

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

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Transcriber: Di Cooper

Q. Does your name have any particular significance, either with you or your family?

I was actually christened Allan and named after my mother's favourite brother, my Uncle. My father was Nigerian and my mother was Jamaican and I was born in the East End of London but my real name beyond that was Allan Chukumeka Kinikwana Ohachuku. My father was practising as a barrister in the early 70s and was struggling to get work, and his name was Maxwell Ohachuku and that came from the Scottish missionaries back in Nigeria in early part of 20th Century onwards and he changed his name to Vincent Luma Ohachuku Maxwell and started to get much more work.

So whilst I was growing up I was known as Allan Maxwell and I had my African names but at boarding school etc I didn't really use those names and much later I was a Tibetan Christian Buddhist monk and I was asked what my name was, and I said 'Allan' and they said that's your European name what is your name and I said it was Chukumeka or Chukumeka is how you actually properly pronounce it, Chukumeka and Chukes is my pet name, so I took that name and that name means "Thanks be to God" or "God's done Great". Ohochiku means "in God's own time" and Kinikwana means there's "nothing greater than a child". And in that part of Nigeria we know names are quite important to us and also it shows exactly from which tribe I come from etc. So it's taken me many years to feel comfortable to use that name because in the past I could go along as Allan Maxwell and nobody really knew where I was from but Chukumeka/Chukumeka people know I am from somewhere different and, Maxwell of course, I couldn't explain why that is named Maxwell.

Q. Which do you know prefer to use?

My Nigerian name? Yes I do prefer because I have had quite a varied life this lifetime and lots of people know me from lots of different names so I try even though energetically it feels difficult when I am introducing myself because people always want to shorten it, I find myself comfortable with calling myself that as well.

Q. Do you mind my asking how old you are?

I am 52.

Q. You have had quite a varied life, obviously our focus is to look at the time you were spending in Exeter but would you like to tell us how you came to Exeter and what some of the life experience you had had before you came?

I came to Exeter for the first time... well actually when I was a monk in Glastonbury I did a show, one of the New Age shows at the Sports Centre down at St Thomas.

The only reason I ended up in Devon ultimately is that I had met and started going out with a woman I was seeing and I moved to Devon to do my Social Work degree in Plymouth University. I moved to Starcross and then to Dawlish, and then when I met my wife, who is my wife now even though we are separated, she had a flat in Exeter and I moved from Dawlish and then we bought a house in Exeter.

Q, So what year did you actually come to live in Exeter.

I would say 2005. I lived in Whipton on one of those estates that were all named after apples. We used to take the train down to Plymouth, or meet people in cars. Our social work programme was one full day and then placements and study from home.

Q. Was your wife studying as well?

No she worked for public rights of way so she was in charge of half of East Devon footpaths and rights of way for the general public. So in those days she would work in and I was studying and as time has gone on, she has become a stay-at-home mum educating our daughter, and I have been working.

Q. Are you still practising as a social worker?

No, I have a registration as an independent social worker and I get called in to work with families, multicultural families. I use the word multicultural now much more than I use ethnic minorities or black or minority ethnic and part of that is because I critique that, I teach now at the university part-time at Plymouth, Bath and Exeter university on certain programmes and it's been a way for me to self-heal and to really understand what it is that creates a level of separation in our cultures, both whether it be through colonialism or tribal or anything like that, or religious, so those are my three main focuses of really trying to find out deeply what binds us rather than separates us. But in my life experience I spend much more on what separates us.

Q. Would you like to share with us some of your life before you came to Exeter?

I can give you a whistle stop tour of my fifty-two years. So I was born in 1960 in Hackney, in 1965 my father took us all back first class to Nigeria. Civil war broke out we got taken out of school, he was put in prison, we were evacuated back to England

in 1967/8 through the help of St Martin's-in-the-field, Trafalgar Square. He was released from prison came back in 1968. '68 to '71 in England, my father then got a job in my mother's country so we went to Jamaica in 1971. I went to school briefly in Jamaica for about a year then I came back to prep school here in Watford in Kent - my parents stayed in Jamaica so I used to see my parents once a year - I was flown out by the British government - and then from there, after Jamaica, they went to live in Belize in central America and I used to go over every summer in the holidays which was 8 weeks and then took an entrance exam to a school in Horsham called Christ's Hospital and went there from the age of 10½ until the age of 18, on leaving there I went into hotel school in Vincent's Square in London and from there I graduated and went to work in Inter Continental Hotels as a store-man and worked my way up to buying all the wine and food for the hotel. I left there and opened up a delicatessen in New Malden in Surrey and then I opened an outside catering business which specialised in European cuisine and parties around London etc. We did food for royal-attended parties and lots of celebrity stuff - it was quite a horrible time in my life but also exciting. We sold the business because it was costing us a lot of money to a Japanese partnership, so we had the first Japanese and English outside catering business.

