

**Memoir by Claudia Lucas (nee Calmon)**  
**Daughter of Dr Curt Calmon**

BERLIN - CHARLOTTENBURG mid-twenties.  
HARDENHERGSTRASSE 14 GERMANY.

My very first memories are of the home we lived in at that time. A very spacious 14 roomed flat on the second floor of quite an imposing building quite near the Tiergarten (zoo).

I was standing in my large cot watching this cosy woman packing her wicker-basket suitcase in my nursery, the woman was known to me as 'Madame' and I was crying because she told me she was leaving me. I knew I did not want her to leave and I realise now that she did not want to leave either as she was crying as well. 'Madame' was French and the reason she had been engaged to look after me seems a little strange to me now but must have made sense to my parents who engaged her.

My father wanted my first language to be German, and my mother, who was born and bred in Prague wanted it to be Czech and they made a compromise - or so it must have appeared to them, for Madame was French and that was my first language. However, the consequences of their actions struck them when they found that my little playmates who were invited to the house were unable to talk to or understand me as living in Berlin at that point, they all spoke only German. Madam was dismissed and a succession of German speaking Nannies and Governesses followed thereafter.

Fraulein Kie followed Madame, and she was a very large and robust Brunhilde type who was severe in every way. Her regime was: 'Do as I tell you - or you get a thrashing'. I got the latter quite regularly. Her thrashings are to this day still quite vivid in my mind. I was put across a chair and my pants pulled down and a special bunch of twigs was used for these occasions. I would get this treatment for a variety of reasons such as not eating up all my meal, answering back, not coming at once when called for, making faces behind her back etc. Fraulein Kie of course taught me to speak German. I really hated Fraulein Kie. I remember complaining to my mother about her and the reply from her was always the same: 'If you had a spanking, I expect you deserved it'.

I saw my mother in the morning after my breakfast. I was taken to either her bedroom, where perhaps she would have breakfast on a tray, or her morning room. I would then not see her again until my bedtime when I would be taken to the sitting room to kiss her goodnight. Sometimes, if she had certain visitors, I might be taken into the sitting room to greet them, having to shake hands and curtsy of course. I used to really hate that performance, because I had to look really clean and tidy with my hair well brushed and face practically polished.

Throughout my childhood I saw my father only intermittently. I do not recall ever missing him, in fact, as I grew up, I realised that I saw more of my mother when my father was not around, and found that an advantage, as I enjoyed seeing my mother. In addition, my father

was a very strict disciplinarian and our conversations seemed to consist only of fault finding on his part. He slightly frightened me most of my life.

It is very difficult to judge time, especially of childhood, but Fraulein Kie stayed with me for about six months. They certainly seemed an eternity at the time. What is clear in my memory is the day of her departure and all that led up to it.

It was mid-afternoon, and although I cannot remember what I had done wrong again, I had been put across the chair and received quite a number of whacks on my bare bottom. I recall that I ran up the corridor to the sitting room where I knew that my mother was having her regular bridge party. I ran into the room screaming, went to my mother and pulled down my pants to show her my beating. My mother's friends all gasped in horror which encouraged me to scream louder and louder. I remember my mother taking me quickly to her own bedroom to rest on her bed, a thing which I had never done before or since. The rest of this drama has

left me, but I know that I never set eyes on Fraulein Kie again. She was obviously fired there and then. I must admit that my mother really had no choice but to act as she did with such a sympathetic audience present. Needless to say, I was delighted.

It was about around that era that I had a succession of childish ailments, one following the other. Measles, scarlet fever, chicken pox, whooping cough and a very gentle and kind nurse featured in my life - Sister Tony. I recall her nursing me dressed in a white uniform and my nursery room was practically transformed into an intensive care unit. Although I did not realise it at the time, it strikes me now that most illnesses had one cure in common and that is an 'enema'. I was forever lying on my nursery chest being administered this treatment which I obviously did not enjoy. I think it was a very common method of dealing with temperatures in middle Europe. I did not think it strange at the time but only in retrospect, that during the whole of that period of illness which went on for about six months, I saw little if anything of my mother, as everyone was most concerned that I should not transmit my germs. I vividly recall her putting her head just inside the door on one occasion and waving across the room and saying 'Hello' and then closing the door quickly. I was completely isolated from everyone except Sister Tony.

