

" 40 Years Ago "

1982

40 years ago at the age of 11, I became a refugee.

my father was born in Mogoke, Buxema and I was also born there. my father was a Ruby mines owner, having land & property, along with his uncle. We had a big house & garden full of flowers, vegetable & fruit trees with a badminton court. Life was quiet & peaceful in the little village with green hills & beautiful scenery.

Mogoke was world famous for Rubies & sapphires. Europeans came there to buy gemstones. Often I accompanied my father to show the Ruby mines to visiting customers.

all this came to a sudden end with the outbreak of the 2nd world war. News came that Rangoon, the capital had been bombed by Japanese jets and that the enemy was moving north. There was panic and fear and people were starting to flee.

Elders in our family decided that we would have to leave as the situation was becoming dangerous. Sadly but quickly we packed a few belongings and left for Rangoon on our way to India. More painful than leaving all our valuable assets behind was the separation from many relatives & friends. It was a very abrupt and sad ending to a way of life to which we had been used to.

We went to Rangoon by boat via the Irrawady River. In Rangoon during our 2 day stay we often had to run to underground trenches to evade enemy bombing. We were all scared & anxious + waiting for this ordeal to be over.

From Rangoon we, about 30 relatives altogether, along with many other people went aboard a large ship named "Chilka", bound for Calcutta. During our 4 days journey we had the constant fear of the ship being sunk by torpedo attacks as Japanese submarines were lurking about nearby.

On the ship food was scarce and on the last 2 days most of us went hungry. all were praying for safety, and when we saw the Indian shoreline there was relief. on reaching the shore we were fed by refugee relief workers.

after leaving us at Calcutta the ship started back for Rangoon to bring more refugees. we all were fortunate, because on its return journey the 'chilka' became the target of Japanese torpedoes & was sunk.

I had never felt closer to God than I felt during the whole of this ordeal. was it a miracle or the grace of God which saved us.

after 2 days in Calcutta we left for Lahore where my maternal grand parents lived. It was a difficult, dangerous & sad journey from mogok to Lahore, from riches to poverty, from security to insecurity. With the little capital & a few mogok rubies & sapphires which my father managed to bring with him, he

rented a house, started a small new business. He bought a bicycle for me to go to school. In mosk I had been going to school in a brand new Chevrolet car. It was a big adjustment in our lives, the start of a new life in a very big city where we knew very few people.

Looking back to that time, now I feel that we were luckier than the Vietnam boat people leaving Vietnam to-day. Better off than those who were victims of Hiroshima bombings.

Have any of you ever been a refugee? If not, you are lucky.