And then I just woke up one morning and thought this is not the life I want to be living, I was playing rugby for Richmond, I was married, I was having affairs, I was just crazy, I was running my business. I just said I am not going to do this anymore, so I walked away from it and went on to become a massage practitioner and I had my own business for 2 years going to different people's houses, working at sports centres etc and, as that was happening, I started studying Esoteric studies, looking at the arcane school and other things like that, just trying to find myself in this whole melee of beliefs and previous experiences. Then I came across the teachings about the Seven Rays and I started to follow a particular teacher and moved to Glastonbury about 1991 and slowly fell in to this centre becoming a monk, even though as a volunteer monk I wasn't quite right because I had used a lot of my life experiences in the past just to escape to being a monk, rather than making that choice. Not to say that a lot of the situation has proven to be true in what I was doing.

So from Glastonbury I came out and worked as a security guard for about a year. Interestingly enough I ended up being a security guard in the very places where I used to walk in the front door as a sales and marketing man selling my catering business so it was like looking at my life back, it seems like it has been like that ever since. So from there I was just I want to go and work for Médecins Sans Frontières or something, and they said what skills have you got, and I said I haven't - I've done this and this and that, but you need to be a nurse or a doctor or something. So I looked around, thought about going into nursing, but I very much like being at different places all the time, which is a blessing and a curse and so I went and joined the ambulance service and worked in that for 4½ years as an assistant paramedic and the last bit I was doing I was the first response in Maidenhead, so if you had a heart attack in Maidenhead, I would turn up. I was much more an intuitive paramedic rather than a real technical know-how 'this is what it going on in the body'. And that was difficult, I got tested for dyslexia and dyspraxia, but they just said I was impatient, and there is a level in me which is impatient because I used to be a sprinter and I always joke about how and what sport people run, or how people run in their life so a middle distance runner is a bit slower in their life.

So I left the ambulance service and that's when I met a woman and interestingly enough I always wanted to do social work when I was 18 but I didn't do it then, because I made a political choice then because it was the start of the Thatcher era and I was so sure the money was going to dry out and so I didn't want to go in to it. I got a place at Plymouth University and at Reading University and I chose, by a leap of faith to come down to Plymouth in 2003 and then whilst I was in the social work course I made sure I always did lots of part time jobs, I can, dare I say it, a level of fear - my father used to say you always have to work harder than the white man, and I think that's a curse and that was his life experience but my life experience was different but it then created that tension so that you never feel good enough, you always have to prove that you are better, faster, more qualified and all of that for me has taken me more and more away from whom I truly am, in that you never really feel comfortable in your own skin, you are always in a level of performance.

Something we need to talk about as black ethnic minority people, or black and white people or people of different cultures. I think it sits at the heart of colonialism, I think for me having I've lived as a black person in colonial houses, having servants, drivers, gardeners, it's very ironic. My grandfather was a chief, he signed a treaty with Queen Victoria, my mother is Jamaican she says her family comes from Nigeria - I didn't know Africans and Nigerians sold black people to white people, so it feels to me that this lifetime very much about understanding man's inhumanity to man and how slavery and oppression is so universal but yet we can get hooked into the narrative that 'Jamaicans don't get on with Nigerians', 'Africans don't get on with West Indians', actually you know, we have all had a part to play in this history. And I say to people that there is no hierarchy in suffering - I can sit with my Jewish friends next to the holocaust and I can say well what about the 10 million people that died in the Congo.

Trying to get to that essence - which being part of the public school system in this country it almost breeds you into that we are much better, faster and we really punch above our weight at the United Kingdom - I love this country but I also see the karma of this country and so my work and everything takes me into that level of work and that's why I got into the mental health and working with the NHS because this is the body of work that we have, this is what it's about and there is no deep level of understanding of our cultural and historic realities as to why we are where we are. I think we need to be much more open with our philosophical debates and political debates to understand and then also to see where we sit in that and also to know that we only have a small grain of the truth as well.

So then after doing my social work degree I left and joined the NHS again as a Community Development Worker working with black and minority ethnic people, but again I couldn't just stick to the narrow remit, I made it much more political so that made me famous/infamous and again if I look back in hindsight, a lot of it was ego driven and at one level still is, but it was also, as I said to you it was also about self-healing and I've also now learnt a lot about that but I've also reached a point where I really recognise that by focusing on just someone's colour, that can be problematic. Especially as I know about reincarnation inwardly myself also my belief system and my tribal belief system, reincarnation is very much a part of our whole existence and in my Christian upbringing it was not really understood, but I think that is really at the root of our human existence.

