

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

Name of interviewee           Olive **Fernandes**  
Name of interviewers       Olivia Hall and Abigail Mureva  
Date of interview:           13 February 2013  
Location of interview:       Own home  
Transcribed by:             Adam Merrison & Dawn Eldridge

*What's your name?*

Olive Clara Fernandes.

*What does your name mean?*

Olive, I know means peace, but if you want to know the origin and why I was named Olive, I'll tell you. My dad's youngest sister was called Olinda, who died in childbirth in Nairobi, Kenya, and three years later I was born, so I was really named partly after her, as a derivation of the name Olinda.

*Do you like your name?*

I do, yes, very much so.

*What do you like about your name?*

The connotations of the word Olive, meaning peace; like your name is Olivia, my sister in law's name is Olivia, that's what I think I like best about the name.

*We notice that you have a- in your surname, is Fernandes, is Fernandes coming from Spanish roots?*

Fernandes is, in our case it's Portuguese roots, because my parents were born and brought up in Goa, India. Goa was under the Portuguese for about 500 years 'til 1947, maybe 1967 I'm not quite sure. But there's a strong Portuguese influence in Goa, and amongst the Goan people, so that's also where, if you like, the religion Roman Catholicism comes from. Our surnames are very much Portuguese surnames. Culture-wise, mainly food I think, music and dancing is Portuguese orientated as well. And you notice Fernandes, my surname is spelt with an S, that is strongly Portuguese, if it was Spanish it would be spelt with a Z.

*For the purpose of the interview, can you tell us again your age?*

I'm 74.

*Thank you, and how do you describe your age, at this time of your life?.*

(laughs) Let's put it that way, have to talk- laugh about it, because I've been reminded by my family, my son, that we are getting on, we're over the hump if you like, over middle age bracket maybe. But it's so nice to know that in this age bracket, people are very active. And I'll tell you a story, I recently had a cataract operation, when I went to the hospital and the various stopping points, they all said, 'I see you're not on medication', and I said, 'Yes

I'm not on any medication, and finally I said, 'Why do you ask then? Are you trying to say that many people in my age bracket are on medication?' they said, 'Yes, so keep it up.' That's trying not to be on medication, what do you do? You try to exercise I suppose, and keep fit, if possible.

*Can you please tell us where you were born?*

I was born in Nairobi, Kenya; Nairobi being the capital of Kenya.

*Where did you grow up, and can you describe your childhood at that time?*

Certainly, I was asked this question by my son, some years ago. 'Where were you happiest?' and I said my childhood and upbringing in Kenya, that was the happiest time of our lives, mainly because we lived in the community, within the family of close relatives. Life was very interesting because there was the extended family which we looked to for various things, whether it was entertainment, indulging in sports, or any other exercises, and that to me is the time of life which creates, or moulds your life and gives you the values you still carry on through life, I think. I do feel like that is an important stage, and for me it was important, it is still important, yes.

*Yes, of course. Do you have friends from childhood, and do you keep in touch with them?*

Yes, I do have a lot of school friends, people I grew up with. I do keep in touch with them, sadly some have passed away, but I keep in touch with a very close friend who's now in Canada, and another friend who's now in Australia, and we keep in touch with the one in Australia at Christmas time, wherein we write a long newsletter telling each other about the family and what has happened in the year. We also keep in touch, my husband and I went to the same school, so we have a school reunion every three years in Canada, in Toronto, where we meet all our school friends, or whoever's alive, and whichever ones can come to it, because our school meant a lot to us; then, and still does now. Most of us are 60 or above, but we do keep in touch, yes. We had a school reunion last year, and the next one will be in three years time.

*What was your school called?*

It was called the Dr. Ribeiro Goan School, you have to know the set-up of the education system in Kenya to understand why that was, because we had the hierarchy of the races in Kenya, it was very much what I call 'semi-Apartheid' system, wherein the Asians lived within their own communities, the White people had their own areas, the black people had their own. Our school started with a contribution from a wealthy Goan who was a Doctor, Dr. Ribeiro, he gave the initial funding for the school, and it was set up with four classes initially, I think, initially. And it was named Dr. Ribeiro Goan School after him, who is a well known person, and then grew in sizes, in classes, in whatever else you have.

*Can you tell us about your life before you came to Exeter?*

Before? In Nairobi then? Oh, as a young person of course it was great, wonderful, we enjoyed ourselves, and as a grown up I went to the local training college and did my training as a teacher, when I finished senior Cambridge and then started teaching now, I started teaching in the same school I went to school at, because they recruited teachers from that, and what was it? 10 years I worked as a teacher in Nairobi. It was great, it was wonderful, I can't complain, can't say I was very politically aware, I think we lived in a

secluded world of enjoyment and happiness, and didn't bother about anything else, but then I do say, we were not told very much about the wider world, and when I say wider world I don't mean England and America, but I mean in Nairobi itself, in Kenya itself. The politics we were not very much aware of it. Now I think I have learnt a lot more. So, for those ten years, working ten years, they were wonderful. Living within my own community, enjoying life, and doing whatever else we wanted to do.

