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Interviewer: Clara Aguilar Falguera
Respondent: Ghzala Khan

So today is the 10th September 2014. This is Clara Aguilar interviewing Ghzala Khan in the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council for the project *Stepping into Diversity*. Could you spell your name please?

Certainly. It's G-H-Z-A-L-A and the surname is K-H-A-N.

Thank you. Where were you born?

I was born in Glasgow, West End.

And when were you born?

1974.

Okay. So you were born during the '70s. How would you describe your childhood?

My childhood? How would I describe it? Friendly. Good atmosphere, back door always open, children playing in the gardens and in the streets and in and out of each other's houses. I just remember my mum calling us in when it was dinner time. The never really bothered about, you know, where we were. Not like today, where there's a lot of, you know, people are a lot more conscious of the fact of letting children out at night or on their own or unsupervised. But we had a local park next to us and we used to go out there. Mum and dad had a shop that was very local to where I stayed in the West End of Glasgow and everybody knew. An early memory is sitting in a pram outside the shop on hot summer days and you know, kids coming out because we had a school round the corner, at lunchtime and just putting sweets in my pram while I'm sitting there. So I used to have lollies and things like that. So yeah, everybody knew who we were because of the sort of local shop that we had in our area and we stayed there as well.

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

It was a brilliant...

.... in that years?

It was really good. I often say to my nieces and nephews that, you know, you've missed out on our childhood. It was a lot more simpler, you know, there was a lot more encouragement to go outside and play as opposed to sitting in and playing games on Xboxes and all the media stuff that's out right now, technology. Modern day technology I think has robbed people of their childhood as a result.



SID-0025X0001M0

And how would you describe your family?

My family..... love them to bits. They're very very close. My mum and dad moved.... My dad originally moved to Ireland with his big brother and this was in sort of the 50s, 60s. And they had a chip shop not far from Shanko Road in Northern Ireland, Belfast and that was when there was a lot of trouble happening with the IRA and the sort of internal war as you would say, the two religions and sectarianism. So my mum moved.... My dad got married to my mum and he moved about 1966 or something like that. And they were there for a few years and that's when they had my brother. But then when the trouble there started to get quite bad my dad's big brother emigrated to Canada with his wife and children and my mum and dad moved here to Glasgow with another family and then that's when they set up the partnership and the family business. I've got a big brother and a younger sister and we're a very close family in terms of we have to call each other at least once or twice a day to let each other know we're okay and if we haven't you know, we get "Oh, well I haven't spoken to you all day" kind of thing, you know. So we're there for each other through hard times. Mum and dad, even though they're from a South Asian background growing up in the West End, they let us make our own decisions but they also taught us about Islam and they taught us about religion and they taught us about our culture. They made sure we knew the language growing up. We went to classes, Urdu classes and Islamic classes during the week and at the weekend after school. But at the same time they also gave us freedom of speech. So they didn't dictate to us how our lives were going to be and they let us make our own decisions throughout life so, you know, I can't fault them in any way. Brilliant.

And how do you feel about your parent's origins?

Their origin?

Yeah.

Yeah. No, I'm proud of my heritage. I'm proud to be of Pakistani origin. I think my parents were born round about the time when India Pakistan split so the majority of the family was in the Pakistan area in Punjab. I haven't to be honest been back to Pakistan for a number of years purely because I think a few family politics through there and also because my grandparents from both sides have passed on. So to me, yes, I've got some cousins there and uncles and aunts which in this day of modern technology the good thing is that you can be on the phone to them every day and you know it doesn't feel as if you haven't seen them for years. But through my work and other commitments I haven't gone back because I felt that if I was going to go back I was going to go back for about four or five weeks at least and you can never really get.... if you're working full time you can't really get that time off in the bulk because then you haven't got any holidays for the rest of the year. So I've been working for most of my adult life. And with my grandparents gone it's kind of stopped me from wanting to go back that but that doesn't mean I still don't embrace the culture, I still don't listen to the music, I still don't watch the movies. You know, I do all that it's just that connection with grandparents and things like that that's kind of slightly lost at the moment with me because I haven't been back.

