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(Community activist)

Bengali community arrived in the 70s and 80s. Basically, we wanted to know your experiences.

If I start from the beginning, shall I? I lived in Harrow road on the 17th floor with two children. I put in for a transfer and they offered me in Lisson green. My mother was doing my childcare during the time and she said 'I'm telling you now girl, if you go down to that terrible place you will have to find your own childcare because I am not coming near it. It's got a terrible reputation'. I said 'I'm sorry mum, I got to go'. They offered me a three bed room flat and in those days for the sake of having two up in the 17th floor in Paddington.

So, I moved down here in 1974 and when I moved down, basically the community was Irish and West Indian at the very beginning. I lived in Risbrough house on the 5th floor which the flat Toki took of me when I moved out of it. He got the flat that I moved into and I have been very very happy down here all those years I can honestly say nothing has troubled me. The only bit of a shock I had originally when we first came down here when I was here for about a month. I invited my neighbours down to have a drink, it was September time and it was a nice evening and we had the balcony doors open looking out onto a small road and we was having a drink there and my two boys were there and then all of a sudden there was sirens coming around and there was saying 'get inside, close the windows, close the doors, there's a siege'. It was the balcombe street siege. I don't know if you heard about that, did you? (no). There was a siege in Balcombe Street in 1974 and as far as I can remember it was something to do with the Irish and whatever. But, anyway the police was all around the place and I can remember my oldest son who was very sensitive spewing up in my brand new carpet in the sitting room. I was thinking mother, perhaps you are right, and I should have not come down here. But, you know what I can honestly say that's the only thing that has ever phased in all the years I have been down here. The community has obviously changed over the years and the only thing I would say is not as clean and neat and tidy as it used to be years ago. One thing I can't abide is all these people no matter what nationality they are, they come spitting on the floor throwing their cigarettes and all that sort of things. But, other than that I mean I lived and you have to integrate with the community. I mean you only have to look at the markets here now and see the change from when it was first here. It was much more organised then it is now and to me it looks very 'higudi piduki' now whereas before it was very nice and neat. But, life changes you know and you can't keep going back to the past, you have to move forward into the future and as I say having lived on Lisson green since 1974, I got some very close friends and I stop and chat to anybody, it does not matter what colour, nation they come from, we are all God's creatures and you know that's the way I like to treat life.

When did you first come into contact with Bengalis in the area?

Well, I was down here in 1974, it would be in 1976 or 1977, somewhere in that region.

What was that first interaction you had; did you have any neighbours, friends?

I can't honestly say I had friends but as acquaintances, people you see. I say good morning. My mum brought me up and said if there's a tramp on the road and he says good morning to you, you don't know his name then you say 'good morning sir'. Just to be polite. Lots of people now and there are lots of different nationalities that recognise me because I got a dog and I am always out on the street with the dog walking and I say hello and I don't know their name but I just say hello madam or hello sir. How are you? And that's it. To be sociable and polite because that's the way you should live in a community, isn't it? We are all God's creatures and we are all here for some short time, some of us longer than others but let's make the most of it basically.

What was Westminster like at that time and how did it feel as an area to live in?

In what respect, safety wise? (Anything that comes to mind, but safety, the community). Well one thing that I'll say is that we had a lot of policeman around strolling which we don't have nowadays. It was a nice clean tidy area which has been deteriorated. I think specially with recycling bins they put out, and the rubbish people put out and obviously it has not helped now with all the immigrants coming in and their digging out the bins every night. I mean it's amazing; I came out one night and all I could see you know those big euro bins we got there, all I could see is legs. I could not see a head and there was literally virtually inside the bin pulling out clothes and goodness knows what else. It's a sad sign of the time, isn't it? Other than that I am happy here and hopefully I will be happy until they take me out into a box.

Day to day, how did the Bengali community interact with the other communities that lives here, was they living side by side, was there a lot of interaction?

I can't say much about that really because I don't know personally Bengali people, I just know them pass by and say good morning and things like that. But, I mean obviously on the estate we have the community centre and I believe a lot of them use that and you know I suppose their interaction is gradually growing the longer they are here and they will become more custom with everything that is going on around the area.

So, right now have you had more interaction with Bengalis recently?

Personally, myself no. I can't say that I have because I don't mix; I don't go to the clubs and things because up until last year I was working full time. I have been retired for one year and basically my day consists of walking the dogs several times a day and going to church in the morning and coming home having lunch and I sleep in the afternoon when Mr Toki rings and says get up to Church Street and you know I have my own group of friends. We have a big social life at the church and obviously anything that goes on in the community centre, my

friend does a lot of organisation down there and we get invited sometimes. It's all very pleasant, I don't have any problems. (Given different communities get along quite well side by side). Well I think they are basically, the only thing I would say is the spitting and the rubbish. It's just untidiness but other than that there the same as you and I, God made them.

Have you ever found that there have been people struggling to deal with language barriers and things like that?

I'm sure there are, there must be. It must be very difficult if you come from abroad and you have not spoken English, it must be very hard. But, then I think there are places around where they can learn English, aren't there?

What were your, in terms of your point of view of the Bengali community when they did come? Did you have any view or observation what you made of the community, when they came?

All I could say, all of the people I have come across in the streets, they have always been polite and they have never caused me any problems. When we first moved here, all those flats in the 5th floor and 2nd floor were connected, so you could go around the state without touching the ground. It was only when they had the Balcombe street siege, they decided to make them individuals and obviously police chasing you, they can't chase you all over the balcony. But, no I have never had a problem and I think it takes people time to integrate and settle down but I see lots of elderly Bengali ladies, they smile and I just say good morning, how are you? And then just go ahead and go on your way basically.

Thank you very much.