Ami longer Interview transcript:

[Sounds of walking along floorboards and doors creaking.]

**Ami** - Off this, off that room is the proper attic. I think it actually should be called the magic attic. Because it's here that 46 years ago, Ami – My mum found these photographs. After, just after Lee had died, she came up here because she was looking for baby pictures of my dad to compare with me because I'd been, I'd just been born. And she didn't find any baby photos, but what she did find was manuscripts and contact sheets and the manuscript was about this battle. And it turned out to be Lee's first ever combat battle, the siege at St Malo. And she brought it downstairs and showed it to my dad, and he just sat on the red stairs we came up, he just read it and read it again. And he just couldn't believe that that was his mum.

**Charlotte** – Wow, he didn't know?

**Ami** - He didn't know, he didn't he didn't talk to her at all. About she didn't talk to him at all about the war. I think part of it is to protect him. Part of it is because you just didn't. You put up and you shut up. I mean, everybody who came back from the war and the general consensus was, don't talk about it. And if you can't deal, have a drink, and if you still can't deal have another drink. So like so many people had these kind of mental traumas that and they couldn't, they couldn't deal with it. Nothing was known about it in those days, PTSD, which is what she'd now be diagnosed as, was like shell shock. No one knew anything about depression or anything. So she was just, all these people were just trying to deal with it. And told to pretend that nothing had happened, and come back and play the game.

**Charlotte** - Wow. Wow. And so he would have only known her as that, as that traumatised person….

**Ami** - Yeah, but he just knew her as, well, the celebrity cook. But when he was younger, he knew her as a very troubled woman who was dealing with mental health issues. Her own depression, PTSD, and trying to live with PTSD, because depression and PTSD is not something that you can flip a switch on, you don't, they don't go away, you just have to learn to live with them. And in those days, nothing was known about it. So she really struggled. And she did what everybody else did, which was you know, the consensus of drinking. And at some point, she realised that that didn't work. And that's when she kind of, I don't know, in some way, realised that working as a photojournalist wasn't good for her. And it was some maybe some kind of trigger, we know now that there's triggers with PTSD, right? So, so on some, on some level, being a photojournalist, triggered her. And so she stopped, she hid stuff up here in the attic, and reinvents herself as this gourmet cook. She still is a really intelligent, creative person so you need another outlet, you're not going to stop being, you know, being who you are, and this artist, and I think... she even says in some articles that cooking is therapy.

**Charlotte** - I wondered, did she find…did she process, you know, if she managed to process any of it in some way, like did she change at all over those years?

**Ami** - There's little things, obviously, nothing is known so it's really difficult to know about like formal processes and things. But little things like her relationship with her mum had been really bad. And cooking enabled her to have another level which they could interact and she became, they became quite close before her mum died, which is really important. And it gave it gave her an outlet still. And I think when you've lived through rationing, and you've been to prison camps, and you've seen starved piles, piles of skeletal starved bodies, you really appreciate food a lot more and then to be able to share a really beautiful creative dish with people that have survived and that you care about. But that's gonna mean a lot more.

[Sounds of rustling paper]

So we have to keep…these have fallen down.. but we have to keep files of all of our exhibitions and what loan has gone to where and all this kind of thing. So we're always looking for new space. And we came in here and we were like, alright, look, surely we can find more space. And I…over there...there was like a this big fabric bag. And the top of it was tied up. And across, on the top was a label on it, that just said rags. And we were like, you know what, hat's rags, just get rid, we need the space. Obviously, archiving, you're not going to throw anything out before you've checked it, so opened it up. It's not rags, it's…one of the first things we pulled out was this amazing bikini with a beach jacket. That immediately we recognised because we've got Roland’s photographs of it. And we're able to date as being 1937. And it's got the designer’s name on it so that the designer was Jacques Heim, and it was from his first studio in Paris, and the materials designed by them. And we were like, oh no, more stuff!

Because I tell you, once you start, because they were all balled up in this blooming bag. And that made us think oh, we better check that all of these travelling cases really are empty. Because we kind of thought we'd done it when we pulled out all the photography and all of the manuscripts. So we hadn't gone back and double checked because even, that's a lot. 60,000 negatives, 20,000 vintage prints. We've got 20,000 pages of original manuscripts, we've got her notebooks, we've got letters and everything. So that's a lot already. So we just didn't think to check.

And so we started opening up some of the trunks. And we're like, oh no, there's a big thing. Like with all museums, they always have a storage problem, because if you're gonna look after the work properly, you need to be able to have space for it.

