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ELLEN WHAITE PIERCE
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ENGLAND, 1920
AGE 15
PASSAGE ON "THE CARMANIA"

PHILLIPS: This is Andrew Phillips. I'm speaking with Ellen Pierce, whose maiden name is Whaite, W-H-A-I-T-E. And it's the 22nd of March [sic] on Monday, 1989. We're beginning this interview at about a quarter past seven in the evening. And we're about to interview, as I said, Ellen Pierce, who immigrated from Britain, I think in 1920.

PIERCE: Padiham, Lancashire, England.

PHILLIPS: What year?

PIERCE: 1920. May 1st.

PHILLIPS: You immigrated from Lancashire.

PIERCE: Uh-huh. Lancashire.

PHILLIPS: And what was the name of the village?

PIERCE: Padiham.

PHILLIPS: Can you spell that?

PIERCE: P-A-D-I-H-A-M, a cotton weaving town. We got a lot of rain.

PHILLIPS: Got a lot of rain. Let's get right back to the very beginning, and perhaps you can paint us a picture of what life was like for you as a little girl in your village in that cotton-weaving town in England.

PIERCE: I remember, three years old, I got an Easter basket full of Easter eggs and then going to Sunday school. But we always had to walk. In those days, you know, I was born in 1905, so this is only 1908 that I'm thinking of now, there was no cars then. We had to walk every place we went. And so rain or shine or anything, we'd wear a fisherman's rain hat and

raincoat and walk.

PHILLIPS: What did the fisherman's raincoat look like? What was it made of?

PIERCE: Well, it had a brim here, and went over the head and down over the neck so the rain wouldn't go down in your neck, you know. They were really nice. I don't have a picture of it, but I had that. And we wore clogs, in northern England we wore clogs. And when I told this gas that works with Ellis Island that I wore clogs she thought I was talking about Holland. I said, "I'm not either. I'm talking about England." And she couldn't believe that we wore clogs. And I said, "Yeah, it had irons on the bottom." And so Judy one day spent a whole day taking pictures of these clogs. So we have pictures of them, and I sent some to Ellis Island and I happen to be able to still wear them because I got them when I was twelve and so your feet are full grown at twelve, so I could still wear them. So, see, there's a picture of me wearing them now, so one of them is in Ellis Island, too.

PHILLIPS: These were clogs which were typical of the area of England that you . . .

PIERCE: Yeah, northern England only. The Lancashire women, because it was so wet and rainy that I guess they figured that clogs would last better than shoes. I don't know what they, I never did hear why we wore them. But it wasn't in London, southern England. In the northern England.

PHILLIPS: Tell me what the countryside looked like, what you remember of what the countryside looked like.

PIERCE: Green. Green and beautiful. We'd go on long walks.

PHILLIPS: Yes, tell me.

PIERCE: It was green and beautiful, and the rock hedges, rock walls, rocks about this size, all along the road. The road's very narrow, but each road had a wall of rocks. Then the lawn would be green, full of sheep, cows and horses. Beautiful, and the countryside, the cottages would be thatched roofs, not like we do here in America. Then I went on to school, and the teachers were real mean, but I learned from them being mean. We had to sit like this all the time and couldn't talk. Every word you misspelled you got hit. Every spelling word you missed, every math

problem you got hit, every history question you got hit with a stick. So we learned. In England we learned, from having to be quiet. But then the day I was twelve, I couldn't go to school any more. I had to go to work.

PHILLIPS: Just before we get to that, tell us a little bit about what the school was like. Was it a one-room schoolhouse?

PIERCE: No, no. It had a playground, and we began with a church service. We'd all march in two lines, straight like soldiers, we couldn't run and play and toss. We had to walk like soldiers. Going to the big hall, and line up in classrooms, and then have a little sermon and a prayer. And then from then on we'd walk into our rooms on each side, so rooms on each side.

PHILLIPS: Sounds like it was a very highly disciplined environment.

PIERCE: Oh, yes, it was, but we learned. At twelve years old, no long summer holiday, maybe a week, and you had other times when there'd be one week holiday but

nothing, you know, long, like three months, here in California now you have three months. But it wasn't like that. When I was twelve years old I'd gone through twelve grades. So then at twelve you didn't go to school any more. But it was all disciplined. A lot of recess time there'd be rope skipping, and the music, and the spinning tops. A lot of things like that during the recess.

PHILLIPS: Was that organized by the schoolteachers?

PIERCE: Yeah. Yes, it was, because (?) teachers, but they were all mean. Never smiled. So . . .

PHILLIPS: Did the teachers used to wear garments, uniforms, like the flying robes, or . . .

PIERCE: No, no. They just wore dresses, blouses, skirts, whatever they wanted. They dressed like the other people. Shawls, some wore shawls because in northern England a lot of them wore shawls over their head.

PHILLIPS: What sort of music did they play when you skipped?

PIERCE: A real peppy rhythm music like march music. I tried to teach it to my kids here, but they didn't want to

learn it like they did in England.

PHILLIPS: Was it the sort of music that you would have heard during World War One, that kind of music?

PIERCE: Yes, uh-huh. Then we marched in to music, like military, quite military-like. But it looked neat, it looked neat.

PHILLIPS: How many children were in the school?

PIERCE: Oh, the classroom was filled. I have a picture of it in that book, in there, of me in the classroom. So the classroom looked like about twenty-eight children in it. And the best students had to sit in the back row, and they did it that way. I happened to be always in the back row, so I guess I wasn't too dumb. I got to sit in the back row.

PHILLIPS: And then the, and the students who weren't doing very well, they would sit right in front?

PIERCE: Yeah. Uh-huh. That's how they did it there. So you could always tell, when you go in a classroom, you can tell, you know, where the poor kids were that didn't learn very easily, and so on.

PHILLIPS: In the meantime, how was your father earning a living and supporting the family?

