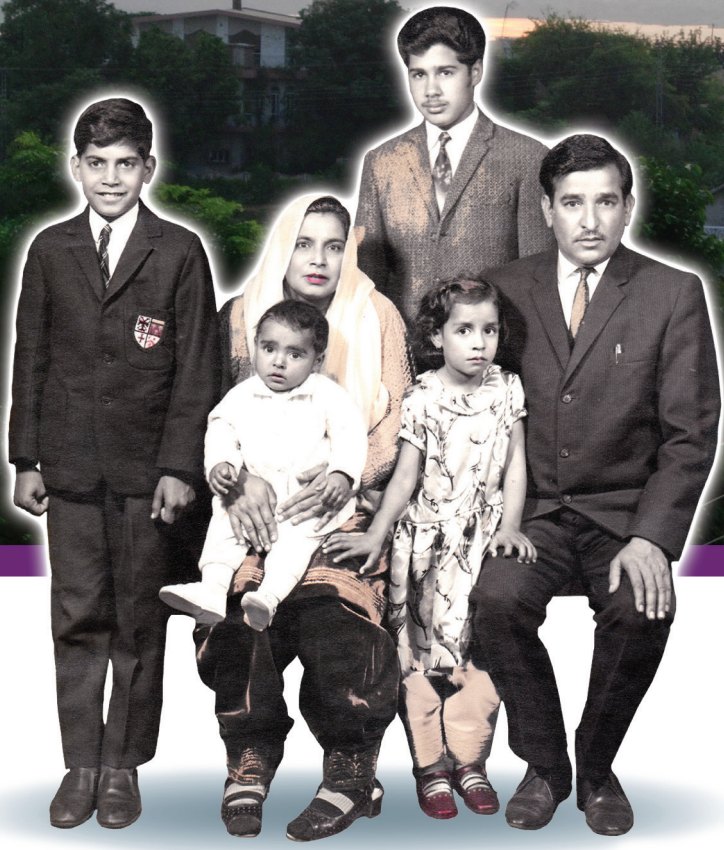


HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Women's Journeys from Mirpur to Birmingham





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Produced in 2014



Shameem Ramzan

Shameem was born in Pakistan in 1955 and led a simple life. Her family lived in an area known as Dadyal but when the Dam was built, they moved to New Dadyal. Her father was very strict and kept her at home. He did not allow her to study. Her family moved around a lot.

She got married at sixteen and two years later she came to England. When Shameem came to England, she stayed at home as she couldn't speak English. She was only taught how to practise her religion.

Shameem and her family stayed with relatives with three other families, when they first arrived in England. Her family moved several times before getting their own house. She liked England but she didn't like the taste of food, even though the meat was bought from a Halal shop in Alum Rock.

Shameem had nothing to do apart from watching TV and talking. Her house chores included, washing the clothes by hand, ironing them and cooking the family meal. She wanted to learn English but no classes were available.

Her husband accompanied her to hospital appointments and other places that needed translation. Although she couldn't speak English, Shameem was confident and stayed at hospital alone. She found the nurses were very nice, helpful and understood her hand gestures.

Shameem spoke to her children's teachers by using hand gestures or asked someone to translate. She taught her children Arabic at home.

Shameem communicated with her family in Pakistan by writing letters, sending recorded cassettes with messages and then finally by telephone. She returned and visited her family in Pakistan after five years of living in England.

In time, Shameem's husband became a bus driver and she got a free bus pass which she used to travel. She liked to visit her relatives and only socialised with her family.

Shameem feels people in the past were friendlier, more caring and the community was safer.

Now Shameem has fulfilled her life-long ambition of learning English. She has also passed her theory and her driving test and no longer needs anyone to translate for her. She goes to college and attends interviews by herself without having to rely on anyone else.



Halima Bi

Halima was born in Rawalpindi. She came from a family of three brothers and four sisters. Halima did not go to school and hence got married to a relative at the age of 14 and had five children in Pakistan and one child in England. She was about 35 years old when she came to England.

Halima liked England when she arrived but remembers it being very dark and cold all the time. Everything seemed to work on coal or gas. Coal was used to heat the sitting rooms.

Her husband worked in a bed factory and earned £50 per week, while she was a housewife. She saved money and tried to buy a house and spent only £15 a week for her weekly shopping.

Halima mainly stayed at home but bought clothes and food from Alum Rock, which was not so busy then. She sewed her own clothes to save money and often bought chickens and cleaned them herself by removing the feathers and skin.

Her last child was born at Dudley road Hospital in Birmingham. She was scared to go to the hospital as she thought they would operate on her but the staff were very nice and helpful. She stayed there for ten nights after the baby was born. However, washing towel nappies was a difficult task.

Halima could not speak English and tried very hard to educate her children, but they only studied up to GCSE level. She taught her children Arabic at home. Halima did not understand the value of money and therefore took her eldest son with her everywhere.

Her husband went everywhere with her to translate and now her daughters go with her to her appointments.





Khalida Bi

Khalida found life in England to be very good when she came. But there were no basic amenities such as gas or hot water. Coal was used to warm the house and a kettle to warm the water. Gas meters, which were installed by the Council worked when money was put into the meter. Electricity was only used for lights, which was free. The houses had no baths and the toilets were normally outside. Clothes were washed by hand. Khalida remembers that the weather was a mix of cold and hot when she first came to England with her children.

Khalida had her three children at hospital and was kept in for five days after giving birth. Her husband spoke to the nurses and Doctors in English when needed.

Khalida found life very busy, as she woke up and made breakfast for her children, sent them to school, and cleaned up the house. The house had cardboard flooring which she mopped daily. After this she made the evening meal, washed the clothes and the children's nappies. Then it was time to collect the kids from school. She taught her children Arabic at home.

Khalida sewed her own clothes. Her children ate chips sometimes but she normally made food at home and bills were low. Meat was not readily available but despite that she felt she lived in a safe community.

