

Sofia
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Interviewer: Katy Wade

Interviewer: I
Respondent: R

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00:00 I This is Katy Wade interviewing Sofia on Thursday 22nd October. Can you tell me about your family?

00:12 R OK basically my dad came over from Pakistan with his, no, his dad came over from Pakistan to work in the factories and then my dad came over when he was seventeen, he was called over by his dad, and then after that my grandmother and the rest of the brothers and sisters were called to England and that's how we started off basically. And after that my dad was married to my mother and she came from Pakistan, she was his cousin, and then after that I was born. Like I think I'd been conceived three months into the marriage or something I can't remember, but she come over in January and I was born in October, so that's quite funny when she tells me that story. And when my dad came over to this country, it was basically my granddad living on his own, and they used to have like a support network of other Pakistani males and whatever at the time, but the wives hadn't come over, so my dad came and he worked as a, on my birth certificate it says cap stand setter, but I'm not sure what that is, but something to do with mechanics and cars. And then my dad started learning how to fix cars and stuff and that became his vocation. And my grandfather had to call over my grandmother because I think at first only the men were given visas, I'm not sure about that, but I think that's what the case was and then when my gran came over, my dad had two brothers and one sister who came over and they all used to live in the same home which was Fulham Road.

01:58 R So when they came over, I think my uncles were put into school and my aunt used to study and stuff, but I think things weren't very good at that time because there wasn't a lot of money to go round, and even though like houses were around £3,000 at that time, still the wages, I can't remember what my mum said, it was about £1.50 or something for a day, I can't remember or £3.00, it was something crazy like that. So they had the kids to look after and everything and I remember my mum saying that when she came over, she brought my auntie a coat, because it was cold and she didn't have a coat to wear, and basically I think when they came over things were very tight, and I think my grandfather wasn't used to having a family to look after as well because he'd been like on his own for quite a while and then I think my dad, I can't remember exactly what age but my dad said that one day he was in bed with his dad and he was sleeping and this is when my gran

had already come over thank god, but basically my granddad had a heart attack and died in his sleep, so my dad was sleeping next to his dad and when he woke up, like he'd literally been sleeping next to his dad who had died during the night, and I just find that really weird when I think about it and dad's very like flippant about it, because I think he didn't realise what the significance of that is, but then that coloured my dad's view in that he didn't like get attached to people too easily in life because like their dad basically brought them over and didn't stay long and then you know left this world.

03:43 R So after that, I think I was the first one to be born and then all I remember from my childhood is that we used to have a little garden where my mother would send me to get mint leaves from the garden like pluck them from the plant to put in the curry and whatever she was cooking, and I also remember they used to, I don't know if it was a man or whether my uncle used to do it, but somebody, we had a gutter like we have now, we have gutters where the water comes down from the bathroom or whatever, and they used to get chickens and they used to like make them Halal which is basically they cut the neck, and there used to be blood and feathers everywhere in the garden. So I find it quite funny when they talk about gore and kids nowadays and how they're affected, like I just remember the man coming, and I think at first it was the house people and then a man used to come and do it, but basically killing the chicken in the back yard. So they're like some of my like early memories, and I remember I used to love, that's why I love mint now because I always used to eat leaves, and I don't even remember if I used to wash them, but I used to go to the garden and ajwain and mint, we have the plants in the garden and then the plants would be used in the cooking, and I don't remember but I think my mum used plant the vegetables as well. And I think that was a throwback from her childhood in Pakistan because when she grew up in Pakistan, she had her own like buffalos and cows and things, and she used to basically, she used to get up in the morning and milk them and look after them and she had pet names for them, and erm, I remember when I went Pakistan once, there was a dog and in those days in Pakistan we didn't have a toilet so we used to have to go out to the rocks to have a poop and erm the dog used to guard the ladies while they were doing their business, and I remember it was quite a social thing because everyone used to be chatting while they were doing it, it was kind of weird but and we used to ask for toilet paper, but that was one of my earliest memories in Pakistan when I was about, I think I went when I was thirteen, but I knew then that this was the kind of life that my mom had come from which was quite interesting to know.

06:04 R But I think her goats were her pets and stuff as well and my grandfather had dogs and stuff like that in Pakistan, so my mum when she came here, she wanted to like grow her own like herbs and food and you know they were killing their own chickens or getting other people to do it. So that was the norm at that time. I mean nowadays you just go to the meat shop normally and I've heard there are people that still do like slaughter their own chickens

or whatever, but I've not seen that lately in the past like ten or fifteen years. So I mean I remember my gran, a lot of people used to come to my grans house, in those days it was like everybody just converged at my grans and they'd be like eating or you know talking and stuff and there was a lot of community spirit at that time. And we had white next door neighbours, and we used to call them grandma and grandpa, I remember. So I don't even know what their real names are to this day, I always just talk about grandpa and grandma. And I remember once when I was really small and erm cause we were brought up here we didn't like understand why we don't do Christmas and things like that, and I remember what happened one year is, I mean I used to be the child that always used to get up and like sneakily look when stuff was going on at night and what happened is I think grandpa dressed up in a Santa suit and like came and gave us a little inflatable kind of, I think it was inflatable Christmas tree and had a sack of presents that he left under it, and this was at night some time and we weren't supposed to know, but I think I'd snuck like to the top of the stairs because there was like a window there that you could see through (laughs) and I always used to do that. I've seen a lot of stuff that I probably would rather not have seen because of that as well but... That's one thing I saw and that's a really vivid memory from my childhood because even though we were Muslims and we don't do Christmas, but you know grandpa would include us in his like celebration and I still remember that to this day, I remember him dressed up in a white beard and a hat, I can't remember if he had the suit on or not, but, that's one of my really early memories, so it just shows that they go on about integration and stuff nowadays but I think things were more simpler back when we were smaller, and there wasn't a fuss made about it, we just did it.

08:29 R We had auntie Brady who was another white lady who lived opposite, and we just called them auntie and you know grandpa and whatever, it was never about that they're white or they're black or you know, and things were just more, I don't know, I don't know if I'm looking back like that, but things were just simpler then, people were just people and you know you'd just, we'd share the food with them and they'd kind of like include us in what they did and we had, I had two friends called Leon and Helen, who used to live in some flats across on Beech Road, so we'd go to their house and I remember being introduced to things like connect four and 'white games' which we thought at the moment like monopoly and I was like what is this stuff and dominos and you know we'd not had that in our house. It was like board games and we used to sit and play these games like as a family, so that was my first introduction to like this kind of thing. And I think my parents were quite liberal. I remember we had a gramophone, and I remember that my uncles used to get, I can't remember what it was, like Jamaican music. I think one of my uncles who is now deceased, I think he was into Jamaican music because when they moved to another house later on, his bedroom had like I think it was yellow, green and something wallpaper like the Jamaican flag.

09:55 R And now I'm looking back I'm like, how was he influenced by that culture if he

was like from a Muslim family or Pakistani background? But like obviously he was, and he had hair that he looked like he had an afro. Looking back I can't remember if he had it done that way or if it was naturally like that. But I don't think it could have been naturally like that because we've all got straight hair, so sometimes I look back and I think what was going on? And my other uncle, he always used to have like Michael Jackson like LP's and he'd like, there was this friend he had and erm, he used to go to his house and share LP's and we'd put them on the gramophone, and we'd have like Tom Jones and stuff and I don't know, I just didn't really think about it at the time. And erm I remember my dad always used to like to put on music and we've got a film of us when we were small dancing around and like he'd just basically follow us with a camera for about, I don't know how long, and now people say that oh this is forbidden and that is forbidden, back then we just did stuff. It was like when we first came over and you know the people that came over, they were just doing stuff, they weren't bothered about all this like religion and stuff, which is so prominent now that I'm that age myself. It's like if you tell anybody you listen to music, it's like "*it's forbidden, you shouldn't be doing it*" and erm we just used to dance round and have fun, it was harmless fun, it wasn't a big deal. So like I've got pictures of myself with like long hair down to my backside basically, that's how long my hair used to be when I was my daughter's age, and erm next to the gramophone and the microphone so obviously we had a karaoke machine as well (laughs).

