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Recovering Kalimpong

He used to talk about looking out the window and seeing the mountains. ... He couldn't quite remember the recipe for chapatis, and over the years he tried to make them, but he loved his curries. I remember sitting down at the table one time and we were all perspiring and he wasn't. But he was very quiet about it, didn't say too much. And he just didn't want to go back.¹

The Kalimpong settlers' 'silence' about their heritage has emerged as the most powerful and often perplexing intergenerational legacy of the Homes emigration scheme. Almost every descendant has informed me that questions asked of their parents about their Indian heritage were met with responses that indicated significant discomfort or unwillingness to talk about it. The consequent reluctance to talk about any aspect of their childhood has puzzled and intrigued their children and grandchildren, who simply wanted to know something about this thread of their family history. As Gilbert Hawkins's above comment beautifully illustrates, whisper-fine glimpses of India in these otherwise silent histories have been woven together by descendants in their attempt to forge narratives out of barely anything at all. The descendants' visits to Kalimpong to fill these silences from the 1980s onwards have triggered a decisive turning point in the narrative, which I have argued throughout this book to be tied in multiple ways to the shifting relationship between India in New Zealand, be it in the sphere of politics, empire, economies, immigration or imagination.

In this chapter, the phrase 'Indian heritage' encapsulates the circumstances of the Kalimpong settlers' birth, racial ancestry and upbringing at the Homes. These three components were each linked to major stigmas in the early twentieth century regarding illegitimacy, race and institutionalization; and here I attempt to tease apart these separate strands within the broader context of shame.² The drive to understand parental silence has preoccupied Kalimpong descendants in the same moment that historians have turned their attention to family secrets and shame. Deborah Cohen's argument that family secrets were a means of

delineating and managing the borders between private and public spheres has been highly influential in my analysis of the descendant testimony presented in this chapter. It is with a light touch that I bring together the many voices and stories that I heard in a variety of settings over the course of conducting this research.³ I begin with parental silences and then move to other aspects of the descendant experience: contact with the local Kalimpong community, being 'mixed race' in New Zealand, material and cultural legacies, and travelling to Kalimpong to find out more about their parent's early lives.

Tanya Evans has argued for 'explicit engagement with the needs, wants and methodologies of family historians' in order to synthesize otherwise disjointed histories, and to find the meeting point between genealogists who tend to work through the material 'backwards' and academics who move 'forwards'.⁴ In this framework my own position has been one of working backwards to my grandmother, and then across to the other emigrants' families, encountering descendants as they reached the point of intersecting interest. Building a collective narrative was an iterative and mutually reinforcing process; descendants possessed rich material about their family stories and informed opinions about the historical context, but were often bereft of knowledge of the larger scheme. The more they told me of their individual stories the more nuance I could bring to collective narrative, and to my engagement with the next person I encountered; and for descendants, knowing more about the scheme and of other families' pathways changed the way they understood their own stories. This chapter thus represents a constant interplay between the twin processes of addressing the absence of the Homes scheme in the public record and recovering a collective memory of the descendant community. I attempt, above all else, to bring the spirit of this ongoing and very affective – and effective – collaboration to the page.

Silences

I was interested to hear your interview on National Radio recently. My Dad was one of the 1912 arrivees, H. S. Holder, and like so many Kalimpong kids spoke little about his experiences at Dr Graham's school or the circumstances prior to his attending.⁵

Lou Holder's first words of communication with me were typical of the way descendants have broached the subject of their parents' Indian background.

The perception that the Kalimpong settlers did not speak freely about their heritage is something that has, almost without exception, been acknowledged as a reason for their children's and grandchildren's curiosity. Here I aim to break down that generalized sentiment into a more nuanced understanding of a silence which has occurred across a spectrum – from not offering information, to a reluctance or refusal to answer questions, to outright denials of any Indian heritage, concealment and intentionally misleading their families. There has also been considerable variation in the reverberations of those silences in the next generation. Most descendants I have been in contact with grew up with some limited knowledge of their Indian heritage and filled in the gaps in later life, often after their parents' deaths, through research and travel. Others had no inkling of the scheme that brought their parents to New Zealand until I contacted them. In some families this has meant prior confusion about whether their ancestry was Indian, Māori or European. Some have known a considerable amount about their parents' backgrounds, but all were unaware of the scale of the emigration scheme.

Gavin Mortimore phoned me the day after receiving my letter, in which I suggested his father, Rend, was possibly a Kalimpong emigrant. 'You've told me more about my father in one letter than I learnt in 60 years', Gavin informed me.⁶ He was delighted and had already shared the relatively minor information from my letter with his six siblings worldwide. Gavin told me of conversations at their many family gatherings that would always come back to speculation about the origins of his father, who died in 1978. Rend had never talked about India – they 'quizzed him' to no avail. Rend's children would usually conclude that he must have been assisted to come to New Zealand after fighting in the Second World War, which was the earliest knowledge they had of him. 'But then', someone would say, 'what about Aunty Jeanette?'⁷ For the family to learn that their father had lived in Wellington and laboured on farms for twenty years prior to settling in Invercargill was as much of a revelation as the Kalimpong background. Despite this sudden burst of information from an unexpected source, the details immediately rang true to Rend's descendants and were accepted wholeheartedly.

Several similar cases of revelation emerged when the University of Otago issued a press release about my research early in 2013. Newspaper articles and an interview on National Radio brought numerous descendants forward. One listener was reminded of a friend's father to whom 'something horrible had happened' in his past.⁸ When I rang her friend, she was interested, but negative about the possibility of her father, Donald, being a Kalimpong emigrant. I did

have a name on the list of emigrants that matched his, but it was a reasonably common name. As she began to tell the story of her father's removal from India on a 'ghost ship' to then be raised at an unknown orphanage in Wellington, I began to suspect that this was a family story that concealed a Kalimpong background. The only other detail the woman had was that the 'Indian nurse' who had apparently accompanied him on the ship took a lifelong interest in him, and they knew her as 'Aunty'. When she said the name of the 'Aunty', the Homes link was confirmed, as she was a well-known Kalimpong settler. Donald had died only a few years before, aged ninety-one. The topic of his childhood was one that his children knew they were not allowed to mention, as this would make him extremely agitated and upset. Their mother would always stop them if they started asking him about it.⁹

In both of the aforementioned cases, the descendants at least knew that their ancestry was Indian. Deborah French's family did not even have that knowledge. According to her great-granddaughter, Deborah 'was sent to New Zealand at about 15 years old and never spoke about her experiences. In fact, we grew up believing we were French until she died in the mid-90s when we found a yearly Kalimpong calendar and letters from the school'.¹⁰ In another family, the two children of a male settler had formed differing opinions of his heritage. One believed that their ancestry was Indian, the other Māori. This had repercussions for his many descendants, as his great-grandson wrote:

Growing up I always believed I had a trace of Indian heritage but in my teen years I realised that there was no proof available to me. ... I think the worst thing is just not knowing something, or being unsure of something. People notice I have darker bloodlines than most British settlers and usually think it's Māori and I have been unsure of how to address their observations. ...

