

## TOSFOR Interview Transcript

Name of interviewee: **Terry Bissessar**  
Name of interviewers: Sandhya Dave and Bati Ghimise  
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Location of interview: Heavitree Police Station  
Transcribed by: Di Cooper

Q. Tell me about your name?

I believe it comes from French Guyana and I will explain how I came to that conclusion. My parents are from Guyana so that would fit. They were both part of British Guyana when it was a colony and answered to the call during the windrush years to come and help the mother country after the labour shortages after the war. So in the '60s my father came over, later followed by my mum who came over by ship? I was once on my patrol speaking to a doctor from Reading where I was based who had a very similar name but spelled Bissessur, which a 'u' rather than an 'a' at the end and he had done quite a lot of research and said that my name probably came from the French quarter of Guyana, which is quite interesting.

Q. So have you been able to trace any history personally, do you have connections with Guyana.

2.40

No, and that's very largely to do with my upbringing, perhaps I will go into that now. When my parents came to the UK and settled here, they were very much aware of the problems and issues and "fitting in" to society here. My father could only be described as perhaps a little bit ahead of his time, realised that there might be potential racial problems and made sure that when I was born that I became no different in every way possible to a normal person being born in this country. So I was never shown any other type of heritage, history, culture - my roots, if you like, about where my parents, my heritage come from. I

3.17 My mother was particularly anxious that I didn't speak another language, although my parents spoke a different language, and they were part of the Hindu religion but never ever worshipped or did any religious activities in front of us. In that period, I always remember, we had a very small house in Hounslow and they would always go down to the bottom of the garden where it was once an outside toilet - it doesn't seem appropriate does it for a place of worship, but that's where they would light candles and I could see the flickering of the candles and always wondered where mum and dad were off to and you would get curious to go and see what they were doing. And you could hear them praying, but when they came back they wouldn't talk about or discuss it - even when we asked them about it outright 'what were you doing Mum and Dad?' - it was always: it's nothing to do with you which leads me onto a funny story. When I was at primary school, I wondered as you do when you are a little kid, what you do friends-wise at the week-ends and all my friends said 'we're going to Sunday School at the week-end, come with us'. So before I knew it, I was sat in the middle of our school hall on a Sunday with my mates, and I didn't really understand what Sunday school stood for, and they were decorating people and putting them into groups and it came to me and the teacher looked at me and had a bit of a gasp and wondered and pondered about what she should do with me and she eventually took me out and sat me in the corridor. And I didn't know what was going on I just thought it was part of a game or something that was happening and what I later realised is that she eventually rang me mum to tell her that she didn't think that I should actually be there at Sunday School - I should perhaps be somewhere else? She was very confused but certainly felt I shouldn't be included in Sunday School, because one of the answers when

the teacher asked me 'did I know what Sunday School was all about' my answer clearly was no, I didn't that's why I was there it was my first day and I was just there because all my mates were there. My mum came down to the school hall - you could tell she'd arrived because the doors flung open and you could hear her marching down the corridor and she made quite a big scene to the teacher explaining that I was part of this country, I am a British citizen they were extremely proud of, and that I would chose my own religion and if this was the one I wished to follow, then she would support me and not take me out of Sunday School. Of course all my mates were a bit bemused by it all, wondering why there was such a fuss anyway, because they couldn't see any difference other than that's Terry Bissessar and he is part of our group and we're all good mates and we're going to Sunday school because we can get free sweets etc. So that was my first rude awakening to actually 'Where am I, where do I fit in?' 06.50 and it was the first thing that made me think 'Gosh, I am different then really' because up to that point I was wearing jeans, I had my hair cut short - everybody was wearing bomber jackets and those sorts of things and my parents didn't treat me any differently, and I kind of felt as if I was an ordinary person going to school in an ordinary country that I belonged to and I didn't have anything to worry about or be any different. Clearly then as I grew older and went to senior school, I started to realise that things were slightly more different that I had originally anticipated. And that was because I guess in my primary school I had a really good network of people, friends etc. and I must remained in that clique, group of people, never really stepped out of it. We went everywhere together, rode our bikes together, read together, we were around each other's houses, having tea and spending nights in each other's place and camping out, as young kids do. But as you grew older you started to get into 'hang on a minute the world is slightly bigger and slightly more scary than you first thought. And my experience of secondary school and grammar were a bit less easy, much more challenging really facing racism overtly in your face etc.