Q. It's very interesting listening to how your belief systems have influenced your life.

It's painful though because the draw of the '80s is still with me - here I am 52 and I feel like 19. I feel like I am starting my life over - you know, 2 marriages on and two gorgeous daughters you can see over my shoulder and so many people I have met, fame, infamy - I've met Buzz Aldrin the astronaut who went to the moon - he was drunk at the time because he was so much in shock at the time going to the moon and back to earth. Our lives are so petty compared to the expanse of the cosmos and whatever. Prince Charles saw whoever and all of that stuff makes no difference to who we are. We get a CB, MBE and we are all ok. I so wanted all that but at the same time knowing it is all an illusion, that tension for me creates a level of melancholia, even though I would say people look at me and say you are lovely, but in me because I have all these competing cultural expectations and I think you need to extricate yourself from the world but be in the world to be who you truly are, if you see what I mean.

Q. Did you feel that the rigidity of the public school system influenced you?

No, because again I am a bit naughty, I try to bend the rules so that I can break them. I remember at school on certain days I used to feel really down because certain things weren't going certain ways, only seeing my parents once a year.. I'd say well in Jamaica today it's a national holiday so we should have this party, and they would believe me. The thing is in my day there were only 4 black people out of 150 so my life experiences have been surrounded by predominantly white people so I've always looked out of my life and it's been predominant white but in my inward reality I am not white or black I am who I am, so to be defined by my colour from when I am growing up to being a negro, to a coloured, to be black and now to be a black and ethnic minority - that has not defined me at all but it has been the way I've been politically defined, so I feel like a guest in my own country, but I feel like a guest in every country so I see myself more as a universal person but at the same time that is hard when we have borders and passports and cultures and situations going on like that, so I look forward to the time when we are a borderless planet, it will happen, when we are more of a sacred planet.

You know even this stuff between east Devon and west Devon we have this thing that we need to be separate and we need to categorise or we need to name. I look forward to the day when we see that that doesn't serve us even when it is an important thing to say that I am from this, I am from that. You see my parents can say I am Jamaican and my father can say I am Nigerian even though they didn't have a Jamaican or a Nigerian passport because of the colonial system. I say I am British and they can say they are British but in their deepest being they can say they come from these different countries.

So I see a lot of children in Devon who have got that situation going on, who have parents from different cultures who have ideals, because the British education is meant to be the best etc. - people don't necessarily understand the rigidity of the historical context of it and I would say that in some African countries they are more British than the British. So that's even more intense, so I had much more freedom at school than I did at home, so the rigidity came from home rather than school, so my

father never really knew me - so there was that continual battle and yet I am my father's son, but what you attract you realise is in you at one level.

Q. Do you have contact still with family in Nigeria?

Yes, but no, in Nigeria the whole thing that we were going to be killed or poisoned, I don't speak the language, so there is a level of deep distrust among family members and that's sad. And everyone has practically died off, so we're really into cousin territory now. My grandfather had six wives all at once so consequently there were 33-odd children and my father was towards the top end of that but he's died off, so I am at the top of the family tree in terms of that, but all I see that doing is to allow younger people in the family get on and not to constrain them into being a lawyer, or a judge or a doctor, or an engineer but to have love in their life. You know I don't feel we talk enough about the word love in this country let alone in Africa, because ultimately if we love the love is not discipline, that's the old way of love that people think. I mean if we really love we wouldn't do half the things we do to our children and fellow human beings.

Q. Are there other family members of your mother's Jamaican or your father's who live in this country and do you have contact with them?

There are a few distant relations. Most of our relations are all over the world - my brother is an Australian citizen, I've got cousins in Australia, Jamaica, Nigeria, Canada a lot of them. I would say Nigeria is a problematic country for Africa and I would say Jamaica is a problematic country for the Caribbean and the karma of those two countries is pretty intense and if you trace historically you can see why those two countries are like they are. That psychological underpinning is never really talked about, we just get categorised and labelled and, having lived in both those countries and having seen levels of class, colour separation - even Jamaica, you can be mixed heritage and you would be treated better than me, so I used to have to show my British passport to get on a beach in Jamaica. This was in the '70s, things have changed of course there would never be a Rasta-haired person on TV; when Bob Marley was playing in those '70s they used to call him a long-haired layabout - now he's a hero. So there's a working out and a healing that needs to take place in places that have had apartheid, slavery you name it. So for me it's about how do we recognise that and deal with that.

Q. Do you feel that your very varied life experience, when you were living in Exeter did you find that that was quite a narrow existence and did you make friends in Exeter?

