



Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots in Devon

Interview with Rose Young French (RYF)

Interviewers: Nicole Redfern (NR) and Louise Rands Silva (LRS), Zoom, 10 September 2020

00.18

Nicole Redfern: Rose, I think you have some photos which you wanted to show us, could we start off with you describing what the photos are of, and what meaning they have for you.

00.26

Rose Young French: OK. So the first photo is of my wonderful children. I have 3 children, twin boys who are now 27, and a girl who is 32. This one is Finnian, but we call him Finn, his twin is Otis, named after Otis Redding, and that's my daughter Sharifa.

The next photo is of my husband, who is sadly deceased. His name was Mark French, he was my soul mate, and we met at a festival. I'll tell you about him later. This is a ceremony at a friend's smallholding, on our wedding day. That photo is special to me because I used to go to a lot of festivals, and I met Mark at a festival. How we met was ... I am quite a spiritual person, so it was quite a spiritual meeting. I was working at the festival and so was he. I had a bit of an issue with the job that I was doing at the time, and I had not long lost my Mum, about 3 months prior to going to that festival. So I was having a bad day with the job that I was doing there, and I bumped into Mark. I had a long chat with him, and after that meeting was when I had the issue with one of the people that I was working with. As I was walking around, quite upset about the altercation I'd had with this person, somewhere inside a voice said, 'Where is Mark? He will know what to do'. Prior to that, I hadn't met Mark, apart from this small conversation I'd had with him. And I thought that it was very odd to hear a voice in your head saying that. What was interesting, I thought OK, I will try and find Mark, but I knew that in a festival situation, how are you going to find somebody that you have only met for literally 20 minutes? Anyway, I did manage to find him. He was in the area where I was actually working, and I just broke down and told him about this altercation. It was a meeting of minds ... we got together then. He comforted me, and that was it then, we got together and during the festival I saw him a couple of times, and then after that, just before the festival ended, we got together and we have been together ever since. He was my soul mate. Within 3 weeks of meeting him, I knew that I wanted to marry him. We actually went, after that festival, to Glastonbury together. And it was at Glastonbury Festival, which was 3 weeks later, that I knew that I wanted to marry him. About a year or so

later, we did get married. It was lovely. He was one of those people who was very spiritual, a really lovely man. But about a year into the relationship we realized that he had terminal cancer. I came to Devon to live with him. We moved to Devon so that we could live together, but we only spent about 8 or 9 months before he passed away. That was in 2015, but I stayed on, because we bought a place together. But I still miss him every day, and I still think about him a lot. He was a very special man. So we had 2 ½ years of just being really amazing together. I miss him every day. So that's why he is very special to me.

Also, I call him my 'hippy dude', because he wore a lot of hippy clothes. What was very special about him was he wore this top hat. Can you see it? The hat is grey-green, with a red band around it, and it's got quite a few little things on it. It's got a badge on it that says 'songs from the shed'. A sun thing, a butterfly, and another little badge which says 'Beautiful days, beautiful people'. Beautiful Days is a local festival that he and I went to in Devon, and it was one of our favourite festivals. This hat, he was great at 'tattooing'. Tattooing is what he used to do at the end of a festival. When everybody's gone, you go round and see what people have left, and you can find everything and anything, like duvets, that people leave behind. He would go tattooing and actually on one of his sessions when he was tattooing he found this hat that somebody had left behind, and adopted this hat. So he was quite a popular figure, because he was one of the crew members like I was, so people knew him by this hat. 'Oh, there's Mark', because of his hat. That's why it's quite special to me, that I kept his hat. It's also got a bow on the back.

08.25

NR: Thank you Rose. We are going to go back in a moment, to your earlier life. What struck me then, you were saying that Mark is really closely connected with Devon and the home that you made in Devon. Can you say a bit more about that?

08.43

RYP: Mark was born and bred in Devon. He was a traveller. By trade he was a design engineer. He was a keen paraglider, loved motorbikes, built his own motorbikes, and he lived with his family here in Devon. He was an excellent builder. He helped his Dad build their family home. What he didn't know ... he was fantastic, a very creative man. When I met him, he ticked all my boxes, if you like! We worked really hard at our relationship. He had a sister who he was very close to. His mother sadly passed away when he was about 25, of breast cancer. His Dad remarried. They had a beautiful house which Mark helped him build. Mark loved nature, he loved life, he loved people. When he asked me to move to North Devon with him, we bought a beautiful wooden lodge together. Unfortunately he wasn't here very long, but whilst he was here we really enjoyed it. It overlooks lovely fields and this is sort of a perfect home for us.

When he passed away he had an amazing send off. He died at home, in our bed. The week prior to his death, the whole family was here for the whole week. We literally had a party that whole week, until he died. It was just lovely, a beautiful week before he passed away. The lodge from that perspective is very special, because there is a part of him here, and always will be.

11.22

NR: That's beautiful, thank you Rose. I think we will come back to talking about Mark and that journey to Devon a bit later.

11.35

Louise Rands Silva: Thank you for sharing that with us. It was very moving. Shall we turn to your parents now. Could you tell us about your parents – I think they came to the UK from Jamaica?

