

Arshad Mahmood

Interview for LMGM

15th of August 2023 with Nabeela Ahmed

Very short interview with anecdotes on management, food and events

I live in BD3 and have done so for 40 years. When I came to England in 1977, I stayed in BD7 for a while. I was 17 years old and had left class 6. I didn't work for 2 years. My dad was here already and he said to me you have a lifetime of working ahead, enjoy your life a little. The first year I went to Green Lane for two hours on a weekend to learn ESOL and then to Asher Street for one year.

John Foster, Queensbury July 1979 Jabbering

My job was to put the bobbins on the machine. The majority of the workers were older white ladies. On each machine there were three people. On my machine there was one white guy and one older Asian guy. I worked days.

After two and a quarter year I took up the drawing job. The shifts were four days one week and five days the next week.

In 1987, I went to Pakistan and stayed for thirteen months. My dad was poorly and calling for me, so I landed at London and headed straight for the hospital. He was so happy to have me back and returned home in two weeks.

1988 I started at Illingworth on Thornton Road as a Spinner

Whilst at John Foster I received full training in twisting, spinning, gill boxing, saveco; I was an allrounder, so could get a job in any of these areas.

I went back to John Foster though as I had friends there. In total I worked at John Foster for ten years.

First day

I was keen to work. I had come to England to work after all. Time passed quickly in the mills. On the first day I knew a few people in the other department, one of them had helped me get this job and slowly I got used to it. Upstairs all the workers were from my area. Nylon took longer as the thread would keep breaking.

Managers

They were all white. They were good to me.

A story I remember

Our manager was Bruno, a Ukrainian chap from Keighley. We all knew that he use to hold a book in front of his face and go to sleep at his desk. Plenty of times we had waved our hands in front of his face and sometimes had stuck notes to his book saying we know you are sleeping really, which he would quickly put in the bin once he woke up and saw them.

I worked nights and one day I woke up early and spent the day watching cricket. I was tired when I got to work. Albert, our overlooker had these cardboards in a room, so I started my machine and then went to sleep. After two or three hours I had dinner, checked that he was still asleep, checked the machine and went back to sleep. At 5.15am the machine stopped and he started to search for me in the toilets and the canteen. I heard the doors and woke up and whilst he was downstairs, I went upstairs and started working.

He called me to his desk and said, 'Mr Mahmood where were you?'

I said to him, 'Mr Bruno, I'll tell you the truth, I watched cricket all day and now was asleep.'

He asked me where and I refused to give up our hideout.

He said to me he was going to tell Derek, the manager. I said to him, 'You can, but I will tell him that you sleep every day and we often leave notes on your book telling you as much.'

He didn't say anything more.

The managers often started the shift off and went off to pubs and returned in the morning.

Food and parties

Our dinner was for 45mins between 12 and 12.45 and then we had tea at 4am. We had an oven at work and I often took in chicken, marinated them outside on the cold steps and then put them in the over to slowly cook as we worked. I'd invite the overlookers and managers to join us. Once I took in a leg of lamb, but didn't know how long it would take. I marinated and put it in at 11pm. It wasn't ready till 4am! On the weekends I use to take the orders, pop out and get fish and chips for everyone. We had a good time.

I did join the union, but never had any issues to need them for.

An interesting story

When Prince Charles got married to Diana, he bought the material for his outfit from our factory, John Foster. He came down for a visit to see how it was made. We were all so excited. We lined up and he shook hands with us all. I have a photo of him on that day, which I will send you.

A mix of people

There was a Sikh man who worked on his own in the cellar. I often visited him and we chatted about before partition and he would tell me about the good times.

1992 to present Chef

There was no work to be found in factories, so I worked at Rajput restaurant for three months to learn the ropes and apart from a two-year stint from 1998 of running a stall in John Street Market, I have been a curry chef ever since then.