**Suzanne Ullman – Life Before The War**

INT: Good morning Suzanne, today is the 31st may 2013 and we are here to interview Suzanne Ullmann, and generally what we do is we ask what your name is at birth and where you where born.

SU : I was born in Budapest in 1935, 8th of December and my name….Hungarian name is Ullmann Zsuzsanna Louisa, Susan Louise Ullmann.

INT: And are you an only child, or ?

SU : No I have twin brothers who are two years younger than myself, and a twin brother and sister who were actually born in London during the war.

INT: So are you the eldest?

SU : Yes I am the eldest.

INT: Would you like to tell us a little about where you grew up in Budapest? Was it a typical Jewish community?

SU : My father went on business to London in 39 and my mother went to visit him and she was unable to return. She went to visit him in 1940, during the war when the war had already broken out. We got stranded in Hungary when I was 4 and my brothers were 2, my parents had been living with our paternal grandmother in a flat, with a nanny.

INT: Was your father still in London?

SU : Yes throughout the war my parents were in London and we were separated for 7 and a half years. And the younger twins, a boy and a girl, were born in England during the blitz. I don’t know when the blitz was, 1942 they were born.

INT: So where you able to keep in contact or?

SU : Well I have just finished translating my grandmother’s letters from 1940 to 1942 and then correspondence stopped. And the letters went via Geneva, the Red Cross, Thomas Cook, some she sent to New York and they were posted on from New York to London; some she sent to relatives in Los Angeles, and as not all the letters arrived she started numbering them after a while so that she knew…And some didn’t arrive at all, and then correspondence stopped in 1942.

INT: It must have been very traumatic for you at the age of 4…

SU : Well…. a child accepts whatever comes, she (Suzanne’s little grandma) says we talked about my parents every day, and in one of the letters she quotes me as saying I am really embittered that they are not here and not coming back, and I said why, and she said because the war is on, and I said well they could take an airplane, or they can walk, suggesting ways, so I missed them terribly

INT: So what age did you start school in Budapest?

SU : In Hungary I went to nursery school for a while and I loved school but there wasn’t much money, because my parents weren’t there to earn the money. I went to primary school later on but the war disrupted education…

INT: Was your grandmother working?

SU : No my paternal grandmother was rather a helpless figure, she was actually German but in 45 years in Hungary she never learned to speak Hungarian. But it was my maternal grandmother who really did all the work and she lived elsewhere. My mother came from a poor family and my father from a rich family, so there was a great tension. They didn’t want the marriage to take place so my father courted my mother for six years and it wasn’t until his father died that he was able to marry

INT: How did they meet?

SU : They met in a sort of Academy of Economics, because there was something called the numerus clausus, because only 20% of Jews were allowed to go to university; there was a restriction on Jewish attendance, so they couldn’t go to university so they went to this Commercial Academy and they met there.

INT: Did you have a Jewish life?

SU : Well I remember my maternal grandmother we called ‘little grandma’ because she was very small and when they introduced me to my grandmother I said, she isn’t grand she is small, and the other we called ‘old grandmother’. She was older and more set in her ways, I remember every morning she would read her prayer book and she would sort of bless us, but we didn’t really have anything else.

INT: So you were obviously quite young while living there, living with a generation that were much older, so did you make friends at nursery school?

SU : Well I was only allowed to go there for 6 weeks initially, I get this from the letters I have just found and translated, and I just loved being there with the children, otherwise no. The nannies would take us to the park, if it pleased them but in fact we were quite ill treated according to my maternal grandmother, especially later on, you know when the Nazis came in, things got very bad like when food was short we weren’t fed enough because they where feeding their sweethearts and own children with the food available, no I just had my brothers, so we fought a lot, because we were very restricted in space.

INT: Do you remember much of your life or do you find reading the letters they remind you?

SU : No I remember it vividly because the things that happened impress themselves on your consciousness because they where so unusual, I remember the various nannies and the way they treated us. I learned things from the letters which where not clear to me, the fact that they brought their lovers up and had orgies in my parents’ bedrooms for instance, I was conscious of people being there but I didn’t know what, I was protected by my ignorance from a lot.

INT: And I imagine it would be difficult for your grandmother to complain because of the situation

SU : Well it was extremely difficult because little grandma lived elsewhere and didn’t have influence at home, she had the brains and knew what was going on. And elder grandma didn’t know what was going on but she had the money, and when she (little grandma) complained what was going on, old grandma just raised the salaries. It was a very abnormal situation.

INT: Did old grandma live with you?

SU : Yes when my parents got married they lived with old grandma, she was quite naive, she loved us, but in one of the letters she says to little grandma, if my son wouldn’t have got married he wouldn’t have had these children and I wouldn’t have all this bother. But then she says to my parents she really does love the children, these things came out but she wasn’t quite up to the situation.

