

# From the Baltic to the Bay: Caroline Amena searches for her roots

ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY



An image of Caroline's Bangladeshi passport

PHOTO: COURTESY



Caroline and her daughter in Denmark

It was just a few years after the Liberation War in 1971. Caroline Amena Lauritsen was a child then. She does not remember how old she was back then, but her adoption papers say she was three years old.

With a group of children, all from the same "baby home" as hers, Caroline flew to Denmark on November 13, 1975. The only memories she has from her life back in Bangladesh are a few words—words that she finds hard to pronounce now.

"Amena no ghum" and "paani" are the only words that she remembers, she tells me, as we settle down for a chat in a cosy apartment in Dhaka and I ask her what she remembers of her life in Bangladesh, decades back. She also has one lasting memory of her best friend "Moti".

"The first thing I named when I arrived at my parent's house in Denmark was their cat. I called it Pilai."

Caroline Amena Lauritsen is now a woman in her late forties and is visiting Bangladesh in search of her lost family.

"In my papers it is said I was found in a hospital in Mymensingh when I was two years old, and was brought to a shelter of Terre des Hommes, because nobody came looking for me," says Caroline.



Terre des Hommes' building in Dhaka from where Caroline was adopted

Caroline is among some of the first Bangladeshi children who were adopted to Denmark. This was when news of Bangladesh—especially incidents of flooding and famine following the war—featured heavily in Danish media, which prompted Caroline's Danish parents to go through with the adoption.

"I see them as my own parents, of course," Caroline says of her adoptive parents in Denmark.

They both passed away; her mother, 17 years ago and her father, a few years back. Both died of cancer, she shares with me.

Caroline, now a human rights activist, spent all her formative years moving between a small city and island in the Danish archipelago. Her childhood, as she remembers it, was wonderful, spent mostly close to nature and by the sea since they



Caroline (center), at a stopover in Thailand on her way to Denmark.

would often visit Ærø, an island. But she laments her lack of a big family.

And she is now hopeful that maybe finding her Bangladeshi family will finally fulfill her dreams of having a sibling and a big family.

Adopted from Terre des Hommes in November 1975, Caroline does not have many clues on which to base her search. Nurses would change frequently, she says. "I found a letter, from the Danish nurse who helped with my adoption and brought me to Denmark, inside one of my mother's old books. There, she inquired about how I was settling in and doing in my new home."

"I managed to meet her through the Danish registrar's office which keeps an account of its citizens. Initially they were reluctant in sharing the information but after I told them my story, they opened up to me. It was a difficult process, but I managed to find and reach out to a couple of nurses who worked at the organisation's Bangladesh office."

It was a futile process because the nurses could not reveal much about any of the adoptee's families back in Bangladesh, mostly because they did not have much information at their disposal. Still, Caroline, felt compelled to arrange a meeting last spring, where she invited the nurses she found in Denmark.

