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Susan Alder - Holocaust Rescuers Interviews

Sam and Pearl Oliner

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Respondent: Susan Adler (daughter of Jenő Galambos)

Interviewer: Sam Oliner

Transcriber: Bethaney Weber

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I: Once again maybe briefly tell you just to review what this is all about. I know Island or Robert, whatever name he goes by. He is a nice young fellow; he is your nephew obviously right?

R: Um hum.

I: And so I am a Holocaust survivor. I was rescued in Poland during the war. I am about 72 years of age and I have been for the last group of years, 20 years or so, I have been doing some research on rescuers of Jews in Nazi occupied Europe, that is Gentile people and I am also interested in Jewish heroism. So Island or Robert came over and told me about his grandfather, General Galambos, and he of course, I think told me lots of stuff, but he didn't know details and he said "why don't you call?" - call not only you but call your brother Andrew Goldman, which I had the distinguished -

R: I can imagine that conversation.

I: Yeah, that was an interesting conversation, but anyway he had somewhat materials. I kept him on the questions rather than the - he was trying to convert me.

R: Oh, of course.

I: But I knew about that so I wasn't surprised because I think Island -

R: I don't know if you know him, but Rabbi Kravitz in Los Angeles he had "Juice for Judaism". So I called him at one point and I said, "you gotta help me, you know my brother." We were just in a thousands pieces over this obviously and I asked this doctor, this Rabbi Kravitz if he would meet with him and his specialty was this - I mean this is what he does for a living, bringing people back. And he called me up and he said I met with your brother for over 12 hours on 3 different occasions and he said, "there is no way I can do anything." And my brother walked away saying this was the best 12 hours of his life because you know here was a man who was able to argue with him and quote him verse for verse like he can know quote verses and whatever, but it didn't shake him. So I have resigned to the fact that this is what is.

I: Well, that is his way of living and I guess it is also okay.

R: I mean it is not okay but -

- I. But you have to accept him - one has to accept him.
- R. At least he is not doing anything evil.
- I. Not at all and he absolutely wants to go to Israel and start buying some land and open up a ministry or mission or whatever.
- R. Oh gosh.
- I. Anyway, let me get to the main thing. First of all how come you speak English without an accent and he has such an accent?
- R. Well, I was much younger, I was born after the war and he went through it. There are 10 years between us.
- I. I see, so that is the reason. So, how old is he?
- R. He is 66 and I am going to be 56, no he just turned 66 a few weeks ago.
- I. So, Andrew is 66. Now let me ask you something about yourself. So you were born - where were you born?
- R. I was born in Budapest. I was born in '47.
- I. When did you come to the States?
- R. To the States I came in '69 December, but we went to Canada in '57 January.
- I. What did you know about your father?
- R. I tell you I know the story. The story that I know is as follows: My father was in some sort of a gathering place where there were maybe a couple of hundred Jews gathered to be deported and my father spoke German, found some German high ranking official who was a mucky muck in this particular place and says to him, "Look why are you sending us when you could make use of us we are bakers and tailors and you know we each have a trade and we could help you in your efforts rather than kill us - you have time to kill us later, why not make use of our skills?" And he figured you know, you gain time, you gain life. And the guy sort of on a whim went along with him and said to him, "you know what, that is not a bad idea, but you have to feed them, you have to clothe them, you have to take charge of whatever their needs are. I will just tell you what I need and in terms of if I need tailors, if I need you to sew uniforms or if I need you to do whatever, but you have to oversee that they do not become a burden to me." And he gave them some sort of a barrack I guess or some sort of a facility.
- I. Was it also perhaps known as a safe house?

R. I don't think that it was a safe house.

I. It wasn't a safe house. It wasn't what Wallenburg did, it was a safe house.

R. I know what a safe house is, my mother was in a safe house, but I don't think this was a safe house and bottom line, my father apparently organized these people who apparently ended up not being deported who ended up being liberated, except that from starting out with a couple of hundred Jews it ended up being thousands. And from what I know is that he organized. There were people who were in charge of getting food, there were people in charge of musical programs, there were people in charge of hygiene, in charge of - I mean he had it organized and it was running like some sort of a machine. And the funny part is that he had a daughter who was not with him and she was deported.

I. She would be your sister right?

R. Yes, my sister in Israel. When she was deported my father got word that she was taken and he went to this German guy who by this time really was fond of my father and my father said to him, "Can you imagine that I have all of these Jews and I am able to help them at least and I can't help my own daughter. You gotta help me." And the guy took my father and -

I. Was it a civilian or military person?

R. I think he was military.

I. Okay, go ahead.

R. And he took a motorcycle and he had a side car and my father sat in the side car and this guy went up and down and my sister was on the march when they walked to Budapest, remember?

