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### Grossman Gyorgy (rescued by Vera Parocai) - Holocaust Rescuers Interviews

Sam and Pearl Oliner  
*Altruistic Behavior Institute*

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## **Grossman Gyorgy - Holocaust Rescuers Interviews**

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## **Interview with Grossman Gyorgy, rescued in Hungary by Parocai Vera**

**Respondent: Grossman Gyorgy**

**Interviewer and Translator: Viola Wdowsky**

**Date: August 11, 1986**

**Transcriber: Bethaney Weber**

- I. I will do this interview in Hungarian language then later on I will translate it into English. Please start.
- R. I was born on July 6, 1922 in Budapest. My father's name was Armin Grossman; my mother's name was Jolan Strasser. The certain family Strasser originates from Kiskun-Felepyhese. There were 8 children in the family. As I learned Vera Parocai came to our house when I was born as a nursemaid and now stayed with us already for 62 years. Till 1944 our life was normal, I matriculated in 1942 from the gymnasium and in 1944, 15 April they called my in for the workings camp (Munkaszolgalat). I was in the forced labor camp till November 1944, when my regiment was taken to Budapest. At that time I ran away from my regiment. I did not have any part connected with deportation. As I escaped from the train, which headed towards Germany I came to Budapest. In the forced labor camp I had a hard time. I was stationed in Berimonostair. This for the SS I managed there quite well except I became ill with jaundice. There was no medication to cure my illness, and then I heard that sugar and potatoes would help cure it. I stole these things and recovered from my illness. On 15 October we heard that Szalasi took over the power and on this night in Pelmonostar we had to stand in line for our execution. They made us to dig out into they wanted to shoot us in. I dig my grave, but in the last moment I succeeded to escape because of the chaos. My joy did not last long because we heard the news in the evening that Lselasi did not fail as the rumor was, that yes. We had to stay in the camp under the SS commandment. The regiment was directed to Budapest. At this time I ran away. While at the age of 16-17, every young Jewish man was called in the fire brigade. I learned about the work of the fireman. I went in the fire station and I asked them to get a job. I told them that I am a refugee from Peco a fireman officer. I falsified my papers, I changed my name for Nagy Gyorgy, and I told them that I am an illegal child.
- I. All these things you have to thank for Vera Parocai?
- R. Not yet. When I escaped I went into the home of my mother into Kiraly utce (street). She alone lived in Budapest. I asked her where is Veca (Vera). She told me that Veca works as a cleaning woman in Mabi hospital. I went to Mabi, I find Veca and there she hid me into the lavatory. It was a good place because it was warm there. There was water to wash myself. She threw in a mattress on which I could sleep and she brought in food three times a day. It was boring, but it was very good. During few days the situation changed there. They started to round up Jews (rassia) and I had to run away

from there. That was the time when I reported myself for the fireman job. I worked there for a while, but shortly after I had to run away also from this place. Meantime, my mother had to leave the Kiraly utce apartment and we went into the Common Protected House in Katone utce. That meant that there were many Jews, as well as Christians living in this house in the apartments. We did not stay there also a very long time. The Nyilas started to round up the Jews and I did not want to wait for this. When I was working as a fireman I had a room and I took there my mother. This room was owned by two elderly Christian ladies. They were pharmacists. My problem in the fireman job was with the showering. When all the firemen went to take showers I did not go with them and they always asked me why I am not going. My excuse was always good.

I. They did not have suspicion?

R. Never. I was always a big vagabond. I was always fearless until today. I never thought something bad can happen to me. But I saw that they start to liquidate the fireguard and I left this place. That was around the end of December. From this time on I went into hiding. Veca and his relatives get me Christian papers. They were risking their lives. To enter into the Nyilas police headquarter and to try to get papers for a 20-year-old Jewish boy was a dangerous act. If they would find out, they would be killed.