11:41 R So I just remember always like dancing around, and it wasn't something weird to me. Whereas now if my daughter's, she's like part of the choir, if she tries to sing or something, her dad's like "*no you shouldn't sing*", or you know people say "*you shouldn't be doing that*", but I let her, I encourage her because I did that when I was small at Fulham Road. You know I'd be standing there next to the gramophone putting music on and just dancing around and we just did that. It's very good memories because you know that kind of stuff, my kids will never remember that kind of a childhood, cause there was a care free kind of atmosphere then that it just doesn't exist anymore. I don't know whether that's cause I'm biased and I'm looking back at that time, I don't know, I wonder about that sometimes. But that was what our life was like, I mean we had, my uncle I think used to sleep in the attic and he was single at that time. My other uncle had gotten married so he'd got his own house and erm I think we used to sleep four to a bed. I remember cause once what happened is my sister woke up in the middle of the night saying "*sharks, fishes, sharks, fishes*" and she was screaming and she wouldn't stop like screaming and we don't know what happened to her to this day, but I remember we were all in the same bed and she was like kicking us, so I think, when I, because I was the oldest, I think when I got a bit older, the room that my uncle and his wife used to have before they went to their own house, I think they gave me that room on my own, and erm, I think that's the only time like I had my own room cause they thought I was older and I needed my privacy. But before that I think there was no room to even like you know for us to sleep anywhere, because it was like my uncle, and

obviously like my gran's sons and daughters, you know my dad and everyone, and then there was like my mum had had four children by then, so like we were basically just sharing the same house and the same bathroom. Sometimes I wonder how we did it, cause I get so annoyed when my kids are in the bathroom and I need it and there's only two of us, and I look back at those times and sometimes I think how did we cope without like killing each other? Which is probably what would happen now cause I just value having my own space so much.

14:05 R Well basically I was given my own room, and then I remember that's probably when my personality started developing, because I remember I used to have cardboard boxes full of Smash Hits magazine. And that was another thing that I was into, cause when we were small, we'd always watch Top of the Pops. It was also like, it would be like a family event, everyone would get round the TV and it would be like "oh look Top of the Pops is on" and I don't understand why because what was the big deal? And that was like it wasn't a part of the culture that we'd grown up in or whatever so I feel really like privileged that you know our family was kind of like crazy, cause one uncle was basically, I think he was a wanna be a Jamaican person and then having my other uncle who used to like work in like and he worked in a bingo for a bit and he worked in a video shop. He didn't do any conventional jobs ever, I don't think I can ever remember him doing it and then having this family which was kind of eclectic. And err I just look back now and I think what was going on? Like all these weird things, but erm basically then I started because we'd always watched Top of the Pops, it's always been like "*Top of the Pops is on, come on down.*" I started collecting Smash Hits magazines, and from that I found out about this person called Neil Tennant, and I laugh now because, when I had a really big crush on him and he was like really posh and I don't know why, whether it was because of the way he spoke and he was really like a London posh accent, I was really like this is brilliant! And I think to this day my accent and the way I speak is a bit like influenced by like that as well because I don't speak like conventional, like people around me, like there's always, I always come out with big words or I'm always talking in a certain like posh way or whatever, but I think I was influenced by that which again it's crazy. Like I find out now that all the major pop stars that I had a crush on like George Michael and Pet Shop Boys, they're all homosexuals and that makes it even more weird, it's like what the hell? (Laughing). You kind of just question your childhood a bit, because it's like what the heck was going on? And it just makes me laugh looking back at those times, but I was really influenced by the culture around me and you know the people and I remember there was a song which was number one at the time which I heard on the radio recently by a band called the Goombay Band or something, I don't even know what the name was, they sang a song called Seven Tears and I remember that from my childhood, I remember that being on a lot because it was at number one for a few weeks I think, so I got memories like that, and I was thinking well I was influenced by the western culture quite a lot even though we had Bollywood films on in the house as

well. Because my uncle worked in the video shop, he used to bring back the videos, but then I also remember us having to either turn the film off, or like give it back because it was too dirty, so I think there was a bit of like censorship in the house but like generally it was very like laid back atmosphere.

17:27 I Can you tell me a bit more about what it was like living with three generations in one house?

17:31 R Well basically at first when my dad came over, he was, after his brothers and sisters came, he was the only one that had got married. So obviously he had children first and by the time my dad had finished with my mum, she had four kids, so we all used to sleep in the same bedroom and then after that my uncle got married, in again to his cousin in Pakistan, so it was them who were married then and they used to have the box room. And basically, I used to like always be worried about what they used to keep in their room and I used to be a really inquisitive child, and what I did once was, they used to have only one bed and a wardrobe in their room because it was really small. What I did is I climbed up on the bed and I'd seen my aunt putting some shiny things on top of the cupboard and I thought maybe there would be some money there or something I don't know what came into me but anyway, I went and I took some shiny squares off the cupboard and I was like what are these and they were perforated, so I tore one off and I opened it and then when I touched it, it was very like slimy and sticky and I was like "*oh my god what is this*", it was some kind of ring with some kind of I don't know, some slippery stuff on it and I was like this is a bit like horrible, why did I do this, this is really slimy and disgusting and then I just chucked it in the bin. And now I know that those were obviously condoms, but at that point in my life I didn't know what the heck condoms were or what they were for, and if it was my kids now they'd probably think like where do you put them? What are they for? What do you do with them? They'd have like a hundred questions. But I didn't even know what they were, all I knew was that they were disgusting and slimy and you know just let them get on with it if they're doing something with it and just put it in the bin.

19:24 R And also I remember one thing me and my, cause my aunt and uncle had a daughter, and erm we grew up in the house together at first, even though there wasn't that much space. And erm what we did once was me and my cousins, we went in the bathroom and we locked the door and we tried some hair removing cream. Now I don't know, maybe we'd seen someone using it or something, but I remember this like burning pain, and erm I think we were only like six or seven at the time, and luckily we tried it on our legs and not anywhere else, and not on our face or you know. And erm because we were together we just to do things like random things and get each other into trouble and stuff. But obviously there came a time when my uncle and auntie had to leave because they had their child and they had to apply for a council house and go, so they left, and then my youngest uncle was left who then got

married to his cousin in Pakistan, and they were living in the attic, and now I always used to be scared of the attic because there was like a side kind of hatch where I think it was just for storing things or something, but it was quite dark so I'd never go in the attic. But once what my uncle did when he was newly married, they had a double bed up there and I think it was me and my small cousin, or was it one of his kids who had a dummy in her mouth? Well anyway, it was one of the little kids was sleeping in the bed with a dummy in their mouth and my uncle, I think he was trying to put me to sleep or something, but he put me in bed with the small child and said "*here you are, I will just the TV on for you*", and I think this was quite late at night, and what happened is a mummy movie came on, and like I was alone in the attic and I was really frightened because this mummy movie came on and it started going "*ooooooh, ooooooh*" and I'm on my own and I didn't have the guts to like get up and run down stairs cause of that hatch that I was scared of, so this is you know what my uncle did to me (laughs). I don't think he kind of thought that it's late and there might be something inappropriate on the TV, because another thing about when we were small was that we didn't have that many channels.

21:41 R I remember we used to be, like the TV channel would finish at like five o'clock or six o'clock or something, like there'd just be this erm girl holding a puppet or something for the rest of the night until the TV started again, so there weren't that many channels anyway. So I don't think there was that much awareness around TV, and how nowadays there's locks and stuff like that. There was no parental control, they just left me in front of the TV and left me to it, and I'm quite scared to this day when I think about that, that was quite a scary moment in my life. (Laughs). And I've never been able to watch mummies and also I think I was a bit scarred by Dr Who because my uncle was like "*Look this cool programmes are on, it's Dr Who.*" And I was scared witless of daleks. My uncle used to be like "*oh it's so cool just sit there and watch it, look you know I watch it*" and to this day my son watches Dr Who and I'm like "*you're bloody crazy, I'm still scared of cyber men and daleks.*" So I think I had a bit of scarring from my childhood, from these things when I was small, cause I didn't realise that it's scaring me. So my uncle even though he meant well, but he ended up scaring me for life and I'm scared, even I can't watch them now, when it comes on I just leave the room.

23:01 R So all of this was going on, but my uncle, when he, he had two sons, and I think after the first one they moved into a council house on Beech Road as well. So they went and then, kind of, I think when my other uncle and auntie left, think cause the room was free, I ended up having that room for myself because I was the eldest child, I think they thought I needed my privacy. And that's when I started hoarding stuff, because I'd never had space to myself. So I don't know where I got them from, I must have been spending my pocket money on them, but I had like boxes full of Smash Hits magazines by the time I left Fulham Road, and I used to always have like random stuff and things that we collected, like there was this matryoshka doll we'd got because we'd

gone Pakistan and we'd stopped in Russia, as a stop over and I'd got that from there.