I. When they walked to Austria, right?

R. Yes. And this German guy took my father to try to find his daughter, but they didn't, they never found her. And I think one of the things my father never forgave himself. As it ultimately happened he saved thousands and thousands of people but he couldn't save his own daughter who was fifteen years old from having this horrific experience. I mean she survived and she came back. And his wife didn't, and his wife's sister didn't.

I. Her name is Magda right, Magda Burger?

R. Um hum. So I mean that is what I know. When they were liberated these handfuls of Jews multiplied into hundreds and hundreds and I mean I have even heard thousands, but I don't want to blow it out of proportion, I just can't collaborate, I don't have dates.

I. But you heard the story?

- R. My father never really spoke about it very much. After my father died there was an article written in a Hungarian Jewish newspaper and it was written by some anonymous person who went through this experience with him.
- I. And he named him by name?
- R. He named my father, this anonymous person who wrote this letter or article or something gave credit to my father for saving these many, many people and at the end of the letter he writes something like may blessings be on something something on his tomb stone. You know that it was very touching and that is really when I knew.
- I. Tell me this, by any chance or by any luck do you have that article or letter.
- R. I probably do.
- I. You do, oh you would be the greatest hero for me if you could send it to me because -
- R. It is in Hungarian.
- I. It doesn't matter. There are lots of people that can translate this Hungarian to English.
- R. That I can definitely do. I am not sure if I have it with me here in Chicago, but I think it is definitely in Los Angeles and that I can get you the next time I go to Los Angeles, that is not a problem.
- I. That's good. When do you go to Los Angeles the next time, I was just wondering.
- R. I probably won't go before the end of the year.
- I. That would be good.
- R. Does my story at all coincide with my brother's?
- I. Yes, it does but he did not exactly know the locations. I know it was in Budapest, he said that. But he thought it was - maybe I put the words in his mouth because I said, "You mean safe houses?" and he said "yes."
- R. He probably did not know.
- I. He did not know, that is what I thought, but he also said that you would know about it and he also said that you might have that article. So he did say -
- R. Now I have another brother.
- I. Yes, Tommy?

- R. Was with my father in there.
- I. Yes, I just tried to call him, but he has gone out of town. His name is Tom?
- R. Yes, but I tell you very honestly I'm not sure if he'd be willing to talk to you.
- I. You don't think so?
- R. I don't know. I could check with him. I talk to him very, very frequently, but I mean we talk four or five times a week.
- I. What does he do?
- R. But he is probably the least likely to want to talk.
- I. Because of some -
- R. His mother never came back and his mother was my father's first wife. In other words Magda's mother - they were sisters and my father had him with him, you know this was his nephew and then after the war, my parents adopted him so he grew up as my brother, but he is actually by blood my sister's first cousin. He is probably the most reluctant to talk. He doesn't like to see any films. He doesn't you know - if inadvertently we had gone to the theater and it was you know on the topic he basically can hardly get out of his seat at the end of the show. It touches him in places that who knows. But he actually was there with my father. Now he was six you know. So I don't know what he would remember if anything or how accurate it would be or how distorted it would be.
- I. Sure, is he the oldest then therefore?
- R. No, my sister is the oldest of the four of us?
- I. Magda?
- R. Yes.
- I. And I talked to Island, which do you call him by the way?
- R. I call him Robert.
- I. So do I. Robert said that I should call her and I was planning to call her sometime.
- R. My sister?
- I. Yes, in Israel.
- R. You can also reach her through email if you like.

I. Oh really?

R. Absolutely.

I. Oh that would be phenomenal. So, before I can continue any longer if you will permit me, let me have the email right now. Also, first let me have your address so I can -

R. My address is 3045 Centennial Lane, Highland Park, IL 60035.

I. That is a separate town obviously.

R. Yes, it is a suburb of Chicago.

I. I think that there are a lot of Jewish people living there, am I not right?

R. Yeah.

I. And your phone number I already have. So now let's get to Magda's email.

R. Magda's email - you know what it is in the computer on my address book, but my husband is doing work on it so I can't get to it right now.

I. Tell you what. If you can do me a favor I can give you my email -

R. If I can get your email address, I can email you her's.

I. Okay, so my email address is spol@humboldt.edu. So if you could send me that that would be great and then I can talk to her via email for a little while and explain to her who I am etc. and so forth. Now let's see now. Let me make sure - Highland Park 60035. You said right? My handwriting is like I can't tell a 5 from an 8. Now continuing right along, did you feel close to your father?