PIERCE: He had a studio in another town, three miles away, and he'd go by bicycle because he didn't have a car, and that was in Ackrington, the town of Ackrington, three miles from Padiham, still in the weaving part. And, uh, so he developed pictures, and then he would teach me to do when I got a little bit older. And he was always practicing, if he knew another picture to take, he'd practice on me, because I was the oldest one. So I was always in the studio, so that's why, I guess, I'm crazy about picture. (she laughs)

PHILLIPS: Can you go back and tell us a little bit more, set that up a little bit for us, about how your father became interested in photography. Did he ever tell you that? Because these are very early days when he would have started, the early days of photography. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

PIERCE: Well, he just, ever since I remember him, he was a photographer, always taking pictures of me. Like, say, that first remembrance is of three years old, of him taking one of me, and I was (?) with the camera,

and we'd go on a walk, like from church or something, and he'd have the camera with him. But it wasn't a small one, it was a big one, probably like what you carry there. And he'd always take pictures of us. But that's why I'm surprised he didn't take any of us when we came to America.

PHILLIPS: Did he ever tell you why he started in photography, how that happened?

PIERCE: No, he was, he was always, he was a weaver to begin with, a cotton weaver.

PHILLIPS: Tell us what your father's name was.

PIERCE: Fred Whaite, Fred Whaite, W-H-A-I-T-E. He had dark hair, dark eyes, dark hair.

PHILLIPS: And he was a weaver. Tell us about that.

PIERCE: Yeah, but not much taller than me. Not a very tall man. About 5'7" maybe, and I'm 5'2". But, and he was always, at home he was always wanting to build something, because there wasn't much to build in England. The homes were brick and everything, but he'd always like to tinker with something and make

things. He always wanted to, he'd even make toys, you know, like a little rocking horse noise for my little sister, when she came along, and brother. He'd build things like that.

PHILLIPS: What kind of toys?

PIERCE: Little wooden rocking horse so you could, the child could sit in. I've got pictures of that, too, in one book. And, uh, then a little, called that a hobby horse. And then a little bouncing thing, that you could bounce on it and stuff. And then he made tops for us to spin. You know, things like that, playthings. Because money was scarce, and even though he had this studio, I guess they made a lot of toys.

PHILLIPS: Once again, can you, if you have any memories of your father talking about the early days of photography, did he ever talk about that?

PIERCE: He did in some ways. He said that they, years ago that the camera, you'd look through the camera, he let me look through it, too, in some of the old cameras, and you were upside down. The object you're

looking at take, was upside down. So you'd look at somebody that you're going to take the picture of, and here they're standing on their heads or something. So, and then they'd change that later on. But at the beginning of it they were like that.

PHILLIPS: And the cameras were very big.

PIERCE: Oh, yes, yes, huge, and a big black cover over it. See, then when I was eight years old, World War One came on, so you had to have black curtains. Every window had to have black curtains on it. You were fined five hundred pounds if a pinstream of light came through your windows, because the German zeps were flying over.

PHILLIPS: The German zeps?

PIERCE: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: Zeppelins?

PIERCE: Zeppelins. We'd call them zeps, and they'd rumble like uhhh, uhhh, uhhh. You could hear them rumbling over the house.

PHILLIPS: Tell us about the time you first saw one of those.

PIERCE: I never saw one. I heard them. Because we weren't allowed on the streets. I had to go to work. I was working at twelve. But when you got, everyone who went to work had to be home, and in the house. A man couldn't smoke his cigarette on the street in case a little light would show. Sidewalks with cobblestones, you know, brick and rock. So World War One, we lived through World War One four years. I was eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve when World War Onequit, so for four years we lived in blackout, no lights. And one of our neighbors was a spiritualist, you know, (?) the table knocking, she used to scare me because she couldn't, there were no lights. Well, let's have the table knocking. Well, it scared me as a little child. I didn't know what they were doing. So it was a haunting period. And we had to line up one day a week to buy groceries, every Thursday. And we'd have to line up in a queue, they called it a queue. And when it was your turn, you showed them a card, that was five of us in the family, so they gave us a bag full of groceries. That had to last one week.

PHILLIPS: What sort of food did you get?

PIERCE: Well, just potatoes, mostly potatoes, and a little bit of fish. And oranges, the only time we got oranges was at Christmas. So Christmas we got a new penny and an orange and a toy, and that was Christmas. Then we had Christmas at church, you know, too, but . . .

PHILLIPS: How important was church in your village and for your family?

PIERCE: Pardon?

PHILLIPS: How important was church in your village?

PIERCE: Oh, well, on Sunday the family all went and spent all day Sunday there. The parents would be there, and we'd have service, and then we children, once a month, put on a play, dramatic. That's more like dramatics. And, uh, then the adults then would play cards. This was in the church. And then we'd have night church, and then walk home. So all day Sunday was in church.

PHILLIPS: Did you enjoy going to church as a little girl?

PIERCE: I did, yes, with other friends, and then being in a play. I liked to be in the play. Once a month we'd put on a play.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember what the plays were that you put on?

PIERCE: I know it was Cinderella, my favorite, and The Three Bears. You know, the fairy tales. It was real interesting.

PHILLIPS: How many were in your family?

PIERCE: Five all together, Mom and Dad and myself. I was the oldest. Four years later my sister came along, Ethel, and two years after that my brother George.

PHILLIPS: Do you, um, remember when the war finished?

PIERCE: I sure did. I was in the parade. We had a big parade in Padiham. And I was working. I was only twelve, but working in an office. And one of the boys loaned me a riding habit, you know, the kind that were tight here, and a regular old-fashioned riding habit. And then loaned me a horse. I'd never been on a horse before, and I was going to be on a horse in this final parade for the, and they had,

they made a big dummy of the Kaiser that was going to burn on a bonfire. Anyhow, I got on the horse, and it went up Padiham Road, past the church where I went to, and as it turned around, the band struck up. Well, it made my horse flare up, and I yelled at someone that was watching the parade, and a man came along and held the horse, you know. So he walked the rest of the way with me. (she laughs) Then we had a big bonfire and burned the Kaiser. He was just a dummy full of old material. Everybody had to bring old material in and stuff.

PHILLIPS: It sound like a big celebration.