23:57 R So I was always into like kind of I don't know weirdo stuff when I was small, like different cultures and stuff like that. And then when I had my own room, I think that was when I started realising you know I'm having time to think on my own, I'm basically I've developed my own personality, cause I think when you're stuck in a room, you kind of, you don't have that time or space to like kind of think for yourself or to develop your own personality, because there's no room. If you're in a room or where there's two beds, and in one of them there's four people sleeping, or four kids, you can't really do much, and I don't think you have time to explore yourself, so I think that's when I kind of started developing my own personality, knowing that you know who I am. And think this was when I was about ten, ten or eleven. So basically, after this at Fulham Road, after everyone had left the house basically with their wives and their children or whatever they had, erm I think that was when my dad was responsible for like basically my mum and the children on their own, because what my gran did is she moved to a house with her son, she didn't stay with us, and basically my dad didn't, I think he used to give my mum money on top of the social security money or whatever, but I don't think it was enough to live on, because what used to happen is I remember we had an electricity and gas meter, well I don't remember if they were separate but electricity definitely. We had a meter above the door, and what used to happen is you'd have to put 50p in it, and then the meter would like run for I don't know how long, and then you'd have to just keep feeding it 50p's, and I remember my mum always used to have go to the shop to get a 50p for the meter, so we had this meter but sometimes what would happen is the meter would go off and we would just be sitting there like in the dark and I remember saying to my mum *"mum why are we sitting in the dark, go and put some money in the meter"* and I think I didn't realise it then but she didn't used to have money for the meter. So then I think times got a bit harder because like everyone had gone and it was basically my dad on his own having to look after the family, and I think he was used to like paying for his brothers and sisters when they went to Pakistan, he got them married and he had been supporting them, because obviously his dad wasn't there, so he was kind of like the man of the house. But I think when it came to his own kids and his family and when he was left to his own devices, he kind of floundered a bit, because he had been used to like kind of looking after everybody together. But anyway my mum, she made do on the money that she had and what I remember is when we used to go to school because we went to Clifton Junior School.

26:54 R I remember when we started school, I remember we always used to walk and, when we came back, I remember there used to be a lot of charity shops on the Ladypool Road, which is something that even on the Stratford Road now there's not a lot of that type of shop, but there was a charity shop, and basically we used to go and buy like trousers and stuff from there, which I

think nowadays I wouldn't even imagine having to do that for my children, but obviously times you know were hard then, and my dad was having to support like four kids through his job, which was I think by then he'd bought his own garage. And so and basically my mum did the best she could with us and when we started at school I remember wearing I can't remember, I think it was corduroy trousers, it's like we would just get what was in the charity shop and we ended up having like really weird photos of that time because we'd have like, I used to wear like dungarees and corduroy trousers and all kinds of mismatched stuff. But I think at that time we didn't care, and I think the children didn't care that much either. And a lot of the children were wearing like traditional Pakistani clothes at that time in school as well so, I don't think we used to have a uniform or like a school uniform at that time, we used to wear our own clothes at school, which again I can't remember when that changed, to like when uniforms became mandatory for the children and whatever because all I can remember is we just used to wear our own clothes. I don't think we had a uniform and this is back in, it would probably be I don't know, in the eighties? So even now looking back on that, I'm thinking when did it change to having you know mandatory school uniforms in the schools, cause I don't remember (laughs). I think when I obviously came to secondary school, I needed to wear a uniform but that's the first time I wore it, but now even in the junior schools the kids wear like uniforms, so that would be something interesting to look at later.

29:00 R But anyway, we used to have our headmaster at Clifton was Mr Tatton, and I've got early memories of him being in the playground and always he'd be standing in the playground, and he'd be saying (**raised voice**) "*Oi you boy!, Oi you girl!*" If anybody did anything bad, they'd know that Mr Tatton would get them. He'd literally be standing in the middle of the playground, watching for children if they were gonna misbehave and then what he'd do, if somebody kicked someone or somebody did something to somebody else, he'd be like (**raised voice**) "*Oi you child!*" And put his hand out and be like, point at them and then he'd be "how dare you do that" and then he'd like grab them from the scruff of their like coat and he would drag them across the playground to the detention place, which was inside or whatever, and we just used to be really scared and we'd never do anything wrong because we'd be scared of being dragged or shouted at across the playground. And I laugh because you couldn't do that nowadays, not at all, it's like you'd be in jail, but that's what Mr Tatton used to do. But he was a really, apart from that, the teachers were strict with us, but we still learnt a lot, and like I basically I used to be really good at reading and writing, so like Mr Tatton would always call my mum and, because she was illiterate, he'd like kind of call her and say to her like "*she's really good at this, teach her that*" and I'd always have extra reading books and stuff because I loved reading, I would just always read.

30:34 R That reminds me of another thing at Fulham Road, my mum, when my auntie or someone would come to go shopping, what they used to do for me, again it's another no, no, but they used to just give me a book of fairy tales because

I used to love reading fairy tales, and they'd put a little pile of ajwain on the table and just leave me home alone. And I just used to sit there reading my books, I've got memories of that and I didn't think it was weird and I didn't care that they'd left me, I was just happy reading my book. So again that's another thing. If you did that, you'd probably be reported to the police, for being a negligent parent but that didn't do me no harm and was just happy doing whatever I wanted and I never did anything bad, I didn't think to leave the house or set the house on fire, or I don't know what people would have done. So that's another memory I've got and then at Clifton I remember our teachers as well, they used to stick up for us a lot like there was this guy that used to bully me, and what my teacher did was, he was from another class and she went in and she said **(raised voice)** *"Don't you dare bully anyone from my class!"* And you know I don't think you'd be able to do that nowadays either, but she basically scared the willies out of him and he never like bullied me again, and she was like **(raised voice)** *"Don't you dare, how dare you do anything to anyone from my class!"* And I'm sure if someone did that, they'd be out of their job probably nowadays. But that was another thing which I really remember to this day, it was really awesome basically that she just stuck up for me like that, because I was a quiet child and I tended to get bullied a lot because people thought because you're quiet you can get bullied.

32:11 R But I remember once, there was this boy that would always trip me up, and he always used to trip me up but what my mum did in the end was she went and she gave him a good talking to, which again you can't really do nowadays and he never like teased me again. Because I remember we were doing our harvest festival assembly or something, and I think I was dressed up as a carrot or something and he tried to trip me over and I just told my mum after that and she just like basically went and told him, and she was like how dare he do that, but that's something you can't do nowadays. And I think all this stuff I went through when I was small, it just basically shaped me as a human being because we were taught respect. You know even at Fulham Road you know, we were taught respect for elders, you don't ever like talk back to people and you don't do this and you don't do that. Our neighbours were always nice, and we never had shouting in the house, or we never had like arguing or there wasn't like, you wouldn't walk out and there wouldn't be like fights, you know like people punching each other in the street or something, or arguing or anything. And my gran always used to keep her back door open which again is a no, no nowadays, you're just asking for trouble. Even if human doesn't come in, the rats will be coming in, so you just don't do that nowadays, our back door was always open, even if my gran left the house to go shopping, you know her back door would be open and the neighbours would always be shouting over the fence *"oh can I have this and can I have that."* We'd be knocking the walls and like the neighbours would come because they would know we were calling them basically, so it was really good but nowadays you don't even know who your neighbours are. I mean I proactively go out and find out who my neighbours are, but that's just

me, because nobody else on the road can be bothers, it's like everyone is really insular. And that's something I really miss from living at Fulham Road. It's like we had like relatives on the road and we kind of knew everybody and it was like, you just, I don't know it was a different world then, you just kind of felt safer, because you knew who everybody around you was. You didn't need to worry that you don't know who your neighbours are or you know stuff like that.

34:23 R That was our life at Fulham Road, and I got up to interesting stuff there. And when I was thirteen, then my dad must have saved up some money somehow and he bought Clarence Road, so he came here, I think his friend had said that he was going to sell it him for £3,000 or something. £30,000 or £3,000 I can't remember, I think it was £30,000 by then, but it wasn't that much money. And basically my dad's friend sold him his house, which when we came here to Clarence Road, we found out it wasn't in very good condition cause what happened is he'd boarded the windows up, and the house looked like ghosts had lived in it or something, but the guy had lived in it with his family, so that was quite weird, it was like the windows were boarded up like it was some kind of like squatters house. And I can't remember much about that time but I remember my mum had to spend a lot of time cleaning the house and making it habitable for us, but for the first time in our lives, me and my sister shared a bedroom and the two like, my brothers shared a bedroom so it was quite like, there was three bedrooms so that was awesome.

