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Date: 17 October 2013
Interviewer: Isabel Smyth
Respondent: Octavia Johnson

OK, Octavia, thank you. This is the seventeenth of October

It is.

...and I'm in Octavia Johnson's flat in Pollokshields. Isabel Smyth is doing the interviewing. Octavia could you just spell your name for me please?

My name's spelt O-C-T-A-V-I-A

And Johnson?

J-O-H-N-S-O-N

Thank you. Octavia where and when were you born?

It was all India when I was born in 1933, but now we are in the part of Pakistan, because India was divided into two on the basis of religion. So some people they stayed there and others they just emigrate.

Thank you. Can you tell me about coming to Scotland and to Glasgow?

My husband had a training in (ph. 00:01:25.4 Serampore0 University and he was sent by the Church of Scotland there in Sialkot. While he was studying in Murray College, the principle – Leslie Scott – he was watching him, what sort of person he is, so his mind and heart was in ministry. So when he was graduated he went to get admission for army, but Leslie Scott the principle, he said that "Immanuel we want to send you to Serampore University for BD training because in Pakistan we didn't have BD training. So if you are agreeing we will send you there, just leave (00:02:26.3)[ph Emmy]," so he was agreed. So he was sent by the Church of Scotland to Serampore University and there he was trained and after three years he came back. When he came back to Pakistan, from here, Church of Scotland, they were needing one person but the condition was that they need a minister who must have this training, BD, and he knew certain languages, Asian languages, because when they saw that here, in this country, the growing numbers of Asians and there was no minister. So they thought that if they get a minister as missionary to go from Scotland to other countries, so from Pakistan someone can be called here to work among all the people, Asian people. So Immanuel just came back from Serampore and because he was new, not having much experience, but there were no other men with BD so according to Church of Scotland conditions, so Immanuel's name was nominated. So that's how, from Pakistan, we came here.



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Thank you. Can you tell me what it was like when you came to Scotland at first? Can you remember your first day arriving in Scotland?

The first day we came and I didn't know anything at all about this country. I heard that it's a very, very cold country, snowing and raining, especially Glasgow, and I was loaded with warm clothes. A missionary called Isobel Dalglish she was there working with Emmanuel in Pakistan. She was sister in charge in Jalalpur Jattan Hospital, so she was on (00:05:13.1) back here in Scotland when we came. So she went to a one-to-one in Edinburgh and she said, "these people are coming and they have no idea where to go, how to read. So why not someone can go and collect them from Liverpool," because we came from ship by that time, it was [ph Selishia] and [ph Carline] so one-to-one people they were very happy they said "that's what we want but nobody knows them, so if you go it will be very good." So when we were getting ready to disembark, and I was standing like this, ready to come down and I said that lady I here see a mirror in-front of me and Isobel's face was there. I said "I know this lady," and in a minute Isobel was there in the compartment, in the cabin. And we were very happy. So she brought us to the railway station. She bought the ticket and when we arrived Central Station Glasgow oh there were Church ministers and elders and press people and a lot of other people and they had our photos and everything. When we came home, we were in 13 Harrogate Street, and when we came home some... the guild member ladies they prepared the meal, house was all nice and tidy, beautifully decorated and meal was ready for us to eat. [laughs] So that's how the first day I was not, I didn't eat, I wasn't used to this food. But for few days Isobel stayed with us and she took me out but we couldn't get anything Pakistani. Now a lot of Asian shops are here, we get everything, but not at that time. There were only us and one single lady used to live in this area.

What year was that?

We arrived here eighth of April 1963 and it was still very cold when we arrived here.

Can you remember how you first learned about the international flat?

In the beginning when we came here and it wasn't easy for the member, it was very difficult. He hasn't got the car and by bus he used to go from place to place, place to place and looking for Asian people but then he went to that (00:08:58.6) at that time so he helped him with some Asian students. Max McGee, he was university Chaplain of these students and he gave some names, so that's how Immanuel found out and very soon he got quite a number of people and then his work increased. Then he got a car and facilities they were there. So students and Immanuel and students used to go for visitation, door-to-door visitation and that's how started.

And what can you tell me about the international flat?

So the work was increasing and then Stella Reekie, when we were there in Sialkot she went from here as a missionary, so when we came here after a few years Stella Reekie came back and then Immanuel and Stella they started working together and then they decided to have a flat that would be called international flat and then they started this job and it was really wonderful work they did. I think this was, this flat was on then, Ugandan nation people came and by that time it was very hard time for them. I have some photos to show so I will show you after this and those photos and the work they were doing with them, helping them, feeding them, in every way they were helped and that's how international flat work increased. Sharing of faith was started as well, so a lot of Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, they all came and they shared the faith in various ways. Meetings were arranged and that's all.