12.10

RYF: They came from Jamaica. I believe they came on a boat, both of them, and they came to Birmingham first, because they were invited by my Mum's sister, who was already here. They didn't stay with my Mum's sister. They stayed with some friends first. I think the reason they landed in Birmingham was because jobs were plentiful. However, when my Mum came here, she didn't like Birmingham very much. She didn't like the fact that it was very built up. There were lots of people, lots of hustle and bustle, and so they only stayed there for a little while. Her sister was actually living in Wiltshire, and had a job and a life. I'm not sure how long my aunty had been here for. So my Mum's sister invited her to Wiltshire. She said, come to Wiltshire, you can get a house, there's plenty of work here. Mum and Dad came to Wiltshire and they absolutely loved it, and the reason, I found out later, was because it reminded Mum of home. The rolling fields and the quiet and peacefulness of the countryside. Because my Mum had grown up on a farm, so seeing the green grass and cows reminded her of home.

They settled in Wiltshire and rented a room in a 3-storey house, which was where I was later born in 1962. I have fond memories of that house. Actually, they pulled the house down years later, and it's now a car park! It was an old rickety house, mind, which is quite funny. When the house was gone, it was the only house in this area, and they turned it into a very small car park, and I did feel a little bit weird that they'd turned it into a car park. I wished I'd known they were pulling it down so I could have gone and got a brick or something! They got work quite easily, and then decided that they wanted to save up for their own house.

Growing up in that old rickety 3-storey house, I have very fond memories. It was lovely. There were other people that lived in other rooms in the house, and Mum helped look after a lot of the black community. She was, if you like, a community leader. I always remember that about her, people coming and asking her for advice and support and help. I remember that a lot about her. She had a lot of friends that would come around as well. I remember when Mum went to work, I had a lady that lived over the road from us, a white lady, and we called her 'our white Nan', because she looked after us. She was the archetypal gran that everybody would have. She was an old lady with white hair. She probably wasn't that old, but when you are young She was lovely and she would sit you on her knee, and there were other children there. I don't remember her name; we just called her Nan. Because obviously I didn't get to know my grandparents, because they were in Jamaica. So that's a nice memory I have. And then eventually, Mum and Dad did buy their own house. It was a lovely house where I grew up, most of my life. I think we moved when I was about 2, or 3 or 4. It had a lovely garden so that Mum could do her garden.

She was big on gardening. Dad went to work. He was a shift worker. He baked Bowyers pies, which was a big industry in Trowbridge at the time. In fact, the biggest I think. Mum worked in Bowyers as well, twisting sausages. I doubt very much that they do that anymore, by hand.

So I had a lovely life. When I was about 3, Mum got pregnant, and sadly the baby died. He had something wrong with his brain. He would have been my younger brother, but he died about 3 days after his birth. So that was really sad, and for a long time my Mum was sad about that. But I do remember being a very young girl, sitting on the edge of the bed, and my Mum crying after losing the baby. I remember saying to her, 'Don't worry Mum, you will have another baby'. My sister came along about 2 or 3 years later. I remember having a very wonderful and lovely childhood. However, because of the way my Mum was brought up, the Caribbean culture, it was very strict. Lots of beatings. Which of course nowadays, that's just unheard of, you are not allowed to do that. Yes, a very strict disciplinarian childhood. But I got over that when I got older. But generally, a lovely childhood. I remember lots of things, having to do chores, having to go to the local shop and get a 5-gallon of paraffin. I had another brother who came over from Jamaica, and I remember before my sister coming along, me and that brother doing our chores and going around the shops to get the paraffin, and eating Jamaican food every week, every day. Because Mum was not keen on English food, so we ate purely Jamaican food, that's what we grew up on. Just having a really lovely childhood really.

Dad would go and do his shift work. He worked a lot, and Mum would do her regular 8 til 5. And then going to school. School was fine. I made a lot of friends at school, I was quite a popular character, loved my sports at school.

19.47

LRS: I was curious about this discipline. Can you give an example? Something that you had a slap for, for what? But you wouldn't have done that with your children.

20.18

RYF: Crikey! We got slapped for anything. My understanding now is that Mum had a lot of frustrations, trying to keep the family unit together, working. So I think it was anything to keep the children in line. So you name it, I could get slapped for it, or shouted at, or told off for it. I think that was the mindset of the time, from Jamaican parents, that children must be seen and not heard.

21.06

LRS: Where does that come from in Jamaican culture?

21.14

RYF: I think it's just the mindset. When you are the parents, that's what you do, that's their way of parenting, 'you do as I say', and that's it. There wasn't any room for discussion about something, you didn't say 'I don't want to do that', or 'I don't like that'. There would be numerous conversations, for example, around the dinner table. You ate what was in front of you, you didn't



have ... 'But I don't like that'. 'Well no, you eat it, I've cooked it, you eat that!'. Everything was about controlling your child. Because you are the child. And that's gone on for generations. If you didn't do something, or if you disagreed with something, then you got a slap for it.

22.11

LRS: And when you were raising your own children, how was that different?

22.19

RYF: I'm not like that, anyway. I made a conscious decision to absolutely shower my children with so much love. Right from the off, they were just cushioned and enveloped in love. I made a conscious decision to talk to them about things and give them opportunities to learn and grow from their mistakes. So it was massive shift in attitude to how I understand bringing up a child. And slapping was a violent act anyway, it doesn't work for me. So I made a conscious decision not to bring my children up like that, in fact the total opposite.

23.43

LRS: Is there anything else you'd like to say about your Mum's influence on you? What can you see of your Mum in yourself?