**Suzanne Ullman – Life During The War**

INT: Did you see soldiers?

SU : Well you see what we had in Hungary was an Arrow Cross, special sort of branch of the gendarmerie, they were Nazis but the regime was under István Horthy who was in charge of the land. I remember distinctly when the Germans came into Budapest because what happened was the Germans occupied the country but from the periphery, it was like a pincer action, they collected the Jews and took them off to Auschwitz or Concentration Camps or whatever from the provinces, and Budapest was the last place. 19th of March 1944, I remember climbing up on a chair looking out of a window seeing them march twenty abreast up the street. We lived up on Andrássy Avenue, which was one of the prominent streets, and it was then that things really became bad.

INT: Where you taken to the Ghetto?

SU : Well we lived in a very important corner house, Andrassy number 2 and certain houses were allocated to the Jews. They were starred, a big yellow star on a black background was placed on the door. And the Jews had to live in these starred houses. And it was sort of a ghetto house, and the Christians who lived near there had the option of moving out or staying there, and luckily our house was a starred house so we didn’t have to move out but we had a flat on the 4th floor with 4 rooms. Old grandma had a room, my parents had a bedroom, there was a large dining room and a small nursery for the 3 of us plus the nursemaid, so we were quite squashed.

And in the end, there where 18 people living there, because we tried to get our own relatives to move in. And one family came in and then other Jewish families came in, and that happened to us but it didn’t last long because the Nazis liked this lovely big building in a prominent position and then they ousted us and we had to move to a very small flat. Well we had just 2 rooms in quite a different part of the town.

INT: And what happened to the families that had moved in? Did you all go together or?

SU: No idea, we were all scattered to different places. The flat we went into was on the second floor of a very tall building I don’t know 6 stories high or something. It was very dark, because the rooms opened out onto the courtyard, there was no light at all it was electric light all the time, and there was another 2 people living there a man and a woman.

INT: Was that in the ghetto?

SU: It wasn’t a ghetto as such these were just starred houses individual houses with stars on them and Jews were allocated. There was more of a ghetto near the synagogue Dohany utcai ghetto but we weren’t there.

INT: And would you be able to go out during the day?

SU : As I learned from the letters, time was restricted we had an hour in the afternoon that was from march March ‘44 that’s when the Nazi’s were in Budapest. And food became very short and Jews were only allowed out for 1 hour in the afternoon during the day to do shopping but there was nothing to buy, Jews were given special food cards with huge yellow stars on them, bright yellow, garish yellow and by the time in the afternoon came that they were allowed to shop there was nothing so it was desperate.

INT: And it would be horrible as well if any of you or your siblings become unwell?

SU : I remember this was before 44, in 1942 I was ill for a whole year so I missed school, in the autumn I got yellow jaundice and then I got scarlet fever, and that was an infectious disease so I was put into an isolation hospital and I remember little grandma coming to visit and just seeing her through the window. But that was fun for me because there was children there and I was jumping up and down on the bed. And I had pneumonia 3 times that winter but it was difficult for Jews to get an ambulance and somehow they took me [Mr Weiss] and I landed in hospital, I remember being fed through the veins I couldn’t eat, I was really ill. I got injections.

I remember that distinctly, I was ill the whole year and the school mistress sometimes came to give me lessons in bed, I remember she used to scold me because I was jumping up and down saying I was behaving like a monkey, and then she said just remember it’s only people we love that we want to correct.

INT: And she would be non Jewish?

SU : I suppose so?

INT: And where you able to continue going to school after the Nazis came in as well?

SU : No and then all personnel had to be dismissed, Jews weren’t allowed to have any servants or cooks or whatever, because it was customary, we had someone looking after us, because old grandma couldn’t look after us but when the starred buildings came in, little grandma abandoned her husband to come and look after us because her great aim in life was to save us for our parents, to reunite us with our parents. And so then we had her, but they all had to go, everybody had to go.

INT: It must have been absolutely awful for your parents

SU : Yes and by that time no letters, and I remember my grandma burning everything from England because that was .., And then they started taking everything away, every day there was a new regulation, complicated regulations, they would ring some bell and we would go out on to the courtyard, the houses were built round courtyards and there would be some proclamation. All Jews had to hand in their radios on pain of death, you weren’t allowed even before then to listen to foreign stations, on pain of death, you know, any excuse they take you away. You hand in all your jewelry, anything valuable, you had to declare it. And lots of papers to fill in.