PIERCE: It was. It was the end of World War One. See, the Americans had helped for two years. They helped two years. There was a big celebration because, and then we could have curtains again without, you know, and Dad couldn't take pictures at night in the studio, and he could only take them during the day. So he took a lot of soldiers, you know, the guys on service, and mail it, maybe. They'd come and have their picture taken, you know, with their uniforms on. So they did a lot of that. Then he was teaching

me how to develop them and re-touch them and to paint them, you know, color them. They didn't have colored film. So . . .

PHILLIPS: So you used to re-touch and color the photographs?

PIERCE: Uh-huh. Like if there's a spot on a picture, you could mark it out, you know, to make it look clear.

PHILLIPS: Tell me what his studio was like.

PIERCE: Oh, it was a beautiful building, four stories high, because we kids liked it. We'd go up in the top story and play. We had that as a playhouse up there. Because after I was getting older I didn't do that. I helped Dad more. But when I was little we'd play up there. And the studio was down, you know, on the main floor. I tried to look-find it but I couldn't two years ago when I went. It must have been re-modeled or something. But the studio was big, just like the big studios here, with studio pictures, you know, big ones. Like that, the book has a lot in it, a lot of pictures that Dad took.

PHILLIPS: What did you, uh, do during your holidays in England?

PIERCE: Well, there was only one week, and one week during

the summer, we'd go to Blackpool, which is on the coastline, with raining. We'd still have our rain hat on. And you saw nobody swimming. I never saw anyone in a bathing suit till we moved to America. I didn't see them. It wasn't warm enough. The sun might be out, but no heat. (she laughs) It was funny. And we had ice cream cones about this big, real tiny, it was real tiny ice cream cones. And then we watched Punch and Judy shows and rode on donkeys. Because you couldn't swim, and we built sandcastles and put flags, you know, little English flags and stuff, in the sandcastles we built. So that's how you do the beach in English, in northern English. See, that's near Scotland, about a hundred miles from Scotland.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about the, um, the situation when the war finished and the black curtains were taken down and life returned.

PIERCE: Well, then my parents had had letters from America begging us to move there, and to Australia. So we were deciding whether to move to Australia. And I was fourteen, so I felt grown up, because I was

working. I probably felt as old as they do at eighteen here, and with working. And, uh, so we thought we were going to go to Australia. But then my friend wrote, one of our neighbors wrote and said they went in the bedroom to check on the baby and a big snake was on the curtain. So after my folks read that letter we started hearing more about America because my uncle, who was a minister, Reverend John Clayton, baptized me in England and then moved to America, so he kept writing and telling us. And then another cousin moved to America and married an American man, and she kept writing and telling us about it. So my parents decided, it took them two years before they got the passport to be able to move to America. You couldn't just get up and move when you wanted to.

PHILLIPS: Before you tell us about moving to America, tell me about what you did, uh, for work, as a fourteen-year-old girl.

PIERCE: I began first as a telephone operator. They had some little thing, about like this, and then someone rang the, it was a bicycle factory, and I was in the

office. So if it rang I'd answer, "Moorehouse Limited Bicycle Factory." And they'd want a certain office, so I'd pick up this thing and plug it in and ring the office they wanted. So I did that for about, oh, probably a month. And then I started working in the bookkeeping department, and did bookkeeping, typing and shorthand, Pittman shorthand, the Pittman shorthand, at twelve and thirteen and fourteen. Then at fourteen . . .

PHILLIPS: How much were you paid?

PIERCE: I don't remember, but not much. But I gave all my, my parents a check. I couldn't tell you, because I don't remember. There's a habit in England, when you work, you come home and give your parents your check. I don't remember what it was, probably two, probably tuppence-and-a-half a day. That would be two pennies-and-a-half, probably a nickel a day. I don't know. I know it was real cheap. It was eight hours, though. Eight hours, and only twelve. I didn't like it. I didn't want to quit school.

PHILLIPS: Did other children have to work like that, too? Did other children have to work?

PIERCE: Oh, yeah. That was the, that was the law in England. At twelve years old you didn't go to school. I got no diploma. I have no written record. What I'm telling you, it's not written, it's just, you got no diploma. So the day you're twelve you went to work. So my parents got me a job first in a weaving mill, a cotton weaving mill. I didn't like it. It was so noisy, and the shuttles going like this, and sometimes one would fly loose, and it was like a bullet, and it would fly through the mill, and I've seen it hit people, and it scared me. So I'd put chalk on my face and then tell my parents, my aunt I was working with, that I was sick and I wanted to go home. I wasn't, but I didn't want to work there. I knew I didn't want to do that kind of work. So then I got the job in the Bicycle Factory in the office and I liked that. And boys in class were with me. They'd be in the same office, you know. So I was with some of the same kids that I was in school with.

PHILLIPS: Tell us about this weaving in this area.

PIERCE: Cotton weaving. They wove beautiful cotton material, beautiful fine cotton material. It was a big

machine, and it would put the thread in, and the shuttle would go this way to weave in and out. And then the cotton would come on a roll, a big roll. And, uh, one of my uncles was one of the bosses there or something, but anyhow, I didn't like working in there. But then in Yorkshire, we were Lancashire, in Yorkshire it was the woolen mills, and then you have the silk mills in other areas. So, you see, there's different areas. But we were the cotton.

PHILLIPS: Was there much illness amongst the workers in those factories in those times?

PIERCE: Much what?

PHILLIPS: Much illness amongst the workers in the factories.

PIERCE: Oh, a lot of rheumatism, a lot of rheumatism, and that was from the damp weather, I think. And they, I know when I was little, if a person lived till they were forty-five they thought they'd lived a good life, where nowadays it's different.

PHILLIPS: What about the rich people in your area? Did you see . . .

PIERCE: Yeah, we saw Gawthorp Hall, where some of the, the Gawthorp Hall it was called, G-A-W-T-H-O-R-P, Gawthorp Hall, at the top of our street. We lived on Shakespeare Street. And the top was Gawthorp Hall, and the lords and ladies lived there. And, uh, they would have, uh, hare and hound chases. You know, you see them in the red uniforms and stuff, and hares would chase hounds and stuff. The hounds would chase the hares. So we could watch them through the fence. And then one time, I belonged to the Girl Guides in England, so the boy scouts had a big rally there in this hall, and the Prince of Wales in those days was there, because he was fifteen and I was fourteen, and he was there too. So I saw him. And then the kind of queen came and gave us, all us children, the cup that Judy has. The handle's off now, but Judy has it, with the pictures of the king and queen. George the Fifth, you know.