I think when I first arrived, I used to joke I used to have a clickometer to see how many black people there were, and that was in 2003 and that was interesting because a lot of people had been there a long time. But the way I deal with living in Exeter or as a minority wherever I am is to go out and try and make connections. I joke about 2 or 3 degrees of separation but, on reflection now living in Totnes and the

way my life is now, I think that is destructive but it was almost like I had to create another character to exist. I wasn't called a 'nigger' so much in Exeter but I was in Plymouth and that's fine because I've learned how to integrate and deal with that word. My life in Exeter was rich, varied I had some really good friends - both my ex-wives friends but also my friends I made both from my work and my placements and really generosity so my life in Exeter I would say would be a time in my life is beyond some of the issues that I brought into my own self that was a very blessed and also incredible lifestyle, friendships that would always be dear in my own heart. And it was also a place where I could get involved in many different things, like so many things that I couldn't do them all. I mean that was the cause of my marriage break-up this time as well as my implosion - I was Quaker prison chaplain for Exeter, I was on the ECA, I was singing I was dancing and I was meant to be a family man who was meant to have his daughter and wife and I just couldn't do it. And then I was out there trying to do work and do this and that and social enterprise. It was ego-driven but it was also a belief system that I could really pull this off. There's a bit of me that wants to be a politician but I know that politics these days is too corrupt, because we are not doing it purely enough, there's too much self-interest in politics no matter how much we try.

Q. You say you had been quite a sprinter and rugby player for quite a prestigious team - did you make contacts through your sporting interests?

In the early days I did but I didn't exploit them as much as I could have got through to the Cambridge squad but I didn't know the system properly. One part of my life which has really helped heal me but has also caused me a great deal of angst all the way through, was I did in my second year of university finally get diagnosed with dyspraxia and dyslexia and that meant the way I learn and communicate became much more understandable to me but in terms of the education system it still always put me in the lower sets or whatever, because I can talk about a system, for instance I dictated my whole exams for 4½ hours just from my head, but if you ask me to write it down, you would be going "what's that?" and I can't even read my writing back. So having gone through a public school system where it is really about that sort of performance, music and everything was really difficult. And my father was really intelligent in that he could write something and intellectualise it and become a judge and lawyer, so he expected his sons to do that. My brother could do that, he could speak fluent languages etc whereas not me. From the moment I was born I wanted to be a priest and that was just not what was supposed to happen, so I have never felt I've done my life's purpose because it always had to be in my mind trying to perform for someone else.

Q. You mentioned you were a Quaker, a chaplain at the prison in Exeter, was that something that you undertook for a while and were you working mostly with people who were Quakers?

You don't usually say in Quakers - I am going to do that job - you get people at Meeting for Worship and they are told that that is the person they should ask - so I try to adopt this attitude in life that says yes to whatever life gives you. So the whole process of becoming a Quaker chaplain in prison was trauma for most people

because what you have to do is take a very traumatic terrorist check and so they were asking questions like: do you have leave to remain and work in the United Kingdom? So I just told you I came from and was born here etc, so do your parents have leave to remain? You have this name where is your parent's British passport? They're long gone. So the people who do the vetting have the cultural understanding that most people from the 50s and 60s in this country who are British with different names did not have a passport that belongs to them. So it took me about a year before I was working in the prison with black and ethnic minority prisoners because there was no representation for those born in the country and in some prisons there are 80 to 90% black prisoners and then I came down to Devon and there is 25%, but 25% is still more than the minority black and minority ethnic. So there would be a whole lot of tensions that came up so when I went in as a black Quaker prison chaplain, I was really concerned that people would be asking me to talk to them about the black issues, and also the prison chaplain at the time said she only wanted me to come in if there was a Quaker prisoner. Thankfully not many people who are Quakers are in prison! There have been 3 in the 5/6 years I have been doing it and given all my busyness, I didn't have time to go in and do it and other Quaker chaplains would go in and be more part of the team. And as soon as I moved to Totnes I asked to step down.

Q. So how many years did you live in Exeter?

I lived there from 2004 June till August 2012.

Q. You have two daughters from the one wife?

No but they look quite similar.

Q. Each of your wives...

Are they British? Yes they are. That's the other thing about having a public school/my lifestyle, I have never really been around black women who have had a lifestyle like me. Or if I have they have been diplomats' daughters or whatever.

