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## Late Ramilaben (Maniben) Gulabbhai Patel

22.01.1940 - 14.01.2019



Ramilaben (Maniben) (Pinsad gaam) came to the UK in May 1958, when she met her husband, who arrived 4 years earlier, Gulabbhai Govindji Patel (Kuched) for the first time at Heathrow Airport. Their match was arranged in India via photos. They decided at the airport that they were both in agreement with their choice and would go ahead and live together in Darlaston, West Midlands.

Maniben's cousin Bhulabhai who lived in London had offered to host their wedding at a later date. But once they making their life together, they decided the cost and inconvenience did not make sense, so they never got married. But of course, both sets of parents in India wanted to see wedding pictures, so they went into a studio and had a couple of photos taken and sent them to India. Their children only found out this fun secret recently.

They lived in Darlaston, West Midlands and initially both worked in factories but moved to London in 1959. They settled in Belsize Park, Central-North London alongside her cousins Bhulabhai and Bhikabhai (Pinsad) and their families. The eldest daughter Rita was born there, but when expecting their second child they had to upsize from their apartment.



Brixton, South London in January 1962. This is where Bina, Eva & Roshan were born and remained the family home for the next 50+ years.

Buying this large house in South London away from all the family/ community not speaking any English or knowing how to read or write was daunting, but they made it work. As the house was an 8-room property, they decided to use 2 of the rooms for themselves and their 3 daughters and renting the remaining 6 rooms out to Indian Students from the nearby College. In those days you could pick and choose your tenants by race and language. These students helped them with learning the alphabet and speaking English and also encouraged them to both to learn to drive. In return, Maniben cooked food for them.



*They brought their first brand new car*

This was all achieved whilst sending money to India for Gulabbhai's parents.

They made friends with all nationalities, English, Pakistani, Jamaican, Greek and learnt how to get along with them all. Maniben learnt how to cook English dinners like sausage, mash, carrots, peas and onion gravy. Her Muslim friend taught her how to cook meat dishes along with sewing, crocheting and knitting. They embraced all cultures.

Gulabbhai was one of 5 sons, 2 were in India and 2 brothers were in Walsall and Darlaston. Both sons Hirabbhai & Kushalbbhai of the eldest brother in Walsall came to London for a short period of time for study/work.

In 1967 Gulabbhai's niece and nephew arrived in the UK from India, they were the children of his brother who was taking care of his parents in Kuched India. The niece Laxmiben was due to marry someone from Birmingham but on her arrival the guy backed out of the wedding so this



left a huge burden on Gulabbhai's shoulders to find a suitable boy for her to marry and stay in the UK before her visa expired. To his credit and determination, they found a suitable young man in Coventry and she was married. This was a difficult time as not everyone had a telephone in their homes and it meant driving up and down the motorway, whilst holding down a job.



The nephew Natubhai was 13 years old when he came over to live with them, he did his schooling and joined Gulabbhai in the printing press. They took him on as their son and arranged his wedding, he went on to buy his first home nearby with his wife, until he emigrated to the USA in 1979.

By 1969 they had finished paying for the house and saved up enough money to visit their parents back in India along with their 3 daughters.

Their son Roshan was born in 1973.

In 1974 they welcomed their nephew Vijay, son of Dahyabhai, from Darlaston who stayed with them for 5 years for secondary school education.

Once all the tenants had moved on and Rita and Bina were married, in the early 1980's they opened up the house as a bed & breakfast for a few years.



As the children were growing up Gulabbhai and Maniben continued to work and maintain their social activities. They have been active in the LPS London samaj since it started in the mid-1980s. Maniben's outgoing and energetic nature was well known to all generations in the committee and the membership. She was also one of the first female committee members and as Gulabbhai's eye sight deteriorated she continued to drive across London for the LPS events in North London, including Navratri every night, every year for as long as her health allowed it. Their children knew the importance of her extended family to them both and would bring them to events whenever possible.



*Maniben with her extended LPS London Ladies Committee family at Navratri*

In 2017, Maniben's sewa to the Samaj and her family were honoured with the President's Special Member's Award at the LPS London Diwali show. Over the years as well as helping many friends and family, she also raised over £25,000 for LPS London. This was one of the final highlights for her, Gulabbhai and her own and extended LPS London family, because hospital appointments meant we only saw her a couple of times in 2018, and she passed away with her family around her during her final winter trip to her home in Kuched.



After 60 years of marriage, Gulabbhai is now a widower and asked this article mention the “after Maniben” life and the importance of being realistic, understanding and flexible during what is a difficult time for everyone to adjust. He, his children and grandchildren have lost their beloved Maniben and like him, also have a life to live in new circumstances. Some people are blessed with a long life, but that does sometimes mean that some from the younger generation are not as healthy or have lost their life before their elders.

Gulabbhai is, in his own words and with support and understanding from his children’s families, has found happiness living in a Gujarati focused care home that includes daily activities, personalised menus, on site medical care and attention and allows visitors in line with UK regulations. He is happier living with those of his age group, free time and interests, with unlimited visits from family. His eldest and local daughter, Ritaben Pravinbhai summarised it well. “He is so busy with activities we have to book time to see him and his waist has gone from 36 to 40, so we know his stomach is happy too.”



*Together at their Kuched family home every winter  
after retiring and building their home*