I. And that was done by Vera?

R. Yes, Veca asked her young niece to go to the police headquarter and bring from me the Christian identification card. With this card we lived till the Russians occupied Budapest till January 18, 1945. Till this time we stayed in the apartment of the two Christian old ladies. When they left home we always stole from them food. We covered ourselves with carpets during the night, because we did not have bedding. The two ladies always asked me: "Officer why are not in duty this time?" So I had to leave home everyday. It did not last long because on January 18 the Russians liberated us. I have to say that without Veca's help I would not survive. They would catch me like my other friends with whom I matriculated. Immediately after liberation we went back to our apartment where we find some Nyilas tenants occupying the apartment. I threw them out. Fortunately we find also some of our things that was stolen away. This is my story and the important part in my story is that such a human being as Vera Parocai exists only one among the millions. With her simplicity, with her primitive personality, but with her sharp mind that was able to play over the then existing problem is a very rare phenomena. We can not thank her ever what she did with my mother's family, how she helped with food, clothing, and trying to save the 9-year-old young child's life during the ghetto times. That she could not save the life of the 9 year old girl was not her fault because she took her out from the ghetto, but the girl's father, Dr. Strasser Resso asked her to come back, then she was deported together with her parents. She, Veca, saved the whole property of the family, money, jewelry, everything. That was unusual what she did and she can not understand until the present day why not others behaved like she. When she would not be then, my family, my wife, son, daughter, myself, my grandchildren, we all would not be here. She saved me and the bible says who saved only one person is the same as he or she would save the whole world. Whom she could not save wasn't her fault. At the same

time this girl's brother (Vlase) occupied a high position here in America to where he emigrated (Professor Dr. Gebauer Strasser used to be the previous president's technical advisor) (the survivor's cousin). He was the only survivor of his family. He is an engineer. He broke off every contact with the Jewish people. He will forget the past. He was 15 years old when he survived in Auschwitz. We tried through Yad Vashem to get more money for Vera because she is the one who deserves it.

I. What are your feelings towards the Jews after that you survived?

R. I am not a religious Jew. I could not stay in Hungary so I emigrated to Israel in 1949. I wanted to go to Israel at this time. Israel is a very hard country, but this is the real place for the Jews. Our generation stays here already. At the age of 60 you can not move. My son was twice in America and he returned and now he works on his second degree with excellence in Jerusalem. Our ambition is to make life easier for our children, because our life was very hard.

I. What is it that you would like to convey in your children?

R. My son has his first degree in Jewish history. He is very interested to know what the previous generation lived through. If he will stay here or not that is his decision. What we can, we help. It would be pity and loss for us and the country if he would leave in spite of the fact that many young people are unemployed. He is now 27 years old. When he gets a job he will stay, if not he has no other alternatives than to leave. He is very intelligent. I am sure if he has to leave everywhere will be welcomed. Our daughter is married to a mechanical engineer. She is a real "sabara"; she and her husband would not leave the country for any money.

I. Can you tell a little bit now about your parents?

R. My father's family came from Peco. My grandfather had a soap factory. My father had a dress shop till the time Hitler came to power. Then he left for Budapest and took a job in one of the greatest stores "Divatcarnok" (Fashion Market) as a manager. Later on he was enrolled into "Hunketabar" (labor camp) and we never saw him again.

I. Did you ever try to leave the country?

R. No, at that time the middle class Jewish families did not think about it. Maybe the religious ones. We were not very religious. On Friday night my father went to synagogue. The shabbat was observed, also the major holidays. My mother's family was more religious in Kiskunkelhe. I went there sometimes for my vacation.

I. During the critical time what was the hardest decision for you to make? During the war I mean.

- R. During this time I did not do any decision. The fait and the Germans did the decisions for me. They called me in to the forced labor camp (munkesrolgalet) where from I run away.
- I. That was a difficult decision.
- R. Yes that was a difficult decision. At the beginning when whole trains of people stuck together people felt that was giving them a feeling of security. I did not feel with this way. I thought I know Budapest and in this place I can run away.
- I. Who else helped you during the war?
- R. Besides Veca no one else helped me.
- I. Your mother succeeded to survive?
- R. Yes. My mother came out in 1962. I have been settled down in 1960 when I decided to bring out my mother and Veca to Israel. I started to arrange for the papers with my wife's permission. They gave permission for their immigration only under those conditions that we will take the responsibility for their living expenses and support.
- I. What was your feeling about bringing Vera to Israel?
- R. My feelings were the same as before. Veca belonged to our family, so I felt she has to be with us. We were happy that we succeeded to bring her here.
- I. You have not been afraid that she might not like it in Israel?
- R. No, I have not have such problems. At this time Veca decided that she connects her life with me family in life she stayed on until the present time. My son feels as her grandchild, my grandchild is her great grandchild and so on. She joined her life together with our family. Next week we will take here to Budapest to see her sister, brother and their families. At the first time we visited them 3 years ago and we stayed there for three weeks. After staying for two weeks she wanted to go back already to Israel. She felt that two weeks were sufficient to talk about the past with her relatives.
- I. How does she spend her free time in Israel?
- R. She stays home in the afternoons. She likes to watch television. She reads. We call here to come with us to places, but she says that her legs are hurting her and she prefers to stay home.
- I. Does she have some friends?
- R. No, she had but many of them left the country or died.