08.30

Q. So just to put things into context, I didn't ask you who you are, what do you do - just to put Terry into context. I said you work at the police station, so what do you do here what's your job?

I work for Devon and Cornwall police and I am an inspector. My role here is to oversee all of the policing operations for Exeter, mid and east Devon and so I am part of a small management team that look after the resourcing and operational issues to do with the Exeter and east police areas.

9.19

Q. and how long have you been in this post at Exeter?

For 2 years, and in the police service for 25 years. I started my career in Thames Valley police where I worked on the board of the Metropolitan area such as Reading and Slough as a young constable and then more latterly worked my way to South Oxfordshire, Abingdon those sorts of areas and eventually about 10 years ago I transferred from Thames Valley police to Devon and Cornwall , and here I am now.

Q. Was your childhood spent in Hounslow?

Yes, that's probably where most of my memories are from because that's where I've had most of my lasting relationships with friends and people. We became very transient as a family and moved an awful lot. My dad worked for the London underground but then he

got a job with British Airways as part of their security staff and that meant that he moved around the country quite a lot, so we ended up in Cardiff for a while and Oxfordshire and then back to London, Middlesex that sort of area and back to Oxfordshire again, so we were quite all over the place really..

Q. And when you came to Devon 10 years ago and had your transfer, is that something that you chose or did you just get given a transfer?

It was something that I always wanted to do, to work in a rural environment and get away from the city life and city mentality and the hustle and bustle and trappings that come with policing a large urban environment. I wanted to in my last few years of the police service, just to slow down into a much more country environment, a different sort of policing.

Q. So when you came to Devon, where did you come to?

12.05

My first posting was north Devon so I was at Barnstaple and Bideford as my very first posting, and clearly I was a very strange oddity for much of the community. Very often we acted at public meeting and, understandably, having consultations with the community that we served and to ask them what they wanted from the police, how best can we deal with issues that affect them.. so my first public meeting at Bideford, I wasn't asked about the crime statistics or what problems there were - about speeding, parking, dog fouling - all the usual things that I prepared for, and was told would definitely come up at those sorts of meetings, I was asked questions about where was I from, how long would I be here, what was I doing here and how did I get to be here, how long had I been in the police and had I done the full training that a police officer has to do. All manner of questions from a range of people across the piste? about what I'd done, what my experiences were as an officer. Had I started as a constable and worked my way up like everybody had to do? All these sorts of questions really - I was really quite tickled inside because some of the questions were clearly well meaning and some thought I wasn't up to the job etc and given that this was my first meeting, people really weren't willing to give me the benefit of the doubt and see me in action, or try and help me to solve the problems, how I was going to be etc which I found quite amusing really.

Q. You found it quite amusing, what other feelings, emotions did you have around it?

14.11

Deep down I got the feeling... when I first arrived, now if anyone has been to Bideford in north Devon, please forgive me, but when I first arrived and they told me I was being transferred to a place in Bideford, I didn't know where Bideford was. So my wife and I had driven down there one evening - before I made the move - and the very first thing I was greeted with was a sign saying 'welcome to Bideford' and right underneath the sign it says 'welcome to the little white town' and I kind of got a bit confused when I saw that, and took a picture of it, with me stood by the sign and my wife took a picture of me and I e-mailed it to all my friends, all of whom sent me back very, very funny anecdotes about being in the Ku Klux Klan down there, don't worry if there's the burning cross outside your house, it's just to welcome you.. All these sorts of things really which were kind of deep rooted racism rearing its head back in the past. And one of the things at this meeting, I said its only been my first day, what is that sign all about: the little white town? Everyone burst into raucous fits of laughter, it was very amusing for everyone, and I got even more angry because I didn't know what the joke was about and apparently there's a Kipling book called 'the little white town' and years gone by the whole time had white-washed buildings to ensure the sea-faring community could see the coastline and the white buildings when the weather

wasn't so good. But they sort of made the connection when I asked the question, but my feelings were quite mixed really because I didn't know what to expect, you are going through a rural place like north Devon as a black officer and I knew there were going to be some issues. 16.42 But what satisfied me really is that they were based on ignorance as opposed to any deep-rooted prejudices about me, which I felt much more comfortable about.

Q. So there was something about that which enabled you to deal with it in a different way?

Yes, very much so.