I wasn’t aware of all the paperwork, I just remember queuing up to hand in our goods it was opposite the opera house in Budapest I remember. But every day they made more and more restrictions, so in the end, the state owned everything you had, and when we had to move from the first house to the second one, the problem was what did you do with your furniture? You had to clear out within 24 hours the new place you couldn’t house everything. you couldn’t leave it out on the street but you also had to look after it because it now belonged to the state, so you were between a rock and a hard place and all the restrictions where so complicated that a lawyer couldn’t understand it and they deliberately did that to trick you so they had any excuse to take you away, and I learn this from the letters because of course I remember the move and this and that but I didn’t know the background… paperwork ….I’m learning that now, and I discovered a 50 page account of what happened that my 100 year old aunt [Saffron Walden] gave me last time I visited Los Angeles.

INT: It’s quite wonderful that actually someone, has taken the time… and important because otherwise people don’t have an understanding…

SU: yes so I am learning the background from the adult’s point of view. I remember in our first starred house there was such confusion and so many people and you know one kitchen everyone trying to cook there…., and of course the children just crammed in there. And I lost my temper for the first time in my life, my grandmother was cross with me because I didn’t obey her. You know ‘go to have a meal/ Sit down’.

I was playing around and she took one of my toys and poor grandma she must have been so harassed and she broke one of these toys, a little plate, and I was so appalled by this that I lost it that I started smashing my own most precious toys, and I was crying and weeping and I was hysterical, and one of the people who lived in our flat just took me and locked me up in the bathroom and calmed me down. but I remember crying I was absolutely hysterical I don’t think I ever had lost my temper, it frightened me the whole experience of losing it, I think I was about 7 at the time.

INT: You were about 7 at the time? If you weren’t able to go outside, and you weren’t able to go to school, I was wondering how you actually spent your time?

SU: In Hungary, do you mean? When we were in confinement, a large part was fighting with my brothers, or trying to get away from them, which I couldn’t. And I tried to do my sewing, I liked sewing and knitting and I would want into go into the dining room which I wasn’t always allowed to do by these nannies. But my when little grandma came and she made things better for me because she said ‘…she wants peace, she was very nervous and the boys make her nervous’ And I read, I loved reading.

And of course we had, in ’44 the bombs came you know, the allies were bombing us. So we had the Nazis but we also had another war from above, so about 3 or 4 times a day or night, we might have to go into the cellar when the sirens started, you know, hooting and.

I remember being given a torch in order to go down into the cellar, I made good use of this because I used it to read under my eiderdowns. But you had to be very careful because the room was shared by the nanny and my two brothers, and I had to insulate myself so that the light didn’t seep out under my covers, and I just adored reading I was an avid reader.

INT: I think it would have been a good form of escapism actually

SU : Pardon

INT : It would be a good form of escapism

SU : yes, I learned to read, by the age of 4 we could all read,I don’t know we always asked what the descriptions we almost taught ourselves, I did a little hand work and learned poems.

INT: And your brothers learned to read too?

SU: Yeah, yes yes yes

INT: where did you get books from?

SU : Well we had books from before, I mean the things didn’t really become bad till the Nazis were actually in ’44, you see while, in London, my parents, I’ve got one letter from my parents writing back, and 1940 the blitz is on and they’re saying you’re were lucky there is no war there, so we didn’t actually experience the war in Hungary until till you know 44, when the bombs started flying then we had it from every side, we had the Nazis getting the Jewish, and the bombs, so we had to go down into the cellar all the time.

But before then it was just gradual, the Arrow Cross were harassing us, always more and more and more. but in Budapest we were relatively safe until later on, Eichmann then settled in and his one objective was to eliminate the Jews forever. At the same time Wallenberg unbeknown to us was there negotiating with Eichmann.

INT: what happened to the Germans afterwards?

SU: Well what happened… Well we were in this, this house, the second starred house, it was near the parliament, and then all sorts of rumours were going around all the time, things were getting worse and worse all the time.

And people were taken away, and rumours were going around and people were trying to escape or pay money to get on a ship and rumours were, you know, you paid your money, you got on the ship to go to America and they drowned you; you know, in the ship. So little grandma didn’t know what to do and what eventually happened was that she had a sister who had Christian papers. No, what happened was we went into a protected house, it was a hospital, (nominally) hospital. So we all moved into this hospital on one of the large boulevards and this hospital was actually in the pay of some Nazis. And there was a Nazi guard outside but inside was bedlam [made up] of Jews and the adults were on the first 2 floors and the children were up on the third and fourth floors.

And it was absolute bedlam because they crammed lots of Jews and I suppose they paid for it. And they were on the corridors and the children were trying to commit suicide throwing themselves, you know, into the courtyard. It was awful.

But we were there for about 6 weeks I think. And just before Christmas things were getting worse and worse and a sister of little grandma who had some Christian papers, she managed to get in and one day little grandma said to us, she dressed us all up in our clothes and she said ‘Someone is going to come at 9 o’clock tonight and you have to call her mother and just do everything she says, just go with her’. So we just had to say goodbye.