Khalida's children are all married now and Khalida lives with her son still in the same community which Khalida finds very safe even to this day.



Sakina Bi

Sakina was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. She was fourteen years old when she got married. She lived a simple life and grew her own vegetables to feed the family and had a bull which was for domestic use. She never went out and looked after the house whilst her husband worked.

Her visa was issued from the capital city, Islamabad and then she came to England. Her family stayed in Birmingham for four years and then moved to London. They lived in a predominantly English area but were happy. They returned to Birmingham and bought a shop called Medina Store and ran it successfully.

When Sakina came to England, coal was used to heat the houses, but one day a tragedy took place and there was an explosion in her house. Her children were injured and the incident was reported in the news. The entire neighbourhood came to find out if the children were ok.

Sakina was confident and travelled alone on buses. She travelled alone to Bradford without any hesitation and problems. If she got lost, she would ask fellow passengers, who were happy to help. She is uneducated but got by and went to places by being strong and brave, she managed by saying 'Yes' and 'No'. Sakina always wanted to learn English but there was nobody to teach her. She also never learnt to drive which was her dream .

All the groceries in those days were very cheap and her husband used to buy a large shop load for £4, which was delivered home by the shop keeper. Sakina also had her clothes sewn by a Sikh lady, which were delivered to her home.

Sakina's neighbours were mainly English people but a few Pakistani families lived in the neighbourhood.

She spoke to her family in Pakistan via telephone and sometimes she recorded her message on a cassette and then sent it to her family.

Her children used to go to a neighbour's house to watch TV in the evenings. Then her husband bought a TV for the children so they would stay home. She remembers watching 'The Wizard of Oz' every Christmas.

Sakina has lived in England for the past 45 years. Through time she has noticed that all the local British people have sold their houses and left the area. Her mixed community became an Asian populated area and that all the High Street Shops that were once in Alum Rock have closed down and been replaced by Asian food and clothes shops. She also observed that people have changed and no longer have compassion for each other and are not helpful. She feels that Pakistani families no longer encourage their children to learn about their religion.

Sakina feels she has lived a lovely and comfortable life and is still living in the same community.





Tahira Farouq

Tahira was born in Pakistan on 7th July 1961. She came to England in 1978 whilst studying for her G.C.S.E's. She came to England at a young age, leaving her family behind. She was saddened by this, but she soon learnt to live without them.

Tahira's English language skills were not very good as she was not taught this subject in Pakistan. Her husband spoke English and took her everywhere. She attended appointments with her husband and occasionally when he could not attend, she managed by speaking some words and by using hand gestures. Tahira used to drop off her children at school. When the teachers needed to speak to her about the children, her husband would accompany her to the school.

Tahira spent most of her time doing house chores and fulfilling family duties. She wanted to do some courses but nothing was available. The weather was very cold and it snowed all the time, so she stayed at home to get away from the cold weather.

Her husband had his own house and spoke good English so she didn't have to suffer and hence they had a secure life.

The only difference Tahira felt between Pakistan and England was the weather, but apart from that her family life was good. She felt very lucky to have a good support network of family and friends around her.

Tahira had no problems when she moved to England and felt that the people were very nice, helpful and supportive.

Parveen Akhtar



Parveen was born in Lahore and then moved to Azad Kashmir. She had a very nice childhood and went to school for a few years. Parveen had two brothers and five sisters.

Parveen came to England on the 19th of November 1977 and having got married on 22nd February 1977. She got married when she was 18 years old to her first cousin. They had a quiet wedding and she remembers wearing a pink suit.

Parveen felt strange when she came to England but her family was already settled here so she was happy to be with them.

People could not afford houses, so two or three families lived together in one house. Her mum taught her how to speak English as soon as she came to England.

Her husband worked as a mechanic and also at the factory. Parveen had her children in England and has fond memories of the NHS staff who were very caring. She spoke English with the doctors and nurses.

“Alum Rock had a lot of white people living here and there were only two shops that belonged to Pakistani people. One had Asian food and the other one sold a variety of things.” she reminisces. Parveen used to buy clothes from a shop on College Road.

Fish and chips were the only takeaways that were available and her children ate them sometimes. Parveen mainly cooked at home. She has fond memories of those times when the days and nights were long and people felt safe in their homes.

Parveen worked as a dinner supervisor from 1988 – 2005 and had to quit to look after her ill husband. In her spare time she enjoyed sewing, embroidery, knitting, gardening, cleaning and much more things.

Presently, Parveen is learning computers and learning to read and write English.



Sayden Nessa

Sayden Nessa was born in Niz, a village at Joging in Bangladesh. She attended primary school in her locality as the scope for further studies was limited there. When Sayden came to England she felt happy but lonely as her husband would work long hours.

When she gave birth to a baby boy her mind became more settled. Even though, she was happy, life was still difficult. Everything, including clothes and nappies, had to be washed by hand. There was no washing machine. Coal was used to produce fire. People suffered a lot but they would not cause any suffering to other people. Her and her husband did not face any difficulty as English people helped them.

Sayden's husband accompanied her to hospital for her first delivery. He spoke English on her behalf. From then onwards she would always go to the hospital by herself, and never faced any issues.

When Sayden first came to this country, there were not a lot of Bengali shops. They used to eat chicken, English fish and vegetables.

There were some saree shops on Stratford road. Her first house had three bedrooms, a front room and a kitchen. The kitchen was on the ground floor. The bathroom and the toilet were outside the house. It was particularly tough during the winter, especially when it was snowing, to go to the toilet and bathroom. There was no gas available and making fire with coal was very hard. This would make things dirty.

She had a cooker. She would wake up, send the children to school, and then bring them back home for lunch to feed them. Again she would send them back to school after lunch and at 3pm collect them from school. Once they had tea then they would go to mosque. There were not many mosques and an Indian clergy taught them Arabic every day after school.