R. Very much so.

I. Now it seemed to be that Andrew was very teary eyed.

R. When he talked about my dad?

I. Yeah, that is very interesting and he also told me when I asked him about when he changed his name and crossed over if his father knew and he said no, he did it after his father passed away.

R. My father would have never of - my father would have disowned him.

I. Yeah, that is what I thought.

- R. My father would have tolerated a lot of things but -
- I. But not that.
- R. Not this and the thing is to my brother, he didn't cross over, he thinks he is a Jew, he says he is a Messianic Jew.
- I. Yeah, I wonder what the difference is from those folks and the Jews for Jesus. Is it the same thing?
- R. It is the same thing. I mean this is under the Assembly of God so it is a little bit - it has more texture, I don't know.
- I. And he has apparently a congregation.
- R. I don't know.
- I. You sound like you speak Yiddish too.
- R. Yes, a little bit.
- I. Tell me more. Obviously when you grew up was he a person that you felt was a caring kind of person?
- R. My father?
- I. Yes.
- R. My father was an incredibly bright and my father had an incredible - I shouldn't say bright - my father had wisdom. My father was not especially educated under the circumstances of his life, but my father had incredible wisdom and one of the strongest things I think in his make up was a sense of fairness, justice. Ah, those kinds of things were extremely important to him and he had that kind of respect in his community. If he were to fundraise for some Jewish cause, he didn't just call and ask for money, he would say you have to give so much. And I remember I once challenged him and I said, "How do you have the right to assess what somebody else shall give?" And he said, "If I say it, they know that I am fair and they will not argue."
- I. I see - he assessed the situation correctly.
- R. Yes, and I remember we were fund-raising for a member of the community. This was in Los Angeles and he had had a leg amputated, he was in the hospital for the longest time, couldn't work, had a child and my father got on the phone and he says to me, "You know we can cover more ground if you get on the phone." And I said, "Me?" and he said, "Yeah, you just tell them your name and this one should give this and this one should

give that." And I said, "Dad, I can't do that." And he said, "Yeah, you just tell them I said so."

I. That is nice, very nice.

R. And when somebody said that they weren't going to give that, they were going to give less, my father called up and said, "You are not ashamed of yourself?" And he got it.

I. Did he speak Yiddish?

R. Not - he spoke but not fluently. My mother was more Yiddish than my father. My father had incredible respect in his community. He was a very, very just man.

I. And the community was located in Los Angeles?

R. Yeah.

I. Because first you were in Canada, so you are talking about the Los Angeles community.

R. Yeah, the interesting part of it is that a lot of the Montreal Jewish community moved to Los Angeles and a lot of them were the same people, but my father was asked - I mean I can't even tell you how many times he was asked to be the head of a benzene. You know a benzene perhaps of our own fashioning the words of two rabbis, but he was asked to adjudicate and even for instance his mahatonim - his son's father in-law, had a business issue with a business partner and the business partner asked my father to adjudicate and people said to them are you crazy, they share grandchildren, they are family to him - you're going to go to him. And he said, "yeah I am going to go to him because no one else will be as fair and just as he." And my father ruled against his own mahatonim, which caused another stir, but that is the kind person he was.

I. So other sources of the story. You said you heard it from this article that you are going to send me, but what else - from what other sources or what other members -

R. I'm sure that my mother just collaborated it, but she -

I. She is no longer around obviously? She has gone to heaven I hope.

R. Oh for sure.

I. Anyways, go ahead, besides your mother.

R. You know, I just don't know. I don't know who else would know that is still around.

I. I wonder if there is any -

R. There is no family.

- I. I wonder if there is any specific historical archive some place. It's tough.
- R. I mean there might be something in the Jewish community in Budapest, they may have something.
- I. His name was the same as it is now?
- R. You know I am not sure if it was Goldenswich at that time. It might have been Goldenswich because during the Communist regime it was changed to Galamobos, but I don't know exactly when the change occurred I think it was after the war, but it wasn't such a wonderful thing to walk around with Goldenswich even before the war, so he may have used the Galamobos and it just wasn't official. I just don't know.
- I. But in the United States he is known as that and he obviously has citizenship as that.
- R. Oh no, it was completely changed to Galamobos. My father was not an American citizen. He kept his Canadian citizenship.
- I. Oh I see, so he may have become a citizen under Galamobos in Canada.
- R. He died a Canadian citizen.
- I. But he is buried in the United States?
- R. In Los Angeles.
- I. Let's see now. Was he a big man?
- R. Not particularly. Not big - it is hard for my to gauge. As a child I always thought he was big, but he really wasn't. He was probably about 5'10, 5'11.
- I. Do you have a photograph of him by any chance?
- R. Oh sure.
- I. Would you be willing to loan me a copy of it?
- R. Sure, I can send you some of that stuff when I send you the article.
- I. Okay, let's see now. I will try - Robert called him "my Uncle Tommy".
- R. Yeah, I will talk to Tommy. He went to New York now and I am sure he will call me from there and I will kind of feel it out if he will be willing to talk to you.

