

THE INTERVIEW

It was the beginning of May 1953 and people were thinking and talking about the upcoming Coronation of Queen Elizabeth 2nd; there was great excitement and anticipation in the air. In school we were learning about the significance of the Crown Jewels and all the other paraphernalia associated with the big day. My parents, on the other hand, had quite treasonable thoughts about what should happen to royalty. They had both worked in service before the war and experienced hard times at the hands of what my mother termed 'the upper ten'. Despite this, my dad always doffed his cap and addressed those he thought above him with a respectful Sir or Madam. In fact, the daughter of his last employer, where he had been a chauffeur, frequently brought pheasants for him to pluck and addressed him by his surname of Brackley and in turn he addressed her as Madam. How infuriated I always felt.

I digress. At this time my mind was on other matters. What was I going to wear to the interview for entry into the Secretarial and Administration course at Watford Technical College? The family had all been amazed when, after sitting an entrance exam, a letter arrived giving me a date for an interview. There had been little confidence in the possibility of success, especially as I had failed the 11 plus exam which had denied me the opportunity going to Grammar School.

There wasn't much money in the kitty for anything new to wear to the interview but it was agreed I had to look smart. The person to consult was my dad's sister, Helen. She had worked as a seamstress and with her treadle machine had produced clothes for all the special occasions in the family even my Mum's wedding dress.

Helen lived next door with my grandparents and from childhood I had stood beside her while she made Xmas Stockings, a guy for bonfire night, Easter novelties, not to mention mending sheets, blankets and even a carpet on one occasion. She agreed to help but said it would be good experience for me to do the sewing under her guidance. I had undertaken smaller tasks quite successfully but this proved to be a real challenge. A light grey wool material was selected for a skirt and waistcoat. Auntie Helen had some material that would do to make a white blouse to add to the ensemble and so the very next day, after school, we set about making the pattern and cutting out the material.

Auntie was a hard task master, everything had to be perfect, and especially the button holes for the blouse. Many tears were shed, fingers pricked, seams undone and redone but I have never been so

proud of any achievement. On completion I modelled the outfit and thought I looked like the cat's whiskers. I paraded in front of Aunts, Uncles and neighbours. Everyone said that I looked very smart and admired my work.

The appointed day arrived in early August and I set off with Mum and Dad to travel to Watford which was about 12 miles from my home. As I sat down in a line of other girls, Mum and Dad's advice was ringing in my ears. Stand up straight, be polite, speak up, and don't mutter. My name was called and I was ushered down the corridor and into a big room at the end of which sat three men and one lady. My mind went blank. After giving my name I was asked why I thought I would make a good Secretary. On and on the questions went, what books had I read, where did I think I would like to work, what were my ambitions. By the end of the interview I could hardly remember what I had said, except one particular question stood out. My answer to where I would like to work. A few miles from where I lived there was an Air Force Base. It was reputed that if you could get a job there, you were made, as the wages and conditions were above average. So when one of the gentlemen on the panel asked me this question, I promptly replied "Bovingdon Air Base". He looked at me for what seemed ages and said "Is that because there are a lot of men there?" Of course I went bright red and mumbled my reply that I thought the work at an air base would be very interesting.

I returned to Mum and Dad, who had a barrage of questions, none of which I could answer except that one awful slip up. It was determined there and then there was no way I would be accepted into the course. We went home in silence.

No one mentioned the anticipated but feared letter we knew would arrive. Four weeks later there it was on the mat. I crept up to my room, how was I going to tell Mum and Dad I had failed again. My fingers trembled as I took the letter out of the envelope. A flush crept through my body. I had secured a place. The excitement, the anticipation - plans had to be made.

I still treasure the necklace Mum gave me to wear on the first day of College, little blue dewdrops purchased from deLisles in Lower Kings Road, Berkhamsted.

