

C A M B R I D G E UNTOLD

RECORDING THE LIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF MILL ROAD'S MINORITY COMMUNITIES

ISSUE 01 | £ 2.50
SUMMER 2007

MILL ROAD'S FIRST MAGAZINE FEATURING

Denzil Gordon
Piero Di Angelico
Priscilla Gee
Sharon Chang
Abdul Arain
Abubakar Siddiq
Arafat Siddiq
Cenkar Ucan
Neide Carvalho
Zarrar Arshad
Kym Lau
Nather Al-Khatib
Shapour Meftah
Errol Chisholm

PLUS

Suzy Oakes
Ann Chang
Sinh Le
Shilpa Shah
Suresh Patel
Timothy Winter
Sheridan James
Valerie Neal
Gabriela Di Angelica

**"IF YOU DON'T KNOW MILL ROAD
YOU DON'T KNOW CAMBRIDGE!"**

- ALI SMITH



Sheltered Housing

The service

Our sheltered housing service provides housing with support to older people. We currently house 750 people in 16 sheltered housing schemes located throughout the city. The schemes vary in size and in terms of the facilities they provide, but most offer communal lounges and laundry facilities.

Support to tenants is provided by staff who spend time at each scheme every day, Monday to Friday. Every tenant has a support plan which is an agreement between the tenant and staff member on the level and type of support they are to receive. The support provided will depend upon an individual's specific needs but may include help with:

- getting repairs done
- obtaining furniture
- filling in forms
- accessing appropriate transport
- getting involved in social activities

Our sheltered housing staff do not provide certain types of help, such as:

- help with washing and dressing
- administering medication
- specialist benefits advice
- accompanying tenants to appointments

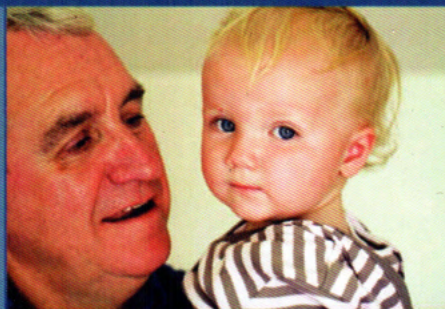
If a tenant needs help that our staff are unable to provide we will, with the tenant's agreement, refer them to other services which can assist them.

A range of social activities take place in the schemes, most of which are open to members of the wider community.

Eligibility criteria

In order to be considered for sheltered housing a person needs to be:

- Over 55 years old (although there can be exceptions to this)
- On Cambridge City Council's housing register
- In need of housing-related support in order to continue living independently



How to apply

Contact the City Council's Housing Needs team to make an application to the housing register and tell them that you are interested in sheltered housing.

You can contact the Housing Needs team by:

- calling into Hobson House in Regent street
- Telephone them on **01223 458 004**
- E-mail them at tracey.hine@cambridge.gov.uk



Welcome

CAMBRIDGE IS SO MUCH MORE THAN UNIVERSITIES!

Mill Road has become a part of my community for the last six years here in Cambridge, with Momentum Arts being only a few feet away on Tenison Road. Going to the shops on lunch breaks, ordering catering for meetings and training days, getting to know the names of the shopkeepers over the years and a bit about their lives and families, Christmas shopping at the Cherry Tree, not to mention last minute postings at Al-Amins and sumptuous dinners at Kymmoy's, just enjoying the multicultural district that is Mill Road. Sometimes just dropping in for a chat at Sweet 'n' Spicy or ordering ice creams at Raj's on a hot summer day for colleagues and enjoying meals at Café Brazil. In fact, when I first moved to Cambridge I lived in Brookfields for a few weeks and experienced this unusual area first-hand and fell in love.

There have been a lot of changes in recent years, adding to the 'melting pot' of this corner of the world in the heart of Cambridge, including new events like the Winter Fair and discovering that many years ago what is now called Ditchburn Place used to be the Maternity Ward. This vibrant existence has been so for over 30 years and continues to grow.

On designing our project the Untold Stories, the missing link would have been not including this unique place and its people. We have been blessed in sourcing our local writer David Lambert who took on the task of interviewing and collating more than 14 stories and with each step discovering more and more inspirational journeys that needed to be heard.

It gives me great pleasure to share the Cambridge Untold magazine with you, thanks to our main sponsor the Heritage Lottery Fund in helping us to preserve the wonderful heritage of people and place. Working with a solid local team is important, so for this I extend our heartfelt thanks to the dynamic Inner Fig Creative company who undertook the design and layout of this magazine led by the creative force of Aiysha Malik.

Cambridge Untold will prove to be an inspiration to any age group. Inside these pages lie heart-rending stories from Boat People, a man, his bucket and ladder and a dream in Stepping Up the Ladder, to the cotton picking young girl in The Girl from Arapau, to a Flight from Baghdad and many more exciting and invigorating stories that will motivate your own journey towards success in spite of limitations, betrayals, and setbacks. As the stories unfold you will discover too that in spite of wars, poverty, abuse, the force of nature through storms, deaths and births, these are stories of perseverance, courage and great strength.

We hope the powerful stories between these pages will give you an even greater awareness of the beauty of the multi-ethnic fascinating journeys of the people of Cambridge and that because of these we can now enjoy a community that is alive and continues to grow with each day.

Included in these pages are people's dreams for Mill Road: my own is that it can one day be regenerated and become the wonderful renaissance that it promises to be with the help of each of us.

Go ahead now and enjoy this unique magazine Cambridge Untold – as it is now told!

Blessings,

Patricia Lashley

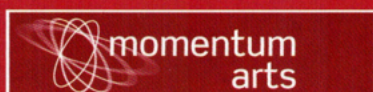
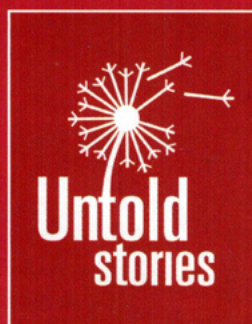




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 All Our Friends On Mill Road

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Karl Hartland – 209radio

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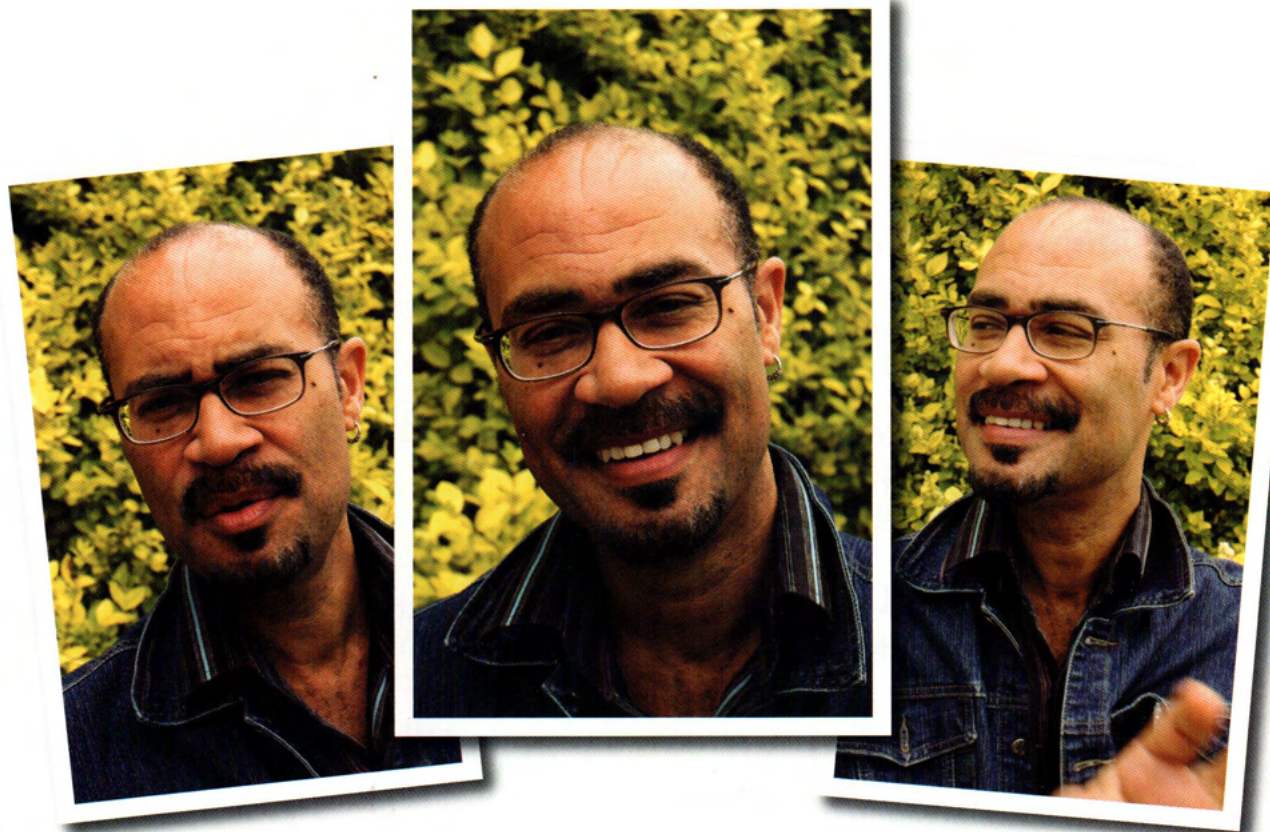
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WHAT'S THE STORY?

"When Cambridge Untold asked me to select fifteen Mill Road business owners and 'get their stories' I was unsure how I might go about it..." Writes DAVID LAMBERT.

When I approached potential interviewees, most had difficulty understanding what exactly I was after. You want to hear my story? One trader, I'm sure, saw me as a snoop from the Home Office enquiring about his status in the UK (perhaps it was the microphone wires dangling from my bag!). Most were initially bemused by the whole idea (who could possibly want to read about their story?). A few, while I was still sussing out who I might include, invited me in behind the counter and plied me with coffee, mint tea, meze or baklava, and started then and there recounting their lives.

By far the greatest challenge was getting busy entrepreneurs to book a slot when they might sit

down with a stranger and reminisce about their past. Many cheerfully put me off indefinitely until a 'less hectic' time.

I eventually heard their stories, whether between clients in a basement repair room, in a back of shop storeroom or down a telephone line to Jamaica. In each case I have been amazed at the honesty and generosity with which people have opened up and shared some of the most heartfelt moments of their lives. Here are memories of childhoods in distant lands, touching accounts of family members, as well as dramatic stories of war, revolution and persecution.

It's all there on Mill Road. ♦



MRS. FIXIT

MRS GEE AND HER SON PHILIP RUN
GEE'S ELECTRICAL SHOP.

'We left London in 1940 when my husband's parents' shop got damaged in the Woolwich docks bombing. His family set up here in Cambridge where he had relatives. We must be the oldest shop on Mill Road.

'I've seen it all. Times have certainly changed. In those days, if your wireless or vacuum cleaner broke down, you repaired it. A customer would come in and ask for a component. We sold resistors, capacitors, valves, everything. Of course nowadays, your vacuum stops working and you throw it away and buy a brand new one! All the faulty appliances go into land fills, don't they. It doesn't make much sense to me...'

As owner of one of the oldest shops on Mill Road, Priscilla Gee was chosen to open the first Winter Fair in 2005.

'I was so taken aback I couldn't refuse. They drove me to the city end of Mill Road in a pedicab. It was a great honour.' ♦

DESPERATELY SEEKING INGREDIENTS...



"A couple of Christmases ago I decided I'd had it with buying unwanted presents. What do you give family and friends who already have everything? Instead, I'd offer delicious homemade foods, each individually targeted at palates I knew well: nougat for my sister-in-law, mango chutney for my niece, cheesy oatcakes for my brother-in-law.... Research done, armed with a

long shopping list, I (somehow) found myself in the shrink wrapped, refrigerated aisles of Marks & Spencer. Not one thing on my list could I find! Not even flour. When I asked a uniformed assistant for help, she looked at me bemused: 'Oh, we don't do ingredients...'

Somewhat disgusted with the high street giants, I resolved my Christmas presents would be home made and locally bought. Popping in and out of twenty little shops on Mill Road, my rucksack was soon bulging with fresh green mango, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, rice-paper, flour (several kinds), lemons, spices, rose water, dark and milk chocolate, orange liqueur.... The only thing I couldn't source was glucose syrup. Even Al Amin's didn't seem to have quite the right thing. As I was asking Abdul Arain, the owner, where I might track some down, another customer overheard me. 'You want glucose syrup? I've got some at home you can have.' He turned out to be a highly trained chef from South Africa, and cheerfully gave me enough syrup for a batch of lovely nougat. He, and the wonderful shops on Mill Road, have all earned my eternal appreciation."

VALERIE NEAL
Neighbourhood Resident.



PASSIONATE ABOUT MILL ROAD

SUZY OAKES is one of the driving forces behind the Mill Road Winter Fair, now in its third year. She also runs www.mill-road.com: A site which tells you pretty much everything you could need to know about Cambridge's most vibrant, bohemian neighbourhood.

“**M**ill Road is an extraordinary street on which it is possible to drink Arabic coffee or fine wines; where you can worship in a Mosque, a Hindu shrine or a Baptist church; where you can eat foie gras or fish and chips, tom yum or chicken tikka lababda; where you can stock up on herbs and spices from aam to zedoary...”

So begins the Mill Road website which was set up with Suzy Oakes in 2005 and which gets 50 hits a day from people wanting to know anything about this street, from shop opening times to where they can buy free range lamb chops or have their nails styled. We are sitting in Suzy's back garden, a surprising oasis of greenery and calm a stone's throw from the bustling street she is so passionate about.

“We set up the website to publicise the first Winter Fair we ran in 2005 and it's grown from there really”, says Suzy. “The first year we had an attendance of about 8,000 and last year closer to 15,000. The aim is to make the Winter Fair a regular neighbourhood celebration without any commercial feel to it. Our budget is tiny, only £3000, and a lot of that goes on insurance.”

The one-day winter event which takes place on the first Saturday in December runs the entire length of Mill Road on both sides of the railway bridge and involves most shops and eateries in one way or another. ‘People pop in to The Nip In grocery with their children to have their hands decorated with beautiful henna designs, while Café Adriatic serves a cheap Croatian lunch - tripe stew! The Seoul Plaza gives out free kimchi (fermented cabbage) and sushi, while at Kymmoy's Noodle Bar you can warm up with a glass of green tea while having a handy lesson in how to use chopsticks! Over the bridge Cutlacks' often has a Christmas grotto and you can



have a ringside seat at an Insect Circus in Hope Yard.’

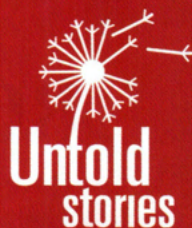
For many, the highlight of last year's Winter Fair was the exotic Chinese dragon in the street with drummers, or the Arco Iris samba band with its 70-strong anyone-can-join core membership, which attracted crowds on Donkey Green outside the swimming pool.

“The Fair came about because some people had stopped coming to this part of town to shop or eat”, Suzy explains. ‘The road gets a bad press and some people associate it with the disadvantaged one does see here, what the authorities sadly call “street life”. It's true, we have our problems. The cemetery just beyond my garden can be noisy at night when dealers gather there. I'm a Friend of Mill Road Cemetery and we organise regular needle pick-ups. But the presence of the disenfranchised is in itself a sign of the generous, cosmopolitan, accepting nature of the street's businesses and residents. We wanted to attract families back with the Winter Fair, so they could stroll along and see the stunning variety of what's on offer. And it's working. Incidence of anti-social behaviour has dropped sharply and now it is fair to say that Mill Road is as safe as anywhere in Cambridge.’

‘It takes constant effort and vigilance to keep a unique neighbourhood like this functioning. For instance, this month we've seen the closing of a very special independent bookstore, Brownes. It's been a part of what Mill Road is all about for over 30 years. Why has it had to close? Students ordering their books on Amazon, or buying from the giants in the town centre. In a way, we're all responsible for Browne's closure. We all have to think local and buy local. If we don't, a unique neighbourhood is at risk.’ ♦



HIGHLIGHTING THE PAST AND CELEBRATING THE PRESENT!