My daughter had to do a school project and present on her family tree and I had to explain the uncertainty to her as well so it's really not a nice feeling. Just finding out about this little information you have amazingly discovered brought tears to my eyes.¹¹

This testimony raises the issue of appearance, the telling factor that for many Kalimpong emigrants raised curiosity. The 'dark complexion' noted in some earlier documentation had often disappeared from families by the next generation, as Graham and others hoped and theorized. In others, it has continued to show for several generations. In my own family, my father and my brothers inherited Lorna's dark skin and eye colour. Because of this, there was never any question about the mixed-race heritage, plus we knew she came

from India because of the tea-planting memorabilia on permanent display in the family home. Numerous descendants have testified to a similar situation, where the tea-planting heritage, and hence the knowledge of India as the place of birth, was never hidden (yet never really spoken about). This perhaps is a pointer to the changes effected by Indian Independence. Whereas for the next generation, admitting to an Indian heritage suggested something exotic, this was not the case when India was under British rule. The great unknown for many families, then, was how and why they migrated to New Zealand. When my mother asked Lorna in the 1970s about where she had grown up, Lorna underlined her unwillingness to talk about it, simply saying, 'You wouldn't want to know.'

Yvonne Gale's family story was very similar to mine. Her grandmother, Jean Mackay, was sent to Dunedin in 1911 with her brother John. Yvonne began to research her Indian background some years after Jean's death. As with the Peters family, colonial objects and photographs prompted curiosity from childhood onwards. Yvonne's father remembered regularly receiving five pound boxes of tea from India, and Yvonne credited a photograph of Jean and John in Singapore, en route to New Zealand, as 'spiking her interest'.¹² Piecing these fragments together with an otherwise total absence of information, the only plausible explanation for Jean's descendants was that her tea planter father took the children on a world tour and abandoned them in New Zealand. Unlike Lorna, Jean denied her ('obvious') Indian ancestry, which made it difficult to ask questions about the topic. As Yvonne recalled, 'We did bring it up, but she was so adamant that she didn't have any Indian heritage – you just had to stop asking her.' The only time Yvonne remembered Jean 'letting something out' about her Indian background was a reference to plantation life, which Yvonne 'didn't know was the truth or not – about peacocks in the garden, and having servants. But that, and the grandmother I knew, didn't go together'.¹³

The perceived dissonance between Jean's New Zealand life and that which came before speaks to the gap in social meaning between 'having servants' in India and New Zealand; but it is also a reminder of the working class status that the Kalimpong settlers had come to embody by the time the next generations came along. Moreover, without a close understanding of the connections between discrete locations in the British Empire, Jean's stories were difficult to believe. As Yvonne stated, she struggled to make a coherent narrative from a story that took her grandmother 'from India, to Owaka. It just seemed a huge jump'. When Yvonne sent the information from the Homes file to John's (Jean's brother) family, his widow phoned her in tears, saying that John had tried to talk about it, but they had not believed him.¹⁴ Lou Holder's father, Henry, 'never talked about'

his upbringing, but did share many adventurous tales. Lou felt that Henry went to some lengths to invent 'extravagant stories' about his background to conceal the truth.¹⁵ Another descendant, Brian Hepenstall, wrote that his grandfather 'never said much about his past. He was a great storyteller so it is hard to know the truth about some of the things he said'.¹⁶ Niall Allcock described his father in law, Wilfred Snelleksz, as 'a great orator ... but not very open' regarding his Indian heritage, although his Indian parentage was never denied. Niall felt that Wilfred was proud of his ancestry despite refusing to discuss the specifics of his background.¹⁷

The stigmas that surround the Kalimpong story regarding race, illegitimacy and institutionalization have a complex legacy in these silences. While the emigrants' shame about their parents not being married has not been directly referenced in descendant testimony, there would certainly have been efforts to conceal this mark against their respectability. Race and institutionalization, however, were commonly believed by descendants to explain the reluctance to divulge details of their Indian heritage. George Langmore called his house in Dunedin 'Lopchu' after the tea estate his father owned, and he and his wife visited India several times. But according to his granddaughter he 'never talked' about India, and while the upbringing at Kalimpong was never hidden, the fact that he was Indian was.¹⁸ Mary Gibson's (nee Ochterloney) daughter remembered being 'excited about telling her teachers and schoolmates all about myself' on her first day at school, but was told by her mother 'not to mention anything about India'.¹⁹ She felt her mother's shame 'as if it were my own' from that day forward. For others, the primary stigma was the trauma of growing up in an institution, due to separation from family or conditions at the Homes. Fred Leith was remembered by his wife, Joan, as being 'very expressive about his gratitude to Daddy Graham and Daddy Purdie. But he never talked about his life at the Homes'.²⁰ Mary Milne recalled the Dinning sisters describing the Homes as a private school for tea planters' children 'and were very indignant about it being looked at as anything else'.²¹ When I asked if the Kalimpong women spoke of a desire to revisit the Homes, Mary recalled Nancy Dinning saying 'she'd *never* go back to *that place* again. She said "It's become an orphanage so we won't be going back there"'.²²

In contrast, Tony (Tom) Spalding's children, Margaret and Ian, did not sense a particular silence around the Indian heritage when they were growing up. They were 'always aware' of the Indian ancestry, plantation life, and the circumstances that led to their father being sent to Kalimpong and later to New Zealand. However, Ian felt that his father 'portrayed the Homes as a boarding school, not

as a “home” type of thing’ and both he and Margaret struggled to remember their father sharing any information about Kalimpong:

Margaret: He used to sing ‘Remember St Andrews and old Kalimpong’.

Ian: And stories of walking down in the cool mornings from Grant Cottage, through the – what’s that flower? – cosmos, orange cosmos. He loved cosmos. And he used to walk down and it was misty and he had these huge rows of those. But not a lot of school memories, mainly from the plantation.²³

Both Margaret and Ian attributed their father’s lack of discussion about the Homes simply to it being an experience that did not lend itself to the same storytelling as plantation life did. This again raises the question of what we mean by ‘talking’. Answering questions and telling stories are two very different things. Because the Spaldings never felt that information was being withheld from them, they had less need to ask questions. Margaret and Ian fondly remembered their father’s pact with his brother Charles that ‘they wouldn’t marry until they could live in the manner which they were accustomed to on the tea plantation. ... So you see I think the plantation was always a foundation of their lives really.’²⁴ Hence for those emigrants who remembered plantation life, this provided a positive framing for their lives that was not available to those sent from their place of birth in very early life.

