

Callman, Ann August 10, 1978 (small second interview)

- Q. When you came to England, you mentioned that you had come on a permit as a domestic. What was your first job?
- A. Well, I came into a house with four grown up people and to do the-- I had to clean the complete house, it was expected to do all the cooking, all the washing and that was rather difficult because I had never done anything like that, being used to an office job and coming from home where I did some cooking of course, German style, but not the English style which they expected me to do. The thoughts which crept into my mind, the adjustment which I had to do can't even be described in words because it was the feeling you had—perhaps it should be expected to say “thank you for letting me come to England to be alive.” That is one thought but then also, I had my mother and my sister still in Germany and that was also on my mind knowing that the war was imminent to break out—and also when you did the laundry in the cold garage and in the winter time, you had to hang out the wash in the garden and do the blankets which we didn't have to do in Germany and then a couple of things which are outstanding in my mind—I was expected to sleep with the lady of the house in the same room, which I refused. and then I had my own room: small but it was mine. And one thing more was, that I call him an old man, but he was kind of handicapped and they expected me to give him a bath, which I, of course, also refused.
- Q. Was it easy to refuse?
- A. No, it wasn't. I just pretended I don't understand so much English, that I refused him, not in so many words, but I made myself understood that it was no and they understood it. They had to keep me for a year because they were kind of obliged to keep me.
- Q. That was what I meant.
- A. They had to keep me for a year because we had to report to the police ever so often, especially after September 3rd, and finally it became so that, just before the year was out, before Christmas, I got a job offered also as a domestic near where my sister worked and that job was even worse. That was a house I would say, it was a large villa with 20 rooms which I was expected to keep clean. The lady of the house went with white gloves about the fireplace to see that I had dusted that morning and there were two children which I had to keep: a baby and a boy. Of course, the cooking had to be done and everything and I, from about two months, I lost about 50 pounds in weight because I was on the go from 6 a.m. until 12 at night because I had no where else to go. Finally, I had to let go because my health didn't hold up so the lady where my sister was then working took me kindly in and found a job for me which was more suitable as a domestic.
- Q. What would happen if you didn't have a job?

- A. I suppose you could have applied to the Jewish community. I happened to be in Yorkshire. In Leeds they would have taken care of you and found a job for you.
- Q. It must have been terribly difficult coming from an office job to essentially a job as a maid.
- A. In retrospect, thinking about it now, there was one thing uppermost in my mind. You don't care what you do so long as you have a chance to try to bring out your sister and your mother and being I would say a more sensible person, I had to swallow my pride in that respect.
- Q. You mentioned learning how to cook English-style. Did anyone try to help you, the other employees?
- A. Oh, there were no other employees in the house. I was the only one and I remember leeks, the green vegetable, well, I have never known to put the meat in the oven with it. That I didn't mind, cook potatoes and vegetables in water. What she told me, I did it. But when she told me we are having company tonight, cook leeks and I had never seen that thing. And when she came home she said, "Where are the leeks?" I said I don't know what you are talking about. So she said, "Well, haven't you cleaned them?" I didn't know there was sand inside or anything. So once she showed, then it was alright but without being shown, then you can't do anything.
- Q. Were they kind to you?
- A. In their fashion I think so. They thought that they were doing something for the Jews; they themselves were Jews, and helping the German Jews—that was on their mind—showing me off as a refugee. I don't think it was kindness. It was more like here; I'm doing something for the poor refugee from Germany. That, God forbid, had the war gone in a different direction, they might have been in the same shoes we were, that didn't even occur to them.
- Q. That must have been quite difficult to cope with—that attitude.
- A. I can only say one thing: when they weren't in that house and I had to do the housework, I would say that most nights that is true but also during the day time, I was continuously in tears. And of course, when they came home and then they said, "What, have you been crying again?" I had to kind of wash my eyes and contain myself, steel myself that is a better word, not to let them see how you feel inside because they felt: look what we've done for her, she should be eternally grateful.
- Q. A lot must have to do with homesickness. It was a totally different environment. You came from Berlin and you were now in a small town.

- A. I had never been away from home. I had never been separated from my sister; I had never been separated from my mother. It was—I had no other thoughts in mind but homesickness. And then, of course, you couldn't show it to them. And I said to myself quite often, don't be so silly; if you aren't here...you have to do the things for my mother and my sister. That sometimes steeled me for the setbacks which I had. But when Lilo came over, I came in January and she came in August 1939, she didn't recognize me; I had lost so much weight. I mean good for me, I'm not complaining, I was overweight anyhow but I lost so much weight that she hardly recognized me.
- Q. Did your feelings change when Lilo came?
- A. Well at least I had somebody from home and she was new so it was still up to me to try to get my mother out.
- Q. There must have been a lot of other girls, English girls not necessarily in the same position, but did they befriend you?
- A. Funny you should ask that. It was such a small place—there was absolutely nobody. I had nobody to talk to with the exception of the policeman who asked me into his house—didn't give me anything to eat or anything like that but that wasn't necessary but just to talk to somebody other than being told aren't you this, aren't you that, why haven't you done this and why haven't you done that?
- Q. So the relationship within the house was strictly an employer-employee...
- A. No doubt about that. And also that you should be grateful that you are getting paid 50 shillings a week, which I dutifully saved. I had half a day free a week and that half a day consisted—I was allowed to leave the house by 12 or 1 o'clock but I had to be back by 6 o'clock to cook the supper.
- Q. What did you do with your time off?
- A. Well, I went to—there was nothing else to do but go to the pictures and I went invariably every week to see another film and I had—there was a place where I went for tea and I had a cup of tea and something to eat because the food which they left me—the lady said you can have baked beans for lunch. I never had baked beans in my life. I mean our idea was a sandwich or something like this and the things she offered me to eat for lunch were so—the baked beans stand out in my mind. I can't remember what else she left for me but it was so distasteful to me that I often went out and bought some sausage or some cheese that I could have something to eat.
- Q. Did you eat other meals with the family?

- A. Oh certainly not. I mean the maid is supposed to eat in the kitchen, strictly in the kitchen.
- Q. And since there was no other help, you ate by yourself?
- A. Certainly.
- Q. And when you went to the movies or this little restaurant?
- A. All by myself. Never anybody. There was nobody there, only the policeman.
- Q. Everybody needs somebody just to talk to.
- A. Yes, but there was nobody. There was one good thing for me because in the eight months that I was strictly by myself I had no opportunity to speak one word of German. I spoke English all the time or I had to speak English so that in about 10 months, I was almost fluent. I spoke some English before and I had private lessons in Germany but I spoke fluent English because of this—even my sister was surprised when she came over.