*We are very interested in how you ended up in Exeter?*

Okay, well you know Kenya got its independence in 1963. We then had this period of 'Africanisation' if you like, that's what we went through. And Kenya being British then, we were given the choice, or we were told, I think you can say, that the British Government would look after you, and we had these passports that were issued, you can have a British passport or a Kenyan passport. Having a Kenyan passport we felt was not, we were not quite sure about having a Kenyan passport and what that would mean. And there was also the talk of being Africanised, so you find the majority of us chose to have British passports, which in itself we were not clear about. These British passports had the letter 'D' which meant 'Citizens from the Commonwealth Countries', it entitled us to come to Britain, and that's how, with the Africanisation, a lot of Asians came to Britain. But I particularly came because Albert, who was then my boyfriend if you like, was studying in Exeter, and we had planned to marry in 1968, so I came to England then. So it was two factors that came into play, one that we had planned to get married, and secondly, the one that pushed me to move, was this business of moving out of Kenya because of Africanisation. So we landed up in Exeter, I landed up in Exeter, but I spent a month before that in Kent, because a friend of mine, a teacher friend, was teaching there and I stayed with her, we got married in Kent and I did a term teaching there. Came to Exeter in '68, but the intention then was probably to go back to Nairobi, it wasn't that we were going to stay here, when Albert finished his studies we'd possibly- at the back of our minds it was that we would probably go back, but in that time there was this strong Africanisation thing, a lot of Asians were moving out, and one was not sure what the situation was going to be like, so we- I shouldn't say we stayed here, we were not- being students, we didn't have a lot of money, Gerard was a year old I think, I got a teaching job, I should say very easily, I don't know how but I got a teaching job for a month.

No, before Gerard was born I was teaching at Bovey, I think I told you that. When he was born I was at home for some time, yes and then Albert happened to be doing teaching practice at one of the secondary schools in Exeter, and through his connections we got to know of vacancy at Countess Wear School and word got to the headmistress that there was somebody looking for a job, she invited me for an interview, and I got that job which was a temporary job which then became permanent. So now I had my job, which was a good thing, it was giving us a little bit of money, and in that time Albert got a job, and because of that we stayed on in Exeter, otherwise we might have moved looking for jobs, but we stayed here.

*How were the schools in that time, when you got that job? And were there a lot of students from other countries?*

No, in the school that I was teaching in, Countess Wear, was very white I would say, there was at that particular time, two children were entered into the school and my headmistress, being a very bouncy, jovial person, introduced me to the parents of those girls, who happened to be living in Countess Wear as well, and their origin was Parsee. No

there weren't any children from other ethnic groups, but as the years went by other children came into the school, it was a very white school I would say.

*Did you feel comfortable teaching there?*

I felt very comfortable at the start, it didn't worry me one bit. I knew that the children sometimes looked at me, you could tell in their eyes that they're not quite sure, they're wondering what was happening, but some things stand out. I know some years later there was this child, this girl who was six years old, who at that time used to do a diary every day, the children wrote in their books as they came to school, and she'd always draw a woman, and that woman was always brown in colour. And I didn't know what to say, I kept quiet, didn't say anything, and only when we had the parents interview, the parents sort of thought, 'funny, why's she drawing that, she's drawing her mother but she's colouring her in brown', she's sort of linking me with her mother in a way, she couldn't quite work out the two things, so it's things like that I'm aware of.

Later on, I did have abuse and teasing, and I did not know how to deal with it, mind you this wasn't when the headmistress was there, but she did tell me later on, you know the two Parsee girls, one of them was having problems in school, being teased, and I didn't know about it, because in those days they never talked about it in the staff room. Yes, they were very sensitive I think. But this is much later in the 1990s, this particular child thought it was fun I think, when I used to walk to school because we were living, must be here, but in another road in Countess Wear before that. I used to walk to school and whenever I came to that road, this child would sort of shout 'Paki' or something like that. And then later on they'd say something else, and that was the type of abuse that I got.

But I have to say, at that time, the teaching establishment, meaning teachers or heads, had no idea of how to deal with it. I mean when I then told my deputy head about it, and I said, 'look, I'm about to cry so don't say anything', he told the headmaster, who then comes to me and says, 'what do you want me to do?' Now I then said to him, 'I can't tell you what to do, you do what you think is right', and I knew what he was going to do, he was going to pick up that child and tell him off. Now in my mind that was not the right way to do it, but that was they way they worked, that they functioned.

The other case which is interesting if you want to know about racial things, another girl who in the playground would always come and stand by my side, would always want to hold my hand, and then when she grew up she went to the local secondary school, and I would meet her crossing, I would be going to the school to teach, she would be going to her secondary school, and she took it upon herself then to tease me, to say 'Paki' you see. I ignored it for a very long time, for about three or four years, err, sessions, I just passed her by, and then finally I got my courage, and I said to her one day, I stopped her there and I said, 'look Debbie, I used to teach you, and I'm surprised you're calling me that name, but I think what the best thing would be, is when you go to school, get your geography teacher, ask your geography teacher to show you the map of the world, ask him to show you where, and explain to you how the word 'Paki' came about, and I'll tell you I'm not from Pakistan, so you can't call me that, you can call me anything else.

