

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

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Intro by Sandhya Dave

I just wanted to ask you four young girls -some of you are 16, some of you are 15.

Sam is from the Philippines originally, Kemberly is from the Philippines as well, Tina is from China and Nikoleta is from Bulgaria. Just placing it for our listeners. Young women growing up in Exeter today, none of you have been born here. How is it for young women living in Exeter, what sorts of things would you like to have there on offer for you to go and enjoy and experience?

Facilities,

SC: Karaoke [laughter]

NK: For me personally I would like to have more clubs, because all the clubs here are open at night and for adults and if we have clubs for young people, like 16 or under, I think it will be more fun. Range of different things.

SD: And is that something that you'd have in Bulgaria, Nikoleta?

NK: Yes

And what sorts of things would you like to be happening in those clubs?

NK: Dancing and music and that's, not the alcohol, because...

SD: It doesn't have to be necessarily about drinking but it's about going out and having fun?

NK: Yes

SD: Anyone else, what else would you like to see?

SC: I wish there was like a massive mall, a shopping mall. In the Philippines we have something called SM which is like a chain of loads of malls where everything is in there, there's games, you can shop, there's a cinema, loads of things like food courts and it's all in there, and you can just go in there.

SD: So you can go out with your friends and do some shopping and you can play at the same time? And cafes. All under one roof. Any other ideas? Anything you might want as young people.

TL: I think it's a bit too much, but a theme park in Exeter. You know, because we have to travel, if you want to go to Alton Towers you have to go quite far, so I think ?

SD: So as young people, if you want to go to these things shopping or to the park or clubs and things, where do you get your money from to spend?

All: from our parents, yeh.

SD: So do you all get pocket-money?

SC: I do chores and stuff, so I wash the dishes, sometimes I do the laundry, the ironing, or clean my room and I get money.

NK: I don't get pocket-money, but because I don't use money a lot but when I ask for money I can get it, once a week or something, I just ask for it.

KE: I ask for it as well.

NK: But I think I might work when I'm 16 or older but I can't now cos I'm only 15.

SD: So that wouldn't be an issue, asking for money to go out for kind of leisure. God, that was different in our days, we had to make do. So Sam, that was quite interesting you said you do chores at home – that sounds quite American that idea to me, is that something that is normal in the Philippines, in the culture where you do some work at home?

SC: Yes it is. Parents like encourage helping in the house, especially elderly people, like they grew up helping their parents and doing the chores because we don't want older people to be burdened with chores. So it's like out of respect.

SD: And that was something that I heard in your different families. So do you think that your experiences of what you think family is, like you spoke about looking after the elderly, do you think that is maybe very different to someone who is an English girl of your age being brought up, do you think she may have different attitudes to family?

KE: Well it's worth asking, I heard that people get kicked out when they are 18 and I find that really, really weird, I don't know why, but it's like you are family and when you have a baby you have it for like 10 or 9 months why would you give up? It's weird to me.

SD: So that was a really unusual idea for you?

NK: Also I've noticed that British people are not as close to their families, for example I know a lot of people if they see their parents outside of school or on the bus they would think it's really awkward.

SC: Yes and they start running away...

NK: They feel it's really awkward to be around their parents, and for me I would be really happy to see my mum, I think that's quite weird.

KE: You know here, if you are like old, you get sent to homes, nursing home but in the Philippines we don't have that because parents look after their own. I find it quite weird because married people they just leave their parents in a nursing home.

SD: So with family upbringing as people get older you look after them. Do you think that it something that might change, with generations? Say for example, if I can just talk to Sam and Kemberly, if you were going to now stay in this country and say that you have children here and have careers, do you think that might change? If you go off and you work in London, do you think that that is something that might change if your parents decide to stay in Exeter?

SC: I think it will change because if, for example, you are born here you are influenced by like everyone around here. I mean even for me, I wasn't born here, but I am influenced – part of me is British and part of me is Philippina and especially if you are a child here and you grow up here, you feel more closer to your British side and roots, and I think you will believe more, the beliefs of the culture here,

SD: So in terms of women as well, because you are all young women, is it different for you do you think with your cultural family roots being a woman to being a young man. Do you think you have been brought up different. Of course if you are an only child you may not have an answer to that.

SC: It's actually really funny, because my mum is like kind of mad on the family, like she's not... but men in the Philippines respect women a lot. For example, my mum had to say that the man is the head of the family, but the woman is the neck (laughs), that's what she says and did taught me that men and women are equal.

SD: So there's no difference for you Sam in what you do in your career or anything like that? It's equal for you and your brother?

SC: Yes

KE: For me, because my parents plan to move back to Philippines, and they expect my brother to look after me. I think they just want him to be everything, they told him that he can't get married until he finishes university.

SD: And how does that sit with you about your brother looking after you?

