moved me to the

front of the list. Well, he knew what an athlete struggles with and that they won't quit. So I defended my work there long distance. It was the Doctoral Council, the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Council, who took me in. I guess there wasn't any other kind of council. Well, in any case, all the best-known psychologists and professors of psychology in the Soviet Union sat on that council. So, of course, I had to do it in Russian and there were two options, one was to write in Estonian and have it translated, but I said "no, I will write in Russian, and so what if I misspell some words, at least I know what I'm writing and when it's finished I'll have it edited". And then the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Council offered me a full doctorate if I was willing to add some extra work. But the twist was, that if I had accepted the offer to get a full doctorate, and failed, I wouldn't get the degree candidate [Degree candidate is a first order scientific degree in Russia. In the Republic of Estonia the degree of the candidate of sciences is equal to the Estonian doctoral degree.] either. I said "no, thank you very much, I don't want that. But please make me a degree candidate and everything will be fine".

I'm going to tell you another great story on this subject. After I made my dissertation defense, my documents had to be sent to the Higher Attestation Committee (VAK) [VAK – a shortening from the organisation name „Высшая аттестационная комиссия“, which means Higher Attestation Committee. In Soviet era the organization issued doctoral degrees.] within three days. I had to gather all my work and the review, and at that time it was still necessary that there was a critical authority or institute. And my critical authority was the KGB Institute in Moscow. And there was a doctoral psychologist who had to write about my defense. And a secretary came to me after my defense and says "You know Talvi, it hasn't happened yet, but it could still." There was a break before voting, and the Dean took my folder with all the documents and started browsing. At one point someone came to him and he left the room, with one page left to look at. Had that not happened, he would have seen I did not have the KGB Institute review. It was missing from the department. But within three days, it was necessary to send it to the Higher Attestation Committee. Jadov, my supervisor, said, "You know, it was 23 February [Anniversary of the Soviet Army (23 February)], we'll write to him that it was the Army anniversary and there was a small party in the department and a flower vase tipped over on to this document and ask him to send a new one. He was not petty and wrote that yes, he would send it. Let Talvi bring that damp paper to me in Moscow, he was at a hospital just then, and said he'd look and write a new one. Another day went by, and a post-graduate student came with a pale face and trembling hands and feet, saying that when he had taken his papers, he got some of mine which were under his. So, it still arrived on time and went to the VAK and was properly accepted. So that's how I got it.

But as far as learning goes, I am a lifelong learner, and even when the phrase lifelong learning did not exist, I went to language school at Marxist-Leninist Night University, it was mandatory for everyone. The name was crazy but everything else was okay. They had very nice lecturers and the Faculty of Culture was involved. So, these are my stories. Yes, the first choice was forced, but the second choice was from the heart.

And then, when I finished, there were several options as to what to do next. I didn't really continue as a coach, but I still had one group. Then one year I was at one of the research institutes and Professor Rein Virkus [Rein Virkus (18.06.1930 – 14.08.1998) - From 1974, he worked as the Vice Rector for Studies and Research at Tallinn Pedagogical Institute, from 1979 to 1992 he was the Rector of the Institute and from 1993 he was Professor Emeritus.], who was then director of the Pedagogical Institute, wanted me at the university. He told me that the City of Tallinn had commissioned a sports science study. My work was in sports sociology after I graduated with my degree in psychology. And my supervisor was professor Mait Arvisto [Mait Arvisto (25.07.1940 – 21.11.2016) was an Estonian educator and sports teacher.] and I could have become a sports psychologist or a sociologist, but there was no such place in Estonian sports. He said Tallinn is commissioning a study of how sports affect the social atmosphere of Tallinn, and so on. And on the day that Tallinn canceled the contract, I accepted a job with Ülo Pärnits, at Mainor though it was not called Mainor yet, then it was the Department of Labour and Management Systems at the Ministry of Light Industry. And Virkus said to me later, you stabbed me in the back. The local government of Kohtla-Järve signed a contract and he had given me my job as a psychology teacher. But now when I think about it, my life would have gone completely differently. I would have been a psychology lecturer there, but I went to Pärnits and we started there, and I ended up doing educational training work.

Jõesalu: We're actually going to get to the topic of your professional work life, but I'd like to come back for a moment, because it was so interesting how you came to the choice of studying psychology, you said that it became important for you to understand your student, so I am asking, who was a good coach to you or who do you think is a good coach?