When she first came, she was young. Her neighbours were English. Sometimes, they would exchange cooked dishes. They loved each other.

Sayden has been in England since 1973. She has been living with Pakistani, English and Pathan people and she's never had any issues. Everyone finds her to be a nice person but she accepts that times have changed.



Sakina Bi

Sakina originates from Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. She got married when she was about eighteen or nineteen years old and then came to England in 1971. Sakina never went to school and instead learnt to work on the farm. She was also taught how to cook and care for a family. She was one of eight siblings.

Sakina was a housewife and her husband worked in a company. He recently passed away leaving very fond memories. When she came to England it was very cold and it was snowing. She felt that it was cold in England throughout the whole year and she kept her family warm by using coal fires and blankets.

Sakina has been living at her current address for the past 45 years. This was because of access to all the facilities were at her doorstep, such as the bus stop and the local shopping centre in Alum Rock. She did her shopping from Alum Rock and bought Halal meat from there, which was important. Sakina never left the house unless she had to but found the local people to be very helpful and honest.

Sakina has six children and when she used to go to hospital to have her children, she was very lucky because there was always an Indian and a Pakistani nurse who explained things to her. Sakina travelled by bus to the hospital. One of her duties as a mother was to drop and pick up her children from school and mosque.





When Sakina first arrived in England, she never understood the value of money and never understood people when they spoke in English. However, she decided to cut costs by sewing her own and her three daughters' clothes herself. She bought loose material from Alum Rock.

Even though she couldn't really speak and understand much English there was never really the need to learn as her neighbours were Pakistani and a Bengali family, so she didn't really need to communicate in English. At first when she came she couldn't understand any English but now she can. She also says that the neighbourhood was much safer as milk was left at the door and never stolen.

Sakina says in those days there were no takeaways and everyone ate homemade food. The only takeaway food that was available was Fish and Chips. She feels that she has always had good health.

Now due to old age Sakina's health is not the same but despite this Sakina still travels to Pakistan to see her family but is always happy to be back home which is in England.



Zaida Parveen

Zaida was born in a city of Mirpur in Pakistan and came to the UK at the age of seven.

When I came to the UK my grandfather didn't believe in education. He would say education spoils children, so I wasn't allowed to go to school or attend a mosque. I would just potter around the house with my dolls. At the age of eleven, my mother started teaching me how to cook and clean so I was able to help her out with the daily chores.

I remember we had only one living room and a small room with a sink but our kitchen was down in the cellar where we had our cooker and a table where we would store our pots and pans.

On the side we had a curtain which was our bathing area, it had a tin bath tub and I would heat water, pour it into the tub and have my bath. When I was finished I would get a bucket, fill it with the bath water and take it outside to the garden and empty it down the drain.

In the evenings I would go out and play with my neighbours children who were all white and I would communicate with them through single words such as "play", "skip" and they would understand what I was saying. Every Saturday evening, I would go to one of my neighbour's house to watch cowboy movies and when I would arrive back home my mother would sneak me in so my dad didn't find out.

Zaida got married in April 1976 and soon after moved to Pakistan for a few years and came back in 1982.

In 1988, I enrolled on to an English course at East Birmingham College, so I was able to learn how to read and write.

In 1990 I started my first job in a playgroup. I have had various jobs since then and I have been working to this day.





Rozina Bi

Rozina was born in a region known as Dadyal in Azad Kashmir. She lived happily with her parents and there were no schools in the community she lived in. She then got married at the age of sixteen to a relative and lived with her in-laws. After seventeen or eighteen years of her marriage she then came to England.

When she first came to England she felt strange and lonely. Rozina lived with her husband and made a routine with her two children. Her husband worked seven days a week in a steel factory. Her children learnt Arabic at home and then at the mosque. She preferred to stay home. Her children didn't go on to college and she never learnt English.

Rozina used her local shops regularly to buy food and later began to buy clothes too.

Rozina came to England in November as she wanted to see the snow but when Rozina arrived in England there was no snow and she felt very disappointed, Rozina said to her husband she really wants to see the snow.

One morning Rozina's Husband woke her up and asked her to come downstairs as he had something special to show her, when Rozina went downstairs Rozina's husband opened the curtains and all Rozina was able to see was the snow, Rozina still remembers this with a smile on her face, how excited she felt to see the snow the very first time.

In that particular year Ramadan was during winter so the fasts were very short. However, there was heating in every room and the house was warm.

Rozina used the local shops to buy shoes and one morning she decided to go and buy a pair of black boots, Rozina says she saw a lovely pair of shoes but didn't know how to ask about the price, the shopkeeper who was a white man walked up to Rozina and asked in Urdu if she would like to buy this pair of shoes, Rozina says she was so shocked and asked the man how did he speak Urdu so fluently and he replied that he stayed in Multan for a while and he learnt the language in that Country.

After a lovely conversation Rozina left the shop with a new pair of black shoes.

Rozina has some lovely memories of her life in England and is very happy.

Khalidi Bibi

Khalida Bibi was born on 15th June 1951 in the region of Dadyal, in Mirpur, Pakistan.

Khalida's mother was a housewife and her father worked in the army for 18 years before he decided to move to England. She was the eldest of three sisters and two brothers, and spent her time caring for them. She went to school but learnt Urdu and Arabic from her brother.



Khalida was married at the age of 16 to her first cousin and was sad to leave her family. Her mother passed away just before her wedding and her father remarried.

Khalida arrived in London in November 1968. Her flight to England was very long and the city looked very dark, cold and it was snowing. She travelled to England with her in-laws and other family members. She stayed in Bradford with a family friend. Later Khalida and her husband got their own house.

After two years Khalida had a baby son who kept her very busy. She felt the healthcare professionals in hospitals were very helpful and caring when she had her children.

