

Margaret Colville recalls her life as the child of Baptist Missionaries in India

What brought your family to India?

My great, great grandfather he set off to India as a missionary, his children were born in India, his grandchildren were born in India, my father and his older sister they were born in India, and I was the very first to actually be born in England. My parents were actually Baptist missionaries, my dad was in India and mum was due with me as a small baby, so she was booked onto a boat sailing in the September. But unfortunately Mr Hitler had other ideas, and the result was everything went haywire, and somehow my mother managed to get hold of the last civilian ship that was able to get through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, and she got as far as Aden before she could send a telegram to my father who didn't even know we were travelling, which gave him enough time to come across from the other side of India to meet us off the boat and take us back, so we were able to be together again.

What was it like going back and forth between India and England?

I was eleven when my father joined the Indian army, which means that even when we were in India, we were separated a lot of the time, And then when the war was over, we came home, stayed with my mother's sister and family who were fairly well to do so they had plenty of room to house us as refugees. But even then, we moved house so I did two more primary schools while we were in England, then went back to India. I think it was six different primary schools before I got to secondary school. Education was important. My mother did home schooling, at other times we were at different schools. Mum stayed home with us for five years while dad carried on overseas, and at the end of that five years I would have been going into the 6th form stage, she took my youngest sister back with her because she'd had least exposure to being ...because there is advantages you know, you grow up in a different culture as well. I and my sister had guardians locally in Norwich so we could continue our schooling where we were. No emails or internet or anything in those days, so little blue air letter forms from mum usually twice a week, and from us at least once a week. We wrote regularly to my dad, and he, being an amazing hoarder, I've even got back a whole load of the letters I used to send to him in those days.

What are some of your memories of living in India as a child?

When we were in the Bangladesh area, to get to the villages, it depended on whether it was the dry season or the wet season. If it was the dry season, he would put me on the carrier on the back of his bike, Janet would be balanced on the crossbar. In the wet season you go by boat, punted through the middle of the rice fields and the rice is growing up and you just go through and the rice sort of drapes over and comes up again behind.

Did you ever return to India? How had it changed from when you were younger?

After we retired, me and my husband discovered that there were ways of doing short term mission things, and I thought oh here's a chance of getting back to India and so we signed up to do the Calcutta one. Before I went, the only thing I could think about – I wonder if the crows are as raucous. And they were!