Untold Stories is a 3 year, arts-led history and heritage project funded and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund which was launched in November 2005. This project is dedicated to recording the lives and experiences of Cambridgeshire's Black and Minority Ethnic communities through four distinct strands:

- * Local and Historical Role Models
- * Reminiscence
- * Cambridge Untold Magazine
- * Storytelling: The Myths and Legends of the Diaspora

Untold Stories is proud to promote a better understanding of the diversity and richness of Cambridgeshire through its events and publications.

For more information on any of our programmes or to get involved, please do not hesitate to contact us:

BY POST

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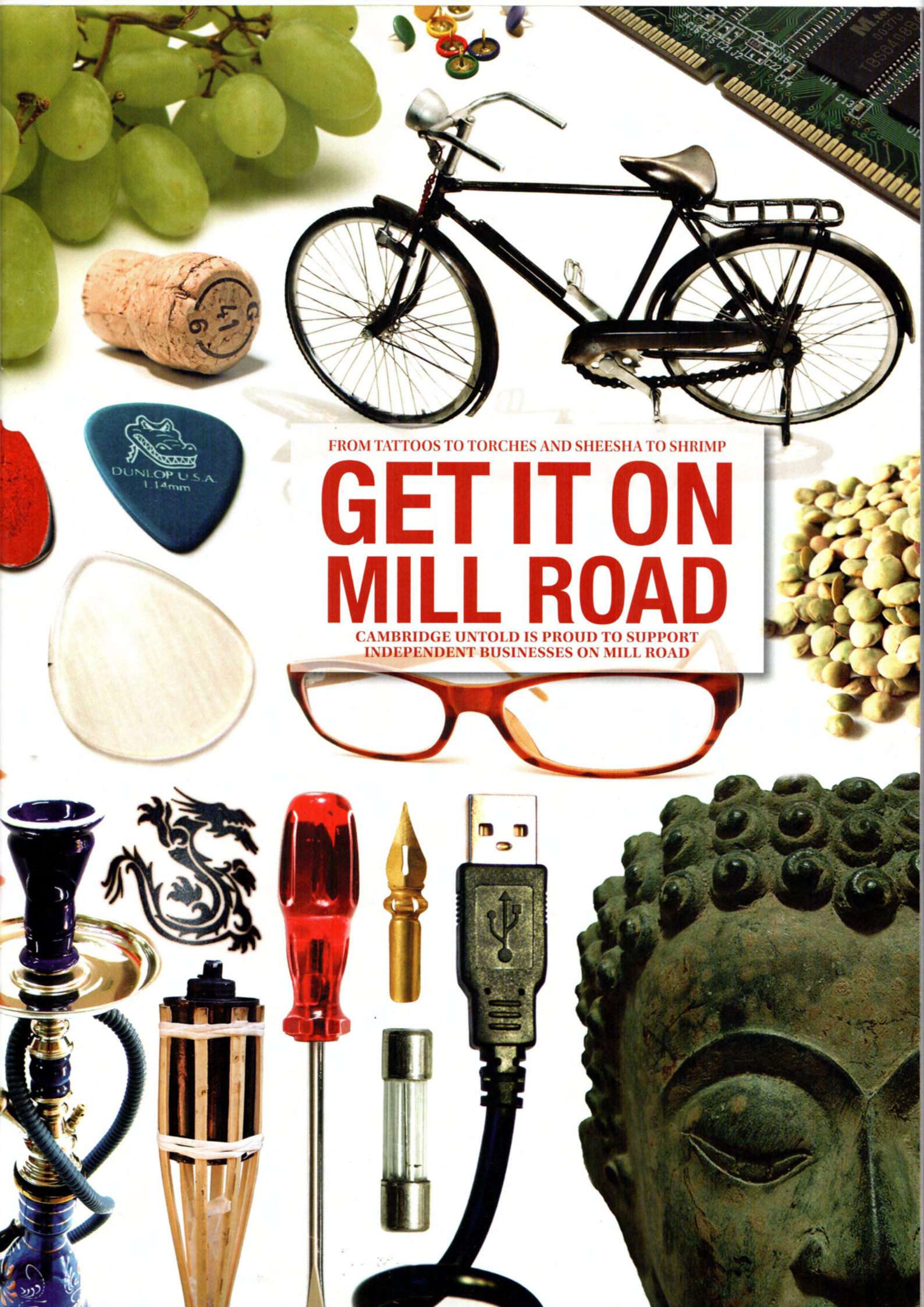
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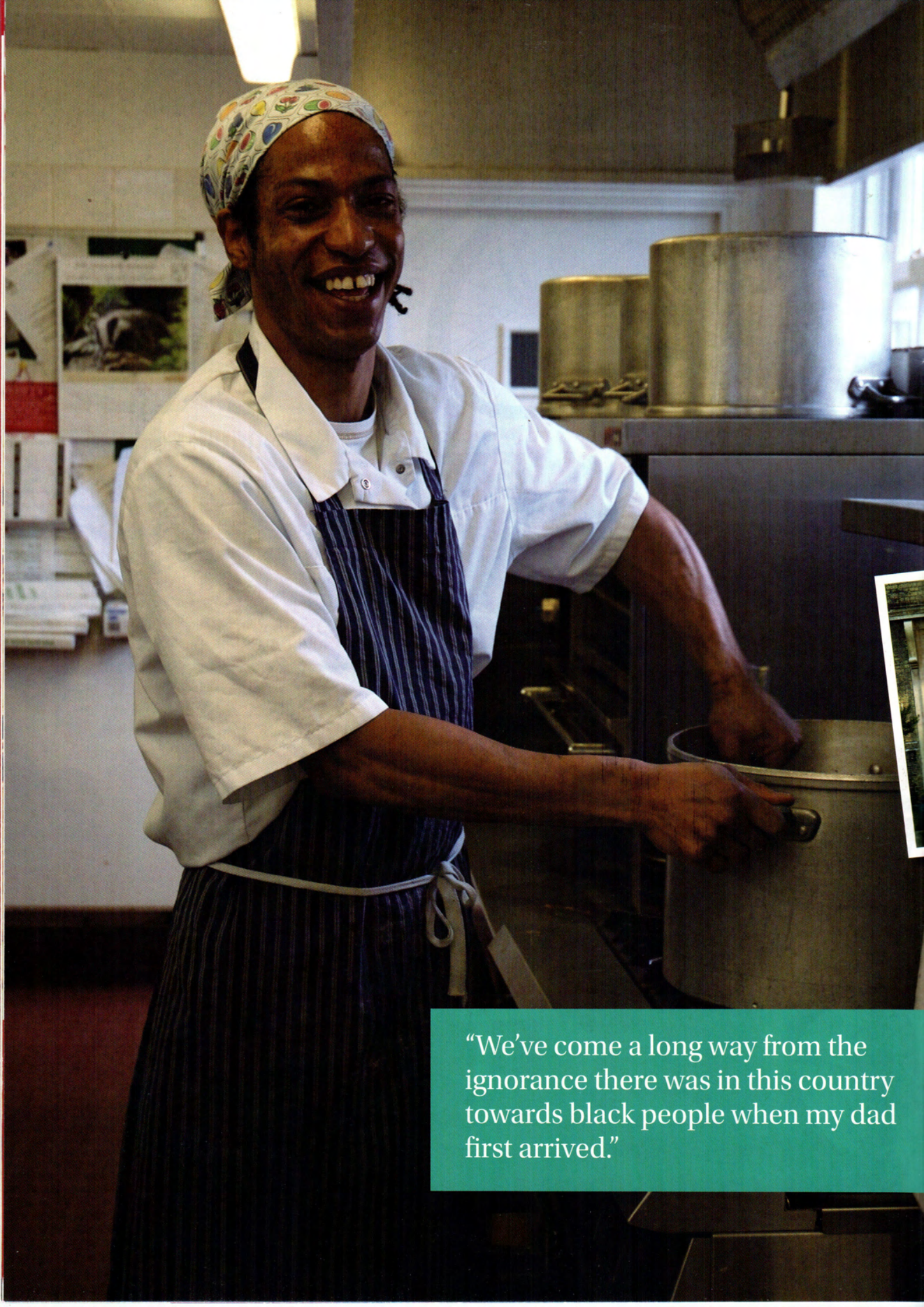




FROM TATTOOS TO TORCHES AND SHEESHA TO SHRIMP

GET IT ON MILL ROAD

CAMBRIDGE UNTOLD IS PROUD TO SUPPORT
INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES ON MILL ROAD



“We’ve come a long way from the ignorance there was in this country towards black people when my dad first arrived.”

CARIBBEAN MASTERCHEF

DENZIL GORDON was recently voted one of Momentum Arts Top 10 Black and Asian Local Role Models in Cambridgeshire. He works as a chef in the kitchens of the same building on Mill Road where, 30 years ago, he was born.



My dad came from Jamaica in 1958 when he was about 18. He worked in Bedford for the London Brick Company. He couldn't get a room; there were signs with No Blacks, No Irish. So he had to sleep with about 8 other people at his cousin's. He told me that every day they had to pack about 20,000 bricks off to London, they were rebuilding after the war. He got really strong heaving all those bricks. He used to come to Cambridge to visit another cousin in St Philip's Road. That's where he saw this picture of a young woman. He kept thinking about her. Had he seen her

before somewhere? So he asked his cousin who she was. In the end he actually sent for her from Jamaica! When she arrived it turned out she was the girl he'd seen waving to his ship from the quayside when he was leaving Kingston. She'd seemed to be looking at him, shouting out 'When are you going to take me to England?' He remembered her face. You've probably guessed she became my mum!

We've come a long way from the ignorance there was in this country towards black people when my dad first arrived. But it was there even in the early eighties, when I was just a kid at Sedley School. I remember one time I was walking down a passageway to the school and I saw a load of skinheads. I don't think I'd ever been that frightened before. They saw me and started calling me Jungle Bunny. That name really got me, it still does. They started coming after me and I legged it. It was like a Terminator film or something. I outran them but I'll never forget that day and the fear I felt.

When I was a teenager, I wanted the flashy clothes, the BMW and all of that. But gradually I realised that was the fake picture of the black man, that's the stereotype we see in films and on TV. You know, the gold tooth, gold chain and bracelet, the 50 Cent rapper image. I almost didn't take my GCSEs. It was the image thing again: it wasn't cool, so I wasn't going to go in for the exam. It was my sister who made me sit them. And I'm so glad she did. It's easy to fall into a stereotype, especially as a young black male, there aren't many alternatives. We do it to ourselves. In the black community if you aren't speaking 'street' and using the West Indian flex, yuh kna wa'ah mean, brudder, it's seen as talking posh. It's like our brains have been programmed.

I reckon a lot of it comes from some of the 'gangsta' rappers' lyrics and the macho image of the black guys who sing them. The rapper, Tupac, was at a Mike Tyson fight. Tupac got into an argument with a guy and beat him up. Later someone murdered Tupac. People think a rapper called Biggy Smalls killed him. Then Biggy Smalls got murdered too! Not very good role models. The funny thing is if you listen properly to the lyrics of a lot of these rappers, they're actually speaking out against violence. But the message isn't coming through. Of course, calling the record label Death Row Records doesn't help...

There are other role models out there, besides boxers and rappers. Take the black apprentice who won The Alan Sugar Award or and the black lawyer who won Mastermind 2004. People take the mickey out of Trevor McDonald, the news reader, just because he speaks properly. But we need people like him.

My dad's actually been my role model in many ways. Back in Jamaica he had to stop school at 10 and go out fishing and herding goats to bring money in. In England, after the brickworks, he worked at Pye in Chesterton cutting sheet metal. He lost two fingers, now they're attached with metal rods. Then he worked for British Rail laying tracks and a sleeper fell on the back of his heel. The way I see it, it would be a waste of his time coming here and going through all that, if I wasn't doing something with my life.

I used to go to the Romsey Mill Centre as a youth, and play football. The youth leader used to ask me to talk to some of the lads who were fighting and misbehaving. There was a lot of that in the early nineties; the police would be turning up all the time. Then the youth leader asks me, 'Would you like a job?' I was at Cambridge Regional College studying mechanics but I took the job as youth worker part time. We got them into football, deejaying, we went on a trip to Alton Towers. We applied to the Prince's Trust and got funding to buy football kits. That team is still going ten years on. I did a lot of deejaying, at the Fez Club, Route 66, and The Junction. With my cousin Kingsley Richards and a friend Damian Andriana from Madagascar we set up a deejay programme at The Mill. Channel 4 did a report on us. 'Troublesome' who started in that little deejaying programme at Romsey is well known all over East Anglia now. The Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, John Carey, came along and I showed him how to mix the decks for Wicked Wicked Jungle is Massive!

Receiving the Momentum Arts Award was such an honour. Barring the birth of my kids, it was the biggest thing that's happened to me. I couldn't believe I'd been chosen along with people like Jafar Mirza, Head of Governors at Cambridge Regional College, and John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York. I want to use the recognition the award's given me to go into schools and clubs, and make a difference.

I went to Jamaica with my family for the only time when I was 12. The beauty was absolutely unbelievable. I didn't look on it as a foreign country, I felt comfortable, totally relaxed. It was nice for the first time to walk down the street and feel you really fit in. It's funny, because as soon as I opened my mouth

Ditchburn Place used to be the old maternity ward. My mum actually had me here. Now it's a residential care community, a quiet caring place right on Mill Road. Some of our elderly residents have their own flats and their own cars come in. They can come and go as they please, but there's a warden to oversee everything. At the back we have accommodation for young people who have had a hard time and we're helping get back on their feet. A lot of my family are carers in one way or another. Before she retired, Mum was a carer at Fulbourn Hospital and my sister works for Care Force.

In the kitchens we work as a team preparing food for 75 people every day. I work closely with Sue Willet and together we try and keep the menu interesting

for the residents. Today it's Moroccan Lamb. We do curries, Italian and Thai food, and try to branch out. Like we've taken traditional English sponge trifle and made it with Jamaican ginger cake, laced it with rum and put in exotic fruit, bananas and pineapples. We call it Jamaican trifle. They love it! The roast dinners on a Sunday are the most popular. We'll do them with the best cuts, topside or whatever, which we order in from a supplier in King's Lynn. Roasts we do with Yorkshire pudding and all the trimmings. You should see the empty plates after they've finished eating! It's a bit of a fight to get any dinner myself on roast days! You can't beat a good English steak and kidney pudding; we make them here on the premises.

Things do go wrong, a kitchen can be a stressful place! You have to be careful with custard and white sauces. We use a bain marie because if it catches at the bottom it'll taint the entire sauce. Sometimes you'll forget to put someone's pie in or something, and then you realise and you start running round. But everybody here treats each other with a lot of respect. Ditchburn Place is like a big family. Meal-times can be the highlight of the day for some residents. I think food is very important in people's lives, especially as you get older.

I watch all the celebrity chef programmes. I like Ainsley Harriet on Ready, Steady, Cook because he empowers people in the kitchen. Delia Smith covers the basics, but there are people out there who don't know how to fry an egg! Jamie Oliver is definitely changing attitudes to unhealthy school meals in this country. Food is important. Perhaps it's not surprising there are so many of these celebrity chefs. You can use food to make a difference. ♦



Denzil Gordon with colleague Yunus Jaan. The team manages the Ditchburn Place kitchen on the weekends.

"When I was a teenager, I wanted the flashy clothes, the BMW and all of that. But gradually I realised that was the fake picture of the black man."

they realised I wasn't one of them and started calling me 'English boy'!

I have brothers out there and they took us round the island. I remember they killed a goat in the morning, cooked it and ate it the same evening. A fisherman went out to the sea and brought us back a massive snapper. I'd love to do some cooking there!



EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE!

PIERO DI ANGELICO came to Cambridge 19 years ago from a tiny village in Italy's south-eastern region of Puglia. He met his Mexican wife GABRIELA here in Cambridge and together they set up Vitruvian Man, one of the city's leading hairdressing and beauty salons. He tells Untold Stories about a typical day in his life



"M

y day starts at 7:30 when baby Isabel wakes up. Gabriela gets up and sees to her and

I stay in bed a little longer listening to Q103 to catch up with what's going on in the world. Breakfast is Italian for me: coffee and biscotti. Gabriela has a totally tropical healthy breakfast, fruit and yoghurt, but she's working on me.

