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Interview Details

Name of interviewee: Ali

Project: Stadium of Stories

Date of interview: 28/10/16

Language: English

Venue: Friends Coffee House

Name of interviewer: Uzma Ravat

Length of interview: 25:11

Transcribed by: Uzma Ravat

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Okay so that's recording, umm can I just ask you to state your name and your date of birth?

Erm my name is Ali, Date of birth XX XX 1975

Thank you. Erm Yeah so would you just mind telling me a little bit about your café?

Umm this is called Friends Coffee House; we do all sort of breads, sandwiches, bagels and full English breakfast. Umm lunch and dinner, omelettes, that kind of things, very used to West Ham people come and eat but they are gone now.

Erm so where are your influences from for your food choices?

Italy

Okay, and when did you open?

Umm I've been here ten years. Before then I had another shop right across the road. It used to be Friends but now it's called Café de Lounge, that was mine alone. But I had to get rid of it 'cos of the.. my family reasons so I'm slowly down to one shop. So this is the one I got now here, combined we've been sixteen years in both business.

That's amazing, so you've seen lots of change

Yeah of course yeah, a lot of things. About the old toilets, outside the... butchers now. Erm that's changed as well, used to be a toilets there. Right in the middle of the Barking Road.

Interesting

Yeah, Heritage (laughs)

Umm how, so why did you choose this area in particular?

Umm I used to work across the road in a Kebab shop. Er there's no reason I choose this area, just the shop was available. I took the shop, area needed the coffee shop which is there wasn't sixteen years ago. There was erm old English style cafes, so needed cappuccino, latte, mocha all that kind of stuff. So I thought it would be good idea to start it. Where and they do community.

Fantastic, Do you live locally?

Yup, I live above the shop. That's the reason between two shops I choose this one. Erm where I was in the other shop I had to rent a flat and pay like almost £20,000 a year and plus the shops rent and rates and gas and electricity. I thought because this one had accommodation upstairs, I choose this one to stay here. (Pause)

Erm, so just a little bit about the local community who uses your café, who are your customers?

Umm in local community, oh that's a tricky one. When it comes to the some of the Asian people they don't socialise they don't go out, like whereas these Europeans just come into the country. Russians, Lithuanians, Polish people. Umm well another reason they do come out and have espressos or do gathering, because they live in the rooms. That helps us, which is big help, which is um pretty happy about it. Other than that umm we got all sorts of customers from office workers, to schools. We do event catering; we used to do West Ham as well doing mascots. Pack lunches for them, yeah they moved to Stratford now, it's not worth for us to go all the way there and I'm sure- heard they got different people dealing with the catering side of the new stadium. (Pause)

Erm so has it, can you just describe the atmosphere when match day was on, at your café?

Ooh match days, the beginning is always the same. Everyone is happy,

(Laughs)

Everyone is getting drunk or getting fat but on the end, depends what team they played against. Or what happened, if they win or lost, umm then it would've been changed but the last game they played here with Man United that's unforgettable. I'll never forget that game, even though we had Millwall here next time and different different teams. It was the Messis or XXX like Man United. (0:04:09:2) No way I'll forget that day.

Why was it unforgettable?

‘Cos of the fights and the behaviour of the fans and there was nonsense what they done that day and I thought they disagree with it and just after that game, I was pleased that they have left. I don’t have to see them no more, don’t have to serve them no more and that makes my Sundays as Sundays, my evenings as evenings or my Saturdays Saturday now. Bank holidays are bank holiday’s now erm because of West Ham we would never be able to book a holiday because there is a game. Or Tuesday night I had to call staff in to come and work until eight, nine o clock to you know serve them. Now I don’t have to do none of that, in a way I’m well pleased.

How has the move affected your business do you think?

Umm I probably the only one business around here, happy about it as I said, because we are restaurant, we don’t have no turnover on the tables, it wasn’t making any like profit. (Ambulance Siren) It was making, no lies but when you hear the pubs and err fish and chips and pie and mash, they used to take £20,000 on a match day. We used to take just over 1000 quid. So it wasn’t worth it for me. In anyway shape or business wise because what we do here, we sell breakfast, erm sandwiches and all that, where it takes five minutes to get it ready and give it to the people. By the time they sit, they leave; by the time they leave I wasn’t earning enough out of it. I was making money no lie, a couple of hundred quid. But when you hear the pubs and pie and mash or chicken and chips or fish and chips they’re next please, yes please. Next please, yes please, with every thirty seconds they were taking pounds, pounds loads and loads of money out of people. They are the one lost. I feel sorry for them but in a good way, they will be loads and loads of builders for next five or six years, by the time they finish the building work. That will generate money to community again, every single shop will benefit out of it, from the builders. Umm a strong experience from Plaistow hospital also being knocked down soon as well so builders do it more than fans and they don’t drink as much as the fans so all pleased.