And after that she did not say anything, but interestingly about three years ago, I was with an English friend of mine, we were going to Topsham we both took a bus here, and we sat on the bus, and as we went to Countess Wear somebody came along pushing a pushchair, and she stopped near me and said, 'You're Mrs Fernandes, you used to teach me', and I looked at her and I thought 'yes, this is Debbie, she's a mother now', and it was

her. And another time she stopped me and said, 'I was rude to you wasn't I?' But then, I wouldn't say she was the brightest of girls, but I do think what she was doing had come from either home, or from the school, from her friends, and they might have put her up to it, and she would have done something like that just to show she was strong, but I could see her now and I know she would say 'Hello'. That was about, really overt racism, if you like, I mean hidden, that's always there, but we don't know how to deal with it do we?

*Can you tell us about your very first day in Exeter, your first memories?*

I can tell you exactly because we'd been living on Old Tiverton Road, in a flat which was very damp, and in February, and I know I had to go out and buy a coat, because I did not have this coat to keep me warm, and living in Kenya in this lovely hot climate, you never bought a coat, you didn't wear a coat, maybe a jumper or a cardigan but not a coat, so I had tremendous problems trying to decide which coat to buy, but we finally bought one. My first memories were getting out of that flat, and walking along to Old Tiverton road into the town, and trying to shop. I think that's about it, nothing more, nothing else. And thinking I don't know anyone here, I'd like to have had someone I could say 'hello' to, somewhere I could go to talk with, yeah.

*How was the weather at that time?*

Oh February was the dullest, dreariest month, it was the 27<sup>th</sup> February, it was a very dull, miserable time of year, it was very cold.

*You worked as a teacher, and now you're retired, what do you do with your spare time?*

Now? I play badminton twice a week, I go to a keep fit class, I do belong to the book club at the Global Centre, and I meet up with friends for coffee, and talk about various things, and we belong to the decorative and fine arts society at the moment, my husband and I, and they have a talk on art or culture once a month. We go to the theatre quite a lot, because Albert's quite keen on drama, and the cinema.

*Do you have English friends, or friends from any other groups or country?*

I have mainly English friends, I've not been able to make friends with other ethnic groups, but I do know people in church whom I say hello to, and we talk quite often. Yes, it's mainly English friends at the moment, who we socialise with, let's put it that way. But I haven't- one of my most amusing things is when I started teaching at Countess Wear, and I said to the headmistress there, and that was the first time I mixed with White people, living in Kenya you did not, on par. Then, a year later I think, she, through the University, had two Kenyan students, African students, come to the school for some experience, work experience, and I told her then that, 'this is the first time I am talking to African students, on par', because living in Kenya, our only encounter with African people, was to work in the house, no one on par, as such. So that was hard, then, yes, but now, yes my friends are mostly English, because of where we live, I think. And Gerard going to the school, I haven't been able to make friends with any other ethnic groups, but I do know people, we do talk with them. Sorry, having said that I do know Daphne and her husband, who are from Ethiopia, half Ethiopian and half something else. And I know a Mangalorean [?] couple as well. So I've got a mixture of friends, you could say.

*Do you feel confident to talk about certain topics with your friends, especially with your English friends? How do you feel?*

With select English friends we are very comfortable talking about political issues, racist issues, I belong- I did used to go to the Racial Equality sessions as well, and one of our good friends who's since died, was very strong in that group. In fact, when I was teaching there, I do not know how they decided to send me, but I went on a course which the home office was running in Devon, for the judiciary, because around the time of the Stephen Lawrence case, I think the judiciary said they'd never met people from other backgrounds or colours, so the Home Office ran a course in Devon, where we had to travel to different parts of Devon for sessions and conferences on that. It was more to do with getting to know other people, for the judiciary, not for me. So at this there were quite a lot of Asians, I think, quite a lot of African people, but I've not been able to keep in touch with them. And I did go to a session called CARJ, which is the Catholic Association for Racial Justice, which was run in Buckfast, and some sessions were run in Exeter, so I did belong to things like that.

*Do your friends know about your life in Kenya, and the things that you're living there?*

Yes, the close friends do know about that.

*Your very close friends?*

Yeah, we did tell them, they did ask as well.

*What did they think?*

Meaning?

*What was their impression of you being from Kenya, and do they sort of like the fact that you've been exposed to cultures?*

Yes, a lot of them say, 'you have experienced life elsewhere, you have lived elsewhere, you lived a different life and you've come here, and you're living a different life', in other words it's the richness of what I've experienced, if you like, that they do admire, if one wants to put it that way.

