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Interviewer

Interviewee

Interview Details

Name of interviewee: Gopal Gautam

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Okay cool, erm can I ask you to start with your full name and your date of birth for the tape

Its Gopal Gautam, its XX XX 1984

Cool thank you, and can you tell me a little bit about your shop here?

(customer being served)

erm so we're in err Upton Park Station, it's a little kiosk we do erm newspapers, magazines, oyster top ups, sweets, chocolates drinks, stuff like that. So err when you come up the stairs, it'll be one of the first things that you see as you're coming up you know coming up through any of the platforms so yeah. We've been here for, well the shop itself has been here for near on about thirty, forty years.

Oh wow

But we've been here physically ... it'll be ten years. No it's been nine years so far so... this time next year it'll be ten years we've been here so yeah.

That's incredible; you'll probably seen lots of change over your ten years here

Yeah bits and bobs of change over the last... over the last ten years definitely, erm but yeah I would say... it's a completely station how it was maybe twenty, twenty five years back.

Okay, do you have any memories of it?

Small recollection, yeah small recollections of it err

Mhmm

It seemed a lot busier... in certain ways erm on a daily basis but now its's just... yeah... there's...there's still much more you know much more of a footfall going through because earlier mornings is just manic as you might have seen at some point. Erm so yeah there's err... there's a lot times where up until 9 o'clock we don't really get... me and my colleague here, we don't really get a chance to take a breath so even if you have a cup of tea it goes cold because we're just running round the whole time which is good,

Mmm, for business

It's better than twiddling your thumbs.

(Train Passing, Interference)

What about the local area, have you noticed any change or at Upton Park, Boleyn side?

Yeah... err over the last 10 years... (Station Announcement) noticed a change in people really... it's a ... it's an area that you know it's quite you know it's quite, got quite a strong kind of eastern European err community so what we started here, (Customer served) you know you get you know one group of people coming in kind of dominating your day and then the other ... you know couple of days later you get a you know different group of people. So it might be, people from Africa or Asia and then Europe so like it changes every couple of years it just kinds of shifts every now and then so err yeah at that moment its quite a strong kind of big eastern European community.

Yeah, its waves of migration come through and changing...Are you local to the area?

Yeah yeah I live in Manor Park

Okay,

**So quite local, so I've been walking through Green Street quite a long time now, years.
Yup**

Erm... can I ask if you're a West Ham fan?

I am yeah...

Okay

(Coughs) as a kid I used to be a Man United fan,

Mm

Because that's how it is you know, as a boy, as a kid you know you're, you're always jumping for the best team that's out there. Who's the best, who's at the top, Man United at that time. Mid-nineties they were the best team so I was kinda like seduced by

them, I think erm, they was (Customer Served, Shop Noise) late nineties there was a, a game on at West Ham and it was five pounds for kids to get in (shop staff serves a customer) and me and my brother and a couple of cousins we said yeah £5, I went in as a (interference) Man United Fan, came out as a West Ham fan. Thought why am I supporting a team that's miles away when I've got a team

Mm

Right on my doorstep so erm, so yeah, kinda regret supporting West Ham, it's a misery most of the time but it's good, it's alright.

Do you still regret being a West Ham fan?

Oh no, it's fine

(Laughs), Have you been to any matches at the Boleyn ground?

Yeah, yeah plenty. Err so, every season me and my brother we would try to go to at least a couple, two, three matches. Erm it would, it would become a lot harder with this place because you know with, with all the fans going through

Mhm

Erm we'd sell the match day programmes

Oh right

Err (coughs) so up until kick of time people are still running through and you know buying X,Y and X and then the programmes and so there was...you know whenever we would go, we would miss the first ten, fifteen minutes of it and sometimes you know you feel a bit short changed on what you're... paying your ticket for so...erm but yeah most of the time you know, two, three times a season we would go.

Okay, do you have any favourite matches or really memorable games?

Erm... yeah there's a couple. The first one, obviously. First time you actually go into a stadium and see the pitch you'd be like (whispers) oh my god that's amazing. Erm...

