Ann White
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How would you feel if you had

A GENIUS IN THE FAMILY

Ann White

Ever since I had an interview with Artur Rubinstein some 14 years ago, I have been thinking about the stories he told me of his childhood, if you could call it that. The great pianist was born with an inner security. One would be inclined to categorize him as an infant adult rather than a child.

But this is not what I am thinking about. I am fascinated by the frustration Pappa Rubinstein must have experienced when time after time, his baby boy of four bested him in battle. It must have felt awful. I think this should be of great comfort to those parents who feel inadequate today when caught up sharp by their youngsters.

My interview with Mr. Rubinstein scaled everything from appreciation of art (he chooses art he likes by a funny feeling he gets in the pit of his stomach) to techniques of zither playing. In the middle, we fell into a lively discussion on children.

The Rubinsteins were living on a large estate in Los Angeles with their own four children. Paul, fourteen, was rebellious at having a famous father who was seldom home. He sat around the house all day reading comic books. Nevertheless, Mr. Rubinstein had firm ideas on how to bring up children. "You never <u>force</u> anyone. You make them <u>want</u> to do what is right or good for them.

He illustrated his point with a story about the problems he had to meet with his own father when he was a precocious four-year-old.

Pappa Rubinstein had no theories on child upbringing to guide him. He had seven children and they obeyed the laws set down in

the home in Lodz, Poland. One of these laws was: "You shall eat all your porridge for breakfast daily without argument or question."

Artur was, as I have said, four years old. He loathed porridge. He plopped down in his high chair one sunny morning among his six brothers and sisters who were dutifully spooning theirs. Then he made an announcement. "I shall never eat porridge again."

The family put down its respective spoons to smile at the adorable baby with his mop of blonde curls. Artur explained, "It's horrible stuff."

Pappa Rubinstein recovered sufficiently to ensure his authority. "You will sit at the table until you have eaten the food God has blessed us with," he thundered. The boy was so little that he felt he had been harsh. "We will all sit here until Artur eats his porridge."

They sat, the uneaten porridge in Artur's bowl growing colder and more glue-like. The boy watched the pendulum of an antique clock swing back and forth. The minutes passed. Artur made no move to eat the porridge. His father was restless. He had to be at the office. "Mamma," he ordered, "bring me the strap."

Even this threat didn't perturb the little genius. He accompanied his father to the next room and took his whipping. There was not a howl or a whimper from him. His sisters cried and his brothers paled in the memory of similar whackings. Finally, his father stopped. Artur marched back into the dining room, head high. He climbed back into his high chair. He folded his arms.

"Artur, eat your porridge," his mother pleaded.

"Artur, eat that porridge," his father roared.

Artur answered his father. "Pappa, you can never get me to eat porridge by forcing me. You have to make a person like what he

has to do, not force him to do it." With that, he crawled out of his chair again and slowly walked from the room.

Mr. Rubinstein said that incident imprinted itself in his memory never to be forgotten. He said that from it he learned to please people so that they would want what he had to give them. In his case it was music. He has always tried to bring his audiences his own enthusiasm for the composers he plays.

It required several clashes with his young son for Pappa Rubinstein to learn that Artur would manage his own life in his own way without any advice from his parents.

Young Artur, for instance, fell in love with a neighbor's piano. He was over there every waking minute, fingering scales and playing melodies from out of his head. At first, his ability to play the piano by "ear" created great excitement. His parants were thrilled and word spread throughout Lodz. But then Pappa Rubinstein got worried. Boys didn't play the piano; that was for girls. Boys played the violin. This was the tradition among Jewish families. Artur could not be the exception. He would have to transfer his love of the piano to the violin.

One evening he brought his son a violin just suited to a youngster barely five years old. Pappa Rubinstein approached the boy with the tactics recommended by him in the porridge encounter.

"Look at this nice shiny violin, son. It makes the most beautiful music in all the world. It's what boys play. Only girls play the piano." He handed the violin to Artur.

He took the violin, put it under his chin. He raised the bow and made squeaking sounds across the bridge. He shuddered. "I don't want to play this," he said. "I want to play the piano."

"Artur, you can't play the piano. It's for girls," his father pleaded. "Just try the violin for a little while. See how you like it."

Artur looked at his father. There could be no argument. He raised the violin in the air and brought it down as hard as he could. It broke as it hit the floor. That wasn't enough. Artur jumped on it with both feet, breaking the body into little bits.