I drop four-year-old Maya off at the Anglia Ruskin Nursery and on the days Gabriela is coming to the salon, we'll drop Isabel off, too. Wang Dan will have opened up already. She's been with Vitruvian Man from the word go. I check my appointment book and see that from 9:00 to 6:00 I am usually solidly booked, various cuts, a complete restyle, two wet shaves and hair sculpting. However you plan your day, something unexpected always crops up. The other day Gabriela had to take Isabel to the doctor so I had to pick Maya up from nursery, so all my appointments got pushed back. A good percentage of the clients are friends, so they are pretty understanding. I tell them even if I stay here till 7:30 I'll fit them in somehow. It's give and take, you know. I don't like the word stress. It's my work and I love doing it.

I've been really lucky with staff. Wang Dan came from China to study English and ended up studying hairdressing. She was so keen she offered to be the cleaner! I saw she had real potential and trained her up. The same with Antonio from the Canaries; he was a trained hairdresser but the problem was he didn't speak English. There's Ieva from Lithuania who does nail and beauty treatments, Rob, Nick, and our latest addition Mark who does massage. When one of my staff has an idea, I always say 'Let me see what I can do.' Gabriela gets worried when she hears that! She says my inability to say no is my biggest weakness.

But I remember what it was like when I first came to Britain. I was 17, didn't speak much English and people took advantage. I don't want that to happen to others.

The day really starts when the first client comes through the door about 9:00. On the three mornings Gabriela comes in, she goes down to her of-

fice which is literally a broom cupboard in the basement. From there she manages all the accounts and all the paperwork I hate. I always had a vision of this salon looking just as it does now: white walls, calming lighting, high quality furnishings, even the life size drawing of the Vitruvian man in the circle on the back wall. I did it myself based on Leonardo da Vinci's perfectly proportioned man. You see, Vitruvian Man is all about aesthetic perfection, and the salon had to reflect that. But these premises were a total wreck when we first leased them. Downstairs there was just rubbish. Piles of it. We filled twelve skips! When Gabriela first walked into the place she just cried and said, 'Piero, what have we taken on!' But once I'd signed the lease, there was no going back, I had to make the vision happen. Now, downstairs is a state of the art tan-spraying room and a massage and nail suite.

TO BE HONEST WITH YOU, I DIDN'T GET A GOOD IMPRESSION OF MILL ROAD, BUT NOW I'M ABSOLUTELY IN LOVE WITH MILL ROAD. IT'S THE KIND OF STREET WHERE ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN, WHERE EVERYTHING YOU WANT YOU CAN HAVE!

Lunch is a panini on the go if I'm lucky. Sometimes I only manage to eat something at four o'clock. People ask us how a husband and wife manage to work together and bring up two infants. When we took this place on, Gabriela and I sat down and made a promise to each other: we'd have to work as a team to make it happen or we could lose everything, our business and our marriage. So she agreed to take on the kids entirely, be mother and father to them for 10 months as well as supervise the builders in the day. I'd be cutting hair at my old salon, Piero's Hairdressing Studio, and she'd

call and say, 'The plumber has found another leak' or 'the electricians say the wiring has to be redone'. In the evening I'd come to the new salon to take over with the builders. I was a hairdresser by day and a builder by night. I'd get back home exhausted at one or two in the morning when the kids had already gone to bed. It was really tough not seeing them, the saddest thing.

The best thing about my work? It's got to be the clients. I love to put a smile on someone's face and see them leave looking and feeling better. I see this work as much more than cutting hair, there's a psychological side to it too. It's as much about making people feel good. When my clients come in and sit in the chair, they relax. Sometimes they're so relaxed they nod off! I might start by asking them if they have the day off, something like that. And people open up to you, some want to tell you about what's going on in their life. They want to be listened to. A lot of men come in for a wet shave, it's the most popular thing. For 15 quid they get a complete face massage, the hot towel treatment, a precision shave with an old fashioned razor,

basically, attention and a half hour's complete relaxation. I was shaving an Israeli guy and I noticed this deep scar in his scalp. It turned out he'd been shot by the police when he was attending a peaceful demonstration. They were aiming at someone behind him and he'd raised his head and the bullet grazed him. A fraction of a millimetre more and he wouldn't have been sitting in my chair! That was quite unusual. Most often it's the same story I hear. The most common thing is divorce and break ups. You'd be surprised. Policemen, teachers, builders, doctors, everyone has their heart aches... If you ask 'How are you doing?' the client will often open up and say, 'Well, I'm going through a rough time, actually'. I feel they need someone to hear them, so I do their hair and listen.

I try not to give advice. But once one of my regulars came in and told me he was about to get married. 'Don't do it, mate' I teased. 'Once you say "I do" you won't have any freedom.' I was just joking, winding him up, you know? But he was back in my chair a year later: 'You were right, Piero. I should've taken your advice...'

When I was nine or ten in Italy, I always hung round the barber's shop next to my house. I think the old barber looked on me as his little mascot. Later he took me on as an apprentice, that's how I started. But he had me doing 20 or 30 wet shaves a day! That can be very repetitive work, especially around festival time when all the village men came in for their haircut and wet shave!

He always told me, 'Remember, Piero, barbers are important in society'. Clients would come into the little salon and they'd offer the barber a coffee or a drink, sometimes they'd send out to the bar and buy a round for all the clients waiting for a trim. We're like that in Italy. Because I was only a kid, they always bought me ice cream. I spent the best of my childhood in that little barber shop.

Since we set up Vitruvian Man on Mill Road we're more visible. I've just been asked to teach hair sculpting in London for a day. I use the scalp as a canvas and create pretty much any design the client wants. It was the British lion during the Olympic Games and a Brazilian flag for a Formula One driver.

A biological company on the Science Park has just asked us to put together an entire day for all their top executives: we'll give them Thai and Indian head massage, manicures and of course wet shaves for the men. It's a great way for a company to reward hard working staff. The execs go back to the office refreshed - and work even harder for the company. So everyone wins.

It's funny, but I ended up in Britain because I didn't want to do military service in Italy. I wasn't planning on staying here. At first, I cut hair at brother Peppy's on East Road. To be honest with you, I didn't get a good impression of Mill Road, I thought it looked a bit run down, not a place I wanted my salon. I

GABRIELA



Piero's motto is everything is possible. It was the same when we got married. I'm Catholic and one day I just said 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Pope (John Paul II) could bless our marriage in the Vatican!' Don't ask me how but

he made that happen too! And I have the photos to prove it...

Piero is the kind of person, if he wants something he'll get it. Without being pushy. For example, our daughter Maya has been immersed in the world of fairy tales and princesses since she was two. She decided she was Princess Maya who lives in the Kingdom of Cromwell Road! One day Piero heard on the local radio that the Queen was visiting Cambridge. So he said, 'Why don't I take our Princess Maya to see the Queen?' I was pregnant with Isabel and had an appointment with the midwife so Piero was looking after Maya that day.

They stood waiting in the crowd outside the Fitzwilliam museum. When the Queen came along she must have spotted Maya in her princess outfit, because she came straight over to them. 'What's your name?' she asked.

'I'm Princess Maya', she replies straight off.

'Do you know who I am?' the Queen asked.

'Yes. Queen Elizabeth.'

'Well it was nice meeting you, Princess Maya. I have to go now.'

'Adios', said Maya in Spanish.

'Adios!' replied the Queen.

As the royal limousine rolled past, the Queen said something to her driver. The car stopped and the Queen waved at Princess Maya. We hope it hasn't gone to her head!

I REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE WHEN I FIRST CAME TO BRITAIN. I WAS 17, DIDN'T SPEAK MUCH ENGLISH AND PEOPLE TOOK ADVANTAGE. I DON'T WANT THAT TO HAPPEN TO OTHERS.

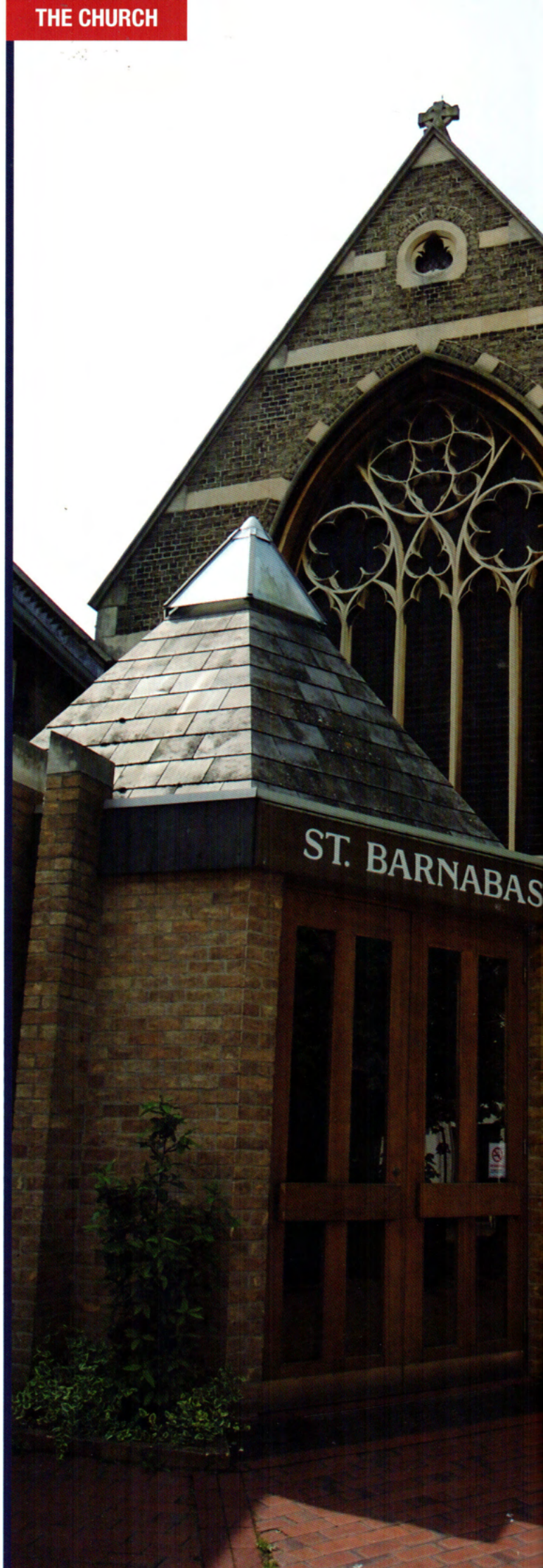
was thinking more upmarket city centre. But now I'm absolutely in love with Mill Road. It's the kind of street where anything can happen, where everything you want you can


have! People are like, 'No problem, mate'. I know all the shop owners, in fact many of them are my clients. I'd never move the salon now. This is really the place to be. It was here I first met people from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. I'd always been curious about religions, particularly Islam, so I was fascinated to find out more.

I met an Iranian girl here and actually ended up marrying her in the mosque. My Islamic name is Rashid. Unfortunately the marriage didn't work out and we separated. But Muslims in Cambridge really took me to their hearts and were really supportive. They still call me 'brother'. I think all religions essentially worship the same god.

In the evening I just flake out on the sofa in front of the TV. We have satellite so I watch French, Spanish and Italian channels as well. I'll watch anything: quiz shows, soaps, even cartoons. It's my way of disconnecting from reality. I should get exercise but at the moment when I come home I just want to spend more time with the girls. When the evenings get lighter I'm going to start running again, I used to run a lot. Gabriela makes sure I get at least one good meal in the evening, I'll eat everything but I love a steak with a glass of Chianti. When I was younger I was always in pubs and clubs, but now I don't need to socialise like that, I'm socialising all day with my clients! When I go home all I want is my little space with my little family. That's what's most precious to me.

When my head hits the pillow around 1am, I'm already thinking about the future. Not just the next day, further on. For example I haven't completely realised the vision I have for this place. I want to expand Vitruvian Man and introduce services like aromatherapy, acupuncture, so it's a well-being centre. I've only realised half the project. I want a centre where a person comes in and they can get all the services. I'm always open to new ideas. For instance, Wang Dan has an idea for hair regrowth called "hair breeder" which uses principles derived from ancient acupuncture. A mild charge of static electricity stimulates the nervous system, unclogs the hair follicles and assists cell generation. If it works, it could be huge. I always think anything and everything is possible. So, I've told her 'I'll see what we can do...'. ♦





A Sanctuary On Mill Road

IF YOU ARE NOT A CHURCHGOER, CAMBRIDGE'S MANY CHURCHES CAN BECOME MERE LANDMARKS ON YOUR WAY TO OTHER PLACES. IT'S EASY TO CYCLE OR WALK BY ST BARNABAS ANGLICAN CHURCH ON THE CROSSROAD OF MILL ROAD AND GWYDIR STREET, AND NEVER ENTER IT.

It is only when you step through its glass doors that its enormous size, not to mention its function, become apparent. When community outreach worker Alan Lowe welcomes me in and the doors close behind me, it is the immediate hush I notice. The bustle of Mill Road is only a faintly perceived murmur outside this sanctuary.

'We have a congregation of some 270 attending our biggest Sunday morning service', says Alan as we walk up into the massive nave. A drum kit and amplifiers are on the stage. 'We have about five different bands who take it in turns to play at services. We're very family oriented.'

I can't help asking why there is what seems to be a half-inflated mini-swimming pool in the front entrance, complete with electric inflator. 'Baptism', says Alan. 'Total immersion. For adults. I think we've got a slow leak.'

Outside through the glass front doors, I can see a bearded man. He's wearing a panama hat and gesticulating urgently. When a secretary from the office opens the door to him, he politely asks for a cup of tea.

'We seek to be a place of welcome for all', Alan explains. 'There is a Sunday club when the lonely or anyone who is having a hard time can become a member and drop in, but if someone turns up on our door step, we'll never turn anyone away. You never know who it might be; we may be their last chance.'

Apart from the comradeship of others and a listening ear, the Sunday Club provides food. 'Sausage rolls, cake and tea, mainly. But we always make sure there are egg sandwiches, for some reason they're a big pull.'

We pass out into a central courtyard and cross to the Old School Hall where a mother and toddlers' group is in full swing (a poster for a dad and babies group shows a euphoric father). 'We hosted part of the Mill Road Winter Fair in here', says Alan. 'We must have had a thousand people through these doors.'

'Barnabas was known as the "man of encouragement"', says Nick Ladd, vicar at St Barnabas. The mission to encourage and include seems something this church takes literally. Apart from providing a popular lunch and sociability on Sundays for some of Cambridge's many international students, there's a once-monthly storytelling group for those who may feel on the margins of community, a 'soup run', and regular services in nearby Ditchburn Place sheltered housing complex. 'We'll send volunteer teams out to help a disabled person do their garden, or perhaps someone needs assistance painting and decorating their home', says Nick. 'Caring for people in the community is part of our mission.'

Nor is 'community' confined just to Mill Road; one of the church's Global Partners is working on a project to build solar ovens in a remote village in a former Soviet republic in Central Asia, while another is starting up an HIV/AIDS awareness project.

As I step back into the buzz and hum of Mill Road, the bearded visitor is on a bench outside, downing the last of his mug of tea. 'Thanks, mate', he says, handing me his empty mug. 'You saved my life!' ♦



Mr Chang steered the tiny boat carrying his family through the treacherous waters from Vietnam to Hong Kong

BOAT PEOPLE

SHARON CHANG'S family owns The Rice House Chinese takeaway on Mill Road. Twenty five years ago, as a nine year old girl, Sharon was one of the thousands of boat people crowding into small boats and taking to the treacherous waters of the South China Sea to flee Vietnam. How did she make it to Mill Road?



'My family is ethnic Chinese but we lived in North Vietnam quite near the Chinese border.

It was a town about the size of Cambridge.

