

Transcript Suzi Smeed

Interviewer: Janet Merkur

Date: 19th February, 2016

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1. State the name you were born with.

My unmarried name is Zsuzsana Borbala Terezia Kalmar

2. State your name now and your current marital status. Where were you married?

My married name is Suzi Barbara Smeed. I do not have children. We were married in Maui, Hawaii.

3. Where were you born?

I was born in Papa, a district of Budapest, Hungary.

4. State your Birth Date.

I was born on 12th September, 1942.

5. Do you have any memories of your family home?

I was very young- I was two years old when we had to leave our home. I can't remember anything during the War. I was a happy child.

6. What was your mother's maiden name and what was she like?

Her name was Elizabeth Halasz. She lived at 108 Arena Road Budapest. Everyone loved my mother, she was a delight. (as an adult) Even after I stopped going out with some of my old boyfriends, they would still come and have a coffee and a chat with her. I could talk to her about anything, till she had a massive stroke which mentally incapacitated her.

7. What profession/work were your parents involved in?

We had a middle class life, and had a maid and a nanny. My father had a successful textile factory before the War. He was involved in wholesale and retail. My mother was a housewife but helped him out in the factory.

8. What was your father like?

My father's full name is Lesley (Laszlo) Emery Kalmar. He lived at 19 Deak Faranc Street, Budapest. He was born on 28th March, 1909. He was orphaned at the age of 16.

Early in 1944 my father was detained and put into forced labour for the Germans (because my grandfather had served in World War 1, my father was not taken until 1944).

(As an adult) my father was not an easy man and I never had a good relationship with him.

My father was not religious, but he loved Israel. Our family, like many other Jewish families in Budapest, converted to Catholicism in 1943.

9. What did your parent tell you about what happened to them in 1944?

In May 1944 we were rounded up and put into a ghetto ready for deportation to Auschwitz. My father was taken to a forced labour camp run by the Luftwaffe making airstrips. There were three nationalities in the camp and they were told that if they worked hard they would be sent home on the weekends. One man who approached the Luftwaffe to go home was tied and put in the fields for the whole day.

My maternal grandfather and grandmother were with us. My grandfather had been Manager at OTI (similar to Medicare Health Insurance) and was close friends with the manager of the local hospital, and with Dr Sulyok. A lay priest Mr Okolichny took my mother and me to Budapest by car. My mother and I were put into a safe house.

There was no room for my grandparents. We found out in 1947 that they had been deported to Auschwitz and were killed in the gas chambers.

There was a fire station, which had a front and back entrance and was part of the ghetto. So with the lay priest and one man bribed from the fire station let us out during the night.

10. What happened to your mother and father?

My father escaped the labour camp late on 15th of October, 1944. He met up with my mother and I. Together with my father's brother and his wife my parents were hidden by friend, George Ola. His mother lived on the first floor of a building, and for six weeks my parents lived in George's apartment on the second floor. One night the toilet was flushed during the day and one of the neighbours mentioned it to George and suggested that someone was hiding in his apartment, so during the night my parents moved. They went back to their apartment and hid in the ceiling loft under doonas where the luggage was housed.

My parents had two servants, both were Day Adventists and they brought my parents a box of apples to eat. From the beginning of December to the second week of January, 1945, my parents lived on half an apple a day. At night my father would climb out of the window ledge and put ice in a pan so they could drink.

Before that my parents decided to get me out of Budapest. The two maids, a mother and daughter, very religious, were given the family jewellery and money and told to take me to friends at Dauna Pantella, about 150 kilometres from Hungary.

In the middle of January the Russians came to Budapest and the bombing stopped. The servants returned, looking for their belongings. They found my parents there.

11. Where did you live from there?

Initially I was left in an orphanage. Then I was hidden by 7 different people. It was not safe to hide a Jewish child.

12. How did your parents find you?

My parents asked the servants where I was and they said they had left me in an orphanage. When he found out I had been left in an orphanage, my father contacted the Head of the Ant Nazi Movement, its President was called Emery Fouest, which enabled my parents to have travel with documents from the Russians. My parents set out on foot, to walk 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 kms. When they got to the train station which had heating, a farmer gave them dry bread, and they bought hot soup, their first decent meal. On the second day, then they got 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. The next train they got was a proper goods train. Sitting in the 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 then the name of the child. My mother described me, and my name was Zsuzika which was knitted into my beige and brown sweater. I had red hair. The old lady got very excited and told my parents she knew the person who had taken me. She undertook to take my parents to me. Eventually after looking in 6 other places my parents found me.