23.35

RYF: So that said, about having a strict discipline in my upbringing, my Mum was a totally amazing woman. I go back to seeing her as a young child. A lot of members of the black community coming to her, and her giving them support. I remember growing up, particularly when we moved into our main house that they bought, every weekend people coming and talking to her. Her organizing events, doing a lot of cooking with other Caribbean women. At the time when they first came here, the black community had a social club that they formed. My Mum and all the other black women, when the men played cricket matches, and did very well playing other teams around the county, my Mum would do all the cooking. Then they'd have social gatherings, and my Mum was very much part of doing all of that. But I think mainly, seeing her be this kind of community leader, if you like, was something that developed inside of me, supporting people and helping them. Also, when she was a lot older and we were a lot older, I was able to have lovely conversations with my Mum. She was a very astute woman. Very emotionally intelligent. So again, having that as an influence on me. Even though she had sometimes quite traditional and antiquated ideas, I was still able to have lovely conversations with her. So she's one of the most, if not the, probably the most influential woman in my life. Even when she walked or talked, she had this stature about her. She was lovely and we had a wonderful relationship right up until her death. I cared for her for the 2 years prior to her death. It was then that that wonderful relationship of all those years was absolutely cemented. We had the utmost respect as mother and daughter, but also as two women. She was very respectful of the work that I did. I did a lot of the events and community things, and she was very respectful of that as well. She actually started a community group when she retired, of elders, and she did that for about 10 years. She was amazing, she cooked and organized things for people. When

she was unable to do that, then I took over that group, and she was very influential in helping and supporting me with that group, where she could. That's why she's such an influential person in my life. She was a very formidable character, mind. If you upset her, you knew about it! Her name was Sylvia James. I would also like to mention that she was a very funny woman, very humorous, side-splitting. So although she was formidable, she had a very soft side to her and she was very funny.

27.39

NR: I just have one more question about your parents. You mentioned that your Mum was a real leader of the black community – was that in Trowbridge? I am wondering what sort of scale the black community was at. Was it a big group of people that they went into, or just a few?

28.18

RYF: No, it was a very large community at that time. I would say that a lot of them came because the work was so plentiful in that area. Trowbridge is the county town of Wiltshire, so the work was plentiful in the 1950s and 1960s. Bowyers alone, I'm not sure of the workforce, was well over 1,000 people. And then there were other industries. There was Avon rubber tyres, Waldens, there was lots of industry at the time. So the black community was very large. I'd say close to 200 to 250, and then add to that there were Polish, Italians, Spanish, Moroccans. Years later when I did the black history project, I found that we had the largest Moroccan community, Muslim community, outside of London, in Trowbridge. So it was quite multi-cultural in Trowbridge, which is quite surprising to a lot of people.

30.07

NR: In terms of thinking about the fact that even though it was quite a big black community, the majority population of the area would have been white, and potentially given that it's a rural area, quite strongly established for a number of generations, how did they receive your parents? Were they welcomed? Did they have a positive experience, or did they ever experience any racism?

30.30

RYF: Yes, it was a large white community there. Generally, from what I understand of my Mum and Dad, they did have some racist incidents, but they were few and far between, which was a good thing to hear. I know when my Mum first came, and particularly remembering incidents from her interview that she gave the project that I did, she said that when the black women were pushing their babies around in prams, the white people would sometimes ... I don't know if she had this personally, but they would spit on the babies. I'm not sure that that happened to her personally, but I know that she heard of that. I know that other people had said, for example, that back in the 1960s when there were teddy boys, that the teddy boys made it their business to fight with the young black lads of that era. So there were those sorts of issues. Some of the participants of that project said that they had had issues with the teddy boys fighting them.

In terms of Mum and Dad, Dad was a very likeable, friendly guy, who got on well with everyone, no matter what race or gender, he got on with everybody. He was so likeable within Bowyers that most people, if not everybody, knew him. Very little racism. I remember one incident he said, where they wanted to offer him promotion and a work colleague at the time refused to work with him if he got that promotion, based on his colour. And as you can imagine, he said something hideous, why he didn't want to work with him. But thankfully, Dad was supported by his superiors, so that was the one and only racist incident that I remember Dad talking about. And Mum, again, there wasn't very much really, in terms of racist incidents. Even though it was largely white, at Bowyers where they worked it was very multi-cultural and everybody got on with everybody. So it was few and far between.

33.24

NR: Thanks Rose. Was that similar for you as a young person as well, growing up, what was your experience?

33.31

RYF: Yes, my experience, as I said, at school was fine. Particularly at secondary school, I was quite a popular figure. I had a little group, most people knew me. At secondary school there were only a handful of black children and a few mixed race, in my year. And in the whole school, it amounted to a handful of us. I only remember one incident at school. A girl that kept asking me a really dumb question, I thought at the time, which was: 'Would I rather be black or white?' She would also say that in front of other people. I remember thinking at the time, what a stupid question! And then saying to her, well obviously black, because you can't change your colour! But it was done as a way of highlighting and degrading my colour.

Other than that, the usual, people go 'Oh, your hair'. They would ask questions about my hair because as a little girl, before secondary school, at junior school, they would wonder why your hair was plaited, that sort of thing. But nothing really that ... I never ran home crying about anything. Or on the occasion that I did, my Mum would always look at me and say 'Yes, but you are not that, are you'. So she would say, stop being silly! So nothing that I know that others have had, that has been horrendous, so to speak. I was quite a popular figure, because of the sports element of me, people saw me more for that, that I was sporting and that I got on with people. People tended to like me and I tended to like people, so there wasn't much of an issue really.