Märja: Yes, that's a good question, because one of the questions in the preparatory materials [She refers to the pre-information about this interview.] were also, did I ever have dreams in my youth? And I had two dreams, one was that I wanted to become a good mother like my mother. And I wanted to become as good a coach as my coach, Evald Kree. Neither dream came true because Soviet medicine did not give me the opportunity to have children. And, I quit coaching and changed jobs. I told all my students not to go to train to be a coach. Because being a coach is not seven or eight hours a day and five days a week. Coaching is twenty-four seven. You are with them all the time; you have to be there all the time. You are at the competitions, you're at practice, and you're giving it all away. At the time when I was a coach, and at the end I was a coach of a youth team, I travelled a lot in Russia to competitions with them. The first thing was that I started buying socks for my husband because I didn't have time to darn socks. Then we got rid of all the strawberry beds, but it must have been a bit later, because my husband tended the beds and did everything, but nothing grew. As a coach you have to be there all the time including weekends. That's the dedication that makes a good coach, and of course you need to understand the person. A coach must be enough of a psychologist to understand their players. And you see psychology, human understanding, really benefits the andragogue too. Because if you do not

understand your learners, who are sitting there in front of you, if you are here and they are there, then you absolutely cannot get results. Perhaps those teachers and coaches think that they are the best, but they can't be. So, there isn't much difference. A dedicated coach or a dedicated teacher/ lecturer, they have to give from their souls.

Jõesalu: We have already reached the beginning of this part of your work life, after being a coach, what was your first job? Please describe your professional career. What have you devoted yourself to, and what do you devote yourself to now?

Märja: I reached women's retirement in Soviet era at the age of 55. It is known that during the Soviet era women retired at 55. It felt like a very young age for me, I looked at how much I had worked, for 20 years I was involved in sports and then for the next 20 years I was involved in education and teaching. And because 55 is still very young, everything that came after that had an even broader scope for me. But yes, I got my work record book before I had even finished high school. I clearly remember sitting and studying for the chemistry exam I was talking about earlier. We were at a training camp at the Pirita Sailing Centre, the tennis camp was there, and I was studying for my ninth and fourth exam tickets in the woods. Because my coach, Evald Kree, understood that my mother's situation was not good at all, I was assigned to be an instructor at the Sports Society Dynamo. Instructor at the time meant something more like a pro-athlete today. But that didn't mean I didn't teach the kids, I started teaching them right away. I coached for a very long time, sometimes freezing in Dynamo Hall during training sessions, where there was barely any heat. And later, I still played tennis myself for a while. So, that was the work, first with the kids and then the kids grew a little bigger and they were in the youth group. Recently I met one former student who said do you remember Talvi, how you taught me as a psychologist, and I won the game, because you knew how to guide me. It is moments like that, that we remember. And interestingly, different people remember different things about the same thing or period. I started thinking about it recently. A bit later, I might talk about why some have meaning for one person, but apparently not for another. That's how things like that come to mind.

But I was a coach for quite a while and then I studied psychology, and I decided that I would give up my coaching job because I just could not be on the go all the time. And it was actually so interesting to change my profession, because it was as if I went to another world.

When I quit the coaching profession, I had already started working at the Department of Labour and Management Systems at the Ministry of Light Industry. It's such a long and complicated name. But later it became Mainor, which is a lot easier. And I worked there for 11 years. It was a very interesting job, and it was also a very interesting time, many changes took place, and finally, when Ülo Pärnits became the director, he gave me a lot of opportunities to do research. And I was able to write my dissertation there and do the experiments I needed to, for my work. And that's where the first assignment really started, which was to create a training programme for light industry system managers. There were 43 companies, and their leaders had to start learning. Later, a

reserve of managers was added. And at the very beginning, probably the first year an American delegation came to visit us. Among them was a senator who wanted to start a leadership-training project between the Soviet Union and America. They were very nice, and on my recent birthday, when Ülo Pärnits was still alive, he said, "Talvi, you are the one who overthrew the Soviet Union, do you remember what you told the leaders of their American delegation?" (*Laughs*) I don't remember it being that crazy, but I do remember what the head of that delegation, the senator said. Our director, at the time, Jakov Portnoi, said that a long (*extending her arms to demonstrate*) wooden map pointer was a souvenir for him. The senator said, "no, no", and embracing me, he said "I'll take this as a souvenir!" (*Laughs*) So we started to work and in the same building we had a separate training facility, where we started the courses. And I will remember my first lecture for the rest of my life. I went to my class, the whole hall was full of young men, they were middle level managers and foremen in factories. I thought, Lord God, I have to talk to them for 45 minutes, what am I going to talk about. My hands were trembling, suddenly someone sitting in the back row, took a shoe or boot and threw it to the front of the auditorium. Everybody started laughing, and I understood, they were schoolboys, there is no difference, when they come in the door of a classroom, they are no longer leaders or top executives, they are all schoolboys. So that is how the training job began. We wrote study materials and did all the usual work around it. And I worked there until ... ahaa, it was after 1983 when I defended my dissertation.