As a child, or at least speaking for myself, of course one is completely unaware of privilege sectors of society or underprivileged people. One just accepts things without questions and blissfully assumes that everyone else does things as you do. I was totally ignorant of the fact that my father was rapidly climbing the ladder from being well off to being a near millionaire at that time. It was very many years later, when I was in my teens, that these jigsaw pieces all fell into place and I could see my life in one picture. My parents were very remote figures in my early life, and when I did see them together, they never discussed business or money. In fact, it was an unspoken rule in the house that to mention the word money was in extremely bad taste.

One occasion when the family did get together always was Christmas Eve. It was also my parents' wedding anniversary. On that day I was allowed to eat in the dining room with them after the formal celebrations. The formal party consisted of the dining room being sealed off and behind locked doors, a huge Christmas tree which always was as high as the ceiling, would be decorated. It had a star at the top and candles which were lit just before everyone was allowed into the room. Plenty of tinsel and underneath the tree would be different piles of presents, each pile belonging to a member of the family and staff. As I was the youngest member in the household, I would be allowed into the room first only to find Father Christmas standing beside the tree in his red suit and white beard. I was always asked the same question every year: 'Had I behaved well during the year?' 'Was I obedient?' I think I always replied 'yes'. After that I knew which would be my personal pile under the tree, as it always was the biggest. I recall the Christmas that I spoiled, because I looked at Father Christmas intently and shouted out, 'Father Christmas has the same bushy eyebrows that Father has'. There was a lot of laughter and the end of that part of the annual performance.

Around that time, I was prepared for lessons and another figure – a tutor - appeared in my life every afternoon for an hour to teach me reading writing and arithmetic. This was even before I attended school. I did not show any aptitude to any of these skills, and my father at one point decided to take the situation over himself. Most evenings he attempted to drill these subjects into me, and those always ended up in tears. In the end they were stopped by what I assume to be my mother's request – she was told that it interfered with my dropping off to sleep after these tearful sessions with my father, who was a rather severe figure.

At that time, we had a smallish house in the country, which we went to in the summer months. I don't recall liking this in particular, as that house seemed small and cramped compared to our town accommodation. I do recollect the excitement of talks and plans for the new big house which was being built to Father's choice and that shortly I would be moving there and live there all the time. The new home address was in Wannsee Strasse com Louen 3, a very attractive outskirts of Berlin about 30 minutes via the Autobahn halfway between Berlin and Potsdam. The Wannsee was a large lake which people used for sailing, fishing, bathing and weekend outings. When I was taken to our new home, I accepted it as nice, but on reflection I should have been more impressed. It was a very large house set in its own grounds of 3-4 acres or more with tennis court, pavilion, vegetable area with three glasshouses, various lawns including the 'English Lawn' which I learnt was different grass and required never ending sprinklers on it – my own playground with sandpit and various gym apparatus, see-saw etc – a rockery and of course flower beds and numerous birch trees which were my father's favourite trees. It also included a wooded area. The house was on four floors which included a

basement flat which was occupied by the gardener and his family, and bedrooms on the other side for staff such as a cook and chambermaid/housemaid etc.

I got to know the basement quite well later on in my life. Apart from breakfast, I was allowed to have my meals with my parents now in the dining room. My governess of the day had of course to be in attendance as well. I clearly remember one of them – Fraulein Pouitz – a very unprepossessing little woman who unfortunately had a terrible lisp. I approved of her as she let me get on with my own things and never noticeably made her presence felt. However, after a while I had acquired her habit of lisping much to the horror of my parents, and later Fraulein Pouitz was unceremoniously sacked.

I was enrolled in the village school where to my great delight for the very first time in my short life I was in the position of being able to choose my own friends. Up till that time all my parties and playmates were children selected by my parents and I must confess on the whole I didn't care for any of them overmuch – at least not sufficiently to remember any single one. I felt aware of great excitement suddenly to be with some twenty or more children from all sorts of different backgrounds and I could choose to play with any boy or girl that I, Claudia, wanted – at least at school.