- I. You could tell him who I am and I am sure you have access to the web site it would be wonderful.
- R. He wouldn't.
- I. No what I am saying is that if you had access to the web site you could look me up, it takes about four seconds to see what I have done. Like I said, I've done quite a bit of work in this area.
- R. I've been wondering whether Tommy would have any clear memory. I have no idea.
- I. Ah, ha, I think Magda would.
- R. Well, Magda would, she wasn't with my father.
- I. Was she close to the father too, do you think?
- R. Oh Magda, she was extremely close to my father -
- I. What about - go ahead, I'm sorry I should have let you finish.
- R. She obviously missed many years with him, many, many years, because after the war when she got married you know they were Zionist and went to Israel.
- I. Did he visit her in Israel?
- R. Yeah, my father, yeah.
- I. Magda does speak English because I don't speak Hungarian.
- R. Magda is fluent in English. She is fluent in English and she is fluent in Hebrew and French and German and Hungarian.
- I. What does she do for a living?
- R. At this point, not much.
- I. Is she retired?
- R. Right now she is retired.
- I. What did she used to do?
- R. Well she had a tough life. She is an extremely bright woman who obviously because of the roads of her life never got the education that she should have had. You know she

worked in the diamond industry. She worked as a masseuse when they first started out in Israel and she built the country.

I. She has children?

R. She has a son and her husband just died. She has a son and three grandsons. She was severely handicapped from the camps.

I. She was. Handicapped physically?

R. Yes.

I. What about - what do you do for a living?

R. I am a cantor.

I. You're a cantor. I love the idea of women cantors. I've met four so far. And my son lives in New Jersey, in Montclair, New Jersey and in one of the temples there that he belongs to there is a wonderful woman cantor.

R. Where in New Jersey?

I. In Montclair, New Jersey. There is a temple I think in the next town something Bendfield or Fairfield - adjacent town where there is a temple.

R. I probably know her.

I. Yeah, it is a young women. Okay so let's see now, what else can you tell me? This is my last question probably. I tell you, if anything else comes to your mind about your father or anything else, I would be very appreciative because -

R. The only thing that I can think of is the Showa Foundation interviewed my mother.

I. Oh yes?

R. I have not had the guts to look at it yet 'cause I lost my mother only in February of '99.

I. Oh my God, that is very recent. Do you have a videotape of it?

R. I have a tape.

I. Would you be willing to trust me and send it to me and I promise to send it right back to you?

R. I don't know that I could do that.

- I. You can't? It is too precious. Okay. Maybe I can get it - I don't blame you - I can actually get it from - because I've been interviewed and I have also advised the Spielberg Institute in Los Angeles.
- R. I'm sure that it is available.
- I. I can get it, yeah; it is not a problem. She was interviewed under what? Under Galamobos right?
- R. Sure.
- I. And her name was?
- R. Margaret. And it probably was in '97, the interview. Either '97 or early '98. Let's see now, I have the tape.
- I. Do you have a number maybe?
- R. See, my brother and I were here all together. I put the tape on and my brother heard my mother's voice and he started screaming "Turn it off! Turn it off!"
- I. I see.
- R. That was Tommy.
- I. Okay, I see.
- R. So that is why I am hesitant.
- I. Does the tape have a number?
- R. Hold on, I'm trying to find it. Survivors of the Showa Visual History Foundation.
- I. I've been interviewed too.
- R. January 4, 1995.
- I. Do they have a number at all on it?
- R. No, the interviewer is Renee Firestone. It is in Hungarian.
- I. Oh, the whole tape is in Hungarian.
- R. Yes.
- I. That wouldn't help me much anyway. I am not going to go in that direction. Do you speak Hungarian?

R. Yeah.

I. Alright - we tried that direction anyway. Thank you.

R. But, I mean if I have whatever to listen to it and it refers to anything. I just have to find the strength to listen to it.

I. I know it is tough. It is very, very tough. So, listen. In the mean time I thank you very much.

R. Oh, you are very welcome and I wish I could be more concrete you know.

I. But do talk call Tommy and see if he'd be willing to do that.

R. Yeah, I will do that.

I. And I very much appreciate it. I will call him in about two weeks. I am going to New York myself as I may have mentioned already.

R. Okay. I will definitely talk to him before that.

I. Thank you so much.