Q. If I could ask you some more personal questions, so you went to North Devon, when did you actually arrive in Exeter?

As part of a development process I was engaged in - I was always very keen to keep developing myself and proving myself in the organisation - I volunteered to do some project work at headquarters which is based in Exeter at Middlemoor, so I came to Middlemoor about 5 1/2 years ago and I started leading on some key projects in the organisation. One was a custody project looking at our custody systems and how people are when we arrest them when they come through our doors, what systems we use. So I developed that and helped with the roll out of that force-wide and then I was asked to go and help in our people services HR group where I was involved in a number of management issues and looked at the force and how we could recruit more people from minority, ethnic communities. So I started a positive action programme to look at the make-up of the force and how we could be more representative in Devon and Cornwall in recruiting more ethnic minority people to work as both police staff in our support roles and police community support officers and police officers and at that point we were recruiting quite heavily and it was making some inroads really trying to breakdown the barriers as to why people don't apply from ethnic minorities to the police, which were mainly centred around trust and confidence issues.

Q. So have you found in the work you've done that there's been an increase in officers coming from BME backgrounds?

Yes, probably a mild success as opposed to a roaring success but we did manage to recruit a number of people through my positive action programme entering schemes that we employed and currently at the moment with a staff ratio of 1,100 officers we've got about 17 minority ethnic community officers working for us now.

19.41

Q. So do you feel that's reflective of the black minority community in Exeter for example, or Devon, Cornwall?

No, it's still woefully low and I haven't looked at the new Census data yet, but the 2001 Census that we were working on, we were looking at about 3% of our workforce should be from minority ethnic community. Currently where we are at the minute, we are just under 1%, so we've got a long way to go, there's absolutely no way that that amount of people are being properly represented. There are a number of issues that we looked at that came into the mix, there is a large Polish community here in the South West and a large Chinese community in the Plymouth area, and part of the problem I had was convincing people, police managers, budget holders - people above me really, that this was a real issue because they couldn't see, or wouldn't admit to seeing, that we in the South West were

diversity rich 20.58. You know, it was very much we don't need to worry about that because we don't have vast populations of minority ethnic to represent here in Devon and Cornwall and actually the truth is that we do - I don't know what the latest Census figures are, I haven't had a chance to look at it - but back in the 2001 Census we should have been at least 3% of our staff from a standing point from there on in. Cos as we now face our budget cuts and everything else, we are doing nothing but losing staff at the moment which is worrying because there are no new fresh officers, police staff coming in from other areas and from areas where we need particular skills, like I said before, Polish speaking officers or Chinese community representation.

Q. So it's interesting to hear that you know the community in Exeter to be a diverse one but it may not be obviously diverse.

Yes and the easy argument I used to use is that people need to open their eyes - in every town or city there are always fast food restaurants, Chinese Take-aways, Indian restaurants those sorts of place - you can see people if you look for them, people who are visibly ethnic minority around Exeter, mid and east Plymouth - in those large conurbations areas of Devon and Cornwall there clearly is - it's just a case of people don't choose to see them I think sometimes.

22.50

Q. So you see that as clearly one of your roles, highlighting that?

One of the things I did when I came here was I wanted to start a network and started the Ethnic Minority Police Association here and basically that meant that we tried to identify all of the minority ethnic people working for us and very often we'd all get together, have meetings, discuss our issues, talk about what mattered to them, some of the challenges people are facing and very much support each other in this organisation so they don't feel isolated or alone, they are not walking or treading a path that no-one has trodden before - we are all walking the same path together - and the number of issues we encounter, we will help

23.30

will help us support one another, that's what it's about.

Q. Are some of those things you would have felt as a police officer in your career?

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Yes, absolutely, there are still a number of issues for minority ethnic staff in any large organisation where people experience themselves being treated differently which then begs the huge question - why did that person get treated the way they were treated and why were they treated that differently. And certainly it has been my experience and certainly I can't shy away from the fact that in my 25 years, yes I've experienced internal racism at all levels I'm afraid to say, because I represent the police service in England and Wales and see myself as somebody who is there to help support individuals and perhaps help people where I can, pull them up that ladder and make sure that ladder is fixed in place every time I move up.