There was just one blot on my horizon. I was taken to school every morning in the Minerva car, driven by our chauffeur Erich. It did not take me long to find out that this form of transport was not approved of. One did not have to be very sensitive about that, as some of the boys were throwing mud cakes or worse at the car. I somehow managed to persuade my parents to allow me to go to school on my bike. I think the reason they finally agreed was because I could ride through a wood path and not use the main roads.

After that peace reigned in my life – at least for a short while. My chosen friends of that era were a mixed bunch of children. My closest friend was Drusilla Bursit, who was an English girl whose parents lived quite close to us. They were considered extremely strange – so I was given to understand. Her father was the boss of “His Masters Voice” [HMV] in Germany, a well-known record company, and as far as I was concerned everything about her and them was great. She did not have to tolerate nannies or governesses, nor did her mother take much notice of anything – Drusilla was allowed total freedom. I must admit, at first, I was a little suspicious when I saw their garden which was equally as big as ours. It was a complete wilderness. There were no signs of gardeners, beds or footpaths – it was bliss for us. We could roam about without any prohibitions.

It was Drusilla who introduced me to English afternoon tea and toast. It was Drusilla who loved to be dared and dared me as much as anyone I met before or since. One afternoon she announced that their little dog who had died a few weeks earlier had been buried in a special grave in the garden. How about digging him up and inspecting to see what changes had taken place? I readily agreed. We started our grisly job when at the last moment I began to panic. I had a premonition that I might be sick. A string of feeble excuses and I ran off.

It was Drusilla who was the financial wizard and had bright ideas of how to increase our pocket money. As I mentioned earlier, we had several glasshouses – one of them was kept for cacti which my father loved but no one else cared much about. That is to say, except the gardener who had to look after them. I soon was shown by an enterprising Drusilla who even possessed a penknife, that a cactus sprouts babies – some more than others. With a very deft hand she soon showed me how to cut a baby off a plant and plant it in its own pot. We would then cycle with our little pots to a nearby garden centre where we sold them for a few “pfennigs”. This was a regular and easy way to stretch our pocket money, and to my knowledge this deed was never exposed.

I cannot remember by whom or how I was introduced to fishing, but somehow I was a very keen angler. I used to slip away to the lake which was only 10 minutes away from the house and sit with my rod and line waiting for my orange bobbin to go under, which it rarely did, and when it did it was either a false alarm or I was too inexperienced to handle the situation. There was one exception which I will never forget. The bobbin dived under like a submarine, and just did not reappear which it usually did. I began to tug away at my rod and stood up to pull the line out of the water. In those days there was no such thing as a reel. I pulled and pulled and eventually out came what appeared to be a very large fish at the end. It was wriggling like mad and I got it on to the bank, but was much too frightened to take it off the hook. Consequently, I panicked and began to cry. Suddenly a large policeman appeared by my side. I must have been a strange sight for him – a little girl of

six or seven crying calling for help with my rod and line and fish dangling at the end. I remember explaining to him that the fish was too big for me to take off the hook. The policeman came to my rescue, took the fish off the hook and knocked it unconscious before sending me back home. I proudly presented my trophy to my mother, who looked most disdainfully at my fish and announced that she would not eat "that" whatever it was, and suggested I took it to the gardener's wife in her basement flat. This I did, and I was overcome with the friendly enthusiasm I received and that was the beginning of a new friendship between me and the basement residents.

On reflection I think it was the preparation for fishing which I enjoyed as much as anything. This entailed finding worms which one usually found underneath stones in the garden. These I kept in a tin and before my excursion I used to cut the worms into two or three sections if they were long enough, fascinated to find that each section continued to wiggle and live. Threading the worms on to the hook also had its fascination. Someone must have shown all this to me, certainly no one in my family.

I was as a child always interested when any workmen came to the house and watched them work. Consequently, at the age of six I was able to repair bells that did not work and knew .....