

### IN TODAY'S PAPER

- Front Page
- Nation
- Calcutta
- Bengal
- Foreign
- Business
- Sports
- Horse Racing
- t2
- Opinion

### SPONSORED

Property **NEW**

### CITIES & REGIONS

- Metro
- North Bengal
- Northeast
- Jharkhand
- Bihar
- Odisha

### WEEKLY FEATURES

- Knowhow Mon
- Jobs Tue
- You Mon
- Salt Lake Fri
- 7days Sun
- Graphiti Sun

### LEISURE

- Sudoku
- Sudoku New
- Crossword
- Jumble
- Gallery

### ARCHIVES

Since 1 March, 1999

### PRESS RELEASES

- Businesswire India
- NewsVair
- PR Newswire

### EXTRAS

Travel

### THE TELEGRAPH

- About Us
- Advertise
- Feedback
- Contact Us

Front Page > Calcutta > Story

Like 5 Tweet 0 G+ 0

## Tiny room home to memories

Jhinuk Mazumdar

### JILLIAN RETURNS TO HER ROOTS



Jillian Haslam (left) and her sister Donna with kids of the Kidderpore locality where they grew up; Jillian in front of the one-room house at 49/5/3D Bhukailash Kanchan Colony, where she spent her childhood



(From left) Jillian at the grocery shop of Ganesh Lal Gupta, now run by his son Santosh. "He (Ganesh) would mix the spices and wrap them in a newspaper before handing it over to my mum," she said. "We didn't have money to give him, but he never said no to us." Her paanwala, Abdul Subhan, from whom she used to take eggs and bread, enquired about her mother. Jillian told him she had passed away. Pictures by Sanjoy Chattopadhyaya

The 8X10ft room in Kidderpore is no match for her "three-storeyed mansion" in Hertfordshire, southern England.

But for Jillian Haslam, the globetrotting motivational speaker and author, "nothing can measure the happiness and the memories shared in that tiny room".

It was homecoming for Jillian as she stepped into the room - her first visit on Christmas since leaving the city and moving to Delhi in 1987 - in the house at 49/5/3D Bhukailash Kanchan Colony.

Here, she used to live with her parents, four siblings and seven cats.

Pointing to a corner in the room, Jillian said her mother, Margaret, used to keep the Christmas tree there and "it would keep falling three or four times at least beside Kanchenjunga, a covered mountain of clothes".

"My mum would make small baskets out of cardboards and stuff them with sweets so that each one of us would have something on Christmas," she said.

"What else is homecoming? It's almost surreal. I don't think anything in the world could match coming back to this little room and reliving the 24th night... when we would help decorate the room with streamers.... I would ensure that I did not fall asleep before my mum."

On Friday, Jillian spent more than an hour at Kidderpore with her sister Donna, who lives in Teghoria near the airport. They remembered how they would carry buckets of water from the tube well down the alley to wash their clothes or "use one of the three toilets meant for 3,000 people of the locality".

"We would walk down to the meat shop amidst tease and catcalls to collect bones, which our mum would boil to make soup," Jillian said.

The Calcutta girl with two Mercs and a Porsche in her garage has inspired a Hollywood film, in which a big star could play her.

When she was growing up, her mother would get the room whitewashed every Christmas, Jillian said. They had to stack everything in the corridor and "get abused and scolded" by people for blocking the way. "My mum was fond of tea... in the middle of the junk, she would ask for a cup of tea."

"Every year, my mum would try to arrange something special for us at Christmas... sometimes there was no sign of anything till the 24th.

"On one such 24th night, there was no electricity and my mum was out. I had used two matchsticks to light a candle and a stove to warm milk for my sister. She returned around 11 in the night. I could see a bunch of lettuce peeking out of her bag... I knew she had got chicken for us... we were so happy."

Her mother wanted to have tea but there were no matchsticks to light the stove. Jillian remembered her mother looking at her and saying, "Run off my little match girl and borrow some matchsticks."

"We didn't have much... but we managed... living mostly on credit," she said.

She spoke of Ganesh *mudi* - the neighbourhood shopkeeper who gave them cereals, potatoes and spices on credit - and the tea shop owner who gave her milk to keep her sister Susan alive and the paanwala from whom she would take eggs and bread.

Every year, Jillian makes it a point to visit Calcutta and Kidderpore during winter. She had last entered the room three years ago.

"Coming here makes me emotional and happy... there is also sadness... I can't help but remember what happened," she said. "But I know how dangerous it is to think negatively. I would not have achieved what I have if I chose to remember only the negative things."

Like 5 Tweet 0 G+ 0

### More stories in Calcutta

- Where Calcutta was on Christmas
- Slow and steady...
- Power of speech in full flow

**SIDDDHA**

My home will have the world's longest rooftop skywalk

**SIDDDHA ALAXIA**  
A RIVA-SIDDDHA PROJECT

Rajarhat, near City Centre II  
**Call 4040 1010**

**Personal Loan Calculator**

Instant Online Approval in minutes. Calculate EMI/Lakh. Check Now!

→