Khalida's family then moved to Birmingham but her husband sadly passed away, leaving her to raise three young children. Due to this, she became depressed and developed heart



problems. She survived and managed her household on financial help given by the government and benefits such as the 'Income Support', which was a very little amount in comparison to today's benefits.

Khalida wanted to be able to communicate with her neighbours, and so learnt English phrases from her brother-in-laws which helped her to understand and communicate better.

When Khalida first moved to Birmingham, she felt Alum Rock was a nice area but now it is far too busy and there are too many Pakistani people. She feels the houses are expensive now, but life was better then.

Khalida used to cook all the food at home as there were not many takeaways. There were only chips available, but now children prefer to eat out all the time. She liked the education system and schools, but was worried as she wanted her children to learn Arabic. She was very keen to educate her children to a degree level.

Khalida returned to Pakistan for a visit after eight years and felt that everything had changed in Pakistan.

Khalida feels that in the past there was peace, support, sympathy and empathy from people, but this has changed now. Life is very different!



Nasim Akhtar

Nasim was born on the 10th January 1949 in Jehlum, Pakistan and later moved to Mirpur. She attended a girl's school until year 7 and lived happily with her extended family.

In Mirpur her family had a big house with large garden and plenty of land. When the Dam was built, she moved to New Mirpur but her father became ill and she returned to Jehlum to care for him.

Nasim got married before she turned 19 and had a big wedding with lots of dowry. Eight months later in 1970, she came to England.

At first she didn't like England but with time she began to settle in. The weather was cold with lots of snow. She had never seen snow before coming to England.

Two months after coming to England, Nasim had her first baby in hospital. She didn't speak English and used hand gestures to communicate. She stayed in hospital for two weeks and the staff looked after her and the baby very well.

Nasim used buses to travel but preferred to travel by car or taxi.

All groceries were bought during the weekend. Her husband bought the meat from a Halal meat shop. Due to this, Nasim never left the house as everything was available at home.

Nasim washed nappies by hand and dried them on the heater, cooked and cleaned daily and her health was good. She also took the children to school daily and sent her children to someone's house to learn Arabic as there were no mosques. She never had any problems.

In 1974, her family bought a shop on Adderley Road where she lived with her family. She ran





the shop from morning to 6pm until her nephew came back from school who then took over. She would then go to the back and do the cooking and housework.

In those days Alum Rock was predominately a white area.

Nasim found, white people to be very nice and friendly. She ran the shop successfully by speaking English and working with money without a problem. She also hired an assistant and they worked well together.

She didn't have a word of English before coming to England. She learnt by listening and speaking with customers, even in her broken language and slowly started to pick up words.

Nasim has always lived in this area and never had any problems. When she first arrived in England, she noticed that in Pakistan the traffic was very noisy but in England everything was quiet.

The only loss she felt in England was her parents. She made a life for children and kept busy but missed her parents. Nasim feels life has a better standard in England compared to Pakistan.

Nasim likes to crochet. She's made beautiful bed spreads, dollies, jumpers and more through whilst in Pakistan. After arriving to England, she got so absorbed with her children that she never pursued her interests.

She is now reviving her old interests by working with the local women's group in an informal setting to teach others by passing on her skills.





Shemem Akhtar

Shemem was born in Siakh, in Pakistan. Her family then moved to a place called Gujrat when she was about two and a half years old. This was due to the Dam being built in the area that she was born in. She comes from a family of three brothers and two sisters, Shemem being the youngest. She is from a wealthy family and her brothers are well educated with good jobs.

Shemem's father was a soldier in the Japan war and was imprisoned for seven years in Japan. After his release he returned to Pakistan and became a farmer and then later decided to move to England. Her father was well known in England. As he couldn't find a job, he returned to Pakistan.

Shemem got married at the age of 14 and moved to Azad Kashmir for a year and then came to England where her in-laws lived. She arrived in England in 1979 and was five months pregnant with her eldest child. Shemem was 16 years old when her eldest son was born in 1979. Her in-laws were a very nice family. In England she found everyone to be very kind and helpful.

Her husband was always at work as he worked in a shop but later secured himself a good position as a guard on the railways which made them financially stable.

At first Shemem's family lived with their elder brother-in-law and then moved into a council house, which they bought a few years later. She was offered a house on the street of their first choice within seven days of applying. They had to work and earn their own money and pay the rent themselves as no benefits were available. Shemem had two children by then. Her daughter Neelam Akhtar was born in 1982 and then a son after 10 months.

Shemem's family doctor was Dr Waheed who was very helpful and nice along with other staff such as the nurses. They explained everything to her with gestures and simple words, as she couldn't speak English very well.





One of Shemem's sons was born premature but the health care was so good that he was looked after very well in hospital and the nurses came home to help her.

When Shemem came to England only the sitting room had gas fires and the cooker in the kitchen. The family stayed warm by using blankets and quilts. During the winter months, the milk bottles froze outside but nobody stole them. The local neighbours were very friendly and kind. Shemem feels that these days life is much easier as there are many machines available and that there is gas in every room.



Shemem's daily duties included house hold chores such as washing towel nappies, and sweeping the floors. Everything was done by hand because they didn't have electric appliances such as washing machines. She feels everything is much easier now for women as there are electric appliances available and babies no longer use towel nappies.

Shemem used to cook chicken at the weekend and the family was very happy but these days, she feels that people are not happy even with the best food and they cook too much food. Food then came in smaller quantities.

The husbands took the women shopping and if they bought a small thing for themselves, such as an eye pencil, this made them very happy. Relatives and friends were happy to see each other and were very hospitable and made time for each other.

Shemem's family had a TV with three channels. On Sunday a programme in her first language was broadcasted and she used to enjoy watching it. She feels that these day's children have more channels but are still not happy.

In her spare time, after completing all the house chores, Shemem enjoys sewing and doing embroidery.

Shemem had a wonderful life but occasionally had its ups and downs. Shemem worked very hard to send her children to school to make them successful in their lives. She is very grateful to this country for everything it has given to her and hopes the future will be good too.



