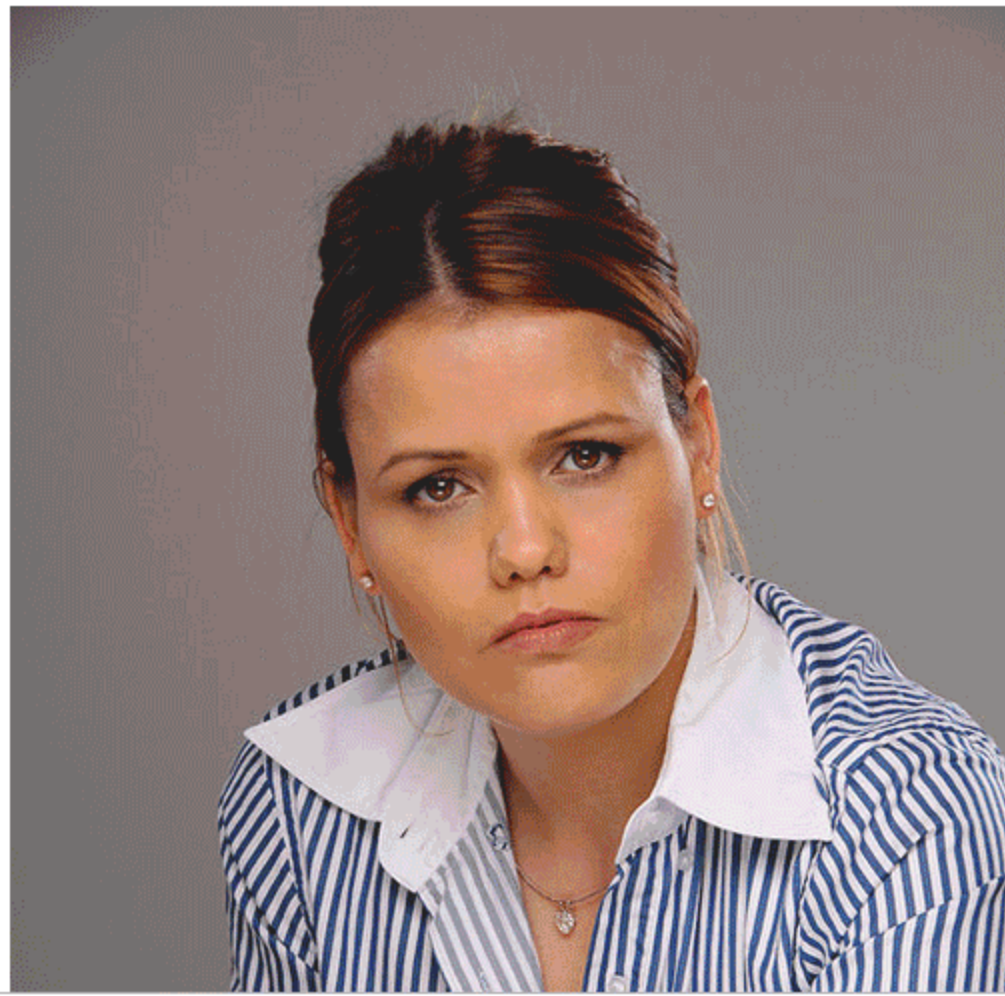




29 JUN



Interview of Jillian Haslam

I am intrigued by the fact that after the British rule ended, your family did not leave Calcutta. Out of sheer curiosity, I would like to know as to what you think about your family staying back here in this city?

Ans. My grandparents were born in the UK and were transferred to India to serve with the British Army. My parents were born in Calcutta (India) at the time of the British Raj. In 1947 after Independence, the British were given one year in which they had to leave the country. Most people left, including my father's sister and her children. Very many families did not want to return to Britain and decided to stay in India only because that is what they knew and loved. Both my parents were married previously within the community but subsequently remarried which is when me and my sibling came along. My father always wanted to reverse his decision but unfortunately by then, the British had left India and the course of our lives had changed forever. They could not find jobs and were reduced to abject poverty.

You are a motivational speaker now. In your opinion, what are major problems of this generation due to which they need a motivational speaker to get on stage and talk about it?

Ans. I think I'm going to position this as five key points:

- (1) As President Obama once put it, they want big houses, fast cars, great holidays but they don't want to have to work for it. Most young people want the easy way out and once they think that they have some talent, they start to believe that its that talent that can take them places, which isn't at all the reality. While talent may get you through the door, its only hard work that can keep you there. Real life stories are the only way to help people to understand how hard work can get them to where you want to be.
- (2) They tend to start off in life believing that they can achieve anything and slowly that enthusiasm dies. That is something that needs to be kept alive by way of motivation & inspiration. Only a good role model & true stories can help achieve this goal.
- (3) Most young people find it very hard to accept constructive criticism and even without it, their attitude almost always gets in the way of their progress. I am a living example of how I buried my pride, ate humble pie and remained small & insignificant in order to learn to excel in order to achieve my own dreams and I did this under very difficult environments (the world of Banking). I encountered people who had egos bigger than themselves only to realise that humility & attitude will ultimately bring success and not a bad attitude.
- (4) Many young people are making technology their lives! While we have to agree that its very important to keep up with the times and to stay a bit ahead, what seems to be happening is that the obsession of technology is leading them to ignore very important and basic skills such as communication, etiquette and so on, resulting in them not being able to communicate effectively or to behave appropriately since human interaction is key to our development & success.
- (5) Many young people are afraid to ask for help. They believe that people are too busy or too big by way of position in order to want to help. This mind-set needs to be changed. Again, I used my own example of how I asked for help and how CEOs mentored me, supported me and helped me to the top. Telling young people stories, giving them real life examples, showing them evidence and making them understand that they too can be highly successful is better done in real life and by actually speaking to them that lecturing them or sending them a document to read about it instead. This is why Public Speaking is so important not just for them to learn but for them to take forward as well.