35:41 R My mum and dad had their bedroom, I was sharing with my sister, and then my brothers had theirs. So that was the start of another part of our life, which then from Clifton Junior we then moved to Hall Green School, and now Hall Green School is kind of connected to Clifton as well, because what I did was, when I had my choice forms in school, like you have to make a choice of your secondary school or whatever. What I did is they, my auntie suggested to my mum that I should be put into a girl's school, because she went to Swanshurst. So they said to me put Swanshurst as your first choice. Now I had been to Clifton which was mixed sex school so I was like, I don't want to go to a school where there's just girls, that's just boring, why would I want to do that? And I couldn't understand why they was saying to send me to a girls school, and now I understand it because it was a cultural consideration where like they say basically you should keep away from boys or whatever, and you know so, on my choices form, they wrote Swanshurst and I think another school and then Moseley, and I can't remember what else. But what I did is and I don't know whether my mum or the secretary know to this day, but I went to the secretary and I told her that my mum said that I should go and change the choices. Now I knew I wanted to go to Hall Green Secondary School, so what I did is I went and I changed the card. I told the secretary that my mum wants to change it so what I did is I took it off her, changed it myself and gave it back, which I don't know if that's another thing you can get away with nowadays. But I knew, I don't know whether it's because of the way I

was brought up and the way that you know things had happened, I didn't want to go to a girls school, a girls only school. I was like that's not going to be fun, and what's the point, what does it matter if there's boys around you, I've had brothers, you know and we've had boys in our school and even though boys are a bit stupid sometimes. But you need to know that in life, you should just know that boys are just dumb and just let them get on with what they're doing. So I changed my form and then we didn't get into Hall Green but then I appealed which is good because I knew how to read and write myself so I was doing all this stuff for my mum, I was happy and then I ended up getting a place at Hall Green Secondary School and obviously then naturally from there my brothers and sisters progressed to that school, so that was the start of a new chapter in my life.

Audio 2

00:00 I Can you tell me about your secondary school?

00:03 R Yea, I went to Hall Green Secondary School which is in Hall Green, and I talked previously about how I doctored the papers so that I could go there. And when I went there it was quite an experience, because we were, at that time there was not that many Asian kids. There was a lot of kids from like Sikh background and Hindu background, but there weren't as many like people from our Pakistani background at the time. And there was a lot of white kids, probably compared to what there is now, because recently I've seen the school and there's a lot of Pakistani children there now. And that was a good experience, because culturally we basically, we picked up a lot of stuff from the school, but there was a lot of bad stuff that happened there to do with like racist bullying and things like that. And erm, at that time I think we didn't even know what bullying was to be honest, and what used to happen is, there was some people there that used to every time you walked passed from the bus or whatever on the way home, they'd call you like 'paki' or something like that. And I think it was just because they hadn't been that exposed to Asian people, because at that time, I think Hall Green was mainly a white area. And if you look at it now, there's now it's totally like, there's Asian shops there and stuff so it's changed completely. But when we were there, there was only one chip shop, and we used to go there at dinner time to have our fish and chips. It's still there, but I think there's quite a few other shops there now, especially food shops.

01:47 R But anyway, I got bullied by some girls at school. It started because, and the funny thing is I think they were Jamaican or something the girls, and I know because their cousin ended up being related to my mum's next door neighbour at some point. But basically they had learnt kick boxing and what they used to do is, they used to go round kicking people in school, but for some reason no one would like say anything, and we had this one guy that was a druggie as well, and he got chucked out in the end but I think he would just like be on drugs and he'd be like kicking people as well, so there was a lot

of stuff that was kind of not, we were just, ignoring it if you know what I mean. It was kind of strange, and with the bullying, right towards the end I got some guts and I spoke to one of the teachers, but she said *"No that girl can't be bullying you because her mum's so like, you know high up in the community and they're well educated"*, so that was basically how they dealt with bullying in those days, which was you know, I just went quiet after that because there was really not much to say. It started because one of the girls threw a pen on the floor in the class or a pencil, and they said *"pick it up."* And I refused to because I hadn't been brought up to kind of do stuff that like people say to you like that, and then they started bullying me after that. And it was like a lot of physical, like I say they had been learning kick boxing and stuff so it was a lot of kicking and stuff, but it taught me a lot about life because, basically when it happened, my so called friends, they would just either walk on or leave me, like nobody really stuck up for you and that kind of taught me in life that you know you got to stick up for yourself.

03:39 R So one day, one of the girls, I was walking across the bridge home, and she threw a penny on the floor and she said *"pick that up."* So what I did was, I picked up the penny and I started rubbing it on my sleeve, rubbing it on my buttocks and rubbing it everywhere and breathing on it and then I gave it to her and I said *"Is that ok?"* and then I think she kind of found that a bit funny. And then in the end the bullying stopped because, I think they probably figured out that I was cool or something and they didn't want to bully me no more. But what happened is we were playing basketball in P.E. and I was always the person that was left at the end that no one wanted to choose, so I ended up being on the team of the girls that used to bully me and they were like *"oh my god she's stupid, we're gonna lose."* And what happened is I don't know what happened that day but one of the girls threw me the ball, and I think it was the last chance to score or something to win, and I ended up scoring and the next thing you know they're all coming and hugging me and stuff and erm it was quite funny and like *"yea she's made us win"*, so I think they kind of backed off after that but then they went after somebody else. There was a girl that I knew, poor girl, she was standing by me talking to me one day and she said something about a blackboard, and then the girls were like *"you're racist"* and started bullying her. So I wasn't glad that she was being bullied, but they kind of forgot about me after that so it was quite funny.

05:09 R But what I will always remember is the way the teacher dealt with it, because nowadays, you couldn't say that and literally everything was just swept under the carpet. And also while I was being bullied there, I was getting quite sick of the fact that people would just, because I used to have two plaits and my hair was really long, like down to my bum, so basically when I had my plaits, people thought it was funny to pull my hair as they were taunting me or whatever. So one day I was in my RE class and the teacher had gone out the class, and there was this young white guy and, I think he was called Paul or something, I don't even remember, I think he was Paul, I think I remember

his name. And he pulled my plait and I got so sick of him pulling my plait, so what I did is, I bit him and I bit him on his arm and I wouldn't let go, because I quite enjoyed biting as well for some reason. So I bit his arm and he was like *"get her off me she's mad, she's mad"* and I didn't let go of him until like, I'd basically enough of biting him, and the teacher came in and he told the teacher and she just laughed and kind of sat down, which was quite funny. But he never bullied me again after that, he never pulled my hair, and every time they saw me they were just *"She's mad, just leave her alone"* which was quite funny, so that was another way that I stopped people pulling my plaits, they didn't go near me after that. But I've always been partial to a bit of biting, I don't know why it's, just that I enjoy it so and erm that was happened at Hall Green School.

06:44 R Also one thing that was really like, that I remember now, and I just think about is that we used to have a teacher, and he was our maths teacher, Mr Fleming, and he was quite an old fellow, but what happened is, I was really good at the books that we were doing, the work books, I always used to finish them ahead of time and even with my reading books I was ahead of time. But with the maths books I remember they had a meeting with me, and it was time for like the children to move up a set and for the people that were like in the medium set to be put into top if they could be in whatever, and I still remember to this day, he sat me down and he said *"well you were good enough to be put into top set, but we thought you'd be better off with your own people"*, which was like I think back on that now, that would be so inappropriate, but at that time I was like ok whatever, like I didn't understand what he meant, and that was because most of the Asian people were in the middle set, so I just laugh when I remember that now, because that would be so inappropriate nowadays and just like it wouldn't be on. And it wouldn't probably happen at the school anyway because there's so many like different kids from different backgrounds now. But that's what happened in my maths class. I wasn't put into top set.

