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Interviewer: Clara Aguilar Falguera
Respondent: Tiff Griffin

So this is [name 0:00:03.2] interviewing Tiff Griffin in West of Scotland Regional Equality Council for the project 'Stepping into Diversity'. Could you please spell your name.

My name is T I F F. My second name as well? OK, so that's Griffin, G R I F F I N.

Thank you. Where were you born?

I was born in Glasgow, in the north of the city in Stobhill Hospital.

And when were you born?

I was born on 18th February 1974.

Ok. So you were born in the seventies.

Yes, in the early 1970s.

So how would you describe your early childhood?

[Laughs] It sounds like a psychology interview. Yeah, I would say it was very normal. I grew up in the suburbs so it was very stable; houses with little gardens and so-on. I played football with my brother outside - all the time it seemed; it seemed like it was always sunny in the summer. I'm sure that is not a true recollection but that's just what we want to think when we remember back. I remember it being a happy house; I'm really close to my mum. I would go to the football with my dad.

So there were the three of you?

Four of us – my brother and my mum and dad.

So how would you describe the decade – the seventies?

When I was going through it, it seemed very normal. I was only six, I suppose, for the rest of the decade, so I don't really remember too much apart from Star Wars [laughs] which made a really ... it was like the first film I ever saw. I suppose looking back on it it was quite a momentous film. I also remember, and I must have been in primary school, something that I've only remembered as an adult; I remember people in the playground talking about this new Prime Minister we were going to get. There was lots of people talking and that she was a woman; it was Margaret Thatcher and I suppose looking back that was the beginning of something that we didn't know



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was going to be very momentous and very defining of culture and society, and have a big effect on communities. I remember people talking about that.

And do you think it was a good moment for a child to grow up?

Yes, I think it wasn't bad; I think it was certainly better than maybe the decade that followed, which was very hard on a lot of communities in the UK. So I think it wasn't such – maybe more worrying to be a parent, because I think at that time there was a lot of things going on with recession and strikes and shortages of things; but I don't remember any of that. In the eighties there was quite a lot of unrest as well. So I think it wasn't so bad.

When were your parents born?

My parents were born in – I'm going to say the 1930s – cos my mum sometimes tells me she can remember having her gas mask; she had a Mickey Mouse gas mask. They obviously made the gas masks – tried to make them not so scary for the kids. So she must have been born in the mid-1930s, and my dad would have been the same. So they can remember gas masks and what to do if the air raid siren went off; because obviously Glasgow was bombed more than anywhere else in Scotland because we produced a lot of ships.

So they come from Glasgow too?

My dad is from Maryhill; my dad grew up just along the road and my mum is from Coatbridge which is in North Lanarkshire. It's about fifteen miles from the city. My dad grew up above a chip shop; a kind of classic Glasgow way to grow up. So it was what you call a 'single-end'; so that's one room that's maybe got curtain dividers and there was like eight of them and they had an outside toilet. Sometimes it makes you think when you think about how far he's come in his life, you know; he's got a lovely house now and he's got a wine collection and, you know, he started off with an outside toilet outside his house. It's a pretty big journey to go on in your life.

Did he mention these kinds of things when you were a child?

I don't remember him ever mentioning like – you mean as in like, you know, "You don't know how lucky you are." No, I think sometimes my grandad – I think for him even more; I remember my grandad sometimes saying how hard – he, my grandfather on my mum's side, came from community as 'The Slap Up' because they were built so quickly to house industrial workers that they were just literally 'slapped up' and they were really poor quality. So I remember that from my grandad more.

And what did your parents do?

My dad was in sales and marketing and my mum was a languages teacher.

And how did their professions affect you in your professional life?

I think there's not really any link to my dad particularly, I wouldn't say, although he was always very supportive of things that I did; but my mum there was much more of a correlation because she's a teacher and I'm involved in community education; she works in languages and I've learned three or four languages; and lately in the last sort of six years I've been working with ESOL speakers in different ways in Glasgow; and in the last year I've qualified as ESOL tutor; that's a CELTA qualification and that's really what I want to do; and I think my mum sometimes –



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you know, I can sort of see her, she's kind of like, "I kind of always figured that you would end up being a teacher, but if I'd told you that you'd have done the opposite. So I had enough intelligence just to let you find your own way." I think she kind of knew.

Yes mum knows... Would you consider yourself a Glaswegian?

Well sometimes I consider myself a Braswegian. I've got a huge love of all things Brazilian and I really love the culture there and I've been out there quite a lot and I feel very at home there; but yeh, I do definitely consider myself Glaswegian in the sense that I can see a lot in how I react to things and culturally; and I'm almost like – sometimes you go to other parts of the UK and you get kind of teased – people will tell jokes about Glaswegians, you know, especially when you go the East coast which I go to quite a lot. But I kind of like the banter; I like the teasing and I feel proud of the fact that I come across like a Glaswegian.