13. Where were you eventually found?

My head was covered in scabs, most of my hair had fallen out and I was only wearing a flannel shirt. I was living in the barn with the animals. My parents didn't recognise me and I didn't recognise them. I just wanted to stay with the old lady who was taking care of me. I was sleeping in a wooden tub.

14. Did you have a favourite toy/storybook/pet or any memories of your life as a child?

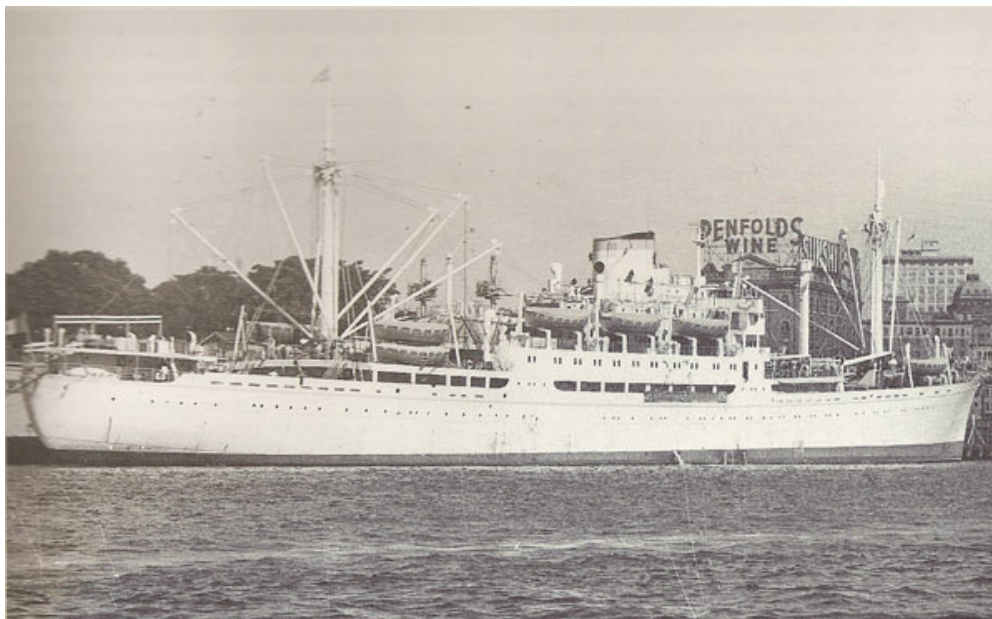
I was left with a woman but my parents found me in 1945, I was living in a barn with the animals, and I have always loved animals. I remember that I loved being read to by our maid; one book comes to mind about a man made of corks. The last Christmas we left Hungary in 1947 I got a Mickey Mouse cowboy who was almost my size. When we left Hungary in 1948 I was allowed one doll, I took a small boy doll with checked pants and a green scarf.

15. Did you remain in contact with the lady who had looked after you?

My father rented a room near the old lady's farm, and my parents stayed until we were all strong enough to travel back to Budapest. It was agreed that the old lady would be my adopted grandmother and until we left Hungary father brought her regularly to us in Budapest to visit and he looked after her.

16. Describe your journey to Australia?

Before coming to Australia, my parents live in Vienna- father made money playing bridge in coffee shops. We got passage to Sydney on the SS Ugolina Vivaldi



17. Describe your life growing up in Australia.

My parents arrived with nine pounds in their pocket. We lived in a place in Rockdale, mother worked in a sewing factory and father packed boxes in a factory. Then we lived a duplex in Kingsford.

Then because we had Catholic papers, father went to the Catholic Board as they wanted me to go to a good school. It was organised to send me to boarding school in Maitland. The girls there called me a "bloody Refo"(Refugee). I remember sitting in the reception area of that school feeling very scared.

After that I went to Saint Sabina in Strathfield, nearer to my parents. I would go to school during the week and come home at weekends.

Then I went to Sydney Girls High School, closer still in Moore Park, Sydney.

18. What happened to you and your family in Europe?

My mother refused to leave Hungary until she found out what had happened to her parents and they found out in 1947. Friends had seen her parents walk into the gas chambers.

19. How has the Holocaust affected you?

I am a child survivor. I was not brought up on religion. I am very lucky that my parents found me and that I am not living in a barn.