It was the 19th of December I remember and my brothers and I…This woman came at 9 o’clock at night and she took us out onto the street and it was dark, everyone was running around, it was Christmas and it was busy and we hadn’t been out, you know, for 6 weeks in the streets, and she said ‘Don’t talk’, you know, don’t say anything, just call her mother. And we got onto a very crammed bus, no not bus, it was a tram, we had trams. And we just followed her and she took us down to near the Danube and I remember this house had a big plaque outside, a metal plaque and all I remember was this cross and it said something about Swedish Red Cross, and so she deposited us there and she went away, and it was a sort of nursery.

And there were mostly mothers and babies. And we were sort of big children, you know like 5 and 7, no 8; no I was just 9; 9 and 7 we were. So we didn’t have any relatives there or the other children and there were about 3 other children, 12 and 11. So we stayed there and it was actually very nice because we got food, proper food, we had proper beds, in the hospital I was sharing a bed with…..you know.

INT: Who arranged for you to go into the hospital I was wondering?

SU : Little grandma’s sister with the Christian papers.

INT: She arranged for you to go to the hospital originally?

SU: No, no, I don’t know who arranged the hospital.

INT: Right

SU: I think little grandma arranged the hospital somehow. I don’t know. Maybe I’ll find out when I study the letters better. All I knew is that, no it was her sister Terka who came to the hospital and arranged this transfer with the ‘pseudo mother’ to go to this house. Now we stayed in that house and we had Christmas there I remember and I even got a Christmas present, A little embroidery set, and I still have a little embroidery piece which I did the cross stitch. But I didn’t discover what that house was until the 1980’s here in Glasgow when someone handed me a newspaper cutting saying “Suzanne you may be interested, this is about Hungary” and I read about Wallenberg and it suddenly clicked because one of the puzzles was I remember this plaque on the door with a cross, and I always thought it was the Red Cross, and why was it Swedish Red Cross?

After all, Red Cross is international and I never understood that. And suddenly it clicked that it was actually not the Red Cross, it was the white cross of the Swedish flag as I had looked it up and it was one of Wallenberg’s houses.

INT: That’s wonderful.

SU: But when we were in that house, of course the bombs were… This is Christmas 1944 and the Russians are coming in and the Germans are retreating and the bombs are flying so we were going down into the cellar all the time and eventually we went down into the cellar and they bombed the house, it fell to bits, and we lived down there about 6 weeks, something like that, and we had very little to eat.

INT: You lived in the cellar?

SU: Yes, and the Russians came in and I don’t know whether it was the Germans or the Russians; they poisoned the water supply. They were pushing the Germans across the Danube so the Germans retreated across the bridges, from Pest to Buda they blew up the bridges so that the Russians couldn’t follow them.

Of course we didn’t know anything about our grandmothers, if they were in the hospital or somewhere. And we were in the cellar during, this was called, the Ostrom, which is the, what is it, the siege of Budapest. This would be just after Christmas up to New Year and then the Russians started arriving.

And of course we children, nobody was looking after us, we older children; the mothers were looking after the babies. And I remember my brother Joseph and I going upstairs out into the…because we had no water so we where scraping the snow and bringing it down to melt it. There was a little stove, everybody was trying to, you know, cook on that little stove or melt water or whatever and I remember they shoved a pot of boiling water and you know my brother got burned because the water just went over him it and my brother Louis, he was too dispirited, he just lay there on the ground.

The basement was actually the basement of a paper factory so there were shelves and we just slept on the shelves or on the floor and there were just two loos for everybody. So it was pretty awful. There was nothing to eat except, two things I remember a sack full, they tried to bring… Oh yes, the Germans, they robbed the Wallenberg establishment which had a lot of food there. They just carried huge carcasses out that he had stored there for the children and we just had sackfuls of, it was called bebe leves, it was some sort of powdered stuff.

INT: Like Formula? Oh right, like Porridge?

SU: Well it was made of pulse, some sort of peas or something, and you had huge lumps of clumps you call it, it was potato sugar, it was a sweet stuff so we just ate that. You know we had bits of this, we had nothing else to eat. And then, then the Russians started coming in and they came down and they were drunk and I remember seeing fights, knife fights between Russian soldiers down there and we were just, you know, cowering in the corner. And they were quite primitive some of them, they came in and they said “ura ura ura”. Ura means watch. They were collecting watches and they had about twenty watches all up this, they were just collecting things. They were quite young chaps, so you know all that went on and then the Germans disappeared and the Russians were in and what else happened?

Well… by January, the middle of January, you know, the Germans were out and people started disappearing, you know, the mothers with their children, and we had nobody so they didn’t know what to do with us.