The Kalimpong emigrants’ reticence in talking about the Indian heritage has also been understood as a generational trait and one that did not necessarily originate with difficult memories of their upbringing. Sydney Williams seldom talked to his son, Vic, about India, the Homes or his early life in New Zealand. Nevertheless Vic felt that his father had a good life in New Zealand and enjoyed his career with the Post and Telegraph Department. While he had been interested to learn more about the circumstances of his father’s background from the family’s personal file held at the Homes, the information did not significantly alter Vic’s understanding of his father’s life.²⁵ Sylvia Slater, the only daughter of Kalimpong emigrants Connie Walker and Horace Brooks, shared a similar sentiment. Her parents’ generation was one that did not talk freely about personal matters, and if information was not offered, children were not encouraged to ask.²⁶ While there were many ways of interpreting the silence around this heritage, one common thread that I noted in my experiences with Kalimpong families was that the recovery of archival information prompted very animated conversations among descendants. This is still a highly emotive subject, but silence is not the way descendants cope with their emotions. The boundaries between public and

private space, as described by Cohen, are not guarded as they were in the early twentieth century.²⁷

Communities

I think the Dinnings were a bit uncomfortable with people knowing that they came from India. Because one thing I can remember when we were little, they had a big gathering of OGBs [Old Girls and Boys] at their house ... and then we went to St Ninian's church in Karori which I think was their church. And they showed the film 'The Lollipop Tree'. But I think the Dinnings never divulged to friends that they'd come from India, they said that they'd come from England I think. But they were lovely.²⁸

How was it that an open and vibrant group of people were nevertheless remembered for their silence about the very heritage that connected them so closely to each other? Anne Beckett's description (above) of the Dinning sisters revealed something of the subtle workings of the Kalimpong community in Wellington. Although the Dinnings' house was a focal point for gatherings, they were also remembered for their concealment of their Indian heritage. This contradiction is partly explained by the Dinnings' assertions about the Homes being a private school for the children of tea planters, rather than a home for mixed-race children; and there is general sentiment among descendants that while the Kalimpong emigrants might have spent a lot of time together, they did not talk about their school days 'as such'.²⁹ But the community also seemed to function on a tacit understanding that some were more accepting of their Indian ancestry than others. This issue was accorded a sensitivity and respect that was due at least in part to the very high regard in which the emigrants were held by the next generation of this community.

Whether or not the emigrants 'talked about it', contact with others from Kalimpong usually meant descendants had some awareness of the Homes. I have found evidence of close, lifelong relationships with fellow emigrants in all of the main urban centres. Particularly in the North Island, there has been a practice of descendants referring to the Kalimpong friends of their parents as 'Auntie' and 'Uncle'. When I first met with the Gammie family (Gavin and Isabella's children) and Sylvia Slater in Wellington, they referred constantly to aunts and uncles, some of whom were blood relations, others not. (Another descendant spoke of not realizing that an 'aunty' was not a blood relative until

very late in childhood.) The Gammie family forged lasting ties between the Wellington group and settlers further north, since Betty, Alison and Moira lived in Auckland, Fergus in Hamilton, and Gavin and Kathleen in Lower Hutt; plus the Kalimpong spouses of Alison, Gavin and Kathleen each had siblings in the North Island. Like the Gammies, Sylvia's parents were both Kalimpong emigrants. As neither of her parents had siblings in New Zealand, and Sylvia was an only child, her family *was* the Kalimpong community. She and the Gammies thought of their relationship as akin to being cousins. Despite this closeness, Sylvia does not remember her parents ever talking about Kalimpong, unlike 'Uncle Gavin and Auntie Isabel' who, as even Sylvia recalled, often reminisced about their upbringing.

In our first meeting, the Gammie family collectively remembered frequent gatherings, as well as several occasions where principals of the Homes were hosted by the Dinnings or the Gammies on visits to New Zealand.³⁰ When the same people were interviewed as a group a year later, Anne Beckett suggested that the 'big gatherings' probably did not occur as often as she originally thought, 'but it's just that looking back they were quite memorable.'³¹ The occasions when they did all get together were remembered for the delicious curries, and the children sitting together on the floor while their parents reminisced about aspects of life in India in their distinctive Kalimpong accent. The Dinnings' house in Karori was 'quite grand, and large, almost like a palace' in Anne's recollection, with 'lots of ornaments ... and lovely china'. For the Dinnings, and several other unmarried emigrants, substantial inheritances from their fathers brought some continuity to their pre-Kalimpong social status, at least in material circumstance. Mary Milne, who grew up in the South Island but moved to Wellington in her late teens, also had strong memories of the Karori house:

You'd have afternoon tea at 3 o'clock at the Dinnings. That was right on – everything was precise on time, meals and everything. It would be like high afternoon tea, it would always be nice, silver tea service, lovely china teacups and serviettes. They were very ladylike, and that was the British way ... everybody used to remark on going to the Dinnings for afternoon tea.³²

Apart from the bigger gatherings, several descendants have recalled regular visits between the Dinnings and their parents. Anne Beckett said that her father, Gavin Gammie, 'would go and prune their trees or help with the garden, just things like that. And we'd always go and have a meal there.'³³ Likewise the Dinnings would catch the bus and the train to come and visit her parents. Mary Gibson's (nee Ochterloney) granddaughter remembers taking her to the Dinnings' house

and leaving her to spend the day with them.³⁴ Many descendants also remember visiting Mary. They all speak of these relationships as being very supportive, whether that meant financial assistance or housing or simply a place to stay when they were on holiday. Mary Milne recalled that when she and her husband were travelling north the Dinning sisters would always suggest Kalimpong people that they should stop off and visit on the way. I asked the Gammie group interviewees about other occasions that they might have gathered:

JM: Were there any other activities – sporting, clubs – that brought the OGBS together?

Sylvia: Not that I'm aware of.

Anne: Just getting together for tea.

Sylvia: But no sporting events, or ...

Jim: But what about the card night at the Brookes?³⁵ [*laughter*]

Anne: The cards eh! There were a lot of cards – Auntie Lucy liked the cards.

Sylvia: Yes fair enough, there were cards [*laughter*] ... and the horses. The horse-racing at Trentham.

Anne: Oh yes, Trentham, picnics!

Sylvia: Picnics, and everything.

Anne: I can remember Colin Bayley being there once. A picnic under the tree.

