

Episode 102: Family

Summary

Our guest, Nick's mother Marion, talks about her mother's life journey, from the Netherlands to Indonesia to spending time in a Japanese prison camp in World War II to finally moving to Australia.

Transcript

Nick: Today I am talking again with my mother, Marion. Mum, welcome back!

Marion: Thank you Nick.

Nick: And last time when you talked about your trip to Europe, we mentioned that your parents were Dutch, and today we're going to talk especially about your mother, my grandmother. Because like many people born around when she was born, she had a very interesting and eventful life, being born basically at the end of World War I and then growing up between the wars and then living through World War II. Umm, so you would agree that she had quite an extraordinary life?

Marion: Absolutely. Umm, what she experienced was different from all my friends' parents.

Nick: Yes, it's a different world, certainly, that she was born into in Europe. And so your family is Dutch and at the time there was a Dutch colony in Indonesia, and so your mother, my Oma, as we call her - the Dutch word for grandmother - she was born in the Netherlands?

Marion: Well, this is where I disagree with my brother. I think she was born in the Netherlands because she told me about primary school in the Netherlands. However, according to my brother, she was born in Indonesia. So there's a bit of disparity¹ there.

Nick: OK, but her family or her father was doing work in Indonesia as part of the colonial rule.

Marion: He was asked to go to Indonesia, umm, to start a school, and he was the headmaster, umm, at a school, yes.

¹ disparity: inequality, difference

Nick: OK, and so she spent a lot of her childhood, in any case², in Indonesia. Is that right?

Marion: Umm, most of it. From about, umm, (age) nine onwards, yes.

Nick: OK. But it's one of those situations, as many of the colonial situations are, where you've got this sort of ruling class, if you like, and there might not have been that much integration, or she certainly comes across as a Dutch person rather than an Indonesian person.

Marion: Absolutely. She was typical Dutch. Umm, she liked Indonesian food, however. She would have had a cook. Umm, I know I saw a photo of her next to a Rafflesia flower, umm, when she was, oh, when she was about seven. So my ... thank you for reminding me, that means she was in Indonesia at seven, yes, at least. Umm, she never spoke ill of the Indonesians, ever. She did say the Chinese, umm, were the prominent, umm, stallholders³, the business people. But they liked the Indonesians, yes.

Nick: OK, and so then later she must have gone back to the Netherlands or gone back and forth between them.

Marion: Every ... well, yes. The Dutch people were always allowed to go back to Holland every two years for a couple of months. And so she went back by boat regularly and has been a boat lover ever since⁴, yes.

Nick: OK, and your father was also Dutch but also lived in Indonesia, is that right?

Marion: Yes, but he went to Holland for his education when he was 12, with his brother, and stayed with strangers⁵, and then stayed on to university. And that was common amongst the Dutch people. They were just sent away which was, I think, very sad. I can't imagine it.

Nick: OK, and how did they meet, do you know?

Marion: Oh, my father was a, umm, compatriot of my grandfather, my mother's father. And Mum fancied⁶ Dad when they used to meet and listen to the radio and during the war, radios were illegal. And that's why, umm, my father went to prison, a prisoner-of-war camp, and Mum and her mother, after that, chose to go to a prisoner-of-war camp.

² in any case: regardless

³ stallholders: sellers at market stalls

⁴ ever since: since that time, from then until now

⁵ strangers: people you don't know (not people from another country, who are *foreigners*)

⁶ fancied: liked romantically

Nick: OK, so this is in Indonesia. So it's a Japanese camp. So your father was sent to the camp, and then you're saying that your mother...

Marion: Chose.

Nick: ...choose to go, to be with your father.

Marion: No, they were separate camps. There were male camps and female camps. And I suspect it was my grandmother who chose to go to a camp.

Nick: And why would she have chosen that?

Marion: Umm, perhaps because it was close to the male camp. I'm assuming it was before they got sent to the camp. Or perhaps they were unsafe without their menfolk.

Nick: Right, so it was actually safer to go into a POW camp than just to stay at home where you might be killed or something like that.

Marion: Yes, yes.

Nick: That's amazing. And so they must have joined eventually in the camps, because didn't your ... wasn't your brother Harry born in a camp?

Marion: He was born in the camp. I think Mum went to the camp pregnant. She was only in the camp for nine months. My brother was born on the 10th of May, 1945.

Nick: Oh, wow.

Marion: And they were released a few weeks after that.

Nick: Right, so this was already after victory had been declared⁷ in Europe but not yet in the Pacific.

Marion: And the Americans, I remember my mother saying, she and my father rarely spoke about the war. But Mum said the Americans, umm, released them and at the gate, releasing them, said to each of them, 'Forget about the war, get on with your lives.' So that's what they chose to do.