Khadijah Mirza

Khadijah was about seventeen or eighteen years old when she got married. At the time she was studying but after a month she came to England.

Khadijah travelled overnight to arrive in England. She came to Birmingham, which was covered in five to six inches of snow. She came to an empty house, as everyone was at work. She was upset and left alone with her eldest son, who was seven years old but Khadijah settled into a routine very quickly.

In 1963 there were not many Asian people around but everybody was very helpful. People at the surgery would give up their seat for her, so that she could sit down. The neighbourhood was also very safe.

Khadijah had no formal education in English but knew enough to get by and was able to communicate with the doctors. She decided to learn English and bought an English book and her husband helped her to improve. She was able to answer simple questions by saying 'Yes' or 'No'. During her stay in hospital, she found the healthcare staff to be very respectful, pleasant and helpful.

As Khadijah's husband worked different shifts, she had to communicate with her children's teachers and did this by relying on her basic understanding of English. She could not speak fluently because she spoke her mother tongue all the time.

It was usually Khadijah's husband who took her to appointments at the hospital. After seven or eight months of being in the country, she was eager to learn how to travel by





buses. Her first experiences lead her to get off at the wrong stop and during her second attempt she had a minor accident. Her husband decided that he would take her everywhere. Even though it was cold and snowing when she arrived to England, she managed to get around using buses and her husband would give her lifts where possible. However, she still felt very confident around the community as people were very nice and accommodating.

Khadijah usually went shopping for clothes and groceries with her husband. She would sometimes write him a list if they couldn't go together. Khadijah learnt to sew her own clothes and bought material from a local English shop. She used a needle and thread to sew. She lived together with seven or eight relatives and managed like this for a year until more female relatives came to England.

Khadijah taught most of her children to read the Quran however, her younger child learnt by attending 'The Central Mosque'.

The difference between Alum Rock in the past and now are vast. Khadijah has experienced and seen many differences and changes. For example, previously all the shops were owned by English people. The atmosphere was friendlier and there were no Asian shops in the whole area. Now, there is too much traffic, it is busy and it's quite stressful.



Rehmat Begum

Rehmat was born on the 3rd of January 1944, in Mirpur, Pakistan.

She lived in a small town with her extended family and studied in a small school at a women's house up to class five. She got married at the age of seventeen and could not study further as the school closed down. Rehmat came from a household which had many servants and so she never had to work.

Rehmat got married in 1961 and her eldest child was born in 1963. In 1968 her second child was born and three years later in 1971, she came to England.

Her family initially lived in Birmingham and then moved to Newcastle. They stayed there for six years and in 1979, her family decided to move back to Birmingham. Rehmat's family moved around a lot in England and at one point she lived on a twenty six acre land farm in Wales. For the past twenty years she has been living at her present address, as her youngest child became ill.

Rehmat faced no financial hardship when she came to England as her family were well off, however as her husband was a student and she helped to bring in income to the household by sewing clothes for ladies. As her family were tailors by trade, she had picked up this skill from an early age. As Rehmat had sewing skills, she got a job in an English factory just after five months of arriving in England. She worked successfully without knowing lots of English and was classed as an expert tailor.





Rehmat lived in a more affluent area and travelled by bus, while her husband worked and studied at Birmingham University.

Her children had been attending an Army Grammar School in Pakistan from a young age and thus her children spoke fluent English. Her children started school the day after arriving in England and fitted in very well.

Rehmat's husband bought the groceries and the meat from a shop called Raja's in Alum Rock, which had been running since 1948 when Rehmat's father first came to Alum Rock.

Alum Rock at the time was mainly populated with English people and Rehmat only ever saw one African person whilst travelling on the bus.

Rehmat now finds the cost of living too expensive. In the past her husband only earned £35 per week and they managed everything. She spent £5.00 a week on food, gas and electric which ran on meters.

Rehmat feels that she has led a successful life. She worked with her husband to establish a good life for their five children. They bought their own home, saved for the future and helped their parents in Pakistan.



Said Begum

Said originates from Pakistan. She had very little formal education and only had the opportunity to study up to class 2. However she learnt to read the Quran fluently and even today continues to read it frequently.

Said got married in Pakistan and had four children. In 1969 she came to England and had two more children, Arshad and Jabin Akhtar. Her husband worked in a factory. erHhhjkjkhhhh Her father had already moved to England while she was still in Pakistan and over time her siblings moved to England too.

Said family lived together in one house. Other family members, such as her brother, sister-in-law and their two children also lived in the same house. It was only a 3 bedroom house but somehow they managed in this simple house.

There were no heating in the house, apart from a small heater in the reception room. The family used blankets and quilts to stay warm. As there was no electricity, water was warmed in pots and pans for the family to take a bath. They all took turns which took a whole day.

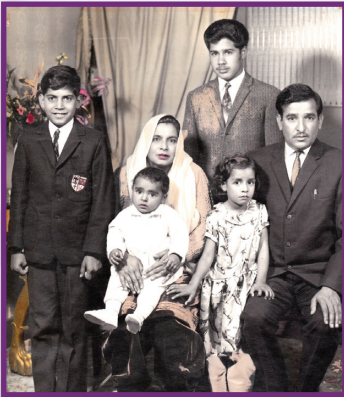
Said kept her children close by but now she feels there are many amenities and life is easier. She feels life was much harder then but they got by. Said and her family did have their ups and downs but they were happy and she was busy with her children. She took her children to school and as they got older they started going by themselves.





When Said came to England, there were no telephones for communication, so she wrote letters to her family or sometimes recorded her messages on tapes and then sent them to Pakistan. Said feels that now it is easier for people to communicate with their families in Pakistan as there are telephones and it is much easier to raise your children.

Said, along with many women from her family stayed at home, as the males of the families told them that the outside environment was not safe for them. Said now feels that in today's society things have changed and that the next generation of children that are born in England are more independent and go out to work and socialise.