Q. So how have you found that different in Exeter?

In Exeter I've felt very much at ease and almost back to being in a city mentality, where people can't be bothered with other people, they are going about their business because

they are busy, they've got things to do, they are coming here to shop, to go to work and there isn't that idleness about people in a city kind of environment where they stop and look and wonder and chat and gossip, you know, pontificate as they do in smaller, rural towns - smaller mentality type of area. Here, the feeling and you very much feel it when you go to meetings, particularly from people in the community they almost feel quite proud for you that you've achieved, or walked in because you are the local commander from the area etc. So there is a much more of a warm feeling - I can't really put my finger on it more than that. but I certainly don't feel hostile, or angry or any of those feelings that I did have in North Devon.

Q. So you've been in Exeter for 5 years and you mentioned your wife, do you have children?

No we don't - we've been married for 20 years, we made a conscious decision not to have children purely and simply because for no other reason than we are both really selfish and we love our holidays and we love to just get away whenever we want to and to uproot ourselves and do something on the spur of the moment. And we just love travelling and I don't think we've seen half the world we'd love to see and if we had children or more ties etc.... we are a bit travel bugged at the moment.

Q. So you mind if I ask where your wife is originally from?

She is white, European and she is from Westminster (born at Westminster) - we met after I was in the police. My wife was part of the station enquiry team, so she would answer calls at the front desk at the police station, and I would often go down as a young pc to get advice from here as to filling out forms etc and we just developed a relationship from there.

28.15

Q. And how is it having a mixed relationship marriage?

It's really quite normal for me, I don't see the difference, but my wife does oddly. If we are going through the airport check-in and everybody is walking past and I stroll up and get stopped, it's very much a case that my wife will turn round and say, they've only stopped you because you are black, different they've only done this because of that. And even simple things, I once remember at Tesco's as the delicatessen we were all waiting to be served and I was stood there trying to make eyes of the person serving and my wife has just despatched me to get some cheese etc at the delicatessen counter, and this lady was just serving people as they were turning up at the counter and of course I was stood there for a little bit and my wife came strolling up and 'why are you still here?'. 'Well I am just waiting to be served, and that person came after you and well -I don't know, this lady just has an odd system of picking people who she is serving next'. And that was it, my wife decided she was going to remonstrate loudly there and then with this individual - so she sees an awful lot. At New Year's eve we went to Trafalgar Square and you know, the inevitable happened, I got stopped and my wife almost leapt on this officer and said 'Don't you dare stop my husband. Simply because he is black! Do you know who he...' and I never tell people when I'm off duty who I am or what I do 'do you know who he is, what he does for a living? You'd be very surprised', and clearly those officers were just doing their job and at that point I was just turning my pockets out as I was asked... But she gets very irate and very protective, and she sees it an awful lot. She will be the first person to point out to me if we are out somewhere, 'or look someone is giving you a funny look over there' or, what she normally does, if we are out somewhere she will rush over and give me

a big kiss and I say what's that for and she says for that chap over there staring at us, wondering if we are together, I've just confirmed that we are.

Q. That's really interesting because it sounds like she is noticing and you are not.

Absolutely, spot on.

Q. And is that because you were sharing earlier about your upbringing, that you were just brought up to be part of whoever you are?

Yes, you have to have two lives really, because with officers here or wherever I've worked, or where I hold a senior rank, people will pay their compliments, pay respect to that person whoever they are. But as soon as I take my uniform off, in my jeans Jo Public wandering in the streets whatever, I kind of don't have any difference in the way I conduct myself, I just assume I am who I am, I don't kind of change, but my wife then sees people treating me differently as to when I am in my uniform, because she will know having been in the police, how people respect officers, but it's interesting if I go to a store and am not served or don't get as good a service, it's very irritating for my wife.

32.27

Q. So those differences that she seems to be more aware of, do you think they are everywhere whether in London or Oxford or Exeter?

Yes, I think so. As I say we travel quite a lot and some places we go to it's much more ... strict Islam countries those place, it probably causes much more furore to people, whereas other places like Australia for instance, people just haven't batted an eyelid, so it's really about where we are. But certainly in Devon we haven't experienced anything adverse, it's just been those odd list incidents that happen.

Q. But you would say perhaps in the police force in Exeter you have experience some racism?

Yes in the police service I have - probably best leaving it as wide as that, but I am in a really privileged position, when I go out on the streets I wear a uniform and I am a representative of the Crown and if people offend me in any way, I've got some powers to deal with it and so people wouldn't dare and people that have in my 25 years of policing, where people have decided to overstep that mark and be overly racist, they've soon felt the full brunt of the law on them and have ended up having to pay me compensation for it on occasions. Where as your normal average member of the community going about their business, are not in such a privileged position to say you call me names, that's fine, but you over-step the mark you are likely to be arrested, but not everybody has that power do they?

