Interview with Franz Kafka

Read the following interview and write a one page summary of your impressions of Franz Kafka. What would you expect him to be like? What traits might he exhibit? Why might you like or dislike him?

Please type and submit one page hardcopy on January 7 with redemption work.

Q: To begin, will you please tell us a little about your family?
- Born on July 3, 1883, in Prague, Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic)
- Middle class, German-speaking Jewish family
- Oldest of 6 children
- 2 brothers who died in infancy
- 3 sisters, all died in concentration camps during WWII
- Father was a businessman, retailer of men’s and women’s fancy goods and accessories. Mother helped manage the business, and often worked 12 hrs. a day.
- Raised mainly by governesses and servants

Q: Where did you go to school, and what did you study at the University?
- Attended the Deutche Knabenschule, (How do we say this one?) an elementary school for boys in Prague. (sent to German schools, because speaking German was more socially acceptable in the Czech Republic at that time)
- Graduated from secondary school in 1901. This school had 8 grade levels, and I did well, taking classes like Latin, Greek, and history.
- Went on to Charles Ferdinand University. Started in Chemistry, but switched to law after two weeks.
- Graduated with a Doctor of Law degree in 1906.
- Completed a year of unpaid service as a law clerk for the civil and criminal courts

Q: Will you tell us a little about your relationships with other people?
- Closest friend: met Max Brod and at the end of my first year at Ferdinand University. Became close friend throughout life. Published many works after my death, even though I requested that all unpublished works be burned.
- Women! To me, they are either virgins or whores. I’ve many “one night stands,” and a few relationships that lasted longer. I was engaged twice to Felice Bauer, but broke it off both times. I was also interested in Felice’s friend, Grete Bloch, for a time.
- I had a relationship with a journalist writer, Milena Jesenska, and many thought that would end in marriage, but I broke that off as well.
- Moved to Berlin and lived with a Kindergarten teacher, Dora Diamant. She was from an orthodox Jewish family. I broke things off with her, too.
- I don’t think I ever really wanted to marry. I thought that by getting married and having a family of my own, my father would be more accepting of me, but in the end, I just couldn’t do it.

Q: When did you begin your writing career, and how did it develop?
After I met Max Brod in 1902, I began writing seriously. I was at the University at the time. Brod was a literary critic and editor, and that relationship encouraged me to continue writing.

In 1912, I wrote The Judgement. People called this a vivid nightmare. This style of writing eventually became known as surrealism.

Q: What events and beliefs influenced your writing?
- First, I believe my family, especially my father influenced my beliefs and my writing. He was a tyrant in our home, and people still refer to him as a bully. His only goal in life was to improve his social standing. He was always disrespectful about my writing. When I moved to Berlin, it was to get away from my family and their influence, but I know that he still had an influence on my writing. The “father” characters in my writings are not particularly nice people. So, isn’t it interesting that I lived with him for most of my life!

- I suffered from clinical depression and social anxiety throughout my life. I was easily stressed out, and this caused things like migraine headaches, insomnia, boils, and other ailments. Some people say that I am a hypochondriac; that I am really quite healthy because I swim and hike. I tried to improve my physical health by changing to a vegetarian diet and drinking large amounts of unpasteurized milk, but that didn’t help much.
- I eventually contracted tuberculosis, which took my life. So, I believe my issues with health, especially my mental health, influenced my writing.

- My friendships also influenced my writing. I surrounded myself with friends who were interested in literature and the arts.

- As you know, I was raised in the Jewish faith. As I grew older, I developed a greater interest in religion, and this may also have been an influence.

- Albert Einstein borrowed one of my books from a friend of his. He returned it, saying that he was unable to read it because it was so strange. He said that human beings were not made to think in such complexities.

- To me, writing has been a way for me to express my guilt, frustrations, and concerns about mankind.