

## MR ABDUL SOBOUR

### **How was it when you first came to this country?**

Hello. It was not bad, I actually felt good. There were opportunities to earn money and I was able to earn good money. In those times the daily wage for workers was 50p. In that time I earned £11 in the whole week. I worked a lot. Then I came here to this country. Also in that time when we came we enjoyed ourselves and had fun. However there used to be fighting that happened with our people.

### **What year did you come to this country?**

I came in May 1962.

### **What was the reason for you coming to London?**

I came to London so I could earn better money.

### **Who did you come with to London?**

I didn't come with anyone but after a declaration (sponsor) was given from a friend of mine, and in that time, he is still alive here today, and first you had to make contact with people in London so that more declarations could be sent to Bangladesh. One declaration is worth £120 and if from Bangladesh someone supports the application and the money is given, then the passport cost is free and there was no need for any excess money to be spent. Once you have arrived in London and passed the gates of Heathrow airport then everything else is your own responsibility.

### **During that time who did you stay with?**

I didn't really stay with anyone as I said, I stayed alone.

### **On the first day you arrived, where did you go from heathrow airport?**

From Heathrow airport I first stopped at the Kings Cross area and resided there for about 1 to 2 years.

### **Who else stayed there with you?**

One of my cousins, who is my dad's brother's son, another cousin who is my dad's sister's son and a person who is from the house near mine in Bangladesh.

### **What job did you do when you came?**

When I came, 10, 12 I worked. Then when I came to this country one of my cousins was already here and he arrived in 1957. Then that's how I came to staying with him.

He was already working as a chef in an Italian restaurant in Paddington. I think after 5 or 6 weeks spending time here, my cousin talked to the manager of the restaurant and had got me a job at the same restaurant. Then I continued to work here. I had learnt the skills for the job and during that time there was 1 owner and 1 manager. After this I was taken to a different restaurant near Victoria and I worked there for about 1 year. After this job I came back to Kings Cross and on the Kings Cross road there was a restaurant and I worked there for another year or 2.

**Was this next restaurant a Bengali restaurant?**

No it wasn't and where were we to find Bengali restaurants? There were hardly any. Then when I came to Kings Cross I was doing a job as a chef. There was another man my age working in the kitchen. Then after I changed jobs and got a job by myself in Knightsbridge. Then after I worked there for some time. After this my cousin has opened his own restaurant. After a while whilst working there, there was an Italian man waiting in the street and my cousin who came here, knew him. He asked has he found a job, to that I replied no and he had said my restaurant is just over there, you can speak to him and tell him to come to my restaurant for work. Then I said, I won't be able to give you an answer, I am his cousin and his brother had opened the restaurant. Then he spoke to the Italian man and secured himself a job and after that my cousin, who used to work a chef, had said do you need any more workers? The Italian man replied I need a chef. My brother here is a chef he can come and work for you, that's when I came and worked for roughly 2 years with him at the restaurant. After the 2 years passed I had left that job and near High Street Kensington had gotten another job and worked there for approximately 6 months. After I left this job and had gotten a job in Marble Arch in a club. During that time, my cousin was working in Warren Street in the White House Hotel. After a while he mentioned to me, come with me you can work here with me, the pay is excellent here for a chef. This was good so then I went to work there and continued there for another year. After I left there and had gotten a job in the Park Lane area near Nomad plus then I went to work at the Dorchester Hotel. During my job at the Dorchester Hotel, I had worked there for many many years, roughly 7 or 8 years. After that I left the job and decided to go back to my home in Bangladesh for a visit, then when I came back I had thought to myself that I wanted to work in an Indian restaurant. Then I found a job in Westbourne Grove at an Indian restaurant.

**Roughly how many years did you work in Westbourne Grove?**

I worked there for about 1 to 2 years, and after that I had left, I used to work in the kitchen and the pay was lower, then a Bengali restaurant had opened in Langley and I was given a job there as a tandoori chef. Then I worked there for another 1 and half years and decided to go back home to Bangladesh again. Then when I came back, the restaurant that I worked in Langley, the owner who was from Dhaka in Bangladesh had said I have opened another restaurant near Heathrow Airport, I forgot the name of the restaurant. There I worked for about 8 to 9 months. After I applied for my family to come to this country.

**What year did you apply for your family to come to this country?**

I applied in 1986 , and in 1988 they came to this country. After they came, I had decided not to go for a job outside the city except on one occasion where I worked for a while. Then I had gotten a job in a restaurant in Fulham and after working there for a while, the Bengali person who was from Dhaka , was very educated and had asked me to come work in his restaurant. I had mentioned to him if I stay in the city for the job I can work as kitchen staff , however if I have to leave the city area then I want to work a tandoori chef. Then I went back to Langley. I went back to my home country after a while but came back too. This is how I continued to work.

**When you first came, was there much halal food available and what did you do to get it?**

There were 2 grocery shops in Drummond street and they used to claim that it was halal, but once I had saw a man butchering and I went and saw the way in which the butchering was happening was not correct. Honestly they never gave us halal food , but had said it was halal and had sold it to us.