36.04

NR: I wonder if you could tell me a little more about how your parents' Caribbean culture and their cultural heritage featured in your life when you were growing up. You talked about eating Jamaican food all the time, and certain attitudes around discipline. Were there any other things which they brought with them and which existed in your life as a young person?

36.31

RYF: Growing up in a Jamaican household was and is, for me, just so lovely. I felt quite cocooned. What I mean by that is I was almost, not exclusively, but kind of excluded from the English way of living. Because they are so focused on their culture, with the discipline, with the food, just with the whole attitude of being Caribbean, that you are kind of away from what it is to be English. So one of the first things I can think of about that is my Mum's very broad Jamaican accent! Of course, growing up, I knew of Mum's Jamaican accent. When I went to school, particularly late into my junior years, and certainly my secondary years, I started to take note of my Mum's accent. Previously it hadn't occurred to me, that it was a broad Jamaican accent. So when I went home I would notice the way she spoke and I would just be in fits of laughter! I would be continually correcting her. So for example, they don't say 'Three' in Jamaica, they say 'Tree'. That was one of the first things, so when she'd say this, I would say, 'Mum, it's not 'tree', it's 'three', and she'd get really annoyed with me! It was every other word then, so I would be continually, when I was 11 or 12, laughing every time she spoke. And she would get really cross with me, and say 'Why are you laughing?'. I'd say, 'Because you don't pronounce it like this, it's like this ...'. She'd get really frustrated with me, because she couldn't speak in 'proper' English, it was very broad Jamaican. So that was the language, and at that moment was when I started to realise there were the 2 different cultures I was living side-by-side with: there was the English and there was the Jamaican. It was almost like coming out of this hole thinking, oh OK, I'm English but I've also got this strong Jamaican heritage running through me.

And obviously the discipline. I realized that other children didn't get disciplined. The other thing about living in a Caribbean household is that they are very protective, over-protective of you. So you weren't allowed to do things. So an example of that is I wasn't allowed to go out and play out in the street. I had to stay in the yard. Children played in the yard. They were also not very keen on other children coming to play with you. When I was growing up in our street, there were a lot of children. Obviously back then in the 1960s you played out in the street, you went to the fields and things like that. I wasn't allowed to do that. I had to play in the yard where my Mum could see me. So even though she would be in the house cooking, cleaning and doing all of those things, she liked to be able to come to the window and make sure she could see me. There was no playing out in the street, even though the other kids were out by the gate going, come on, come and play! I was not allowed to do that.

They were very big ... I remember very fondly ... birthday parties were exceptional occasions. Aunties, friends, all the kids from the street would come to that. We'd have food coming out of our ears. Birthdays were celebrated as massive occasions, so that was lovely, because all the other children got to play with you, so that was really nice. You had presents galore and lots of food, it was lovely.

Caribbean food is a very big thing. On a Saturday it would be soup, so you'd have a massive bowl of soup, it's called brown pea stew, so it had meat and vegetables in it. Every Saturday you'd have that, so I have very fond memories of Mum getting up very early and cooking this soup for hours. You could smell it because it had garlic and onions – you could smell it all day. Your stomach would be rumbling because you'd want this soup, and we wouldn't eat until about 3 or 4 o'clock. As with English households where it was a roast on a Sunday, we would have

rice and peas and jerk chicken on a Sunday. So that was every day up until I rebelled, when I was about 14. I said, 'I don't want to eat any more rice and peas and chicken on a Saturday and a Sunday! I want to try English food!'. Which Mum was very hesitant and reluctant to do, but I started gently, occasionally just adding things like, I was very keen on Italian food, I had started learning about Italian food. So I would make pizzas and things like that. She was curious, but not keen! She stuck to her Jamaican food. But the food was delicious. My Mum was an excellent cook. It was very difficult to refuse to eat it. But I did get to a stage where it was 'no more Jamaican food, please!'. Although I did still eat it, but not so much. So that's what I can remember, really.

43.07

NR: I am curious about what you said about having that moment of realization that you were sitting between this Jamaican and this English culture, and going 'Well, I'm British, but I'm also Jamaican'. How do you think of yourself now, if you were to describe your identity?

43.25

RYP: The same. Very similar, having this lovely Jamaican culture running through me that is a massive part of me, and having my British culture as well, and all the things that are both what I am about. I love people for whoever they are, but the Caribbean side of me is obviously very, very important. I am keen to teach my children about their Jamaican heritage. My son is a chef and he's very keen on Jamaican cuisine. When he cooks it, he cooks it as well as his Nan cooked it. So that element of me, both sit very nicely side by side, both are very important to me. Just to mention, I have never been to Jamaica, but hope to one day. One of the reasons I have never been is because I am a bit of a wuss when it comes to very hot countries! And I know that Jamaica is incredibly hot, and I don't know that I would do very well, but I would like to go there one day.

45.00

LRS: Was there any carnival in Trowbridge, like they have in Notting Hill?

45.17

RYP: No, just the regular town carnival, but no cultural carnival.

45.35

LRS: Moving on to talk about coming to North Devon. Would you like to tell us about your wedding?

