

Hello Everyone,

My name is Barbara, and I was born in Rochdale, Lancashire in 1949. As a child I loved horses and when I was 14 years old, I got my own Fell pony called Shem. I used to ride all over the Lancashire moors.

I left school at 15 years old and went to Rochdale College of Art. I was given a Travelling Scholarship and fell in love with travelling, meeting people from different countries, learning how people live, their customs, their language and realising we are all the same. When I returned to England, I started a three-year degree course at Winchester School of Art where I stumbled across the idea that colours were alive. Everyone thought that I was mad, but I knew I wasn't, so I carried on exploring the idea of Living Colour. I finally went from painting pictures to making visual theatre and wanted to learn makeup.

I decided to travel to Australia overland to learn the makeup of the Aborigines hitch hiking, sleeping in fields and living on bread, tomatoes and water. I spent the summer of 1972 on the beaches in Turkey waiting for the heat in the Iranian deserts to cool down. What I didn't know was that Eastern Turkey and Afghanistan were freezing, so a man gave me a blanket to keep me warm. Can you imagine being on your own trying to talk to people who didn't understand a word you are saying? Do you know what I did? I drew pictures of what I wanted, and it worked. I met lots of people and saw how they wore different clothes. I heard lots of different languages and I didn't understand any of them. I wasn't afraid, I was excited and couldn't wait for the next day to arrive.

When I was in Afghanistan, I started walking through the mountains on a small track from Bamiyan, after seeing the Bamiyan Buddha, to Kabul. Maybe you could have a look on a map where these places are? See if you can see the caves to the right of the Buddha captured in my drawing? A boy let me ride on his donkey and then took me to his home where his mum gave me yoghurt, bread and fried eggs. Before dark he took me back to the road where a lorry stopped. I climbed on the roof and travelled through the night back to Kabul. When it got cold the men invited me into the cab of the lorry. I felt very safe and protected by these kind Afghani people.

After Kabul I went through the Khyber Pass on a bus, through Pakistan, where I learned to eat with my hands, and eventually crossed into India at Wagar Border. As soon as I crossed into India, I felt I had come home. I never got to Australia, I got off a train at the wrong stop in Kerala, south India, accidentally found the Kerala Kalamandalam [where Kathakali artists are trained] and began training as the first female Kathakali makeup artist in the world. Can you believe it? I was the only woman travelling from temple to temple giving performances of Kathakali – the classical dance drama of Kerala.

In 1976 I returned to the UK and started my own theatre group of "Living Colour" and called it Centre Ocean Stream. In 1987 I co-founded the Kala Chethena Kathakali Company with my husband Vijaya, a Kathakali actor I met in Kerala, India. Since then we have taken Kathakali all over this country bringing Asian theatre to around 250,000 people. I am now a senior Kathakali makeup artist, travel all over the world with own my own company and have lots of happy memories. When I die my Living Colour costumes will go to the Victoria and Albert museum to represent Performance Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

That is not bad for a kid from a council estate in Rochdale is it? My message to you all is to follow your dreams, never be afraid of life, be kind to people and never give up. Happiness is not based on what you have but who you are. Good luck – Barbara