PHILLIPS: So did you enjoy that day?

PIERCE: Oh, I sure did. I remember the hall. The floor was so shiny that we kids looked at that floor more than anything else. You could see yourself walking, it

was so shiny. Beautiful, and beautiful views. All the boy scouts of England were there, and the Girl Guides.

PHILLIPS: Were you there in your uniform?

PIERCE: Uh-huh. I've got pictures of that, probably, in the book.

PHILLIPS: What did you do in Girl Guides?

PIERCE: Oh, we had laws to learn, and all that stuff. We learned how to make a bed with a sick person in it without getting the sick person out of bed. So I can change a bed with sick person still in it. We learned how to do that. And knitting and crocheting. And then track, tracking, you know, making tracks and following each other, and whatnot. And the hikes over the moors, because there was moors with gypsies on them, so we saw the gypsies on the moors.

PHILLIPS: What did the gypsies look like?

PIERCE: Well, they had banjos they were playing, and doing gypsy dancing with big, full skirts on. And, uh, the man was called the ray, the rye, R-Y-E. And man

gypsy was called a rye. So it was interesting. They were on the moors. They lived on the moors free, you know, in a big canvas.

PHILLIPS: Did they have horses or donkeys?

PIERCE: Uh-huh. It was interesting to see. And then they'd come and steal, though. If anyone had chickens in town, if the chickens were missing they'd say, "Oh, the gypsies are in town." They'd come and steal people's chickens.

PHILLIPS: What did you think about the gypsies as a little girl? Did you want to . . .

PIERCE: Oh, I don't know. I didn't see them too often, but I didn't care for them. It was interesting to see them, and then I'd know I'd seen them, you know, but the English, the Lancashire witches was what got me. They had real Lancashire witches there, and my aunt and I were chased one night by one coming over a moor. We heard footsteps behind us, and I turned around and here was this big witch, you know, with the hat on and the black cape. And they, they used to steal, too, in town, I think. There's quite a

history to that. I've got books on that, on the gypsies, and the witches and that. But the witches, in the beginning, were hung and killed and all that stuff, but they don't have them any more. But they still, once a year I think they still dramatize that period and dress as witches, you know, and act it out.

PHILLIPS: What were you doing out on the moore at night?

PIERCE: I was hiking to visit an aunt and uncle and cousins that lived over the moor in Hapton, a town called H-A-P-T-O-N, Hapton, about three miles away. We did a lot of hiking, a lot of walking. There'd be no cars, you know, no bicycles. I never had a bicycle. Mother wouldn't let me learn. She said I'd get hurt. So I never learned to ride a bike.

PHILLIPS: Describe for us what it was like on the moors, what you saw and what you felt.

PIERCE: Well, it's pretty. It was open, you know, open, rolling hills, with heather, Scotch heather growing on it, just like they have in Scotland. And all kinds of colorful weeds that grew with flowers on

them. And os it was real pretty a certain part of the year because of the rain, you know, the rain. And some people would pick some of the weeds and cook them. I never tried, we never tried that, but it was interesting walking over the moor. I enjoyed that.

PHILLIPS: What did it feel like?

PIERCE: Oh, fresh air, and out in the open, you know, and free. Just kind of, always hanging onto my aunt. My aunt didn't go with me, because Mom was always busy cooking for the big family, because we had two aunts that lived with us and a cousin, so she had a lot of cooking to do. So one of my aunts was the one that usually travelled with us, hiking with us, and it was fun.

PHILLIPS: Was this a favorite aunt of yours?

PIERCE: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: What was her name?

PIERCE: Louisa. Louisa Clayton. C-L-A-Y-T-O-N. And then her other sister, she had rheumatism, so she couldn't, you know, do all that stuff that we did,

because she had rheumatism. And sometimes she'd go to southern England to the town called Bath where they had hot mud baths and that for them to bathe in, and that seemed to help her.

PHILLIPS: Did you ever go there?

PIERCE: I went to the sea when I was four years old, but I was sick on the train. I remember going on the train and I, in those days they didn't have dramamine to keep from being seasick, and I got sick on the train. I went with my Dad on that one. Dad took me down there on the train, to southern England, that was.

PHILLIPS: Tell us what it was like going on a journey like that, because that would be quit a long way to go in those days by train, for a little girl.

PIERCE: Oh, it was, and the trains in England are different than here. You get in, and go through a door. Then you go down a corridor, and then down the corridor you go into rooms, maybe holds six people. So going into them. And we just got into this one with Dad and a man sitting next to me had just opened up a newspaper and I remember getting sick and threw all

over the newspaper. I never will forget that. (she laughs) I felt embarrassed, too, even though I was only a little girl. I was only about four or five, but I remember, though. It's clear.

PHILLIPS: What did your father do?

PIERCE: Oh, nothing, just help me clean up. It landed on the paper, so it didn't mess the man's suit up. (she laughs) But it bothered me.

PHILLIPS: So at some point your father or your mother or both decided to leave. How did that happen? Why did your family decide, how was it that your family left to travel to America?

PIERCE: Well, we wondered, our kids wondered that too, in a way, but then, but we got these good letters from our aunt and uncles in America, and one of them came to visit us, and they said, "Sara, I had to tell Sara, Ellen won't have to work in America. She won't have to work. She'll be at school again." And, uh, the better weather, and all that stuff. They just raved about it so much that they got my parents excited. So they sold their studio and their house and decided

to move to America instead of Australia, on account of the snake, I guess.

PHILLIPS: Because the weather was bad, but also the working conditions. Was that part of the reason, also?

PIERCE: It probably was, because there wasn't good pay or nothing. Mother always stayed home. She used to be a weaver, but then she had the big family to cook for, and Dad had the studio. So that's why Dad enjoyed his studio. He liked that, enjoyed that. He got me into it, you know, working me in with it, me being the oldest.