And then one day Ülo Vooglaid came to me and said, Talvi, let's go to the Continuing Education Centre of the Pedagogical Institute. He told me that there was a Professor Tüرنpuu [Lembit Tüرنpuu (30.06.1934 – 05.05.2017) was an Estonian educator.], who wrote all the punch cards in a systematic way and when there was a break, there was always music playing. These are the things that I remember. So, we went to visit it and Milli-Irene Pedajas [Milli-Irene Pedajas (16.08.1933 – 08.10.1991) was an Estonian pedagogical researcher.] said that because I wrote my dissertation on teamwork and had team training experiences and had trained at least 20 real teams, I should come there to teach.

So we started doing trainings there as well and the question, "what next?", appeared. Professor Rein Virkus was a rector then, the first time when I had refused his offer, he had been a vice rector. He said they would only open the andragogy department if I joined them permanently. "If you come, we will do it." he said. Ülo Vooglaid was the one who helped name it - the department of Andragogy and Leadership. I said, wait, let me think. Then I said okay, all I have is one or two conditions. "What conditions?" asked Virkus. I'm not coming to work by 8am. Because I'd had that at Mainor for 11 years, every morning when I got up at 6:30 am, I thought I am not going to work tomorrow. I do not like getting up in the morning - didn't like it, now it is different, now I have a dog who demands it. The two conditions were that I would not have to go to work so early. But then actually I still had to, because my husband took me to work in the car. Later on, it became clear that all the subordinates, I was Department Head then, thought that I was going in early to check that they were getting to work on time.

(Laughs). And the other condition was that I could create the department workload myself, the department load, not the lecturers, and it gave us so much freedom. Professor Larissa Jõgi [Larissa Jõgi is an Estonian educational scientist and professor of adult education in Tallinn University.], for example, completed her dissertation because I did not assign her a workload. While she wrote her dissertation, all the other faculty members covered for her. Virkus said that so long as the work is done, it is okay to come to work later. That's how I got into education.

But actually two years earlier, I had taught at Tallinn University of Technology. Well how did I get there? It was a nice story as well, because Boris Tamm [Boris Tamm (23.06.1930 – 5.02.2002) was an Estonian cyber engineer.], a close friend of the family, was a rector there. It happened that in the university newspaper those who had graduated as economists and engineers wrote in an opinion article that they were good economists and good engineers, but they didn't know how to communicate well with their colleagues, how to speak publicly etc. And then came the idea, that there was a need to teach psychology to economists and engineers. In Soviet times, psychology at a Technical University was unheard of. Well, ostensibly there was an attempt, but it wasn't actually a real competition, but many were asked, and Henn Mikkin [Henn Mikkin (20.01.1947 – 06.06.2004) was an Estonian psychologist.] wrote that he wanted to do these communication trainings as well, but that never got on the record. But Milvi Tepp [Milvi Tepp is a psychologist. She has worked for many years as a consultant and trainer in human resource management.], she is also a professor, and I, we wrote a joint programme and with that programme we started teaching for two years (1984-1985) in Tallinn University of Technology. We had very big groups; each had half of them. And I remember, the first year, when I did everything properly, I wrote a detailed plan and followed it, feeling it my responsibility as a university lecturer. And also our programme was very nice, about what psychology is and, what kinds of insights come from it and then at the very end of the programme what communication is and how to work together and so on. Well, I gave those lectures while the girls knitted. Well, I'd been watching them knit, wondering "how can they take the exam?" In the end, I decided to make the exam multiple choice and everyone took the test, but that was the first semester.

