

ANDY GROVE

The Life and Times of an American

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1.

Andy Grove was born on September 2, 1936 in Budapest, Hungary. His given name at birth was Andras Istvan Grof. He was born into a solid middle class Jewish family. Andy's father George was a partner in a medium-sized dairy business while his mother Maria had given up her dreams of becoming a concert pianist in order to have a family.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and the hostilities of World War II commenced. Like all of Europe, the Grof family were swept up in the dramatic events which then unfolded. In 1942, when Andy Grove was five years old, his father was conscripted to the Hungarian Army. Since he was Jewish, George Grof was assigned to a battalion which was clearing roads, building fortifications and performing other hard labor on the Russian front. In the spring of 1943 Maria Grof received an official notice which stated George Grof had "disappeared" and despite all her best efforts she never could find out what had happened to her husband.

When Germany officially annexed Hungary on March 19, 1944, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were rounded up and shipped to Auschwitz where they would be murdered in cold blood. Andy and his mother managed to avoid getting shipped off to Auschwitz or any other concentration camps through a savvy combination of luck, friends and street smarts. They would leave Budapest for the country whenever any sweeps for Jews were just about to happen and then return later when it was safe. They also endured the "Battle of Budapest" which would later become described by historians as "one of the bloodiest city sieges of the Second World War in Europe".

Due to the War, Andy Grove's early schooling was a little bit spasmodic and disjointed. This was not a problem because he had always earned good grades. Andy did, however, contract scarlet fever, a common streptococcal infection of the era which was treated at that time by having some bone behind his ears "chiseled away" by doctors. He was hospitalized for six weeks and then had to stay home for nine months while he was convalescing. Andy Grove's hearing would be permanently affected by this bout of scarlet fever.

In September 1945, George Grof was finally reunited with his family after enduring years of hardship in a Russian prison camp. He witnessed absolutely unfathomable acts of sadism and cruelty while at the prison camps and had suffered from exposure, starvation and lack of medical attention. Putting all these hardships behind them, the Grof family wanted to get on with their lives, but this was not easy in post-war Hungary. In late-1945, the Soviet Union had one million soldiers in Hungary, a nation with a population of around ten million people. The Communists took firm control of the country's government.

At first, things seemed to be getting better for the Grof family. George Grof was appointed as a director of a state-owned company which bred livestock. Then, when his uncle was arrested in the middle of the night for being a newspaper editor, George Grof was fired and was then informed he would never get another job that would pay more than a quarter of his previous salary. With the death of Stalin in 1953 and the rise to power of new Russian leaders, the Hungarian government was instructed to release most of its political prisoners. According to most estimates, this was about three-quarters of a million prisoners, including George Grof's uncle. Against all this background of political unrest and uncertainty, Andy Grove finished his high school education and prepared to go to the University of Budapest.

By the start of Andy Grove's second year at Belgrade University the country was in a state of uproar. An anti-Soviet demonstration which started peacefully ended with Russian troops shooting people. With the University closed, Andy spoke with his parents about the possibility of escaping to Austria. The Russians were going around summarily arresting young people on suspicion of being involved in the demonstration, so Andy Grove decided it was now or never to get out of Hungary. In December 1956, Andy Grove bid farewell to his parents and headed to Austria.

Getting across the border at that time was a very risky endeavor. First Andy linked up with another three youth who also wanted to get out of the country. They caught a train to a town about fifteen miles from the border with Austria and then disappeared into the woods. They managed to link up with an underground of people who helped them avoid the Russian patrols and make their way towards Austria. After a few tense days of hide-and-seek games played against the very real danger they would be caught, they managed to stumble across a field into a farm somewhere inside Austria. And no sooner had they made their way across the border than they were arrested by Austrian police and taken to an unheated schoolhouse where they were instructed to stay. As soon as the police had left, Andy Grove departed the schoolhouse and made his own way to Vienna.

After sending a telegram to his parents telling them he was safe, Andy Grove made his way to the offices of an organization called the International Rescue Committee. At first, they were reluctant to provide him with passage to the United States of America but Grove managed to persuade them. He was included in a group of refugees who were given transatlantic voyage on an old converted troopship that was on its way to New York to be decommissioned. He finally arrived in Brooklyn, New York on January 7, 1957 along with 1,715 other Hungarian refugees.

"The dangers involved in escaping Hungary were about equal with the dangers of staying. Hungary was a pretty sad place in 1956 and there were strong rumors about people being picked up, people my age, being picked up on the street and herded away and I thought it was a good time to make a run for it. When a friend of mine and I left Budapest, we had no idea what was going to happen near the border. You know, there was no Internet in which there was a home page that somebody could tell us the border conditions of the day!"

– Andy Grove

2.

The Hungarian refugees were taken to Camp Kilmer, a onetime prisoner-of-war camp in New York. Fortunately, however, Andy only stayed there a couple of days. He contacted his uncle Lajos and his wife Lenke who welcomed Andy with open arms. They took him from Camp Kilmer and let him stay with them in the Bronx. Within a short period of time, Andy Grove decided it was time to get moving again on his college education. Since he couldn't afford the tuition fees of Brooklyn College or the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, Grove enrolled at the City College of New York which was government-funded and thus tuition-free.

"My aim was to acquire a profession that would enable me to become self-sufficient as soon as possible, so I could support myself and set aside enough money to help my parents get out of Hungary and join me in America. I was about to forget college when I learned about the city colleges. Friends told me all I needed was ability. Americans don't know how lucky they are."

– Andy Grove