Said couldn't speak English and the only way she could communicate with the nurses, when she had children, was if her husband or relative accompanied her that spoke English.

Said went to Pakistan when her son Arshad was 8 months old and lived there for 2 years. She had a good time in Pakistan and was very happy.

In her spare time she enjoyed doing embroidery and knitting, but now she is just passing time. Her children are all married and she hopes they have a good life.

She likes to live with her second eldest son as she is at ease there and is happy with his children. She is happy to see her children stable and earning money to have a good life.

Although, Said's husband passed away 31 years ago in Pakistan, life went back to normal after his death. While her husband was in Pakistan she stayed with him for some time but then had to return to England for her children.

Said thinks the past has been kind to her and hopes the future will be too.



Zubeda Bashir

Zubeda was born in region known as Old Mirpur in Pakistan on 10th April 1937.

Zubeda's family moved around a lot during her childhood. Zubeda had a good childhood and spent her time playing. But during the India and Pakistan partition in 1947, things changed and time passed quickly. Zubeda never went to school.

Zubeda got married in Mirpur and after eight years in Pakistan moved to England when her eldest child was nearly seven. It was very cold in England and she was sad to leave her family. She had no telephone and couldn't speak to her husband during the time they were apart.

Zubeda learnt basic English and her signature in Mirpur, before she came to England. She had no problems here as a nearby family became friendly and helped her to take her children to school. Zubeda also arranged for her children to learn Arabic. She never went shopping to buy food or clothes as the men in the family did this.

Zubeda eldest son was born in Pakistan while the other two were born in England. She attended hospital appointments by bus until her husband got a car. She didn't have many problems in communicating with doctors and nurses at the hospital as there was always an Indian lady doctor who was very helpful.

When Zubeda first came to England she lived with another family and after six months bought her own house. On her street there were only four houses that belonged to Pakistani families and the rest of her neighbours were English. They were very friendly.





Her husband worked shifts in a factory and when he returned home, he spent time with the children. Zubeda was very protective over her children and didn't allow them to go out near the main roads. As it was too cold in England her husband used to buy coal to heat the house and a kettle was used to warm water before a boiler was installed. Zubeda returned to Pakistan to visit her parents after seven years but always ensured her children's studies didn't suffer. Her parents have since passed away.



Zubeda says everything was very cheap and the neighbourhood was safe. Her husband used to buy Halal meat from a Muslim butcher and used to pay 50p for two chickens.

Zubeda married her eldest son to his first cousin in Pakistan, but her other two children chose to marry in England. Recently, one of her son got married and she enjoyed the wedding thoroughly. Zubeda is in good health but lately she has become ill. Her daughter-in-laws now looks after her and the home. Recently, Zubeda went to Saudi Arabia to do Hajj and preformed it without any problems.

Zubeda was happy when her parents were alive but once they passed away she found her happiness in her children and now in their success.



Kishwar Parveen

Kishwar is from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. She was raised by her mother as her father passed away during her childhood. She has two older sisters and two brothers. She does not have any formal education or any qualifications.

Kishwar got married in May in 1969 in Pakistan and then came to England. She did not express any real emotions when she came to England as she feels that she was too young to really understand what was happening. Kishwar has two sons and two daughters. She was always worried about educating her children and noticed the differences in the style of education. When she arrived here she noticed that the houses were like closed boxes. Kishwar was the only female in her family, in England, however, a few months later, her sister in law joined her. Kishwar's mother-in-law who is also her maternal aunt remained in Pakistan for the first few years of her married life. She later joined her in England.

She remembers that she came to England in February and it was always dark and cold. However, a few days later she celebrated Eid-UI-Adha and was disappointed that people did not celebrate it like they did in Pakistan.

In the past Alum Rock had many shops but the men of the house always went to Small Heath to buy their groceries. Kishwar now feels that things have become very expensive. Kishwar didn't really leave the house and travelled in the family car to and from places for her daily activities.

One of the major problems Kishwar and her family faced was buying a house and getting a mortgage. Kishwar led a very busy life as she raised her children, managed the





house, worked in a textile factory to sew clothes and also taught Arabic to children in the neighbourhood. She had to work very hard with her husband to make a life for themselves. Kishwar is now a grandmother and is very happy.

Kishwar feels that things have become easier now as there are washing machines and other appliances to give a helping hand. A major difference that she has noticed is that in those days people had to work in shifts and late at night and her children couldn't see their father as he worked shifts on the railways. This however has now changed and fathers can spend time with their children.

Kishwar felt very proud of her culture. She felt confident and happy to wear her ethnic clothes. The only thing that Kishwar didn't like was when her daughters had to wear short tops as part of their uniform.

Kishwar's family then bought a shop in an area known as Vincent Green and half of the family decided to move to that location. Kishwar spent most of her weekends plucking and cleaning chickens as they ran a butchers shop. She found life very tough in England.

Kishwar bought and collected things over the years with the intention of returning to Pakistan but her children are happy here and returning to Pakistan has just remained a dream. She feels there is no one to really go back to visit as her mother and mother-in-law have now passed away.



Naseem Begum

Naseem was born in Mirpur in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. She is one of three siblings. Her father worked in a factory and her mother was a housewife.

Naseem got married in 1975 to her cousin. Her wedding was a big ceremony and was arranged by her parents. She was very happy that she was coming to England but found it strange when she got here in 1977. She travelled with her cousin and her children. Naseem had never travelled anywhere on an aeroplane before and so found London Airport very strange. She was 21 when she had her first daughter.

Naseem says the weather was cold, windy and very dark. She wanted to go back to Pakistan and cried every night. She also found it weird that six people had to live in two little rooms. She wanted to go for a walk and see things but the garden was very little and there was nothing to see.