One of things I struggle with because I was sent to public school and my girlfriends were from Roedean school, our school, as beautiful as it was 2000 acres, you wore the same uniforms since 1553 - yellow socks, Blue coat and so on, but you'd go to other public schools and they would call you paupers because the whole movie of the Prince and the Pauper was based upon our school, but it was almost like you were in the top 2% of schools but you were in the bottom of the 2% so that can at times depending on how you are psychically or over-sensitive make you still feel you were part of the class system although you were not because opportunities which were afforded to me were incredible. So you didn't have the same amount of money as other people who went to public school but at the same time you had the education and the space and the cultural awareness and everything to maybe fit into that. But because the class system can be quite a cruel way to look at people, it was always

difficult so predominantly, just because a person was black didn't mean she was going to like me or I was going to like her.

So it almost became like a repellent - you'd see a black person and you'd both repel each other rather than come towards each other and, for me, because I am not African and not Jamaican or British, I'd always struggle because most of the girls when I was growing up my age in Nigeria wanted sugar daddies, most of the girls in England wanted babies and in Jamaica I couldn't dance the same way the Jamaicans could etc and it was something so simple, and I can't talk Patois - my brother could - so I was always pushed away, never feeling whichever culture - your cult - I fitted in.

Q. So you don't see yourself as British or Nigerian or Jamaican, but you are who you are.

Internally I would say I was British - I was born here... I've got a British passport, my whole attitude towards the world is no different, but it's like what I've done is self-critique myself and there's a lovely phrase I use from Krishnamurti - if you describe yourself as a Christian, this my country... it's like an act of violence, because it is this form of separation from the rest of humanity, and it takes a lot of courage to admit the unitedness of humanity on a spiritual, physical and emotional energy and not go "I am going to be with the Palestinians or the Jews or this or that, or I'm going to be with men not with women", this duality is the acts of most of us, and the more you try and do your spiritual practice, not your religious practice, you have to lose that. So I'm not saying I'm totally there - this is an aspiration but it is also how I feel - I know my life when I try and fit into a little group or culture is very difficult. I can relate across tribes, or across cultures but it's almost from a detached, loving perspective. Because I find when I integrate too deeply it is too painful because I had a black American girlfriend who couldn't stand the fact that I had white friends, and that was partly because of her experience. So there is a lovely phrase that I use through a lot of my life even though it's painful and it is: seek first to understand and then be understood. So I need to understand why is a person being racist, sexist and then forgive them from that perspective rather than just go out and forgive them. So as long as you can be patient and loving enough, there is a massive experience as to what is going on, and life isn't the way we quickly judge at times.

Q. You talked about dealing with being called 'nigger' - have you experienced much racism both socially and in your work place?

Ironically enough in the '80s I couldn't get work - they'd tell me you aren't going to work at the desk in reception here because you are black and I would not be allowed to join the golf club because I was black, but this was 1986. Meanwhile I'm playing rugby for the county. And really ironic in the '70s, because jokes about the Kunta Kinteh was on TV or Love Thy Neighbour, and now sometimes I'm not sure if I've got the job because I am black! Especially the jobs that I got and so that becomes difficult and then at one level, just because you are black you almost energetically side with a person because they are black rather than because of who the person is, because this is your job, you work with BME people... my personal experiences -

projected out on to other people may be, is that if you spent most of your life receiving these negative images of this belief system, everything when you sometimes come across a problem, it's quite easy to revert to "it's because I am a black man" - the comedians do it, Lenny Henry has done it, where he dresses up in a blonde wig and gives you a Page 3 pose and they go "you can't do it" and he says "Well it's because I am a black man!".

But it's this thing that's so easy to revert to so it's really hard to ask "is it because my character has taught me to fight and be faster creatively" so guys go "it's Chukes because he's black" or is it because it's Chukes who has got this energy who wants to do things this way. So that's why I'm really into energetic medicine, seeing things in terms of energy and vibration, rather than focus on just colour. Because if you understand the cultural context, and what people have gone through, you can understand why they behave. But our health system, our mental health system, our schooling - you can't do that, it doesn't give the space and time for individuals, or for the person, the teacher, whoever to really understand. And then it's really difficult, and even for me - when I first started going out with [name], I would explain to her lots of these things and she was in denial of them because it wasn't her lived experience.

But as time has gone on, and she has studied and done different things, we can talk about it now. But I'm not there any more and I don't want to go: "it's because of this or that..." that was my perception because of my lack of self-integration, because if you know who you are, if someone calls you a 'nigger' or anything, you just go phew!! So for me the 'nigger' thing, when I used to be called it at school, I used to turn that incredible Hulk and beat people up. I went to America, and a black cousin of mine called me a nigger and he just went "a nigger just means you are stupid" and I know why he said it and that they were trying to claim back the word and everything else, and I can understand historically why people get called 'nigger' and 'boy' and all these things.