And now in the second semester, after the New Year, came the fifth course, who in spring had to defend their diploma work, and they were mostly IT boys. The groups were big, at least 40 students and several groups were together. And then I decided; the first semester was a nice experiment, but no, I won't do that anymore. Because there was a need to learn how to communicate and how to collaborate. How could I leave that to the end? What's the point of it? I turned the programme around, so we started from communication and teamwork and then would see when there was a need to clarify something. And I remember very well the first time I got together with a group. At the University of Technology, there was a small dark, cold, room separated by a curtain from the big hall, on 10th January 1985 there were ten students sitting in the room. And I said "oh, how nice that you are here. But please tell everyone else in the class that they do not have to come to lectures. Everyone will be graded in the spring

so if they don't want to come, don't come. But whoever wants to come can come". And when the course ended in the spring, I asked the department to tell me who the hell these boys were, that instead of doing their graduation thesis, they all came to my lectures, 40 of them in the hall. They said "no-no, you're confused, all the other lecturers said they didn't show up anymore". But I gave them what they wanted. I did collaborative exercises. I did role-play games with them. I let them take tests and I gave feedback to everyone. They got what they wanted. I have told others not to follow my lead, but for me it was freedom. If you want to come, come, if you don't want to come, don't. They wanted to come, and at the same time I did not need them to, so you see such experiments can be done.

My journey and role in politics started very humorously as well. In 1993, one day Ülo Vooglaid came to the department, and he said "you know Talvi, the situation is that the Coalition Party needs women to run for city council". So, as a dutiful person, I went to the Coalition Party office and, introduced myself, and some of them knew my face. They asked what I wanted. I said, I would like to run for election. (*Laughs*). It was such a funny moment, that someone crazy comes in and says she wants to run. I lived in Nõmme, and Professor Endel Lippmaa [Endel Lippmaa (15.09.1930 – 30.07.2015) was an Estonian academic, and professor (Chemical Physics and Physical Chemistry).] was already on the ballot there, but they said I could try Mustamäe [Mustamäe is a district in Tallinn city.]. Why not? I went home and told my husband that I'm going to run. He says, "You're crazy, look at your passport, don't you know how old you are?" It was 1993. He continued, "I know how hard you work and I see how tired you are and how much you struggle at home. But if you dress up and go out of the door and announce your candidacy, no one else will understand it, but I know you're too old." I went back to the office and told them that I will not be a candidate, my husband said I'm too old. Well, they probably thought I was crazy, and they said I wouldn't win anyway, but there would maybe be a few votes, and I might as well be on the ballot. I returned home and my husband said, "What? If you are already a candidate, you can't run with that attitude! Going through with it knowing you can't win. There are two options, either you run properly, or you don't run."

Well, at the end of the day, we agreed that I would run. I got almost a thousand votes. This was a big surprise to Tiit Vähi [Tiit Vähi (10.01.1947) is an Estonian politician and entrepreneur, the Prime Minister of Estonia in 1992 and 1995-1997.] too, who back then was the chairman of the Coalition Party. That's because I was running for Mustamäe and there were so many voters who had been my students, so I got into the council with quite a few votes. While I was on the city council, Arnold Rüütel [Arnold Rüütel (10.05.1928) is an Estonian politician and agricultural scientist, President of the Republic of Estonia from 2001 to 2006.] was appointed chairman of the culture committee of the council and Rüütel said that he wanted Talvi Märja to be his deputy. In the final years, he wasn't so active there, and I was in full command. Then came the 1995 parliamentary elections. I said that I was not running, that I couldn't stand all the muck and how the members of parliament are insulted. Vähi said that I should calm down and he will take care of everything. Back then, it was not like it is nowadays with

everyone campaigning, releasing propaganda, pictures, and so on. Back then there was the list. And I was on the list representing the Coalition Party and the Rural Union (KMU) [The Conservative Party and the Peoples' Association (less commonly referred to as the Confederate Party and the Peoples' Association) (abbreviated as KMÜ) was an electoral alliance formed for the 1995 parliamentary elections, consisting of five parties.]. Ülo Vooglaid who had been in the first parliament in 1992 as well said he was swapping places with me. You're going to the Parliament and I'm going to be the chair of the department. Of course, he did not become chair of the department, but he gave me his place on the list. So I was on the 9th place of the list and eventually 41 from the list got a place in the Parliament. So absolutely no advertising was done, except for the four top spots. These were Tiit Vähi, Rüütel, Endel Lippmaa and Andrus Öövel [Andrus Öövel (17.10.1957) is a former Estonian rower, sports person and later politician.]. I got relatively few votes but as I said I didn't really campaign either. I didn't have the resources. I couldn't use my own money, at that time I was a professor, but the pay was very small. But because there was this possibility to get in the Parliament through the list, so that's how I ended up in the Parliament.