46.02

RYP: I'll start with when Mark asked me to marry him, which was again a lovely occasion. I was living in Southwick at the time, and Mark was living with me. After our mealtimes, we would sit and chat for hours about life, everything and anything really. On one such occasion, we'd had our dinner and we were chatting away, and all of a sudden, I think I looked away for a moment,

and when I looked back at him he was knelt in front of me on one knee. I was like, what are you doing? And then he presented me with this absolutely amazing ring and said, 'Would you do me the honour of being my wife?'. It was not long after he had been diagnosed, and he chuckled in for some silly reason, 'It's not because I'm ill!', which we both laughed at. He said, 'I really would love you to be my wife' and presented me with this ring which his Mum had given to him just before she passed away. It's an antique ring and it's very special. Someone had presented it to her when she was 16. This man was an older man who was absolutely in love with her, but she had to tell him 'no', she wouldn't marry him, but he still wanted her to have the ring anyway. So she kept the ring and gave it to Mark and said, 'When you meet the love of your life, here's a ring for you'. So he presented me with this ring that he had kept for many years. Of course I said 'yes'. Then I phoned around and told everyone because I was really excited. So that was how he asked me to marry him.

Then obviously after that he became sicker and sicker, so the focus for the next few months was his illness, because he had chemo. At one point he decided to go down the 'alternative' route, so for the next few months our focus was that. But unfortunately he just got sicker and sicker, and so we put off the wedding. It was around the time when we knew that it was imminent, there was no turning back, there was nothing the doctors could do for him. I said to him one day, 'Look, let's just get married, let's just do it'. And he agreed, and I literally said whoever we can invite, can come. We'll ask our friend who has a smallholding if she will host if for us there. We'll have a hand fastening wedding, to which he agreed. I literally, as soon as he said yes to that, organized the wedding within about 2 weeks, just invited anybody. What was interesting was it was about 60 of our friends that came to the wedding. It was an amazing day. They turned the smallholding into a mini-festival for us. On the day, the ceremony was supposed to take place at 11 am, and at 11 o'clock there was absolutely torrential rain! So we had all our guests waiting, because it was all going to be outside, so we couldn't do the wedding. We waited for a couple of hours and then the rain stopped and we went down to the area of the field where we were going to hold the ceremony. What was lovely was we all stood in a circle and Mark and I stood in the middle of the circle. The high priestess took the ceremony. I didn't see it myself, but people told me that although it was quite dark and gloomy, where we were all stood on this grassy area, the clouds parted and there was a shaft of sunlight coming through during the whole ceremony, which was beautiful. What was lovely on that day, because we had organized the wedding so quickly, my children had told me that they couldn't come to the wedding because they had work commitments and it was too short notice. On the day, whilst I was getting my wedding dress ready, I walked out of the caravan and both my sons appeared, and I couldn't believe it. They hadn't told me that they were going to turn up, and it was just lovely to see them. So as well as having the most perfect day, it was beautiful because my sons turned up on the day as well. I just had a lovely time. The wedding was absolutely amazing.

51.55



LRS: Thank you for sharing that with us Rose. Do you remember what it was like the day you arrived in North Devon with Mark? What are your memories of your first home and settling in in the early days, acclimatizing?

52.38

Ryf: Prior to actually moving to Devon, Mark had asked me to live here with him. We took a trip from Southwick in Wiltshire to come and look at potential places where we might live. His favoured place was Hartland. I can remember driving into Devon in his van and looking around and thinking, 'I could live here. It's actually really nice'. I had not been to Devon for many years, so I wasn't familiar with the area at all. He showed me around Hartland and I liked it instantly. The reasoning behind Hartland for Mark was that he was a well-travelled man. He travelled all over the world and the one thing he said to me was that his heart was in Devon, in particular Hartland. He loved the area, so that's why he wanted us to live in Devon as opposed to living in Wiltshire. So I came here and loved it. We did eventually find a place. He found the wooden lodge. When we came here he was already very ill, when we moved, so we spent a lot of months again still focusing on his illness. A lot of that time, when I moved here in January 2015, the focus was on his illness as he was getting more and more poorly. Although we had a few days out and he had a few good days, he was very tired, so we weren't able to do a lot of things together once we actually moved into the lodge. But we still had a lot of nice times, lots of lovely meals. I was trying to establish myself in Devon, seeing how the land lay in terms of work and what the community had to offer. But the focus was very much on his illness.

55.17

LRS: Can it be isolating being out in Hartland?

55.22

Ryf: It is isolating, but I like the isolation. I like the peace and tranquility here, which really appeals to the character that I am, and that we would have been as a couple. We liked going out and meeting people, being quite social, but we liked the comfort and the peace that it offers, away from everyone as well. So it's perfect.

55.55

LRS: Were there any other challenges then, and more recently, that you have had to manage living in North Devon? What has helped you to do that?

56.20

Ryf: When I first came here, I was very keen to develop community relationships, to see what went on in the community. So I made a big effort to find out what sort of developments go on within the community. The first thing that I noticed was that there are a lot of community groups within the town. A lot of, if you like, movers and shakers, people doing different things. I was very friendly with the people that owned the health food shop at the time. They were integral in talking about the type of people in the community that do community stuff. One of the things that



I noticed was that because there are a lot of community groups, they don't work together. And no one knows who is doing what. I thought that was quite odd, because of the work that I had done when I had worked at the college, I wanted to bring that together.

