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Summary

Peter Gorog was born March 10, 1941 in Budapest; his surname at birth was Grunwald. He changed his name at his mother's request in 1962 in advance of starting his studies at the University of Budapest as Germanic names in Hungary were assumed to be for Jews. His father was Árpád Grunwald, born in Budapest in 1907. He was declared dead in 1943 when captured as part of a forced labor battalion, to which he was assigned in September 1940, attached to German troops in the Ukraine. His mother, Olga Schönfeld, was also born in 1907 in Uzhhorod (now Ukrainian) as one of nine children. Her sisters – Ibolya, Elona, and Gabriela – and one Uncle (Lazlo) immigrated to the U.S. before the war. His parents married in 1937. His father worked an office manager at a publishing company, his mother as a milliner. His family rented an apartment, which other than during wartime re-location, remained in his mother's possession until she died in 1998.

Peter describes the unusual circumstances surrounding the Hungarian forced labor practices and the escape of his uncle. He also describes how Hungary treated the Jews until the Nazis took over in 1944. His mother avoided deportation by hiding "in the open" in a friend's apartment until a neighbor's betrayal prompted her arrest. She was able to gain release by claiming she was a "war widow" due to unclear documents certifying her husband's wartime service. They still avoided the ghetto by finding safety in housing set up by Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who was working to save Jews by providing false papers and safe harbor. He describes life at the protected house until they had to leave in late 1944, whereupon they moved in with relatives who lived in the Budapest ghetto.

His family remained in the ghetto until Russian troops arrived in January 17, 1945. They returned to their apartment which had survived despite heavy bombing. Conditions were difficult. Peter considers that life began to return to "normal" when he started at a Jewish elementary school in 1947. His mother worked at refurbishing hats until becoming an industrial seamstress at a company called, Minta, in 1949. Peter's schooling on World War II focused mostly on the Soviet successes with virtually no coverage of the death camps and Hungary's role. His mother remarried in 1953, but largely turned away from religion due to her Holocaust experience. Peter's religious enthusiasm waned as well, but it eventually returned. He experienced no professional discrimination for his Judaism.

Peter decided to defect to the U.S. in 1980, despite membership in the Communist Party and having a good job in computer science, after a divorce and growing weary of the Hungarian system. He was not granted political asylum but obtained a green card for his professional skills. He moved to Washington, DC. Peter became more involved in the Holocaust Museum when he retired in 2014, becoming both a docent, part of their Survivor testimony team, and

undertaking translation work. Peter concludes with reflections on the Museum's impact on the perceptions of antisemitism.