KE: I feel sorry for him, he can't have what he wants, he just has to look after me. I feel bad, I want to become independent as well. I am going to be 18 in a few years time and I can't just let him look after me.

SD: So your parents are planning to go back to the Philippines? And you are going to be happy to stay here?

KE: Yes I will finish my school here.

SD: Do you think you might stay here – I know it is a difficult question because you don't know, but do you think you are planning to stay in this country afterwards, do you think?

KE: Yes.

SD: So, what I am hearing from all of you is you've got these lives at home that are based in your own countries of origin and then you've got this life which is outside, which is a British life, you go to school, and go to shops and hang round in an English way etc. and I'm just wondering is that difficult, how is that to hold those two different, I would call it identities, so maybe a Chinese and English identity?

TL: I go home to China every summer for holiday, I go to my granddad's house, he like lives in this area, there are lots of old people there, and most of them haven't been outside the country. I go back there and they are just like, oh you are the one who went to the UK and like how come you are still the same, you are still speaking in Chinese? And like I don't really change much, I still have the Chinese culture with me and all my friends ask me to go out in the night, but my granddad still tells me to go home at 7 o'clock and like, you are the one who went to the UK and you are the one who has to go home the earliest. And I was like, I really don't change that much. I think I have more of a Chinese side.

SD: So even living in Exeter for you feel so more Chinese than English. And anyone else, how are those different kind of cultures that you hold?

SC: For me, I think it depends on the people you speak with, because if I was like with British people and people that have been here for a long time, I would speak about things that are relevant, like to each other and have things in common, but if I was with Filipino people I would try and speak in Filipino and try to like relate to them. But I think depending on the people I speak to I adapt, like how I speak and things I talk about because I don't want to make them feel awkward. Sometimes they might like try not to understand things that I am saying, coming across.

SD: How do you feel about having those two different identities Bulgarian and English?

NR: At home, you know I just don't think what I do because I'm already comfortable, but when I'm outside I'm kind of careful what I do and what I speak to other people because before I say something, I have to think about what I say in English to other people, I might say something that they won't be able to understand and I think to look how far outside the home I feel comfortable, and sometimes at home I seem to have long conversations but when I go outside I don't know that much.

SD: I just remember, because I can relate to that what you were saying – when I go back to India for example, that's exactly the reaction that I get when people say, wow you are not really different even though you've grown up in England in London. But it's interesting because I wonder whether you feel you are losing anything by living here?

TL: I don't think I am losing anything but I think I will miss stuff, because if I haven't been in the UK if I've grown up in China and lived there forever I would pick up more things, all I have in my memory is when I was small in primary school, but things change a lot when you go to secondary school and go to college, and I think I will miss that part of the life. Yeh.

SD: Any other comments about losing..

SC: I think of doing something rather than losing, kind of a combination of the two. If I like stayed in the Philippines I would have the information and people around, I would be kind of the same as them. But then here, it's like hard to explain, the culture in the Philippines and like the knowledge of history and stuff like that, if I was in the Philippines it would just be that, but because I went to England I love history of art and other cultures and it's a combination of the two.

SD: So for you, you are kind of being enriched because you are learning more and I think you were talking about that as well earlier Nikoleta about Bulgarian people being a bit closed, you felt people were more open here, you learn more about other cultures.

Great, let's just talk about, I wanted to ask you: what do you like about Exeter, what do you guys like about it?

NR: There are more things to do than Bulgaria. Because in Bulgaria like I say, it is quite a poor country and we don't really have the money to build new things, so it's the same things when I go to Bulgaria and here they build new shops, but there are still new things which are really interesting to see like the difference here and Bulgaria.

SD What do you like about Exeter?

TL: I think about school, in China starting from primary school, because the population... things are really hard, starting from primary school, you have to try hard at everything, but here you just do what you want to do but in China you have to be good at everything, it's really hard.

SD: So there's more pressure, so actually you like Exeter because you get to be...

TL: I can choose what I want to do, but in China it's like when you go to university, your parents kind of say, be a nurse because you will earn a lot and it will be a good job. But here if I want to be a bus driver (laughter)...

SD: You can be what you want, there is a real sense of choice here.

NR: In Bulgaria it's also really, really hard like from the day you start Year 1, it's really hard and gets harder, we are really pressured by the teachers and we get lots of homework, yeh... That's the thing I like about Exeter, we don't really get homework. But in Bulgaria we get homework everyday and it needs to be completed for the other day, like if we get it on Wednesday we need to complete it by Friday. So when we don't get much times to do it, and we get loads of homework...

SD: What about you, Kemberly, what do you like about Exeter?

KE: There's a lot of Philipinos here. I'm not saying that there's not much Philipinos in other cities in UK, there's a lot in London as well but you know Exeter is a bit smaller than London therefore you meet more Philipinos here, easier you know compared to other parts.