08:09 R And basically, after that I did an Urdu GCSE while I was at school, and that was because my mum said that I should learn Urdu, and it came in useful afterwards anyway. But what happened is, I went into the exam there and again I don't understand what happened, but the guy pointed to a cupboard and asked me like what do you call this in Urdu, and I didn't know for the life of me, so I said it in a Pakistani way so I just said cupboard or something like that, and I ended up getting a good grade in the end, but I was just laughing because it's like I got away with so much stuff in the old days, I think he was just laughing or something and he was *"well that's good enough if you don't know"* and I must have done good enough in the rest of the test, and I ended up passing that, but that's another memory I've got. And they used to do it externally at that time, because it wasn't in the schools but now my son is actually, they can choose to do a GCSE as part of the curriculum. So that was my time at Hall Green School and there was a lot of bullying and I kind of feel bad, because my brothers and sisters joined me at the school, and they had a

lot of like, it was like basically because of there not being that many Asian kids, it was a really hard time and they ended up getting bullied probably.

09:27 R But I'd left by then so, I just kind of told them to get on with it. And after that, after I'd got my GCSE's which were quite good, I got a lot of C's, I think I got some B's in science and stuff like that, and I left Hall Green School, and then I went to what was then Hall Green College, and it was just around the corner, so it wasn't far, and we used to go on the bus anyway, because our dad for some reason never used to have time to drop us off at school or college or anywhere, so we would always go on the bus. And I used to go to Hall Green, and then at Hall Green I was doing computer studies as a BTEC, because what had happened, and I'd completely forgotten about this before now, but I'd gone to Cadbury College to do A Levels, I got onto Science and French and English Literature at A Levels, but I think, I don't know what happened, but I got into the classes and I just wasn't at the level of like being able to study there. And the only thing I was good at was Computer Studies, and I remember being so nervous that I didn't even walk into the Chemistry class, and when I went in they were talking about these things called molars and moles and I don't know, all this sort of other stuff and I didn't know what it was and I ended up skipping classes and that year was basically a waste. I ended up not going to the classes in the end and I remember my English Literature teacher saying that "*you're really good and you could have done something*" but I don't know, I just didn't have much guidance and because I hadn't had tuition or anything, I wasn't able to bridge the gap between GCSE and A Level at that time.

11:11 R So I think a lot of that was just messing around, and like, I don't know, I just used to sit outside cause I didn't have the guts to get into the class, I don't know it was just, I don't even remember why actually. And at that time there was a guy who used to live on Clarence Road at the bottom of the road on my mum's road, and he was the cousin of one of my friends who was at school with me and basically I think he died from blood cancer or something or brain cancer, I don't even remember, but he didn't tell anybody what he had, I think only his like people around him knew. But one of the days I remember he came to me and he said "*don't waste your life, life's too precious to waste and you're really clever, don't just mess about*", cause they knew what we were doing there, and afterwards I found out he was saying that because he'd like basically had that terminal illness at the time, so it's he kind of told me don't muck about. I think they knew I was clever but I kind of, I don't know, I think I just got shy or something, and I couldn't deal with A Levels, because I went into A Level French and they kept saying "*donc*" and I'd never heard donc before in my life even though I was good at French. And there was all these French students there, and I think I just got overwhelmed by it all, which is why I try to tell my kids now that tuition is really important, but they don't listen, so, but I think it's a bit easier for them nowadays as well.

12:38 R So from Cadbury College, then I went onto the BTEC because, I was just

thinking if I was so clever, why was I doing a BTEC, but that's what happened, I went from A Level to BTEC. And I don't think anybody at the college ever asked why I wasn't there, or nothing came home to tell my parents that I'd not been there, or whatever. But another thing that happened is cause I used to go on the bus to Cadbury College, I remember once, I don't know why but I just used to bus hop. I don't know why but I think I used to bus hop because I didn't want to get to college, and then miss the class, that must have been it. So I got off in Kings Norton one of the days and I got off the bus, and I had my headphones in and a white man came up to me and he leaned towards me and said something but because I had my headphones in I didn't hear, so I took my headphones out, I go *"Excuse me what did you say?"* He goes *"You paki."* So I was like *"ok"* and I just put my headphones back in, because well yea whatever. But I think nowadays people are like it's a really bad cuss word and stuff, but we didn't know what the heck you know anyone was saying to us in those days, like racism and bullying and these kinds of things just didn't come into it, because we'd just not dealt with it. You know we had dealt with it, but we kind of, there wasn't an awareness in those days of that kind of stuff. So that's another thing.

14:03 R So I did my computer studies at, erm, I think it was... I did my BTEC at erm Hall Green, and then I think at the end of my BTEC, then I went on holiday to Pakistan and then my mum asked me she goes *"Do you want to get married?"* and me being the naïve idiot that I was, I said *"yeah why not, what's wrong with getting married, yea ok mum if you say so"*, cause at that point in my life ,and before I'd just been saying *"yes ok mum"* to whatever she had said so it was like yea she knows what she's talking about. And obviously looking back now, I think well maybe I could have been a bit more like knowledgeable about certain things. But anyway we had our religious ceremony, and then there was a big mess because they said just do the religious ceremony and then we will come and like give you away after a few years, probably because I was so young. But looking back that was a bit of a mistake because once you're married, you're married, like kind of, you can't get away from it. So what happened is I got married in, it was basically the year when I finished my BTEC I got married and then I had been applying for a HND and I think it was project management or something. It was a programming because basically I programmed in like C++ and stuff, I was self-taught when I was about thirteen or something. I used to have like my uncle gave me an Acorn Electron as a computer like gift on one of my birthdays, and I used to read the manual which was written in machine code and I used to go in and you know games like Snake and Frogger and stuff like that, I used to go in and I used to change the code so that the snake wouldn't get bigger and stuff like that. Or if I hit a car in Frogger, that I wouldn't die and I just used to mess about with codes. So from that I leaned C++ when I went onto college, but by the time I got to my HND, cause I had gotten married, I kind of got distracted and by the end of the year, when I was trying to get my husband over and stuff, I just lost interest in it and it was like, that wasn't a priority to me anymore which looking back was a really big mistake, because

if I had carried on doing like project development or whatever I was doing, I would have been really good, because again my teacher said *"I'm really sad that you didn't do anything"* because I went in at the end of the year for a project to help my friends, and he was like *"you was so good, you could have done so much with this."* So I think because I got married, I ended up getting distracted and that just went to hell basically. And then after that, it's like I think most of the time I spent trying to get my husband over because I had to get a job at Asda to bring him over and I was trying to do that while I was studying but I just couldn't do it, so I think that's why in the end I just gave up with the studying. And erm I worked at Asda and then we had to apply for my husband to come over to the country, and I even fluffed that up, because when we went to have the interview in Pakistan, I was like *"I wanna go and I want to be there too for the interview"* and looking back that was a mistake, because what happened there is, they asked my husband, they asked me first *"who is he to you?"* and I said *"he's my first cousin."* They asked my husband and he said *"she's my first cousin and I'm also her dad's..."* I don't know what he's related to my dad in some other way because of through the grandfathers. So in Pakistan they've got a habit of telling the second or third relationship that they have as well, because there's a lot of like cousin marriages and stuff. So the people came back and they said *"we don't believe it's a genuine marriage because she didn't know that you were related to her in the other way."* So our case got rejected, so that was like, I shouldn't have gone, but that just showed from the start the cultural implications. It's like I didn't know that there's like two or three relations to every person in the family and there's all kind of weird stuff going on cause of intermarriage. So I messed that up and then we had to appeal and then I think it took about a year to appeal but we still didn't get anything. The thing that helped him come over was that the conservatives were kicked out and labour came in and they opened all the cases and said you can all just like come over, it doesn't matter, so that's how he came over in the end so we didn't have to appeal for too long and he just got this visa and his indefinite stay.

18:43 R So when he came over, basically I was living in my mum and dad's house at Clarence Road in the front room, which wasn't very good, because like everyone could hear what was going on in the house and even if we were inside arguing or something, they'd think we'd be bonking or something like that in there, and it wasn't very nice and there wasn't like privacy. So what happened is, I stayed there, my husband worked at a chocolate factory that used to be on Percy Road, and it was quite good because they had popcorn and chocolate and he'd always come home smelling of like mint chocolates and stuff, and if the samples that they had, they'd give them stuff to take home, or like if something hadn't come out properly out of the machine and if there were wonky chocolates or something, we'd have them so that was quite good. And he worked there, and then what happened is, I had left Asda by then cause I'd had enough and erm he worked there but I had a stroke of luck cause erm I had two accidents in the space of a week and I ended up

getting compensation for the accidents, and I saved up the compensation and I started putting money towards a deposit for a house which was good, and I did actually have counselling afterwards about the accidents, because I started getting nervous after that. But when I went the psychotherapist said, well he didn't know I'd had two accidents within a week of each other and he said "*Well statistically you're never gonna have like more than one accident in every like, I don't know how many years*". I was like "*well that's not true because I had like two in a week.*" And he said "*oh well that's statistics for you*" because he couldn't explain it in any other way, but that kind of, I think it was cognitive therapy or something, I don't think it worked on me because of that, cause basically what he had told me, it wasn't true according to me.

