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Suzi Smeed

Maiden Name: Zsuzsana Borbala Terezia Kalmar

Suzanne Barbara Smeed was born in Budapest, Hungary on the 12th September, 1942, the only child to Laszlo (Les) Emery Kalmar and Erzsebet (Elizabeth) Kalmar. Her father was born on 28th March, 1909. He was orphaned when he was aged 16. Elizabeth Kalmar, her mother, was born on the 8th of February, 1919 in Papa. The Kalmar family lived at 19 Deak Faranc Street, Budapest.

Les and Elizabeth's fathers fought in the Hungarian Army during World War 1 as allies of Germany. This offered them, they hoped, some protection from the anti-Semitic laws and restrictions imposed by the Nazis before the outbreak of War. In October 1943 Les and Elizabeth converted to Catholicism believing this might further protect them.

Prior to the outbreak of War, Les had a successful wholesale and retail textile business. The Kalmars had a maid and a nanny and enjoyed a comfortable middle class life. Suzi has a few, happy memories of her childhood in Budapest. She remembers that she had a maid who read a book to her about a man made of cork.

As a Jew, Les was conscripted into the Hungarian Forced Labour Group run by the Luftwaffe, making airstrips. He was granted occasional leave. Elizabeth organised a fake appendix operation for Les, but his Group was moved to the eastern Front. 75% of the Group that were sent to Russia died. However, Les returned to the Forced Labour Group early in 1944.

Elizabeth and Suzi lived in Budapest until early in 1944. Then Elizabeth and Suzi went to Papa, a historical town in the [Veszprém county](#) of Hungary. Elizabeth wanted her parents to go to Budapest, but soon after the Kalmars arrived in Papa, Eichmann squads arrived and set up a ghetto. There were many Jews from surrounding villages in the ghetto, held there before being deported to Auschwitz. Suzi found out in 1947 that her grandparents had been deported to Auschwitz in July 1944, and were killed in the gas chambers.

Suzi's maternal grandfather had been the Manager at OTI (similar to Medicare Health Insurance) and he was close a friend with the manager of the local hospital. The latter, a lay priest was called Mr Okolichny. Together they arranged Suzi and Elizabeth's escape from the ghetto. There was a fire station in the ghetto, which had a front and back entrance. One man from the fire station took a bribe from Mr Okolichny who then freed Suzi and her mother during the night. Mr Okolichny took Suzi and her mother by car to Budapest. They went into hiding and for a time Suzi and her mother were safe.

Suzi's father escaped the labour camp late on 15th of October, 1944. He met up with his brother and his wife, and Suzi's father was reunited with Elizabeth and Suzi. They were all hidden by a friend, George Ola, and for six weeks they lived in George's mother's apartment in Budapest, in an apartment on the second floor. One night the toilet was flushed and one of

the neighbours heard it and said to George that someone was hiding in his apartment. Fearing they would be discovered, the Kalmars went back to their own apartment in Deak Faranc Street and hid in the ceiling loft under doonas where the luggage was kept. Their two servants, Seventh Day Adventists brought the family a box of apples to eat. From the beginning of December to the second week of January, 1945, they lived on half an apple a day.

Suzi's parents planned to get Suzi out of Budapest. The two maids, a mother and daughter, were given the family jewellery and money and told to take Suzi to friends at Dauna Pantella, about 150 kilometres from Hungary. Initially Suzi was left in an orphanage. When the orphanage was closed, she was hidden by 7 different people. It was not safe to hide a Jewish child anywhere. Elizabeth and Les had no knowledge where Suzi was.

In the middle of January, 1945, the Russians entered Budapest. The servants returned, looking for their belongings. They found Les and Elizabeth living in their own home. Suzi's parents asked the servants where their beloved daughter was and they said that she was in an orphanage. When Les found out that Suzi had been left in an orphanage, he contacted the Head of the Anti-Nazi Movement, Emery Fouest, who organised travel documents for the Kalmars. They set off to find Suzi.

Les and Elizabeth set out on foot, and walked in the snow to Miskolc. They were weak from lack of food and did not have proper clothing or shoes. On the first day they managed to get a lift in a horse and cart to Godolo, a distance of about 40 kilometres. When they got to the train station a farmer gave them dry bread, and they ate hot soup, their first decent meal in weeks.

On the second day, then they boarded a train. The railway men had to rip up the railway sleepers to burn the engine. There was no coal. That night they arrived at Fuzersabone, where they had soup again.

Sitting in this train, the other passengers were surprised to see two Jews, as there were none left in the area. An old lady asked them how they had got on the train. They explained to her they were looking for their daughter who had been left in an orphanage in Miskolc. She asked them the name of the child. Elizabeth described her daughter's red hair, and that the name Zsuzika which was knitted into her beige and brown sweater. The old lady got very excited and told them that she knew the person who had taken Suzi. She undertook to take the Kalmars to their daughter. Eventually after looking in 6 other places, Suzi was found.