*Can you explain a bit about your national identity, and your culture as well.*

National identity is a bit difficult because I hold a British passport, I tick 'British-Asian' when the census comes round, and maybe I am British, but I feel strongly Indian now, though Kenya had got a very strong place in my memories. Culturally I think we're a mix of English as well, because the things we go to are mainly English, being here. But we do like to go to anything that might be of different origins, like African dancing, or whatever. So it's a mixture, I think I could say that.

*In that mixture, do you feel like a British citizen, or do you feel that you are more from your country?*

No, I feel British. If I go to any of these things, it's only when- I think at the international mass that we had, that's when we felt, maybe we've got a different- there is somewhere in our lives a gap, a place where we can claim to be from a different country. Such as, they say, 'it would be good if you can wear your international dress', so a lot of the people wear

their international dress. And even though we were brought up wearing dresses in Kenya, my mother never wore a Sari, I wear a Salwar to the international mass.

*Is that the-*

The trousers and a long thing on the top. So I wear the Salwar, but I only wear it for that. And I think a friend's wedding reception, requested that we wear a Salwar if we have it, and I wore it to that wedding, but otherwise, I don't wear that normally I wear a dress, western clothing.

*How do you feel when you dress in your own traditional custom?*

I'm quite happy in a Salwar, I have got a Sari but I'd feel very uncomfortable wearing it. I'm not used to it and you get the feeling that it's going to fall or do something. I admire the Sari as a dress, but since I was not brought up wearing it, I'll find that difficult. I haven't worn one- well I did practice wearing it, but I've not worn it out.

*Are you worried about you losing part of your cultural identity living for so many years in the UK, especially in Exeter?*

Yes, that is a constant, not a worry but it is there at the back of our minds, and this occurs mainly because of my son, and his children, he's got three boys, and he does say we need to keep them in touch with the culture, and these three boys, being brought up in Bristol, mix with English children all the time, also the mother's English. But we're planning on going to Goa, India, this year, and the plan is to take Gerard and his family, and they want to come along because they want us to take the children around and show them around Goa. So they'll have a better idea of what it's like, what Goa is like. So that's the only thing I can say that we do, nothing else.

*How do you maintain your culture, living in Exeter? Sometimes it's not very easy?*

No it's not easy, maybe only in food-wise, church-wise, religion-wise, maybe. But no, at Christmas time I insist on hanging a star in my porch, because houses in Goa will have a star outside, so we put our star outside in the porch. And at Christmas time we make special Goan sweets which we give to visitors, and that's what I would do.

*How important is your faith in your life?*

Well for us at the moment it is very important, though we are not blind followers, we call ourselves 'liberal Catholics', we do look at the world as it is now, the modern world and to think how the faith can fit into it, Catholicism is in the limelight, very much so at the moment as well with the Pope deciding to resign, the paper's full of it, the news is full of it, it's been thrown into our face, and mixing with most of my friends who are non-Christian- well it's not right to say they are non Christians, but they are not strongly religious, we are put in the position of having to justify, maybe, our faith, but no one has been rude or cruel in that sense, they will accept what we do and [inaudible] that's what I do. Like, for me, good Friday's an important day, but my badminton friends will play badminton on the Friday, and I'll say, 'sorry, but as a catholic I like to go to church on good Friday', because it's an important day in my calendar. So I do tell them that, but I'm not pushing my faith on to them, I'll say what I want and you don't push your faith onto me.

*Talking about your church, how often do you go to the church, and do you feel comfortable going there and meet your friends, how do you feel?*

Now, at the moment, we are very comfortable going to church, we've got to know a lot of people, it wasn't like that for a good many years, and we complained bitterly that it's a very cold church, literally, cold, and the people were very cold, and it's only in the last, probably ten years, maybe, that we've got to know a lot of the congregation. I mean, my son was young and we did not know anyone, no one stopped to talk, to say hello, even other parent- only now some parents, whose children were at the same time and were the same age as my son, only now do they talk to us, they didn't talk to us before, because- I think maybe shyness, maybe uncertainty as to what this is about, and maybe quite a few think that we cannot speak English, because that's the common belief.

*Do you feel that they are being- do you feel racism in certain ways?*

At the international mass which is a very uplifting service, it's a very warm service, my husband's on the pastoral council, I pushed him to do it, but he's on the pastoral council, so he takes an active part and we take an active part, and after the service we have a get together where people are encouraged to bring their international food, their own food, and we all share it, and Albert was busy clearing the place and tidying up, and someone comes to him and says, in a jocular way okay? 'You're working like a black man', and then says, 'pardon the pun', and Albert was so shocked, he couldn't believe it, how can he? And when he came and told us we were quite angry, but, I am going to say to the person concerned, and I will mention it to other people, now, it can be said as a pun, it can be said in a jocular way, but that's not what we do today, that's what they used to do long, long ago. And these are the kinds of things that institutions such as churches, or wherever - police even, or football teams - have got to be aware of, haven't they?