And what language do you use to talk to your family or parents?

Oh, it's a mixture. With my sister and my brother its English because that's probably what I'm most comfortable with. My mum and dad have got a good command of English as well so I will start off a sentence in our language and I'll finish it off in English and vice versa. They'll do the same you know. It's really easy for us to sort of go from one language to the other so it doesn't



SID-0025X0001M0

really matter actually. The majority of the time I probably speak Urdu Punjabi with my mum. And with the kids it's English as well although what we did attempt to do when they were born and they were growing up, before they went to school, was speak Urdu to them only so that they would start to get a grasp of the language as well so that that part of it isn't lost which is happening quite a lot now with the south Asian community especially. A number of children can't speak the language as well.

And when you were born here in Glasgow did you remember other classmates coming from other cultures, other languages?

Within the West End of Glasgow there probably was a few families. Probably not as much as the south side of Glasgow where you had predominantly in schools a lot higher number of minority I think communities. In my school certainly there was a few Asian families, you know, and I was friends with all of them along with Scottish white kids as well. So I remember there being a lot of other Indian and Pakistani families at that time, not a lot of other central eastern European or Middle Eastern or African communities. It was mostly south Asian when I was growing up. That was a predominant community I would say.

And regarding to your parent location, what values would you highlight? Like you are proud and you are trying to give it to your own children.

Respect for elders. That's I think a key. In our culture anyone that's older than you, an aunt or an uncle, and we try to teach that to nieces and nephews and children. It was always weird calling older people by their name growing up and a lot of people actually within the wider community, the Scottish community thought you have lots of aunts and uncles. [laughs] You know, and you're like, no they're not really, it's just out of respect. You don't call them Mrs Mohammed or Mrs Ali, you just call them auntie or uncle. That I think respect for elders, respect for people of all ages. Mum and dad also taught me that regardless of what culture or faith that you're from that you have to respect all people as human beings. And you know, I think one of the most evident thing was that even though there's a huge Hindu/Muslim divide and Indian Pakistani divide, my mum's, one of our closest family friends at that time was an Indian family and you know, she's still one of my best friends growing up. We went to school together, we went to college together, at each other's weddings. And her mum recently passed away in December and I was the first person she phoned. And she phoned my mum first because she thinks of my mum as her mum as well because we grew up living in each other's houses and we were the first people that were at the hospital, you know, because that's who.... And that just showed my mum's upbringing. Whereas you probably hear, or I do hear of maybe families in the south side of Glasgow or other areas within Glasgow that are a little bit more, you know, living within the box and not integrating as well and they have these preconceived barriers up of other religions, other cultures. And they probably wouldn't have those links or as strong. Or they might have resentment that's been built up through, sort of historically or they don't know how to communicate. Whereas we celebrated each other's festivals, you know, when it was holy or you know Vaisakhi, their mum would come up and give us sweets and similarly when it was Eid or Ramadan, their mum would be phoning us up and saying, you know, what's happening. And to this day, you know, the family, the husband, the man in the family both still give my mum money on Eid as a sister. So that's the kind of values that I think definitely my mum and dad have taught me and I embrace completely.

And which other differences between the way you grew up and the way your parents grew up?



SID-0025X0001M0

I think we were a lot more privileged obviously growing up here because my parents grew up in Pakistan. Although my mum and my dad..... my dad was different. He lost his parents when he was twelve so he was kind of passed from brother to sister for a lot of his sort of young life. Probably not as well off as my mum's family was. I just remember my mum's family having this huge grand three storey house, whereabouts..... I don't know, about twenty odd rooms in it and you know, bathrooms on every floor. And it was very very grand in its time. So you know, so my mum's upbringing in terms of monetary wise and wealth wise was probably very different from my dad's but my mum and dad have always provided for us and that's what they..... my mum probably her side of the family, she probably lacked a little less love, you know, and she tries to compensate that with us by giving us too much at times. And I think that's probably because in her upbringing that's something she lived due to factors within her family life. But I think all in all they've basically ensured that we were provided for and cared for. And their life growing up, there was a lot more fear of the elders. We're open with our parents, you know, we can tell them how we feel whereas my mum says that she remembers listening to the radio underneath the bed because you know, it wasn't allowed at that time and their dad was quite strict and the grandparents.... Father was quite strict so I suppose that's the difference. But I think it would have been a huge difference culturally anyway. You know, they didn't have the freedom to just get up and walk out and go shopping and things but we did so, you know.