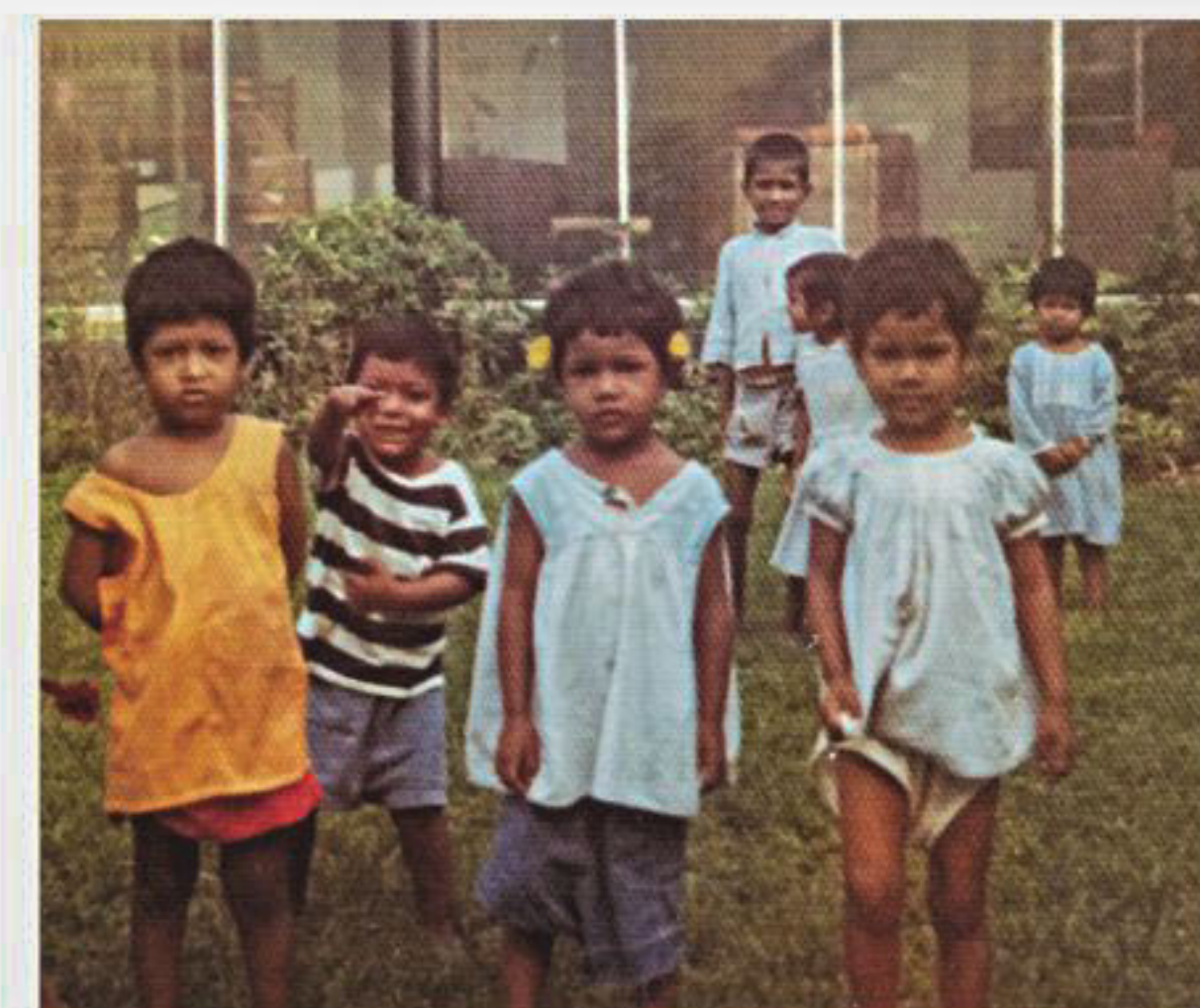
Through a Facebook post last spring,

Caroline called upon any Bangladeshi child who was adopted through Terre des Hommes in the seventies and brought to Denmark. The post received an overwhelming response.

"In the meeting, I ended up meeting a Bangladeshi girl who was brought to Denmark. In fact, she and I came to Denmark together. We both have the same picture together in Thailand, taken on our way to Denmark."

In her search for a family, Caroline also collected a DNA sample kit and uploaded her gene code onto three websites—Ancestry, Myfamilytree and MyHeritage.com that run searches for DNA matches.

Caroline was matched with a fourth-generation cousin—Akther Jahan Rahman, a 78-year-old lady from



Caroline in the shelter home in Dhaka.

Mymensingh in October 2018. Akther Jahan Rahman now lives in Australia but Caroline managed to reach her through emails and they arranged to meet in Bangladesh this January, when they would both be visiting the country.

"That Akther Jahan was from Mymensingh made me very excited. Because I kept thinking, if not her, then maybe her family might know of one that gave up their child or could not find their child around the 70s in a Mymensingh hospital," says Caroline.

Although Caroline managed to meet up a few of Akther's family members, no one could reveal anything of significance to her.

She was also matched with two other people, both third generation cousins—Rob M Bashar and his brother Kaiser Ahmed—both from Mymensingh. Although she has reached out to them, she is yet to get any replies.

Still her search continues. "I have a seven-year-old daughter named Fayee and she is very curious of my past in Bangladesh. And we do not have much family, you know, so I want her to have a chance at a big family, maybe?"

"I too want to know my parents, or my family, and know where I was born. I think everyone deserves that much, you know," Caroline thinks out loud as we pack up the interview after she poses for a few photos.