The cook and a few of the adults from the care home upstairs, they were still there and they just didn’t know what to do, so end of January they wanted to dispose of us. And I don’t know why but they separated me and my brothers and they took the boys off lord knows where and I was taken by Stefi the cook, she was looking for an orphanage, and I remember tramping through the streets of Budapest in the snow looking for the orphanage. But we didn’t find it so we went back again into the cellar and the next day again, eventually we found the National Hungarian Orphanage but it was for boys and I was a girl.

And she pleaded with the lady there to take me so I was eventually taken in to the orphanage as the only girl and lived there. So by this time I had lost everybody; my brothers, my grandmothers. And so they took me up into one of the corridors, of course the house had no windows, everything was sort of ‘war time’. By this time it was the beginning of February and I remember they cut my hair. They didn’t cut it all off, they just cut it and washed it they took all… my clothes were of course all ridden with lice, I had head lice, I had body lice, so they took all the clothes and burned it and they gave me a boys uniform, you know, of the orphanage.

And so I actually had quite a happy time there. We were all 45 of us sleeping in one big bedroom and we were given little nightgowns and we had to say our prayers before going to bed and, well, we were given a minimal amount of food. And the nurse who was looking after us was actually, she told me, Jewish herself and her husband was taken away but, you know, she sort of kept that quiet. She got a job there and when we were going for a walk during the day she would always go down to the Danube because they’d put up a Pontoon bridge for the people coming back from the war. She was always looking for her husband and she confided in me, who was nine years old, about her problems and I don’t know whether…Her name was Edith Novér, Edith, Nurse Edith. But whether she found her husband, I don’t know.

But eventually it really was quite miraculous because we all got together, we didn’t know of course what happened to our… I didn’t know anything about anything. And one day a man appeared and he was distant relative of little grandma’s and he must have gone to all the orphanages and all the hospitals and everywhere. He somehow found me, how I don’t know. And eventually he was in communication, because what happened, little grandma had gone with this person who took us to the orphanage and called us mother, whom we had to call mother. And she was a Christian lady. I don’t know what motivated her or whether she got paid, I don’t know. But she took little grandma as her mother, (little grandma didn’t look Jewish).

Little grandma was her ‘mother’. She took her across to Buda, the other side, to a place called Vermezo which means “the field of blood” actually and stayed with her and she posed as her mother. And that house where… She had a miraculous escape because the house she was in was bombed and as the bombs were coming they didn’t know what to do, they ran into the bathroom and the whole house collapsed except for the bathroom. And it was totally miraculous.

INT: It is

SU: And then she couldn’t get back to Budapest because there were no bridges, and the Danube was frozen and there were big blocks of ice floating and a lot of people floated across and some fell into the water.

She thought ‘I’ve survived, I’m not going to get drowned, I’ll wait until a bridge is put up’. Something. So eventually, you know, they put up these pontoon bridges and so then somehow she turned up at the orphanage. Totally miraculous.

INT: And what happened to your brothers?

SU: Well, when we were going for a walk in the orphanage, myself and all these boys, I used to, we used to have to go along in ‘crocodiles’. You know two by two with somebody, a teacher. And there were other groups of children and I used to go up and say do you have twin boys with you, you know I was looking for them on the street as we were…but I didn’t find them. And what happened to them I discovered later is the boys were taken actually and deposited in a monastery or at least with monks somewhere.

So they didn’t know what to do with two little, sort of, lice ridden Jewish boys, the monks. They had enough to eat but they got rid of them. But my brothers say they sat them in the kitchen on stools, and I think they slept on these chairs. Eventually after a few days they took them to some care home they found and the boys, although they were only 7, they remembered the address of one of the relatives and the people from the care home went to this address and right enough they found these relatives.

So one of the relatives came over and made contact with them and saw that they were… And this relative only died a few years ago so, you know, she told me lots. She said she went there and Louis, who was 7, was begging for just a tiny crust of dry bread, just bring us something.

And she had, she then got some food but she had to stay there and watch until they ate it because if she didn’t it would be taken by somebody else, you know. So she just stood there while they were eating whatever she’d brought. And so eventually little grandma must have made contact and so they knew where the boys were.

This other male relative must have somehow got in touch with little grandma and little grandma turned up in the orphanage where I was. It must have been March by this time. And I remember the first thing she brought was a toothbrush; some food and a toothbrush. And so, you know, we were together and then the boys were…eventually they came to join me in the orphanage.

So we were in the orphanage and she would come and bring baskets of food whenever she had because, of course, everything was pretty dire even then. But you know we got a bed and we had a roof.

INT: And did your other grandmother? Did she survive?

SU: Well we didn’t know. She stayed in the hospital because she was, she was sort of old and cumbersome and she had swollen feet.

INT: Right, right.

SU: She couldn’t move much so she was left there and she survived too. And somehow, we just don’t know because she was never mobile, you know she had these swollen feet, she managed to find her way back to the original starred house, and, you know, little grandma must have gone round looking for her and she was found too. How she did this journey we don’t know, we could never understand; but we all survived.