I remember the sea in front of the house and a lake

and a river and mountains behind. We had a massive garden with the kitchen and the toilets built separately in the gardens. We kept chickens and a couple of pigs, and my mum grew our vegetables. My dad was a builder and he did pretty well. There were six of us children, two boys and four girls. We'd spend our time swimming and fishing. In the 70s there was no danger, as a kid you were free to go where you wanted. I remember my mum was really hardworking. She'd get up at about two some mornings to go



"Usually, I try not to remember all this. If you hadn't asked me I wouldn't choose to remember it. In fact, in our big family we never talk about it. It's all in the past, we look to the future."

over the river to China to buy things we couldn't get in Vietnam, Chinese foods like dried squid. She'd come back with all this stuff strapped to her! If the border police caught her, Mum would have to bribe them or they'd confiscate all her stuff. It could get expensive. Once she brought back live fish, I don't know how she managed it!

I suppose growing up I knew that our family was different, but it wasn't a big deal. We spoke Canton-

ese at home and learned Vietnamese at school, but I've completely forgotten that language. At school there were about 10 other Chinese in a class of 40. Ethnic Chinese people like us stood out in Vietnam because our skin is lighter. Where you live is home for a child, so when war suddenly broke out between Vietnam and China in 1979 and people started calling us 'bloody Chinese', it was weird. They started saying 'Go back to your country!' But for me Vietnam was my country. I think people were jealous of

us ethnic Chinese because we're really hardworking and so usually richer. The local police got really unpleasant too, there was nothing like human rights or anything. I remember my dad telling us all we had to run away. Suddenly we didn't belong.

My 18-year-old brother and I were sent over the border into China to my uncle's so we could arrange a place for all the family to join us. After a few weeks they fled Vietnam too. The government was throwing all Chinese out; it was getting dangerous to stay. We left everything, our house, all our possessions. I remember my dad had saved a case of Vietnamese bank notes that were supposed to last us a while. But they devalued the currency. Overnight all our savings notes became worthless! All we had was a few clothes and our passports.

I was devastated about leaving my friends. Our next door neighbours were Vietnamese but they were always nice to us. I think they would have liked to escape the communist government too.

Once we'd fled to the Chinese side, one of my uncles bought this boat and said we should all leave in it and go to Hong Kong. It was still British in those days and they would take us in. That's if we made the long trip in the South China Sea. I heard the adults talking about storms and shark infested waters and pirate raids.

I was shocked when I saw the boat; it was only about 20 foot long. It was designed for 5 people but my uncle took other people for a fare. In the end we set off with 64 of us squashed into it! It had a sail and an engine. My dad had worked as a fisherman and he was going to be captain.

The first thing to do was get enough food on board to last the journey. My dad bought a lot of belly of pork and us kids salted it so it wouldn't go off. Salted pork, salted fish and dry biscuits was all we had to eat on the journey. Horrible. We cooked with a gas bottle at one end of the boat where all the food was stored. You can imagine how cramped it was! Of course people got on each other's nerves. There was nowhere to lie down, we all had to sit on



Sharon's sister-in-law, Ann Chang, also fled Vietnam on boat. Now she runs the Rice House and the fish and chip shop in Cottenham.

"I went back a few years ago to our village in Vietnam. After 28 years, I couldn't recognise it. They've built a block of flats where our house stood.

I haven't told my children about the boat journey or about the refugee camp in Hong Kong. I've no time. Besides, they have their lives to live. One son is studying IT at Hull University, my daughter is studying fashion design in London and my youngest boy is at Parkside school."

benches, at night we curled up on them against each other. I'll never forget, there was this seven month pregnant woman beside me. I hated her! She was sea sick and kept throwing up all over me! She took up a lot of room and made my life hell. She was actually a single mother which people looked down on in China in those days.

My mum was so worried about my little one and a half year old sister. My elder brother was really good, he helped my dad out and our family sat together and held hands a lot. When it rained we pulled a tarpaulin over us and sat there miserable waiting for it to stop.

We were three months on that tiny boat. It was quite an experience... People say, 'Oh you're a boat person?' But it's nothing to be ashamed of.

My dad was a good sailor. He was always looking at the sky for storms. We sat there at night on our crowded benches holding hands and praying for no storms! We did actually have a storm and luckily for us, my dad put in to an island in time. I remember this boy got a snakebite on the island and I thought Oh, no, he's going to die. But my dad found these plants to treat him with. My dad was captain, doctor, everything... He's 74 now and is out cooking till midnight at the Rice House, he loves it.

My other uncle, my mum's brother, captained a larger ship with about 160 passengers, behind us. My uncle thought he could make it through the storm but his boat got caught in a whirlpool. The boat got smashed up and they were pulled under. Only three people survived: My uncle, his step-daughter and one other passenger. My uncle lost his wife, children, everyone. In Viet-

nam he'd been really wealthy selling jewellery, with two wives and a massive house with servants... Now he was left with nothing and no one.

Once, I remember we signalled to a big Chinese ship, waving and flashing lights. We begged them to tow us some of the way. Our money was useless, so they asked for gold. My mum and my aunty and everybody had to hand over their rings and earrings. Eventually we got towed to Hong Kong harbour where the harbour police put us on a really big ship.

We were so relieved! I remember my dad saying there had been five boats behind us, but only two made it. I knew what had happened to those poor people. Storms, sharks, pirates. That could have been us...

I didn't like the Hong Kong police much. I think they'd had droves of boat people constantly arriving and were sick of the sight of us! In Hong Kong they put us in a camp which was like a massive hangar for storing goods not people. Our family were in a room about 12 foot square, no bed or anything. We slept on the floor. Every morning we got only two slices of bread with sweetened condensed milk on it. Carnation, I remember the brand. Now I can't touch condensed milk. Ugh! It reminds me too much.

At night there were these large rats running around, it was awful. My dad as the head of the family had to go and queue up for food, bring it back and share it out. It was never enough. My poor mum wasn't producing any milk for my baby sister so we always saved her an extra piece of bread. I remember some people traded their gold rings for a pack of cigarettes!

After a couple of weeks we were moved to a more permanent camp. That was better because they gave us ID cards and we had to go and find jobs. My dad and older brother and sister got jobs, cleaning, working in factories, that sort of thing. I did all the shopping, aged nine, because my mum wasn't very well. In the end I earned some money looking after people's kids while they went out to work. In the camp there was no privacy, we all slept in rows and rows of bunk beds. That lasted a year! I was terrified as a kid having to share with all these people I didn't know. Some girls got raped. I remember my dad used to stay awake at night to keep watch.

There was one guy who slept in the bunk opposite us. One night he was in a deep sleep because he'd been working so hard. These three Vietnamese boys turned up and stabbed him to death as he slept. My dad saw it all. He called the police but they didn't do a thing. It had a real effect on me and my sister. I couldn't sleep after that. I'll never forget the blood dripping from the murdered boy's top bunk onto the woman who was on the bunk below. Who



Ann's and Sharon's nephew, Sinh LE, 23, mans the Rice House takeaway most nights.

"I was born right opposite the Rice House, just over the road in Ditchburn Place when it was the Mill Road's maternity ward.

My family came all the way from Vietnam but I've only had to come across Mill Road! I'd never heard all these amazing stories from my aunties or grandparents. Everyone in the family is too busy working. It's the Chinese work ethic. I think we work too hard..."

knows why they murdered him, a row about a girl, they said. In fact a lot of people got killed in the camp. Can you believe people killing each other after fleeing their country and spending months at sea in crowded boats?

Usually, I try not to remember all this. If you hadn't asked me I wouldn't choose to remember it. In fact, in our big family we never talk about it. It's all in the past, we look to the future. Sometimes it'll crop up, but more to remind the younger members that they should be grateful they're alive and lucky enough to be living in Britain. They shouldn't waste their lives or their money gambling, for example.

By the time we got asylum in England I was twelve. My dad chose England and not America because he said they have too many guns. In England people are nice and everyone rides around on bikes, he said, it'll be lovely. That was before we ever thought about Cambridge. But as the plane touched down at Heathrow, to me England looked dark and miserable! We were taken to a reception centre in Watton near Norwich. All the way, I remember my mum looking miserably out the window of the minibus at the dark motorway. She'd heard they would feed us only potatoes.

When we got to the centre we were given our own little house and they'd cooked chicken and fish... and rice! I've never seen my mum's face so relieved and happy!

I don't go around thinking 'I was a boat person' but it does effect how I live. Sometimes I'll catch myself looking at my five-year-old daughter (Caerly-Ann, it's a Scottish name) and thinking 'You're sooo lucky'. Or she'll say 'Buy me this, Mummy' and I say 'Sweetheart, when Mummy was your age, she didn't have all these things'. And she'll go 'Why?' And I'll tell her a little bit about how Grandma and Granddad and all her uncles and aunties had to escape in a boat."♦

"Where you live is home for a child, so when war suddenly broke out between Vietnam and China in 1979 and people started calling us 'bloody Chinese', it was weird."

GOING GREEN WITH AL-AMIN



I didn't always run a shop. For years I was in senior management, auditing for a multi-national. But I fell out with the company on ethical grounds. I found I could no longer work for an organisation that

put profit before ethics.

So, I resigned. It gave me plenty of time to think about where I went from there....

It was about that time that I got a call from a family friend who ran a small food store. He was in tears, desperate for help. The bailiffs were at his home with a warrant to collect his outstanding council tax bill or remove goods to cover the debt. He was a father of six, trying to do the best by his family and my heart went out to him. I went to his house and paid the bailiffs the money (around £650).

But my friend was caught in a cycle, with much of his debt the result of money owed to him by restaurants he was supplying. He couldn't pay his suppliers so they stopped sending the goods. He also had difficulty in covering the shop's rent. My family was on good terms with some of his wholesale suppliers as well as his landlord, so my father asked me to speak to them. I managed to get his suppliers and landlord to agree to extend his credit terms.

But the poor man had neither capital nor time to reinvent his business. He decided to fold. All the time, his debts were increasing, I felt responsible. I couldn't just walk away. So I agreed to take over his business debts, and try to collect whatever money was due to him. Surely with the right management and further financial injection we could turn the shop round. That was my original goal. Then simply sell the shop as a going concern to recover whatever I'd invested. I renamed the business Al-Amin, the nickname meaning 'just' or 'fair one' given to me by my late grandfather back in Kenya. He was a devout Muslim, and a giant within our community.

ABDUL ARAIN, the owner of Mill Road's Al-Amin grocery store first arrived in Cambridge from Kenya aged 16. On his first day in his new home town, he left his house in Abbey Road and set off across Midsummer Common to explore. Seeing some youths his age on the common, struggling to tame a kite, Abdul went over and gave them a hand. It is a telling vignette. Twenty-five years on, joining in and giving a hand is what **ABDUL ARAIN** is all about.





"I renamed the business Al-Amin, the nickname meaning 'just' or 'fair one' given to me by my late grandfather back in Kenya."



Mill Road shoppers are not your average shopper: a whopping seventy per cent reuse their bags!

I'd certainly never seen myself as a shopkeeper, but I soon realised that I enjoyed being my own boss, and loved working with the public. I had unwittingly found my ideal occupation! Every morning I woke up

looking forward to the day. Most important, I was at last free to operate on an ethical basis.

My brother Aahmer joined me and with the rest of my family, we set out the store's policy. We wouldn't promote any item which is harmful or results in harm to an individual or society. Out went the cigarettes, alcohol and the lottery tickets. We'd promote local interests and businesses. We'd take the environment into consideration; make a difference to the lives of others. We'd put people before profit.

Building on the theme 'the melting pot of cuisine and culture', within six months, we completely changed the little grocery's stock. People certainly responded and Al-Amin developed a wide and wonderful customer base. I can now say that most of my customers are my friends. Many will drop by and discuss personal issues with me, the loss of a loved one, or a relationship break-up. I feel humbled that they feel they can do this. Today Al-Amin's clientele are students, pensioners, housewives, local traders, masters of some of the Cambridge colleges including Nobel Prize winner Professor Amartya Sen who introduced micro-credit for the poor, allowing thousands of Asian women to set up their own businesses. Professor Sen would come in with his family and stock up on Bengali hilshah fish, dahl pulses, chillies and turmeric, curry leaves... Any success I've had comes first and foremost from Almighty God who has guided and equipped me with the resources to deal with the challenges I face. None of it would be possible without unconditional support from members of my extended family, in particular my wife, my brother Aahmer and my parents.

Of course, locality is a massive part of Al-Amin's success. It is heartening to see Mill Road people bring their friends into the shop and show them around with pride, almost as if it were theirs!

In 2004 Al-Amin launched a series of initiatives to play our part in saving the planet. We began by proactively reducing the amount of plastic bags we

were using. Then we introduced the Al-Amin cloth bag, giving away the first 2500 bags free. Next came bio-degradable bags at the Al-Amin counter, and the donation of 2p for every carrier bag our customers reuse. Mill Road shoppers are not your average shopper: a whopping seventy per cent reuse their bags! All proceeds raised are donated to a local charity. Just now it's Brookfield Hospital in Mill Road. So everyone, including the environment, wins.

With the Cambridge Carbon Footprint, we're launching an art competition for primary schools called Energy Wizards. We've just run our first competition to encourage our shoppers to take individual action against climate change. The winner gets a trolley-dash round the shop, filling it with as much as it'll hold in 60 seconds. The runner up gets a 20 second dash...with a basket!

We're delighted we could save the Mill Road Post Office from closure in 2005 when we offered it a home. What is a community without a post office at its hub?

About eight months after taking over the shop, early one morning, while I was unloading a delivery, a dishevelled young man approached me and asked for money for something to eat (he said). I suggested that if he helped me, I would give him some food. He continued to turn up two or three times a week, sometimes drunk, asking for 'loose change'. I simply repeated my same offer. It wasn't important what work he did, just that he earned the money. I suggested that if he came each morning and helped me for a couple of hours, I would pay him a regular wage. Amazingly, he did. Then after a couple of weeks, I suggested that if he arrived sober, I'd up his pay. Today that young man is head of the bakery in a large local store.

Over the years, Mill Road had gradually become home to many outreach agencies, resulting in more than its fair share of drunks and beggars. By working with the council, local politicians, the police, and some truly dedicated traders and residents, we are finding solutions to these problems. We're not just interested in moving the drunks on, but creating partnerships to offer help and support to those unfortunate individuals. After all, the fact that you've stumbled does not mean you can never walk again. The true gauge of success for any society is how it looks after its most disadvantaged.

There are five rules I (try to) live by daily: free your heart from hatred (forgive); free your mind from worries (most never happen); live simply and appreciate what you have; give more; expect less.

It's a daily challenge. Certainly not as easy as flying that kite! But if we all do our bit, mere ideas can get off the ground. It's remarkable the difference we can make. ♦

THE AKASHI PROJECT

THE AKASHI PROJECT RAISES AWARENESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AMONG DIFFERENT FAITH AND CULTURAL GROUPS. RUN BY SHILPA SHAH, ITS HEADQUARTERS ARE IN GWYDIR STREET.

What can we learn about living a sustainable lifestyle from the traditions of other cultures living in our midst? Why do media reports on climate change fail to take other cultures into consideration?

These were the questions which prompted the birth of Akashi, an interfaith, intercultural project, receiving government funding since 2006. The Akashi Project listens and talks to Cambridge's various ethnic communities on what is now the most pressing issue facing mankind. 'Raising awareness locally is best done by a small neighbourhood group like us,' says Akashi Project coordinator, Shilpa Shah. 'So the government has contracted the job out to 50 or so projects UK-wide.'

'My job is to make members of our ethnic communities aware of their carbon footprint, the amount of harmful carbon dioxide we create as we go about our daily lives. After talking with the Akashi Project, people will stop me in the street and say, "Last night I saw a TV programme on the environment I wouldn't normally have watched" or "I've started leaving the car at home and walking to work". So every little counts.'