PHILLIPS: Just, before we leave England, can you tell me a little bit more about that weaving culture, all of those men and women who are involved in that in their communities. Was there a sense of the trade? Can you just tell us anything that you really remember about that that you think would be helpful?

PIERCE: Well, I know that most people there did that. Most people were weavers. If you lived in Lancashire, England, you were a cotton weaver. Not very many in offices and not many in stores. There's a cotton

naturally known as a cotton weaver. And they had a hard time. They worked long hours, and the mills were, one mill that we worked at, that I started at, that was not far from home, maybe two blocks from home. I didn't have too far to go, but it was just cold and damp. It's always damp, and damp working, too. Damp working conditions, and poor wages. Like I said, I don't remember what I got. They were poor wages. So that's why I'm glad I got into the office.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

PHILLIPS: This is side two of the cassette interview with Ellen Pierce. Okay, so, um, let's now leave England and start the journey to America. You say you got letters from your family who had already left. Why had they left for America?

PIERCE: Well, they heard some neighbors that had moved to America and some to Australia, how better it was here, most opportunities for your family, for a man's family, to be in America. So those were the reasons that I can think of. And my mother's brother, John Clayton, was a minister, and he moved to America and

liked it and wanted us to come and said, "Ellen wouldn't have to work there." They were looking out for us kids, I guess, to think there were better opportunity here.

PHILLIPS: So tell me about the day that you decided, in fact, did leave your home. Tell me what that felt like.

PIERCE: Well, we had sold our studio and our home, so we were staying with relatives. Everything all packed in barrels. Dishes all wrapped separately and packed in barrels and everything. And we were supposed to leave April 1st, but the night before we were supposed to leave a telegram came to my aunt's house where we were staying, but we couldn't leave that next day, April 1st, because the ship that we were loaded to be on was overcrowded. So they were taking us off the ship, because our name began with "W." They were going by the end of the alphabet. And the cousins that travelled with us, three of them, were called Clayton. So they took them off the ship too, because they knew we were travelling together as a group. So we then had to wait another month. Well, it kind of upset us. Just a little bit we couldn't

leave then because, you know, we were staying with relatives and all packed. So we knew we couldn't leave for another month. Anyhow, were we ever happy, because this ship was cut in half with icebergs from Greenland in the Atlantic Ocean, so we would never been drowned. Maybe saved, some were saved, but we never know. So then we sailed in a month later, May 1st. Okay, we were . . .

PIERCE: What year?

PHILLIPS: 1920, May 1st. And the icebergs from Greenland were still in the Atlantic Ocean, and so they wired for our ship to go a thousand miles north out of our way so to miss the big ice flow. So then we circled 'round and went through them. So we had the foghorn going night and day for five days. Talk about a noise! Five days, night and day, fog horn going. The ship going like this. I was seasick five days. I couldn't eat or nothing. I was just dead sick. And they announced there were sharks following the ship, and that was a sign of death. And I said, "Oh, that's going to be me." I was so sick I wouldn't have cared. I'd have died then. And so anyhow the

next day my cousin that was travelling with us, Jim Clayton, he said, "Ellen, come on. Let's go up on deck." So I went up on deck then the next day, and sat in them big lounge chairs on the ship. That's the first day no waves were coming over the deck. That's how, it was beginning to calm down. So we just sat down, when from the other deck a man came falling down and fell as close to us as that wall right there, and he turned white as a sheet. He died that night, so we had a burial at sea. So I've seen a burial in the Atlantic Ocean. In those days they couldn't carry a body (?) ship. So they had, we couldn't see what they had, but it must have been two planks like this over the edge of the ship. This one had an American flag and a British, because he was an American. Him and his wife and twelve-year-old daughter (?) a trip to England. So on the top one was the flags, and then, and this one here. So they had, every one, all the rooms were locked up. Everybody had to be on deck to be at the service. And they had a piano there and a regular church service. And then after that, well, then, this must have been lowered, because we heard the body, we heard something drop in the water, and this didn't

move. So you couldn't see that. It was covered, but in figuring out how they were doing it, it must have been like that. So I've seen a burial at sea. Now, this was the sixth, the seventh day. We were two weeks on that ocean. And we were going a thousand miles north out of our way. We landed in Halifax, Canada. That's how far north we'd gone, almost to Greenland. So the ship then had to re-load with fuel and food. Although my cousin, my daughter, my sister and my little brother, all they can remember was eating hard-boiled eggs. They remember eating a lot of hard-boiled eggs and stuff. But, anyhow, so then we finally sailed in into New York Harbor May 14th. That was two weeks later, a fortnight later. Sailed past the Statue of Liberty, and they played the National Anthem of America. Then after that we got to New York. I thought, "Good. I'm going to put my feet on ground, and keep my feet on ground. I'm not going to get on a ship any more." And so then we were put on another ship to go to Ellis Island. So what's this, we didn't know what was coming on then.

PHILLIPS: So just before you, tell us about that. What sort of ship was it?

PIERCE: It was Cunard Line ship and it was called the Carmania. A picture of that's in the book, too. My life history book.

PHILLIPS: Did it have a sail as well as steam, or was it just, uh . . .

PIERCE: Oh, no. It had, two of those big funnels, you know. It's a regular oceanliner, a regular oceanliner, like they have now, only not as good because it didn't have the balancing things that ships have now, I guess, have something they can spring out to balance it. Well, this didn't, so it just rocked with the ocean any way it wanted to. Seasick, you know, that's, that was terrible.

PHILLIPS: So you first arrived at Ellis, sorry, you first arrived at New York. You were not allowed to get off the boat.

PHILLIPS: Oh, no, no, no.

PHILLIPS: But you said you wanted to put your feet on solid ground, but you weren't able to.

PIERCE: I had to go to, I had to get to New York before I put

my feet on ground. In Halifax we couldn't get off the ship. And then, coming out of Halifax then, then we came along, then when we saw land, it was just, oh, it was like a dream come true. And I didn't know the world was that big. I didn't realize the world was as big as, you know, travelling two weeks. I didn't know.

PHILLIPS: So tell us about arriving at Ellis Island.

PIERCE: I'll never forget that. I thought we were being herded like a bunch of cattle. Everybody else . . .