*Do you think that the churches, or the institutions like that, have been changed?*

It will take a long time. There is- I told you, there is this 'CARJ', which is Catholic Association for Racial Justice, but it hasn't moved further, it needs to move further and touch all areas, it does. I mean the person concerned may not consider that what he said was racist, but I think it is. What was he trying to say, what was going on in his mind? You sort of wonder, 'why make a comment like that?' But you know, when you're put in that position it's very difficult to respond because you're least expecting it, so you don't know how to respond to that.

*Yes, exactly. Have your children suffered discrimination?*

I only have one son, who came to the same school that I was teaching in, before he could go to the St Nicholas school, and he did have some teasing. It used to be 'black sambo' then. There was a bit of teasing but, I hope he got over it. Later on, as an adult, I know one day he came home, he was about 19/20 years old, at the time of the first Iraq war, and he had been in town with friends, and they boarded the bus, and on the bus bringing him from town to here there were some rowdy people who were making rude comments, and he was terrified. The conductor did not do anything, but he said he was so glad to get here and get off the bus and come here. And the person he was with was a white person who got off near County Hall, and he said, 'just sit still and don't do anything', and nothing happened further, but they were taunting, if you like, and provoking Gerard, the one different coloured person on the bus, with comments such as- it seemed to have it's roots



in the Iraq war, the first Iraq war not the second one. I think that's about it, maybe he's had some, not overt racism, but covert type of things, I don't know.

*What do you do to comfort your child?*

Oh if he was young now I would have the courage to do it, I didn't then because I didn't know what- it was new to me, when he was young I didn't know how to- what to do, no one sort of told you things, you didn't read about it, but now, with my grandchildren, I could do something.

*Do you feel more courage?*

Yes, I'd tell them how to deal with it, or how to 'handle' it is the word, it is 'handling' it. From what to say in response, you have to encourage children I think.

*How do you do it, how do you explain that? How do you encourage them to help to deal with those kind of things?*

Well, first of all I think boost their own self esteem, the child's self esteem, and he or she has got to have confidence and belief in themselves, and then tell them that there are rude people outside, they will tease you, and this is how we'll have to deal with it. It depends what the child says, I mean I don't know what they do now in schools, whether they do, or what.

*Anti-bullying, they work at these problems-*

Yes, it's under that category of bullying.

*And moving on a bit, with the interview, what could you be doing if you were still living in your country?*

In Kenya? I feel I could do quite a lot there, if I was still there, with the local people, in the form of education; and when I say education I'm talking broad education, not just in the school, but education wider than, outside the classroom, I feel I could do quite a lot, and also helping the people with how to counteract poverty, if you like, because there's a lot of poverty there. I do feel I could do quite a lot, but I'm not sure we're that good.

*How important is the food? And what do you think about British food, especially in Exeter?*

I think British food has moved on from the time we first came to Exeter, it has taken tints and hints of snippets from other countries, other cultures as well. We do have a Sunday roast, especially when my daughter-in-law is here, with no added spices or anything, really simple and plain. And that is about it, English food is very easy to cook also, it saves time.

*Plain?*

Yeah, plain and simple. No, I do cook a lot of my own food, but adapted as well. Because if I'm cooking my own food, I'll be spending most of the time in the kitchen, and I'm not prepared to spend most of the time in the kitchen, so there's a lot of adaptation in the food that we eat.

*We can say that your food is more British?*

No, no, it's more Goan if you like. It is definitely more Goan.

*And how easy is it for you to get ingredients?*

Very easy, I have to say now. When I first came in '68, you could not get something like Ginger and Garlic in Exeter.

*Garlic!? I can't believe that.*

You couldn't get it. And what did we do? At that time we used to drive to London quite often because I had a lot of friends living in London, or around London, and we used to buy our Garlic and Ginger- fresh Garlic and Ginger, from London, and bring it here. Yeah I used to buy my spices there, you couldn't get anything, even in the Gateway supermarket, as it was then, in Heavitree, you couldn't get fresh Ginger and Garlic. Now you can get plenty of it, from any supermarket or private Indian shops.

*What are the most important ingredients in your cooking?*

It's ginger and garlic, definitely.

*Is there anything that you miss a lot from your country?*

It's the friendship and the friends, that's what I miss a lot, and I keep saying to my husband, more so now that my son has grown up and moved away and started his own family, you miss your close friends, and the warmth that exists between them and us, I miss that a lot really.

*Do you keep in touch with your friends?*

I do, yes, frequently; and my family. I do keep in touch with them.

*Can you explain to us, what does your country mean to you, now?*

My country? Do you mean Kenya?

*Kenya, yes.*

Umm, that is a very-

*How do you feel when you think of Kenya?*

Yeah, naturally when I think back to Kenya I think of the days when we were there. It has changed a lot. For instance, the population has increased in Nairobi, it has become a very crowded city, it's become chaotic, if you like, where traffic is concerned, and I think the infrastructure, sort of, makes you feel that something needs to be done. So there are the good memories that we have, of when we were there. And there are these other memories, of when we visited, like 1998 is when we last went there, which we have. And then, now we have knowledge from the papers, or someone who's been recently to Nairobi will give us this news of what it's like. No it's mixed.