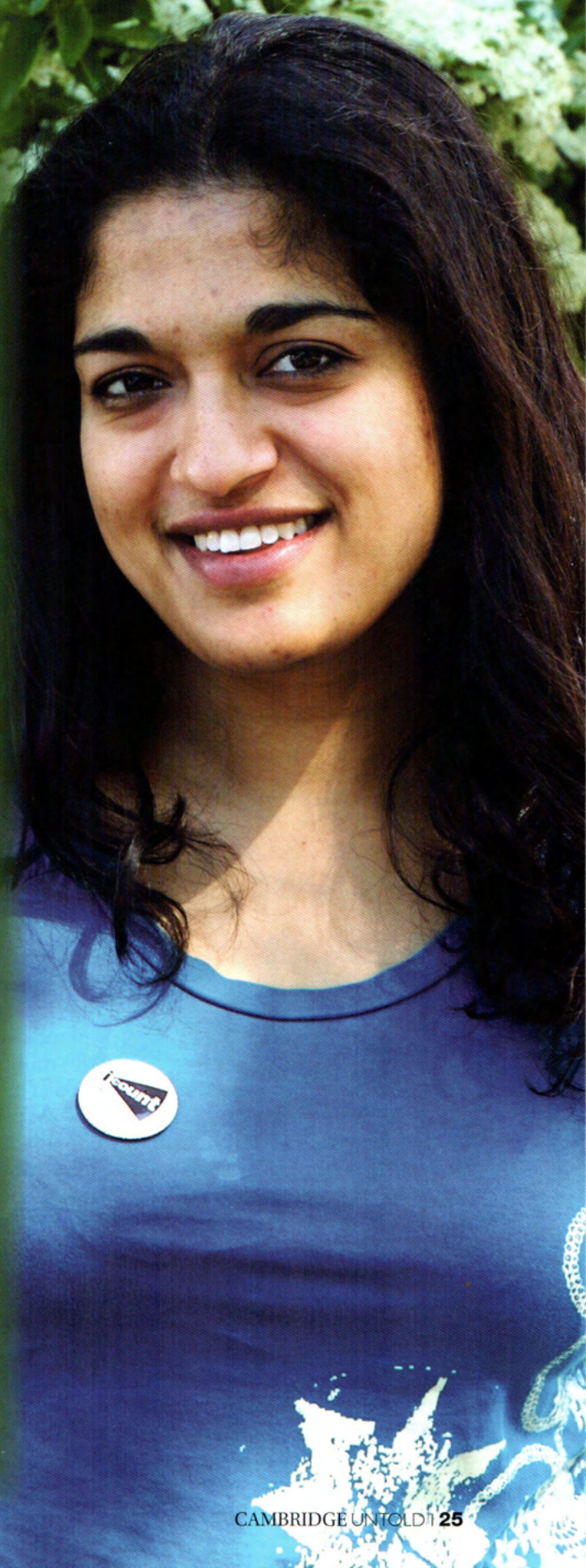
Shilpa warns however against assuming the ethnic groups she talks to are somehow less concerned about environmental issues. 'This morning I was talking to a group of Bangladeshi women. Their attitude very much resembles the British post-war generation of Waste not, Want not, Make do and mend. It's very much part of South Asian lifestyle never to throw food away, and to bathe using only a small bucket of water. Though they don't necessarily think in terms of 'saving the planet', their values are spot on.'

'If anything, I'd say Cambridge's various ethnic communities have above average awareness of the dangers of climate change. After all it is their countries of origin which are already suffering the devastating effects of global warming. Tiny Caribbean islands are increasingly at risk from rising sea levels and shifting hurricane patterns. Bangladesh is more than ever vulnerable to horrendous floods.'

Whether organising a henna decorating session with environmental motifs or organising individual carbon footprint measurements with the local Jewish community, Shilpa has found the differences dividing faiths and cultures are more apparent than real. 'Respect for people and nature is common to all faith groups. Christianity sees man as having stewardship of the earth; Muslim teachings say that humans are the earth's vice-regents, while for Hindus and Buddhists all mankind forms one interconnected family. Global warning concerns us all.'

Akashi is a project of Cambridge Carbon Footprint. To participate contact www.akashi.org.uk

Look out for the Akashi Project Multi-faith and Cultural Day at the Junction on 27th October 2007. ♦



OPEN ALL HOURS

ABUBAKAR SIDDIQ and ARAFAT SIDDIQ are two young brothers who run **Yasrab Newsagents** in Romsey Town. They came from Bangladesh in 1999 to join their parents who had settled in Cambridge. They spoke to *Untold Stories* in the shop's tiny back storeroom during a break in the *World Cup Cricket* from Jamaica where the *West Indies* were playing Ireland.



Cambridge Untold: Tell me about where you're both from in Bangladesh.

Arafat: We come from Sylhet province, a place of some 8 million in North-East

Bangladesh. We were born in Mathiura, a very big village. The best thing about life in the village is everyone knows everyone. There's always someone to say hello to in the street or market, and people drop in freely to each other's houses. That's one of the things I miss. Here you might not see your next door neighbour more than once a week or once a month.

Abu: It's true, but a lot of people from Sylhet are actually here in Britain and in Cambridge. Each household in our district has at least one person who is now in the UK and more than half the Bengalis in Britain come from Sylhet. A lot of funds get



sent back, so it's quite a well to do place compared to the rest of Bangladesh. We're known as the tea capital. There are about 120 tea gardens in Sylhet alone which provide a lot of jobs for tea pickers, women mainly. You don't hear so much about our tea, because India buys it and exports it. But it's Bangladesh tea!

Arafat: It's the largest tea production area in the world. It was actually started by the British in the 18th century. The terraced tea gardens and green and very beautiful.

Cambridge Untold: What do you remember of your childhood in Bangladesh? What was a typical day like?

Arafat: Well we're cricket fans so there was always a match going on in the field behind our house! It's very popular in Bangladesh. On a typical school day, breakfast was just tea and biscuits. We'd get to school for 10, quite a late start. We studied English and Bengali language, Maths, Science, History, Social Studies and Religion. It was a government assisted school so our parents paid something toward our schooling. The classrooms had 60-70 pupils. Here, our younger sister has about 30 pupils in her secondary school class and people say it's too many. After four o'clock, we went home and had lunch, rather late compared to kids in Britain. Homework was very important and there was lots of it. After that we'd play cricket again. We lived next door to a mosque so we'd attend prayers every evening.



Cambridge Untold: What did your father do for a living?

Abu: He used to run a computer shop but he was one of the many who left Sylhet to come to Britain with our mother when we were young. We stayed with our grandmother who sadly died only amonth after my parents left. Arafat and I were raised by a widowed auntie who had lost her husband in the 1971 War of Independence. After the Partition of India in 1947, one Muslim state consisting of West Pakistan and East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) was formed. Thousands of miles separated the two parts of the new state, with India in between! In 1952 West Pakistan started to impose Urdu as the official language on East Pakistan where we spoke Bengali. This 'Urdu only' policy was very unpopular. Can you imagine your government forbidding you speaking English? A lot of our Bengali-speaking students protested, and many were killed defending the right to use their language. Our auntie's husband, Komor Uddin, had been a very well known Sylhet singer who used to perform for the troops. His songs encouraged thousands to sign up for the army to fight the war against Pakistan.

Arafat: After the War of Independence, Pakistan and Bangladesh became two separate nations. But our uncle was targeted for singing songs to the troops and, sadly, he was tracked down by agents and killed. Our auntie lost her only daughter a few months later. So we two brothers were taken in by her when our parents left for the UK.

We have very loyal customers... One elderly man, who comes in for his daily paper, told me he was a paper boy here 75 years ago!

Cambridge Untold: Why were so many Bangladeshis coming to Britain at that time?

Abu: For jobs and to join family members. My father worked as a chef in an Indian restaurant.

Arafat: We say 'Indian' restaurant because that's what they're called here, but really about 90% of all 'Indian' restaurants in Britain are run by Bangladeshis. In Mill Road they all are. In fact they're all from Sylhet!

Abu: In Bangladesh our big thing is fish. People have ponds in their back yards where they raise carp and other fresh water fish. You find it in a lot of Bangladeshi restaurants in Brick Lane in East London. There are so many, we call it Banglatown!

Cambridge Untold: You've opened a newsagents, did you ever think of opening a restaurant?

Arafat: I've worked as a waiter in two here in Cambridge for three years and I can see it would be very hard work running one. You have to work very late in the restaurant business.

Cambridge Untold: You both seem to work very hard here running Yasrab news.

We say 'Indian' restaurant because that's what they're called here, but really about 90% of all 'Indian' restaurants in Britain are run by Bangladeshis.

Abu: It's only the two of us, seven days a week. It makes it difficult to follow the cricket World Cup! Sometimes our father relieves us behind the counter. It's our first business, we took the shop over from a Pakistani owner only two years ago. But we have very loyal customers; some of them had already been coming to this shop for years. One elderly man, who comes in for his daily paper, told me he was a paper boy here 75 years ago!

Arafat: Yes, some families have been coming here for three generations. That's why we kept the old name Yasrab News. The locals see it as their shop. It's only thanks to them that we're still in business.

Cambridge Untold: You're obviously facing competition from the Co-op supermarket just opposite and the giant Coldhams Lane Sainsbury's. Is the local corner shop threatened?

Abu: There are advantages to the corner shop. We know exactly what some of our regular customers want when they come in, who'll want ten Embassy Lights, who reads the Saturday Guardian or the Cambridge Evening News. In big chain stores the staff changes from month to month. They can't give personal treatment.

Arafat: It's true. Many customers come in just for a chat and may stay talking maybe half an hour.

Cambridge Untold: What do customers talk about?

Abu: Everything under the sun! Often it starts with the weather. The older ones particularly. And then maybe we'll move on to global warming and pollution. Or people buy their newspaper and see the headlines, and we talk about the state of the world, how it's all messed up! A big topic is the A14. It's a dangerous road. Accidents are always in the local news. I think people really go out of their way to support their local shop. One woman told me her husband asked her not to buy his newspaper at the supermarket when she did the shopping, but always to come to us for it!

Cambridge Untold: So, you've never met any prejudice?

Abu: No, customers seem to choose us. Narrow-minded ones are the exception. They probably assume we're Pakistani because the previous owner was. I don't think they're bothered about the differences between Pakistani or Bangladeshi or Indian.

Generally we find people here very friendly and accepting. I'll give you an example. Last month I shaved my hair off. Lots of customers complained! Why did you go and do that? I don't like it! I pre-

ferred it how it was... I was amazed. You know, your wife and children or close friends may say this sort of thing, but your customers? I think if they can complain to my face about my haircut, it means I'm in there!

Cambridge Untold: You have a personal relationship with your regular customers. How else do you compete with the giant stores?

Abu: By stocking a bit of everything! Take a look in our shop window... people get curious and come in just to have a look and end up finding something they need.

Cambridge Untold: I can see candles, DIY tools, an ice tray, an electric fan, and lots of toys. Earlier a customer came in on the off chance and asked if you stocked pot-pourri...

Arafat: Often they come in for one thing, and leave with something else entirely! And it's not true the small shop is more expensive. Sainsbury's can buy massive amounts of products, say crisps, where we will buy maybe just one box. But we still sell our crisps at 40p against their 47p.

Abu: And we price our toys so a parent with two or three children can buy them all something with £10 or so. We sell a lot in summer and at Christmas. Most of our transactions are very small, kids buying sweets on their way home from school, a newspaper, a can of soup. We make ends meet but it's not easy.

Cambridge Untold: The shop is obviously a focal point in the community. What would you like for Mill Road?

Arafat: If we could stop large chain stores opening it will help! If just one of them opens it will close us down overnight...

Abu: We have to attract more people to this side of Mill Road. Numbers this side seem to have dropped since we opened. It's because there's nowhere to park. If someone wants to pop in for a photocopy, where can he park his car without getting a ticket?

Cambridge Untold: And do you ever envisage going back to Bangladesh to live?

Arafat: To be honest, we are stuck here! All the family is here now, our parents, our wives and children... But it's a nice place to be stuck.

Abu: I'd say the standard of living is higher here. But maybe some quality of life is missing. In our country the air you breathe is fresher, the wild flowers grow wilder and you can see the stars clearly in a black sky! After eight years we do miss things in Bangladesh. The beautiful tea gardens of Sylhet, oranges growing on the tree... but the way I see it, if we manage to make a living here we can visit Bangladesh regularly. Then we can have the best of both worlds. ♦

MESMERISED BY MEZE

CENKER UCAN came to Britain from Istanbul in Turkey. The owner of Cambridge's prize-winning newest eatery talks to Cambridge Untold about waking up as a child to a military coup, and leaving London's most select restaurants for Mill Road.



dated premises of an electrical repair shop. Now, it's a stylish diminutive place done out in pale wood, with tasteful etchings of nineteenth century Istanbul on its creamy walls. What wrought such a transformation? Its present owner Cenker Ucan had just been told by his wife that they were expecting their first child, and Cenker (pronounced Jenker) had gone for a long city walk to take in the enormity of the news that he was going to be a father. Setting out from his home near the Coldhams Lane Sainsburys', his mind on the future, he was walking along Mill Road when he spotted a sign in the dusty

I'm sitting in the Meze Bar in Romsey just over the bridge in Mill Road. It's hard to believe that before it opened its doors in June 2006, this space had long been the dilapi-

window of the closed down Fairdeals Electrical shop. It said Consent Given for A3 (meaning the premises could be converted into a cafe dealing in food and beverages). Buoyed by the good news his wife had given him, Cenker decided then and there, that on this at first glance unprepossessing site, he would open Mill Road's first Turkish Meze restaurant.

It's 3 o'clock on a dull February day and I'm catching Cenker in the mid-afternoon lull between his lunch time customers and a party of twenty four who have booked the Meze Bar for the evening. 'Meze...' explains the proud owner, serving me a latte and sitting down opposite at one of the six tables, 'it's the name we give to any small dish, something like a Turkish tapa. There are over 600. We make them, fresh with meat, cheese, sea food, with herbs and vegetables fried in olive oil. You want to try our anchovy meze?'

It is surprising to hear that the idea for this meze bar, conceived with Cenker's first child, now a thriving baby boy of two, almost never happened at all. 'I made an offer but I was broke at the time, I had

70p in my pocket! I told a good friend my crazy idea. He put up £15,000 straight off. I raised another £45,000 and things started happening. There was a lot of red tape, I had to have disability access put in for the toilets and fire doors and escapes. In Britain the council is very particular about things like that, and the legislation keeps changing. The first builder left the job unfinished – basically ripped me off twenty thousand quid – so I had to get in another firm to complete the conversion. I was low on cash, the first week's rent was due, we were due to open...it got stressful.'

So, what made Cenker want to open a Turkish eatery on Mill Road? It's not as though there aren't any others. 'I'm not about kebabs', Cenker explains. 'And I don't do take-away. Meze is different. I'm a meze guy.' Had market research revealed a niche for an upmarket restaurant offering Mediterranean food on the Romsey side of the bridge? 'I didn't do any marketing', Cenker shrugs. 'No business plan. Just word of mouth. I wasn't at all sure we were going to make it, but we went ahead and opened our doors the first night and the place filled up. Ninety percent of my customers live in the neighbourhood. Some couples, they eat here two maybe three times a week.'

The son of a successful Istanbul restaurant and club owner, Cenker did not come into the restaurant business by accident. 'My father owned a fish restaurant under the famous Eminonu Bridge in Istanbul. He had a club as well, seven outlets altogether including a really modern meze bar, kind of like this one in a smart district called Beyoglu. In fact, at 19 I became bar manager in Les Parisiens, Turkey's only striptease club! You know, in Turkey we have a great food culture, we like to go out and eat really late, at around 9:30. When we sit down for a dinner it lasts hours, lots of friends, everyone's children around, lots of shots of aniseed raki, and of course, lots of mezes.'

The various red tape and building challenges Cenker faced in transforming the old Fairdeals Electrical outlet into Mill Road's only meze bar pales in comparison with the setbacks his father had faced in Istanbul in the 80s. 'Just when things were going well for my dad's restaurants, Turkey had a military coup. The generals imposed a curfew so no one was allowed to go out after midnight. In Turkey that's when we do our eating and drinking, so the curfew hit the restaurant trade very badly. My father lost all his businesses. I watched them all close, one after the other.'

"I love Romsey. I buy my wine from Threshers down the road, I buy my vegetables from Hilary's across the road, and my meat from the Notun Bangla Bazaar, the halal butcher's next door. They support me and I support them. There is a great community feeling here."

