



Leading Lights

Rani Singh, Special Assignments Editor

Jillian Haslam – Suffered the Pain of Extreme Poverty but Survived to Tell the Story

Jillian Haslam is a qualified trainer, motivational speaker, success coach and author of her emotive memoir; *Indian. English.*

Both of Jillian Haslam's parents were British, born in India at the time of the British Raj to British parents on both sides. Her family was part of a forgotten minority of British left on the streets of India after Independence.

She was born in India and considers herself Indian. Jillian says that she owes a lot to the country that saved her life and that of her siblings.

"If I didn't feel Indian, it would be a disgrace," she told us.

"My childhood consisted of poverty, hunger, disease and death I had to get through each day trying to save the life of a younger sibling. I was homeless up to the age of six or seven, going from one veranda to the back of someone's house to rest, or under people's



Jillian Haslam

steps to by-lanes, wherever we found a dry spot to sleep. My first home was under some steps – and is pictured on the front cover of my book. It was wet, full of vermin; people washed their clothes, bathed and went to the toilet only a few yards away."

In a nearby lane, Jillian and her siblings would regularly watch a man frying food on the roadside. Because they wouldn't leave, he used to splash hot oil on them with a spoon but the children would scamper a few yards, return and continue to look longingly at the food.

He would get so fed up that he would put some food in some paper and give it to them with a warning never to return. But they did; every day, and he fed them every day.

"My second home was in a slum, where approximately 3000 people shared three bathrooms. The little room we had was eight by ten feet. There was no electricity, no water and no natural light. It was like living in the black hole of Calcutta. My sister and I were very little at the time, eight and ten. We took care of an infant sister and a two-year-old brother; we were left for hours on end with no food and no one to turn to. My youngest sister

almost died of malnutrition too. A local tea shop gave me a bowl of diluted milk every day in which I mixed some white powder that the hospital had given us and that, along with love, hope and prayers, saved her life."

There was also a grocery store that gave them credit knowing that Jillian and her three siblings were at home alone and starving. Chocolate bombs (illegal Diwali fireworks that look like chocolates) were thrown in front of their house hour after hour, because the passage was just three feet wide. Locals did this intentionally, for fun, but the children were traumatized.

"I remember holding my dying sisters' ears trying to save her from the terror of the blasts, thinking she would never make it.

I didn't want to allow another sibling of mine to die. My daily thoughts were on how to find the next meal for the three little ones in my care, how to fight death and how to be a brave example to them."

After leaving school, Jillian moved to Delhi and found a job in a private company. She worked hard and her family lived with her.

She competed with approximately 250 people for a role at the Bank

of America. After several rounds of interviews she was selected and shortly after that was promoted to being the President of the Bank of America Charity and Diversity Network.

Jillian then left the Bank of America to move to the UK on her parents' ancestral papers.

She worked for Morgan Stanley, ABN Amro and RBS in London and simultaneously wrote her book. She has since been invited to speak to women's organizations, schools and universities, has set-up her own training business and works with charities too. At RBS, Jillian won the first runner up social and humanitarian award for the 2012 Asian Woman of the Year.

She has overcome extraordinary challenges and aims to be an example of true potential. By telling her story, she hopes that corporates and individuals understand how sponsorships and kindness can save lives.

"I want them to see that there is hope and potential even in the most hopeless cases on earth."

Discover more about Jillian at

www.indianenglishthebook.com and www.helpyourselfassociates.com.