- I. How do you feel about German and Poles after the disaster?
- R. Towards the Poles I have great antipathetic. I feel the Poles are very ugly, bad. They were big anti-Semites. There are no survivors in Poland. In Hungary from 800,000 to 200,000 survived. The Germans are murderers, but you can not live in the past always, because then you can not think about the future.
- I. What do you think another Holocaust is possible?
- R. The question is difficult; perhaps by learning from the past it will not happen. Once a year we go away from home. When I am away I do not think anything on my vacation that is good.
- I. What is your message to the future generation?
- R. They should not forget what has happened in the past, because if they do, they can not learn anything from it. The next generation still will remember more but the generation after will remember very little. My son is very interested about the history. I am sure he will convey a lot, but my daughter is very different. She was born here and is not interested to know and she can not understand that 6 million Jews just went to the slaughter place and did not defend themselves.
- I. How much did you tell them?
- R. We had here my wife's mother bring with us and she told them too much and too soon when they were still very young. My son is now 27, my daughter is 29. When my son was 3 years old she told him a lot. I did not tell them too much. I did not want them to feel hatred when they go overseas and meet someone in work. The whole world hates the Jews, till today anyway.
- I. Do you trust people?
- R. The question is hard. I am not very sociable. But when a human being does not harm anyone this is already enough. I have bad experiences, even here in the country. There are very few helpful people.
- I. What did you learn about yourself and about the people in general during your experiences?
- R. It is a hard task to trust people. Sometimes you think that they are your friends, then you find out they are not even here in Israel. I was very young at the time in Hungary, so I do not know I think if someone is not an enemy that is already good.
- I. What have you learned about yourself?
- R. I, if I can help, mostly feel indifferent. I never but never harm anyone.

- I. I would like to go back a little bit with my questions. What was your relation with the Christians before?
- R. In school 50 percent of the students were gentiles, 50% Jews. That was a "gentry" school. Who still stays in life, students, professors keep contact with me. They all become very successful. There never existed any problem among us.
- I. What can of anti-Semitic experiences have you had?
- R. Till 1942 being in school I did not experience any anti-Semitic feelings among friends. I did not have any anti-Semitic experiences in Hungary until 1942. Then when the anti-Jewish laws were enacted I could feel anti-Semitism.
- I. How was the neighborhood where you live?
- R. My neighborhood was Jewish. There were only 2 or 3 Gentile families in our building.
- I. Did you belong to some kind of organization?
- R. No.
- I. Who was the person that mostly influenced your life?
- R. I myself. I am very stubborn, until today. I do not listen to anyone. I always get what I want. When I wanted to come here, I came. Since my marriage in important things we decide together.
- I. Are you pleased with your present life?
- R. With my family life yes. With my professional life yes. The problem with Israel makes our life harder. The taxes, the military actions make our life bitter.
- I. What would you do differently, if you could, during the war?
- R. I could not do anything differently. Till the age of 20 I did not decide for myself. Life decided. Probably when I would be born into a different family, everything would happen differently, especially when I would be born in a different country like America.
- I. What else more would you like to tell?
- R. I have not been the main interviewed. That was Vera Parocai. Unfortunately there were not more like her. Those who are still in life (I do not know any one of those) we should like, honor and help.
- I. You say that you cannot reciprocate those things that she did?



- R. Neither reciprocate nor pay for it or to be thankful for those things that these exceptional people did. I feel with this way. She stays with us since 1962. Me and my wife, also the children, we try to give her the motherly feeling. We give her the role of the mother and grandmother. Every Friday night she asks my wife Liliva about the time she has to light the candles. She lights the candles. Till my mother-in-law was alive they went together to the synagogue.
- I. When did your mother-in-law pass away?
- R. In 1979.
- I. They were good friends?
- R. Yes.
- I. Thank you for the possibility of giving us these valuable interviews.
- R. I am not the main interviewed, Veka is the one. I hope she will still get some money. She is now near the age of 80. I think she deserves some more money. She gets only her pension like everyone in Israel who is over 65 of age. We support her, but it would be nice when the government would help her to make her life a little bit easier. She would deserve it.