What did the nine-year-old Cenker remember of that military crackdown of 12 September 1980? 'I remember waking up in my bedroom, it was a warm September morning. It was still the holidays and usually I would hit the street early to hang out with my friends. But that morning everything was

eerily silent, you know, no traffic noise outside, nothing. When I looked into our street, it was like a ghost town! I felt a kind of nervous silence in the house too. I remember we lived in a third floor flat at the bottom of a hill and at the top was one of Istanbul's main streets, Cumhuriyet Street. I saw tanks passing one after the other. My parents turned the TV on to find out what the hell was going on, but the screen was blank! Then

at about 2 pm all these generals appeared on TV in uniform and announced the military takeover. It was a nightmare. There was constant propaganda, curfews, arrests, especially of left wingers like my parents. People were hanged. It all lasted three years till around 1983. The coup cost my father all his businesses, including his meze bar like this one...'

Cenker's eyes flicker, and he is back again in his Mill Road restaurant. He casts a fond proprietary glance over the creamy walls, its polished hardwood tables illuminated by discreet lighting. The coffee machine behind the bar hisses steam and Cenker asks his waitress, Aysegul, who comes from Turkey's Black Sea coast, to fetch me another latte. She has been busying herself behind the bar, but not without lending an ear to Cenker's Istanbul reminiscences.

'I do get homesick sometimes', says Cenker, unprompted. Often? I ask. It's as if in his busy life he has not had time to think about Istanbul and has just realised how important the city is to him.

'Like five times a day!' he laughs, and lights a cigarette. 'No, seriously. I love Cambridge but I miss my city, it's a unique place. And Bosphorus!' (he says Bosphorus dropping the English article 'the'). The seemingly magic word crops up at various points in our conversation and whenever it does, a faraway look appears in the down to earth entrepreneur's eyes. When I say I have never seen the famed straits which Istanbul straddles, the spot where Europe meets Asia, he shakes his head in commiseration and proceeds to evoke its beauty for me: a jumble of pastel-painted fretworked houses flowing down the wooded hills spiked by black cypress to the edge of the glittering blue sea, the spires of the many mosques pricking the skyline, the rounded form of

the Galata Tower from which Byzantine soldiers once looked out over Istanbul as far as Tarabia Beach washed by Bosphorus....

I glance out through the large windows of the Meze Bar at Mill Road. A light stringy drizzle has started and passers-by, quickening their pace, hunch their shoulders into the wind. It's a long way from the Bosphorus. Cenker, however, seems oblivious.

'And the people! I miss the people of Istanbul. You see, people from my city don't really see themselves as just Turkish. The real natives of Istanbul are not Turkish at all, but Rumi. They date back to Byzantium and they were there before the Turks when Istanbul was called Constantinople. And there are other ethnic minorities too, different cultures, Armenians, Kurds and people from the Black Sea, it's very cosmopolitan, a real mosaic. In fact, that's what I like so much about Britain. When I first came to London I immediately felt at home with my Asian or Greek neighbours. It's the mosaic effect again.'

So what made Cenker leave Turkey to come to Britain?

'Well, when I turned 21, I received a letter from the military: they gave me three weeks to report for eighteen months compulsory military service'. I'm pretty anti-military, I wouldn't like to bear arms or be under anyone's orders. I think that played the biggest part in my coming over here. The British Consulate in Istanbul gave me a two-month visa to come to England. I arrived in Stansted in September 1991. I chanced upon the nicest immigration officer because he looked at the letter from the Consulate and my two-month visa, and extended it for a full year!'

Hearing Cenker's story, what springs to mind is the image of a man repeatedly landing on his feet. Only 21 at the time, he landed a job as barman at the London Hilton Olympia near the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre where ('would you believe it?') the general manager turned out to be Turkish. Learning the hospitality trade on the hoof, it wasn't long before the bright and capable young Turk had moved on to the position of head barman at the fashionable Westbury Hotel in the West End. 'Money wise I was doing very well and the plan was just to stay a couple

of years and return to Turkey. But the thing is, see, I was spending a lot too, you know. I'd earn it and spend it the same day.'

Next came Cenker's promotion to bar manager at the prestigious China House complex next to the Piccadilly Ritz. It was all going swimmingly, Cenker's ascendant life curve fully living up to the dream of every immigrant arriving in a foreign capital in search of the good life. When he met his wife Lisa, an English girl who worked at Selfridges, life could not get better. Here Cenker breaks into a smile and you catch the flipside of the earnest, hardworking entrepreneur. 'My wife and I used to go out three or four times a week. We loved London. Soho, Covent Garden, our favourite place was l'Odéon on Regent Street, we'd order champagne, the works!' he shrugs and grins. 'Hey, I'm Turkish.'

But in 2000 came news which changed Cenker's life, and which accounts for why he is now in his Cambridge Meze Bar talking to me: he was diagnosed with

Crohn's disease.

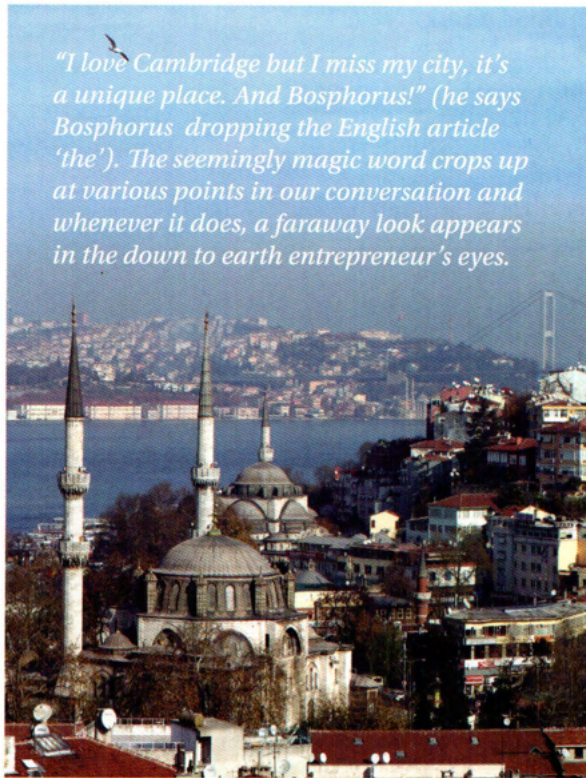
'Inflammation of the intestine', he explains. 'I'd got very thin, I couldn't eat and I was really sick. I was off work for six weeks, and when I went back I couldn't enjoy it anymore, I was just psychologically off work. Then we decided to come to Cambridge...'

Why Cambridge? 'Well', Cenker explains, casting his mind back seven years. It's as if the genesis of the decision to move here is only now fully hitting him. 'My wife, Lisa, she came on a day trip... She came home and said Cambridge was really pretty and maybe we should go and live there, and I said okay. So, I sold the flat and bought a house here...'

Had he visited the city? I want to know. 'Nah', Cenker shrugs, with a look that says, 'Lisa fell in love with Cambridge. You know, she's more than a wife to me, she's my best friend, my advisor, everything. I trust her judgement.' So they moved in early summer when Cambridge is at its most seductive, white-mayflower swathing the trees and the first punts drifting down the Cam. But what did Cenker the metropolitan bon vivant make of this quiet university city?

'A bit boring after London', he admits. 'But we moved into a house with a garden which is a luxury in London, I picked up a bike and enjoyed cycling

"I love Cambridge but I miss my city, it's a unique place. And Bosphorus!" (he says Bosphorus dropping the English article 'the'). The seemingly magic word crops up at various points in our conversation and whenever it does, a faraway look appears in the down to earth entrepreneur's eyes.



around, I got a dog... then there was the baby.'

It was only after they'd moved to Cambridge and Cenker started getting treatment at Addenbrooke's that he realised the Cambridge hospital was at the cutting edge of research into his condition ('would you believe it?'). He'd landed on his feet again. But perhaps it was not pure coincidence. 'We never really spoke about it, Lisa and me, but I think it was the reason she chose Cambridge. I think she knew. I still have Crohn's. The disease does affect your life, but I've had an operation, and you have to learn to live with it. You can't give up in life because you have a disease. That's why when I heard we were going to have a child, I went for that long walk, and when I happened upon that sign in that old half-derelict building, right where we're sitting now, I decided "I'm going to make a go of it." I wanted life to continue as normal'.

The telephone behind the bar trills and Aysegul takes the call. Cenker cocks an ear and listens in. 'You see', he smiles, 'she's taking a confirmation for a booking later this week. A local couple celebrating with 23 of their friends... I love Romsey. I buy my wine from Threshers down the road, I buy my vegetables from Hilary's across the road, and my meat from the Notun Bangla Bazaar, the halal butcher's next door. They support me and I support them. There is a great community feeling here'.

And Cenker's plans for the future? 'A few more Meze Bars would be nice,' he grins. So, what of the original plan of spending a couple years and going back to the shores of the Bosphorus. 'Cambridge is home now', he sighs philosophically. 'Wherever I earn my bread, that's my home. Besides, I have a little son now, William'. A very English name I point out. 'Yes, but his middle name is Timucin which is the birth name of Genghis Khan...and I'm teaching him to speak Turkish. You know, he says Mummy in Turkish and me he calls Daddy in English....' Cenker's delight is unmistakable. 'It's why I do all this', he says. 'It's for him. Every parent wants the best for their child.'

So after sixteen years, is Cenker here to stay? 'To be honest, if I went back to Turkey I would miss Cambridge'. What would he miss? We look out at the early evening winter murk settling on Mill Road and the rush hour traffic backing up bumper to bumper down towards Brookfields.

'I'd miss a lot. Weather isn't everything. You know, people in Britain are lucky. You can do anything you want to do in this country, you don't have to bribe anyone, nothing dodgy. It's a really open society. And I love the fact that there are so many different kinds of people here. It's making this place rich, not in money but culturally, you know? This place is in Europe, but not in Europe. That's its uniqueness. Istanbul is where Europe meets Asia, but Britain, it's where all the world meets.' ♦



The old Mill Road Library has been given a new lease of life and opens its doors as a fully renovated purpose-built community space.



In an unnamed side street (soon to be Bharat Way) leading to the city depot at the foot of the Mill Road bridge stands the old Mill Road Library. Built in 1896, the cavernous redbrick building was once a public lending library, an important nexus in the neighbourhood. Like many other public services, it fell victim to short sighted spending cuts in the 1990s.

The solid wooden book stacks, newspaper racks and reading tables have long since been removed. What greets me as I push open the large door to the old library is a vast white space, a high vaulted ceiling and at one end, still incongruously wrapped in bubble wrap, the beautiful, intricately carved stone altarpiece of a Hindu shrine. I can make out elephant-trunk supported brackets, devotional wheels. Fresh sawn timber has been stacked at the other end of the hall, and from somewhere above on a high mezzanine hung with a hessian dust curtain, comes what sounds like someone sandpapering. When I call out his name, the noise stops and from behind the dust curtain, Suresh Patel appears.

We sit on moulded plastic chairs in the middle of the hall, with a view through the open door to the street where Suresh wants to keep an eye on his car, parked in one of only two pay-and-display bays. 'I've paid for another hour,' he says. 'But if I run over by just four minutes, I get fined. The traffic wardens' office is just next door and they're merciless.'

A highly experienced architect and urban planner, Kenyan-born Suresh trained in India in the sixties, and worked in Nigeria and the Midlands before becoming head of design on a government research project near Oxford in 2000. 'The Indian community in Cambridge had no permanent place to hold various religious and cultural events. There was a real need for a purpose-designed meeting place for local Indian elders, who found themselves stuck at home, isolated, their children out at work. Many of them spoke only Gujarati, so social services could not really meet their needs. It seemed obvious they should come together.'

In 1996 the building's landlord, Cambridge County Council, invited various community groups to submit proposals for use of the former library. The Indian Community and

E together

new lease of life as Bharat Bhavan, the Indian Community and Cultural Association. This autumn it is a newly designed space complete with Hindu Shrine. Overseeing the mammoth task is SURESH PATEL.



Culture Association's proposal was one of 35 submitted. They won.

'We've called it Bharat Bhavan, which means India House. We use it for all sorts of Indian cultural and religious get-togethers, and teach Indian dance, music and languages. But we also open it to over 16 different users, from an African dance group to a yoga class. Though it's a Hindu centre, it's open to absolutely everyone. With all the rich and varied communities we have in this city, how often do we all come together?'

As a place of worship, Bharat Bhavan cannot receive government assistance. Amazingly, the £85,000 that has gone into redesigning the old library has been raised entirely from individual donations and local fund-raising events. They are still in need of a further £40,000. 'Every Saturday lunchtime we serve home cooked vegetarian curry at £3-£4 a plate. Our Indian lassi drinks are very popular at only 50p a glass. It all adds up, and has allowed us to remove the false ceiling and open up this lovely vaulted space with its high lantern window. It also paid for the Hindu shrine carvings we had done in Jodhpur in Rajasthan in local sandstone, and shipped to Cambridge. I just couldn't find the craftsmen to do it over here. Although many Indians left for the UK as highly skilled wood and stone carvers and embroiderers, once here, they got jobs driving buses and trains, or running small grocery outlets. All lost their skills as artisans. It's sad. It

took 25 craftsmen 4 months to produce that altar. All the various statues of the deities which are so important in a Hindu shrine, Ganesh, Vishnu, Krishna and Ram, we got in Jaipur which is the place in India for deities carved in marble by families of stone carvers practising their trade for centuries.'

The plans for Bharat Bhavan are ambitious. From a new entrance from the street, the visitor will be welcomed by a marble statue of the elephant god Ganesh in a niche ('Ganesh is a must in any Hindu building', says Suresh). The white walls will be hung with paintings and sequinned embroideries depicting scenes from life on the Indian sub-continent as well as East Africa. Suresh, one hired labourer and a volunteer are currently carrying out the refurbishment of the new facilities which will include kitchens, a basement dance studio, and a disabled lift up to what will one day be an airy mezzanine complete with resource centre and cafeteria serving up vegetarian food. 'We want to have the daily newspapers available. I'm mindful of the fact this was once a library. In our proposal we stressed that we wanted to maintain the original building's function. So not everything is changing; we're committed to restoring many features to how they were in 1896. This beautiful Victorian redbrick structure is an asset to Cambridge. It belongs to us all.'

The Hindu Shrine in Bharat Bhavan will be inaugurated this autumn when the carved statues of revered Hindu deities are carried in colourful procession from the Guildhall, along Parkside and Mill Road. Local schools, colleges and music groups will be invited to join in the festivities. Besides the beautifully decorated bullock cart, there are plans afoot for a holy cow, and if possible an elephant! No Hindu festivity is worthy of its name without musicians, bhajan mandli (devotional singers) and street dancers in colourful costumes. 'And plenty to eat,' Suresh assures me. 'Prasadam is the offering of food to everyone who comes to pranapratishta, the religious ceremony where life is instilled into the marble statues and they actually become deities'.

Suresh stands up from the plastic chairs on which we've been sitting and we walk towards the main door. It's time to feed the greedy pay-and-display meter. 'Bharat Bhavan is a Hindu space but it's open to everyone,' Suresh repeats. I wonder if this extends to traffic wardens. 'Absolutely everyone!' laughs Suresh. 'We all have to come together!' ♦



Lunchtime. Café Brasil. A Brazilian saudade melody floats into the air, heavy with longing. (I'm missing you Brazil, I yearn for your golden sands.)