So I decided that I would work with some people and make it known that I was trying to organize an event that would bring a lot of community groups together to highlight that within the area. So I began developing with some people how I would do that. I then created an event called the 'Positive Living Fair'. But before that, I was very keen to meet people, and for people to meet one another. When I lived in Wiltshire, I had been to a few events called the 'Positive Living' group in Glastonbury. It's a networking event, so I decided to bring that event to Devon. You invite local or national speakers to speak about alternative ways of living and thinking and being. So I created those events so that I could meet people, and other people could network together. Out of creating that little event, I then created this bigger event for the community. What I found was that there is a lot of enthusiasm within the town. People are doing lots of amazing work supporting people, networking, trying to build community collaboration and cohesion. But they seem to work a lot in isolation. So that organization will do what they are doing, but they don't seem to always work collaboratively, which for me has a lot of credence if you can share your resources and staff members. So I tried to, with that event that I created; the Positive Living Fair was about the community as well as the organisations recognizing what they do. And it worked really well, because the community realized that there were a lot of groups that they could tap into, and the groups themselves realized that they could tap into other groups.

But I still think that that bridge hasn't really been built. A lot of the groups still work in isolation. They don't see the benefits of sometimes working together. So I found that quite difficult. The reason is because I think that we have to work in different ways now. I think it's important that collaborative projects are allowed to flourish with people working together. It helps with more community cohesion and people realizing what goes on in the town. I have found that very difficult. Some of the groups are quite possessive about what they do. I find that quite challenging. For me, that doesn't always work. I find that attitude quite difficult. And also, there's an apathy in attitude about helping people and supporting people, and the way groups work together. There's apathy, 'Oh yeah, we don't do that'. That's been quite frustrating for me, because I like to get on and do things. I have found that attitude quite challenging. But it's in a lot of places. I've found that in Trowbridge as well. And having the same conversations with councils and some organisations. For example, when you are talking about diversity, the 'hard to reach' terminologies, and working with young people. Still, people are in that historical mindset, if you like.

01.02.39

LRS: How did different people in the town react to you and treat you early on? How did that make you feel?

01.02.47

RYF: Through having this contact in the health shop, it turned into quite a community hub. So I had started to meet and network with a lot of people through this health shop. I found quite quickly that I made a lot of friends and got to know a lot of people, if you like, the movers and shakers in the community. So they quite soon got to know what my aims and objectives were, and we worked together and forged a link quite quickly. When I came here, I had boundless amounts of energy and enthusiasm, so that seemed to rub off on a lot of people. The people I was in contact with immediately saw that in me, and it was almost as if they were waiting for that energy also. So between us this is why we were able to develop this event, the Positive Living Fair, which was very successful. A lot of people came on board with my enthusiasm, my energy and my ideas quite quickly. We developed that together as a very small group. In terms of that, I was received quite well. The only sticking point that I had, if I had any sticking point, was the council. When I went to the council and asked them if I could put this event on at the Pannier Market, Bideford Pannier Market is a beautiful building, very under-used, and I was insistent that I wanted to put this event on there, that was the only sticking point that I had. The attitude was almost, well who are you? We've never heard of you. How come you want to put on such a big event? But I was quite insistent. I was a bit bolshy actually(!) to the Deputy Clerk. I said, I've put my proposal to you. Please, let them know how keen I am to run this event, and why. And that was the only sticking point really. But other than that, the people that I worked with were amazing, and had as much drive and enthusiasm and energy as myself. So it worked really well.

01.05.39

LRS: Thank you Rose. That's a big indicator of the value of diversity, isn't it.

01.05.59

NR: You have touched on some of the work that you've done in recent years. I know that you've had more than one career and more than one string to your bow. Could you tell us about the work and how that relates to your identity?

01.06.16

RYF: I'll start off by talking about my catering career, my catering journey. Obviously, without a shadow of a doubt, my Mum was an excellent cook, and so growing up I had to help my Mum a lot in the kitchen. I won't say that I was particularly enthusiastic about food, apart from eating it! But I did love watching her and talking with her about food. But I had no specific idea about what I wanted to do in life. In my late teens, and I can't remember at this point how it came about, I just got an interest in food. So I started doing a little bit of cooking, badly, I don't hesitate in saying! So my first recollection of trying to cook was I tried to bake a cake. So I knew at that point that the easiest thing to do was a Victoria Sandwich. 'Ah, I'll make a Victoria Sandwich'. And guess what, it came out as flat as a pancake! I thought, right, let's go again. I made another one ... which came out as flat as a pancake. I just continued on making these Victoria Sandwiches, and every single one of them ... And on my fifth or sixth attempt, it came out and it actually looked like a Victoria Sandwich! 'Yay, I've cracked it!' At that point, I then decided

maybe I could have a career in catering. So I was aged ... I'd finished college and I had done a secretarial course, which didn't suit me at all. I didn't like it. So I went to work at 18, at Tesco's. We had a new Tesco's open in Trowbridge. And I thought, 'this isn't for me'. So I went to catering college aged 21, which made me the oldest student in the class! Because everybody else was 16 or 17. I did catering for about 3 years, and that's when my catering career kicked off. And I've just loved catering and cooking ever since. I have always concentrated on large-scale catering. So that's where working in schools and colleges started; I worked at the hospital as well. That's where mainly you have a set period for lunch, 12-2 for example, you serve from the great big Grundy tin trays. I have always liked that, the hustle and bustle of doing that. Not the other end of catering, hospitality in pubs and clubs, that's never appealed to me. But large-scale catering - I have just loved cooking food. I have a passion to teach people to cook. Through doing catering, I have a passion to teach people to cook, which I have never been successful at being able to do. That was one of the things I would have loved to have done when I came to Devon, but it's not worked out. I am a big fan of conscious cooking. So smelling, tasting the food, and talking about what food means to people, and how food impacts on our moods and things like that. I love cooking for my friends, family, I just love anything to do with food.