Back in your time, who inspired and motivated you to sit tight and fight?

Ans. No one motivated me to sit tight and thank goodness they didn't. They did motivate me to fight and to keep going. My parents are number one on the list. They didn't have anything to give but they gave it all. The poorest of the poor helped us and saved our lives and cared for us when our parents were not around. They are the people whom we grew up with and the people we love and care for so its not really the city but the people of that city that live in our hearts. A building is simply concrete without a soul if people don't dwell in it. In the same way, a city wouldn't be worth anything if there wasn't that warmth, generosity, and kindness that come from the people of that city. I grew up with these people every day, they made me the person I am today, they taught me humility, something that has been the key ingredient to my success.

How did Kolkata make you fall in love with it?

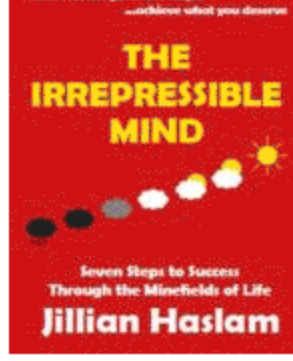
Ans. We were very little and lived in abject poverty and the people who lived around us were really and truly the kindest people in the world (in my opinion). They didn't have anything to give but they gave it all. The poorest of the poor helped us and saved our lives and cared for us when our parents were not around. They are the people whom we grew up with and the people we love and care for so its not really the city but the people of that city that live in our hearts. A building is simply concrete without a soul if people don't dwell in it. In the same way, a city wouldn't be worth anything if there wasn't that warmth, generosity, and kindness that come from the people of that city. I grew up with these people every day, they made me the person I am today, they taught me humility, something that has been the key ingredient to my success.

Are you accustomed with the major Bengali festivals and the culture?

Ans. Yes. I certainly am and I think they all have a lot of meaning to them. Its just when we were little, at the time of Holi, they used to throw water balloons at our heads and chests and necks etc. and it hurt quite badly and its something I will never forget. It was also quite embarrassing at times since we were all girls. During Diwali too, they used to throw chocolate bombs in front of our little room, the detonation was unbearable. We lived in Kidderpore at the time and there was hardly any electricity in addition to there being no sanitation, no ventilation and we had one small room with a huge building in front of us and so the smell of cordite was terrible too. When we used to go out, they used to throw those bombs into the rickshaw as well. Apart from those two festivals, we used to enjoy all the other festivals as much as the local people would.

Tell us more about the book that you have written?

Ans. My first book is titled Indian.English. Its a memoir about the good, the bad and the ugly that we faced while growing up in Calcutta (India). There isn't a single person who has read the book who has not said that it broke their hearts and taught them very many lessons in life. I have since then had a screenplay written that won the Best Screenplay award in the epic and historical category at the Monaco Film Festival and since then Hollywood has picked it up and is turning it into a feature production. You can learn more about the story at www.indianenglishthebook.com or www.indianenglishthemovie.com.



Do you still think of the dark times and feel that your uneven past is the reason behind shaping your personality and making you the person that you are now?

Ans. I never think of them as dark times. I always think of them as "great times only because it made the person I am today (its a gift that I couldn't have got if I was born anywhere else in the world). I would give anything to return to Kolkata (to my home, to my little room in Kidderpore) and live there. Hopefully, I will one day, soon. I miss the love and the kindness that existed among the poorest of the poor (something that all the money in the world cannot buy). My dream now is to try and make a difference to as many people as I can before my time is done on this earth.



Do you feel that optimism is the key that always leads to something good, if not the best.?

Ans. Optimism is always good but it takes more than that to weather all storms and to come through not just alive but stronger than before - resilience, persistence and mental strength are key to being able to stand-up every time you step on a minefield (a minefield of life). One must be able to commit and recommit every time they fall down. I talk about these attributes in my next book (scheduled to be out in September 2017) *The Irrepressible Mind*.

Your book has been taken by a script writer for your biopic, suggest a title for it!

Ans. Answered above. As of now Indian.English. is being used as the working title but it will be the job of the producer & director to come up with a title that will work for a global audience.

We would be honoured if you could give any message for Laughalaugh.

Ans. Some of us (including me) would never be heard by the world if it wasn't for organisations like yours. Its as though we are instruments (beautiful instruments) but without you or people like you, no one would ever hear our stories or hear the wonderful music that we have to share with people around the globe. A huge thank you to LaughaLaugh! for this opportunity and for being an instrument of peace, love and the glue that binds us all together.

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