On the blue sofas,

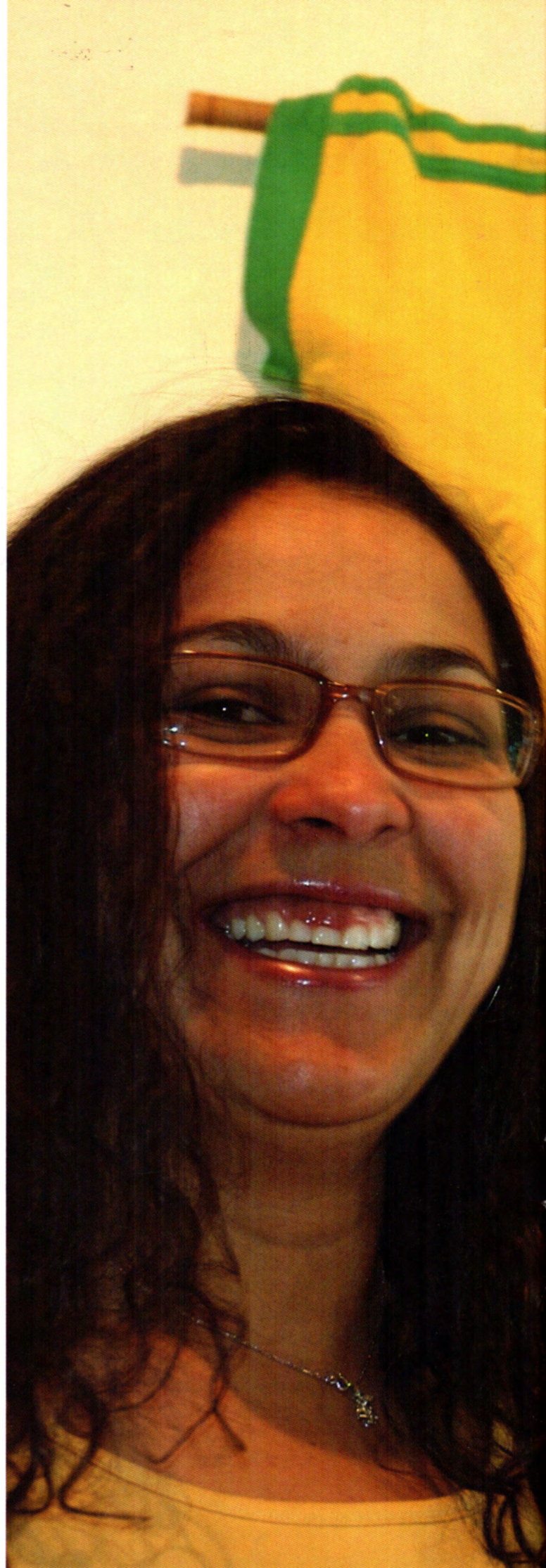
two students are comparing notes over mocha. Three young mothers have parked their prams beside their table and are catching up over herb tea and pear and almond tart. A small queue has formed at the counter to order from the waitress. In the kitchen a microwave dings. Neide Carvalho emerges slightly flustered, carrying before her an order. She is a diminutive young woman, her dark hair pulled back in a pony tail, and she is clearly expecting. 'Which table is the Chicken Brazil?' she asks the waitress. She is surprised to see me. 'Ah! Our interview...it's today!' She glances at her line of customers. 'Give me ten minutes', she tells me. 'Sit down. Have a coffee.' And she bustles over to serve the couple at table 8.


Once the midday rush has died down, we sit upstairs in a surprisingly spacious internet café in a bay window filled with yuccas and geraniums overlooking Mill Road. When I ask her to paint me a picture of where she was born, Neide lets out a long sigh. 'I was born in a place so different from here...', she begins, and then shakes her head, as if words fail her. It is as though the task of evoking this other world is beyond her practical, workaday English, not a word of which she spoke six years ago, and which she now uses to run her thriving business. 'It was a tiny village called Arapau...' she begins hesitantly. 'No, I don't think there is a place I can compare it to here...'

I have heard of the Brazilian propensity for nostalgia, their tendency, when they reminisce about their vast country, to grow misty eyed and melancholy. It is seeping up the stairs from the CD player in the words of a hummable saudade playing. (Oh, Brazil, when ever will I see your green jungles, feel the breeze of your velvet nights? Nothing compares etc.) Did the village have a church? I prompt gently.

'It was too small for a church!' she laughs at the idea. She sighs, and then makes an effort to summon the words that might conjure Arapau for me. 'The houses were made with, what is the stuff you make baskets with... and earth and water? My father built ours himself. We had no electricity in Arapau, just lamps with petrol so at night it was black and scary for us kids when we went outside to the loo, and we had no beds, we slept in hammocks hanging between posts...It was awful!'

I can suddenly imagine the village Neide grew up





in: Arapau, a tiny cluster of wattle and daub houses lost in the sertao, the semi-arid hills of north-eastern Brazil. The suffocating heat, teeming mosquito-whining nights, the broad swathe of the Milky Way above, and the narrow mentalities of the villagers asleep in their beds.

'We were very poor. There were 8 of us kids. Our family wasn't unusual, all my friends had 7 or 8 brothers and sisters. Even now, my sisters all have big families, lots of children. I once asked my mother why she had so many of us and she said it was because there was no television!' Memory gradually makes the words come tumbling out as Neide recalls her early life in the village. 'I went back two years ago and it was completely changed after 30 years. There's TV in the houses, cars, people live like millionaires compared to back then. We didn't have an oven; we cooked on an estufa, a wood stove, on the floor. I started to cook for my older brothers when I was eight while they went out to work. Life was very, very hard.'

Neide went to the village school until she was nine. She remembers unimaginative lessons in the stultifying heat, and a strict teacher meting out punishment with a piece of wood. The government provided a meagre school diner: a glass of tepid milk, some rice or couscous with vegetables, and if they were lucky, some dried mince meat.

At home, there wasn't enough money coming in for the family to afford the basics. Her father went away in the week to work in the salt mines. Her mother was a maths teacher in a government

THE GIRL FROM ARAPAU

"Life is a test. But you always, always have choice. I always say 'Si acredita, voce pode.' In English it's something like 'If you believe, you can' "

NEIDE CARVALHO runs Mill Road's Café Brasil. She tells Cambridge Untold her remarkable tale of childhood hardship in the tiny village of Arapau, and her determination to get out.

secondary school, but it paid so little that she left and got work sewing dresses at home for a factory, until an allergy to the synthetic material brought her hands out in a scarlet rash. 'My two older brothers got work in the fields planting onions. But it couldn't feed us all. So I left school aged 9 to work picking cotton. My older and younger sister did, too. We had to stand in direct sun at 35 degrees. Can you imagine wearing thick jeans in that heat to avoid getting scratched, a big hat on our head to avoid sunstroke. When you pick cotton, it pricks your fingers, all day long.' Neide winces at the memory, and rubs the tips of her smooth fingers. 'It was really painful.'

Neide worked in the cotton fields from 5:30am to 5:30pm with an hour's break for water and a meagre packed lunch. At the end of the day, she'd queue with hundreds of other child labourers as well as elderly men and women to weigh their day's pickings in massive sacks. Their tally for the day would be noted by the gang master on each labourer's individual tab. Only at the end of the month would the workers be paid. 'It was a few reaes, now it would probably not even buy you some sweets. But it helped us pay off the monthly account we had at the grocery store.'

After four years hard labour, Neide was developing into an attractive young girl of 13. Her emerging beauty was not lost on one of the bosses of the cotton plantation who asked her father if he could marry her.

'Of course I was surprised, he was 22 and I looked on him as my boss, not a husband! I was afraid my father would make me marry him, because that happens in Brazil. In those days in the village everything was possible. People are very Catholic. My father always told us that sleeping with a man before your wedding is the worst possible thing that can happen to a girl. My younger sister was a bit naughty, you know, she disobeyed my dad when she was 13. My dad told her 27-year-old boyfriend he better marry her or he'd tell the police he'd slept with an under-age girl. The marriage lasted 28 days. She ran away.'



'As the bus set off, I told my shocked aunt my plan was never to return. I was leaving the village for good!'

Neide's brush with life as a child bride was a wake up call. An astute, determined girl, she looked at the women in the village, and her own sisters, each one into her next pregnancy and still labouring for a pittance under the scorching sun, and saw with a shudder the future that awaited her in Arapau. She resolved to get out. One escape route from grinding poverty and early motherhood was to go into the church.

'One woman started a little house church in the village and I loved the dressing up and praying and the singing and clapping. It was lovely. At one point I really wanted to become a nun.'

The other way out was education. So Neide enrolled in the village school where the huge gaps in her basic schooling were immediately apparent. At 13, her writing was still that of a nine year old.

But after one term, Neide was restless. She imagined a better life beyond the hills of the sertao and begged her parents to let her travel to her grandmother's house in the coastal city of Natal. But she had never been on a bus or travelled outside the region, she was too young, there was no one to take her on the four hour journey. In the summer break, an aged aunt from the city came to the village and agreed to take Neide back to visit her grandmother in the city. 'As the bus set off, I told my shocked aunt my plan was never to return. I was leaving the village for good!'

Once Neide got to her grandmother's, the 13 year old surprised the old lady with the news that she was never going back. As the weeks went by, the grandmother realised her bright determined granddaughter would suffocate back in Arapau, and in long distance telephone conversations tried to convince Neide's outraged parents to let her stay. It wasn't long before a case worker from the juvenile courts was knocking at the door, enquiring about a runaway minor. Just in time, Neide got a job as a nanny to a wealthy family, the Cavalcantis, who lived in the upmarket district of Pontanegra. Neide fled there, not giving her grandmother her new address.

'It was the best thing I ever did. I looked after the

family's two and a half year old daughter, Tassia. She was lovely. The family gave me days off to go back to school and even paid me overtime, I couldn't believe it. I started sending money back every month to my parents. I'd give an envelope to the driver who knew my family, so I could trust him to take it to them. It was like five times more money than any of us had earned! After 18 months I was really missing my parents but I was afraid if I went back my dad would keep me there. The last thing I wanted was to be trapped in the village again! A letter arrived in my mum's handwriting (my dad was illiterate) promising the Cavalcantis that

they would not try to keep me in Arapau. In the end, I went. When I got there, I couldn't believe what they'd done to the house: they'd rebuilt the mud walls in cement and hooked it up to the electricity. They'd even bought a TV with the money I'd been sending back.'

Drama came to the household as Neide's week with her parents came to an end. Hearing the rattly old bus waiting with its engine running outside the new village shop, Neide said her goodbyes and carried her suitcase down the garden path to the new iron gate. Locked. 'After all he'd promised, my dad had locked the gate and had the key in his pocket! He started saying that I was only 15 and too young to go back. I was going to miss my bus! In the end my mum found another key and opened the gate! Looking back, Neide can understand her father's desperate bid to keep her there. 'Basically, he was afraid for me, all alone in the city.'

Neide went back to Natal, where she continued to work as a nanny to little Tassia, moving out for greater independence, worked in a bakery, got engaged to a local football star, found out her fiancé had 'a past' (he was married with a child, and was a serial adulterer). She left Natal, rode the bus three days and two nights south through half the continent of South America to the teeming metropolis of Sao Paulo and a new job as nanny to the two teen-aged daughters of a single mother whose toy-boy, live-in lover turned out to turn tricks as a gigolo, and had his eye on both Neide and her young wards



"I went back two years ago and it was completely changed after 30 years. There's TV in the houses, cars, people live like millionaires compared to back then."

(when Neide brought this fact to the attention of her boss, she was asked to leave the next day). She also managed to complete six years elementary education in two. She was just 22.

Buses play a big part in Neide's story. In a country occupying virtually half the land mass of the South American continent, these huffing diesel monsters provided the only means of escape to a better life. It was on a long distance bus while she was travelling the 2000 kilometres from Sao Paulo back to her village that she met a young British back packer travelling in Amazonia for six months, John. 'I fell in love on that bus', smiles

Neide.

Neide eventually joined John in Britain. She met her first cool English summer with characteristic determination: 'Yes, I want to live here.' They married in Cambridge and have a four and a half year old year old daughter, Juliana, with a little brother or sister expected in September. 'John is actually of Portuguese parents so he can speak some Portuguese. We try to for Juliana's sake. And you remember Tassia? You know, the little girl I used to babysit in Natal. She's here staying with me', says Neide. She's 18 and learning English at the Embassy school. And my mother is coming from Arapau this summer...'

At only 31, Neide's story is one of trials and hardships ultimately crowned with success. Could she ever have foreseen back in the village, that one day she would own a nice café in Cambridge?

'Life is a test. But you always, always have choice. I always say "Si acredita, voce pode." In English it's something like "If you believe, you can".'

Has she been back to the village recently? 'Two years ago. My sisters are still there, they all married very young to illiterate men and can only get jobs, which pay nothing. It's hard to relate to that, they think I'm made of money and can help them. It gets in the way. I see my young nieces who are beautiful girls of 14 or 15 growing up in that place, and I worry it's all happening again. I tell them, don't do what your mothers did. Get an education, get out of here! "Si acredita, voce pode."'

Still Sweet and Spicy

Zarrar Arshad came to Britain from Fazalabad, Pakistan in 1976. He owns Sweet n' Spicy restaurant opposite Ditchburn Place. Below he talks about how Islam informs his life and work and shares his views for a better Mill Road.

Cambridge Untold:
You came to Britain in 1976. Have you been back since?

Zarrar Arshad: Yes, I go back quite often. My mother's living in Lahore, but a lot of my friends and family have left Pakistan. I have two brothers and a sister in Cambridge and lots of my friends are living in Saudi Arabia. My three children go back to Pakistan every summer. It's a way of keeping in contact with their culture and with the Urdu language. My youngest son is eleven, and of course, his main interest in Pakistan is cricket. He wants me to send him to cricket camp so he can learn more about the game. He says he wants





"I've been here over 30 years and I think I know all the Mill Road business owners. It's become a real community and many of us are working to build that further."

to play for his country. I think he means Britain. Last year our family went to Mecca in Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage or haj. Unfortunately, my youngest son didn't manage to get a place. There are millions of applicants and you have to get permission from the haj authorities.

Cambridge Untold: What does going on the haj in Mecca mean to you?

Zarrar Arshad: All Muslims are encouraged to make the pilgrimage once in their lifetime. But you should never get into financial difficulties to do it, and only go if it's something you can afford. People are discouraged from taking out a bank loan or borrowing money to visit Mecca. And the money you raise to go on the haj must be morally earned, it can't be dodgy money. To finance your trip with money from amoral sources, like theft or gambling, would be a waste of time because you wouldn't be pleasing God. Generally, Islam discourages loans. People ring you up out of the blue and ask you if you want a loan, or letters come through the letterbox constantly urging you to borrow, or buy now and pay nothing. People run up massive debts. It causes a lot of unhappiness. Strict Muslims even consider interest earned on one's savings to be immoral.

Cambridge Untold: As someone who runs a business, do you use the banking system?

Zarrar Arshad: I do, but I've never taken out a loan. And I don't serve alcohol, although that is where a lot of the income in a restaurant comes from. I used to sell it when I had a grocery store and we had fights in the shop or on the pavement every night! I stopped the day I read in the Cambridge Evening News that a young girl, a student, had died as a result of alcohol. That article and the photograph of the young girl who had all her life before her, deeply affected me. I thought about it all day and in the end I

said to myself, 'That's it, I'm part of this, I'm responsible too.' So I stopped selling beer and wine, though financially it was a huge setback.

Cambridge Untold: Islam is seen as a strict religion which might be difficult to follow. Is it?

Zarrar Arshad: I'd say Islam is easy if you follow it, but if you don't follow it properly, it's very hard! Take praying five times a day, for example, which is what the Koran says we should do. Those five prayer sessions actually only take about 20 minutes in an entire day. It's something God asks you to do and once you make it a part of your life it becomes very easy. When I was younger I prayed maybe three times and skipped the other two sessions, but now if I don't pray I really feel I'm missing something. There is a logical reason for the five prayer sessions. When you stop what you're doing and take time to wash your face, hands and feet in order to pray, you feel so refreshed after! Stopping to pray makes you take a physical break in your busy day; it becomes a special time, a personal connection between you and God.

Cambridge Untold: You have three children, two boys at Impington Village College and a daughter at Anglia Ruskin University. How much of a challenge is it to bring them up as Muslims in Britain?

Zarrar Arshad: Well, they've been regularly to Pakistan and witnessed a Muslim society functioning successfully. But we've never forced them. Our youngest is still a child and has no pressure on him, but he gets up at five most mornings to pray with the rest of us. He loves to memorise whole sections of the Koran and he attends the mosque in Mawson Road regularly. He's a young boy and he's interested in learning about Islam along with cricket, computers and everything else! I think all religions give young people a

moral framework to grow up in. Ours is a Muslim framework, but I recognise all religions as good, though I happen to think Islam contains the wisdom of all those other religions.

Cambridge Untold: Many aspects of modern British culture must clash with your values...

