

INTERVIEW WITH SAMMY MUSANI

[SK]

This is Stacey and Keith completing the interview on the 14th of February, just after 1 o'clock. I'm here with Sami, again. Sami, can you confirm your full name and how you like to be addressed please?

[SM]

Of course, my full name is Sumayya Ahmed Nusani, but I prefer to be called Sami.

[SK]

Thank you. So, the first question is, can you tell us a little bit about your family and your earliest memories or first impressions of Whitney?

[SM]

Of course, during traffic times, it's like 40 minutes, so that just depends on the weather and the traffic. I moved to the UK, or to Carderton, which is a very small, village-y sort of town. I've been told it's a town, but you know what, it looks like a village to me.

It's very small, it's very rural, so the first time my family took me shopping, it was in Whitney. I had moved from Kuala Lumpur, which is the capital of Malaysia, so very noisy, very bustling, 24-hour city. I used to live in a high-rise flat on the 50th floor, where you had all manner of services available.

From there to Carderton, it was a little bit of a culture shock and a big change. By the time I actually got out to Whitney, it felt like coming home. It was the first place I'd seen since my arrival here, aside from the airport, which had escalators at the Marks & Spencer.

And I was like, oh my god, civilisation at last! So, my first impression of Whitney, I'd say, is very positive, because it was a proper town, not a village like what I would call where I lived. But rather, there was a market square, there were shops, there were brands I recognised.

For someone who's very homesick, without even realising that she's homesick, Whitney was like a warm, comforting hug, despite the fact that it was a very cold and rainy day. So, those were my first impressions of Whitney. So, like I said, I don't live in Whitney, I live in Carderton, even to this day, to my dismay.

And I have made every effort to try and move to Whitney, it's just not manifested itself yet, but I will keep on trying. So, like I said, I landed in the UK in April 2023. I came here to marry my wonderful partner, because only something that big would perpetuate a move and taking your whole life from one part of the world to a very different part of the world.

But, I'm very happy I came here, and I'm very happy I saw Whitney, because like I said, it reminded me so much of home, even though it's not exactly like it, but there were remnants, elements of the life that I'd left behind. And what keeps me here is basically the connectivity. What keeps me here in the UK, obviously, is my family.

I'm now married. Most days, very happily. And, well, Whitney specifically, Whitney is basically my gateway into the civilised world, as I like to think about it.

Whitney is my way into Oxford, Whitney is my way into the bigger shops, Whitney is my way into meeting different people from different diverse groups. Because in Malaysia, we are a multicultural society, it's very common to go out and hear five, six languages being spoken all around you. Whereas in Carderton, you'd be hard-pushed to find decent English.

But in Whitney, I remember the first time I was in Whitney, I heard fragments of Punjabi, of Mandarin, and it just really felt welcoming. So, I guess I keep coming back to Whitney whenever I feel a little bit homesick, because it's not the same, but it reminds me of home. And it's also really convenient, because I've made friends in Whitney now.

[SK]

How has Whitney, or the local community, or landscape, changed since you first arrived?

[SM]

So, like I said, I've only been here since 2023, so it's currently, what, February 2026, so just shy of about three years. I wouldn't say the landscape specifically has changed, it's more that I've gotten to know it better. And that's what I really appreciate.

Like, for example, last year I found out that we had something called the Bishop's Palace, which was near Mount House. I had not known this before, and surprisingly, neither had the locals who've lived here for 20-odd years. Or even longer, because it's such a tucked away little place.

But yeah, I have really loved learning the history of Whitney. Everything from when the bishops first came and settled the town, to why the Whitney Feast is celebrated, to the monkey that was smashed down on St Mary's Church, the poppet. I have made such wonderful connections, and the more I learn about it, the better.

And I feel like now I have something of a basis for an opinion on the town's matters, I suppose. Like, for example, current MP Charlie Maynard is trying to get the train station going, which was news to me because I didn't know, one, that Whitney had a train station, and the two, it had stopped. So that prompted me to learn more about Whitney, and I went, oh wow, that would be so helpful to have a train connection straight from Whitney into Oxford, as opposed to the million buses I now change, which may or may not, mostly not, are on time.