PHILLIPS: Would you be careful not to touch the microphone?

PIERCE: Oh, I didn't know what it was.

PHILLIPS: That's all right. Um, could you say that again for me? I'll ask the question. Tell me what it was like to arrive at Ellis Island.

PIERCE: I'll never forget that, because it was just like it happened yesterday. We saw this big building, and then the ship stopped, and then everybody got off and we just, like, herded like a cattle, a bunch of cattle. So we followed the rest of them to where

they were going. And as we entered this big room it looked like jail or something, and we were put into one of them. And the guard came in with us. And then pretty soon a policeman came in, and he slammed the door shut. And they had bars or something, so we could see other people in the corrals, or wherever they were. I don't know. It was just a big place. And then the policeman was talking and asking, "Are you the Whaite family from Padiham, Lancashire, England?" So Dad said, "Yes, we are." And so he said, "Why are you coming? Why did you leave England? Why are you coming to America? How much money do you have?" And I got thinking, I was fourteen, I'd been working, I thought, "I thought we were coming to a free country. Why all this questioning and all this stuff?" I was getting puzzled. And then he had my dad open all the barrels of stuff and suitcases. We had to open all them, take everything out. Dishes were all broken, but one plate. My daughter Judy has that one plate. And everything else was intact, his cameras and everything, but all the dishes were broken, a great big barrel full. The ship was so, you know, rough.

PHILLIPS: So how long were you on Ellis Island?

PIERCE: Well, I imagine all day, because it seemed to me like hours, maybe two days, but it wasn't. But we saw some families separated. If one in the family was sick, they were sent back to the country they came from. They weren't allowed to stay. They checked your eyes and checked you, so you can stay. So it took hours before, you know, they seemed to have said, "Welcome to America." (she laughs)

PHILLIPS: Did you move straight out to Los Angeles?

PIERCE: No, no. Our friend was living in St. Mary's, Idaho. Imagine, we crossed the country on a big train, got on this big train, much bigger than them in England and up on the ground, where those in England are all down. You get out of a train in England and you step right out of the train right onto the platform. In those we got on here, you had to climb up and get onto the big train. So then in Chicago we had to change trains to go to St. Mary's, Idaho. And my uncle, Walter Ales, his wife was from England, but not him. And anyhow, he got, he worked for the railroads, he got on the train, before we landed to

St. Mary's, Idaho, and so he welcomed us then on the train, and then got off with us and took us to his home.

PHILLIPS: St. Mary's.

PIERCE: St. Mary's, Idaho. Beautiful, beautiful town, with two rivers that run together. Beautiful town, but it's an old logging town. So Dad felt, well, that wasn't a town to start a studio, you know. That's what he was looking for. And then when I first went through the house in St. Mary's, had to open a screen door, and then the other door. I thought, "Why does American home have two doors?" And I thought, "Well, maybe it would keep the bears and the Indians out." Because I had always heard we were coming to where bears and Indians were. So that's what, that was my first impression of going into an American home, that the two doors was to keep the bears and Indians out. (she laughs) I didn't realize that a screen was only flimsy, you know. I just thought of the two doors.

PHILLIPS: So when did you move from St. Mary's to Los Angeles? How old were you?

PIERCE: We never did come to Los Angeles. We went from there to Spokane because Uncle John Clayton, mother's brother, was a minister in Opportunity, Washington, just on the outskirts of Spokane, which is a big city. And so then we went, about three months in St. Mary's, and then we went to Spokane so I could start school. I had to go back to school. And so we got to Spokane, but Dad took me uptown to get me a job. And they said, "We can't hire Ellen. She's only fourteen." So he showed them my recommendation. He said, "She's worked two years in an office and did typing, bookkeeping and shorthand." "I'm sorry, we can't hire her." So goody. I got to go back to school. So I got to go to an American school then. So I went to Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, Washington.

PHILLIPS: Say that name again.

PIERCE: To Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, Washington.

PHILLIPS: Lewis and Park?

PIERCE: Lewis and Clark.

PHILLIPS: Lewis and Clark.

PIERCE: Yeah. Like the Lewis and Clark, you know, history of the Lewis and Clark, you know, trail. So I went to that High School and graduated.

PHILLIPS: What was it like being in an American system of education compared with where you'd come from?

PIERCE: Altogether different. The teachers were different, for one thing. I was taking the business course, because I worked for two years in an office. I continued with business. So the teacher would sit by me and take money out of his pocket and explain, you know, or a quarter and a dime, to introduce me to the money, American money. And I thought, "How nice and kind for a teacher to take time to sit by me, instead of hitting me for getting something wrong." I just thought, "What a difference." And some of the children would be saying, "Hi, Phyllis. Hello, Joan." Or, "Hello, John." And I thought, "Gee, they don't get spanked." I discovered early, in high school, that whatever you wanted to do, if you wanted to do it, go after it, and you'd get it. So I tried

to be the bookkeeper for the Lewis and Clark Journal and got it. Tried out for class play and got the lead in that. Whatever I wanted to try out, I got into it. In England you couldn't do that. You had to wait to be invited into it. So I discovered a big difference. Free country. (she laughs) I loved it.

PHILLIPS: Tell us a little bit more about those experiences at school.

PIERCE: In school?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, in Spokane. This was in Spokane, right? Where are we? No, we're in Spokane.

PIERCE: Spokane.

PHILLIPS: We're in Spokane. Spokane, yes.

PIERCE: Uncle John was a minister, so he had time on his hands. He had time on his hands. (break in tape)

PHILLIPS: We're just picking up the interview. I just stopped the tape, I'm picking up the interview. Yes, uh, if there's any other memories that you have of your life in school here, perhaps that would be interesting,

when you were young, as a young girl in school. Anything else which stands out in your mind?

PIERCE: Well, I found out, like I told you before, that whatever I wanted to try out to be I could get into it and so I tried out for basketball. I'd never seen that played before, but I tried out and learned the game and got to be a center, whatever that is in that. And, uh, I got, tried out for different things and I got to do it. And I thought, "Gee, this is great." I'd heard it as a free country, but I didn't dream that it was, if you just wanted to try something you could do it. If you wanted to go after it, you could get it.