I'm glad to be living in England I have to say, the opportunities in England for people our age, and this is what I will say strongly, for people in this age bracket, are great. There are wonderful opportunities for older people, and no older person can say, 'I don't know what to do', because it is there, you just have to go out and find it. Whether it's rambling, singing, dancing, making things, we've got a group called 'Knit and Chatter', I hate knitting but it exists, so I can go and knit and chatter, you can join a bridge group, you can join various groups, so for me, at the moment I feel England is great because it has these opportunities for the older generation, and I suppose for the young as well. But I'm taking about me in particular.

*Yes, definitely. Can you please tell us, how important is your family to you? How do you feel about your family?*

My family- when you say my family, you're talking about my son?

*Yes your children, your husband.*

My family is very important to me, my son and his family now, take a very important role in our lives, and it is our- what we do is geared around them very often, though they live in Bristol, though we have the opportunity to do our own thing, but my extended family are also important, those that are left, mainly my three brothers in Canada, and Albert's two sisters in Canada, mean a lot to us, so we do keep in touch, we do exchange news and items, we do see one another frequently. No, it means a lot, certainly, and my son wants us to play an important role as grandparents in these children's lives, so there's this strong thing to get us to move to Bristol to be there, but we said we will when we feel the need, and we can still drive up to Bristol at the moment, an hour drive is not so bad. Such as to see what activities the boys are involved in, like Tom the eldest is a very good swimmer, and he takes part in the swimming Galas organised by school, and there is one sometime soon, which we can't go to, but we gear our days and times to go to the next one, just to see them taking part in these activities. And that comes from Gerard, my son, who feels that grandparents play an important role in the lives of his children, like we did, even though both his grandfathers died I think, but the grandmothers were alive, and they were- one was in Kenya, one was in Canada, but he did enjoy the short times he spent with them. So, we're doing a different role now.

*And you talked about your grandchildren, how do you pass your culture on to them?*

It's not very easy, because their mother is English, but she's very understanding and wants the children to know, so because we're planning this trip to Goa, we're trying to get them to eat a little spicy food. We talk about India quite a lot, we talk about the grandmother- his photograph of his grandmother, and we talk about anything that we can. They came to the international mass, they were there, they saw us dressed in those clothes and we told them what it was about, but I feel, living where we are, it's not very easy, and there isn't a big Goan community in Exeter, to help us out with that, so it isn't very easy.

*Did they ask you questions about Kenya? About your life there? Do you tell them stories?*

Yeah, we tell them stories. It's more telling stories of what we did-

*What kind of stories do you tell them?*

It would be our school, and I think Tom asked something about the wildlife, so we had to tell them stories about the wildlife, and what did Albert do when he was in the Cubs, because they are now both in the equivalent of Cubs, Beavers. So we tell them that, we show them photographs. No they're not very much, it would be more if they were living with the...more nearer or with, within the community

*Is English your first language?*

Yes it has been. I do not speak my own language because my parents didn't teach it to us. So my husband and I do not speak our own language and that's the grumble or grudge my son has, that we cannot speak our own language

*Which is your own language?*

It's called Konkani which is similar to Marati in India, but we don't speak it. Now quite a few Goans would be speaking Konkani and quite a few Goans would also be speaking Portuguese. But English is the main language.

*How do you spell Konkani?*

Good question - I told you I'm not very good. K-O-N-K-A-N-I. Some years ago there was someone in Exeter university language department, we heard through somebody else, he had discovered that it is the least spoken language by numbers of people

*Can you please tell me why your parents didn't teach you Konkani?*

Ah, that's interesting, because they were brought up under the Portuguese rule who then tried to discourage people from indulging in their own culture. So you adopted the Portuguese values, Portuguese religion, Portuguese food, everything. And also at that time when my father was a young boy, the British were in India so in order to get a job – preference was given to people who could speak English. So if you wanted a job then as a young lad, you needed to speak English. Now my father would speak Konkani quite well – he could – but he learnt English because he wanted a job, so that's how he got into English speaking. And then, therefore, when we were out in Kenya – we were born and brought up in Kenya- all my friends spoke English, fluently because that was our main language. Very few would speak Konkani. Maybe if you came from Goa then you would speak Konkani as well.

*Do you regret that you can't speak Konkani?*

Yes, I do regret it very much, that we cannot speak our own language. Now, luckily those living in the London area have classes and they go to the classes to learn Konkani.

*Have you had the opportunity to learn Konkani?*

No. I've got a dictionary. I can understand it if we go to Goa and I hear it being spoken, I can understand it just as I can understand Swahili. We didn't learn Swahili in school for instance, in Kenya. I can understand it and probably say one or two words. And Konkani the same, but not speak it sufficiently well to make myself understood.

*Can you say a few words in Konkani?*

[speaks Konkani] is "God Bless you". Jambo is hello in Swahili -very often when we are in Kenya or somewhere else, you want to say something in Konkani but Swahili word would come, and we'd mix that up quite often.