So I feel like, in terms of me getting to know Whitney, it has changed, just because I've gotten to know it better, know it more. I've particularly been well acquainted with the shopping district, as my partner will tell you. And all of the beauty salons and the nail places.

But yeah, I also work in and around Whitney now. So yeah, I think, again, Whitney hasn't changed so much geographically or culturally in my time here, it's just that I've now gotten to know it a lot more. So in that respect, it's changed, and I've enjoyed every moment of it.

[SK]

What are your favourite places to meet people in Whitney, and how has community life changed over time?

[SM]

My favourite places to meet? Right, okay. So it is so dependent on the weather, really.

And you know, when things are dependent on the weather here, then there is no dependency at all, is there? But when it's nice and sunny, oh, the Lees are absolutely gorgeous. I love going there for a picnic, I love walking around that area.

There's a little cafe there on the Lees, which has the nicest staff. So that's a really interesting place to meet people. Lately, I've been frequenting the Heritage Bakery on Mill Street, which is a lovely, lovely shop.

You know, lots of cake, lots of nice hot drinks. Very friendly staff, and it's just, especially because in the winter months, it's so nice and warm and smells of good baking all the time. So that's been my usual haunt these days.

I also liked meeting people at the Cogs Farmhouse, but that is, again, weather dependent, the Cogs Farmhouse cafe, because in the winter, it gets very cold. In the summer, there's a nice seating area outside. Lots of families, lots of children playing around.

And it depends on what we're doing as well, because Whitney has a lot more restaurants than where I live in Clatterton. So if you want to go somewhere nice, you would almost always have to go into Whitney, which we call going to town. And another thing that should be something I put to my partner, see, we live in a village, because when you go into town, it's called going to Whitney.

So, yeah, in the cinema, oh gosh, I love going to Cinema World, and of course M&S, and yeah, Whitney is basically the place where I want to do what I would call a big shop or a decent shop, or meet friends or hang out with friends. Whitney is also a place which is more central than where I live, so if I wanted to meet friends from Oxford and they were driving to me, it's just more convenient to meet in Whitney, so I can take the bus into Whitney and they can drive into Whitney. So, oh, I don't drive, I'm visually impaired, so that helps there.

I think that context is important for this interview too. But yeah, so those are my favourite places to meet in Whitney, and again, people have not necessarily changed, I've just gotten to know them more, like I was saying earlier, and I come from a very diverse place, so it's very common to see, to hear multiple languages being spoken in Kuala Lumpur, which was the thing that I experienced in Whitney first when I got here. Fragments of Punjabi here, fragments of Mandarin there, it made me feel really good, and now I've gotten to actually know these communities.

For example, I now speak Vietnamese when I'm at the local nail places, or when I'm at Bubbles Beauty Salon, I get to speak Punjabi, or when I'm visiting residents at St Mary's Meadows, then I get to practise my proper English. So yeah, it's not so much changed, I've gotten to know people more, I've gotten to do more things, I've just familiarised myself and acclimatised to the town.

[SK]

Can you share a memorable day, object or place that reminds you of Whitney?

[SM]

Hmm, that's a really good question. I think I've kind of summarised all of my important memories of Whitney. If I had to pick an object, I think I would pick in the Market Square, I'm not sure if you know, there is a statue, I guess a statue or a board of a baker in front of a butcher's shop, a butcher in front of a butcher's shop, and an apron.

He just stands in the Market Square, like a cartoon baker thing. He is as tall as a man, he's life-size really, that's the word I'm looking for. And so, whenever I see him, I feel like, Hi, I'm in the Market Square, I know where I am!

Which is really important to me. So I think he's become such a symbol. I thought I was the only one who thought of him that way.

And then one day, I was in the Market Square and I heard, I wasn't intending to, I promise, but I overheard accidentally a phone conversation of a lady just telling someone, I'm in front of the effing butcher! The actual butcher! And I guess she must have had her phone on the speaker, because the person said, at the butcher's shop, No, in front of the man!