How old were you then?

I was (pause) fourteen, fifteen

Ah, okay

So it was the first time ever I was in a football arena, erm my brother ... maybe ten, eleven years old. So we were both just kind of awestruck by the whole thing. Erm, so

that... I don't think I'll ever forget that. You know there's a few moments that I, I don't think I can ever forget where I... 'cos it was the stand... the green street end

Mhm

and erm this is before it got knocked down to be built up again and so it was very tight, cramped you know. There was a lot of shouting and swearing and so a couple of my cousins who were seven or eight years old were like err just kind of covering their ears and stuff like that. Erm but yeah so there was a penalty on the other end and I remember, because I couldn't see, I had to stand up on the seat

(laughs)

to look and he missed the penalty and I kind of had my head in my hands and fell back and the guy behind me caught me and he went (claps hands) tap me like 'Go on mate, don't worry about it'. Erm so that. And then there was, earlier this year, we was against Liverpool. Err it was the F.A cup game, in the last – no no... yeah it was the F.A cup, it went to extra time. It was the last minute of extra time before it went to penalties and there was six of us. Three of us were west ham fans, no two of us were west ham fans, me and my brother, and then we were surrounded by Liverpool fans. All my cousins and his little boy all Liverpool fans XXX (0:07:02:4). And so they were pretending to be West Ham fans and erm when West Ham scored in the last minute they kind of had to you know begrudgingly clap. So that was a joyous XXX (0:07:14:9)

(laughs)

So that's probably one of my favourite memories

It sounds like football was very much a family affair.

yeah, yeah. Most definitely. Even now, me and my brother made sure that we've gone to the new stadium a few times (interference, train passes) since its open. Its good, it's not quite home yet but it's all right

I'd love to come back to that, erm you mentioned earlier that you sold programmes for West Ham here

Yep so err when we started here, the fellow that was here before us err used to sell programmes and he used to sell 'em err in the little corner just opposite there.

Ah cool

but as you're coming out, err as you're coming out from up the stairs he had a little stall set up there he could sell programmes there or you could sell them outside on the middle err the middle exit. (Staff serve a customer) And erm the TFL you can't sell them out there so we started selling them in here. Which (coughs) worked out in terms of business it worked out a lot better in terms of people walk in and you know, they buy a programme and they go alright, give a chocolate, crisp, and drink instead, as well so err that worked out quite alright. And then we've sold them for near enough nine years I'd say? Nine out of the ten years, no eight out... eight out of the nine years that we been here. Err missed out on the first season for some reason. But yeah you'd get the same people coming in everyday err every day that there was a match on so erm

Mhm

Yeah so we... we almost knew you know if you had walked in, you know I would know exactly what you wanted, you want a programme you want these chocolates... these two chocolates and this drink and then you know... Sorry (Customer talks to interviewee)

(Recording Pauses)

Where were we?

Erm so you were talking about your regulars on match days.

Yeah so... Regulars would come in every day, every match day pretty much and erm we would know what they would want even if they didn't ask for anything. So get the bag ready for them and then go cheers and you know quick handshake and then, and then they're out. So...

That's incredible

And they would probably (pause) I would say yeah, in terms of customers, in terms of customers they were probably the easiest person to deal with. They come up the stairs, they know they want to get a programme or get a bottle of water or some chewing gums with it and they're in, they've got the money ready in their hand, boom and they're out. (Interference, train passes) and so if they, if its, you know if it's just a regular customer they would like looking around going okay, what do I want you know the line builds up behind them. But most of the time, match day fans they would go right, want that want that give me what I want so I can just get to the... get to the ground as soon as possible. Erm yeah and so (coughs) probably the busiest days that we had but probably the easi-like the most fun days.

Mm, yeah

Because you know you would start selling programmes around about 11 o clock erm and it would be 3 o clock and you wouldn't even realise it would just fly by

It would go fast, amazing, erm can you tell me a little bit about the atmosphere around here on match days?