In between the way you grew up and your children?

I don't have children but if..

Oh sorry. I understood you've got children.

No, no. No, I don't have children but I've got nieces and nephews.

Okay.

I think the difference possibly with us is that we probably don't give them as much freedom as our parents gave us but I think that's mainstream society today and what you hear in the media. I don't know if it was just the media didn't cover all these stories twenty odd years, thirty years ago and there wasn't that fear factor but I think, you know, an example would be the other day my sister was round with my niece who's twelve and one who's eight and I was like "Well can you run to the shops?" which is like a five minute walk, you know, it's not much, "and get me the Sun. I'll give you money - get yourself some sweets as well." And Fara's like, my sister's like, Fara's like "Oh, are you letting them go on their own?" [laughs] because that's something that in her area, because it's quite built up and there's not a lot of shops nearby..... and I said, you know, they used to stay in this area, they went to school every day walking and I said "So they're just going to the shops so it's fine. Chill". [laughs] And I was like, how different that was from ours when we used to be out all day and mum used to have to shout to try and find out whose garden we were sitting in. We weren't just kept an eye on so I suppose that's kind of one difference. I think the freedom.

So would you consider yourself a Glaswegian?

Yeah.

What does it mean for you?

Sorry?



SID-0025X0001M0

What does this mean for you?

I think, [pause] culturally I've got the accent. [laughs] I was born here, I was educated here. You know, a lot of my friends were Glaswegian. I see myself as, I would probably say..... you know if anybody asks me you know, what are you, are you a Scott, I would say I'm a Scottish Pakistani. So when it comes to Glaswegian, definitely I'm a Glaswegian. And I think it isn't because I moved here when I was seventeen, eighteen, that I could still say I'm a Londoner or I'm from Lahore, or you know, it's purely because I was born here that I feel that I am, I do belong.

And what nationality you said, you.....

I identify myself as Scottish Pakistani. Scottish Pakistani.

And in terms of religion?

Muslim.

And do you have any place for worship?

Yeah, I mean, there's lots of mosques here. Traditionally it's the men that go to the mosques, whereas there's no barriers for women going and the majority of the mosques and local Islamic centres have a section for the ladies but traditionally and Islamic way has kind of said that women pray in the house, so that's what I do.

Think about your life in ten years later. What do you think.....how do you imagine your life in ten years? Do you imagine yourself living in Glasgow, living in Scotland?

Yeah, I mean, at the moment I think so. My parents are nearby. My sister and my brother, we're all sort of like in a ten minute difference drive, ten, fifteen minutes from each other. I think it would take a lot for me to move cities, move homes. And that is just because of personal reasons like family life and the need that my mum and dad possibly have at the moment of me. So I would say that if I've been here for forty years I'd envisage myself still here in ten years' time. I don't see myself moving but then never say never, you just don't know what tomorrow could bring. But at the moment I'm quite settled to be here. I am one of these people that, I like my roots. I like my home life, I like my family life and I've never been one to just pick up a backpack and say, you know, I'm going to travel. I've seen certain parts of the world, certainly through holidays and things but [pause] I think, yeah.

So you've been living here for forty years so how do you think the city has changed, Glasgow?

