

Telling our Stories, Finding our Roots, Exeter's Multi-Coloured History Interview Transcript

Interviewee: **Ayşe KUZU**
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Q. So Ayşe if you could just tell me a little bit about your childhood?

My childhood was very happy actually. I was born in the middle of Turkey, it's called Konya. I studied in Konya until the secondary school and college was finished. I found a job in the government office and while I was working in Konya, after I moved to Izmir. I started again, a government office another job and I met my husband in Izmir in 1985 and we married in Turkey. My husband had a political problem but we were married, we couldn't go to the Registry Office properly, we give money to somebody and they give our paper and we just sign it. We did not to invite other people because Abdullah wasn't legal people. And 4/5 years Abdullah stay home, I worked again only nobody knows our marriage – the outside knows I am single, Abdullah was at home. And four or five years we lived like this, it was very hard for Abdullah and for me as well. After we decided to go because it wasn't easy life for us and after we came to England, Lâle was two years when we came here and after we started our life in London.

When we came to London Lâle was 2 years and she was understand Turkish only when we came to London she heard the English as well and she confuse which language she is going to speak and she stopped talking. For four years she didn't speak any word actually. She was angry because she lost everybody around her and when she started crèche she was scared, she always wanted someone to stay with her. After she got used to it and she was happy in London with her school. And we worked together with Abdullah. Two years we've been College in London and after 8 years we moved to Exeter and we start again new life here.

Q. So how did you find it in London - was it easier than being in Turkey and Izmir and what challenges did you find?

It was very difficult because when we came to London we can't speak English and we didn't know anybody around us, we'd be with our Turkish and Kurdish community and we often go to that place and we were happy there because everything was very strange for us in London and after 4 or 5 years later we find it easier, not very difficult.

Q. So after being in the hustle and bustle of London, what were your first impressions when you came to Exeter?

When we came to Exeter, we don't know anybody and we started a new business and we were very depressed how it was going. 2000 in Exeter was very quiet, we were scared how we can manage that. When we move here Lâle doesn't want to come to another place because she was 2 years when we came to London and when she was 10 years we moved to Exeter, again she lost her friend. When we moved here she got some accident - she broke her toes in foot and she can't walk and she was crying and we have to

concentrate on our new business, it was really very hard at that time. And after 2-3 years in Exeter we get it right and after four years actually

Q. You spoke about starting a new business, so can you tell us a little bit about how that came about, did you find the premises first, or did you start the business elsewhere?

No we haven't got any experience actually. When we were in London, our neighbour was helping to look after Lâle after school and he told us if you live in London you can't leave her in another house because she wants to stay in her own house, you know. And we thought it was better if we start a small business she can stay with us and we look after her. London is not very safe for children actually. For this reason we decided to come to Exeter. One of our friends opened a Kebab shop, they advised us it's a nice university student city and the other hand a small city is not good for foreign people you know, they don't want another... they say Exeter is good for foreign people because they used to foreign university students for this reason we chose here actually.

Q. I am interested in your impressions of Exeter and memories of Turkey and how you feel about being away from Turkey now?

Actually we are very busy with our business, we can't think lots of things, we haven't got time to feel something. We just come in morning and start to work and especially when we started this business it was very difficult for us, we haven't got any experience and we spent a lot of time to business. Again we miss the Turkey of course, we've got Turkish television we watch every day, news and what happens in our country, what is the political situation and we get upset mostly. We miss Turkey of course, that's our country and we would like to go back there and live there actually.

Q. What do you miss most about Turkey?

Mostly the sun [laughter] again our friendships, we miss everything in Turkey because we grown up there actually.

Q. I don't know if you mentioned earlier but at what age did you leave Turkey, Ayşe?

33 years.

Q. So do you think it's been difficult for you and Abdullah to make friends here?

No, we made very easily friends actually because we love people, we're not thinking English or Turkish or Arabic, this is our character or idea, we thought all people are same, not nationality, and we make very easy friends. Because our character I think, we like to make people happy and we always wants to give something and I think we make it easy life, otherwise it's really difficult.

Q. Do you think it's been different for Lâle making friends here?

No for Lâle, like us, makes easily friends, only when she was teenager she confused. Because she took our culture, we give her, share everything and care for people - like humanity things, this is the normal thing. Only when she goes to school, for example, they don't share anything, they don't give her anything and she say: 'why am I giving everything and nobody shares with me' – like this, she confused. Only she going her way, she didn't change, she still same actually, she wants to share everything she gives to people love,

and everything. Only her teenage was very difficult really, because I noticed when it's a holiday, when she stay one week with us, she's alright - when she started school, she changed, she's angry with us, she confused actually the cultures because English culture and Turkish culture are different especially when she was teenager actually.