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Have you any stories about the flat that you remember and would like to tell us about?

There are a lot of stories but people they used to go in that flat and they... suppose it's Christmas time and they used to go, girls they used to go, ladies like you they used to go and make, you know napkins, serviettes for Christmas and writing something on, making things for Christmas, decorating the building and celebrated really in a wonderful way and we were all in harmony, we all love each other and we worked together and everybody likes, Stella Reekie usually with ladies, she buys some presents, especially for Children and some other people coming into the flat, used to give them tea, something to eat, she was very nice. She was very nice. And Immanuel was there and I was always, to help them. I wasn't their worker but I helped them in every way.

And what did you do, did you do cooking?

Yes, yes. Cooking, tea, this, that, whatever, yes. And went to visitation with Stella, with Immanuel and we had a lot of meetings, we went to churches and did whatever we could.

You did a lot of work with children too I think. Did you help out in the summer clubs, playgroups?

There was a lot of work but it's a long time I can't tell you... I don't want to say anything wrong but work was going on and I was always there and those photos they may help you.

Well we can talk about those later. And what about Stella what can you tell us about Stella?

She was very friendly, her heart was in this job, even when she was in hospital and she was dying, without telling and without permission, she left the hospital and she came, there was a great meeting and she came there because her heart and mind both they were in her job, and whatever she did she did it from the heart and she has the instinct to do the service wholeheartedly. Yes. She was nice person, very friendly, very helpful and she was everywhere.

Tell me more about being everywhere.

About?

Her being everywhere.

In Pakistan, when she was as a missionary and I was as a teacher, she was so popular. She used to go with the bible teachers out and visited different people. Bible teachers they stayed in one house and they had a wee service teaching them the Bible, telling them about Jesus Christ and she was visiting the other places, so she can visit more and more things. And she was so popular among the people, some people, maybe other missionaries, they weren't very happy that she was taking more highly... she was thought of a highly person.

And what do you think it was like for her here in Scotland? Did people like her in Scotland?

People like... Stella Reekie they still remember... If I meet someone in the way, in the town, or something, and they always say "Oh that was a very good time, when we were all working



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together with Stella" so people they haven't forgotten her. She is in people's heart and she was very good.

And what... the international flat closed of course, didn't it?

Yes. Both of them were gone. Stella was gone, Immanuel was gone and it was not easy to run, so it's sad. It's not a good thing. It's sad. Once you start something and if it goes in this way. So don't know what was Lord's will but it was closed. And a lot of people they miss it because they were helped in various ways and now they can't get the same help.

Do you think though its influence is still around? What good do you think it did?

Influence is still there. I think just people remember and they think that she was a very good worker and she was very good helper so sometimes they just get together and have a meeting and they speak about and that is in her memory.

So people are still remembering Stella?

People are still remembering her yes.

And can you tell me anything about that? Some of things they say and the stories they tell when they remember?

Well they would ask me "Oh they were very nice days when we used to go to international flat, Stella Reekie did this, Stella Reekie was doing that, and she was very, very helpful to us"... she helped a lot, even the people who are really uneducated and I remember one boy in McCulloch Street and she lifted him up, she tried to give him some education and that boy, he was always wherever the meetings are, programs, Christmas, Easter and other programs on and he sang because he had a very good voice. I can't remember his name he lived in McCulloch Street and the whole family then used to go because their son was taking part. Yes [laughs].

Are you aware of the interfaith work that still goes on in Scotland?

I don't know now whether it's on the same level, if it's going on. I don't think it's on the same level, I don't know whether it's going on or not. They should have replaced Stella Reekie and Immanuel because they were the main workers, so if they're not there then someone... that's the way of the world, one goes another comes, one goes another comes, but since they're both gone, Church didn't have anyone else, nothing is replaced.

And why do you think that was? Any idea?

How the work can be carried on if people are not there?

But have you any idea why the church didn't replace them?

Maybe, I think, I heard that the Church says "no money, not much money left," just that they are facing some problems money-wise, so I think there's the reason.

How about the well, do you think the well is connected to the international flat?

No.



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No.

No, no.

How does that differ from the international flat?

I don't know.

Just different.

Yes it's difficult. Difficult because... I don't know the situation of Church and I don't want to say anything that I don't know. So that's why, but I know because churches are facing this difficulty and from time to time the funds are not enough.

Any other memories or stories you would like to tell us? So that we keep Stella's memory alive.