SC: I just like being comfortable, I know where everything is, for example if I'm in the Philippines I'm kind of like paranoid, I feel lost because it's big and I haven't been there for a really long time. In Exeter I know where everything is, I don't feel frustrated, if I'm in one place, I know how to get home, but if I'm in the Philippines, I don't know I have no idea and the people are like I can just ask them, they are approachable, but in the Philippines talking to strangers is like just weird, you can't just say: oh by the way... blah blah – they would just like, what are you doing?

TL: you know when I first came here and people would smile at me, so weird, even without knowing you, but I smile at people now.

KE: Like me and my brother was walking in the morning and there's this old lady, she said Good Morning to my brother and my brother said Good Morning and I'm jus like: do you know her? And my brother is like, no, I just greeted her. (laughter) I thought that was also weird.

SD: And so do you think Exeter might be a friendlier city compared to another English city?

NR: I think England is friendly, British people are really polite.

TK: Part of the culture.

SD: And do you think that might be different, if you go to Bristol or London or Plymouth, do you think that's different here?

SC: Yes, because in London, no-one says hi or something, because I stayed there for about 2 weeks and when you walk around, people don't smile as much, they are kind of more suspicious just because it's a bigger city and the crime rate is bigger.

SD: OK lovely, and I just wanted to ask one more question about your school. You go to St James and it's really got quite a high percentage of children from somewhere else, and I think about 11%, and I know that they do embrace other cultures really, really well, St James has had an excellent reputation due to some good teachers there. And I just wondered if you've come across any experiences – Kemberly you shared that story about the boy sitting on his own sometimes at lunchtime, and just what you feel your school could do to help change that, what do you feel?

TL: I think that because in school there are different groups, I think what happened to us is because we are like foreigners, and we stay in a group, it would help if sometimes we get, like in lessons, if we get to be in groups with other people, so we get more chance to talk to each other.

SD: OK, so that's interesting. So you are saying that, in your year, what you are saying is when you guys socialise and hang out, but also in class and out, you guys tend to stay together, stick together and so do you not mix with English kids?

SC: Well we have English friends, but don't just mix with like a separate group, that's not due to race it's more like, to interest... just natural.

SD: So it's something you are just attracted to, that's where you are more comfortable. So what you are saying is maybe in class it could be mixed up a bit more.

SC: So we get to know each other a bit more.

KE: We should have more group discussions and group work where the teachers puts us into, like varying the group, not just our friendship group all the time, because she always says get into a group of three or two, or something like that, but she doesn't give us like, a specific group, she always says work with whoever you want to, so we always work with the people we feel comfortable with.

SD: So a little bit more preplanned splitting up might help? What about this boy, do you think, who sits on his own?

TL: Probably like us, we don't really have a problem because we already have friends, but the boy I was talking about earlier, he doesn't have like anyone to talk to – even though he's sitting at a table with a group of boys, they don't really talk to him. And I think that we should have something like a club where him and other people and like socialise with each other.

SC: I think it's more about the language, if you can talk fluently in English, it will help a lot. I don't think he is confident in speaking to other people.

SD: Yes. If you're not confident speaking the language, it's harder to socialise with people. Have any of you ever been laughed at because of your accent?

TL: I have.

KE: I have.

SD: In school or out of school?

TL: In school

SD: I think we did talk about it earlier, but you said you didn't tell a teacher. Why didn't you tell a teacher?

TL: Because the teacher's English as well [laughter] The teacher might be biased.

SD: You think that they might not hear, or take it seriously or...

TL: I wouldn't trust teachers that much because I think they are just there to teach.

SD: Would you know, if you saw something in your school that really wasn't ok, like say that one child called another child something – I'll relate it to me, so say for example if I was in school and I got called a Paki and you guys were in the canteen and you saw that happening, would you do something about that?

KE/SC: I would tell the teacher. Me too.

SC: One time, it wasn't to do with race, but these boys were really annoying us, I think they were calling Tina me or something...

TL: Yes, but sometimes the teacher doesn't take it seriously.

SC: But Miss Marder went past and I said Miss they are kind of like annoying us and irritating us, and she told them about it, said you'll lose your break time if you don't like...

SD: What were they calling, can you remember?

SC: Sometimes they keep on saying Tina to everyone of us. When they meet us in the hall they're like Tina their brother is in our year

TL: They were calling everyone in the group like my name – Tina..

SD: So you told the teacher and she took it seriously that you were being pestered and then..

TL: I didn't expect the teacher to take it so seriously, but she did, that was good.

SC: It was the head teacher

SD: It sounds like you would know where to take something if you saw something quite serious as an incident.

SC: And because we are like prefects and head girls we have authority so they trust us more. So what we say is more valid. But for other people, I think that they should like talk to prefects, so prefects can take it to the head of year or something.

SD: Great well thank you very much guys, it was very interesting.

End of interview