So do you consider yourself more of a community café?

Umm sort of yeah, I lived here twenty – just over twenty years so I know the West Ham. I know the extension of the stadium when they done it. I was like young lad, now I’m forties but maybe that’s why I’m happy that they went. Because it was too much headache, trust.

Are you not a west ham fan?

I do support West Ham but I do fancy different teams as well because I’m Turkish and if any Turkish player plays in any other team, I do look at that games as well. Liverpool Emre Can you’ve got different different players in different teams. So even West Hams got one Turkish player I believe, I’m not sure I think so yeah.

Fantastic, umm so you mentioned that you did the catering for West Ham?

Yup, when they used to have events there, we used to do trays of sandwiches but recently we were only doing the mascots. The packed lunches for them, you know piece of fruit, carton of juice, bag of crisps and little sandwiches for little kids before they come out the ground umm but in the main time we had loads and loads of workers from there coming us you know there was a quite a big people working there but obviously it might be two or three hundred people but it's going to be twelve, four, five hundred builders there and more. Almost about a thousand people working there every single day, from electricians to plumbers and bricklayers to plasterers, security guards, loads and loads of people always generating money and we had the people who done the money Final Score there, here they were coming here as well. So they updated us what's going on with the Stadium and all that. So I don't know, it's come to an end (laughs) its good

Are you quite positive about the future of this café?

Yeah next five, six years its gonna generate money to everybody as I said the builders gonna be there, fish and chips and chicken and chips and the pubs and everyone will be making money again. But it will be spread, instead of having just one Saturday every two weeks or whenever they play, now you'll have just normal customers on a daily basis Monday-Saturday or Monday-Friday. So I'd be good, I mean it doesn't, it didn't affect me at all. I'm happy, on Saturdays I don't have to call more extra staff now. Me and just my normal staff can cope because football is a thing that people wanna come and watch the game and enjoy and go home but these days it's not happening. Even with the new stadium as well, you heard the news, what they're doing, the fans and the each other so I reckon especially Asian people, they're probably more happy than anybody else that you know they can go to green street now. Enjoy the street, enjoy the Queens Market. You know where there used to be fans, you couldn't walk down the road because there wouldn't care who you are, what you are they'd just ram you through so it's safer now to be out and about on a Saturday then on a match day.

Erm do you know how any of the other local business feel about the move

Oh of course, they're all my friends. The Boleyn Pub erm, Pie and Mash, even next door he sells Beds. He couldn't sell bed on match day but now he can because there's no one about. Like because of the fans people, local people wouldn't come out shopping, that's blatantly. But now they asked the people, as you say some of them lost severely, which is 20,000 or 30,000 per match is quite a bit money when it comes to end of the year. On my case, as I said couple of hundred quid ain't gonna affect me which is I do that Monday-Friday anyway. Loads and loads of deliveries and caterings, as I said we do events for the schools erm most of the schools in the community, they work with us. If you mention Friends Coffee House, they will know, say Oh yeah we get the sandwiches of them. All the way from Beckton to Canning Town to Barking round about to Romford Road, all the way to Stratford. Yeah I'll

do as I said a hundred people, seventy people, two hundred people, three hundred people. On the trays, sandwiches cut up, umm variety of fillings, we got fish, chicken and vegetarian. So every tray takes about ten, fifteen sandwiches. So if there's ten trays, 150 sandwiches job done, lovely. Then having facing the fans and come on where's my food, come on where's my barbecue sauce or brown sauce, where's that. Come on how long for the toast. I know they're a fan but when it comes from our end of, to view it's hard. All these people in the kitchen was going mad. Oh quick this order quickly, oh this is not cooked properly. Oh do this, do that. None of it now, just local people just come out more Saturdays now. As I said there's loads of Europeans they come here and have breakfast and bagels or anything omelettes, burgers, so I mean that is the man you wanna talk to. He used to run the Green Street Café and he's been there thirty odd years but they shut down. Err but it's nothing to do with West Ham. General day lease ran out so he sort of stayed there because West Ham is going anyway so he comes and works with us now. He has some experience we've been discussing it with the neighbours and people as I said, some not happy, some happy but hopefully when the building work properly settles in 'cos it's just started now everyone will be happy. But obviously as I said, some people lost I'm ma roll with it, there's nothing I can do except for me going to spend my money there to make them happy. That's it.

