



# **‘Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots’**

## **Interview with Jaz Rogers (Interviewee)**

**Interviewers: Rose Young-French and Gail Hickman**

*Sail Room, Pannier Pantry at the Custom House, Bideford, Thursday 24 September 2020*

**Gail 00:00:37:**

Welcome Jaz! Tell me about yourself.

**Interviewee 00:00:44:**

My name is Jaz Rogers. I have grown up and been in the Bideford area all my life. I am 25 years old. I was possibly the first black child born in Westward Ho!. Both my parents are from Hertfordshire. They moved here about 20 years before I was born.

**Gail 00:01:07**

Interesting. We know somebody who is also mixed race, that was born here, who I think is older than you. So they might be contesting you for the oldest black child born here!

**Interviewee 00:01:19**

In Westward Ho!. A very small village!

**Gail 00:01.32**

Do you like living here; do you enjoy what this area has to offer?

**Interviewee 00:01:35**

Only recently have I been able to make the area work for me, really. Before, I wanted to move to a bigger area, somewhere like London, where I have lots of family. But over the past 2 or 3 years, I have made the place fit me for the things I want. I am working with the Council, things like that, creating outlets for people like me, for things that I am into.



**Gail 00:02:06**

What were some of the problems that you encountered before?

**Interviewee 00:02:15**

Just the lack of resources. I'm into my graffiti and street art. They didn't have any of that here. I would only find places where I could really get along with it in big areas like London or Bristol. So here, over the past years I have worked with the Council to create things that we can use to do that. Through that I am building a large friend group as well, who are just getting into it, we've formed a scene out of nothing, basically.

**Gail 00:02:59**

That sounds amazing. It's very interesting that you have brought this about, with your need for the area to fit you, rather than you fitting the area.

**Interviewee 00:03:08**

Now, I am a key factor, rather than just hating the area and forgetting about the area. I am helping the area.

**Gail 00:03:19**

And that in turn would help others, wouldn't it, other children growing up and wanting to make it fit them?

**Interviewee 00:03:26**

Yes, so I am starting a graffiti school. I've got it all on Facebook and Instagram, all over the place. So after the lockdown, we can then start putting that into place. Hopefully along with the help of places like the Burton Art Gallery and the Council.

**Gail 00:03:44**

Do you think that having a local art gallery, a museum, is vital to an area like this, to showcase various cultures and identities?

**Interviewee 00:03:58**

Yes, definitely.

**Gail 00:04:01**



Do you think it's well-used?

**Interviewee 00:04:08**

I think it's on the up. I don't think it's been very physical over the past years, but I think recently they have got two new people who are doing well in the art gallery, both of them are from away I think. They are pushing a lot of potential into our local art gallery. So it's definitely going to be on the up, and bring more interesting and vibrant things to the area.

**Gail 00:04:33**

That's very positive news. Rose, I'm sure you have some questions for Jaz?

**Rose 00:04:40**

I wanted to ask you about growing up in Devon. Can you talk to us about this, particularly as you were the first child of colour in a very small village. What were the attitudes of people. What were some of the experiences that you had?

**Interviewee 00:04:58**

Growing up, when I was very young, I was quite naïve really, to what it was like. But as I got older I seem to have noticed that there are problems with older Devonians, like OAPs. They were very wary of who I was, and my skin tone, and surprised when I would say 'hello'. Things like that. Then going to secondary school, I had problems with lads who were a few years older than me. They would try and cause problems. I guess it was partly to do with intimidation and confusion as to who I was, and what I was going to be like, so they caused problems with me. It's something I had to deal with through secondary school, a lot. I had to put up a hard shell, really, and just stand up for myself! If you don't, you end up getting walked all over.

**Rose 00:06:04**

How did that feel, that hard shell, for you? Can you explain more about having to develop this hard shell?

**Interviewee 00:06:11**

Well, it didn't really get me anywhere really. I was excluded about 16 times from school. And it carried on into college. I just didn't really get much out of any of that end of education, to be honest. The education of life is the only thing I gained from it all!

**Rose 00:06:39**



When you look back on that time in your life, now, as an older person, how do you feel about those experiences?

**Interviewee 00:06:50**

It's annoying. For instance, I have done a lot of youth work and lots of voluntary work since that time. Lots of teaching in new centres, working in schools that take on permanently excluded children. But because of my story and my past, I am able to talk to these young people and tell them that I have been where they are now, and I have been through it all. So it helps having a story that people can relate to, especially down the road I want to go, with my work. I want to teach people things ... it helps, and everything happens for a reason, I believe.

