

Introduction

by

Henry Turner

I first met Waltraud Suzuki in 1979, at the International Suzuki Conference, which was held in Munich that year. Plans to set up the British Suzuki Institute were already far advanced, and Felicity Lipman and my wife, Anne Turner, who subsequently became musical directors of the Institute, had been invited to attend.

Dr. and Mrs. Suzuki paid their first visit to England later that year and my wife and I were honoured to be able to act as their hosts on that occasion, and again on their subsequent trips to Europe.

On that first visit, I well remember that Waltraud arrived with a large and imposing suitcase, which contained not only all her own things, but also all Dr. Suzuki's clothes, and we were immediately faced with a crisis. No one could remember the combination of the lock, and the suitcase remained obstinately closed. In desperation, my aid was sought. I gazed at the suitcase, and twiddled the numbers on the lock; and to my surprise and relief, the suitcase opened. I had rendered my first service to the Suzuki movement, and acquired a totally undeserved reputation as handyman!

Anne and I are among those who have been urging Waltraud to write down the story of her meeting with the young Shinichi Suzuki, and their life together, and I am delighted to be able to introduce what I am sure you will agree is a fascinating account of nearly six decades of shared experiences.

And what a story it is! Those of us who have the privilege of knowing her will recognize Waltraud's voice telling us of a young woman moving from the familiar cultivated surroundings of mid-twenties Berlin to the totally unfamiliar atmosphere of pre-war Japan; the horrors and deprivations of the war years; and the frustration and disorientation of the immediate postwar years. And through it all, the indomitable courage with which she supported Dr. Suzuki in his efforts to establish his educational theories, and to build up the Talent Education Institute.

To revert to the analogy of the suitcase; in a very real sense it was Waltraud's never-failing support which made it possible to unlock the treasure-chest of Dr. Suzuki's teaching: not by any fortunate accident, but by love, sheer courage, and single-minded determination over many years.

Although, with characteristic modesty Waltraud would probably play down her role, I think the following pages make it clear how much the thousands of children, parents and teachers around the world whose lives have been enriched by Dr. Suzuki owe to the selfless support he has received from his wife.

Preface

People who have known me for some years all say: “You should write a book”.

Well, I am not one of the gifted authors who can successfully intermingle fantasy and reality, but in a very plain way I have tried to write down some of my life’s reminiscences.

It is not my intention to discuss Suzuki’s philosophy and work in detail in this book, since those subjects are sufficiently covered in *Nurtured by Love, Ability Development from Age Zero*, and many other publications about Suzuki.

This is just an account of our life together.

Waltraud Suzuki

My grateful thanks to
Henry and Anne Turner
who encouraged me to
finally write this book.

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Chapter 1

Growing up During the First World War

I was born in 1905 in Berlin, Germany into an upper middle class family as the third and last child. There followed a happy childhood, except for the piano lessons my sister and I had to attend from the age of six, and my mother's summons when visitors came, "Now play a little for the guests". I didn't like that at all. The conventional lessons did not inspire me, but no Talent Education or Suzuki Method existed then.

At that time, I didn't know what life held in store for me, and fate goes curious ways.

In 1914, the First World War started. Two years later my father died after a prolonged illness. Those years were very hard. Food was scarce. I went to school without breakfast and when I came home from school there was no lunch. I went down to the greengrocers to relieve my mother who had been standing there in line since early morning in hopes of getting some (frozen) potatoes. My sister and I shared this task. Sometimes, when my turn came, everything was sold out. There was not enough food for the ration cards.

The year 1917 was called the rutabaga year, since there was hardly anything else to eat, no fat or potatoes, let alone meat to make them more appetizing. Bread, like everything else, was rationed. There too, one had to stand in line for hours to receive one loaf. It was still hot when it was sold, direct from the oven, baked only once a week. One could compress the loaf in one hand. Little blades of straw and what not could be found in the slices; but it was

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We Move to Tokyo

In Tokyo, we were soon accepted in the foreign and Japanese music circles and society. But we were poor. It was difficult for me to reciprocate all the cocktail and dinner invitations. Sometimes I couldn't even pay our gas bill. And my husband was and never has been concerned with money. Unlike my own experience through the First World War, for him money had always been there. So, he still always took taxis where ever he went. Once he came home and said, "Please give me one yen, I have to pay the taxi and have no money". A yen at that time had some value. There was another coin — *go rin* — worth half a yen. And for a *go rin*, one could buy half a chicken. When Shinichi had paid the taxi, I told him, "That was our last yen. I don't know what we will eat tomorrow". But my husband found this very amusing and laughed. Then he went to his brother to borrow some money.

We still received living expenses from my father-in-law, and I didn't like it, and told my husband that he had to earn our own livelihood. Shinichi had sold his beautiful Vuillaume violin to help his father. My Bechstein grand piano had arrived from Germany. Shinichi told me his father had asked him whether I would sell it to pay his debts. At that time, there were very few such instruments in Japan, and they were very valuable. Of course, losing my Bechstein made me sad, but I asked myself how I would feel if I asked my husband to do something for *my* family and he refused. So I said: "Yes, if it really helps".

Shinichi had earlier given successful concerts, but didn't like it, saying there were better artists than he who could do that. Chamber music was rare in Japan. So he