In the Parliament I went to the Culture Commission. The elections for the chairman and the vice-chairman were up. The candidates were nominated, but no votes were given to them. One was professor Sergei Issakov from Tartu and the other Jaak Allik. So there was a recess while new candidates were selected. Ülo Vooglaid nominated Talvi Märja. I was thinking "what are you doing by choosing me?" But that's what happened. Then the voting started again and it was draw, draw and again draw. In the end we were tossing coins, so it turned out that for the first year I was deputy chairman and the following year I became chairman of the Committee of Culture for the next three years. Well, it's a very big job, a policy job with much to do all at once. When I finished in 1999, I became a professor emeritus, and maybe I'm going to stop this job part of the story now. Well, I can, of course, continue, but there are many adult education stories to be told.

But one funny story just popped into my head. It happened immediately after I left the parliament in 1999. When I was the chairman of the Culture Committee, I constantly received letters from here and there. So after I left I got a letter with an offer from a man, who wanted to create an adult education system here in Estonia. I do not remember where he was from, but he wrote that he had been in Africa and created a system that worked very well there. He wrote that he didn't want much for it, just a house somewhere in Europe – so you see, not even in Estonia, but in Europe – and some money as well. I was relieved that I wasn't the chairman of the Committee of Culture anymore so I could just thank him and explain I no longer have the political power or resources for such a project. In those early first years of re-independence, there were many who wanted to help us and many who thankfully did. But not all of them had sincere ambitions – to compare Estonia with Africa in a way that it doesn't matter, come on, this is ridiculous. But that was a real story.

Jõesalu: But that was the time when the Adult Education Act was passed.

Märja: Yes, we actually started with the Adult Education Act in 1989, before Estonia became independent again. Our idea was that maybe we could manage to get it ready on time, so Marju Lauristin, who was back then a member of the Supreme Council, could support it and bring it to vote. Unfortunately, this did not happen due to the hectic situation. Luckily this act gained momentum again, and we made some changes and presented it to the first composition of Parliament in 1992. First, the chairman of the Committee of Culture wiped it out with remarks and questions. We even went to talk to the Minister about it and the thing that was debated most and caused the most arguments was about how many free days should an adult person get for studying. It was again Ülo Vooglaid, (you see his name pops up a lot!) who told us that in Finland they have 40 free days for learning. Finally, it was decided that in Estonia it will be 20 days. In 1993, the law was passed and it continues now though, of course some changes were made over time. But the most important part of this act was that we got the settlements about the financial resource in it as well. A small proportion went directly to non-formal education and continuing professional development courses for pedagogues and civil servants received generous funding. So the law passed in 1993 and for one year in 1994 the financial resources were there and it seemed everything started to work well for the pedagogues and civil servants as well. But as it happened all the funding wasn't used in that first year, because the training programs weren't all in place and up and running yet. Based on that the Minister of Education thought that the program was unnecessary and cut the funding for the following year. So there were no resources to continue for an entire year. And I think the following was one of my most important efforts in service. For the whole period of preparing for the next state budget I tagged along with the Minister of Finance and explained how important this funding is. Back then the government and parliament were in the same building, so it was easy for me to do. I achieved and got it reestablished and it stayed that way for a long time. When the European Union grants began to come to us, then it was decided that we will use it for further funding. So that was the story about the Adult Education Act.

Jõesalu: When did the words Europe and European Union start to enter your consciousness, and also your work life?

Märja: Once again I have to say there was a coincidence in my life that led me to this. In 1988 I was already working at the Pedagogical Institute. That summer, academic Heino Liimets [Heino Liimets (22.01.1928 – 30.04.1989) was an Estonian educator, lecturer of logic and psychology. He was the first educational academician in Estonia.], approached me about my work with adult education and said that he will give me an invitation. He just arrived from Finland, where he gave a presentation and he said that the Finns are organizing an event called the Meeting in Finland seminar. So you see, the Finns were smart to invite the world to them instead of going one by one to explore other countries' practices. I attended it for the 3 following years and there were around 250 people participating. Finland paid travel expenses, hotels, and daily allowances to everyone who attended from outside Finland, so people around the world were there, even from Africa. So yes, he gave me the invitation and I said to him that I don't even

speak Finnish. But after I received the invitation the first thing I did was take a Finnish language course, so that I could speak and understand at least a little. And then I went to the meeting. Again a memorable moment comes to mind. I remember it clearly how I travelled by boat, the 'Georg Ots'. Because years before I had trained the Estonian Navy team, and every time I needed to travel by ship I went to the crew and asked for a cabin. (Laughs) So I got a cabin and travelled to the meeting.