PHILLIPS: Tell us what the country looked like.

PIERCE: In Spokane?

PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PIERCE: It's a nice, beautiful city, so it's down kind of in a valley with mountains around it and forty lakes. So we went to a lot of lakes after, we had someone with a car. My dad couldn't drive, you know. Nothing (?) learned to drive. But later on in life,

later on the, in a few years, we got to go to the lakes and have picnics and things there. But in high school they passed a law. I was going to be a senior the next year and they passed a law that you had to swim fifty yards. And I thought, oh, I'd never even had a bathing suit on before. In England you couldn't wear bathing suits. It was too cold. And so I bought a bathing suit and took swimming lessons. So he said, "Everyone line up around the pool." There was a big pool at Lewis and Clark high school, twenty feet deep in the deep end. So I stood with my friends and I told them, I said, "I can't swim, you know. And what am I supposed to do?" And so the instructor man, he said, "Everyone jump in." And I just told my friends I couldn't swim, and so he'd come along, and those that didn't jump in he pushed them in. So my friends helped me to the side to get out, because I couldn't swim. I didn't know what to do. And I was eighteen then. And the one girl went to the bottom. He had to finally dive in and bring her out and call the Fire Department to help bring her to. And so that teacher was fired. He was fired. And then they passed a law that you didn't have to swim fifty yards, which pleased me, because I

knew I couldn't learn how to swim fifty yards and graduate that June. But Spokane had beautiful scenery around it, and beautiful lakes. But hot, sultry weather in summer. Maybe a thunderstorm, and it would be so sultry and hot you'd be miserable. Then in winter it would get twenty below. And I've seen firemen trying to put out a fire, and they couldn't because the water would fall on their hats and they'd have icicles hanging over their hats from the twenty degrees below. And I told you I was carsick. I couldn't ride in a car, because I was seasick on the ship. So I walked three miles a day to high school, and three miles home every night.

PHILLIPS: Is that, what's that noise in the background? (break in tape) Okay, I just stopped the tape again. There's a big of refrigerator noise. We can't get the refrigerator off, unfortunately. Um, all right, well, let's move on from school, unless there's anything specific you want to tell me, and to your working life in America, and a little bit about that.

PIERCE: Okay. The day I was supposed to graduate from Lewis

and Clark High School the principal called me to the office. And I thought, "Oh, what have I done wrong or something." I was going to graduate. And he said that the Interstate Telephone Company had called and wanted a bookkeeper and a travelling accountant, and so they were recommending me. So after school I went down to the office, it was right near high school, and got hired. So I was never out of work after I got out of high school. Recommended from the high school. And I became a travelling accountant. Ninety dollars a month, eight hours a day, and that was big pay in those days. That was 1924 and, uh, then it was at that time that I went down to this office and met my boyfriend and we went together three years, then I married him, Fred Pierce.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about travelling through America in those days as an accountant. What towns did you go to . . .

PIERCE: I got to go to Spokane, Spokane to Moscow, Idaho by the University of Moscow. And I was there for one week and the office had got me a room to stay in, a room and board place to stay in. And then I got to

go to this office to help open a new office for Interstate. It was Interstate Telephone because Idaho, Washington and Montana. And so I was a week there, and I went to a dance and a party at the Moscow University and stuff, so I had a lot of fun there for a week. And then I got more expenses paid and my salary. So that was interesting. And then I went to Newport, Washington for a week, helped put in an office there. And then got to Billings, Montana and opened an office there. So it was a good position. But after you got married and work there they wouldn't hire you. I had worked there two years. I was getting married, so I had to quit because they thought if you got married you'd get pregnant and they didn't want some pregnant woman working in the office in those days. So then I got a job then in one of the department stores as an art and craft buyer, assistant buyer. I was the assistant buyer. Fifteen dollars a week. I can't believe it. You know, you work eight hours a day and only get fifteen a week. Of course, rent was only thirty-five a month, you know, for a nice, a real nice apartment. Things were cheaper then, you know. A bag of vegetables that big was a nickel. So things

were cheaper accordingly.

PHILLIPS: But how did you feel when the company that, I think, I gather you enjoyed working for them.

PIERCE: I did. I did enjoy it, and I was working up to be the head boss in one of the departments, and I didn't like that, that I had to quit because I was getting married. I didn't like that part of it, but that's the way it was in those days in that business where I was working. It wasn't in the stores or nothing, in the other places but in this office, why, they didn't want some young married woman working there. They wanted just the single gals.

PHILLIPS: So you got married. Where did you get married?

PIERCE: In Spokane, Washington. A home weeding, just had a pretty home wedding. We were married forty-nine-and-a-half years.

PHILLIPS: And what did your husband do?

PIERCE: He was a lumber man, worked with, run special machines to build fancy doors for expensive homes in Spokane, fancy doors that no one else knew how to set

up these machines, special machines or something, he said. The lumber, you know. We camped a lot and we were outdoor people anyhow, but that's what he did until later in life.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about camping.

PIERCE: Oh, we started first with just a bed roll, and my parents thought, gee, American people camp on the ground with just a bed roll and stuff, no cover over or something. But I loved it. I'm glad I learned how to do it. It was great, because we had all these forty lakes, you know, to go to and free camping. And in those days you camped anywhere without being afraid of someone coming and getting you or something, a knife in you or something. And so it was free and beautiful. And then later, of course, we got a tent, and then later a travel trailer.

PHILLIPS: But you used to camp, at first, without anything over you.

PIERCE: Uh-huh. Just in a bedroom. Just in a bedroll. And I woke up one time and saw, all I could see, I remember the moon was out that night, and all I could

see was horns. So what kind of animal it was that was by me, I don't know, and I didn't care. I went back to sleep. But I had, I wasn't afraid, because my husband was with me, but after all I felt safe in a tent then, and then later a travel trailer.

PHILLIPS: So you've done a lot of travelling.