Sylvia: Yes he was there, and Hamish, Katherine ... Auntie Lucy. Yes, the races bought them in, over at Trentham. And as you say, picnics. And I can remember us running up all the old steps, collecting the tickets [*general agreement*].³⁶

I have spoken to numerous descendants of Kalimpong families from the Wellington region during the course of this research. Most could name at least four or five Kalimpong emigrants that their parent kept in contact with, and they describe a community in which there was much humour, close bonds and a special affection for these unique individuals that were a much appreciated presence in their childhoods. Ruth O'Connor, daughter of Margie Smith, wrote that 'as children we were never told of mother's background, which I felt was a great pity because it was something different'.³⁷ However Ruth had begun her letter by naming many of the Kalimpong women who she remembered from her childhood:

Firstly many thanks for the magazine pages you sent, have found them most interesting. Many of the names listed on the Permit Register are so familiar to me, the likes of Constance Walker, Alice Smith, Margaret Fox, Lucy Tweedie were all our 'Aunts'. They would all come to our home on a Sunday afternoon, play cards and have a curry – which I didn't like!³⁸

Molly Chambers was another who developed very close relationships with other Kalimpong families in Wellington. Her son, Clyde, was able to provide detailed information about seven of the women in the 1937 Wellington photograph with Graham, including the whereabouts of their grown children. Their families spent holidays together and supported each other in a myriad of ways. Given this closeness, Clyde 'never thought' to ask those who had grown up at the Homes about their background. He did say that Molly was a little bit embarrassed about her heritage and that there were a couple of 'rough moments' that made her a bit introverted. But he also said that they knew about the Homes, and that Molly always admitted that her mother was Indian and her father British.³⁹ However when her granddaughter went to India to find out more about Molly's upbringing, she avoided questions about where she had grown up and would 'shrug and either say nothing, or say that she didn't know.'⁴⁰ As in every case, there were gender, generational, familial and individual dynamics to consider in unpacking the way that the community (and the silence) functioned. My impression is that the closeness of the community in some way functioned to protect the silence from specific queries. As my father has said, Lorna was 'just Mum', and he did not think to ask questions. Clyde's sentiment regarding the 'aunties' was very similar.

Further south, in Christchurch, Gordon Cullinan kept in touch with two emigrants in Dunedin, Terry Buckley and Harry King. Gordon's daughter-in-law, Gaynor Cullinan, remembered visiting Harry and his family in Dunedin and attending get-togethers in Christchurch.⁴¹ Gaynor knew that the men had come from the same place in India, but no further information was ever offered. On one occasion she asked Harry directly about the Kalimpong background. He looked to Gordon and Terry and 'deferred to them', as they indicated that he should not talk about it.⁴² But Gaynor emphasized that the occasions on which the men were together were 'very special', they were 'very happy together', and while Gordon was 'disappointed' by the lack of correspondence with his parents, he regarded his background and emigration to New Zealand positively. In my own family, Lorna concealed from her family the Kalimpong connection to two women in Dunedin with whom she had lifelong friendships. When I asked my father if Lorna ever spoke of India, he remembered particular occasions prompting some memories:

Don: Probably when I was about midway through school she might have talked – I might have asked more then, because we were doing things at school or something. I remember asking her about what different words were in India for tea and milk. ... But then we'd have the wee trips to Port

Chalmers. ... She'd talk a wee bit then because she was going to Mrs Mac's and that would remind her of coming over here.

JM: So Mrs Mac was someone that she worked for?

Don: Yes at the church ... she must have – probably helped at the church.⁴³

Some time later I discovered that 'Mrs Mac' was in fact Mrs McDonald (nee Kennedy), the Dunedin woman who travelled to Kalimpong in 1908 to volunteer at the Homes, and after her return in the 1920s was mentioned in the *Homes Magazine* as a supportive presence for the emigrants. Although my father had suspected she had some connection to Lorna's early life in Dunedin, it had never occurred to him that she was linked to the Indian background. After all of the occasions we had talked about Lorna's silence, which had never particularly concerned my father, the information about Mrs Mac prompted a strong response from him. 'Why didn't she tell me!' he exclaimed. Another Kalimpong emigrant, Lorna's 'best friend' Mae Sinclair, used to frequently stay with the family at Pine Hill. Don knew that Mae was Indian, but was unaware that they had grown up together and been sent to New Zealand as part of the Homes scheme. Any talk about India would be hushed before the children could really understand what was being said:

JM: So [Mae] used to stay here [at his home in Pine Hill]?

DM: Yes, they were real good friends. ... She used to come up on Saturday afternoon, in the taxi, and [as] we got older and had cars we'd take her home on Sunday night. But she was nice, always tidying up, she was busy, busy, busy all the time. You'd come out here at 7 o'clock in the morning and she's dusting everything [*laughs*].

JM: Did Mae look Indian?

DM: Oh yes. Very much. She had quite a small face, round sort of face, always had her hair tied back in a bun, and quite dark. She seemed to be darker than Nana.

JM: So did you think they'd come here together? That they'd come from the same place?

DM: Yes, we sort of knew. They'd talk about things together sometimes, and you'd listen in, and think a wee bit about it [*laughs*]. But they were pretty shrewd. Mum would soon – if it got too deep she'd whip onto something else so quickly you wouldn't know.⁴⁴

Dunedin was also the place of Mary Milne's early childhood with her mother Kate Pattison, whose house in Broad Bay was often visited by the 'Indian girls' (as Mary refers to them). Although the family moved to Gore and Invercargill before settling in Christchurch, Mary had strong childhood recollections of

the women in Dunedin, whom her mother remained close to throughout her life. Like other descendants, Mary felt that her childhood was greatly enriched by the Kalimpong people who were an integral part of her family. She shared many humorous and colourful stories with me, and her memories portray Kate's friends playing an intimate role in her family life, as a few snippets show:

JM: So the memories you have of the 'Indian girls' in Dunedin then, that's from your very young life ... they must have made quite an impression.

Mary: They did, because they were so happy and always laughing and always full of love. You could never do anything wrong. And Auntie Kathy, as I say, she was such a darling.

JM: And they all called you darling didn't they?

Mary: Oh yes, 'darling', and 'pet', and my aunty would always call me 'dumkey', 'little dumkey', whatever that was, some term of endearment.

JM: In Dunedin, you lived in Broad Bay, and the 'Indian girls' used to come and see you at your place?

Mary: Oh yes ... some of the girls would come out and stay at our place in Broad Bay the night. ... It was just so happy, it really was. They'd all be cooking together and making curries. I mean, we were brought up on curry. And they used to sit up on the verandah ... and we're down here playing ... and we'd turn around and they'd be leaning over the balcony ... 'Oh Kate', they'd say, 'they're darling little girls, they're beautiful little girls.' We thought we were the only little girls in the world at that stage.

JM: What did your Dad think of these Indian girls coming over to visit?