Yeah, busy obviously it would be a lot of people when they, when I tell them that you know I've got a kiosk inside Upton Park station and you know the match day fans go through every week or two. They go oh, you know West ham fans are... isn't it a bit rough down there? Do you ever see any trouble? The only two times I've seen trouble really... erm is the Millwall game about seven or eight years ago erm and then was it last year when we had the Newcastle fans up there but you know it was just mainly because the Newcastle fans were drinking on the way in and were all kicking of downstairs err on the platform. Erm and then obviously the Millwall game a few years before that. Erm and then on the last day over here but most of the time like I would say ninety five percent of the time it would go off without any hitch erm they'd be... you'd you'd always feel that there was an important game, there was like a charged atmosphere within the station erm just because you know the.. you get a group of fans coming up the stairs... and they would be singing songs and sometimes that would spur everyone one and you have the whole station going boom boom boom and so that, those... those will be great moments. Erm but yeah, erm cheery... quite rushed... and quite... yeah I would say like a charged atmosphere.

Mmm it's quite a big operation on match days with the stations and the entrances and exits...

Yeah there was a few times the last few years where we had the issue of people trying to come in and get down the platform and because there were so many people coming up there was just a big blockage for about ten minutes, so there would be erm a bit of a panicked atmosphere with us two because we're like okay we just need to get these people out so we can sell these programmes and erm but most of the time yeah... charged and quite electric and quite err just yeah there was a few times where you could just feel it in the air where you know if it was an important game, like you know if it's against another London team or if its ... if it's a game that's really really important that they have to win you can just feel it and everyone's a bit more kind of you know looking a bit more awake and determined to get to the ground.

Mm

So...

How about after the matches?

Erm we would normally close

Ah okay,

At three, three-thirty? We tried opening a couple of times (train passes) they would normally shift the people, shift the fans out from around so... every now and again you know someone will try to nick under the gates and try to get a bottle of water but there was no point. We tried it a few times but it didn't really work so we thought okay, let's get home kind of you know

Yeah

Instead of running into the, into the crowd again

I suppose it gives you a chance to go home and watch the match as well?

Erm yeah

Or keep up with the results?

Yeah.. if if we can. Like a lot, a lot of the time we just try and get home and then watch it later on at night and just so... yeah I think if it... particularly on a Saturday try and get out before half four making sure that you know you're not getting caught in the home run.

Yeah it gets really really busy on weekend match days if I remember correctly. Erm how have you felt about West Ham moving from their Stadium to Stratford (train passes)

Erm, disappointing to be honest.

Okay

Just for the reasons I gave before, there's a really kind of you know nice kind of feeling that you get, a good feeling that you get when you wake up in the morning you know that (snaps fingers) the days gonna go really quickly because and your, your standing around and your serving people that, that you know that wanna see you and they're happy to see you and then and I feel in terms of the ground being moved from here t Stratford, the novelty of this area is gone. Erm it will be just like any other high street, pretty much erm or like you know err, maybe not like any other high street in terms of you know it will have a Sainsbury's, a , a Holland and Barrat, a Tescos, a few of the others you know highbrow shops but ... just in terms of like the novelty of the area being the stadium.

(Recording pauses)

No problem at all, yeah that's fine.

So erm yeah I think you'll get (Station announcement) completely different sort of person walking through the station to get to the ground and that's gone now. We've definitely noticed that in the last errr three or four months where even though there wasn't any football games (interference) you know conferences or weddings going on inside the ground there's no... and you get people walking through and they're always where the football ground tourists coming here going I wanna see West Ham's football ground I just go five minutes down the road you won't miss it and so that's gone. Err and now as I understand there's gonna be a big block of flats in place. So it's just gonna be it's gonna be another soulless block of flats unfortunately. Businesswise its probably the right, better thing for us because instead of 18 match days, sorry 19 match days that we would get normally erm where we here we would get what 500 people buying something from us each and every Saturday erm we might get 300 people every day from the block of flats, even if they're just walking past. Erm and they take notice of the shop one day. Err so that might be better in terms of business but it terms of yeah the novelty of the area I think it's a ... it's a bad thing that its happened to west ham. Erm and I've been to the new ground a few times and it's... I like it ...but.. have you been there?