Q. Is that just within the police force, or just generally, the idea that there are serious recriminations if they call you something?

35.01 Internally and externally I think really.

Q. Are you able to say about places within Exeter?

I certainly know that in the job that I do, we have our fair share of racist incidents where it amounts to either name calling of a racist nature or even assaultative behaviour which is

motivated by racism, so we do have our fair share in Exeter in terms of how our crime statistics are. We have a hate crime policy, we call it, where we give an enhanced investigation and service to those crimes and make sure they are treated with all due seriousness. So if a taxi driver, for instance, is racially abused in Exeter, they should receive a minimum level of standard of service from the investigation teams etc dealing with it. That's not to say we would deal with any other crime less, it just means we would have a minimum standard for people involved in race hate crimes where we understand and do an awful lot more particular around community and assurance victim satisfaction to ensure that we have covered all those areas that we need to, in much more depth because of the issues surrounding that. We have had in the past, incidents that started out small, you know small racial incidents that started out small could end up in large-scale public disorder if it's not treated seriously and dealt with robustly and if the police service, particularly Exeter which I've got responsibility for, particularly if we allow things to happen and things become the norm and language, attitudes, behaviours become the norm, then that's obviously when the fabric of society begins to breakdown. So that's why we are here, that's what our main raison d'etre is in this organisation, to ensure that we maintain standards of society so that every crime, I make sure that we review those crimes at a very senior level to ensure that we do maximise every opportunity, in terms of racist crimes when we deal with those as robustly as possible.

Q. and racism within the police force?

We've gone an awful long journey in my service really around racism within the police service amongst our own staff. I've had the luxury of working in two forces and coming to Exeter, as I've said before, has been an extremely refreshing period for me because people kind of just get on with being busy and getting stuff done and don't worry about the other stuff, the gossip and chat and stuff internally. So I haven't experienced particularly in the Exeter area any internal issues, so I'm happy to have that on record if you like, but I don't think we ought to rest on our laurels. There are still issues within the police service within Devon & Cornwall police. We just need to ensure that the language is right, it might not be about the hearts and minds of the individuals concerned, it's much more about just being aware and being respectful of each other's needs internally in Exeter. And that's where I think we've got a bit more of that journey to do before we get that right and again, I'm not just saying it's the police station, it's any large organisation I would imagine would have these kind of issues about people's attitudes and behaviour internally in the workplace and particularly in Exeter, I think the biggest issues for me are around just people not understanding what they are saying, knowing what the implications are of what they are saying. But it's only when you point things out to them that they say 'well I didn't mean to say that then'. Just simple language, when people talk about a witness, a victim or someone having some involvement with the police - referring to them as a 'Paki' for instance isn't just an abbreviation of the country where they are from, it actually does sound and is, to me, offensive. And I always make a point of telling officers about it, when I hear it, so that's just an example really of the level I am talking about, it's just language.

Q. So you live in Exeter with your wife - do you have any other family in Exeter or Devon?

41.6

No, when we transferred to Devon and Cornwall there was nobody we knew here, and we had to make new friends and all those kinds of things were quite a giant leap from Thames Valley. Family-wise, I am from a family of 6: 3 boys and 3 girls and I'm the last of the litter. All of us don't really contact each other so often for a large family. We weren't really that close as a family really - my brothers and sisters - there's a bit of a generation gap which



doesn't help, but also an awful lot of my family are clearly living their own lives and are busy. We don't really put family up there - this Christmas for instance, we must go and do this or that with the family... The only time the family really got together was when my father passed away about 9 years ago now. We haven't kind of conversed or been together since then. We're not that kind of family that we stay in contact regularly that kind of thing.

Q. and you spoke of when you were a child being brought up where your parents were having - it sounded like they were living a bit of a double life when they were doing their Hindu prayers for example but you guys weren't involved in that. So how do you feel about that now, where do you fit?