Fantastic, thank you so much. Erm so you mentioned that loads of local people use this, including schools and builders

Yup yup, offices

What do you think brings them to your shop? Why do you think they come?

Umm I would say uniqueness; it's unique what we do here. What I do the bagels, baguettes, Paninis they don't do it no one. The fillings I do here, no one does it. Erm shop is clean and neat. I always look after it. Some of the businesses in the area, old cafeterias or old green street café, they were spending to decorate it or keep it tidy. And this is family run business, I live above it. I care about my customer. I don't look at it like one goal, like 'oh let's just take his money on a match day' as you say like fans, you don't know when they're going to come or not. But even west ham fans they were my loyal customer. And I only got like ten fifteen tables, once that's full that's it. My regulars that's it and other people comes in, they look around oh no table go and where they go? Go outside fish and chips or pie or chicken and chips queue, half hour. They wouldn't wait here ten minutes for a table so no, were happy with the local people, serve them and now they will come find a table empty you know they be always there for us, as long as they come. As I said I've been here ten years plus six across the road, sixteen plus four years in the kebab shop. Twenty years of my service for them so, in the area as I say if you look at my menu or their menu you see the difference. So people will choose us, we don't do like, I'm not saying unhealthy but we do all the stuff healthy like this is not chicken and chips, it's not a fish and chips its sandwiches bagels like you know something healthy that people will enjoy, anytime of the day. The other shops mainly based

for evening meals and that kind of stuff. (Pause)

Fantastic, thanks erm. Yeah it's really interesting how you've managed to keep it a very community café so you're not too affected by it.

No erm I mean Monday to Friday as I said I'm doing okay. Saturday just a little bonus but what we do is local communities local business, MPW across the road, Newham Partnership working, they work with us we do good catering for them as well umm mainly like as I said the schools the one I work with, when I do these buffets, sandwich platters there's various, there's various people just one phone saying I got sixty people and that's it. I'd have to supply the sandwiches, drinks crisps or fruit platters, Danishes if it's a morning meeting, teas and coffees, fresh juices... so doing very well. So hopefully keep going on like as long as it takes I don't know, as I say I've been here twenty years, I know the people, what they up to I could have kept there used to be a Liberty's wine bar yeah used to be one of them pubs but its shut down. I took over, turned it into a café. As I said from my first shop across the road, err Café de Lounge erm I was killing it then, making loads and loads of money so I guess what I took this one as well. Monday to Friday is very important as I said now, the pub Monday to Friday, nothing there. Just match days was making money, I know the geezer, he suffers a little bit but there's nothing you can do, just got to you know look forward, keep working at the end of the day, not being funny, you can have £2000 profit or £200 profit, that £200 will still look after you. Same thing with £2000 you spend that 200 put 18 in the bank (laughs)

Um...so you've been along the same street for a number of years so have you had the same regulars?

yeah, new faces, regulars all sorts. As I said, twenty odd years been at Barking Road (Laughs)no people come and go you know. some people move to the area or new ones coming in, so within the past twenty years loads happening in Upton Park, a lot so I don't know from immigration, different different people move to the area from Romania, Russia, Lithuania, Poland so they're still about. They do come and drink and eat and most of the building work is done by them I think so, so obviously companies English, British but obviously the workers will be mostly foreigners so they'll come eat and drink. On that building time, everyone will make money, trust me so it won't be just Saturday and you call about ten people to come and help you out and you got a couple of people not well you know, you struggle you suffer, none of that happens now. Even though like they played Tuesday night there, I was here, I'd didn't even feel a thing which is good. I mean we do have still fans coming here before they go to Stratford because Stratford is expensive for them. There's no parking umm as I said they would come here, have food, fry up which is fiver ... go to Stratford. Now they won't even get a fry up. They won't get full English there I don't think so. They'll probably end up having KFC or Subway or some really silly meal because that's what Stratford's based on and if you go to somewhere where you can wine and dine and sit

down, they would take too much time, they won't like that. So I don't think so fans are happy but business is not happy, some of them as I said. We'll see what it comes to end I don't know because I'm speaking to a few people they're not gonna eat Stratford blah blah blah what can I say?

do you think it's gonna be increasingly common that they come to Green Street and Upton Park first and then head over to the stadium?