**Charlotte** - So we've got the dress that she was wearing when she was pregnant with your dad…

**Ami** - That was, that was kind of, when we went that was in one of the chests. And when we pulled that out, we were like this can't be hers. It's so odd. And then Laurie who works in our copyright, here, she was looking at it, she goes, I think I've seen a picture of that. But it's great, because our pictures are all black and white. We've got very few colour pictures. So like the Jacques Heim bikini was easy, because the picture’s in colour. But the other stuff is all in black and white. So you've got to translate the colour that you're looking at into a black and white picture. And she was like, do you know what, I reckon I've seen that. And she went rummaging through and there's this picture of Lee looking enormous, because she's like in the last month of her pregnancy, and she's standing in the garden in their London flat. Yeah, it's the, it's the dress.

Realising there's a whole load of other clothes that she hasn't kept. But why has, why did she really keep the, you know, why did she keep the Jacques Heim bikini? Why did she keep the maternity dress? Maybe it was because she thought she couldn't have a baby, she couldn't get pregnant. So it was a massive surprise when she had my dad. But then we know that she suffered from postnatal depression. And then she really, she really loved him. We've got loads of pictures of him when he's little, but she struggled in being a, you know, what is expected of being a mum. Maybe she kept that because of some kind of feeling towards being an actual mum, which I think is quite nice, because my dad certainly doesn't remember, have good memories of her when he was young, he just remembers her as you know, unapproachable, because she has, was suffering so much with her mental health. And by the time he got to be a teenager, he just didn't want a relationship with her anymore. Because he, she was so inaccessible to him. So it's quite nice for me to see that. You know, and also knowing more about, now that we do about postnatal depression and about depression to see that, you know, from his view, he was like, she was blooming rubbish as a mom. But from her view, she actually really did love him, but in her own way, and you know, that's, that's a you know, another sign of the depression and what she was dealing with, and I think that that was quite a strong thing when we, when we realized, wow, that's, that's her maternity dress and maybe, why, why did she just keep that?

**Charlotte** - She's an interesting character, isn't she? She obviously knows, she knows how to show love doesn't she, in these, in these other ways, in different relationships. And then I mean, she's, she's a complicated...

**Ami** - A complicated cookie yeah! I mean, you weren’t in those days, you didn't really talk about that kind of thing either, did you? Yeah. So and I think, so she was and she was very much a more like an actions person. So it makes more sense to me that she, she kept these specific things because they have a good memory or they're the association with the designer of things and things like that. May, you know, I don't think we have an exact date for the ski suit. But I think it's from when she was in Switzerland, and that's where, she was on that assignment when she found out she was pregnant with my dad. So it's like, is it, is it from that? Is it, is that why she's kept it? We don't have any pictures of her in that ski suit. But is that why she's kept that? Or is it because it's just beautifully designed? And she could just, and she knows her clothes. And she started off as a model, didn't she? So she's, she's worn couture since she was, you know, 18. So she knows good clothes. So maybe she just kept it because of that. We've got, I've got a lot of questions.

**Charlotte** - I guess I want to, yeah, it feels like I want to ask like, do you, do you feel like you know her?

**Ami** - It's really weird, isn't it because I met her. I think I am probably the only person in the world that can say they puked on Lee Miller and you know, the rest of them are probably dead. But I, you know, when I was a baby, she was already dying of cancer when, when I was born. So there's pictures of her holding me in bed. And she's really quite ill. So we got to meet. But she died three months after I was born. So we never really got to have a good chat. But it's kind of like this, so close, and yet so far. And then that I've ended up working with her stuff. Like I've read all her diaries, I read all her manuscripts, I've seen all her pictures, I know so much more about her than I do about my own mum. And I love it. It's such a privilege to be able to work with your family history. But also like when somebody that you really care about dies, and it's part of you dies and other people want, it’s nice to be able to still talk about them too, say like, you know, I really, I remember my granddad a lot more because he died later. But it's really nice that people want to know, and it kind of keeps them alive, doesn't it, that you get to talk about them, and that people find her so inspiring. That's really when somebody comes up to us, my dad or me at an opening and they're like, oh, this picture inspired me to do this or part of her life story inspired me to make changes or whatever. I just think that's, that's the best gift you could do ever, just offer….and throughout their lives, they were the Surrealists, were interested in inspiring each other and making and finding the marvellous in every day work. So, if she's continuing today that 46 years after she's died, like good on her!