I don't know if you've ever seen the programme 'Who do you think you are?' but when I've been watching this programme when people are trying to trace their ancestry back and I suddenly thought to myself - I wonder if I went to trace my family back, how far I would be able to get? And I went on the website but wasn't able to get very far and I suppose that's an issue for me, I've always wanted to go. But every so often I do sit and wonder where I am, from what background and those sorts of things. Unfortunately I think because of the job I do, I try and look forward most of the time rather than backwards 44.20 if that makes sense, so I always try to look to what I am going to be doing next, what is my next opportunity and trying to prove myself in doing x, y or z etc and I very rarely look back and only have momentary lapses of I wonder what or I wonder where I am from.. I kind just sort of assume that when I look in the mirror what you see is what you get. And I know I should pay more attention to where I am from and what has made me what I am and where are my roots from, and I have had that longing. I once had an opportunity, I went to work, was seconded I just worked away from my normal place of work, and I was seconded to Trinidad and Tobago and went to work out there for a while on an operation and didn't realise but actually Guyana is right next door to Trinidad and you could actually go by bus to Guyana. And I had arranged this day to go to Guyana, just go over the border and just feel, just say that I've actually stepped on Guyanese soil, so to speak. But unfortunately the job I was doing at the time, all the tickets had been paid for etc and I wasn't able to go, so I missed out on that day and unfortunately that was the end of that. I did go back to Guyana when I was about 5 but I really can't remember anything about it - I was bitten to death by mosquitoes and big huge blue land crabs running everywhere underneath this house which was on stilts. And I remember sleeping in the hammock and that's really my only memory of Guyana. But I can kind of think about when I was in Trinidad what it must have been like - the climate, the temperature, the environment, the infrastructure etc. so I can kind of imagine what it was like and certainly from speaking to my mum even now, when you say would you ever go back? it's a very adamant NO, we will not go back because that for my mum particularly and probably for me if \*'m truthful would seem to be going back as in 'backwards' as opposed to back to where I was sort of thing. She sees going back to Guyana as 'that third world country' and I apologise to any people from Guyana listening to this but that's my mum's view not everybody's view and clearly not my view but you know it's not something that I have a burning desire to do. I think I've made my life, here I am in Exeter, made my friends, network, social and otherwise around here in Exeter, because that's where I am, that's the here and now of me 47.35 so that's interesting.

Q. So do you have any faith?

I did, and I probably did it out of protest really because of the Sunday school thing, I vowed then that I would follow the teachings and religious beliefs of Christianity and followed that

through, although I wouldn't profess to be the best Christian worshipper in the world - I don't go to church etc unless it's weddings and funerals and things like that and Christmas mass occasions, but in terms of having a belief and having something to believe in then it comes to being a Christian really.

Q. Coming back to that citizen question, so if I was to ask you 'how would you describe yourself in terms of citizenship' how would you answer.

OK - I always tick the 'black other' box in statistics and stuff because I don't really see myself as Asian, British or Afro Caribbean or Caribbean or whatever, so I always go for the black other because I am sure, although I don't have any proof of this, I am sure I do have Asian origins and Guyana - there's kind of no indigenous population in Guyana per se largely it's made up of people that have landed there for one reason or another: slave trade, silk trade, spices trade that kind of stuff. It was quite a busy place to be - certainly Portuguese, French influence and the British influence there of explorers and traders landed there, brought people with them on ships etc so I am sure that some of that labour force that they brought to those shores were from the Asian continent and so that's how I ended up being in South America, possibly, in terms of heritage. So I do think - and people often mistake me or look at me and think I'm an Asian person and start speaking to me in Gujarati or something and I'm looking at them vaguely until I declare to them that actually I am British and I don't know any other language I'm sorry. So in terms of my citizenship, I would say I am British.

50.20

Q. And do you find that people react to that: I'm British and don't speak any other language...

Yes, they do. It's very interesting really because quite often I have a conversation with somebody on the phone for instance, and I say ok I'll meet you in my office or wherever, and when they meet me, you can see them going Oh, you're Terry! Because I think the impression they must get, or the mental picture on the telephone and they're probably thinking, I wonder what he does look like - they get an impression of something different to what I actually look like possibly and so of course when I turn up as a black person in police uniform, it causes an eyebrow raising moment for them sometimes.

Q. That's probably interesting, because you probably cause that response no matter who is looking at you?

Yeh, it does and it's interesting because I kind of assume that people - when I say I'm speaking to Mr, or to Terry Bissessar, that Bissessar is a bit of a clue - but of course people have all different sounding names, it's not always Mr Smith or whatever being English sounding names that you could put an ethnicity to - at least I don't think so anymore in multicultural Britain.

Q. So it is possible that your roots beyond Guyana could have been Indian?

I think so, I definitely think so, just looking at my complexion and skin tone and colour - I agree I do look Asian, I could probably fit quite well in to an Asian community.