[Old Grandma – Martha. – turned up once with sandwiches for Joseph and Louis – before they joined Susan in the orphanage (they were both in another refuge). We were hugely surprised to see her.]

INT: Absolutely incredible.

INT: So the Russians are there?

SU: Yes

INT: You are under communist regime.

SU: Yes

INT: What happened next?

SU : Well, we were in the orphanage now, and at Whitsun that first year was the first time that we went home to our second starred house, and little grandma made us a, you know an Uhonla which is a tea. You know we had Kichel, she made Pank, what is that in English? These, not scones…

INT: Pancakes?

SU: Pardon?

INT: Pancakes?

SU: No they’re not pancakes, I forget the names of them. Anyway she made these things, and of course I disgraced… Well that was the second memory I have which I’ve never forgotten is I ate and ate and ate and I couldn’t stop eating and what was left she put in the larder. But of course I went into the larder and ate some more and the inevitable happened and I was sick, and I was so ashamed. I’ve never been sick in my life again after that.

And so we spent the weekend there, the Whitsun weekend from the orphanage. We went back to the orphanage and stayed there until about July, and then there were camps for rehabilitating, you know, destitute children who were starved, and we got to go to one of these camps on the mountain in Buda.

And we stayed there for about… until Christmas. For about three months. And little grandma would climb the mountain with baskets of food, and, you know, whenever she had something [Little grandma also brought a change of clothes for the 3 if us at the w/e]. And she and old grandma were living in the second starred house that we had, the first one you know, that was gone, and somehow quite a lot of the furniture managed to survive too.

**Suzanne Ullman – Immigration**

And so that would be about ’45, ’44/’45 so the Russians are in. So now she made contact with London, my parents. So we were in contact again and now was the business how do we get out? So she went every day and put in petitions here and there and I suppose our luck was because we were too young to be of use to the communist state, the grandmas were too old, so eventually they let us go, end of ’46 she got the papers and we emigrated. So I’m not a refugee, I am an emigrant. And we even got some of the furniture out. So we were reunited in 1946, so we met our parents for the first time, well yes, in London.

INT: Do the boys have much of a memory of….I was going to say

SU: No, the boys don’t remember as much as I do.

INT: And would they have remembered their parents because they were only 2?

SU: No they were only 2, they didn’t remember the parents. I hardly remember my father, I just remember one or two incidents with my mother; jumping up and down in her bed or, you know, her teaching me how to pray and things like that. But, no…

INT: And how was it?

SU: Pardon?

INT: How was it when you met them for the first time?

SU: Well the wonderful thing was that this little grandma of mine was a really remarkable woman and she always talked about my parents, so much so, showed us pictures, that we felt we knew them.

She told us stories about their childhood, everything, so that they weren’t strange. And showed us photographs, she says in her letters that I kissed the photographs every day, you know. And why aren’t they coming back but I didn’t…I myself, you know, I felt I knew them because she made it so. I mean I think back now how clever she was, how insightful, you know she was a wonderful, wonderful woman. So but then I was very disappointed because I was dying to see my brother and sister, John and Eva, the English ones. But they weren’t at home. I was desperately disappointed. It wasn’t until December that I saw them because, unbeknown to me, they had been evacuated during the war. And they were, at first, in a Jewish nursery in Knutsford near Manchester, in a Jewish Nursery. And I was bullying my parents so in December they took myself and my two grandmothers, I don’t think the boys were there, to Manchester and we spent the night there.

And I remember there was an announcement on the news that in this particular nursing home a fire had broken out and a child had died and my father went berserk, but it wasn’t my brother and sister. So the next day we went there and, we went to this nursing home, and my father went in with the grandmothers and I was just sitting outside and this little girl comes in, out to go to the loo or something, and she looks me up and down and I later on I was introduced to her as my sister. And of course we couldn’t communicate, they were 4 years old and I was 11 and we had no language in common. So I spent the night there in the nursery with them. It was December and it was cold, I remember lying in a cot beside my little brother John and we just sort of held hands in the dark, you know, across the bed. So they stayed there and we went back to London and, you know then our life began in England.

INT: What did your father do during the war?

SU: My father, he first worked in, I think, in a book shop, and he had some Hungarian contacts in London, he was a jeweller by trade. And then he worked for a man called Mr. Vees who was a jeweller. I think he was a jeweller anyway and, in an office, and eventually that’s what he did during the war, yes. And after the war he went into partnership with another Hungarian and opened a shop in Hatton Garden. And my brother Joe eventually carried on. Two of my brothers are in the trade.

INT: And is that jewellery?

SU: Yes and little grandma in one of her letters says to my parents during the forties, you know, maybe one day Joseph or one of them will carry on and that’s what happened.