So when I came back to England after that experience, the skinheads used to beat me up and call me 'nigger', I just used to deal with in a way that didn't affect me, and as time has gone on I just allowed the word... Richard Pryor used to do this skit "There was this nigger, and he went to Africa and he said: "I saw no niggers..." and then he came back to America and told people why we mustn't use the word 'nigger' and so I use this in my training as well. There is this great fear around the word - in Buddhism they talk about words, they say "Words are empty, they don't really have any inherent meaning", or you can interpret them another way and say "words can be damming, cruel etc" and there is a vibration in the words you speak that goes on to people. I can tell in milliseconds whether someone is being racist or trying to be awkwardly funny, or whether they are just being ignorant. And even by me seeing they are being ignorant, it can be a judgement on them and so then I want to talk about things in a certain way.

So that's how I approach it - maybe it's too deep, too complicated but I try to look at it that way otherwise I would just be a reactive nuclear bomb all the time, I think.

Q. In the training you were doing at the different universities, this is to raise their awareness, to get them to look at their culture?

Their culture, their names - what do their names mean... which tribe do you come from in this country etc, and I didn't know that this country had lots of slaves, or the Icenis were here before. So it is understanding the history, but not getting stuck in it. And also, if I am working with a person who is full of anger from Jamaica or Nigeria... I've had Nigerian people in this country who have said they don't want to work with me because I come from the wrong tribe! I've had to explain that to the Commissions, the assumption is that because I am black and I'm working with Zimbabwean people where the two languages are Shona and Ndebele. So with these forms of separation, you have to include the Commission in that understanding because to be able to talk about something or be able to talk in your mother tongue changes the situation. But people, because everyone is so busy and one cap fits all... these cases flare up. So that's why I found my little niche and though that niche is not there so much, and yet there is a need, so I'm trying to balance it between really being part of the solution and not continuing the problem so I can be busy and wealthy..!

Q. Would you return to live in Exeter, did you enjoy Exeter?

I did, but I always came to Devon to move into the countryside, so I just love the sunshine just looking out there, but in Exeter I didn't have that, I was just looking onto the back of a house. I was always disappointed in Exeter with the lack of garden space, because in London I had a house that was smaller than that, but I had an 80ft. garden! And I just had a little courtyard in Exeter, the house was nice but I just spent a lot of time going out of Exeter. I had lots of things to do in Exeter. There is a phrase in the Bible which I so need to embody in my everyday life and it is: "Be still and know that thou are God". And that's beyond religion, there is a lovely way of looking at that phrase if you go: "Be still and know that I am God" or "Be still and know that I am" and go back all the way just to: "Be" -become a human being, a human doing, a human tribe - everything is push, push, push. What I am trying to do now in my second half of my life is try to be responsive to what comes at me in a loving way rather than trying to manipulate my way through to get this level of success. Because I have had everything I want in this life, everything I want I get it, but it's how do I really go I am really enjoying that, because at one level having all that and being sad, you haven't really understood what the lesson is.

Q. Your girls are living in Exeter?

No, one lives in London in my old family flat, I owned that flat when I was 17, so it's nice to see it re-furbished and she lives in Hackney and works in Vauxhall and my other daughter lives at a place called Embercombe, where she stays in a yurt and looks after sheep and goats and Dartmoor ponies. Totally different lifestyle, but I think the way she is, I would totally support that. There is no pressure of getting up for school, no worry about the day. The difficulty is that my ex wife has dedicated every working moment of her life to Asha, which is because everything is so quick with us, we didn't develop a lot, so everything that I am sharing with you now I haven't sat and talked with my wife. Even though she knows that part of me as well, we always got into our drama of where we were both damaged from. So I love her

tremendously, like I love every girlfriend I've ever had, but it's always been really difficult for me because of this complication I bring to life to live with people. And also not enough deep self love. Whereas now I feel really happy with them living there, if they chose to go into a house later on they can do that. But the level of education and connectedness with nature and groups of people that my daughter - who is 6½ now - has with world now, is far more advanced now than her 24 year old sister, who wants to have a very glamorous, R&B lifestyle because of lack of... I would say I wasn't there enough for her, but I couldn't be because when I was growing up, I was into all that that she is into. Whereas this other one I feel is the more evolved part of me.

Q. We are getting to the part where we will wind up the formal part of the interview. So from the professional point of view, could you speak briefly about integration/segregation/social welfare provision because that's part of your work experience?

