

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Fletcher, Ellen

Date of interview: 8/15/1995

Summary: Ellen Fletcher was born in Berlin, Germany on December 3, 1928. Her name was Ellen Amster, her father was from Poland and her mother was German. The family lived in Germany before her father left them and returned to Poland. Her mother had to work full time as a social worker so Ellen had to live in a Jewish orphanage (1934 - 1937) and then went to an orthodox Jewish boarding school. During her childhood she saw signs of gradually worsening anti-Semitism and clearly remembers Kristallnacht as a young child in the orphanage. She remembers being very scared in a dark room listening to all the noise outside. She states that she became an atheist after that experience of Kristallnacht because of what she had witnessed. She saw religious Jews running inside synagogues in order to save the Torah and questioned why 'God did not save them'.

Ellen felt further fear shortly after Kristallnacht when she was walking to school and was approached by a man who told her to go home as quickly as she could. She received papers in the mail from the police that said she was to meet with them the next day, however, her mother went instead. It was arranged for Ellen to leave the country within ten days. She left for England on a train full of young children, this was one of the worst memories she had experienced. At the station there were hundreds of children with their parents saying goodbye. It was probably the last time most of the children would ever see their parents. It was not as hard for Ellen because she had not lived with her parents prior to leaving for England.

When Ellen arrived in England a foster family took care of her. It was difficult at first because of the cultural differences. It was customary in Germany to place your hands under the table, in England it was polite to keep your hands above the table. In school she was an outcast because she was a German Jew. She had to learn English by looking at a German to English dictionary. She worked as a baby sitter while she lived in England and was able to stay in touch with her mother through mail. Ellen learned later that her grandmother died in Auschwitz.

From England Ellen moved to New York in 1946. She had wanted to be a nurse until she had appendix surgery. After seeing what nurses had to deal with, she changed her mind and went to college working in the school cafeteria as a cashier. She majored in sociology and married an English man named Martin Fletcher while she was in college. She became a homemaker and had three children. Ellen Fletcher later divorced Martin and she now resides in California.