Mary: He thought it was wonderful. Because they were always nice to Dad. And it was good for Mum and Dad, I mean he'd come in from working on the roads, in depression times and they would all be laughing and chattering away, and they'd be so pleased to see – 'so pleased to see you Bill', they'd all say. And they all used to hug one another. It was a nice relationship. ... Auntie Kathy would say to Dad, 'now Bill, I don't think you should have said that to Kate', and 'you know you shouldn't have spoken to little Mary like that, she's not a naughty little girl'. That was her favourite – she'd always say, 'no you're not a naughty little girl, you're a good girl darling'.⁴⁵

Being mixed race in New Zealand

With limited information about their Indian heritage, most Kalimpong descendants grew up with a generalized sense of being mixed race. They

were (and are) often thought to be part-Māori. Exploring this aspect of their experiences contributes an interesting layer to the growing scholarship on interracial communities in New Zealand.⁴⁶ As noted previously, Graham made repeated public statements that New Zealand was an ideal destination for his graduates due to the absence of colour prejudice and acceptance (and prevalence) of racial mixing between British and Māori. This was an outsider's perspective. Few mixed-race Māori claimed this ancestry during the era of assimilation.⁴⁷ Graham's public rhetoric seems to have been an oversimplification of even his own beliefs, as letters to his graduates revealed that he was not surprised that they experienced some hardships owing to their darker skin colour. Graham was apparently satisfied that New Zealand at least allowed his graduates to cross the border and to find a place for themselves in which they could quietly raise their families. His great hope was that both the colour and hence the discrimination would completely disappear in subsequent generations. Graham's biographer, James Minto, echoed this sentiment in his assessment of the emigrants' fortunes, noting that many married New Zealanders and that 'in another generation the Indian connections will probably have been forgotten'.⁴⁸

Few descendants had ever heard their parents speak of discrimination or racial slurs, but most expected that the emigrants would have experienced both. The nature of any such discrimination was complicated by the common perception that the emigrants were part-Māori, as Graham had anticipated and regarded positively. The reactions of the emigrants depended on whether people assumed that they were part-Māori, part-Indian or neither, and on how they felt about those categorizations. According to her granddaughter, Mary Gibson (nee Ochterloney) lived in an area where there were many Māori, and so preferred that people thought she was Māori rather than Indian.⁴⁹ I encountered this attitude on numerous occasions, particularly in the North Island where there is a much higher Māori population.⁵⁰ Several male emigrants married Māori women and produced families that are strongly connected to their Māori heritage. Hence the attitudes of the wider Pakeha community towards Māori, plus the proximity of Kalimpong families to Māori communities, have affected the nature of the experiences of the emigrants and their descendants.

The relevance of geographical location goes beyond the northern-southern divide or regional variation in the density of the Māori population. The testimony of two Kalimpong families who settled in northern areas demonstrates the complexity of everyday life in ethnically diverse rural communities. Their memories challenge Graham's simplified version of New Zealand social relations,

and in the first of those two families, reveal the direct impact of racial prejudice upon the Kalimpong emigrants. Richard Hawkins's family grew up on a farm in Puni, a rural locale serviced by nearby Pukekohe – the town well known in the history of New Zealand race relations as the birthplace of the White New Zealand League.⁵¹ Pam's recollection of racial segregation in Pukekohe contrasted with her initial answer about the family being 'white' among the Puni community:

JM: We've talked a bit before about Pukekohe, about the ethnic diversity there.

Pam: Oh, at Puni school, yes. We had the Māoris, the Chinese, the Indians, and us, the whites. But yes, Pukekohe – in those days it was a bit ... we didn't really realise until we had grown up what it was really like. It was a nice place, but the street was divided. We called it the 'Māori side' down the bottom, and in the picture theatre the Māoris were only allowed to go downstairs. And if Dad wanted a haircut, he was only allowed down the bottom of the street because of his colour. Nobody up the other end of the street would cut his hair. He never ever said anything negative about it. So he may have had lots of thoughts but never ever told us children.⁵²

Tony Spalding's two children grew up in Awanui, a small rural community even further north. Like the Hawkinses, they differentiated between their acceptance in this tiny community and the reputation of the nearby town of Kaitaia. Margaret firstly connected their acceptance to the high proportion of Māori:

I can remember – probably when I was about twelve – realising at some stage that I was very fortunate because I was totally accepted by the Māori children. Probably half of the children were Māori, and I was always accepted because of my brown skin. My father was accepted as well. Whereas some of my Pakeha friends ... they suffered from it a bit, because they were Pakeha, from the Māori children, but I never ever ever felt that.⁵³

Margaret also stated that their parents sent them to Awanui school, unlike 'the people on the road next to us [who] were all sent by bus to Kaitaia school, and that was the racist thing. ... So we were lucky that our parents were never ever racist'.⁵⁴ This was something that caused confusion in interviews – people assumed I was asking about their parents' racism towards others, rather than the other way around, which demonstrates the fluctuation between thinking of their parents as white or as different, part of the majority or marginalized. This points to the perception of mixed-race people as interlocutors, referred to by Margaret when talking about the broader impact of her Indian heritage, which she believed gave her a 'sort of tolerance of other people, and an understanding

that I can meet anybody at any level and ... they seem to be able to relate to me.' Margaret also linked the presence of a sizable local mixed-race community (which sprung from intermarriage between Māori and Yugoslav immigrants in the early 1900s – 'what we called Māori-Dallies') to the family's high level of integration, which was required to successfully run the only garage providing petrol and mechanical services to a large rural area.⁵⁵

As discussed earlier, Margaret and Ian stated that they were 'always aware' of their father's Indian background and ancestry. 'I don't ever remember not knowing that my father was part-Indian,' Margaret said. 'Or suddenly being made aware of it,' Ian added. Margaret elaborated further on the way she answered questions about her ancestry: 'When people would say, "Are you Māori?" I would say "No, I'm Indian, my father was Indian, part-Indian"'.⁵⁶ Margaret used the common terminology for mixed race in New Zealand, 'part-Indian' or 'part-Māori', which does not imply affiliation to a particular community (in contrast to the Anglo-Indian community in India), nor does it employ the colonial 'language of fractions'.⁵⁷ Margaret's way of answering questions about her Indian heritage also illustrates the importance of colour and appearance. Unlike Richard Hawkins's children, whose appearance would not suggest any non-European heritage, Margaret and Ian have both often fielded questions about their ancestry because of their colouring. Hence, Pam and Gilbert could only comment on their experience of *being* mixed race, while Margaret and Ian could additionally consider the impact of being *perceived* as mixed race. The distinction between these two increases the breadth of experiences for Kalimpong descendants.⁵⁸

My finding that many Kalimpong descendants bemoan that they do *not* carry any visible reminders of this heritage was one of many indicators of the profound shift in societal attitudes to race in just one generation. The Gammie family have a very lively remembrance of Gavin's involvement in a confrontation after he was refused alcohol because the barman thought he was Māori.⁵⁹ He took considerable offence at this suggestion. Another descendant remembered their parent showing concern for grandchildren born with dark skin, believing that they would 'have a hard life'. Others, as already mentioned, preferred to be thought of as Māori. When Sylvia Slater's skin darkened over summer, her mother, Connie Walker, called her 'my little Māori'.⁶⁰ In contrast to the varying reactions of the emigrants, their descendants have all spoken of their Indian heritage positively. This shift in attitudes has coincided with, and is no doubt related to, the increasingly multi-cultural composition of New Zealand's population. An important element in the resurgence of the Kalimpong narrative is the greater acceptance and visibility of the local Indian population. Mary

Milne (in her mid-eighties) used an older terminology to express this new kind of social interaction:

I think it was lovely, Mum being half-caste Indian. I always used to say, 'Oh I'm an eighth.' And then Sabita, my friend – she's Indian – she said to me, 'Do you realise you're quarter?' And I said, 'For goodness sake, I've been saying I'm an eighth.' 'No girl', she said, 'you're a quarter.' I said 'Oh, that's very nice.'⁶¹

Legacies

Aside from skin colour, most Kalimpong descendants have been able to identify some tangible reminders of their British Indian heritage, which becomes more visible when looking at the community collectively. In this section I begin by exploring Indian cultural legacies (food and language), then a Kalimpong legacy (accent) and paternal British ones (plantation stories and colonial objects). Looking firstly at language, Richard Cone remembered his mother, Dora Moller, being 'quite fluent' in Hindi and wanting to teach it to her sons, although she never did.⁶² Mary Milne recalled the Kalimpong women in Dunedin speaking and writing Hindi 'for a start', but felt that they 'lost interest' as they carried on with their new lives. In later years her mother would say, 'I should have taught you girls Hindi', and would sometimes sit down and try to write in Hindi. Mary also remembered mentioning the language to Margaret and Nancy Dinning, who indicated that they had 'forgotten that part of life' and did not want to speak Hindi.⁶³ Pam Gardiner remembered her father teaching them 'Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of *pani* [water]'.⁶⁴ When I first met Gavin and Isabel Gammie's children, they spoke of their parents often using an Indian language to swear at each other. I broached the subject again in a recorded interview:

JM: I think you mentioned last time that there were some language things that came through, phrases that they used? [immediate laughter]

Anne: I know Mum and Dad used to curse each other in – what's that thing Mum –

Ron: *[reels off a long Indian phrase to lots of laughter]*

Anne: Oh that's right.

Ron: Yes because after we went to Kalimpong we went to Nepal, and the evening after we went for the walk, and there were some young kids around ... they would have been about 16 or 17. ... I said that [the Indian phrase] to them and they looked at me and they laughed. ... But I can't remember what it actually meant *[lots of laughter]*.

Anne: I can remember being on holiday at Smith St in Hamilton and Mum said that to Dad and I said 'what does that mean?' and, [*gestures that she won't tell her*] and I said 'I'll ask Uncle Ferg' and she said 'NO you don't!!' And she used to say [kera mai...]. I don't know what that meant. And Mum always called Dad a 'lhata', which I gathered was a stupid oaf, or something similar, something derogatory.

JM: *Do you know what language it is?*

Anne: I don't know.

Ron: No I don't know.

Anne: No idea!⁶⁵

A related topic is the Kalimpong accent, which many descendants have noted as the Indian legacy that most differentiated their parent. Given the stigma around accent in India, which was an important determinant of Anglo-Indian's position on the spectrum from British to domiciled and mixed race, it is interesting to speculate on how it might have been received in New Zealand. For descendants, the accent is something they remember fondly. Wellington descendants sometimes used the Kalimpong accent when recounting memories of their parent, describing it as a combination of Indian accent and a Welsh sound. Anne Beckett had a childhood memory of hearing someone talking to her parents at a sports game, and she thought he spoke 'just like Mum and Dad, and it did turn out that he was from Kalimpong. At the get-togethers they would all just fall into this way of talking, all the same. They had a real lilt.'⁶⁶

References to food have already frequently appeared in the excerpts in this chapter, and it is the most tangible legacy of the Indian heritage in Kalimpong families. Eating Indian food in 1950s and 1960s New Zealand was significant because it not only meant eating food that looked, smelt and tasted different, but also required preparing and cooking meals in a particular way, and locating unusual ingredients. Mary Milne recalled that when they gathered, the women would 'sit on the porch and be chatting away in Hindi, eating soup and picking stones out of the lentils ... boiling up the rice and drinking the rice water.'⁶⁷ Later when Mary travelled to Fiji and stayed with an Indian family, she described feeling 'at home' when they engaged in identical food rituals, which she had never seen outside her family home.⁶⁸ George Langmore also loved to cook Indian food. His granddaughter remembered him sourcing pickles and tea from India throughout his life.⁶⁹ Ron Gammie stated that, 'apart from having curries, which were a really great thing to have, I would have classed myself as a Kiwi'. Anne Beckett's husband Charlie supported that sentiment, stating that

it was really a 'school culture' that they brought to New Zealand, rather than an 'Indian culture', and that 'the only Indian thing I know is Mum (Isabel Gammie) and her curries'.⁷⁰

In addition to tastes in food, dining habits (from plantation bungalows) were brought from British India to New Zealand by the emigrants and the planters who followed. Egerton Peters and Hugh Dinning were not the only tea planters to visit or settle with their children in New Zealand. Richard Hawkins's father arrived in New Zealand in the 1960s to spend the last few years of his life with his son and young family. Although he did not share stories of plantation life with his grandchildren, he made a strong impression on them. Pam thought that 'he spoke like the Queen' and Gilbert noticed his very different habits:

We were typical Kiwi family, we'd roar in for tea – and he'd turn up for tea, in his suit, tie, and you had to have a napkin with a napkin ring on there, and a solid – a silver knife and fork there like this, and I'd just look [and think], like where's this joker come from? And he did that right up until the end.⁷¹

Although Gilbert saw his grandfather's behaviour as contrary to their own 'Kiwi' way of life, many descendants have found a legacy of plantation life in the Kalimpong emigrants' tendency to be 'very particular' in a variety of ways. Edward Snelleksh's grandson described him as 'incredibly gentlemanly' and 'in fact, a bit overboard' about his concern with manners and hygiene.⁷² Although Vic Williams remembered his father for his deft manual skills (another trait common among the male emigrants), he too described his father as 'a wonderful gentleman', who 'dressed for lunch'.⁷³ Pam Gardiner remembered her father 'always dressed spic and span, nothing out of place'.⁷⁴ Tony Spalding's daughter directly connected his memories of having a *punkah wallah* at the dining table at the plantation with his later concern that things were arranged in a particular way: 'You always had to have your napkin beside you, even if it was your lunch or breakfast, the table settings had to be just perfect. He was very particular about those sorts of things'.⁷⁵

The final legacy of the British fathers was financial bequests. In some families this was a source of discontent; in others it was regarded as evidence of their lifelong concern for their children's well-being. Tony Spalding purchased his business in Awanui with a trust fund held by the Homes from his father's estate. Mary Milne remembered being about twelve years old when her grandfather passed away 'in London or wherever he was'. 'All of a sudden, out of the blue, we've got a grandfather', she said.⁷⁶ Although her mother's claimant

rights were contested by relatives in England, the sum awarded financed much-needed renovations on their Loftus Street house. Yvonne Gale believes that the events following her great-grandfather's (Jean McKay's father) death created significant disturbance in their Dunedin household. 'Dad talks about a huge row in the family,' Yvonne said. In their case an inheritance was not forthcoming, and this caused a rift between Jean and her husband that was never mended. Judy Wivell believed that her grandfather, George Langmore, received financial support from his father's family in England, with whom he had regular contact.⁷⁷

As Durba Ghosh's work has shown, wills are a useful source for addressing absences in records pertaining to South Asian women.⁷⁸ The Spalding family obtained a copy of their tea-planting grandfather's will in Britain, which showed that he left the sum of 15,000 rupees to 'Prasanna Tati of the family of Chintamani Tati Kurma Tea Estate' (the mother of his children) and the remainder of his property to his sister. Their understanding is that Prasanna used the money to buy an amount of land sufficient to provide for her future. The reading of a will was perhaps the time that some British families found out about other branches of the family. Wills are also useful for addressing archival absences about the women who did not marry. When Gertie Plaistowe died in 1983 she had cash assets of almost NZ\$10,000 and valuable furniture items including an 'Indian brass table' and other items possibly inherited from her father. She bequeathed two-thirds of her cash assets to the Homes in Kalimpong.