I just want to tell a story here that I just got last week. I have two cousins in America, in Philadelphia, and they are in their 70s now and they are both pharmaceutical executives - worked in their past were - so last week I decided to have a go at pharmaceutical companies, partly because I worked for them in my catering business, I did two parties, one party must have cost £35,000 to launch a new hay fever pill and it was so long ago that like, has it helped? And I certainly believe in medical herbs, I take flower essences.. anyway we got into this big debate, my Aunt who was just back from Jamaica said "I believe in segregation" so I thought "OK, just breathe, listen to this one" and as it went on, she said in 1964, she went from Jamaica to university in Washington DC, a black university, and of course in 1964 it was the Martin Luther speech etc, so the black American said to her then "You can't come on this march, you don't understand what we have been through". And I was listening, and trying not to comment and she went: "We didn't understand, because we came from Jamaica and we were in theory liberated, even though we had a class system" and she said "when I saw the three toilets, black/white/coloured, I couldn't understand that, because I just want to go to the toilet!" She said in hindsight they just did not understand, because in her mind segregation was good. Black people just stayed together, they helped each other, bought houses together - now that's all fallen apart.

And I find people... like last week I watched Question Time and there was a Polish lady on there and she was saying there are too many Poles here etc, and they have no respect... And I find people who have emigrated here and have gone through the struggle - my father was one, he became the Appeal Court Judge for Immigration and would not allow people through. I said "Dad, you wouldn't allow yourself through at this rate, you know, if you had gone back in history" - so it's a very short memory span of how far we have come with this whole issue. By focusing on the negative and segregation, quotas etc we are reinforcing that. My whole work now, in theory, is meant to be focusing on inequalities.

There's hardly a thing in our life that does not perpetuate inequalities and the amount of money, 'commodification' of all our services, of many different things, creates greater inequality, so it's a real subtle thing. So how do we really get the equality that we know is our divine right, how do we really support people?

Because if you put yourself in the front of the County Council as they did recently, where should you cut money from? Most of them will cut money from the social welfare and put money into potholes, right, for roads - even though that is really important as well - but it's the lack of awakesness in our politicians, in myself, in other people... and we can't do this through just protesting, we've got to do it - I don't even call it protesting, it's demonstrating - we really have to get to people's hearts and minds in a place that really helps people wake up, so that we help each other. Because if I attack a politician and I replace them with my anger, it doesn't solve the problem. So for me, there are certain people in Exeter who are working in the diversity reality that I wouldn't work with. Not because I am better than them, but because I see in them the aspect of anger that has affected my life and then also destroys the other people. Even if they are racist, how do you name... There is a wonderful prayer: "The greatest punishment for sinners, is forgiveness". So the way you need to communicate is still say it is the way it is, but communicate so the person has the opportunity to make a choice and retain their dignity - if that is so important to them - but they do what is right. And I found working with this group, with ethnic minority people - because of my experience, my qualifications, my life experience, my rugby playing, my pushing, I can manipulate the situation for the benefit of the person I am working with i.e. at one level I am then creating a problem somewhere else within the whole system. And I know we have to get things back in equality, but even in reincarnation terms, there is a belief system that here I am seen as a black man, I could be very responsible as a white person in a previous life, of the very things I am trying to sort out. So when you have that deep understanding you have to work with it from a totally different perspective.

And the old politics and the old ways of dealing with things has to change because every system that we have going on now is perpetuating the very problem, the very difference... even though they are right. Now I've watched the programme the other day on TV technology - you take an i-Phone now, you can be sitting with someone, they can press this button, you can speak into the phone in your language and it will translate it back - what a wonderful bit of technology! OK so I want my friends in the interpreting business to do well, but at another level, that's the level of how we can heal this planet. You know it shouldn't all be about money, like sustainability - Africa could be supplying the world's planet now with technology and environmental health, but not at the exploitation of the people. I would love to go to Africa and work but I can't, who do I think I am? This is a collective consciousness reality, you know. Mugabe is so upset that he is not having tea with the Queen, that's the moral important thing to him, but how can the man... and I've watched Bob Marley's film when he went there with so much hope that this country was going to be liberated and free - we've gone from bread basket of Africa to Old Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, there. I know more Zimbabweans over the planet now, some of them getting their OBE's because they are more British - one of the most British countries in Africa.

I said to someone the other day, "Give me a Zimbabwean national dress" and they said "I can't do that" there's no national dress, you know. So these issues need to be understood. So they sent me on this course - I'm on an emotional leaders course now on the NHS, but there was a course before which was "Towards the Strategies of Success" which was for black and ethnic minority people to get further up in the NHS and I went, as much as I am happy to be on this course, I don't want to get to the very top to recreate the thing that I complain about. But for most of my

colleagues on that course - from Zambia, Zaire, India they've got quite good jobs. I said this is not about how much knowledge you have about this disease etc., this is about are you part of the right club... they were even showing us what shoes to wear when we went on an interview. So I do everything to buck - now I won't wear a tie, and I won't put my jacket on which is a dark suit, I'd wear a beige suit - look at me today - I do this because I know how this system sucks you in. So as much as my father was a black judge, there was part of him that was so African that couldn't change, but there was also something in him that was so British, that he was part of this system, and I couldn't understand how he flipped from being African into being British.

