

A Global Woman

Richard: Hello Allison, one could almost call you a global woman.

Allison: Yes, perhaps, I think, probably, I was born in Hong Kong, and went to school in England, and lived in Australia, and now I'm here in Norway.

Richard: That's quite a mixture. Tell me about this, why were you born in Hong Kong?

Allison: Well, my father was a colonial servant, as they were called in those days, and... so, my sisters and I were all born in Hong Kong, and he worked for the British government, which of course was the colonial ruler of Hong Kong until nineteen ninety seven.

Richard: Alright, but you didn't go to school in Hong Kong?

Allison: No, I... it was the old practice of "you send the children back to the mother country to be educated." So, yes, I was sent to boarding school at the age of ten, in England.

Richard: I see.

Allison: And, would fly home twice a year.

Richard: I see. An upbringing very unlike most people's one might say.

Allison: I suppose so.

Richard: Did this give you strength? Or, was it a problem for you?

Allison: Well, it seemed quite normal to me at the time actually, I didn't really think about it as I was experiencing it, but I sometimes used to wish that I came from, you know, a part of England that I could say "that's where I'm from." And, my mother would say she was from Yorkshire, but of course, she was also a daughter of a colonial... But, it's... sometimes I would want to be like the others, yes.

Richard: As a child of the Empire, I suppose you spoke English at home in Hong Kong, and obviously at your school in England, did you pick up any local languages in Hong Kong?

Allison: Well, yes, as I was born in Hong Kong I had a Chinese amah, who was my... like a nanny, and who spoke to me in Cantonese, and I spoke Cantonese mainly before I went to school.

Richard: I see.

Allison: It was, I guess, my first language.

Richard: I see, that's interesting, and then you mentioned Australia?

Allison: Yes, when... after I was married, my husband and I were both Hong Kong children, and we found England far too cold and depressing, and thought Australia seemed like a good idea, and we migrated in the early eighties, and... We have three Australian children.

Richard: I see. I've met a lot of people who've been born in different parts of the world, and often their brothers, uncles, and aunts have also travelled a lot, is this true in your wider family?

Allison: Yes, both my husband and myself, we have have siblings who live in different countries. My eldest sister has lived in Malaysia for many years, and she's now in Australia, and my husband's brother has moved around a lot. He's in Canada now, but has lived in Singapore, Switzerland...

Richard: You make the world sound so small, do you ever feel that you perhaps don't have a real home? Is your real home Australia, or what would you say?

Allison: My real home will always be Hong Kong. When I go back there, this is my childhood home, the home where I was born, it's a strange place to think of as home, but it was my home. Australia was my home for over twenty years, so I'm very comfortable there, but not really a true Aussie.

Richard: I do see, but when you go back to Hong Kong now, it's part of the Republic of China now, Communist, you know, what do you feel going back there?

Allison: Well, Hong Kong has never really changed its character, it's not in a least bit Communist really, if you go there.

Richard: Isn't it? Right.

Allison: It's very Capitalist, and the Chinese people are... have always been the Chinese people, the way they do business, the way they live, I don't think there are really big changes since it's become part of China, no.

Richard: Perhaps you could tell me, what do the local people, the local Chinese, think of the long period when they were part of the British Empire?

Allison: It depends which generation you speak to. There's the generation who were the servants, if you will, it's a very... not a popular term these days, but the people who worked for the British, and they are actually quite traditional, and I think they saw a lot of the benefits of the British system.

Richard: Like your nanny?

Allison: Like my nanny, my amah.

Richard: Your amah, yes.

Allison: But, I think perhaps, certainly, my parents had an amah who was the same age as my mother, and all her children are university educated. And, I think... I think, there's a kind of affection. I think there was a period when there was an anti-British feeling. I think now, it's, you know, I think they actually do like the ties with Britain, the British way of doing things, yes.

Richard: I see, and of the three languages in your family: Cantonese, Spanish, and English, which of them do you feel is the most useful in the modern world?

Allison: Well, you know, it probably would be English. I do know that in the Americas, and South America obviously, Spanish is very useful. It depends where you want to go and where you want to live, but personally it would have to be English.

Richard: Allison, would you like to sign off, in let's say... Cantonese?

Allison: Ok, "goi nei."

Richard: Ok, nice talking to you.