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Summary

Meir Kinde, born November 19, 1929 in Orosháza, Hungary. He was first named Istvan (Stephen) Kaufmann, but when Meir was about 17, his father changed the family name to Kinde after a region in northern Hungary. His father was Nandor (Nathan), who owned a lumber business. Nandor had three siblings: Jacob, went to the U.S. before WWI, Hilda and Julia. All five members of Julia's family and Meir's paternal grandparents died at Auschwitz. His mother, Olga, (née Hartmann) was also from northern Hungary; Meir describes a number of towns in the area where her relatives lived. His parents married in Kisvárda. Meir has an older brother, George (Menachem).

His family, and his local Jewish community, spoke mostly Hungarian, rarely Yiddish. Meir describes his school life in Orosháza and their interaction with the local community.

Meir was aware of the war's start in 1939, but conditions for Hungarian Jews remained unchanged. Since Jews didn't want Germany to win the war, many chose service in the labor battalions instead of the military. In 1943, most Jewish businesses were required to have a "straw man", a non-Jewish executive, to prevent harassment. When Germany took over Hungary in 1944, conditions quickly worsened. Labor camps took more people and at older ages. In July, his family was re-settled into a ghetto in Orosháza. His younger brother, Tibor, died in a work accident in their house. They were soon sent to the county seat, Békéscsaba, for just a few days before going to Debrecen for transport to Auschwitz. Departing Debrecen to the east, Meir noticed the train was reversing direction; eventually they stopped in Vienna and confined to a school. They remained at the school until liberated by Russian troops in April 1945. He describes their life and treatment while in Vienna.

Meir remembers that one of the Russian officers, Major Tulman, sent them home while correctly advising them to seek assistance from Jewish soldiers and officers in the Russian army on their way. He describes his experiences as he traveled back to his home in Orosháza through Budapest, which they were able to re-claim mostly untouched. His father was able to re-claim his business but lost it again under Communist nationalization. His parents moved to Budapest where his father worked in the government on forestry issues.

In 1949, Meir went to Israel. In 1961, he went to George Washington University to get his Ph.D. in immunology and virology.