So for me, how do we really do the diversity in a loving way and don't see the person as being from Israel, or being black or they need our help, because actually I feel very strongly that we are healing ourselves. Everybody I meet in my social service job - I'm not working with people so much now, but even so I had the opportunity to heal an aspect of myself when a person came in and sat there. And now when I go out and teach, I want to make the students amused so that they learn, I give them the bad information. I am so frightened to reinforce the negative message. So at university we always used to talk about white privilege, so that would affect the black students really badly but also the white teacher would push, push, push. I got put back a year on my university course because I challenged the way we taught anti-racism. Because I said if you teach someone to be anti-racist, you don't solve the problem, you just go well "I hate racists". So what happens when a racist, paedophile sits in front of you, if you hate all these things? So my course now, is "Why 'isms' don't work" because I am challenging myself as well and I need people to think critically because we have this thing about "well this is who I am when I am at work and this is who I am when at home" you can't have this conflict, because that is what causes so much of our schism - our mental schisms. So for me, integration has been my journey and there are times when there has been overt racism, there have been times when people have been so frightened. I've had people frightened to order a black cup of coffee next to me! That is ridiculous - that's how far it's gone, but it doesn't mean that David Cameron is right that multiculturalism is wrong, or is a failed experiment. It's not his fault he's gone to Eton, he can't help himself.

Q. Is there any particular message you would like to give people in Exeter?

What, before I become Mayor in 2020!? Just keep on doing what you are doing. Look at the Real Food Store, look at places like this. The thing is there is an assumption that if you feel that this doesn't really fit with me, as a black person whatever, you will bring that to the group. For instance I used to know a lot of black people who would say that the Exeter Respect Festival wasn't put on for us, we didn't organise it. There is never not an opportunity... there are structural inequalities in our society which go beyond colour. They go through every bit of our society and we need to wake up to that. So how is it for a black woman compared to a white woman? And there is this whole thing that goes on. So the black women's movement is very different to the white feminist movement and there are different issues going on, but if you get into that, you will always find some sort of separation, do you see what I am saying? So you focus on that, rather than saying: "What are the strengths in this situation, how can we change? So we're just about to launch, we've called our social enterprise Ubuntu, which means I am because we all

are...but it is now caused my ego.. yes, I want my own organisation, I want to do this... But the whole point was to focus on people's strengths, so people don't feel the victims of their colour, or their class, or what they believe. That's also hard, because at one level I think I know what's going on for everyone, so that's arrogant. But beyond that, the philosophy beneath it is correct, that if we focus and try and help people with their strengths, that's what they become. If you do it the other way though - "I am giving you a service because you are unequal and because you are black..." that's how you are going to feel, so you trap that. So you spend a lot of your time first dealing with that rage, that anger, that illusion that you are going to be given a life in this country that is not really there.

Q. Is there anything in particular that you might change in Exeter, something that you experienced?

I think change is going to happen, what I'd like to see so that we do remove the structures of inequality. Exeter has been given dispensation from the Council to put up Council Tax, more than anywhere else. But let's use it honestly, I don't want to see hundreds of people laid off, and then people of ethnic minorities get pushed even more down. I rather say, let me pay a bit more council tax and everyone keeps their jobs, or everyone does this... Let me pay a little bit more on my National Insurance and then I have a free NHS. I get paid a lot of money doing what I do, which is not a lot at present as far as I am concerned and that is really weighing me down badly. So I think people in NHS and big jobs really have to look - we are meant to be public servants - what does that really mean? Self interest and education does not give you the right to say "I am a public servant" but that's what we have done. True service is - if I need to mop the floor, I need to mop the floor, you know? Wash the dishes, wash the dishes... Humility that is something that is so hard to learn when you have been bred to rule. And public school systems, education breeds people to do - if you can do this, then get to university... Soon, we will have enough technology coming up that we won't need to do a lot of the medical ways we are doing. So many things are going to change. So for me, there is going to be a natural evolution, we are just going to need to be loving to each other, and that's the biggest change, because people will do the right thing. And we have to trust in the goodness of humanity, whereas I've been taught and bred that people are inherently bad. Even in religion - sinful, we are going to be saved... We have been saved, we just need to wake up to that reality.

Q. Thank you for the interview. I have learnt a lot.