*Sounds good [laughter]*

*In which way would you like to help their country?*

I think education is the way they need to go, and I don't mean education in the classroom, I mean all-round education for the girls for the boys there, and education to tell them we have to have pride in our country. They've got to do things in the country first and then think of what else. I think I've learnt a lot by teaching here. We had this idea that England was great, that everyone in England lived in detached houses with a long drive, because our books showed us that, the books we used in school were fundamentally English dealt with the Bargery family which consisted of Jane, John and Jack and Mr and Mrs Bargery and a dog and a cat. Therefore our impression of England was based on that and when I came here it was very hard, when I was in Kent with my friend and I asked her where are all these houses with the big drives, because I could see terraced houses, and she said these are called terraced houses, and I said where are the drives, where are the cars, and the cats and the dogs? And she laughed because she said that exists, but not like we thought it did. So I was disappointed.

Then teaching in a school I also learn that there is deprivation here, which we didn't know about, deprivation on a big scale educationally, because I was teaching in a State school, so you learn that families are deprived - of what, love, books? - money they seem to have but not really a lot. And simple basic things. I remember my first letter to the class I left behind in Nairobi, because I came - I didn't tell you how I came, I came overnight - almost like a refugee I'd say. Do you want to know about that?

*Yes please.*

Well it happened in February, the British government was tightening up on the passports, on the British passport holders, meaning they were going to restrict entry to England. And I did say to you I did plan to come because Albert was already here - I was going to come in the Summer of 1968 - we would get married then - but I ended up coming in February because the British government (it was the Labour government then - I think it was Callaghan or someone) was putting the restrictions on the passports because I think the British government was taken by surprise at the number of Asians leaving East Africa and coming to Britain. They hadn't anticipated that, so they had to do something, they were going to put some restrictions. So in order to beat the restrictions a lot of Kenyan Asians were leaving Kenya in around January/February of 1968 and I know what had happened, my Aunt had come over to see my mother and said this is what's happening: it's going to be difficult Olive's planning to go in the Summer, she may not be able to go in the Summer, maybe we have got to get her off now! So on the Thursday, she came, on the Friday I was persuaded to give my notice in to the school. Mind you, things were in a turmoil then, a lot of people were uncertain or were leaving or doing something, there was chaos if you like, and by the Monday I packed some things very quickly and was on the plane and landed on Tuesday in England. Overnight.

That's why I said I felt a strong urge to go back, in 1975, because I felt I had not said goodbye to people or things, and I needed to go back. And we went in 1975 because my mother was emigrating then. Yes so that's how I landed at the airport with a lot of other

Asians rushing, rushing, pushing to get somewhere. At that time I had a brother living in London and he guessed I think that I would be coming because you didn't have e-mail and things then, but I think he worked out that I might be coming. And I rang him from the airport and said: Oh I'm here, can I come and stay with you and he said yes, carry on, make your way. I could go there because in 1966 I'd come on a holiday so I knew how to get from the airport to his place in Muswell Hill in London. So I made my way and knocked on the door and the landlord took me in and I stayed with my brother for about 3 or 4 weeks I think. So that was how I came to England in the first place, unexpectedly before I was due to come.

*How did you feel at that moment - did you feel you were doing things in a rush, how did you feel especially with your family back?*

Now, looking back I couldn't understand how I did it, I just cannot believe that we did. I do feel an empathy with people who come here as refugees and with the Ugandan Asians who came here because it was similar in a sense though they came as a big group - I mean ours was almost overnight, we had to - in order to beat the deadline that the British government had put down, we had to leave by - I think they had said by 31st March we are going to put this deadline - so all the Kenyan Asians left as quickly as they could. Otherwise it would have got difficult, because Kenya was putting the pressure for jobs, the news was that if you had a British passport you wouldn't get a job easily, you had to have a Kenyan passport. The Kenyan passport had to be an Africanisation type of thing. So that's the dilemma that a lot of Kenyan Asians had at that time.

*So having a British passport makes life a bit easier for you?*

Now I have a full British passport it makes it easier, but we all had a D passport which wasn't easy, the D passport put you in a different category which we did not know about, it was only issued to Commonwealth citizens. So when we learnt about it, and when we were due to have a proper British passport, I think after 5 years, we had a full British passport so now no-one can put any restrictions on us. [Laughter]

*Changing topics, Exeter is a beautiful city.*

Yes, I would say that.

*So how do you feel, are you happy living in Exeter?*

I am happy living in Exeter, I do miss the people from other places, I miss the community very much and I would have loved, I think I said this to Di once, I would have loved the opportunity of being a teacher in another part of England where there were a lot of children from other backgrounds coming, because I think they would add to the interest that took place in the class. And I often see the children in church, lots of children from Kerala, from different backgrounds and I think: Oh I'd like to be in a school teaching these children, because they must add a lot, to stimulate so much of discussion in various things in the classroom, rather than it being a very narrow outlook. I mean it must be so nice to have a child like yours half Mexican being in the class. I think you can add so much, although of course it depends on the teacher and on the school as well. No I am happy living in Exeter; I do feel sometimes the need to go to London, yes the need is there every so often. And when we were younger we did go to London quite often especially at Christmas time, because I think Christmas with the family is so different. We really enjoyed Christmas, it was not just giving presents, it was more the gathering of the people

to celebrate and to get together over a meal and to sing songs or whatever. And I'd come back here, we'd go there for the New Year's dance for instance, and I come back and go to school and feel so miserable. Happy New Year! and to them it was just another year, another term. And that is what I miss the excitement of people from other countries and the zest that they have for life.