20:46 R So even though that led me to be nervous about driving, it also helped me to have a nice sum of money to have to save up towards a house. So I started saving up, and then like a relative here gave a thousand pound, a relative there gave a thousand pound and by the end I had like £13,000 saved, so it was quite good. But that's because I've always been a saver. I spend, but if I spend £10 I save a £100. So that's a habit I've always had, and I've never been a big like, I don't like putting lots of suits on and stuff like a lot of Asian people, like basically like having like ten suits and then chucking them away and getting more sewn, and so I wasn't a good customer on the shops on Stratford Road, the clothes shops. And basically after I'd done that, I'd saved up for the house, we started looking for a house, and at that time we were really lucky because at that time Solihull Road where we are now, it was basically full of old Irish people, and like Irish families, and they were moving out, I don't know maybe back to Ireland or maybe moving up, or I don't know, one of our neighbours went to Devon I think somewhere and they were basically moving out and they were selling their homes, and the thing about the Irish people was, it's like English people are never like, they will just take whatever you give for the house, whatever the market value is, and then they will give you the house and go. But with Asian people, what I've noticed is, as soon as the Asian people have come into the area the prices have rocketed, which is really like, I had a friend whose dad died and they just sold the house and shared the money and it was like whatever we get is fine and let's move on, but if it was like an Asian family, they would probably want like £20,000 more than the house is worth. You know so they can have a good thing to share.

22:47 R But anyway when we came here, the houses were selling for like, basically, £23,000 to £36,000 which was really cheap. I didn't realise it at the time because we had an uncle, and we went to him for advice, we said "*shall we buy a house?*" and he said "*no the prices are gonna fall even lower*" and it's lucky we didn't wait otherwise we would never have been able to buy one. And then so basically we bought our house for £36,000, and that's the only reason why now when people have like mortgages, even rent that is over £400, our mortgage is only like a £100 which is really good but erm the Irish people were basically moving out. We moved here in 1999 we bought the

house in about May, and then by the time we like furnished it and moved in, it was like August. And also I found out I was pregnant. A soon as we got the keys to the house I found out I was pregnant and I always laugh with my son about that I say like, even though I had two miscarriages before him, I laugh and say it must have been because they were waiting for me to buy the house.

23:59 R Then I was pregnant while I was here with my son, and we just started building up the house and stuff, and we had Irish neighbours on either side, and erm basically our neighbour was a little old Irish lady called Mary, and she used to get together with her friends off the road and go for bingo and stuff and she used to do like get her hair done at the local hairdressers, which is called Maggie's which is on Formans Road. And it was basically that was where the Irish women used to go to get their little like buffeted hair done like the old people get done. So they used to get their hair done and then they'd have their little hand bags on and they'd go for their bingo wherever that was. But mind you at that time, I've forgotten now, but we used to have an Irish community centre on the corner, which has turned into like a wedding hall or something now, but it used to be an Irish community centre, and when we first moved here, it was really funny because like, we'd have all the drunk Irish people coming down the roads swearing and stuff at night. Like they'd come out of the community centre, and it just used to be really funny because like they'd be these little Irish men all drunk and (*doing Irish accent*) – "*Oh get out of here*" and coming down the road and we'd here it like as we were asleep in bed.

25:20 R So there was a really big like Irish community at that time, but slowly, slowly as obviously Mary, she used to be standing there when we came from school or whatever, she'd be standing there with lollypops at the door for my daughter and stuff, and she was really nice, and she'd always be like saying like hello and asking how my son is. Actually no, I think she died by the time I had my daughter, I can't remember. But yea for my son she used to be standing there with like sweets, she'd know that he's coming and stuff like that, and erm those were good times, it was like we knew who our neighbours were, and you know, and they'd always be there and they'd talk to you and stuff. And after that I think poor Mary, she fell down the stairs or something. She went to hospital and she never came back. And then our neighbours on the other side, I think they went to Ireland but then they came back again because they just couldn't settle there again for some reason. And then they came back, and the next time they left was to go to I think Devon or somewhere down south where there's like a, probably where all the Irish people went actually, down south to where the sea is and stuff, actually yea that's probably where the Irish people went from here, that's where they went to do their retirement days out and whatever so.

Audio 3

- 00:30 I Tell me about life after marriage.
- 00:33 R OK, basically after I had my religious ceremony which was in 94, I came back to England and my husband obviously couldn't follow me, because he hadn't got the stay or visa to come to this country. So in 94 we had the Nikah which was the religious ceremony, and in 97 we went and we got married officially, but what happened is, even then my parents, my mum reluctantly went and got us married, because what had happened that year is my dad's brother had died, and my dad's brother used to live in Demark with his wife and his kids. And basically, after my uncle had died, I didn't get to visit Demark while my uncle was alive, my younger brother and sister did, but I didn't, and I think they went to Demark on a ferry or something, I don't think they went by plane. But I don't remember much about that, but I remember they went to visit him while he was alive, and at that time my aunt was living with him who is here. She's here, he married my aunt from Pakistan and he had a daughter with her, but they had problems and then the marriage broke down, and although he didn't divorce her, he did tell people that he didn't want to live with her no more, and then he went to Demark and then he ended up getting married to a Danish woman and her name was Bordil or something, and I remember basically I think I visited Demark just before my first miscarriage, and this would have been when my husband came over.
- 02:23 R Yea I think what it is, is I'm getting confused now. In 97, we went and we had our official wedding ceremony, and then I think in that November my husband came over, because that's when the visas opened. So my husband was already here by that point, and then we were living at my mum's, but then what happened is, my uncle had already passed away by that point. He had blood cancer and I think what happened is, they had told him, because he was having chemotherapy that, cause he was a smoker, don't smoke and don't go outside and I think he went out in his garden or something to do some gardening and he ended up getting pneumonia which is what killed him in the end, so it was a sad time but my mum said we've got to get you married because it's like, it's been too long now.
- 03:15 R So we got married and then I brought my husband over after the marriage and when he got his visa, because we heard that labour had come in and said that everyone can come over now. And after that, basically I went to Demark with my cousin because she went to visit her step mum there, and well, I think it was her ex-step mum or whatever it is and she took me along and I didn't realise but at the time I was pregnant, and that was to be my first miscarriage when I came back. Demark was quite an experience, obviously my uncle had passed away, and my two little cousins were there Cecelia, who was only like a toddler at the time and then my cousin Casper and he was only a little boy at the time as well, and I remember it being really sad

because I hadn't been able to go when my uncle was alive, even though my little brother and sister had, and I remember it being such a culture shock, especially when I got off the coach in Demark, and like here if somebody is in your way you just say excuse me, and they kind of move out your way or something like that. Well as I got off the bus there was a couple, a man and woman that were like passionately kissing, standing like just in front of the coach entrance and me being from Britain, I said "*excuse me*" and I expected them to move out the way, but they didn't hear me or something, they were just like, to busy kissing or whatever, I think and I ended up tripping over them with my bag which they were kind of giving me funny looks, but that's when I realised that you know there's something different in their customs over here. And then we went in a taxi to I think the place was called Aarhus or something and we went there and it was kind of like in the countryside, and erm it was like, there was forests around and where the house was that my uncle had been building, because I think he was trying to extend it just before he'd gotten ill. It was like a, you know like in America they have the single storey houses, it was like that, the ones that are kind of built on the wooden kind of bases, I can't even remember properly now, and they had a really massive back garden. And basically I was inside for a few days and then my cousin was like we have to go shopping to buy some food because basically in Bodil's house it was basically stuff that they eat, and they'd got a freezer that they put their meat in and stuff that we couldn't eat the meat that they had.