Although the unmarried women did not produce their own families, they were certainly part of the Kalimpong family and are remembered through their relationships with descendants. As we have seen, the Dinning sisters' house was a place to socialize. Also in Wellington, Amy Gollan used her substantial inheritance (£6,000) to buy a house in Lower Hutt, and when Gavin Gammie was building a house nearby he and his family lived with 'Aunty Amy'.⁷⁹ Their circumstances also suggest that some maintained a presence in their extended 'empire families' from a distance. Eva Masson, a 1926 emigrant, worked in Nelson until 1981. When she died in 1998, her death notice described her as the 'loved Auntie of Malcolm and Robert Junior, and Norma and Jim Ellis, all of London'.⁸⁰ Contact with Eva's extended family revealed that these were her paternal relatives. For descendants, contact with the British branch of their families has usually been that of a reconnection rather than a continued one, sparked by travel to Britain to research their family history. Often the first step in tracking those relatives has been a trip to the Homes in Kalimpong.

Return to Kalimpong

And so nothing much was said until I was about 18, and I asked my father, 'how about going back to India?' He said 'this is the first time in my life that I've had a family around me and I don't want to leave it. I'm not interested in travelling or anything.' So that was the end of that. It took many years before I started to think about it again.⁸¹

A surprisingly high proportion of descendants that I have been in contact with have made the trip to Kalimpong to retrieve information and see for themselves the circumstances under which their parents grew up.⁸² Most of this travel has happened from the 1980s onwards, which coincided with a greater ease of international travel and with India becoming a much more common tourist destination for New Zealanders – another way in which the Kalimpong narrative has been influenced by connections between New Zealand and India at a broader level. As Gilbert Hawkins said, when he first thought about going to India, very few people that he knew of went there. 'In those days, everyone went to Australia,' he explained. The timing of this travel also coincided with the period in which many of the original Kalimpong emigrants died, which brought a nostalgic interest in knowing more and the opportunity to do so without upsetting their parents' delicate relationship to their past. These journeys have also been prompted by the discovery of photographs or documents among their parent's possessions that led them to Kalimpong. Many descendants had been reluctant to carry out research into such a sensitive area when their parents were still alive, while some were actively discouraged or misled. Mary Howie's granddaughter wrote that Mary was 'horrified when I told her that I was going to start looking into my family history' and as a result she had 'not really pursued this side of my ancestry'.⁸³

The contrast between descendants' mobility and the Kalimpong emigrants' stability warrants some exploration here. The strategies of silence and stability used by their parents to make a new start were a poignant precursor to their children's subsequent mobility as a means of disrupting the silence and reconnecting with the past. What is remarkable, like the shift in racial attitudes, is how quickly that transition occurred. In one generation, descendants have been secure enough in their 'New Zealandness' to turn back towards a heritage that for their parents was something that threatened the possibility of their social acceptance. The journey to Kalimpong has been viewed as an opportunity

to answer questions about family heritage, but also as a means of giving purpose to an existing desire to travel. Many descendants, myself included, have been quite happy that the only way to find out more was to pack one's bags and go to Kalimpong. Certainly in my own case, there was a prolonged frustration with stories that had 'worn out'; stories that had been heard and misheard so many times, and changed and misunderstood to such an extent that they held no possibility of disentanglement. Some fresh 'evidence', as simple as photographs of the place my grandmother might have inhabited, had the potential to add new life and new possibilities to a family history that had come to be thought of as shrouded and mysterious.

If I could generalize about descendants' responses to visiting Kalimpong it was a combination of sadness at the discovery of certain details about their parents' upbringing, but also in the realization that it was chiefly the stigma of being born into an interracial family that prevented discussion of this background – a stigma that descendants understood, but did not themselves share in any way. They have been amazed and surprised to find the Homes in a similar state to what it would have been when their parent lived there, and impressed by the beauty of the landscape. For many the motivation to go to Kalimpong was simply to stand on the ground that their mother or father had grown up on, particularly for male descendants. Gilbert Hawkins was surprised by his emotive response when he found himself in the precise location of his father's childhood, which was essentially unchanged:

That first time we went there they said it was virtually the same condition as when your father was there and we walked around, up the hills, and into the dormitory. It was rather, mmm, it sort of gave a certain amount of closure to it.⁸⁴

Gilbert found his father's name inscribed into the head of the bed in what they knew to be Richard's cottage. His sister Pam, who visited Kalimpong separately, stood at the foot of the stairway in her father's cottage and wondered 'how many times he went up and down there, and did they ever dare slide down the banister!'⁸⁵ Many people have found visiting the dormitory room in the cottages to be a moving experience. Seeing forty beds close together brings home in a very direct way the nature of 'orphanage' life, regardless of what they know of Graham's motivations to provide a better future for Anglo-Indian children (Figure 8.1).

When Ron Gammie attended the Homes Centenary in 2000, his parents' reminiscences allowed him to connect in very direct ways to Kalimpong life.

Figure 8.1 Gilbert Hawkins pauses to reflect in the dormitory where his father grew up, Kalimpong, 2005. Courtesy Hawkins private collection.