Q. You do look quite Punjabi.

Yes, somebody else said that before..

Q. Was it easy to make friends in Exeter, to find a social network?

Yes, I think it's been like anything really, it's who you are and kind of portray yourself etc and I've always been or tried to be who I am, just normal outgoing friendly-ish sort of person. When we moved to the area the first thing we did - when you introduce yourself to your neighbours, the first thing they ask is: 'what do you do for a living?' and that's always a big question for me really because do I say: I work for Devon and Cornwall police? Or do I say something different - I normally always go for the say something different bit first, I like to get them to know me first before I start with what I do for a living - I don't want to automatically say I work for the police. I normally say that I just work for local government and tend to fob people off that way because you don't want to put people off - you want to make friends and get on with people and very often saying you work for the police means they shut the door or don't invite you around, or they worry whether their tax is a day out or when they drive off whether they have their seat belts on - and all that sort of stuff. I just very much say I am an ordinary person just here to make a living and to get on with life really. Life is too short to worry about other things, and we've made some really good friends particularly in Exeter and have some great friends up in North Devon that we keep in contact with regularly. You make your bed how you sleep...

Q. It sounds like it's been fairly easy for you.

Yes, I like to think so.

Q. Can I come back to the family, your parents spoke another language - what language was that?

You know I don't know, because we always used to have - my Dad always used to play when he was quite merry, Indian music with obviously a different language and he would know what they were saying and never knew. I was only small then. When you knew your parents and wanted to talk about something you never pushed the point really. They were quite strict, my parents, so I never bothered to find out or worry about it. I suppose when I got into my teens I knew the reason why they were doing it as well - when I started to see and experience stuff, I thought I know why I wear jeans now and don't wear something different, and I know why my hair is cut short.. I kind of assimilate - I'm not quite comfortable with that, but I know why.

Q. Does that mean that your parents dress differently to how you would?

My parents dressed differently to when they were in Guyana - they westernised themselves, only on special occasions - if my mum was going to a wedding, she would wear a sari, that's the only time I ever saw my mum in a sari.

Q. What do you feel is the part of you that they are passing on to you - I know that is a very difficult question, but I mean like food?

I've got an awful lot, in terms of my culture, I'm comfortable that I am British and I don't need to find anything else to identify with - I am happy to be British, and I'm proud of the country that I belong to and am part of, and have served. I've had Guyanese food, I've had great recipes from mum on bake, roti, cooking, planting casava and all those sorts of wonderful cuisine dishes. My dad taught me an awful lot and I'm indebted to my dad, he's passed away sadly, but he always taught me to just strive and always do the best you can but I kind of got the philosophy of don't look back just look forward from him and that's kind

of what's driven me to be what I am, kind of thing. And I live that philosophy, for instance just this Tuesday gone, I've been to an interview and it was successful, so I am going to be working in London - as of next week - after Christmas, I'm being seconded to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary on promotion, so it's things like that - I've got that drive and enthusiasm and looking forward and pushing and challenging and stretching myself has probably been the legacy that my dad left me.

Q. So our project T.O.S is about making visible invisible histories from the past and also current histories, like yourself, in terms of the work you are doing within the community and I'm just wondering if I had to ask you what message you have to give to the people of Exeter - what would you tell us?

58.60

I think the message loud and clear from me would be that if you are from a minority, ethnic community in Exeter - mid or east really - is just follow your dreams, don't limit yourself in any way whatsoever. Somebody once told me this and I always remembered it really, that a minority ethnic person may look at a job and think - of those ten things that are required, I can only do seven so I probably won't apply for it. Whereas a white European person would probably look at the job and think I can only 4 of those ten things needed for that job, I'll definitely apply for it and probably get it. So if you are out there, just be comfortable in your own skin, but just be true to yourself and just follow those dreams... don't be the person that society wants you to be, just be the person that you want to be - if that makes sense?

Q. Such a lovely answer. I just wondered if there was something else that YOU want to share with us - a story...

The only thing probably in the project and the Telling our Stories issue for me, is really is let's keep highlighting and let's keep the flag flying about our multicultural history and ambassadors around Exeter - those pathfinders. Let's hope people are queuing up behind them and ensuring that those people who are out there who have got dreams to follow, do end up doing great things.

Q. Terry, it's been really fantastic speaking to you. Thank you for your time.