They are doing it but I don't know how long it's going to last because the reason they might come now, the stadiums still more or less there but once it's been knocked down and forgotten about it, I don't think you'll see any of them because the way the new stadium is built now, go in, watch the game go home, that's what they want from the fans. Don't even drink, don't even eat, just go in there, watch the flipping game, shut your mouth and go home because that's what I read on the papers today about yesterday or the day before, keeps saying oh no drinking, police this that that. How would you expect fans to be... I don't know? They never been football fan before themselves so who runs the club now? I suppose Kare... no clue. Otherwise if you ask any fan they will say look, like to go to my pub, have my pint, go to pie and mash have my pie, watch the game, yeah scream shout, have a few more drinks, go home. But these lot saying no this, no this no that and I think they either said it, worst case scenario they're gonna play the game without the fan. (laughs) so I think it might happen within a couple of years, not even that. So West Ham will have no fans to watch the game.

That will be very strange

Well that's what they're saying, they say if there's trouble, they already banned 200 of them and they've only been there what a couple of months, do you know what I mean so ... soon they'll have no fans (laughs) good luck to them that's all I say but in our ends, I'm very pleased I got no problems, no complaints. I just feel sorry for the fans, that's all I say. But these days erm, people who run the club, they run it by the numbers not by soul or mind or who cares, they don't

Do you still have regular fans who come in and talk to you or?

Some yes, but as I said it won't be no longer than well a year or this seasons. Especially they're doing bad this season so I don't think so they'll be happy bunny next season. So probably just go watch the game and go home as the as they, Karen she keeps asking them do, keep hearing them stories about she's a column writer on Sun newspaper so nothing good (laughs)

It seems like there's a very strong English tradition...

they have but it's all done now. All dusted everyone as XXX that's all here's no turning back now there's one, that's what they say, people who run the club. You know so, there's nothing

we can do. As I said I'm happy that my Saturdays are Saturdays now, Monday to Friday there's nothing we can do, keep, but carry on working or do what we're doing best, as I said that my Saturdays are Saturdays now. Monday to Friday I get that money, so don't need to any aggravation a headache, as I said just feeling sorry for the fans. Other than that no comment (Laughs)

That's perfect thank you

Could I just ask a little bit about your personal history?

Personal history... I'm from Turkey originally

Mmm

And I moved to UK when I was eighteen to Tunbridge Wells, Tunbridge wells, in the kebab shop across the road the best Turkish kebab house and I don't know why I stood there for four years and I thought that's enough let's do, you know I was getting older I thought let's do a little bit business and I started friends coffee house across the road and about ten years ago I had to let it go because it was too much you know one is enough. I'm happy with what I got now. Especially I had kids and girlfriend, just started relationship. Two businesses wasn't doing no good. Just work work work, so I thought I'll just keep one and I know what's going on. With the shop I think I might have left the shop and then call me saying this missing this what happen, come and fix this or bring this, ketchup ru out, I don't know silly, silly things so it's all done now (laughs)

So you've been here ten years in this shop?

In this one yeah, all in all as I said 14 years.

How have you found your time over at...

Time goes quick, just like days and weeks, weeks follows months, months follow years and before you know it I don't know time gone very quick. That's all I say. West Ham's gone from here, ain't gonna change nothing. Monday to Friday we're still working, time still goes quick so were happy.

How about your parents, were they born in Turkey?

No, they're still there yes, they never been here. Just stay out there. Keeping away from trouble (laughs)

(Laughs)

Uhm... what inspired you to start up the café from the kebab shop you were working at?

Before the kebab shop I used to work in a café. I used to work in shopping centres called XXX Italian based so I learnt everything from them or from that place and then when I moved to London I'm thinking they haven't got one so ever since then every things perfect no looking back doing well

Seems like quite a successful thing that will last

coffee, like us what we do especially... Green Tom, legend from Green Street Café is more famous than Tom Jones, trust me

(laughs)

Super, do you have anything to add?

No I'm bless as I said one thing I'll say just (horn beeps) bless the fans they're still going to the games, I wouldn't

(laughs)

I probably went their twice, all this twenty years

To watch games?

Yeah, to watch, only twice. But it's only because of friends and family lets go let's go otherwise from the first time I hated it. Years ago years ago they had a friendly Italian home game. Swearing shouting the language I thought that's not my place. And I thought never again I would rather sit home watch on telly or in a pub with mates than going out there the way they're swearing at the people nonsense have you ever been to it?

No I've never been to a game

You wouldn't go anyway. So if you go there its 'break his fucking legs, you cunt you mother fucker' or something and what for? He hasn't even touched the ball yet.
yeah?

Yeah that sounds -

Okay thanks for having me

Thank you so much for being interviewed

you should ask him a couple of questions



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(laughs)

Thank you.

[The End]

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