PIERCE: Oh, yeah, all our married life. All our forty-nine-and-a-half years I've seen a lot of country. From the east coast to the west coast to the east coat, along the Trans-Canadian Highway. Our kids have camped. She's hiked halfway down the Grand Canyon, and Beverly did. Judy and Beverly both have hiked halfway down the Grand Canyon with us. We've been on all kinds of campouts. Then we took grandchildren with us when we started getting grandchildren. We took them with us. Now they still talk about it, about how they enjoyed it, sitting around the campfire, you know, and talking about it. And they'd ask me questions about England. And when I told them about the ship we should have been on that was cut in half, then they would say, "Then, Grandma, we wouldn't have been here then." They thought they

wouldn't have been here if I had been drowned. I says, "No, you wouldn't." So the grandchildren enjoyed our stories.

PHILLIPS: What about your schoolteaching career? How did that start?

PIERCE: My husband didn't want me to work when I was raising the children. He wanted me to raise them. And I wanted to, too. I didn't want some other woman enjoying them. I wanted to do it. But after, there's fifteen years difference anyhow between Joan and our oldest daughter, and Beverly our youngest. There's fifteen years difference. So, you see, there's quite a period of time. So they'd separated. And so Joan then was married, and our son was in the service. He graduated from S.C. and was in the service. Judy was a junior, a senior in high school, and Beverly a sophomore.

PHILLIPS: What is S.C.?

PIERCE: U.S.C, United, U.S.C., the (?).

PHILLIPS: I thought you said S.C.

PIERCE: U.S. Trojans. And so, anyhow, so I thought, "What am I going to do now?" I'd been working, and helping in P.T.A., so I'd always been active in school, and so I thought, I was teaching them for Covina recreation department, teaching two afternoons a week. And in order to do that you had to be going to college to work for Covina. So I went to college and I thought, "Well, I'll study to be a teacher." Never dreaming I'd get it. Because I'd take a three-hour test and that three-hour test, I'd been out of school, you know, since I was eighteen, in high school. And so I took the three-hour test and nine-and-a-half, we got a five minute break, so we all got to go outdoors and get some fresh air and move around and not think for a minute. And I was thinking there. Pretty soon a man come by and he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "Go back in. You'll make it." And later I found out he was the principal of the college there, the dean of the college. And he told me, so I went back in and made it. Because I thought if I go back home the kids will say, "Well, how'd you do?" And if I said I only went halfway through, I thought, well, that wasn't setting a good example. So I stayed with it and made it.

PHILLIPS: You haven't yet told us how you got to Los Angeles.

PIERCE: How we got to L.A.?

PHILLIPS: Why you came here.

PIERCE: On account of the Depression. The Depression in Spokane, the mills were on strike, closed down, shut down. My brother was with machinists, and his machine shop was closed down. Big Depression hit, the 1930 Depression. And so my sister lived down here, and her husband said there was more opportunities here and stuff, so, and my Dad got killed going to work, so he never got his dream of having a studio, so Mother was left alone. So we just moved to California in 1945. Been here ever since and liked it.

PHILLIPS: Had the war finished by then?

PIERCE: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember when the atomic bomb was dropped?

PIERCE: Oh, yes, I sure do, yeah. I've lived a busy, interesting life, huh?

PHILLIPS: Can you tell me about those feelings when the war was over, when the atomic bomb was dropped, and President Truman announced the end of the war with Japan.

PIERCE: Right at that time when it happened we happened to be at Lake Tahoe, and we were up there that day and it was, my son and his wife, and we listened to it on the car radio and I don't know, it was just, it was just at thrill or something, or just something different. We just sat there just, just listened to it in beautiful Lake Tahoe. I like to see the world all in unison and together. The same with Russia. I'm glad now that Russia is beginning to form in with us. It seems like they are. You know, they helped with the, with that flow of the oil, you know, and everything so, in Alaska, so . . . I like to see peace in the world. I've been through one war and others I don't want any more.

PHILLIPS: What have you done, a big question, in more than forty years that you've lived in Los Angeles?

PIERCE: What haven't I done?

PHILLIPS: That's not a question. It's just probably setting

this up. But you moved to Los Angeles, you became a schoolteacher. How long have you taught for?

PIERCE: Thirty years. I'm still teaching one day a week but I've made, I've crocheted these for the May Company. It was one, a pattern I made up for my own children, and I made a bunch, two dozen pair, and took them to the May Company in L.A. when it first moved here, and they ordered one hundred and forty-four pair and wanted them in three weeks. So I was sitting and doing this till I was going cross-eyed, so I'm still making these.

PHILLIPS: What Mrs. Pierce is showing me is a pair of little woolen baby's booties crocheted. Tiny booties.

PIERCE: Oh, I make them for dolls. I make tiny ones for dolls, about this size. I just made some yesterday for my great-granddaughter. Then I've crocheted them afghans behind you. She has how many, a dozen or more. Judy has a lot. They all have. Every place I go, every home I go into with my children, they all have one of them afghans.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about teaching as a, what school, grade, do

you teach?

PIERCE: Chadroke Elementary, and I was hired for the first grade teacher which I love, those little children. And I thought, "I'm not going to teach my children to be afraid of making a mistake." In England school, I was afraid to make a mistake because I knew if I did, I knew if I didn't answer, if I answered wrong, I'd get hit. So it made me afraid to make a mistake. And even to this day yet I feel afraid if I've made a mistake, just afraid. So in my, I'd put math problems on the board for the first grade children, and I did two of them wrong, just to see if they were watching. And I said, they'd spot it and I said, "See?" I said, "Even teachers make a mistake." And if they made a mistake on their paper I said, "That's good." And they'd look at me kind of funny, but I said, "That's how you learn. You learn by making a mistake." And then when we'd salute the flag in the morning I'd say, "We salute . . ." And I said, "I know you're only little children six years old." "But," I said, "somebody I hope you remember that you're saluting the best flag in the world." So probably some of them still, you know, remember it

because I, my granddaughter, Scott Karahan, has a close friend. He used to be in my class, and what we did. So I enjoyed it. That's why I'm still teaching, because I love it.

PHILLIPS: Okay. So that's going to be the finish of our interview number 399 [DP-25] with Ellen Pierce. A very rich source of material. She's a little bit dry. I suppose we could go on for a long time, but I think we've covered a good deal of, unless there's anything specific you would like. I think that's the end of the interview. Thank you.