Naseem has had some formal education and is educated up to G.C.S.E level equivalent. When she came to England she could read and write but she couldn't speak English. Mainly the men of the house did the shopping but sometimes she went with a cousin, who could speak English to do the shopping who helped her to interpret English. She used to buy material and sew for herself. Naseem says a few families bought Halal meat together and shared it.

Naseem found it very hard to attend appointments at Marston Green Hospital because she didn't speak English fluently. She used to go on the bus and people were very nice





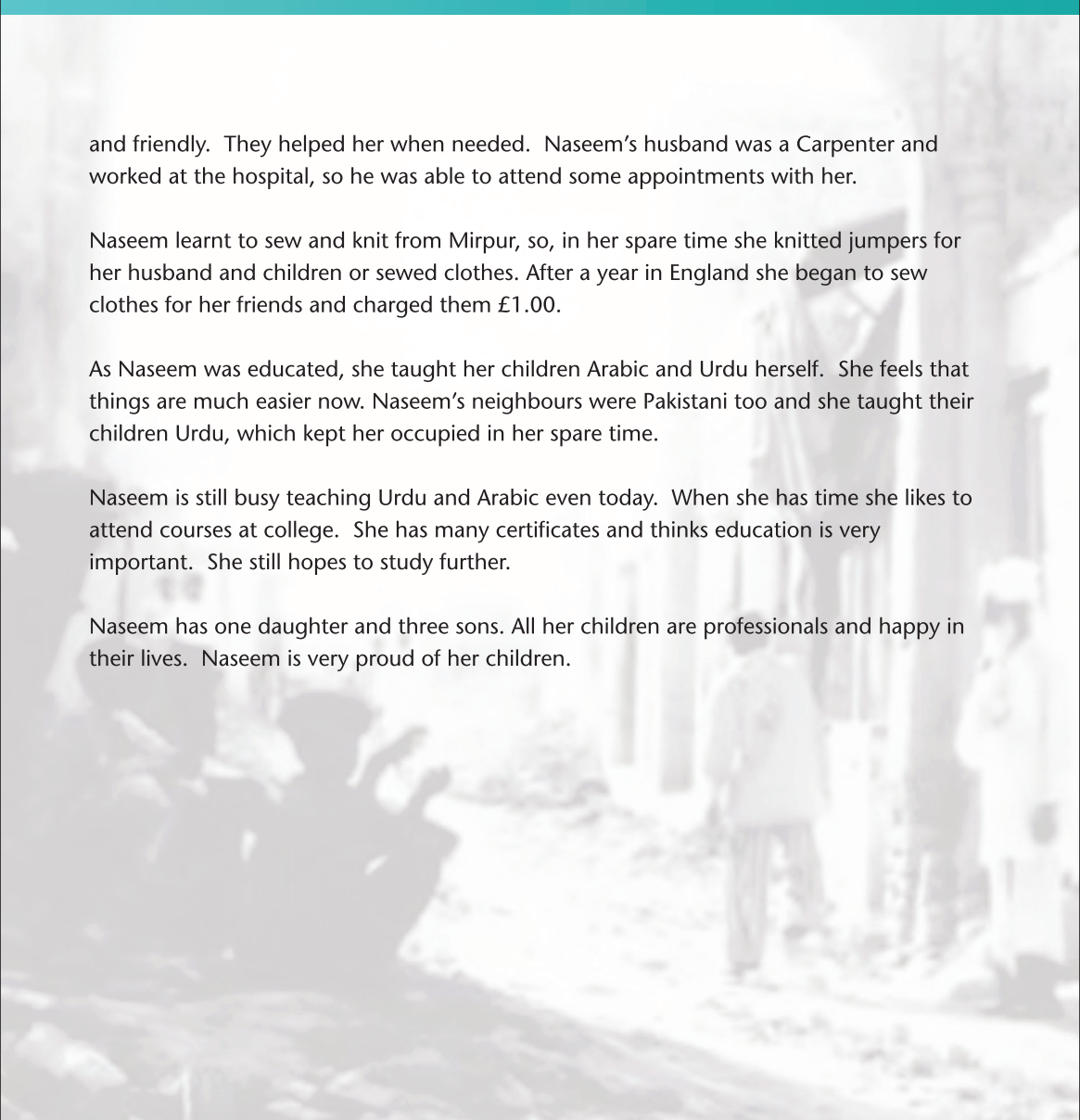
and friendly. They helped her when needed. Naseem's husband was a Carpenter and worked at the hospital, so he was able to attend some appointments with her.

Naseem learnt to sew and knit from Mirpur, so, in her spare time she knitted jumpers for her husband and children or sewed clothes. After a year in England she began to sew clothes for her friends and charged them £1.00.

As Naseem was educated, she taught her children Arabic and Urdu herself. She feels that things are much easier now. Naseem's neighbours were Pakistani too and she taught their children Urdu, which kept her occupied in her spare time.

Naseem is still busy teaching Urdu and Arabic even today. When she has time she likes to attend courses at college. She has many certificates and thinks education is very important. She still hopes to study further.

Naseem has one daughter and three sons. All her children are professionals and happy in their lives. Naseem is very proud of her children.

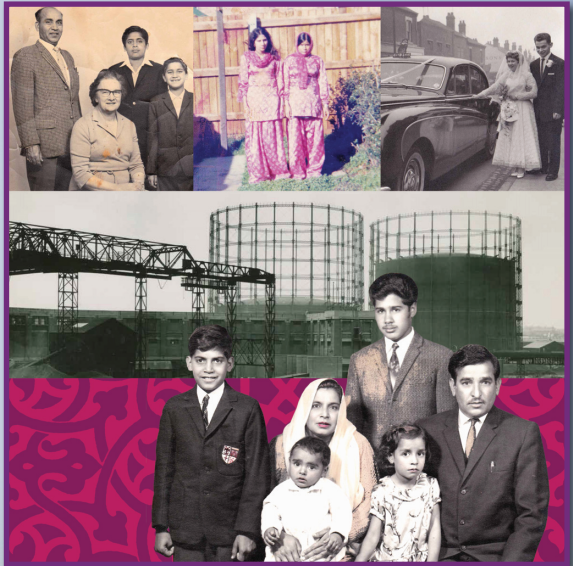




Collage of local photographs - Fond memories of the Good Old Days!

