

Interview by Jemma Purdey with Meta Smith, Melbourne, 18 December 2013

Diploma of Commerce, RMIT, 1960 cohort



<p>[00:01:00]</p>	<p>Originally from Manado, North Sulawesi, parents moved to Makassar when Meta was in secondary school. On finishing school in 1959 heard about Colombo Plan scholarships to Australia. Education was important in the family. To be eligible for the scholarship, had to have an academic average of seven out of ten and eight out of ten for English. Meta is the eldest child, was a bit nervous about going to Australia, had never been away from her parents and was first in the family to go overseas, but her parents were encouraging. A good friend wanted to go to but her family was against it so she didn't.</p>	<p>Childhood</p>
<p>[00:04:52]</p>	<p>There was no pre-departure preparation, training only started on arriving in Sydney. Fifteen Indonesian students came. Two were girls, Meta and Harry Whitfield's wife, both from the same high school. In Australia, Meta studied Economics, had already done three months of university in Makassar. Parents did not go to university. Father went to technical college but not</p>	<p>Scholarship experience; Arrival; Early education</p>

	university.	
[00:08:46]	Went to Darwin via Jakarta, in immigration she was stamped as '100% no English'. In Sydney they were welcomed to Australia and had a few weeks of introductory classes. Was in Sydney for a year at UNSW (failed), staying with a Lebanese family, not far from the uni, and also an Australian family, sharing a room with a Javanese student. Then went to RMIT in Melbourne.	Arrival; challenges; living arrangements; home-stay
[00:13:08]	Found it hard to adjust at first, writing essays was difficult and lots of distractions from other Indonesians, even some from Makassar. Lots of campus activities. Didn't really get to know Australian students. Enjoyed the food provided by host families – loved having mains and dessert. When failed at UNSW was sent to Melbourne in 1961.	Challenges; Indonesian community in Melbourne; food and culture
[00:17:11]	Remembers the education department representative who looked after her in Melbourne. Studied a Diploma of Commerce at RMIT, more figures and fewer essays. Lived in Preston with a retired lady, a friend from RMIT lived across the road. Discussion about how hosts were chosen. Then moved to a share house with Charles's ex-wife, Tania, 177 Grattan Street, Carlton. Julian Assange lived there too. Got a stipend, every fortnight or month. Met more Australians and a Chinese woman in the share house. Lived there until finished	Living in Australia; social network; friendships

	studying.	
[00:23:28]	Most Australian students studied in the evening at RMIT, the day classes were all Asian students. Lecturers were helpful, Meta didn't experience any discrimination. Studied for four years, '61 to '64, then did a year's placement in Accounts Payable at Ramsay Surgical in Berkeley Street.	Studying in Australia; Work experience post-study
[00:26:14]	Part of the Colombo Plan agreement was not to go home for the first three years. In the holidays had part-time jobs. Worked as a waitress in an Indonesian restaurant in Sydney, found going home at night frightening. In Melbourne, sometimes spent the holidays with Tania or Barbara at their families' houses in Beaufort or Bermagui. Felt nervous driving to Bermagui at night, in Makassar that wouldn't have been safe. Had a very nice time with Tania's family. Found that Australian families were very relaxed and welcoming.	Leisure; part-time work experience in Australia; friendships
[00:32:21]	In Makassar had family servants. In Australia had to do all her own housework, that was OK, good for learning independence and living within your means. Had to return home after finished the placement at Ramsay's but finished in '65 and didn't go home until '68, lost some years. Went home in '68, bonded to the Indonesian government, but her qualification wasn't recognised and there were too many public servants so	Living in Australia; independence; Returning home to Indonesia; Career