And how do you think the city has changed from when you were a boy.

Oh lots and lots and lots. So at my school, when I grew up, there was no – the whole school was white – white and Catholic. In my street - I think we had one doctor from Uganda once, that came to live there - again white and either Protestant or Catholic. You hardly saw anyone in our time that wasn't white. So when I think of that now and I look at Glasgow and it's about 10-11% ethnic minorities – and you just need to walk down Sauchiehall Street on a Saturday and you see every colour, you know, and people in lots of different kinds of dress and they're obviously different kinds of religions; and obviously from working among those communities as well you see what a big part of community life they are in Glasgow now. So that's a huge change, and a lot of that happened in the last 15-20 years. So Glasgow's gone through it pretty quickly in comparison to other cities, certainly in the UK. Also I would say, I do remember when I was probably still quite young, becoming aware of some of the issues around the football teams and sectarianism. I remember as well as the religious divide I remember the tension around the football matches when Celtic and Rangers played and I would say now that's been really diluted, and it's really not that much of an issue compared to those times. I think that diversity has helped to break that up. So I think in that sense diversity has had a really positive effect; it's had many positive effects, but that's one issue where I can really see it's changed things.

I would say overall Glasgow's become more cosmopolitan, more vibrant, more diverse city and it's a lot better for it. There seems to be a lot more things going on, as a kind of mixture of these cultures.

And can you think of something negative that used to be better in the past than now?

Yeh, um [pause] – do you know I'm actually hard pushed to think of that. I think the city is growing; I think that maybe if anything I would say that there's, for a big chunk of Glaswegians, the standards and the quality of life has improved. I think the lowest 10-15% of people who were already struggling, already facing a lot of social problems, I think they're getting really squeezed, so I think it's making that shift, and most of the people are having a better time; and the people at the very bottom, well, they're kind of getting left behind.

Do you know anyone that has moved to Glasgow?

I know many many people who have moved to Glasgow from different parts of Scotland; I've got friends from Zimbabwe; friends from Ghana; from many many different parts of the world.



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Now this is quite normal to move from abroad, from different countries; can you think about the first person that came, that you met, from a very different culture who came to your city? Maybe you were very young?

I'll have to try and go back through...

I mean someone quite close to you, when you were quite young?

Yeh, like I said our school was all white and there just wasn't anyone who wasn't Scottish. I mean that's how Catholic schools were then. So you'd really be talking about probably when I went to college or went to university, when I was seventeen or eighteen; and probably, I suppose maybe - I had a friend who was from Luxembourg; that's probably the first quite good friend that I had that was from another culture. Eighteen is quite a long time; I don't think young people in Glasgow have to wait that long now to make a friend from somewhere else.

And do you think that Glasgow and its people are respectful in terms of immigration nowadays?

Overall yes. I'm not going to paint it like it's some picture that everyone in Glasgow is super – you know, celebrates diversity; I think anyone who's from another culture will tell you that's not 100% the case. I think overall we're a quite sympathetic city. I think Glaswegians have it in their nature to be quite warm and quite open. That's the feedback I get when I talk to people; they generally tend to say, you know, "Of course if you get somebody that's on the bus they say things, but most people in Glasgow have been really nice." and again it's another time when I feel really proud of my city. I think overall yes, I think there's still work to do and I think at the moment that has been challenged because of being part of a wider picture in the UK of people being more intolerant of immigration because it's being pushed by the newspapers; and I think we'll need to work to keep Glasgow where it is.

And connected to immigration, what do you feel about religion?

Can you quantify that question a little bit?

Glasgow and the people, how do they respect different religions?

I think that's probably area where Glasgow has a slight advantage, because I think a lot of people in Glasgow have long since learned that religion is maybe best left up to individuals, you know. We've gone through a period of 70-80 years of having a lot of violence and discrimination associated with religion; and most people now – most people, I think, will have got to the point where they really – it's just not conflict they want to get involved in. So I think in that sense people are relatively respectful.

And how would you describe yourself in terms of religion?

I suppose the first phrase that comes to mind is a surviving Catholic, in the sense that I was brought up in a very traditional Catholic household. My family – part of my family are Irish, so I've got Irish roots and that whole thing gets pushed on you and that's a part of your identity; and then there's the whole Celtic Irish divide thing. But from about fourteen I really didn't want anything to do with Catholicism. Unfortunately I still had two years to go at Catholic school, so I found that a struggle; it just was something I did not want to be part of. I don't like organised religion. If there is a God he definitely doesn't want that; I think he doesn't really care about



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whether you go to church, what you call him, or what book you choose to talk to him through. So at best I am what you would call an agnostic. I'm not totally convinced there is a need for religion, but I'm absolutely fine if people want to carry on with theirs – just don't drag me in.

