

From Behind the Kitchen Door *Life as a Filipino domestic helper in an observant Jewish home*

I am a Filipino, who has worked as a domestic helper here in Hong Kong for almost eight years. I have worked for many families, five in Hong Kong. This is my life. I have met all kinds of families. I left mine behind.

My employer now is an Orthodox Jewish family who arrived in Hong Kong directly from Israel. It is a new experience for both of us as they were new to Hong Kong and life as expats and I had never met a Jewish family before. Some friends of mine and those who see me taking care of four children (ages 5, 4, 2 and a month old) think that I have a really hard job. I suppose it sounds difficult but after hearing my side and learning about how my employer treats me, some even began asking me if I knew other Jewish employers that are friends of my employer who are looking for a helper.

Since I love reading very much, when I saw Asian Jewish Life I started reading it. I also read the book Hana's Suitcase. I had heard a little bit about the Holocaust but was told mostly about it by my employer and the need to remember it, but it was the book that really made me feel and understand it.

When I told my employer regarding my thoughts of contributing some writing of mine to submit to the magazine, she gave me courage and even inspired me to share my words in the open. This again is something new to me. In my role there is often little opportunity to speak out. Helpers seldom can share their experience and attitudes.



I was raised as a Catholic and am now a Born Again. I come from a family who are very much devoted to their religion. Growing up, during my primary school years through college, I attended a school run by nuns and priests. I even worked for a company owned by a Catholic congregation for seven years until I decided to apply as a domestic helper here in Hong Kong. I did this mainly due to marital problems. I needed to get away. Money is just a secondary reason why I applied as a domestic helper.

Never in my life did I think nor plan to work for a Jewish family. Not only that, it never even occurred to me about the existence of Jewish people living in Hong Kong until I came to see it and worked within this community. Just imagine how shocked I was seeing how big the Jewish population is and how active they were. I hope to enhance my wisdom and my knowledge of the life, culture and history of modern Judaism. It is something I knew almost nothing about. My first month was spent getting used to going to their shul or synagogue to help with their children. Many of us (domestic helpers) go every week to synagogue. It is part of our routine. We sit through

the children's service with the younger children and babies while the older children have their own service and the adults have theirs. We learn their songs and hymns with them and many of us can sing along too.

Before getting to know this family and learning about their customs and practices, what I knew about Jewish people was based mostly only on the words of the Bible. Growing up in the Philippines, never

did I expect to see and meet a Jewish person in my life, much less work with these chosen people of God. We grew up learning that the Jews were the chosen people. I am grateful that I had this experience to live with them and learn more about the people of the Bible. I believe that God led me to my employer today. They are good people with good values and love for their children and other people.

And, these are people that have so much respect for family tradition. While every Sunday, I spend my time going to church to attend the services and taking apart in my community, during the week, I manage a kosher home. I have learned many of the rules. I have taken classes, made notes and learn more all the time. I like the taste of all of the Jewish foods. They are all new to me and so different from the foods I grew up with and ate in the homes of other employers. My favorite is cholent on Saturday and also Israeli couscous. In keeping a kosher home, at first it was difficult, but I am adjusting. ♪

* The author's name has been changed at her request.