06:01 R So we went to the supermarket in Demark, and it was quite funny because we couldn't afford none of the English food because it was all too expensive. It was like one box of Frosties was like about £6 or something. So it was like what are we supposed to do now because we couldn't buy any of the British stuff it was too expensive. And we just ended up buying things like bread and whatever we needed to like have while we were there. And I remember once Bodil's parents came and her dad apparently hadn't been happy with her marriage with my uncle so he was sitting there and he was drinking wine at the table, and he kept looking towards me and with a frown on his face and putting his glass towards me and saying "*skål, skål*" and I didn't know what that meant, and I was like "*yea, yea*" like I just thought he was saying something to me and he was like "*skål, skål*" in a really like angry voice and afterwards I found out he trying to say to me say cheers, and I didn't know that. Apparently it was rude that I wasn't doing that, but I didn't know what was going on, so Bodel explained to me afterwards what had happened, and I was like ok I realise why he was getting annoyed now because that must have been a custom for them to do that at the dinner table. And it was really weird to think that, I mean my uncle had never been conventional, but I think after he got married to Bodel, I mean she had the Islamic like wedding and everything, but obviously she hadn't converted to Islam or anything properly, and she just reverted back to how her old lifestyle was after married. So it's kind of weird thinking of that, cause, if we ever do go and visit our cousins there, I mean they've got a totally different life to what we have here, and it's

like the customs there are so different. But like here with my kids, what I always do is I always sit and I will put their legs in my lap or something or they'll come and lie on my lap, and I remember there, we were sitting and Casper was sitting on the sofa and he wanted to put his legs up and I thought he wanted to put his legs in my lap so I wanted to do that, but like he wasn't sure what was going on so I think he did it in the end but like his mum was like "*oh he didn't understand why you wanted him to do that*" and there was so many like cultural contradictions and like me being, getting used to Greggs and everything, I was looking for my chocolate eclairs in Denmark, but they had these really weird pastries and I was like what are these I don't like these. So like when I got back to England I was really happy, I was missing my treats and eclairs and that's always what happens when I go abroad. But basically that made me think about what we have here, because that wasn't my first visit abroad, but it's like every time I go abroad, I always appreciate Sparkhill more, and the way that we've got so many shops here that sell literally everything that we're used to like, Greggs and the chip shops and you know the bakeries like with their cheese and onion pasties. I mean I don't know, maybe people have cheese and onion pasties in Demark, but I wouldn't have known what they were cause like, we couldn't speak the language there anyway so that was my visit to Demark.

09:26 R And although I didn't know it at the time, and like I said I was pregnant, and I came back and that was my first miscarriage and which wasn't very nice. And erm then I had two miscarriages, a few months between each other, and that ended up probably it was me being silly and naive but I didn't realise how much they'd wrecked my body, cause a miscarriage is apparently worse than a pregnancy, so I didn't have any kind of rest, and then I guess a while after that, probably say about eight months later I was pregnant, so my body must have gone through a lot and by the time I had my son, the lady in the hospital ended up giving me an epidural which totally wrecked my back as well. So I had a lot of health problems after that, and I think that's probably what I was suffering from at the time was probably post-natal depression which then turned into like proper depression, and sometimes when I look back at my sons life, I can't remember a lot of what happened at that time, and it's hard to remember like kind of time and date and what happened when, and I think that's probably because I did lose a lot of my kind of mind to that kind of darkness that you go into when you get depressed.

10:46 R But around me no one knew what I was going through, or, what was happening to me, cause I think there's a big like when it comes to mental illness like depression and stuff like that in the Asian community, especially round here, there's no knowledge, and people don't understand what that is and they don't know, you're just supposed to just get on with the housework and you're just supposed to do like you know, just look after your kid and do the normal stuff. They don't realise that you can actually become like ill, and you need help afterwards, and that's like a bit of a sad part of our community, because there's a lot of help but like kind of when you fall into

these kind of like pits, there's no help then because nobody understands what you're going through, and looking back now I can see what I was going through because I had some help through a psychologist and stuff.

11:41 R But another good thing is, now we've got where the old hospital used to be on Showell Green Lane, there's a new centre now which is a dedicated like mental health hospital, so it shows that from those times that things have come forward and although there was a lot of protests in Sparkhill Park at the time, that the mental health centre was being proposed. It still got built but people were saying like *"oh no we're gonna have mad people running through our community"* and stuff, and don't think they really understood the implications and the fact that the Asian community probably need it more than anybody else, because of all the stuff that we have to go through, and we're kind of not allowed to talk about it and stuff like that, so it's quite funny. But I think that's a good thing that's happened and even though people don't talk about those kind of issues, but I hope this will be dealt with in the future, so that if someone's listening to this in the future, that there's you know there's a lot of stuff being done for mental health illnesses, especially in our communities where like I said, people don't talk about this kind of stuff because it's a big issue at this moment in time.

12:55 R I mean I was driving down Solihull Road, and I saw there was a lady walking on the road in front of my car, and it was like she was in a daze, and I beeped my horn and she didn't react, and obviously there was something wrong with that lady and it's like it's happening on our doorstep, but it seems like nobody knows what's going on and why like you know, well they probably know why but there's a cultural of keeping quiet in the Asian community and I guess it's in all communities as well but in our community when something bad happens, you're supposed to like keep quiet about it like you're not supposed to talk about it, like it's going to bring shame on the community. But a lot of stuff is coming out like recently with all the stuff about the sexual grooming cases and things like that, so hopefully in the future there will be conversations around this stuff, and I've noticed that people aren't willing to take it anymore. And basically I've got two children at the moment, and my son who was born in 2000, and then my daughter, because of all my health problems, I'd kind of given up on having a child again, but, there's a story behind how I got my daughter. Basically we've got like a spiritual leader and their family in Pakistan who our family over there follow and like everyone was laughing but when he came over here and everybody was paying their respects, and I said well they say god gives you if you ask for it and cause we're Shia we believe in intercession, which a lot of, some Muslims don't believe in it, but we believe that if you meet someone who is close to god, they can intercede for you. So basically this person, spiritual leader came, and he was at my sister-in-law's house, and I went to him and I said well can I have something to him basically, something along them lines, and er, I didn't realise it but I started puking, and I didn't even think that I'd get pregnant, because I'd given up hope because I hadn't got pregnant before so, I didn't

think that anything would happen, I thought my body was just too gone. And yea I found out I was pregnant and it was my daughter, and even though I had a bit of a rough pregnancy like with a lot of puking and stuff, but bless her, it's been really good, and I've got her and that's why then we got our spiritual leader, their brother in Pakistan named her and he actually named her Tawassul which means intercession so that was like the name fitted in with how I'd got her. Although though strictly speaking if you ask the spiritual leaders about this, they won't know what you're talking about, but I kind of know that because I asked, you know I got and that's something that people have forgotten too, how to ask from god and I do believe like god is listening, and like that's why I kind of, ok after I had my daughter, I had been like depressed for quite a while and I was kind of getting a bit sick of life, and one day I was sitting down in my room and I was just crying, thinking that my life is over.

16:16 R But for some reason I heard a voice in my head which said, *"well just go to college and like go and enquire at least"*, this is like it was already September by now and it said just go and enquire and find out what you can do for next time so that you can find out if you can do a course or go back to college or do some education or something. So I was sitting there crying, after I heard this voice I was like ok, so I got on the bus and I went to what used to be South Birmingham College but they'd moved to Digbeth, and now they're called Hall Green College, the media centre had moved to Digbeth so they were called South Birmingham College, so I went to South Birmingham College Digbeth campus and I walked in there. I didn't know what was going on, but like through some stroke of luck there was an enrolment day going on, and erm it was really lucky because I didn't have a clue what I was doing and I walked in and next thing you know I saw this, the people for the media like courses, I went up to them and I said *"I want to learn about flash and you know this kind of stuff, and the programming to kind of get back into that"* and so I met a guy there, a tutor called Alex a really big guy, and he was like *"yea we'll sign you up"* and I was like what the heck is happening, because by the time I'd walked out there, I'd signed up for the course and I was gonna start the next week or something.

17:38 R So that was really like a strange thing that happened, and erm, I signed up for the media course and then I was at South Birmingham College Digbeth for two years, and we learnt photography during that time and a lot of stuff and how to make flash animations, and a lot of stuff and we had a lot of teachers there and a lot of stuff happened there. But basically there was a tutor there and I didn't know what he meant at the time but he said *"you people are going places"* to me and my other friend that was there, and that just resonates in my mind sometime, because what he said was true. I didn't realise at the time that because I'd joined the college, my tutor Alex kind of as a natural thing, when we started our second year, he started telling us that we need to apply for uni, and like I hadn't thought about uni at that time, it

just wasn't in my brain I was glad that I'd actually got out the house, out of the depression to actually do college in the first place.

