

Abdul Aziz – Transcript

Audio Quality: Good

Focuses on immigration and discrimination

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LMI: and then we'll just have a chat.

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Sounds lovely.

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Can I stand up here and...

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LMI: Yeah, that'd be great. It'll only be five or ten minutes because I know you guys have to leave and that'll be as quick as it gets.

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I don't want to leave somebody behind. I saw a coach pull up, but it was for the primary school, so we're on.]

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LMI: Hello Abdul. Do you want to just quickly introduce yourself, and say when you came over to the UK?

AA: My name is Abdul Aziz. I'm from Pakistan. I came in England 1962.

LMI: And how old were you then?

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AA: I was 22 years old.

LMI: Wow. And did you come over on your own, or did you come with other family members?

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AA: I just came on my own.

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LMI: So you didn't know anybody when you came over?

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AA: My uncle was living in Sheffield. He came 1953, in England. And I had four or five people from my village, they were living in [a] Slough, Buckinghamshire. Near the Heathrow Airport. So I landed on the Heathrow Airport, 15th February, 1962.

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AA: I got a bus from the Heathrow Airport to Slough. And then I went to their house. That's how I came.

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LMI: And how did you feel coming over to this new country? That must have been really scary.

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AA: Yeah. Well, I knew a lot of things about England because of the relatives who were already here. I never anticipated it was too cold. When I landed on 14 February, it was snow about two feet. And I had a very thin coat. And very thin trousers. For a hard country, you know, it wasn't suitable for this weather. So I was glad when I sat down on a bus. That was...that was warm. And then we came to Slough, it took about 20 minutes. And then I went to my relatives' house...the people who came from my village.

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LMI: And when did you move up to Bradford?

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AA: Well, that's a long story. I stayed about two weeks in Sheffield. I was young, 22 years old. And I weighed only eight and a half stone. My uncle said that Sheffield is a steel city, and very warm, very hot. He said, 'I will take you to Leeds, to a friend's house and you will try a job for there.' So I came to Leeds, I got a job, and that only lasted about two weeks.

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AA: And then I went to...to look for a job. I went to Derby, Nottingham, Banbury, Oxford. I got a job in Oxford then. And that lasted only one month. And then I went to Slough, where my villagers live. I got a job there. I worked four or five years in Slough, then I went back to Pakistan.

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AA: When I came back, I was a married person, and I had intention to call my wife in this country. But house prices in Slough was too high - four and a half thousand pounds in 1962.

LMI: That's a lot of money.

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AA: It was a lot of money at that time. So the houses were cheaper round here. And a lot of people I knew, they lived around Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. So I came to a friend's house in Keighley. And I got a job after two weeks trying around, you know. I had a textile job.

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LMI: And what sort of job did you do in the mills?

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AA: The first three years, I was a packer. I mean, the end products I used to put in the cans. Then I wrote a destination on it, load on a truck, and they used to take it. But that was only three or four years, because then I realized I have to stay in England. And instead of working as a labourer, I need some sort of skill. So I went to Leeds Vocational Training Centre for Engineering, and I learned the centre lathe turner.

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AA: But when I finished there, I got a job as a central lather turner for one year. Then I tried another factory with a good job, you know. That was funny. When I went there, the foreman came along, and he just ignored me totally.

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AA: Then he asked the receptionist, 'Where's the person who is a central lathe turner?' She said, 'He's there.' And he looked at me and said, 'Are you a centre lathe turner?' I said, 'Yeah.'

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AA: He said, 'I never thought any Pakistani do that job.' I said, 'Probably they don't. I love this job.' And he said, 'Old factory...' It was John Smith Crane, you know, in Keighley. They used to make a crane on there. He said, 'He started 1870,' and 1970... it was 1970 when I went to try the job.

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AA: 'There was no Asians, no black person ever employed in our firm. You are the first one on here.' And then he said, 'You got a job, but you have to be unionized. You have to be a union member to... It's an inclusive factory, if you're not a union member, you can't work.' So I said, 'All right, I will be a union member.' So I worked there 25, 26 years.

LMI: Wow.

AA: In John Smith Crane.

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LMI: And were you affected by the mills closing when all the work started to go abroad and a lot of the mills shut down? Were you made redundant then?

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AA: No, not really, no. But most of industry was on a decline. And then John Smith Crane, that was closing. We got a notice that somebody else is buying it from America, and they might close it down. And then they bought it and they closed it down in 1994. Then I had to find a job in another firm and I worked there for another 10 years until I retired.

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LMI: And what was it like being the first Pakistani worker in that mill, in the job that you did? Were people welcoming? Or did you find that there was tensions there?

AA: Well, it was a mix. 80% of people were very nice, very friendly, very civilized. 20% of people didn't like. It was common in any society. It was common in here as well. But the 20% who didn't like, they expressed their views more often than the person who did like. Or who didn't mind, you know. But I remember one instance...well, two instance...One was when I started John Smith Crane. The John Smith Crane, they didn't have their own canteen. They used somebody else's facilities, you know.

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AA: And I asked them what they eat and how they go there. And I was only interested in fish and chips because I couldn't eat the meat and couldn't eat the other. So they said, 'It's a Friday, the fish and chips is on Friday, and you have to book it one day before.' So I gave him the money for fish and chips, and I asked him if he book for me, fish and chips on a Friday. After dinner, he came around to me and he gave me money back. And I said, 'That was for my dinner, to book it.'

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AA: He said, 'Sorry Abdul, they says we don't serve the black person.'

LMI: Oh my God.

AA: Then I went to my foreman. He was very gentleman, very nice, very.... I should say, in blind color. But very fair. When I told him what happened, he said, 'Well, in my view, you should have a dinner. If you can't have a dinner, nobody will go there to have a dinner because you are John Smith's employee as much as anybody else.'

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AA: 'And if they refuse to serve you, the other people shouldn't go.' And I go to see the manager, what he says. He told the manager. The manager tried to wiggle it out. 'That's not our canteen. We can't control it. It's up to them.' He said, 'Well, if you can't sort it out, I will go to Race Relations. Or he will go to Race Relations.'

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AA: But Race Relations law was passed on that time. And then he was forced... I think he rang the person who was running the canteen. And that person said, 'well, I didn't know that he was refused. Tell him he will come next Friday; he will have a free dinner.' So the next Friday I went there, I had a free dinner. And the ladies who were serving on there, they were so nice.

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AA: I worked 25 years, and they were always kind, you know. The people used to come and go. I never had a racial problem after that. But sometimes I think the people... they express their view without even having any contact. So that's what happened.

LMI: Oh, I'm glad your manager was so good at defending you.

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AA: Oh, he was very nice. Not manager, the foreman.

LMI: The foreman?

AA: Yeah. He forced him to take action. Otherwise he wasn't interested, you know. To him I was another colored person or black person, or brown person. Or whatever it is. The foreman took the action. And then I found out that some people are very fair, but only stereotype. They do what they... listen, you know, what were they told.

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LMI: I think your coach might be here to take you back to the Sangat Centre.

AA: Oh, alright.

LMI: So I think we're going to have to wrap things up. But thank you, I'm really glad you were able to tell that story.

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AA: Oh, okay, alright.

LMI: So, thank you. That was...I just can't believe people would treat people like that. It's unbelievable. So, oh, thank you.

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AA: I worked 55 years, and I was a handyman.

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LMI: Did you enjoy it?

AA: Oh, very much.