I did catering for a number of years, and then when I got to my late 40s, I decided I wanted a career change. Again, the whole community and support element of my character came up, and I decided to go into youth work. So I went into youth work, and enjoyed very much the things that I had learnt about bringing up my own children, which very much led me to focus on other teenagers. I thoroughly enjoyed working with young people and managed to get a youth work job, as they were back in the day. I have very fond memories of doing that. It was very challenging, as you can imagine. Then I managed to get a full-time job working in a college of further education which was in Trowbridge, at the local college. I did that job for about 6 years and thoroughly enjoyed that. I brought a lot of the community-based skills that I had into that role. I was an assistant student liaison officer, which is pastoral care, basically. I would bring speakers in for the young people to listen to. People like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, the Teenage Cancer Trust, people that talked about testicular cancer. Theatre productions, that would do what's called 'forum theatre'. All sorts of things like that, life skills that I felt young people needed to be a part of their development within the college, being a college student. And thoroughly enjoyed it. Then I left that role in 2010, to care for my Mum for 2 years. So that's my career really.

01.12.56

LRS: That's great to hear Rose. You have done so much to nourish and help people, especially young people. How would you describe Bideford to someone who's never been here, in terms of the people and the place, and the community? Can you compare it to Trowbridge or anywhere else that you have lived?

01.13.33



RYP: Bideford is a small backwater town. It's quite a close-knit community. What I have noticed about Bideford and North Devon is that they are quite behind. From a catering background, they are still very behind in a lot of the ways they serve their food; the food choices that they offer in the cafes and restaurants. People seem to like that. But they still serve iceberg lettuces rather than lettuce leaves in a lot of the establishments, which I find quite strange. A salad in a lot of respects still looks like when I was first doing my catering. From that perspective, it's quite funny.

As a community, the circles that I have moved in, I have found a lot of people are very forward-thinking, switched on, really enthusiastic and keen to develop the community. That's really lovely to be a part of. If I compare it to Trowbridge, where I lived all my life, Trowbridge was equally as difficult and challenging in a lot of ways. Although because it was more diverse, more multi-cultural, I felt it's easier to get things done and people, the community and the council, are much more keen to develop things, much more open to ideas. I don't think it's always as open, wider than my social network in Bideford. They have this apathy here, whereas the apathy wasn't quite so much in Trowbridge. But Bideford is a lovely town. I don't have any immediate issues with it at all. People are friendly here. I've not had any issues here. I think sometimes when you are a stranger they can be a little bit hesitant towards you. But as soon as they know that you are a warm and friendly person, I think they are fine.

01.16.54

LRS: Do you feel part of a strong community? Secondly, is there anything you would like to change about the town?

01.17.08

RYP: Yes, I do feel part of the community. I have been here for just over 5 years, and I do feel very much part of the community. I think you can safely say that you feel part of the community when you walk down the street and you meet 2 or 3 people! Particularly when you are in a hurry, instead of taking 20 minutes to walk through the town, it's an hour later, and that has happened to me on a few occasions! I know a fair few people now, so I definitely feel part of the community.

Would I change anything about the town? Yes, I would love to see more community cohesion. More working together, more collaborative ventures going on, which I think again, as I said before, is really important in this day and age, particularly with everything that's gone on in the last 2 to 3 years, Covid, BLM. I think that people are feeling and wanting to feel more community-spirited, more community-minded. So I would love to be a part of that development, for sure.

01.18.27

LRS: Thank you. That leads well onto talking about this year, 2020. Covid, health disparities with BAME communities related to Covid, and the Black Lives Matter movement in a rural

context. Is there something you'd like to talk about related to that, Rose? What your main insights?

01.19.15

RYF: For me, the Corona virus, at first it was a frightening time, as it was for everyone else. A pandemic is not something that I've ever experienced in my life, and probably didn't expect to experience. So a very frightening time. Once I'd settled in to what I understood it to be about, and particularly once lockdown restrictions were imposed, I actually settled down within myself. I used it as an opportunity to look into myself and do some inner work. So for me, I thoroughly enjoyed that period of time, and still am enjoying it from that perspective. Just doing some personal journey work. Obviously the last 5 to 7 years have been challenging emotionally, looking after Mum, looking after Mark. My Dad passed away last year. So that space and that time of the lockdown restrictions has given me time to do some inner reflective work on that. For me that's been very good. It's been challenging trying to understand it from the perspective of me being a very touchy, feely, social person, and now a lot of that has been taken away. So trying to understand that has been very difficult for myself and close friends, close family. It's been a confusing time. Obviously within all that, being furloughed as well. And then having to pick up the project, and the attitude that people have had. Because I know that people are in a heightened state of sensitivity because of Covid. So that's something that is uppermost in my mind. There's a lot of confusion for people. And every day something different is coming out, in terms of Covid. For example, I heard yesterday that you are only allowed gatherings of 6 now. So every day something's coming out, and it adds to the confusion of what's going on. But I think the biggest thing for me is doing this inner work, which has been amazing, but also how I feel about not being able to see my friends, and be as I normally am with my friends, the touching, the feeling, seeing them on a regular basis. That's been quite challenging on a personal note, for me.