INT: So you went to school in London? And you said you must have had…

SU : I went to school in London for a year.

INT: Right which as you said was a very steep learning curve

SU: Well yes, I couldn’t speak. I went first in Golders Green. My parents had to buy a new house, and moved to Golders Green because of, you know, the family was going to be enlarged and I went to the local school in Golders Green. They put me in there the first week I arrived. I couldn’t speak. I had a few words like window and pencil and nothing else. And two of the little girls from the school came and picked me up and walked me to school and all I knew was that when they said 54 I had to say ‘yes’ because I was number 54 in the class.

INT: 54? That’s a big class.

INT: On the register?

SU: On the register. And during lunchtime because there were too many children in the school we went, there were British restaurants, wartime restaurants, and a bunch of us went to the British restaurant and I remember sitting there crying my eyes out because I didn’t know how to use a knife and fork. These little girls were eating with all sorts of strange things like spam, which I thought was terrible with these jelly bits in it and custard, I’d never eaten custard, and I didn’t know how to use the implements. But anyway after Christmas my parents put me into a boarding school, a weekly boarding school in London, in Sheen, to learn English, and I’d go home and I was crying and I said “Why’d you put me off, I’ve been waiting all this time and now you send me away again”.

You know, I was devastated. But anyway I went to school there and I just learned English, I just had to. If I didn’t know what grass was they took me out and they showed me, that’s grass, you know, and it took me about a year. And then they put me into a French school in Sutton Waldron which was really away but by this time I was 12 and my contemporaries were learning a second language, and it was desperate for me to learn French when I could hardly speak English, and, you know, I’d have to conjugate verbs and I couldn’t do it, you know, and the teacher in desperation said “well do it in Hungarian”. So I put it on the board, conjugated in Hungarian and then he’d be pleased because he recognised the Latin, you know, he went off and I was left off the hook.

So I was there only a year because, no only a term, because they had a, infantile paralysis broke out and one of the children died and my parents whipped me out, you know, didn’t want me to get it in my sort of still dilapidated state. And I then went to a school, which was an extraordinary school, it was a progressively coeducational school and my brothers were already there in Kent, called Longdean school which had its foundations actually in Scotland I discovered, in a school called Kilquhanity somewhere in Ayrshire. And it was run, they put me there because it was run on, well it was very free. It had a farm attached, education wasn’t the high priority but, you know, the arts and farming, you know it was to build us up. And so I was there until I was 16 and managed to fail most of my O levels, but undaunted I went to another school and started on my A levels.

INT: So were you…was that residential as well?

SU: Yes

INT: Right

SU: It was in Kent, yes. It was in Chiddingstone, near Tunbridge Wells, in a castle, Chiddingstone Castle. An old pseudo castle. And it was a wonderful place really. The friends I made there, schoolchildren, I still have, you know. So it was the beginning of proper education. From there at 16 I went to Welwyn Garden City to a proper school where they taught you lessons and concentrated on the academic side so I was there for a couple of years and…

INT: And then you went to university?

SU: Well they fortunately, well, I was allowed to give up things like maths, and you needed maths. I didn’t know the difference between arts and sciences so, you know, I had to do a lot of work during the holidays. And when I went to the school in Welwyn Garden City I had to take up science and maths, you know, at 16 from scratch because, you know, I was allowed to give it up. That wasn’t so important. In Longdean school, the teachers…only the headmaster had a degree. They were refugees and, you know.

INT: Were they Jewish refugees or…? Was it a mixture of refugees?

SU: The teachers?

INT: Yes.

SU: Well, one was a Sri Lankan,

INT: Right

SU: And he wasn’t Jewish. But I think, I only learned recently that the nurse was Jewish and the German teacher was half and half.

INT: And the children who were there were they…?

SU: The children were mostly, well, delinquents sent by London County Council because of the free atmosphere. But the trouble is that the balance was tipped in favour of the… you know, because they paid for it, you see my parents paid for us, but they had too many of these children so the school really went…In fact in 1952 it went into dissolution because it, some of the staff were a little delinquent too! But it was a sort of free and happy place. We got plenty to eat and the arts.

INT: And I think compared with what you’d gone through

SU: Yes. This is why my parents put us there and, you know, I think you could be vegetarian there, you know, it was all health, it was avant garde. It was…you know.

INT: And you could be a child.

SU: Pardon?

INT: You could be a child. Which I think is…

SU: Yes and, you know, we had a wonderful time there. We built a lorry with the biology teacher, and on this lorry we went to Italy and Spain.

INT: Good grief, fantastic.

SU: And we made costumes out of sack cloth and dyed it and acted out Shakespeare plays. You know, we had real fun but academic education wasn’t too seriously taken.

INT: But on the other hand it’s a holistic view of education.