But now back to the seminar. It is interesting that all the first impressions are so memorable. We were in these big workgroups and had to say in English what we were doing professionally. I wrote down a few words for myself and when it was my turn, I said that we have these qualification courses and we are training people who are already working in the field. So the first question to me was, okay, you train people so they can be better at their work, but how do you teach adults to live better? "To live ..., I don't know?" I went home, went to the department, and gathered all the others. "How do we teach adult people to live?" I asked. After that we no longer used the word qualification course, we started to use the term adult education. So this was the start of using the term adult education. And we had to figure out how to do it. It was an exciting time.

We were in this transition period, our fight for freedom was going on and many countries reached out to us, to support us. I was invited to Sweden and elsewhere and the question always was, "what are we going to do to get our freedom back?" And already the following year in Sweden, I gave a presentation at the plenary meeting. But we were unsure of our standing - because we had been so isolated due the occupation we were so sure that we were behind with our progress. So I went abroad in 1989 and came back and said that we were on par with others doing the same work. Ülo Vooglaid doubted me. The next time I said we were on the same level as others, and the third time I said we were ahead of them. We were methodologically and theoretically strong, because after all we had these initiatives like Ülo Vooglaid's school and then we started the Uulu [Uulu seminars – seminars for adult educators. These seminars were named after the first seminar that took place in Uulu. In these seminars the theory and methodology of adult education were discussed.] seminars, from which the organization Association of Estonian Adult Educators ANDRAS grew out of. We already had a very good theoretical basis, because we'd had many thoughts and discussions already about the matters in adult education. So we were not behind at all.

Then there was another important moment for us. At a seminar we met a young man who was from Belgium, no actually from The Netherlands. Back then there was this organization called European Adult Education Bureau [Now it has become the European Association for the Education of Adults.] and he worked in that organization's finance department. So we met him at a training seminar, where he was the trainer. It was a very good training session. I remember so well, in the evening at dinner, there were white linens in the dining hall, servers in black tuxedos, and it also turned out that he had one course there, where he taught how to live at home after your husband has retired. So the main point of the training was how to adapt to the change, when your husband retires, because back then women were housewives. Years later, when my

husband retired, I immediately remembered this training! But back to the story again, so he was the one who said, "why wouldn't you want to become a member of this Bureau?" We stuttered "we have no way of affording the membership fee." He said "ahaa, I know how. I will tell you how the Poles got a membership. They brought me a painting and I sold it, and with the money I paid their membership fee." "Okay" we thought and so next time we went to the Bureau also with a painting. Again I remember so well how we flew there, so we started our flight from Moscow. And since Ülo Vooglaid was a member of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union [The Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union was the most authoritative legislative body of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) beginning 1936, and the only one with the power to approve constitutional amendments.], he could go through the VIP door. We had the painting nicely rolled up and packed, and Ülo took it with him, because we knew he would not be checked. I entered through another door. (Laughs). Later he still had to open the package, but we still managed to bring the painting to the Bureau. So that was how Estonia's organization, ANDRAS became a member of the European Adult Education Bureau.

I went to many places for the 'fight for freedom' movement, I was invited to talk about how we were dealing with independence and what we were doing. For the Scandinavian countries it was especially important. In 1989, we got the first of many invitations from Eva Launonen [Eva Launonen was the director of the Viittakivi International Folk High School.] to the Viittakivi International Folk High School. I managed to send all of the faculty members abroad to learn. I myself didn't go anywhere. It was so important, because we were all learning, because we were all still building the way in the field of adult education.