Had she been alive I think that... people they would have called her a heroine because she was very good. Work wise she was really good.

What's your outstanding memory of her?

Outstanding memory... nice lovely person. Tall. Well built, beautiful, smiling face, talking, talking, talking. Anyone she sees talking, ready to help, ready to say something. That was her attitude.

Would you like to show me your photographs and we can talk about the photographs?

Yes.

PART 2

Great. Good. Thank you.

This is Bobby.

Yes.

The oldest one.

Yes.

And this is [ph. Evis], the second-oldest. And this is [ph. Asher] and this is [ph. Rhoda].

Lovely.

Two daughters and two sons.

Thank you.



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This is [ph. Stella Reekie] and this is Emmanuelle [laughs] – I'm in the middle and if any time she wanted to ... me to do something and give me a ... A young girl [s.l. who asked me did 0:00:39.8] so she said, "oooh, she looks ... she looks ... she looks ... she looks young" ... this dress on. She's very young so she can do this part in any ... anything going on or any play or something or something – in the church; church meeting – they held a number of women's meeting and, therefore, she spoke.

Can you tell me the story of that picture? Where is it?

This picture is when [pause] ... When these Ugandan Asian people came – do you remember this lady?

I think I do, yes.

Uh-hmm, and some other people and help was given to them and I think you know what sort of help it was needed and they were very, very distressed people but it ... here is Stella, here is some of these people – Emmanuelle and ... [pause] Therefore, they were helped ...

Yes. [Pause] Is that Belmont Street or Glasgow Street? Where are you there?

I think it's near in ... in International flat? Maybe there?

Right, that's not the International flat in Glasgow Street, but it might be in Belmont Street?

Maybe? Maybe?

Stella started in her own home.

No, this is St Stephen's Church and this is St Stephen's Church too.

Thank you.

Uh-hmm. This is [s.l. Stella Reekie]. This is in our house; sister Alice – she was an Evangelist lady who came from America and this is my family and Stella and me and all of us having a meeting; a service singing and preaching, uh-hmm.

That's (0:03:18.2). Uh-huh – I'll see her more.

This is ... Have you heard of (0:03:28.8)? He came here for 42 days when ... This is the (s.l. well 0:03:35.1) – I used to work in well.

This is the (0:03:41.7) one – a teacher. I was working, then I was working with Catherine and here we were away in ... from [ph. Serco] to somewhere else to visit.

These are the people we were working with them (s.l. Route with the Lord 0:04:04.7).

Right, oh right.



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(s.l. Route with the Lord). This is the one when I went away to Pakistan and when I came back and I was speaking a sort of (s.l. deportation 0:04:20.8) work in various churches – so that's that.

I think that's Easter time and we are singing and holding a meeting.

In your house?

[Pause]

Is that your house?

[Pause] Yes, I think it's ... Yes, yes, uh-hmm. A lot of meetings they held in our house.

This is the one I went to ... Pakistan and different places. That's my home town and they called me to visit the school so I'm just giving them ... addressing them and this ... these are the girls; they do meetings and they send out to other countries, for ... for financial help.

Yes, uh-hmm.

Uh-hmm. And that's the same one. It's a High School there in ...

That's when I was with Catherine Nichol.

Oh, yes.

In (s.l. Serco). There's two of us [laughs].

PART 3

I'm taking some photographs from Octavia for use in the project. One of them is a gathering of missionaries in Octavia's house with Stella Reekie present. Another is a group of Asian Christians just after a service. Another is a group, again of Christians, but they're Asians, people from Asia, from Africa and also from Scotland.

Aha you can see Asian people.

With Stella Reekie and Immanuel outside a house, it's not the international flat in Glasgow Street but it might be Stella's own house in Belmont Street where she started her work. A second photograph, an informal gathering this time with Stella and Immanuel and Octavia Johnson and some Ugandan-Asians. Another photograph with Stella, Octavia and Immanuel and then a photograph with Octavia and Catherine Nichol?

In Sialkot.

In Sialkot.

She's in charge of that place. You have been there, you know.



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Yes. Octavia had been to Sialkot after her husband Immanuel died to do some voluntary work, but she began here life there in Sialkot with Immanuel and Stella Reekie had worked as a missionary in Sialkot and so Octavia knew Stella in Pakistan.

Yes.

Before she came to Glasgow.

Yes that's right.

Another picture again of Catherine in Sialkot and then two photographs of Octavia working with women in Sialkot where they are doing sewing and making garments that they can sell for finances really. And a photograph of Immanuel conducting, it looks like, a religious service in his family home. Thank you Octavia.

Transcript ends 0:32:05.8