Ron was surprised by the extent to which the visit heightened his interest in his parents' history. 'I almost need that real element for it to mean – well not to mean a lot, but to really understand it,' he explained.⁸⁶ When I asked him which aspects of his visit brought the most emotional response, his answer conveyed the very real sense of reconnection between this distant site and New Zealand towns (in his case Lower Hutt) that many descendants experienced:

On the road below the school ... it winds down to that Rilli River. I guess that's where for me it was the most emotional, because that's where there were a lot of young kids. ... I remember them [his parents] talking about going down and swimming in the river. But there were lots of moments, just things like seeing the names [of his parents' cottages] and you knew what a part of it [they were] – and here you are, so many miles away.⁸⁷

The recovery of information through the Homes practice of retaining correspondence in a 'personal file' for all previous students was an unexpected bonus for many who have travelled to Kalimpong, and in retrospect this information has become the most 'amazing' part of that journey. Other descendants have received copies of the files in the post after making contact with the Homes. The information they contain has often brought about a complete transformation in their family narratives. For the Spaldings, who had never had reason to suspect a negative aspect to their father's upbringing, some letters in the file 'took a while to come to terms with.' 'Margaret and I went into

a great funk for about a week', Ian told me, for 'we couldn't imagine that this had been my father's life.' It seemed to them that Tom's upbringing had been 'glossed over', particularly the separation of the boys' from their mother.⁸⁸ In addition, the Spalding file revealed that a third brother, Donald, whom Tom said had died prior to Ian's visit to India in the 1970s, had actually still been alive at the time. Although this information had a positive outcome in their eventual reconnection with Donald's daughter, their initial response was one of betrayal by an otherwise 'very honest' father. For Yvonne Gale, reading letters written by her grandmother and her great-grandfather had the opposite effect. 'I was amazed,' Yvonne said. 'It showed a side of my grandmother I didn't really know when she was alive. ... It completely changed my thoughts about her. I was a little bit in awe of her considering she had another language, and that she'd travelled the way she'd travelled. We knew nothing about that.' The letters also showed a surprisingly caring side to her great-grandfather. 'We thought that the two of them had been abandoned,' Yvonne said, 'so our opinion of her father wasn't very high. That changed it.'⁸⁹

In seeking information to fill the gaps incurred by their silences, we descendants have ended up privy to information that the emigrants themselves did not necessarily have. Concealment began with their fathers, and Graham, both of whom kept information from them. When we ponder their silences, we might consider that part of the silence may have represented a genuine lack of information about central aspects of themselves. Perhaps at the core of the stigma and the pain was the simple fact of not knowing who your mother was, or what became of her, or why your father sent you away. Speculating about such sensitive matters is one thing when perusing letters written by a great-grandfather over a century later, but raised very different feelings for the Kalimpong emigrants, many of whom knew very little about their own parents. The extent of this missing genealogy that Homes graduates wrestled with over their lifetimes was expressed with incredible poignancy in a letter from a New Zealand emigrant to John Graham in the 1920s, who simply asked, 'Who are my parents? Will you please write to me and let me know what I am?'⁹⁰

Lou Holder's sentiments after visiting Kalimpong were common to many descendants who regretted that their parent or grandparent did not feel comfortable talking to them about it before it was too late. 'The Kalimpong heritage was something I had always wondered about,' Lou said, 'and I was very sorry to have not pressed it when my father was alive and been able to

talk to him about it and possibly taken him there.⁹¹ But I would (and did) say to Lou that there were reasons why those discussions did not take place. In hindsight it may seem a simple thing to persist with a line of questioning, but in real time, in any given moment, it can be incredibly difficult to broach a subject that an elderly parent wishes to avoid, especially if the reasons for that reluctance are not known. My own understanding of the silences in the Kalimpong story is that there was a process by which the emigrants reached an acceptance of their past, which took time, but which once settled gave the impression to the outside world that all was forgotten. The slightest stirring, however, could instantly raise that sediment, disturbing the present moment, and making it murky with past memories and emotions of surprising intensity. There is no separation of the good and the bad when it comes to the emotions stored inside our precious memories, especially when delving into the stuff of childhood and family. While the return to Kalimpong has been an adventurous, emotive and tranquil journey for the present generation, there is an enormous gap between those sensations and the distant, complex memories of those who left it a century before.

‘Final thoughts’

It seems apt to draw this final chapter to a close with the responses given by descendants at the end of their interviews, when I invited them to add any final thoughts. Several spoke of wanting to know more about their Indian grandmother. Margaret Matterson said that while she felt her Scottish and Irish heritage were important to her, she would ‘love to know more about my Indian side, would love to have known my Indian grandmother.’⁹² Yvonne Gale also identified her maternal Indian ancestor as the only part of the story that she had not been able to fully explore, but viewed that as ‘an impossibility’. She spoke of a friend who was looking further back into the family line, ‘but that totally doesn’t interest me. It was just Granny [Jean] and her life. Her story.’⁹³ I had a strong sense with Yvonne that after a sustained period of research, she had let the story rest. Learning about my research and meeting me had stirred up her engagement with the family story, but in a more limited way. For Yvonne, and for many descendants I met, learning of the larger community was a welcome opportunity to dip again into their family history, almost like an epilogue to the research they had already done. Nothing would ever

approximate the very personal and intense journeys of discovery that they had already been through.

The lingering gap which is the absence of information about the Kalimpong emigrants' mothers echoes Cohen's discussion of the present preoccupation with 'talking' as inherently better than 'not talking'.⁹⁴ We might just as soon ask ourselves why it is that we *do* talk, as ask a former generation why they did not. But I think descendants would say that the problem with 'not talking' was that future generations were left with a gap in their family line. In our way of thinking, there is nothing that carries so much stigma that it is worth sacrificing a branch of one's family tree. It is difficult for descendants like Gilbert Hawkins to accept that despite their full commitment to this research, they can only put 'Bengali' in the space for their grandmother, with nothing but blankness further down the line. Even so, Gilbert found the whole experience of travelling to Kalimpong and Assam very meaningful:

While I was milking the cows tonight, I was just thinking about how it has all affected me, not knowing at the time. I've always felt that I'm a bit different ... and you often wondered, well, where do you actually come from. So that's become quite a big part of my quest to at least find out a little bit about India, or the area [we've] come from. It wouldn't be completed until I've found something out about my grandmother, but I don't think that's going to happen.⁹⁵

Final thoughts about the merits of Graham's scheme have brought forth conflicting opinions. Lou Holder was shocked and upset by the cold manner in which his Indian grandmother was treated, as evidenced by the letters in his father's file. After speaking with Lou, he sent me an email to clarify his opinion of the Homes, stating that although he was 'initially distressed by the actions of my Grandfather and Dr Graham towards my father and his mother' he was also 'eternally grateful' that his father was given an opportunity to settle 'in a more caring environment probably than if abandoned to the streets of India'.⁹⁶ Those present for the Gammie group interview had differing opinions of the Homes, but agreed on their good fortune as a result of their parents being placed in New Zealand. Graham himself would probably be surprised at the turn towards India that the next generation has exhibited, despite and even because of the heritage fading over time. His inability to foresee the anxiety that blank family lines would cause illustrates the function of a kind of forgetfulness that in his time was a precursor for a new beginning. And although he lauded the relationship between settlers and Māori in New Zealand, it is unlikely that he

had any sense of the deep connection with Māori culture that many Kalimpong families would develop, as expressed in Anne Beckett's response to meeting with me and learning of my research:

I think part of this thirst to know as much as I can about my parents comes from my journey learning Te Reo Māori [Māori language]. I am truly inspired by so many concepts and values within Māori culture. For instance there is this premise that you have to walk backwards into the future, always acknowledging those people and experiences that have preceded you and have helped shape your individual identity. ... In a way, I see your research in that same light, Jane, for you are uncovering the history of a group of people who share a common kinship and your research is going to bring their stories to light for so many of their descendants.⁹⁷