01.22.15

NR: Can I ask about the Black Lives Matter movement, and how in a lockdown context you have been able to connect with that during this time. Particularly what your thoughts and feelings are about the relevancy of Black Lives Matter as a global movement, as a person of colour living in a rural area.

01.22.40

RYF: I took the decision many years ago not to listen to the news. I didn't hear about the whole George Floyd thing for about 2 weeks. Then once I realized the impact of it, I was absolutely horrified and my first thoughts were, 'oh my gosh, this again'. Then obviously it spiraled and went global. I had a feeling, once I realized the impact of it globally, I felt very hurt and upset by it, as a black person. Then I started to feel the impact of it in terms of my colour, in terms of being a black woman, a black person. I was very upset about it. I started to have conversations with my family, a few friends started to call, and I thought to myself, I can't believe that in this day and age it's come to this. However, what I do feel is that because everybody was in a state

of limbo, of flux because of Corona virus, it's given us all an opportunity to think about racism in a different way. What I like about that and what I think is really good about that is it's given us a great platform to perhaps look at racism in a more productive way, which I think is really important. And in an 'out of the box' way. I think that a lot of healing needs to come from this, should come from this. I think a lot discussions need to be opened up about it, and I am more than willing to have those discussions with anybody and everybody. I think it's about having those discussions and I think that's the key element. If we were still all in our busy lives it wouldn't have had the same impact as everybody being in this limbo state, where people are having an opportunity to think, to settle into the experience, the situation of his death and what that means. So I think it's a great time in a way for us to be able to have those conversations, and really important for us to be able to have that. I'm more than happy ... I did feel a slight sense of anger. I also felt a slight sense of vulnerability, and that vulnerability looked like, walking around I didn't know whether somebody was going to shout out anything at me, or try to harm me. But that only lasted for a few moments. But it was a very real concern, one I have not really ever experienced before. Just because people are in a very heightened state ... hyper-sensitivity. I was a bit angry at first – I think the anger came from having discussions with my children and thinking, they are 27 and they are having to go through this. When I would have thought ... my son shared some experiences which I didn't realise, and I thought, that's sad, at 27, that he's got to adjust and have those experiences himself. A little bit of anger, but that's gone. It's more about how we can go forward from here, which I think is a great thing.

01.27.01

LRS: What did you think about the pulling down of the statue of Colston in Bristol? It's related to what we are doing in our project, Telling Our Stories.

01.27.37

Ryf: I had mixed feelings about that, because I know there has always been an issue with the Colston Hall. For me, what's important is to highlight both the historical elements of statues and history. To discard one, and say this is more important, is not the way. I think that both sit side by side. The sadness is that one has been seen as more important than the other. I think that this is an opportunity, again, to highlight both, and how and where they sit, together. To give people the real histories. I can see why people did it, and why people think that it was important to do it. But we can't deny that there is a history, and what that history is with both. The cultural side of it, this is an opportunity for that to be highlighted. So the pulling down is important. It's a huge symbolic illustration, I get why people do that. But I also think that it's a time where we can look at it in a different way, and highlight the histories and the symbolism of why people felt it was important to pull down the statue.

01.30.15

NR: We've just been talking about the past – I wonder if you have any hopes or fears for the next 10, 20, 50 years?

01.30.16



RYF: Yes, I do. I'm a person that lives in hope and I trust very deeply in the human spirit and psyche. I can see that with the spiritual path and journey that I live on, I trust in the human psyche. I think that there is a wave coming, and that people love people. It doesn't always seem that way, because there are a lot of horrible things that are going on. We are in a time of mass transition, emotionally, psychologically, physically. But I think that those transitions are important. Just as the seasons change, Mother Nature does what she does. I think all those things are really important. I think that things will be well. Everything is going to be OK, even if some days we get up in the morning and think, what the hell is going on? I try to exist in that sort of mindset, that sort of path. Things will be OK. It's really important that we develop community, that we continue. Everywhere you go, no matter where you go in the world, in your town, in your street, I think that you will see examples of that going on. That's why I think that everything will be OK. I have hope that things will be good. The generation coming up, a lot of them are fairly switched on, definitely in terms of my children. Things will change. It will be challenging, it's meant to be. I see myself as an elder of the community. So I think that the knowledge and the wisdom that I have, to be a part of that will be very special.

01.32.44

NR: As an elder of the community, do you have a message which you like to leave for people listening to this in the future?

01.32.59

RYF: Be true to yourself. Support and love one another. Supporting each other and supporting your family and friends. Try not to buy into the stories and the fear if you can. We all are different, but that's what's lovely about us. We are all unique and we are all very beautiful people, and to recognize that within each other.

01.33.35

NR: Thank you Rose. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before we finish?

01.33.46

RYF: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to do an interview. It's been fun. I've been very relaxed, I've shared some emotional elements of my journey, but they have been fantastic. It's been lovely to talk about Mark, for example. Lovely to talk about my 3 wonderful children. Lovely to be part of this project, which I feel is very important, particularly at this time. We didn't know how important, with the Black Lives Matter movement. It's been an honour and a privilege to share my story and be part of this project. Thank you both for your questions. I've thoroughly enjoyed that.

01.34.33

NR: Thank you Rose. We will finish the interview there.

End