Nick: OK, and so then they must have decided to have gone back to Holland, because then that's where you were born.

Marion: Well, they stayed in Indonesia for a while, umm, and then when Mum was pregnant with me, she ... because she'd had a son born under awful

⁷ declared: announced

circumstances in a prison camp, she wanted to have me in style. And so she ... yeah, they went back to Holland. And I've lived in style ever since!

Nick: And so eventually they decided to emigrate⁸ to Australia. And so do you know why they chose Australia or how that all came about?

Marion: Well, my father spoke five languages, and initially he wanted to go to South America. He spoke, umm, Spanish, and then decided it was not the right place to bring up two children. So Australia was close...

Nick: To Indonesia.

Marion: To Indonesia. And they were living in Indonesia at the time. And we came out on the Batavia, umm, and I'm glad they did. I think when they came to Australia, they got a shock. It was ... the food was boring compared to what they'd had. But it was a good lifestyle, yes.

Nick: And so then your three younger brothers were born in Australia.

Marion: Yes, yes.

Nick: OK. And so unfortunately your mother is no longer with us, or your father, but your mother lived in Australia for 50 ... more than 50 years, right?

Marion: More than 50 years, yes.

Nick: I remember you had a celebration of some sort for her 50th year in Australia.

Marion: Yes, that's right, we did too, yes, yes.

Nick: And do you think she was happy with that decision?

Marion: To come? She and my father, having lived in the tropics, did not want to go back to Holland where it rains eleven months of the year. So, yes, they wanted the climate. Umm, I think there would have been very difficult times. Umm, they were both, uh, politically interested in world affairs. Umm, Australia, at that time, wasn't. They (Australians) were only interested in themselves, or the people around us were like that, umm. But I think, yes, I think they were happy. But it would have been difficult initially⁹.

Nick: And then your father passed away quite young, in his early 60s, I think.

Marion: 64.

⁸ emigrate: leave a country to settle in another; to come to the new country is *immigrate*

⁹ initially: at the beginning

Nick: And so your mother was alone, more or less, for the rest of her life. And then I remember towards the end of her life it seemed like she, uhh, went back a little bit more to her Dutch roots. She had a Dutch bible group or a ... that she met with and she enjoyed speaking Dutch with them.

Marion: Absolutely, she did like that. It brought back memories, umm. Yes, she was happy.

Nick: I also remember there was an Indonesian restaurant near where we lived and we used to¹⁰ go there, and the owner was very nice to her and, umm, they had ... shared some nice moments together.

Marion: And the important thing about that restaurant, the Indonesian owner was from, umm, Bali and he came to Australia to surf and then opened the restaurant. But Mum did say he cooked Indonesian food properly. Yes, she loved Selamat.

Nick: Excellent. Alright, Mum, thank you very much for telling us about your parents.

Marion: Pleasure.

¹⁰ used to: did regularly in the past

Comprehension Questions

1. What do Marion and one of her brothers disagree on?
2. Why was Marion born in the Netherlands and not in Indonesia where her parents were living at the time?
3. Why didn't Marion's parents want to move back to the Netherlands after World War II?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. Children are taught not to talk to _____.
2. He _____ her, but she was more interested in his brother than him. And he didn't have the courage to tell her how he felt about her.
3. The President _____ yesterday that he would run for reelection next year despite his poor approval ratings.
4. Her family _____ used to go camping every summer. They would always go to same place because the kids loved it.
5. She brought either three or four large suitcases on holiday, I don't remember exactly. _____, that's too much luggage for a short trip.
6. There's a huge amount of _____ in the world in terms of wealth, even within most countries.
7. He went on his first train ride with his grandfather when he was four and he's loved trains _____. That's why he's now a train driver.
8. They didn't want to leave Venezuela but eventually the situation became so bad that they were forced to _____.
9. She started a new job two months ago. _____, she found it difficult, but now she's getting used to it and she's starting to enjoy it.
10. They missed their train and by the time they got to the Christmas market, it was late and all the _____ had shut up shop.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Marion's brother Harry was born in 'awful circumstances' in a prisoner-of-war camp. Can you describe what you think these conditions would have been like?
2. Marion's parents emigrated from Indonesia to Australia. Can you imagine leaving your country permanently to live in another country? Which country would you choose and why?
3. What do you know about your family's history? Can you think of any interesting stories?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. On whether their mother was born in Holland (the Netherlands) or Indonesia.
2. Because her mother wanted to give birth for the second time 'in style' after doing so for the first time in a prison camp.
3. Because they enjoyed the warm climate of Indonesia and didn't want to go back to the weather of Northern Europe.

Exercises

1. strangers
2. fancied
3. declared
4. used to
5. In any case
6. disparity
7. ever since
8. emigrate
9. initially
10. stallholders