	<p>she was told to find her own job. Got a job with Chase Manhattan Bank in Jakarta, new offices opening. Living in Jakarta was another big adjustment. Went home for sister's wedding but it felt foreign.</p>	
[00:36:50]	<p>At first rented a place like a garage, in Menteng, but later shared a house with Charles and Tania Coppel, and two-year-old Louisa, when they came to Jakarta, really liked that. Met her husband there. Worked at Chase Manhattan for a year but the pay scales discriminated against Indonesians so got a job with an Indonesian travel bureau as their accountant. Pay wasn't high but it was equitable, and enjoyed working for an Indonesian firm.</p>	Returning to Indonesia
[00:40:41]	<p>Quite a few Colombo scholars lived in Jakarta so reconnected with a few, including Sukrisman, an architect who has a business in Darwin and used to own a cafe on Rathdowne Street. Meta met him and others when they lived in Arnold Street in Carlton. Melbourne in the mid-sixties was safe and not crowded. Meta never felt discrimination, others did.</p>	Indonesian alumni network; Living in Australia
[00:44:29]	<p>Met Keith in Jakarta in '68, he went back to Australia but kept in touch and returned to Melbourne in '69 and they married in 1970. No problem returning to Australia, it felt like coming home. Keith was from Brisbane but they decided to live in Melbourne. Keith was a technical expert in Indonesia during the mid-</p>	Family; marriage; Returning to live in Australia

	sixties to help build airports all over Indonesia.	
[00:48:08]	Worked for ICI in Melbourne for a year, then Keith got a job with the UN in Kathmandu. Keith left and Meta stayed until the end of the financial year before joining him. Got a job with UNICEF doing administration. Came back to Melbourne in '72. Still good friends with some Nepalese colleagues, visits them there.	Career; international mobility
[00:51:05]	Came back to Melbourne in '72 and worked at ICI again – in different sections, finance, costing, IT – interesting work costing explosives production. Wasn't promoted, preferred to use knowledge rather than manage people.	Career
[00:54:10]	In '75 Keith got a job in Somalia so they went there for five years. Impressions of Somalia: a poor country, dry. They don't eat fish, despite the sea, there was a UN program to encourage fishing but the Russians fished on a large scale. In Somalia Meta worked for the American School in Mogadishu as the secretary and bookkeeper, enjoyed it. Felt safe there then, wouldn't now.	International mobility; international networks
[00:59:01]	The UN provided two trips out a year and Meta and Keith went to Addis Ababa or Rome, could have gone to South Africa but didn't want to experience apartheid. No problem being Asian in Somalia, Somali people were very friendly, no caste system like in Nepal. Went on Safari. Went to Indonesia	

	once via the Seychelles and Colombo.	
[01:01:07]	Came back to Melbourne in 1980 and stayed until 1999. Worked at ICI again overseeing the IT transition, then retired. Keith had retired during the nineties and did consulting work. Meta visits Indonesia regularly as a tourist, finds it too hot and humid now. She has four nieces and nephews in Indonesia and three in Melbourne.	Career; Family in Indonesia
[01:05:00]	Meta's sister came to stay with her when Keith was in Kathmandu and met an Australian who she married. Meta's other sister was widowed and later married the first sister's brother. Meta's parents have died but her mother visited Melbourne quite a few times. Her father did not like to travel.	Family
[01:08:56]	Still sees Colombo scholars in Indonesia or if they visit Melbourne, e.g. Koesmarihati, former head of telecom in Indonesia. Discussion about other Colombo scholars: Joan Whitfield, Sulaksmi Newstead, did engineering at Monash and went to school with Ben Kioka in Singaraja, Helmi, Mustafa Sabarudin, Houw Tan and Hendi Hendrata.	
[01:15:42]	END	
Second recording [00:00:00]	1999 to 2005 in Paris, France, Keith suggested they go there and learn French to challenge themselves. Originally went there for a year but stayed longer, learnt French, went	International mobility

	to galleries and traveled to Spain, Holland, Germany, Austria. Got their visa extended every year, lots of friends visited. Saw the turn of the millennium in Paris. Lived in the fifth arrondissement. Went back once but feels it's too far now.	
[00:05:21]	END	