Q. So do you think she found it hard to have a sense of who she was?

Yes, if she'd grown up in London maybe different because lots of people come from other countries and she would not feel foreign. Only in Exeter she feels she's different from the other girls and she wants to be like them and she couldn't manage, she couldn't put herself from that. It was very hard time we had and for us as well, because when she go to a club, I haven't been to a club in Turkey and club is for us like disco and is not a safe place, they are drinking, not a good place. And when she comes 2 o'clock/3 o'clock I was very upset, I can't sleep while she is not coming. When she comes home I sleep and in the morning at 8 o'clock I have to wake up to go to work. It was really very hard for me. Now it's alright she getting very well and you know sometimes two cultures is good, if you are using it in a good way because she is taking something from us, from English culture and she mix it now, she is reading lots of books and she knows what happens in the world...and Abdullah help her a lot. I give love, Abdullah give... help her find her way – Abdullah is not like Turkish men they get quickly angry and beat...never, never, he say she will be alright and she will find her way.

Q. So if you were to ask Lâle now how she might describe herself - what do you think her answer might be?

I think she can't say I'm Turkish because she has seen lots of negative things of Turkish life and government and political system. When she was 17/18 she wants to live in Turkey, after when she has seen what happened I think she say just I am human, she can't say the nationality. Sometimes she say I feel myself I am Arab now, because Abdullah came from Egypt you know - and when she's been in Palestine she says I found myself I am now Arabic and I am learning Arabic, she can't say I think anything really, maybe in the future?

Q. What do you like about being in Exeter?

Exeter is a small place, actually a good size, not big not small, and people are used to foreign people, I never feel foreign here, maybe I've got business and people are coming here, my place for this reason I don't know if maybe work somewhere.. I feel I belong to Exeter, I don't feel foreigner here. Just everybody's our people; our customers are relatives I feel...

Q. So leading on from that then, where would you say home was?

Home was I think again is Turkey. We can't make any plan, only I want to live in Turkey.

Q. So let's go back to Turkey then, you spoke a little bit around your childhood but do you have any siblings, brothers, sisters?

Yes, I have two brothers and one sister. I lost one of my brothers when I was 19 years and after when I came to England I lost my mum, my daddy, I couldn't go to the funeral because I haven't got passport at that time – we applied for resident permit here and that... because I was the younger of the children in my family and they love me a lot

actually, and they get very upset when I leave everything when I moved with Abdullah to England. I didn't tell them I am going because I know they can't accept it and that stayed always inside, my heart.. first time I say that.. it's not easy life really, not easy life.

Q. So do you regret leaving?

No. I made maybe a mistake, only again I am not looking at the mistake because when married with Abdullah I know he has political problem and I accept it and we went on the road, you know, I never talk to him: 'you leave it, your political life because we married' because I know and I respect his life because it is a good way.

Q. It's so much part of him

Yes, yes, I never regret really because if we live in Turkey maybe something would happen to him because it's not safe place, I read lots of things and around us happened lots of things for this reason I never regret really. I know he is not doing this for himself he is doing it for people for this reason really.

Q. So what do you do on your day off? Apart from sleeping..

Actually our day off we go for a walk to Exwick on the riverside, and we find lots of things... reading, at home and sometimes we visit our friends, we have lots of friends if we find time we meet with them. We are quite busy [laughter], even though day off.

Q. Have you been to Dartmoor?

Yes we've been, our customer took us there to a nice place, it's called Fingle Bridge and we walk at National Trust place I think, 2 mile. You are walking and you are coming back to the same place. All our customers sorry for us and they say you come we take you somewhere. They help us a lot actually - one of our customers takes us one week-end actually. And sometimes we go to seaside when we have got guests you know from Turkey or from London, we take them Sidmouth or Exmouth, that nice pub Fisherman's Cot close to Tiverton, we go there. We like life actually only, we haven't got time. And sometimes we're travelling if Lâle calls us and we go somewhere.

Q. Do you think there's a difference between Exeter and the rest of Devon?

Exeter is nice for us because there are lots of students here from Azerbaijan or Saudi Arabia, lots of students, and Turkey and we find here is different to the other places actually, we haven't been there - I think Exeter is good for us.

Q. And maybe looking at the contrast between Exeter and London?

Of course they are different, London is more - easy for us actually because we have a big community there and you know if something happens we can go for a march or something. Exeter is a small place of course, especially for Abdullah. London is different than here of course.

Q. Would you prefer to be in London - given the choice now, you have lived in Exeter for many years?

I think I prefer to live in Exeter because we have lots of friends. We left London in 2000 – 10, 13 years gap has got now, we feel here more happy – we have more friends.

Q. Do you have a message you might like to give the people of Exeter about your experiences or just generally?

Actually Exeter is good for living, people are friendly. Everything is easy, travelling is easy, very tied-up place. Life is nice in Exeter.

Thank you Ayşe

You're welcome

End of interview