**Rose 00:07:36**

That's lovely, thank you. In terms of those experiences, how would you describe your identity in a rural area such as Devon? What does identity mean for you?

**Interviewee 00:07:54**

Identity – it is what I *do*, more than my skin tone. A lot of people have this ... the colour of your skin comes before your name. So someone is trying to relate to who you are. They say, 'Black Jaz', or whatever. And that's what it's always been. 'Ginger Sally, from round the corner' and things like that, identifying people by their differences. But slowly it's starting to change more, people have started to call me 'Graffiti Jaz'. It's a new identity, I guess. If you can form your identity for yourself, once you make a big enough impression, and people will actually take notice of you. They don't care about identifying you for just your differences, rather than something that really stands out about who you are.

**Rose 00:08:56**

Going back to your identity as well, within the town, do you feel that you are establishing that identity well?

**Interviewee 00:09:06**

Yes, slowly.

**Gail 00:09:17**

Your own specific culture. Is your culture purely British? Or are you half Jamaican, or are you British and love Jamaican food? Or nothing to do with Jamaica or the Caribbean? I am British/South African. Light a fire and I am there, which is South African. Do you live with both



those cultures? And if you do, did you teach them when you were a child ... 'Come to my house, we are having Caribbean food tonight'?

**Interviewee 00:09:52**

My Mum cooks more West Indian food than my Dad does, and my Dad is the one who has got the West Indian heritage. My Mum wanted to take it on and teach me as much about my culture as possible. Whereas my Dad, you will catch him listening to Classic FM, doing a Sudoku, drinking tea. Two completely different people, but they have both come from opposite ... it doesn't make any sense. I am very Western and my cousins laugh at me for how Western I am. But I am free. I am not trying to be anything that I am not. Especially living in an area like this. You meet people who have absolutely no connection to anything that I could be walking around trying to show about my heritage. I obviously don't even talk about, at all, what my past is, or my skin tone is, or anything like that. I am who I am, and from where I am.

**00:11:00 End Audio file 1**

**Audio file 2**

**Rose 00:00:02**

Thank you for sharing that. Can you explain about family and what family means to you?

**Interviewee 00:00:12**

Family means somebody who had made a massive impact on my life, really. It doesn't have to be blood or married into my family, or anything. It has to be somebody who has made a great difference and change, and who has been there for a long time, or even a very short amount of time. But they have really impacted.



**Rose 00:00:40**

Would you like to talk about somebody who has been that influential in your life?

**Interviewee 00:00:52**

I have sisters, well, I've got one sister really. The other ones we talked about. My Dad brought them up from the age of 8 years old, before I was born. Their Mum passed around the time that I was born. Their father passed about 5 or 6 years ago. My Dad had a much larger impact in their life than their actual father had. So basically he has taken them on as his children, and now they are my sisters. But the other half of my family, I don't see them as my family and why they should be my family. So this is something where I've got two sides of my family fighting, almost, over me, and who I should accept as my family. And I'm saying, well, I can't remember before I knew that person. And they have been so connected with me. I ring them up all the time, and I need them. Because if I don't have them, then who am I meant to ask these questions, and things like that. It's just people who you can really have to help you along.

**Rose 00:02:18**

Thank you. It sounds like you do a lot of community work and you are building community identity. Could you explain a bit more about why that is important for you, particularly in a rural town like this, where people aren't perhaps so forward thinking. You are a young, gifted, out-there person. The importance of building that identity in this type of community.

**Interviewee 00:02:52**

Even though I was a bit of a troubled youth, I went to the local Youth Centre from the age of about 13. I carried on going for years and years. None of my friends from outside the Youth Centre ever came to the Youth Centre – I always went on my own. I had friends who were never seen there. But it was my safe place. Then I decided to start volunteering there at the age of 16 or 17. I volunteered for 6 years, and then started working as a youth worker and making money for it and things like that. So having the whole kind of safe place community, helping people who really need to get an escape for the evening or day. That's what I always remember. If I can give that to somebody else, somewhere they can just go and feel like - take a weight off their shoulders - and just rest and have a laugh, and not try to pretend to be anyone. It's really good and I know it helped me and a lot of people. So, why not give back? It needs to be done.

**Rose 00:04:10**



That sounds amazing. And in terms of your youth work, and having the Youth Centre as a safe space, was there anybody influential that you remember, that helped you feel safe and encouraged you to then become a volunteer and also to help others?

**Interviewee 00:04:28**

Yes. There's a guy called ... He has hair like Lister from 'Red Dwarf', Craig Charles. He helped me out a lot. He was always there. I remember him feeding me things like squirrel and pheasant! And he said, why don't you volunteer? So I started doing that. And there were a few other people. It was good.