**Where there any mosques around?**

With mosques, prayer, Ramadan we weren't able to tell when it went passed or when was the required time for these.

**Did people keep their fasts?**

They did but as I said it was hard to tell when Ramadan had gone pass and when it was time to break our fasts.

When you came to this country did you celebrate eid?

As I said it was hard for us to tell when Ramadan started and when it finished, so for us to celebrate eid was hard but if we knew of course we'd celebrate it.

**When you first came here were you able to talk in English?**

I could but very little bits of English.

**If you needed anything how would you communicate in English, for example if you went to the doctor or the post office?**

There was an Indian doctor whom I could go to and speak with and whom many people spoke with.

**Did you speak Hindi with the Indian doctor?**

No, I used to speak Calcutta Bengali which he used to understand.

**When you first came to London, how did it seem to you? What did you think?**

When I came everything was new and I really liked it.

**Did it seem different to you?**

The difference was where I came from and where I arrived. You can understand what the difference is.

**Where you happy when you first came or upset?**

I was very happy. I was earning money and was able to go back to my home country. If I had invested in Bangladesh then I'd have to be there permanently and leave this country

**Where your family happy on arrival here?**

Yes they were very happy when they came.

**After bringing your family to this country and about your children...?**

After bringing them to this country I still continued to work. I had work then I left and then returned.

**Did your children complete their education here?**

Yes they did.

**How did it feel them going to school here?**

There were various problems in those times which arose during education. My son, who was 5 years old who was appointed a school near Harrow Road, the school was mainly white children dominated; another man whom was my friend lived near me, also sent his children there. Along with his children, he took my son, because I was at work and the children needed to be dropped off and collected. My son was 5 years old and his son was 7 years old. One time these white boys came to my son and my friend's son and grabbed their arms and with intention punched him in his nose. Then my friend went to the teacher who was also white to report this and all he received in return was laughter and laughter. Then I decided to remove my son from this school and wanted to move him to a school near my home which was St Augustine's primary school there is also a secondary school now too. Then when I wanted to get him enrolled, a lot of people I knew opposed to this idea, they told me this school are predominantly black children and he will continue to get into fights and get hurt. I replied he was already involved in fights; I put him here if it happens again it will happen. What am I to do? I'll just change his school again if I need to. Then after I enrolled him, I saw personally it isn't just black children; there are

different ethnics such as Moroccan children too. Till this day I have not heard this school to have a reputation of fighting. My son continued to study here and went to the secondary school here too until it came to the time for him to study at college level, then he said to me that he can continue his studies here and get the qualifications to go to university from this school. Then I said that's fine you can stay here, and stay with a school your familiar with. Then he finished his studies here and passed and went onto university and studied at Queen Mary University. He studied 3 years there and then achieved his degree.

### **Were there many fights with white people?**

There were a lot of fights yes, but also there were people who also supported us a lot too.

### **Supported you?**

Nowadays if you get lost for example, and ask the police how to get to your destination they will tell you without thinking twice. However in those days, I hardly knew any English when I asked a police man with the little English I did know they would not understand properly nor would I understand them properly, it was hard to communicate , but we always carried the addresses with us , so I showed him which address and instead of telling directions he took me to the doorstep of where I needed to go to ensure I got there safely with his car. This is how they helped us. There were always people who were good and who were bad. There was a type of people who were called skinheads, with shaved heads, who would beat people up and hurt them.

### **Did you get hurt or beaten up?**

No fortunately it never happened to me. God saved me in this case. During that time I lived in Westbourne grove, when I used to leave work I was fine I had another person who was with me and used to finish the same time as me so we would go together. We came to the end of the road where our restaurant. There was a tall building with glass windows then on the corner of road there were 25 people waiting. Then when cars used to come they used to use an alternative route after looking at them, then there was no other possible route except this road for us to go. A few people had warned me not to use this route and I said I am still going to go this as I have no choice. They would place a beating on people. My friend who was with me , I told him to stay behind me but close and to keep his eyes to himself not to look left or right and I told him to keep in mind if one of them pushes you make sure you fall on another one of them. If you get caught in with them they would either beat you up and leave you to a side or push you onto the road. I also instructed him if they do hit you throw one of them on the other one too. You come with me. We started walking fast to avoid all this, then we went past them and 10 of them started walking and 15 waited behind. Then as we were walking we saw bottles being thrown, my friend mentioned to me what are we standing here for watching this? If we get caught watching they'll come for us, lets run from here. So we ran then I arrived home. Then after a few days all the glass windows that I saw

most of those windows broken. That's the only time I came close to falling into trouble otherwise I was safe.

**Currently now how are you feeling staying in London?**

Now I'm with my family. Even in Bangladesh it's not like how it was before, yes I still have a home there but now things are different.

**Do you have any plans to go back to Bangladesh?**

I do want to go to Bangladesh, but looking at everything im thinking will I be able to live there. I didn't make many properties except for a small house, which my nephew currently lives in with his wife and children. So if I think about going to Bangladesh I have to see how I'll live. I haven't been settled for 26, 27 years, after my family came I haven't thought about going back. It has been many years.