

Ellen's Story

When I was born, my mother died. My father couldn't take care of me, so he sent me to an orphanage. When I was eight, the orphanage sold me and my friend Elizabeth to a factory owner, and I had to work in a textile factory. Here is my story:

Elizabeth and I became 'scavengers.' Pieces of wool and cotton would fly in the air and obstruct the machines. We had to pick up the pieces of wool and cotton to keep the machines clean. This was very dangerous work. Some children lost a hand or an arm. We had to stand up all the time, because sitting down was dangerous for our hands. We worked up to 10 or 12 hours every day, so we were always tired, making the work even more dangerous!

Elizabeth had beautiful long hair. One day Elizabeth's hair got stuck in the machine. The machine pulled a big lock of hair out of her head! Elizabeth cried terribly. There was no doctor, and she had to continue her work. After the accident, Elizabeth always cut her hair short.

Our main food was oatmeal with water and milk. We ate potato pie with boiled bacon in it for dinner. It had so much fat we could barely eat it, but we were hungry enough to eat anything. We never got tea, and we had cheese and brown bread only once a year.

Life in the factory was terrible. We got up at five in the morning and worked till nine at night. We were always hungry, tired and scared.