I think it's definitely a lot more diverse. It's taken on the role of being a lot more cosmopolitan. It's actually probably one of the cities that I think welcomes diversity as opposed to maybe some of the other cities in Scotland where it's a little bit..... it's starting to increase but for us, because historically we've had a large population of diverse communities for a long time, I think it's amazing that you know, Glaswegians adopt or adapt to other people's cultures even without realising it. It's almost as if they didn't have a culture of their own but you know, having a curry on a Friday night is a norm for so many Glaswegians. And you know, now I slowly see them picking up cultures or values from other cultures as well. So that's very different. Whereas there



SID-0025X0001M0

was racism to a certain extent when I was growing up. There was politically incorrect terms that could not be the classes hate crime now, but they were just used as everyday language and people didn't necessarily mean to offend by that. If they had a name for the local corner shop, you know, or a name for the Pakistani community that was just everyday language. And I think some people still do use it but it's only because their generations have used it and they've learnt that word and they don't necessarily mean that it's a bad word. But yeah, historically I think that's definitely changed, what you can say to one another in terms of making sure that you're politically correct.

So you think that now Glasgow and it's people are respectful in terms of immigration and diversity and people from abroad?

No. I think as with any place there is, there's almost always a divide where there's certain individuals that are welcoming, that will help, that will support, that will understand other people's plights but no matter where you go you'll never get a fair society whether it's people that are discriminative against disability, whether they're homophobic, whether it's racism, whether it's against somebody's age, somebody's gender. That will always to a certain extent be there, yeah, so there will be in a small amount of people that are going to be, you know, physically and possibly vocally, you know, show their opinion as to what they feel about immigrant communities and things like that. But I think more and more, especially with the Commonwealth Games that happened just a few weeks back, that actually showed diversity in Glasgow and how everybody was welcomed. And I think that actually showed a massive changed. There is a shift happening and I don't know if it's because I work in the voluntary sector where the majority of people help these communities that I see the positive sides of it. But I think there is definitely a shift because of our work, because of work for other voluntary sector organisations are doing to break down barriers.

How did you come here in the West of Scotland Consul?

I used to work for Ethnic Minority Enterprise Centre. My background [sighs] is so different actually. I've got an HND in beauty therapy so I'm a beauty therapist by trade. That was what I did when I went to college. I gave that up and then I joined the Bank of Scotland so I worked for the private sector for seven years and I was a Sales and Service Manager. I was a Training Consultant. And then I moved to Ethnic Minority Enterprise Centre and that was my first experience of voluntary sector. And it was helping ethnic minority communities into employment. I was there for five years but unfortunately funding ran out and then I was made redundant. And Fara, who is Office Manager in here is actually my sister and she told me there was a small sessional opportunity while I was redundant and I came in and I talked to the staff and management. I took on that six day sessional and I've never left. So, because there was just a little bit more work and a little bit more work, and I've just built myself up to be first part-time, full-time, and now I'm on a secondment as Projects Manager which is ending in four weeks.

So how many languages do you speak?

How many languages? I speak Urdu, Punjabi and English.

And would you like to speak more languages?

Yes, certainly I would. My husband's Iranian. I can speak a few words of Farsi but I'd love to develop that language because I think it's a gorgeous language. I'd love to develop that language a little bit more. I did a little bit of French, a little bit of Spanish, just one year of



SID-0025X0001M0

Spanish in school. French I did four or five years so I've probably got more understanding of French if I hear it than I do Spanish. But yeah, no, languages has always been something that's very intriguing to me.

What does the word community mean for you?

Family. Integration. No barriers. Open, honesty, trust.

How would you describe your community?

[pause] Divided at times. It's very family orientated if you have extended family here. We don't, it's just my family, my mum and dad, my brother and sister. We don't have any immediate cousins and things here. But I think when there's a disaster happen we all pull together. When there's a common cause for us to fight for we all come together. We're great at charity work as a community, because as a Muslim that's one part of your, you know, the pillars of Islam is to give charity. So I think as a community we do a lot of charity work within and I think..... but at times, yeah, there can be that.... there's divide between generations now as well as sort of between the more wealthier or the people that have been here for a longer time to the people that are just coming in. I think a little bit more support is needed for them.

Okay. Thank you so much.

Is that okay?

Yeah, it was excellent. Absolutely.

Alright. Okay.

Ghzala, thank you so much for your time.

Oh no, that's fine. I'm glad that you got everything that you need.

Transcript ends 0:25:22.9