How would you describe yourself in terms of nationality?

Well, it's a good time to ask people that question, obviously; so I would see myself as – yeh, I feel I notice it when I, you know, I don't feel that I feel so very Scottish when I'm here, but when I travel to other parts of the world I enjoy chatting with people and if they want to know about my culture, as people do; so I would say I feel 'Scottish-ish'. Yeh.

Have you experienced any time like a problem to – for example when you are explaining where you come from, or you were just explaining how you feel with your language, your culture – when someone was annoyed with you for your origins?

[Laughs] only people from the East Coast – only within Scotland! No, again, not really; I guess that the only negative comments I've had have been, interestingly, from other people with the same heritage. So people for example who also have a Scottish-Irish background, and I've had some negative comments from them if, for example, you don't have the same interpretation of history, or take the same viewpoint on certain political areas, for example, say, Irish nationalism or Irish republicanism; then you are seen as some sort of cultural traitor in some way, you know, you've forgotten where your grandparents came from – bla, bla, bla. In the rest of world, no, I always feel it's really lucky to be Scottish because everyone seems to really like Scottish people; I mean really genuinely you know. Quite a lot of the places I go I speak – so you know, if I'm in Brazil I speak Portuguese, and if I'm in – you know, I also speak French and Spanish. So I would be able to, probably to a degree of people, but people just seem, you know – I don't know, people just seem to really – either people know whiskey or they know trainspotting; one of the two!

You mentioned you speak many languages; how good has it been for you to know other languages when you go abroad?

It's brilliant and I find it incredibly frustrating when I've been to countries where I literally couldn't even say "hi; please; thank you"; like I've been in Budapest and it was like, "Oh my goodness, this is what it must be like for people that speak no languages," because I felt like a child; because I had to get everyone to do everything and I couldn't even – if I thought someone had done something really nice for me, and I appreciated that they showed me the way, - I couldn't even say that; I couldn't share anything with them; I couldn't say what I thought about their culture, or how positive – I just found it really frustrating. So I think it's an incredibly – you know, even if you can manage one language I think – apart from the fact that it's good for your mind, for your brain – it's just, wow, what a gift it is to be able to talk with people; and the conversations that you can have and the things that you can learn; it's really enriching I think; it enriches your appreciation of yourself; of your own culture, and also of all the places that you go. Sometimes you get questions or you get a lot of things where people ask you, if you could have one superpower what would it be? And mine would have been like the babel fish, you know, from the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy where you swallow the fish and you can instantly speak any language. That would be my dream, to be able to talk to anyone anywhere.

This is mad that a Scottish girl had said the same to me – amazing! But do you think that English speakers are aware of what you said? I mean because if you speak English you can go more or less wherever you want with your proper mother tongue;



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do you think generally that English speakers are aware of these communication problems?

Yes, I don't think they are, because increasingly, especially with globalisation and the internet and you know, English is becoming such a default language, more and more as well; occasionally I have times when you want to try and improve your language, but people just want to practise their English and then you're almost having to – you'll be in the middle of San Paulo and you'll be having to fight with someone to speak, like, "No, we're going to speak Portuguese!", and "I want to improve my English!" So I don't think English speakers realise; I think, like you said, so many staff now get trained – like in hotels and cafes – they get trained to speak a lot of English. I think if English speakers realised how tiring it is to try and speak in your second language all the time, they would maybe have more appreciation of how big an effort people are making.

The last question would be what do you think you will be in the next ten years?

I hope not living in the UK; not that I don't love it, and I would love it as some of my colleagues would, if the next year we are living in an independent Scotland. That would have a big effect on my future because if it's a 'Yes' then I'll put off my plans to go and try and be part of, for a few years, of helping my country find its feet and giving my skills. If it's a 'No' then I will have to respect democracy but I feel I will be part of a bigger country that doesn't share my ethics and doesn't share my values; and I don't want to be part of that. I've been struggling with it for six years, so it will propel me – it will push me out of the UK, cos I'll feel a little bit hopeless about changing things. So yes, I'd like to be part of Scotland, you know, living here for a few years and then take my qualification and go and see life in another part of the world. Travelling is one thing, but really living somewhere means you go into that rhythm of daily life and become part of the community in a way that you don't when you're travelling; and I think that is such a great experience; I would really like to do that, probably in Brazil to begin with.

OK. Thank you so much; it has been a pleasure

Thank you.

Transcript ends 0:23.38.3