I haven't been there no..

So... if you feel a little bit detached from it.

Is it because the game is further away?

Yeah there's a running track between, between the, the crowd and the pitch so it looks bright shiny beautiful but... everything looks amazing erm but from there at the moment it just looks, seems a little bit yeah... bit detached. Because its.. you know the teams not playing that great so that's not helping.

(laughs) do you have similar seats in the new stadium?

Erm we've kind of shifted around

okay, no particular section you were attached to?

At the old ground?

Mhm

Erm (pause) not really. There was different places had, different places around and

different atmosphere which was really good erm we sat behind the goal once where we had a couple of funny moments erm yeah there was a crazy old lady that we sat next to a few times erm last season because we managed to get the same seats over and over again. And there was a crazy old lady who was the most abusive old lady the whole time. It was just like, just like screaming at the players and shouting abuse and) erm and so .. but when that same player would score... oh your brilliant, you're really really good erm and so me and my brother were kind of nudging each other, oh she's really scary (whispers) erm but err yeah I think different places, different places in the ground have sort of different atmospheres.

Do you think the new stadium will be able to kind of encapsulate that charged...

It will take a while

(laughs) okay

We went to one game recently against Chelsea where the atmosphere was really good and that was because the team was playing really well. If the team continues to play well the atmosphere will be as good as the teams playing. Erm but in terms of making it home and making it feel like this is our ground, it will take a long, long time and it all just feels a little bit, I dunno, cold at the moment because have to do that fifteen, twenty minute walk from the station through to the stadium. Again it looks amazing but it will take time. I think it will be great but it will take time.

Yeah to establish their presence there

Yeah.

I've heard a few fans still come down to Boleyn or around Upton Park before matches.

Initially they did yeah err

Are you still selling programmes for matches?

We are ... we still have some left over from before

Okay

So... (Station announcement) yeah initially you know, especially during the summer you'd get people walking through and you know just coming to take pictures

Mhm

One last time

Yeah

Or picking up the last bits from the auction

Erm but yeah less so now, kind of now the stadiums completely closed they've starting knocking it down and so you might get the odd person walking through, I don't know. I don't know if they have bene but erm just come in and take pictures of last ...

Yeah I've seen quite a few around the statue of Bobby Moore

Yeah they were talking about moving the statue as well which erm

How do you feel about that?

Erm no, leave it please.

(laughs)

(laughs) leave us something. You know yeah

Yeah

Don't take everything away

Yeah I think if the statue goes they'll be no indication of...

Yeah if you came down in ten years, and everything was knocked down, flats built, statue gone you would never, you would never know there was a football ground here. Which is sad I think I think yeah you should get some sort of a... a ... some sort of a ... kind of..

Memorial?

What am I looking for? Yeah like ... kind of memorial? ... Something that we can remember the

Yeah

That we can mark this ... this was where had our stadium, where we had 100 or so you know year sof chaos at certain times.

Mm that's really, really exciting the... it think it was a really exciting time for fans, erm I feel like they established themselves at Boleyn, at the Boleyn ground.

Yeah like kind of. There was jokes going around West Ham fans saying erm oh yeah this new stadium's really nice and you know clean and spotless and they go oh give it a few months, we'll sort it out (laughs)...

How do you feel fans generally feel about the move because...

Erm 50/50 at the moment, from what I hear. Erm there's the people who are loving it this is great and erm there's then the other people who are saying this is terrible this is, you know, this... feels empty and cold and everything like that. I think if the team plays a lot better that the atmosphere will get better and people will just right yeah this is absolutely fine I'm loving this. But they'll be teething problems anyway we could have you know walked into a purposely built stadium for west ham and there would still have been teething problems and so this is typical west ham anyway to

(laughs)

have something good and royally mess it up so... so it's perfect for that sense.