Top row left to right

Photograph taken in a studio 1965 on Alum Rock Road of Mrs Praveen's husband who came from Pakistan at the age of seven to join his family in the UK. Photograph taken in 1979 after the birth of Mrs Shemems first child, the clothes were given as a gift by a family member. Photograph of Mary and Dougie Burns on the 14th February 1959. Standing next to their wedding car after the wedding ceremony outside Saltley Methodist Church on Alum Rock Road.



Middle row

The Saltley Gas works explosion of 10 October 1904 was allegedly caused by a worker lighting a cigarette. It is said that the explosion broke windows within a half mile radius and that the ground was felt to shake in Coleshill 8 miles away.

Bottom row

Photograph taken in Studio 1970 on Ladypool Road Road. Mrs Begum came to the UK in 1969 with her three sons and one daughter to join her husband who was already living and working in the UK.





My life in Spring

Elegantly I opened my eyes [after a long time] what do I
See, the glistening sun staring at me.
I begin to stretch my leafy hands,
Just like stretching a rubber band,
I am here in this grassy land
With trees no sand....
Soon I am taken away by a sweet little girl,
To flower, blossom in the wind whirl,
She placed me in a petite pot house
Even little for a sweet mouse
Carefully she positioned me on a mantel piece to shine.
When everyone comes she says "the flowers mine"
Now I sit here, as spring passes by,
Until one day, it's the end of my life....

Written by Aishah Amin
Aged 12

My Grandparents

I love my grandparents
And they love me too
Unfortunately one died
I prayed and I cried
They are all very soft
And that's the way it should be
I love going to visit
They spoil me to bits
They let me have the things
My parents don't let me have
And they should know I love my grandparents
And they love me too

Written by Raqaiyya Gulzar
Aged 11



What Are Grandmas For?

Grandmas are for stories about things of long ago.
Grandmas are for caring about all the things you know.
Grandmas are for rocking you and singing you to sleep.
Grandmas are for giving you nice memories to keep.
Grandmas are for knowing all the things you're dreaming of.
But, most of all, Grandmas are for love.

Read by Sanaa Ayoob, Aged 6



Grandma's Wings

Grandma I wonder
where you keep your wings.

Are they hung in your closet
with the rest of your things?

Do you put them away
and just use them at night

or give them to Rosie
to polish up bright.

I know you have wings,
for this must be true,

'cause God always gives
them to Angels just like you.

Read by Sanaa Ayoob, Aged 6



Spring

Spring is here, Spring is there,
Flowers are blooming everywhere.

Everybody, get up and play,
For today, is a sunny day,
The sun is shining,
Children are smiling,
The grass is green,
It's everyone's dream.

March, April, May are the spring months,
Everybody likes them so much,
The months before summer are the best there is,
The ones you never ever want to miss.

Flowers and Daisies in the fields all around,
In the fields that you will never be found,
Due to all the flowers, that are grown by the farmers,
In the fields and the hills around.

**Written by Aadam Ayoob
Aged 11**



Grandmother

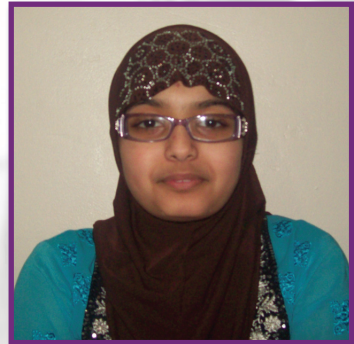
What is a grandma?
To some it's just their parent's mother
To me it's so much more; it's the person who gives in when mom says no
The person who knew all the nursery rhymes by heart
The person who always has a hug no matter how old or big you get.
To me grandma is more like my best friend, the one I trust with my deepest secrets.

**Read by Shamas Azad Raja
Aged 13**

Granny

Her smile can light up a room
Her presence is of grace
Her opinions are heard without one word
But by the look upon her face
Her touch is so gentle
Her spirit is kind hearted
And warm as a summer's afternoon.

Read by Leena Iqbal, Aged 11



Grandma

Baking cookies one by one
Planting gardens in the sun
Reading books on her lap
Cuddling up for a nap
Long walks in the park
Watching stars in the dark
Kissing boo boo on my knee
Big squeeze hugs hugs for me!

**Read by Javeria Idris
Aged 10**

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Women's Journeys from Mirpur to Birmingham

Project Background

'Home Away From Home' looks at Women's Journeys from Mirpur to Birmingham

It tells the stories of the women and their families as they made new lives in the Saltley and Washwood Heath areas of Birmingham. These stories break all the stereotypes of 'hard times' and 'struggles' faced by women during this period. Despite the lack of availability of traditional Asian food, limited understanding of the English language and feelings of homesickness, women recall these times as the 'Good Old Days' when they received nothing but sheer warmth from the new community they found themselves in and felt safe and secure in their homes.

This booklet is a celebration of all those women and we hope the audio recordings at Birmingham Libraries and Archives and this booklet will inspire and inform generations to come of sacrifices made by the first and the second generation migrant women, so that that their families have an opportunity for a better future.

Home away from Home arose out of an HLF-funded oral history project and has been developed by Go-Woman! Alliance Community Interest Company. The oral histories will be deposited with Birmingham Libraries and Archives to be accessed by future generations.

Our heart-felt thanks to all the people that made this project possible.

Yasmin Akhtar - Project Manager

Find out more about the project on **www.gwacic.com**.
Email us on **info@gwacic.com**, if you wish to receive
additional copies of this booklet.