*If you could tell something to Exeter people, what could be your message for them, if you imagine you are in front of a lot of people, what would you like to say to those people?*

To accept the people for who and what they are and to show an interest in what they have to offer and everyone has something to offer. I think I do feel a lot of people get their views from the television especially when they do something like Comic Relief to get this view of Africa as being what they see. But there is so much else that they can learn from the people even if it's Africa or India or whatever. And that's what I'd say to the people of Exeter. [Laughter]

*And do you think that Exeter needs to know about other cultures?*

They need to know and to accept that culture on equal footing as their own culture, they have to accept that, because if you go back to the Empire, their views, the older generation, are generally based around what the people brought back from the days of the Empire, that the Empire was great, Britain was great and nothing else happened elsewhere and that's what I think they need to be aware of. To take Mexico, they never thought that anything existed in Mexico, like the Mayan culture, it was not acknowledged. Or take Africa, it's got Timbuktu and it was never acknowledged that there was a culture there. That India has a culture.

Recently when we were in Turkey, we talk of classical Greece, but no-one ever said about classical Turkey. There's a lot that happened in Turkey and we happened to say where did civilisation start and she thought it started in Greece and we said no, it went back even further - if you go to India you would see it there. If you go to China you would see early civilisation there and parts of Africa, but it was never talked about. And I think that somehow how do you make people aware of that? People need to be made aware of it. You know there are a lot of books recently that have come out on the Empire? Yeah? And I say people must read those books first before you do anything else. There are books that are critical of the Empire which I think people should read. Not just that it was a great thing and a western view of the Empire, but of the negative things that happened at that time I think is very important. So I quietly say to my friends: this is a good book you should read it. Or like Andrea Stuart, from one of the Caribbean islands and she has written a very nice non-fiction book called 'Sugar in the Blood' about the slave trade in Barbados, she's from Barbados, that gives a very good picture of what it might have been like at the time of the slave trade coming right up to present day. She herself is of mixed blood because the white men who went there had a lot of women around, so you had that coming down the line. And I think that's a good book for people to read as well.

*I will read it then!*

Because it shows you what it was like and the ill-treatment that went on; it was money orientated because they wanted the money from the sugar to build the houses, to live a comfortable life here. There are a lot of books out at the moment on the Empire, and we did read quite a few. We also read 'Britain's Gulag' which is about the treatment of the

Kenyan Africans, the Mau Mau, they were very harshly treated, very rudely and cruelly treated as well. And you don't believe it if you don't read a book like that, you see.

*Yes thanks. What would you like to change about Exeter - are you happy, if you had the opportunity, what would you like to change?*

Exeter is still very provincial, there are pockets of it which are very parochial I think, like in Topsham, and the change will only come about with people like us and you moving and mixing amongst the local people. It will come about because they will then learn something about people. Now we talk about the Global Centre and so many people do not know about it, they have no idea Global Centre, what's the Global Centre. And if at all, they will link it with left-wing politics and you try to say it's not that, it's making people aware of the globe and the world and that everyone has something to offer, culturally and intelligently as well. That is what I'd like to see happening.

*Hopefully.*

Yes hopefully - it will happen because Exeter has changed a lot since I was first here in the late 60's/70's and now we are 2013, and I think it has changed. There are lots of things happening in Exeter, we didn't have them then, like the Respect thing, there are lots of things happening, but it's trying to get everyone to come to it.

*Do you have any traditional stories from Kenya that you want to share with us, any part of your culture?*

No I don't have any because we were brought up in Colonial Kenya, the books are all British. I know a lot of British history which the British people themselves don't know. The exam we did, Cambridge School Certificate or something, so we studied British history. But traditionally, no I would have to think about it. You mean an object?

*Maybe a children's story..*

No they are all English based nursery rhymes which are common to everyone.

*Can you sing us a song?*

No, just English. I'm not a good singer anyway. The prayer Our Father, we encourage people to say it in their own language. I've got it written out and will try to say it, read it, in Konkani.

*Is there anything you would like to tell us?*

No, I'm hoping this Project achieves its purpose, that is for everyone to be treated equally, because I think inequality is not very nice and putting down of someone I do not like for their colour. So hopefully a project like this will help, it's not going to eradicate it but it should help to make things better for people generally. I mean the fact that she's here is nice. [Laughter]. She - I meant Abigail.

*Exactly, yes. Well we very much enjoyed your stories but now I think we are just about to finish the interview. Thank you very much Olive for the wonderful memories you have.*

It's a pleasure. Thank you for volunteering to do something like this.