**Rose 00:05:04**

So would you say this person was a mentor to you?

**Interviewee 00:05:07**

Yes, definitely a bit of a mentor, and would have a word with me if I was being stupid, ... down the line, take me to the office! Sort it out.

**Rose 00:05:19**

And whilst you were in the Youth Centre, and later on, did you have any negative experiences once you were in the Youth Centre?

**Interviewee 00:05:27**

No.

**00:05:34 End of Audio file 2**



### **Audio file 3**

#### **Gail 00:00:01**

You mentioned earlier that there were only two of you in your school that were different. There were no coloured nationalities that were different. In your difference, did you feel isolated or alone, or felt you had a need to go and 'find your tribe', as it were?

#### **Interviewee 00:00:28**

Not really. I have always had friend groups that were classed as 'outcasts'. Different, like Emos and Goths, musicians, and people like that. People who would not be classed as the popular ones, I guess. And that was always my friend groups, and it still is now. The thing in an area like this, someone with a bit of colour, especially like myself, would try and stand out as something that is exciting, how can I put it? like hard, they want to be strong, 'everybody look at me'. I am not that kind of person. I'm really grounded. And so I have always steered away from people like that, and it kind of annoys me, people who are like that! Because I don't see any point in that. Just relax, you are in a really nice quiet area, take the façade off and just chill out.

#### **Gail 00:01:48**

People are just people, and just get on with it. It doesn't matter to you where they are from, what colour, what race.

#### **Interviewee 00:01:54**

I would much rather somebody just chill out, rather than be egotistical.

#### **Gail 00:02:01**

What do you see yourself doing in your future? What is your big plan?

#### **Interviewee 00:02:10**

To be a professional, self-employed artist, really. And have numerous different branches of income for it. And making an impact, I suppose, here and possibly other places, making an impact.

#### **Gail 00:02:28**





What kind of impact?

**Interviewee 00:02:31**

Changing the way that people think, but through the arts. Doing all these classes that I want to do. Channeling people's energy, I guess, into a positive outcome.

**Gail 00:02::47**

Make people conscious.

**Interviewee 00:02:50**

Yes.

**Rose 00:02:56**

Thank you for sharing. It's really fascinating hearing elements of your story. I'd like to ask you, do you have any hopes or fears for the next 10, 20 or 50 years, in the future?

**Interviewee 00:03:20**

Not really. I just take every day as it comes.

**Rose 00:03:30**

What do you think are the big challenges that we are facing now? Obviously, we have had Covid. As a younger person, what sort of challenges do you think we are facing right now?

**Interviewee 00:03:44**

For things to get back to normal. And I don't think it ever will get back to normal now. I think they have done this to separate people, and making it the new normal. I worry for the younger generations, because they are shut in as much as they are anyway, with the technology. Now they have nothing really exciting to go to do. They are really stuck. I am quite lucky that my generation just caught the tail end of it.

**Rose 00:04:25**

Just on a personal level, you said about the challenges that you are facing. How has it impacted you, do you think?

**Interviewee 00:04:36**



The lockdown? I wanted to start a graffiti school, as I have mentioned. And it's a challenge to even be able to do that, really, with social distancing and things like that. So it isn't worth doing it until things get a little bit more normal.

**Rose 00:05:08**

And in terms of Covid and your family, is there anything you would like to talk about, how it's impacted your family, for example?

**Interviewee 00:05:25**

My youngest sister, on my father's side, she didn't leave the house – she left the house twice in four months. Because the school would have scared her so much, and she thought, if I leave the house, I will catch it. So yes, it's really upset people and affected people massively.

**Rose 00:05:59**

We spent time talking about your life in North Devon, and the journey which brought you here. Is there anything else you would like to share today?

**Interviewee 00:06:09**

No thanks, not necessarily.

**Rose 00:06:14**

So the last question is, this oral history will be kept for people to listen to in the future. Do you have a message you would like to leave for people that are listening?

**Interviewee 00:06:26**

Be yourself. Don't forget your past, but don't forget your future either. Be yourself, be bright, be beautiful, be who you are!

**Rose 00:06:44**



If you could talk to yourself or a family member, the day you were born, and through the experiences that you have had here, what would you say to them? If you could talk to yourself, or a young family member. What would you say to them now, with all the experiences that you have been through?

**Interviewee 00:07:05**

Keep your head on. Nothing's forever.

**Rose 00:07:09**

Thank you for sharing today, Jaz, and Gail. It's been enjoyable hearing your story today.

**00: 07:15 End Audio File 3**