How are you feeling about the clubs future?

50/50 as well... could go one way or the other. Knowing west ham it will probably go down but yeah... it could, it could be the best thing that ever happened to us but that remains to be seen.

Mm you mentioned earlier about how the move affects your business

Yeah

You mentioned that you think it's probably better in the long run

Yeah... I say that through kind of gritted teeth in the sense that I don't know, whether it will be. Erm but I'm just thinking like in you know purely with a business head on . if people do , if they're are 250 that go from the flats there and walk through here that you know, everyday that's more than what we would get on a regular basis er with the football fans but err I know what I'd prefer. In terms of just the atmosphere and the vibe of the place erm yeah and I... I don't know, I don't know. I think, I think it would be a good thing business wise. Again the novelty will go from the area. And it will be just like any other high street and a block of flats at the end, erm because green streets all that... you know this team last year, up until last year it was almost split where you had the market, the football stadium (train passes, interference) people going that way and then you had mainly the Asian contingent going that way for the Asian shops that way so there was you know there was a nice split (customer served) there sometimes you get a nice mix there as well and yeah so you would have you know up until late August , September we would have people walking through erm to take pictures rm you know take pictures I'm just gonna go for an Indian just further down and then I always knew once it got cold and dark people would stop coming because there's no point and once it starts raining its gonna be ever less of a point to go down.

Yeah... how long do you think you'll continue selling programmes for?

Just as long as I have them (laughs) these are all programmes from last year

Okay, they're still selling...

Err yeah every now again people come in and go oh I missed that one from last year or err or people come from far away .. picked up a few from last year so I've got loads of some erm and little of others, erm but yeah this year I haven't sold any programmes because again they've changed all the system around so the fellow who did supply us the programmes he's been taken of contract as well

Oh

So it's all within you know the London stadiums so they've hired out their own company and peoples and stuff like that and you know by the sounds of it all it was all chaos in the first couple for weeks because they don't quite know what to do or what to expect, (pause – to a customer) no were okay, we're okay - But yeah that's, still gonna have teething problems as well. But yeah we haven't sold any programmes this year, we haven't been in line to get them and it would have been a waste ... to keep them here

Mm

Because not many people are gonna buy them I've had three maybe four people asking erm you know if we sell this seasons programmes which si fair enough

It's a shame really because I feel like selling the programmes would help kind of connect with fan and help the fans help it feel a lot more local to the fans.

Yeah but if, if you're a West Ham fans and you live in let's say I don't know.. you live in errr er in Dagenham there's no other reason to come down here. Apart from seeing the stadium there's no other reason to come down here. So instead of getting on from Dagenham and getting of here, they'll just got straight to West Ham and get off sat Stratford... there's no other reason. So you know... the connections lovely, it'd be nice but they're not gonna go out their way just to... do an extra journey just to which is fair enough erm erm and my brother have already seen a few people, so the few matches that we've gone to this year erm we've seen you know regular customers you know someone's grabbed our shoulders from behind' what are you doing here!' so that's always quite nice erm and the last day was ... I don't know if you've ever moved house anywhere or anything like that ... when you're leaving a job or whatever that last (customer served) day everyone's shaking your hand, 'it's been a pleasure' and that was really really nice, really really nice day erm and so luckily we bumped into a few of those people at the new stadium so you know grabbing us saying 'oh you've got legs! We never knew you had legs!' cos they only see obviously you know (laughs)

(laughs)

the waist up so err so yeah its nice bumping into them

Sounds like a right little community of fans

Yeah, last year we went to on boxing day we went to Birmingham to see the Aston Villa game, me and my brother and err again e bumped into a couple of fans all getting the drinks in again really, really nice bunch um there's always, there's always a couple that make you know... he's a bit of a difficult customer but in general, in general there really, really nice bunch.

Thank you so much, have you got any last thoughts to add? About the move or your business or anything at all?

I don't know (laughs)

That's fine

Wish us luck really

(laughs)

Great thank you so much

Cool thank you.

THE END