Suzi's head was covered in scabs, most of her hair had fallen out and she was only wearing a flannel shirt. She was living in the barn with the animals. She slept in a wooden tub. Suzi's parents didn't recognise her, and she didn't recognise them. Suzi did not want to leave the old lady who had taken care of her.

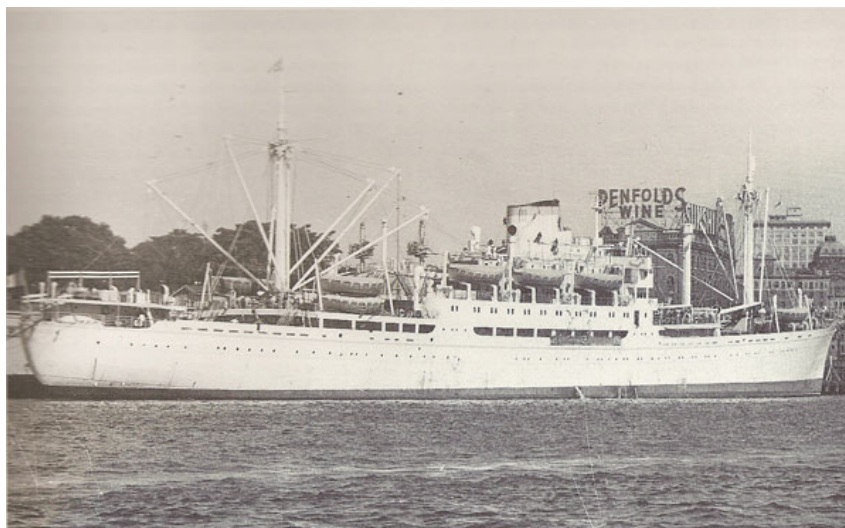
Les rented a room near the old lady's farm, and stayed until all three were strong enough to travel back to Budapest. It was agreed that the old lady would be Suzi's adopted grandmother

and until they finally left Hungary, Les brought her regularly to Budapest and he gave her gifts and money.

Les acquired at almost no cost, a large number of Hungarian-Russian dictionaries which he was able to sell at a profit. But Les wanted to leave Hungary and immigrate to the USA. Elizabeth refused to leave Hungary until she knew what had happened to her parents, and did not find out for certain until 1947. Then she knew the devastating truth that they had gone straight to the gas chambers.

In 1948 Les found out that there was a warrant out for his arrest by the communists, so the family escaped to Vienna in a mail truck. They hid under sacks of mail. They left everything behind except for one suitcase. Suzi was six and allowed one doll. The Kalmars lived in Vienna and Les made money playing bridge in coffee shops.

The Kalmars got passage to Sydney on the *SS Ugolina Vivaldi*, a converted cargo ship. They arrived in Sydney in February, 1949 with nine pounds in their pocket. The Kalmars lived in shared accommodation in Rockdale, Sydney.



Migrant ship, SS Ugolina Vivaldi

Elizabeth worked in a sewing factory and Les packed boxes in a factory. Soon after, they rented to a duplex in Kingsford.

The Kalmars focused on settling into their new country and they wanted to speak English and become model citizens. They changed their name from Kalmar to Kent. Next, they wanted Suzi to receive the best education they could afford. As they had converted to Catholicism, Les went to the Catholic Board to get Suzi into a good school. Suzi was sent to boarding school in Maitland, in country New South Wales. The girls there called Suzi a “bloody Refo”(Refugee). Suzi stayed in the school for three years and being the only non-Australian, was very lonely.

After that she attended Saint Sabina in Strathfield, nearer to her parents. Suzi went to school during the week and came home at weekends. To complete her education, Suzi went to

Sydney Girls High School, closer to home in Moore Park, Sydney. From then on, Suzi lived at home.

As an adult Suzi, worked as the assistant manager of the heritage listed Strand Arcade in Sydney, from 1979-1982. She appeared on television to promote the Arcade. While working there, Suzi met her husband, a successful engineer- businessman. They married in Maui, Hawaii, in 1983 and now live in retirement in the desirable seaside location of Noosa, in Queensland.

In 2002, Suzi returned to Hungary to celebrate her 60th birthday and her good fortune in being a Child Holocaust survivor. She revisited Papa, where her mother had been held. Suzi met an old man there who held the original list of Jews intended for deportation to Auschwitz and found the names of her grandparents, her mother and even herself on the list. It was a very emotional discovery.

Suzi loves her adopted country, Australia, and works hard within her community to preserve its ecology and freedom of speech. She is presently getting involved with the “Courage to Care” program that goes into schools and Suzi will be a speak about bullying and being a Holocaust survivor. Suzi Smeed is a child survivor who escaped death many times. She feels blessed and lucky that her parents found her and that she does not live in a barn.