And that's how I know he was used as a signpost too. And he's just a jolly little cartoon fellow welcoming everybody to the butcher shop. I've never bought anything from the butchers, it's worth saying.

Not that butcher.

[SK]
But, is it?

[SM]
Well, I'll have to ask someone to take me one day. But it smells divine. When we go walking on our green walks for My Vision, we always pass by the Market Square, and the man is always just jolly friendly, greeting, you know, like, here's the butcher shop, and it helps that I'm always hungry when I'm walking.

But it smells so good in there. I've never went it in, because I've heard horror stories of sawdust on the floor and things.

[SK]
Not anymore.

[SM]
I hope not. Because that baffled me for a little bit, until it was explained to me it's to mop or absorb the blood. And not very enticing when you hear there's blood on the shop floor, you don't really want to go in, do you?

But it smells absolutely fantastic. So I think that's one object or symbol of Whitney that I always think of. In my head, it's like, Whitney is that jolly little butcher man in his green apron, I believe.

[SK]
Finally, what are your hopes for the town's future?

[SM]
For now, my hope is to move there someday. I know it's a bit of a controversial take, since a lot of the people I speak to want to move out of Whitney. They don't think it's heading in the right direction.

But I suppose that really depends on where you're coming from. Those who've lived there for a very long time have now started to see the cracks in the façade, I suppose, or they've seen lots of things they would improve. But from where I am looking, I think Whitney has a lot more to offer.

Whitney would be so much central than where I live right now. Whitney would afford me the ability to travel more, it would afford me more independence, it would afford me better shopping options, better eateries, just better planning and I think people... I don't know.

I think Whitney's very safe as well, so I'm not entirely sure what I'd like to improve on it, but my personal hope is to move to Whitney. As opposed to the broader picture, I suppose Whitney is right now struggling with its identity. There are pockets of communities.

There are young families, there's the elderly community, the retirees, there's an immigrant community that's also bustling in Whitney, and I feel like they don't necessarily always possibly interlink or are even intentionally designed to organically interact. I don't see very much intent on a government level or a council level or whoever the people in power may be, I don't see a lot of intent on their part in trying to make these communities come together and live as a part of a single town. Right now, all of the effort seems to be from the communities themselves and very naturally, when you're forming your own community, you kind of segment yourself away from the others and I feel like that could be so much better planned and designed because I don't see any reason why Whitney couldn't be more like London or couldn't be more like Birmingham or couldn't be more like even parts of Wales and Scotland where there's a lot of interlinkage, there's a lot of homogenous, organic chemistry in how the communities come together, whereas here, it seems still unintentionally but rather segregated. So I think some intent on the government's part or the ruling authority's part would be really good to make sure everybody felt that they were welcome, to make sure that everybody felt they were included in the joint decision making of which direction the town should be heading towards and I must say that Charlie Maynard, our MP, is doing a really good job of that at the minute. I won't bore you with my politics or my views on certain parties in power but he has been making a concerted effort to basically bring together people from different backgrounds and diverse sects of society and I would like to see more of that in the future, really.

[SK]

That's all my questions for this evening. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

[SM]

Well, I think we've covered most of it. I'm sure you're really bored of listening to me by now. I apologise, I do tend to ramble on and on but I do love Whitney as a town

and I really do hope that it does go towards a direction that is more positive and uplifting.

It seems to be heading there but, as always, progress is too slow and too infrequent to be measured by just one individual. I think progress is better viewed in hindsight when you see things develop over centuries or even decades. I think children growing up in Whitney now will look fondly on it 20 years from now but right now they just want to go to school and get out and go to Oxford.

I do hope that more connectivity happens. I do hope more interactive communities get promoted. I do hope that the sanitation issues get addressed.

I do hope that the parking in Whitney remains free because that's really important. It is. And that's not just for Whitney.

I've also heard legend has it that Whitney's Wetherspoon is better than most Wetherspoons in the country. I'd really like some sort of formal recognition of that or at least understanding why that might be the case. So, yeah, those are all of my hopes and my impressions and my thoughts on Whitney.

[SK]
Lovely. Thank you for your time, Stacey.

[SM]
You're very welcome, Stacey.