SU: Yes it was, it was. I never regretted it. It was wonderful.

**Suzanne Ullman – Settling In**

INT: And so where did you study? When did you decide to study…?

SU: Well I went to this proper school in Welwyn Garden City and did two years there, managed to get advanced German and Biology, I think. I had to do Maths, you know, from scratch and Chemistry and eventually I got into University College, London. They did a course called Intermediate so you could make up. So I did Zoology, Botany, Psychology and Chemistry there. So that brought me more or less on a level with others, not quite, but more or less. And then I didn’t get a place there for a degree but I got into a college, Chelsea College of Science and Technology, and I did my degree there and I did, after that I did my PhD there as well.

INT: Your parents must have been so proud, you know, that you…

SU: I don’t know. I think I was a disappointment to my father, at least that’s how he made out, because he wanted me to get married and have 6 children. That would have been like a Victorian father. So when he got grandchildren I said well, you know, now you’ve got a grandchild and then he said it’s not the same as from a girl. But he never let on to me but he must have been because to other people, you know, other people would come and say your father is pleased but he would never let on to me.

INT: And so did your parents live to a long age or…?

SU: My father, well when I, what happened then? I did my degree, I went, and then I came up to Glasgow and I got a job as a very well known Professor’s assistant, a research assistant in Edinburgh, so I spent 3 years with him. And then I got an assistant lectureship in the university zoology department, and then the policy was you couldn’t stay on after that, you had to move on. And I was invited to Glasgow University. Imagine; now people are clamouring for jobs, then you were invited to apply. So I was very lucky. I was invited by the Professor of zoology and I got the job and I am still in the department 40 something years after. But in 1975 I decided I need a break from Glasgow, and I met someone at a conference and he’d invited me to go to Australia so being a zoologist I thought, well, you know, I must take my chance go see the world. So I went out there for a year and while I was there my father passed away.

INT: Oh right.

SU: In ’75. And my mother… I was offered a job, you know, out there but I thought, well I’ve been separated from my family once in my lifetime, its too far away. So although everything was hunky dory I decided to come back and, you know, because my mother was still alive. And she lived to be 83, and she lived until… I think it was 1990. So that’s what happened.

INT: And so you have twin brothers, and a twin brother and sister.

SU: Yes

INT: And so did you say are some in America? And…

SU: Yes funnily enough. The Hungarians became British, and the British went out to America and eventually became Americans, you know, they were running away. So it’s only in the last 10 years I’ve really got to know my sister because now I go out there. The last few years to visit my aunt who is now 100, and after that I spend a couple of weeks with my sister who has a timeshare in Mexico and this year I came back via New York where I’ve got my brother and his extended family. So, you know, we keep… We’re still scattered but…

INT: And are you the only person who has gone into academia?

SU: Yes.

INT: What speciality did you…?

SU: Pardon?

INT: Did you have a speciality?

SU: Yes I took a… I specialised in entomology. Insects. I did my PhD on insect embryology, spent 3 years studying an egg which was 1 and a half millimeters long.

INT: As you do.

SU: As you do. And then when I went to Australia I thought, well Australia’s famous for marsupials so I actually changed to marsupials. I set up the first colony of marsupials in Glasgow University and, you know, we published quite a bit on it.

INT: So do you work with the vet school?

SU: No. I taught vets, but no. Developmental biology became my field, firstly insects and then mice and marsupials reproductive biology and embryology.

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**Suzanne Ullman – Reflection On Life**

INT: We usually finish Suzanne by asking about reflections, and we’d like to finish with a positive as well. So when you look back, because you have obviously had a wonderful, I think, academic career, what would you say is the highlight?

SU: Of my academic career?

INT: And your life in general.

SU: Well I think my early life taught me values, it taught me how to appreciate things. I take nothing for granted, I don’t waste resources, I recycle everything and, you know, I appreciate everything that comes my way. It has made me positive, I think, and it’s made me very grateful to the good lord in whom I believe that, you know, I owe my miraculous survival and that of my family.

I mean it really is miraculous that we all separately under such circumstances… So I very much believe in providence, in the goodness of God and I try to do my best to, you know, to spread good things around and to be positive.

INT: I think you do, because you do also a lot of voluntary work as well, so despite the fact of retiring you seem to be busier now.

SU : Oh yes, I, you know, I just wish I had more energy because, you know, I get tired sometimes and I can’t work until two in the morning as I used to do before. But, you know, you have to know your limitations as well and, you know, just be grateful for what you have because we have so much and we know now how badly off people are in other parts of the world. And I’m very happy with my own life, my only sorrow is that everybody isn’t in the same happy position. There are still prejudices and still all these negative things and wars, I just pray for peace every day.

INT: Thank you very much Suzanne

INT: Thank you

INT: It was a real privilege. Thank you very much.