



Nirmal and Joy Dutta

Tell us a bit about yourselves –

Nirmal: I was born on a tea estate in Assam where my father was a doctor. I am the oldest of seven children, three boys and four girls. When I was six, I moved to a small town to live with my grandparents so I could attend school. I matriculated there and went to college. I then went to university in Kolkata where I received my masters in anthropology. I worked as an anthropologist for about five years before moving to the UK in 1969.

Joy: I was born in Chandannagar, a small town in West Bengal, about 50km outside Kolkata. It was one of five French territories in India and was a prominent sanctuary for many freedom fighters during India's struggle for independence from the British Raj. I am the youngest of four children, one boy and three girls. My father was General Manager of a large Indian conglomerate in Kolkata. My mother was my inspiration who encouraged me not only to study but also to learn Indian dance and classical music. I was extremely interested in music, singing and dancing. I wanted to go to the famous "Vishwa Bharati" University, founded by the Bengali poet, Nobel Laureate Robindra Nath Tagore, where art, music and dance were taught as major subjects. Ever practical, my mother suggested I should do medicine instead and continue with dance and music as hobbies.

How did you meet –

Joy: Nirmal was a close friend of my cousin from his school days. He first came to our house with my cousin when I was thirteen or fourteen. My mother loved Nirmal and, when I finished school, she was happy for him to escort me to interviews at the medical schools in Kolkata. When I started studying in Kolkata, I was commuting from Chandannagar with Nirmal. I remember my first day at the medical school so clearly. Nirmal dropped me off and went to the university. It rained so hard that day that my school closed quite early. As a stranger to the city, I did not know what to do but fate intervened. I went to a coffee shop nearby and started chatting to a young couple – they were from the same university as Nirmal and offered to take me there. Nirmal and I have been together emotionally ever since.

Nirmal: All of Joy's siblings had arranged marriages. We were worried that Joy's parents would never approve of our relationship as I was not from the same caste. We decided to get married secretly in a registry office in Kolkata. At the time, Joy was only a fourth-year medical student, and I had just started my first job at the Home Office, Government of India. Only my three friends, who were the witnesses to our marriage, knew about the marriage and we continued to live separately until we left Kolkata. When Joy qualified as a doctor and completed her training, her brother who

was living in UK at the time and was aware of our secret marriage, suggested that we move to the UK and start our married life there together without family pressure. It was not long before we got the blessings of Joy's parents.

Joy: We both applied for emigration vouchers. I had to apply for my passport in my maiden name as the local officials knew my parents. After getting the passport we realised we had to get married again for legal reasons. Finally, I came to the UK in 1968 and Nirmal joined me later in 1969.

How did your lives evolve after arriving in the UK –

Joy: My first job was Senior House Officer in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. I worked in many different hospitals in UK, most importantly Leighton General Hospital, the first District General Hospital in UK.

Nirmal: I did not see a future for myself as an anthropologist in the UK. I took night classes in computer programming. My tutor suggested I apply for a job which fortuitously was in Cheshire where Joy was based. The day Joy moved to Leighton Hospital I also passed my driving test. I clearly remember going with Joy and our young son to buy our first car. It was a new Triumph Toledo – we only found out later that in those days doctors could get 10% discount on new cars.

I moved up the ranks from programmer to Computer Services Manager at Siemens. When Siemens took over Nixdorf in 1993, along with our whole IT department, I moved to Nixdorf in Bracknell. A few years later I became the service delivery manager for Siemens' in-house IT services in the UK on behalf Nixdorf. When Nixdorf relocated all the key IT roles to Southampton in 2001, I decided to take redundancy and retire.

Joy: Our son, Shomit, was born in Cheshire in 1971. He went to the Royal Grammar School in High Wycombe, Bucks after which he went to Oxford University for his Classics Degree and PHD. Our daughter, Shormila, was born in 1979 in Denham Village, Bucks. She went to Beaconsfield Grammar School for girls. She graduated in English from Birmingham University and then she decided to study medicine like her mother. She qualified as a doctor in 2007 and now she is a GP.

Although we have always loved living in the UK, there were times when we missed our families and considered relocating to India. In 1983 we took it seriously, sold our house in Denham, resigned from our respective jobs, packed our belongings, and left for Kolkata. Nirmal took an IT consultancy job in Saudi Arabia just in case the move did not work. We knew the move would be difficult but still we felt that we had to give it a go. Now when we look back at our failed move, we feel that it was a decision worth taking. As a family, we learnt a lot from the experience and this helped us during our relocation back to the UK.

When we returned to the UK in 1984, we settled in Beaconsfield and lived there until 2014. I re-joined the NHS and moved to Heathrow Airport as a Senior Port Medical Officer at the Health Control Unit. Nirmal also returned to his old job at Siemens in Sunbury on Thames. We have never looked back since.

When did you learn to play bridge?

Joy: While I was working at Heathrow, I learnt medical acupuncture. I used to practice acupuncture in hospital, and also had a private practice at home. One of my private patients was Tessa Templeton, an EBU bridge teacher who had her own Bridge Club and School at Gerrards Cross. She suggested that I should learn bridge and I persuaded Nirmal to join me. We went to many EBU bridge congresses and won a few prizes. In 2014 when we were planning to leave Beaconsfield and move to East Twickenham to be near our daughter, Tessa told us that Richmond Bridge Club was one

of the biggest bridge clubs in the country. We did not realise then that we would be living only five minutes-walk away from the clubhouse. We joined RBC in September 2014 and have been members ever since.

What do you like most about RBC?

Nirmal: RBC is a very well-run club. Most of the members are very friendly and we always have a good time. Our proudest bridge achievement was winning the Lucia Turner Cup. Our names are on the honours board!

What other hobbies do you have?

Joy: We both love gardening, taking long walks and spending time with our grandchildren. We have three beautiful granddaughters. I also enjoy my dancing and singing. Nirmal also loves dabbling in the stock market and watching cricket.

What are your proudest moments?

Nirmal: Our son is a playwright and going to the press night of his play, Stumped, at Hampstead Theatre in London was special. Joy and I were also immensely proud when our daughter qualified as a doctor. She is a GP in Ealing and will soon be joining Parkshot Medical Practice in Richmond.

Do your children play bridge?

Nirmal: Our son used to play bridge with the late Harold Pinter and his wife Lady Antonia Fraser. After Harold's death he has continued to play bridge with Lady Fraser and her friends once a week.

Finally, what is your secret to looking so young?

Nirmal: I have a glass of whisky and Joy has a gin and tonic every other night! Moderate exercise and regular walking help us to keep fit.