18:48 R So next thing you know I find myself applying for courses at uni, and what I applied for was, I went to Stafford uni and I had applied for CGI cause I really wanted to do CGI kind of work, and then I applied for Birmingham and I applied for this course called Visual Communication, and I didn't know what the course was and neither did the tutors at college know what the course was but, they said it's something to do with like media or whatever so I applied for it as a backup because my main course I applied for was television and like special effects for shows like Dr Who and stuff, I wanted to basically do CGI and special effects. Stafford, even though I went there, it would have been too far for me to travel, and it was probably a bit of a dream for me to go there because it was like the main hub for these animations and CGI kind of courses. But erm I just didn't like the area as well, it just I had a bit of a bad experience there which I'm not going to go into, but I had a bit of a bad experience at Stafford and I decided not to go there anyway, and then what happened is I went, the film editing course, I found out, when the results came through I found out I didn't get the place on the course and I had a place on the visual communication course. Now I just started crying because I didn't know what the heck visual communication was and I just wanted to do the TV and special effects and I wasn't interested in whatever this visual communication is. So I started crying, and at that time, there was a free offer on my email for this thing called California Psychics, so what I did I was crying and then I had a few free minutes with the California Psychics. So what I did is I phoned up the psychics and I said to the lady you know this is what's happened with me, and I wanted to do this course but I've got this course and I was crying on the phone as well, *"Look is this the right thing for me?"* and even though my money had nearly ran out by the time I spoke to her but she said to me *"my crystal ball has lit up for visual communications so just go ahead and do it"* and that kind of made me feel a bit better because I was really upset about not getting the course I wanted. So I went to visual communication, and I found out it was basically you could choose to do photography, illustration or graphic design, so I chose photography, and but before I'd gone there I didn't even know what the course was.

21:32 R So I started my course there, and I had a bit of a hard time at uni because I was a mature student but also a mature Pakistani student, and there weren't many of us there. Like there were no one there basically, and I think that some of the people weren't sure what to make of me and erm I had a bit of a hard time because, Perry Barr had a lecture theatre, and I was waiting outside the lecture theatre and there was some white kids standing behind me and basically I turned round in time to see one of the guys looking towards his friend and sniggering, and all I heard the other person say was *"oh it looks like she's just walked in off the street"* and that kind of really made me sad because, I was already having a hard time at uni because I didn't fit in anywhere, and this comment really made me sad, but by then I'd

been through so much crap in life that I basically turned around and thought no I'm not gonna let these people say that because I've come here, I pay fees the same as them, I've earned my place on the course basically, so to hell with them. And in that time I just stood there and I resolved to just do what I was doing and not let anybody get in my way, because I was already having trouble from home because my family were like "*why are you doing photography? Don't do it, do teaching or something*" and then my husband didn't want me to be at uni in the first place, because he just thought I was doing college as kind of like a time pass or a joke. So I thought no I'm not putting up with this anymore, I've had enough. So from there I resolved to just do what I wanted to do and carry on with the course and I ended, through doing the course, there was a lot of problems and whatever that I had, especially with having the kids to look after, so in the end I just did my course, and in the end I decided that I wanted to like, some people wanted to do the course and go off and like film tigers in Africa or something, and I think I didn't want to do that from the start because I can't be bothered, and plus that doesn't sound really safe as well, cause I hear about a lot of wild life photographers being eaten and stuff. And there was all these people that wanted to go to war zones like Syria and like save the children and stuff and take pictures and I thought I don't really want to do that because that's a bit crazy too, so I chose documentary, but I decided to do my own area which is Sparkhill. And like basically like document the people and what's going on round here, because like it seems like everybody is so busy going off to Africa and wherever, they've forgotten about where they live and I went to the archives in the central library and there was basically barely anything on the current life in Sparkhill, or basically our lives and the way we're living, and all the stuff that we've gone through, so that's my journey and it's ended up at university, and then I ended up getting a 2:1 at university which was really good and I probably could have got a first if I'd have applied myself a bit more, but I think I gave my best so, that was ok. And then after my degree I've decided that I'm just going to like do local projects and see what's going on in the local community hopefully.

25:00 I Is there anything else you'd like to add?

25:03 R Yea I'd just like to add about the way that things are in our community at the moment. I mean Stratford Road where we live in Sparkhill is, there's quite a large South Asian population, and a lot of Arab people have come in, and there's a lot of Somalian people that have come in which are bringing like aspects of like Muslim life to Sparkhill and whatever. But even though that's a good thing that there's a lot of diversity, there's also a lot of problems that are coming about at the moment, because there's a lot of domestic violence in the communities and there's a lot of sexual abuse, there's lots of stuff that's going on, especially with like grooming gangs and stuff, that people aren't talking about, and I think that hopefully the community will get better at dealing with this kind of stuff soon, but it's just sad that sometimes when stuff happens in people's houses and you hear so many stories and they're

kind of not supposed to speak out about it. But that's kind of weird because in Islam the first thing you learn is that you're supposed to speak out against evil and enjoy whatever's good, so I get confused by that sometimes and I feel really sad when I hear stories of the ladies in the community who have been, I don't know burnt with cigarettes by their spouses or something, or the beatings that go on, and all kinds of stuff. And even though South Asian people are really nice and friendly for the most, our communities are good and there's a lot of community spirit and you know, people live together a lot and it's really nice, there's still a lot of issues that need to be dealt with and hopefully with time, they will be dealt with. Because back home in Pakistan probably if you beat the heck out of your wife, it's not seen as anything that anyone else would want to do anything about, but obviously in this country it's wrong and it's against the law, so people need to realise that. And hopefully as the cultures, basically mature, I hope things like that will get better and we won't need places like the Zinnia Centre as much. Because I see a lot of like women going into there because there are a lot of mental health issues in our community, but things like Schizophrenia and stuff like that, I can imagine totally that they would be so misunderstood by people and it's like, we've got a eunuch in Sparkhill, I don't know whether to call her he or she, but she will be on the bus and she's got Asian clothes on, like women Asian clothes salwar kameez, but she's got the look of a man it's so she's walking like you know the transgenders in Pakistan and it's like it's so obvious and but, then you see people being nasty to her on the way sometimes and you just think you know, people should have a bit more respect sometimes and especially for older people as well.

28:13 R Because back home you're supposed to have respect for elders, and here it just seems like erm, a lot of the culture has gone to hell basically, and it's really weird for me because we were brought up with these kind of things like the respect for the elders and stuff and I really like old people and I like sitting and listening to old people, and I think it's sad that the young people nowadays don't realise what a treasure old people are, and what kind of lessons and stories we can learn from them. But I'm just hoping that you know all these issues that are in the community that people learn to speak about them and learn to deal with them and also to speak out in their own houses. If you can't do anything for the community, at least speak out if you see something around you in your own house or something like that, so that's something that I'd like to see change. And then hopefully if someone is talking in a hundred years' time from my community, the things they will be telling you will be completely different, and it's for my daughter and their generations, for them to have a good life and be able to have the things that we maybe didn't have when we were younger, and this land of opportunities and even though I did my degree at a late age, I was still able to do it and I had a lot of support from the government and whatever, and it's just to teach our communities to just use the opportunities they have in England and to grow and mature and hopefully there won't be all these things that we hear about, like we heard about this basically there was a lady who went for a

dentist appointment or something with her child and she went to the train station and she jumped under the train with her son holding his hand, and apparently she'd been suffering from depression for ages, and she got married and her husband wasn't very caring towards her, he just kept going to Pakistan and leaving her and stuff, and her depression probably got on top of her and that's how it ended tragically.

30:14 R Hopefully the men will realise as well, that you know, if someone's got a problem, like with me when I had my mental health issues, a lot of people they just call you mad, they say "*oh she's the mad one*" or they try to say that your life's over and you've got nothing to live for anymore, because your minds just gone doolally or whatever. And that you're not worthy of looking after the kids or having the house or even looking after your husband. Rather than helping you, you kind of get ostracized, so hopefully that kind of stuff will be less in the future and not to as big a extent as it is here, because I can see the women as they're walking ground. It's like they're pushing their pushchairs but sometimes it's like they're zombies and they don't see what's going on around them and it's really sad but like I said, hopefully the issues through people like me talking as well and other people kind of realising what's going on, because I know a lot of people are working towards these kinds of things, but hopefully these issues won't exist you know in the future.