At the beginning of September, after Estonia declared independence in August 1991, it was the General Assembly of this European Bureau for the Education of Adults (EBEA), in St. Gallen in Switzerland. We attended and as I told ANDRAS was already a member. And on that day when Estonia was officially declared free by the Soviet Union as well, then the president of the Bureau, Leni Oglesby a professor from England - and I have to say here, that she and all following ones have been so supportive towards us - came to me and said that since Estonia was now independent, we are no longer just a member. He explained that the member organisations presidents are also the members of the Bureau board. At first it was a steering committee, later a board. So that was set then. And the following summer there was a board meeting planned in Cyprus. A Finn, Timo Toiviainen, said to me that he couldn't go, but he had a plane ticket and a hotel room, and everything booked through a travel agency. And he offered me his voucher. I stuttered "no I can't take it, we have no finance for that". The Finns paid for everything and I ended up going, and it turned out that the president and vice president were being elected at that meeting. And Paulo Federighi, an Italian professor from Florence, was elected as president, and then it was said that Talvi Märja is elected as vice president. And I was so surprised, my mouth went big and I said "good Lord." Professor Leni Oglesby [Professor Leny Ogelsby was the former president of the European Bureau for the Education of Adults (EBEA).] got so angry with Bill [He was

the secretary of EBEA.], one representative of a member. Leni shouted, “Did you really not talk to Talvi before?” He didn’t and I had to turn the offer down, because we just didn’t have any financial resources for it. Of course, it would have meant that I had to go to meetings and represent the organization etc. and all this means that you have to have resources. So unfortunately I could not accept. But then finally in 1995, I was re-elected vice president. Then we had a contract with the Germans, and they paid the expenses because we still had absolutely no finances. The support we got from outside, that was really, really big and helpful. But most important was that we were professionals, not amateurs. In the field of adult education, we were leaders, we were no runners behind. And if you speak clearly and directly on the same level, then you are equal and all things are possible.

So that is how it started for me and it was my job for over ten years. And at first, I also represented Latvia and Lithuania, and in the same way that the Finns, helped us, we helped the Lithuanians and the Latvians. Finally, I decided to step back so that others could be more active. So I think Latvia then took more initiative. But all this time when I was engaged I was part of the team who developed the organization from a Bureau to an Association [Today it is the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)]. And this was really hard work. So I think this was, for me, the feeling of Europe. I had to fly a lot and had many meetings in other countries.

But it wasn’t the European Union yet, but it had started forming, before we joined. The European Commission’s Directorate-General had an expert group dealing with adult education. Larissa Jõgi and I were in the expert group already some years before EU membership. We started evaluating European Union projects, Larissa wasn’t much for evaluation, but I was. And one more thing about the awareness of the European Union. There was a project in 1994, that was run by the Belgians and it was only for the members of the European Union, back then there were I think twelve countries in the EU. But not all of them were involved in this project and then they took us Estonians into the project. The Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia, weren’t members yet, but we participated there. The project was called Euro-Delphi and it was about adult education policy. We didn’t have many resources, but we contributed voluntarily and also we could participate in the meetings. The final conference of this Euro-Delphi project was in 1995. Then in 2004 we became members of the European Union. In summary the European Union has contributed to and supported a lot of opportunities for the development of adult education in Estonia.

Jõesalu: Do you have friends abroad and what do you tell them about Estonia and Estonians?

Märja: I have many acquaintances, but I also have some very good friends. One of my very good friends lives in Belgium, outside of Brussels who I’ve visited several times with my niece’s children, who for me, are like my own grandchildren. Unfortunately, he has only been to Estonia once. But we still exchange letters, and I sent him a very nice picture, which we took when the parliament turned 100. And Martti, my grandson is in the picture with me who was so small when we went to see him, but who is about to

become a father for the second time. We took a beautiful picture, with the word Riigikogu [The Estonian Parliament is called Riigikogu.] in the background. Martti wanted to take the picture. I said no. But Martti insisted. And I finally agreed. So, I sent the picture to my friend Pierre. He thanked me for the picture and asked me what does the word 'Riigikogu' mean. I said this is our Parliament. And he wrote to me, "Do you remember when you were in Brussels once, we were walking along the street when your cellphone rang. You said that the Minister of Education had called and was asking for something. I was shocked that in your culture the minister has to ask the Parliament's committee chairman for permission. In our culture, and political system, a minister would never have done such a thing." So, it was a nice thing to have happened. And just a while ago Martti's sister Getter visited Belgium with friends and I said to her that she should tell Pierre that she is there. When she left, she didn't say anything to me, but then one night I got a big picture to my mobile phone of her and Pierre. Of course, they called each other and they met as well. He is a very good friend, but there are others I enjoy meeting and talking with too, but no close friends.