

They've gone.

I've been thinking about this day for twenty-five years. Growing up half a world away, with a new name and a new family, wondering whether I would ever see my mother and brothers and sister again. And now here I am, standing at a door
5 near the corner of a run-down building in a poor district of a small, dusty town in central India – the place I grew up – and no-one lives there. It's empty.

The last time I stood here I was five years old.

The door, its hinges broken, is so much smaller than I remember it as a child – now I would have to bend over to fit through it. There's no point in knocking.
10 Through the window, as well as some gaps in the familiar crumbling brick wall, I can see into the tiny room my family shared, the ceiling only a little higher than my head.

This was my worst fear, so paralysing that I suppressed it almost completely – that once I finally found my home, after years of searching, my family wouldn't
15 be in it.

Not for the first time in my life, I'm lost and I don't know what to do. This time I'm thirty, I've got money in my pocket and a ticket home, but I feel just like I did on that railway platform all those years ago – it's hard to breathe, my mind is racing and I wish I could change the past.

20 Then the neighbour's door opens. A young woman in red robes comes out of the better maintained flat next door, holding a baby in her arms. She's curious, understandably. I look Indian, but my Western clothes are probably a little too new, my hair carefully styled – I'm obviously an outsider, a foreigner. To make matters worse, I can't speak her language, so when she speaks to me, I can
25 only guess that she's asking me what I want here. I remember barely any Hindi

and I'm not confident about how to pronounce the little I do know. I say, 'I don't speak Hindi, I speak English,' and I'm astonished when she responds, 'I speak English, a little.' I point at the abandoned room and recite the names of the people who used to live there – 'Kamla, Guddu, Kallu, Shekila' – and then I
30 point to myself and say, 'Saroo.'

This time the woman remains silent. Then I remember something Mum gave me back in Australia, for just this situation. I scrabble around in my daypack and pull out an A4 page with colour photographs of me as a child. Again I point to myself, and then say 'little' as I point to the boy in the photographs. 'Saroo.'

35 I try to remember who lived next door to us when this was my home. Was there a little girl who could now be this woman ?

Taken from *A Long Way Home : A Memoir*, 2013
by Saroo Brierley.