His father bought him a piano.

This brought another anecdote to mind. Mr. Rubinstein said his father soon became reconciled to having a boy play the piano. He delighted to sit in the parlor with Artur while his son let his fingers wander over the keys.

One evening he said to Artur, "Son, when you play like that, what do you see in your mind?"

"Nothing, pappa. I see nothing, but I have such a beautiful feeling here in my heart."

Pappa Rubinstein shrugged impatiently. "It's impossible. How can you play if you don't see pictures in your mind?"

"I don't see a thing, pappa. I just feel," the boy insisted.

Every evening Pappa Rubinstein asked what was going on in Artur's mind. "Do you see soldiers riding on horses? Maybe there's a war going on."

Artur soon found a solution. One evening as his father sat down to listen, he pounded the keys. "Listen, pappa! These are the horsemen racing across the fields chasing the fox. Now here is the fox." He pounded harder. Pere Rubinstein sat back, satisfied at last, and smiling.

"Yes, yes, this is the way it should be. See, son. I was right after all."

Artur's talent was prodigious and soon the talk of Lodz. It came to the attention of Joseph Joachim, then the greatest violinist of the century. He wanted Artur to go to Berlin to study composition and technique. Joachim offered to help pay for his studies but only on the condition that Artur be treated as an artist and not exploited as a child prodigy. This he insisted upon with a strong stare in the direction of Pappa Rubinstein.

The family agreed that Artur should not be exploited. Indeed, they secretly knew the self-willed Artur could not be. He thought and acted like an adult. At the age of eight, Artur could be depended upon to conduct his own life.

He found studying music to be a boring, dull routine. Karl Heinrich Barth, his professor, screamed , cajoled and threatened. Artur, he complained, spent more time wandering around the city talking to people and investigating other aspects of life than he did practicing. He received the same complaint from Max Bruch, his professor of composition.

Nevertheless, a seasoned pianist, age eleven, returned to Lodz. The family sat in especially reserved seats to hear his professional debut. Proud and thrilled as they were, Artur even then was an anomaly, so sophisticated beyond his years that his father found conversation with him almost impossible.

Artur returned to western Europe. He discovered Paris, caviar, beautiful women, champagne and vodka. When he was fifteen he disappeared from Paris for months -- until he was almost forgotten. He returned bitter and unhappy, the victim of an unrequited love affair. He tried to forget via champagne and travel. The champagne made him deathly ill and he never got drunk again. The entire experience, he said, taught him to enjoy the moment he lived

in and not to look back.

His first concert tour to the United States, at about sixteen, was far from sensational. The critics praised him mildly for his colossal technique but he did not seem to take himself or his music seriously. One New York critic, however, commented that the boy "had the wit of a boulevardier." One wonders what Artur's father would have added to that.

Artur remained a bachelor until he was forty-three. During those years he became a world traveler, at home in every part of the globe.

He took a more serious view of life after his marriage. When his daughter, Eva, was born, he suddenly realized that he had not worked hard enough. She might grow up to hear some one say that her father was a second-rate pianist. The very thought drove him to serious study for the first time in his life. His artistry became supreme, but even more, he became a conscientious father.

This brings us back to the discussion on Paul, Rubinstein's oldest son, age fourteen at the time, and an avid reader of comic books. The comic books worried the father until a conversation took place at dinner.

Eva, a year older than Paul, had attended a concert. She was telling her father about it but couldn't remember the name of a number she had heard on the program. Paul, seemingly engrossed in "Superman," was spearing his food absentmindedly, but he looked up long enough to blurt out, "It was Rapsodie Espagnole."

"I was so proud of Paul," Rubinstein said. "He undoubtedly had studied the program Eva brought home. To compliment him I said, 'And where did you learn that?'"

"He answered me, all right," Rubinstein smiled, "about the way I would have answered my father. He looked down at me and smirked, "In a comic book, of course."

Mr. Rubinstein's favorite story about his children by now has become famous. It concerned Eva when she was five. He had just come home from a long trip abroad. Eva jumped into his arms, hugged and kissed him, and then said breathlessly, "Daddy, will you play for me?"

Mr. Rubinstein was so touched by his daughter's request that he determined to give her the best concert of his life.

He carried her to the piano bench and sat down himself, prepared to strike the keys, when he felt her tugging at his arm.

"No, no, daddy. Not the piano. I want you to play the new phonograph mommy bought."