Zarrar Arshad: Yes, but my children remain very much part of modern British society. They watch TV, spend time on the internet, and go to their friends' parties or Cine World like everyone else their age. I'm actually not very strict, though I do keep an eye on what company they're keeping. I think if you put in place the right values, you can trust young people to know right from wrong.

Cambridge Untold: Is the Abubakar Siddiq mosque the only one in Cambridge?

Zarrar Arshad: Yes, and Friday prayers are getting very crowded! Cambridge is a medium sized town but it has a massive intake of foreign students from the Middle East attending the universities and language schools. Then there are local Muslims and new converts to Islam. We tried to acquire new premises at Coleridge school and the old Fiat garage in Romsey. We made an offer but didn't get it.

A new mosque will cost several millions. I'm actually hopeful we can raise the funds within Cambridge, though we're appealing to Muslims in the UK and abroad. Many Muslims give 10% of their earnings to charity or for good works of this kind. Again it has to be clean money, earned in a moral way. We'd like to get somewhere quite central which visitors and tourists could visit as a new point of interest in the city. It's very important that people see that Islam has nothing to do with terrorism, as the media often portrays it.

Cambridge Untold: How do you feel about that portrayal?

Zarrar Arshad: It makes me sad. Those terrorists are misguided fanatics, certainly not Muslims. I now go out of my way to show British people that Islam is about care and compassion, about being on good terms with your neighbours. Certainly not about blowing innocent people up. So it saddens me more than I can say.

Cambridge Untold: For six years you were General Secretary of the Cambridge Pakistan Association and are very involved in the community. What changes would you like to see in Mill Road?

Zarrar Arshad: I've been here over 30 years and I think I know all the Mill Road business owners. It's become a real community and many of us are working to build that further. To be honest, when I first came to Cambridge, Mill Road was rather run down. It wasn't the kind of place to walk after dark, not only as a Pakistani but as anyone going about their business. Now that's changed. There are lots of new shops and restaurants, some of them quite upmarket, and there's a broad mix of people from Cambridge and the surrounding area. But we still have a long way to go: for instance, the quality of the actual road and pavement is awful. You could say Mill Road is becoming a victim of its commercial success. One big problem is parking. I have to park my car in Tenison Road and keep going out to pay for it. I get a fine of £30 almost on a daily basis. In the past people have suggested I stand for election as a local candidate. I've always said no, but now I'm tempted. It may be the only way to get real change. When I was in Dallas, Texas I saw some wonderful things they did to open up parts of the city to pedestrians, and I thought of here. Imagine Mill Road with people sitting out at tables in the summer! There could be rickshaw bicycles or even horse and carriage rides for tourists in summer... ♦





المسجد عبد الباقر السديق

THE CONGREGATION OF ABU BAKR SIDDIQ MOSQUE MUST BE ONE OF THE MOST DIVERSE CONCEIVABLE, WITH SOMETHING IN THE ORDER OF 70-80 NATIONALITIES.

Walk along Mill Road where it meets Mawson Road any Friday afternoon after prayers and see for yourself. Or rather, hear. As the worshippers spill out shaking hands, back slapping and making for the Café de Paris or Carlos' takeaway, I hear Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Urdu, and Estuary and American English. But isn't that Spanish? And Chinese?

Abdal Hakim Murad, who sometimes leads Friday prayers, explains. 'We have a group of Chinese worshippers of the Hui ethnic minority. Islam goes back over a thousand years in China. There are also a few Venezuelan converts, and some African-Americans who drive in from the US airforce base at Lakenheath. Our main Imam, Sejad Mekic, is Bosnian. And there's me, an English convert to Islam.'

When Abdal Hakim Murad is not wearing his preaching hat (or turban) he is Tim Winter, fellow of Wolfson College and lecturer in Islamic studies at Cambridge University. Is it confusing having two names? 'It's got its advantages', says Abdal Hakim/Tim. 'It means I can write glowing reviews of my own books.'

Abu Bakr Siddiq mosque is said to have started life as a synagogue, then for years did service as the Coop warehouse. Converted to a mosque in the 80s, the building has been extended right back into the bay fronted window of an east facing terraced house in Tenison Road, from where Abdul Hakim leads Friday prayers. But as Cambridge's only functioning public mosque, besides various prayer rooms and a small university mosque, its congregation is literally spilling out into the street.

'There are a potential 3000 Muslims in Cambridge who may want to attend the mosque at any time,' says Abdal Hakim. 'On big holidays, like Eid el Fitr at the end of Ramadan, we use Kelsey Kerridge sports hall. But most Fridays we're literally praying on Mawson Road! The local residents are very good, I must say, only the traffic wardens get a bit uptight.'

At the moment the mosque is having an upstairs extension to make room for the devout forced to spread their prayer mats in the street. It will also enlarge the upstairs gallery to accommodate more worshippers, many of them women, the fastest growing group of British converts to Islam. One such convert is Sheridan James, Britain's first female Islamic chaplain at Anglia Ruskin University. 'Most British women convert through their own spiritual questing. For many, conversion comes with marriage to Muslim men. Others, as in my case, convert because they are opting out of liberal western expectations of what it means to be a woman. Such stereotypes proved the opposite of liberating for me personally.'

With numbers rising, the mosque is looking for new premises. Funds are being raised through donations and Cambridge may soon have a purpose designed Islamic centre. Hopefully, the Abu Bakr Siddiq Mosque will remain as an annex.

'I hope so', says Abdal Hakim. 'Many Cambridge streets have become just an impersonal strip of chain stores and gin palaces. It's starting to happen in Mill Road, but with the new Hindu shrine, St Barnabas church and the mosque, hopefully it can remain a real neighbourhood.' ♦



"When I opened this place, my Dad was in here to see if he could pick up any negative vibes! He'll still drop in from time to time to see if he can frighten any ghosts off!"



When I meet Kym at her noodle bar one afternoon, she is busy taking delivery of a batch of sea bass. In the open kitchens an assistant chef is ladling marinade over a whole duck in preparation for the evening,

while another is chopping squid and bright red chilli peppers. Kym spots the last table of lunchtime diners signalling for their bill, and sends a waitress over.

We sit at a table near the kitchens. 'Kymmoy was my nickname as a baby', she begins. 'It means "little girl".' Her mobile rings and in Cantonese she tells the person to please call back later. When we return to the interview she gets a text message from her son: please pick him up from Letchworth tennis courts by four. I begin to see why it has taken weeks to get this interview with Kym. We go upstairs where there is less chance of the boss being interrupted.

'I've been in Britain since I was two, so I have no memories of Hong Kong where I was born. My dad came to work for my aunty in Birmingham a good 55 years ago when she opened her first restaurant there. It was a few years before he could send for my mum, my older sister and me. I was brought up in Birmingham, Wales and London, all over, wherever my aunt had restaurants really.'

When Kym's aunty opened The Pagoda (now Charlie Chan's) in Regent Street, the family came to Cambridge. It was one of the city's first Chinese restaurants and in those days a real novelty. 'Now we've got a lot of competition.'

Kym's entire family on her mother's side is in the restaurant trade, but she never intended to go down that road. 'I actually trained as a photographer', Kym throws her head back and laughs as she remembers. 'Seriously. I worked for Kodak in London, taking and developing pictures. I even did some work for Vogue.'

It's not every Chinese immigrant to this country in the 1950s who could open a string of restaurants and takeaways. Where had the money come from? 'We were quite rich on my mum's side', says Kym. 'It goes back to when my great-grandfather got a job with the Chinese Emperor as his servant. It was a very prestigious post to work for The Emperor, but I don't suppose you could get rich on it. Then when my great grandfather got too old, his son, my grandfather, inherited the job.'

Kym's grandfather actually became the servant to the last Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Pu Yi. When the Japanese invaded in 1937, the last Emperor was

Lei Si Fan Mei?

KYM LAU was born in Hong Kong and came to Britain as an infant. She owns Kymmoy's noodle bar with husband, Alan, the head chef. She tells Cambridge Untold about her rich Chinese heritage.

dethroned and died in 1967, demoted from God-like status in the Forbidden City to a simple gardener in the Beijing Botanical Gardens. The fate of Kym's grandfather, however, took a turn for the better.

'He became a very successful shipping merchant! Somehow, he had managed to acquire jewels while in the Emperor's service. Inflation after the Japanese invasion meant paper money was useless, its value. I've asked my mother how her father came by those jewels but she says he died the same year she was born, so she doesn't have a clue. And my grandmother, who died in 2004, never really liked to talk about it; she was only an 18 year old girl, the last of five wives, when my grandfather married her so she wasn't really in a position to ask! Wife Number One probably knew but my grandmother as Wife Number Five couldn't ask her, and of course that first wife is long dead too. So, who knows?'

It's tempting to think that the Emperor was behind Kym's grandfather's sudden wealth. Perhaps, one morning, foreseeing his imminent removal by the Japanese, the Emperor called his favourite servant to the Imperial bedroom to help him button down his starched collar, and slipped his astonished retainer a small velvet bag of sapphires, rubies and jade... It would mean that those takeaways and restaurants in Wimbledon, Birmingham, Chepstow and Kymmoy's in Mill Road owed their existence to the gratefulness of the last Emperor and the demise of the last Chinese dynasty.

'I dunno', muses Kym. Her speech is pure Cambridge, with persistent Cantonese inflections. 'It makes you wonder though, doesn't it?'

In 2004, Kym flew back to Hong Kong with her husband and children. It was effectively her first visit as she had left when she was a baby of two. Yet, she found it was very much what she expected: skyscrapers, teeming streets, familiar smells of soy sauce and duck marinade. And she spoke Cantonese and the Haka dialect as if she'd never been away. 'It was what I expected,' she shrugs. 'I kind of felt at home.'

It's a sentiment regularly expressed by emigrants returning to their country of origin, and one often shared by people of different heritages born in Britain and visiting 'home' for the first time.

'I went across to mainland China to see my maternal grandmother who was 89, I wanted to meet her



but jewellery kept

these massive heavy doors into a huge quite tatty living room space with chairs which looked to me like they went back to the time of the Emperors. They'd be worth quite a bit, I reckon.

Her bedroom is up a ladder in a kind of mezzanine or balcony, and the kitchen is outside across a yard in the old Chinese style, everything has its block. The toilets are separate and there's a barn where she kept chickens. Staying in that draughty old house for a few days really made me feel a sense of history. It's where my mother was born and grew up, it's kind of where I came from.'

If going 'back' connected Kym with her Chinese roots, what was the visit like for her children, Jamie, 17, and Jade, 14?

'They hated it', she laughs. 'They didn't like seeing the poverty in the villages. We saw this old woman begging in the street one day, she must have been as old as my grandmother. We asked her why she had to beg for food. She said her son had thrown her out! Her husband had died and the son had inherited all the money. It's an old Chinese tradition, the sons come before the wife or daughters. The girls get married and lose everything with their surname.'

Kym, brought up in Britain, yet very Chinese, looks on the culture of her country of origin with what seems a mixture of fondness and irritation. 'Those ancient chairs at my grandmother's. Now she has passed on, my mother has no right to them or anything in the house. Girls don't count. It'll never change in China. It's just the tradition.'

If British traditions go back centuries, in China they go back millennia. Not surprisingly, the word tradition comes up at several points of our conversation. That and 'in the old days', with which Kym starts so many of her sentences as she tries to explain the reality of today's Chinese living abroad. But tradition, ancient and time-honoured, seems a double edged sword; it confers respectability on the continuance of outmoded, outrageous practices. On the other hand, it enriches heritage, informs iden-

tity, and provides a real sense of cultural continuity.

'Food. That's really important in Chinese culture all over the world', laughs Kym.

The Chinese obsession with food was perhaps born of its extreme scarcity until relatively recently. China is a nation of 1.3 billion where only seven percent of the vast land area is cultivable. It goes some way to explaining why in southern China, when someone comes to your house, you open the door with 'Have you eaten?' (Lei si fan mei?) But it may account for the rich varied cuisine the Chinese excel at.

'The other big thing is money. Getting it quick!' Kym laughs. It does seem that the Chinese are very into the link between prosperity and luck. 'There's a lot of betting and gambling in Asian culture generally. Perhaps I shouldn't say it but it's true. They are all at it! A man will think he's lucky, but then he ruins himself, goes bankrupt. I know people who've lost their restaurants at the betting shop. That's traditional, too.'

What about women? I ask. 'Older women love playing majong, it's a home game. In the old days, the men didn't let the women out, I'm sorry to say, so they stopped themselves getting bored by playing majong together. Only, they didn't have any money so they played for stones and buttons. My mum still plays majong, and my dad goes to bet on the horses. Luck and money, it's Chinese tradition again...'

Such deeply rooted cultural attitudes must surely have affected Kym's attitudes. Is she superstitious? For example, did she open her noodle bar on a propitious date? 'I'm too westernised for that', she scoffs. 'But when I opened this place, my dad was in here to see if he could pick up any negative vibes! He'll still drop in from time to time to see if he can frighten any ghosts off! He'll start smoking the place out with incense or whatever, like they did in the old days. He's very superstitious. I let him do it. All it does is set off the fire alarms!'

In the open kitchen, Kym's husband and his two kitchen assistants quicken the pace as lunch time approaches. Pans clang, bright orange flames leap dramatically around the woks and steam billows up into extractor hoods. The tantalising scent of ginger, soy and hoisin permeate the air of the bright little noodle bar.

'Alan was older than me when he came from Hong Kong, about 13, so he's more Chinese than I am. His family were very poor. They smuggled themselves from mainland China to Hong Kong which was British in those days. His parents came to Cambridge to work in a takeaway in 1982 and got naturalised. Alan

was the head chef at the Phoenix Chinese restaurant in Histon for nine years, until I headhunted him to cook for me here. Our specialities are sea food: squid, scallops and prawns, monkfish and crab. We get it all in fresh three times a week.

The chef hangs up two ducks, glistening with marinade. 'We'll do 3-6 of those ducks a day, more on a weekend. We cater a lot for allergies with nut-free, gluten-free dishes, and we're popular with vegetarians and vegans. A lot of mums bring their toddlers here in the mornings.'

A van pulls up outside and two deliverymen come in with large cardboard boxes. Kym signs and directs them to the kitchen. 'I've started using these brilliant little cardboard takeaway containers from the States. No more of those tin foil things. These you can put in the microwave, they are environment friendly, people love them for their packed lunches.'

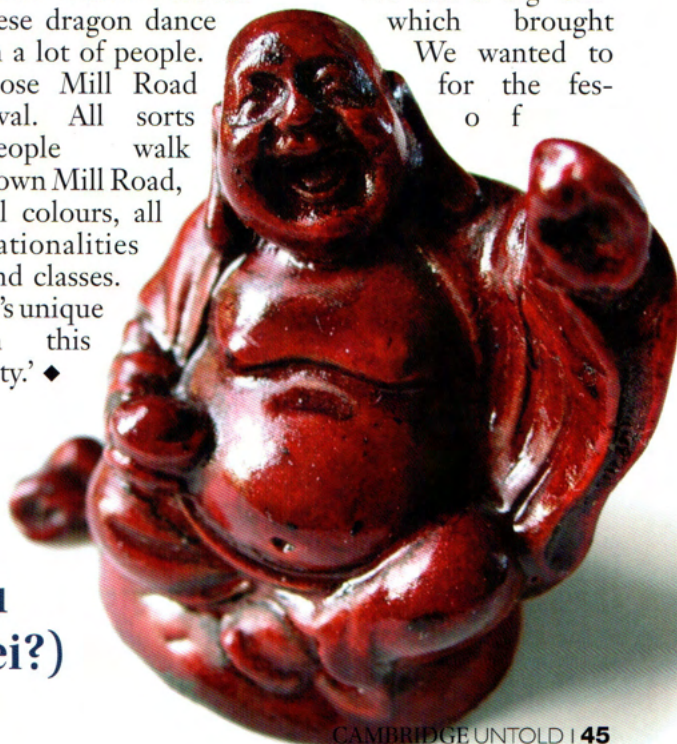
Mill Road is Cambridge at its most alternative and bohemian. After eighteen years here, it's what Kym loves about it. But she points out, bohemian need not mean run-down.

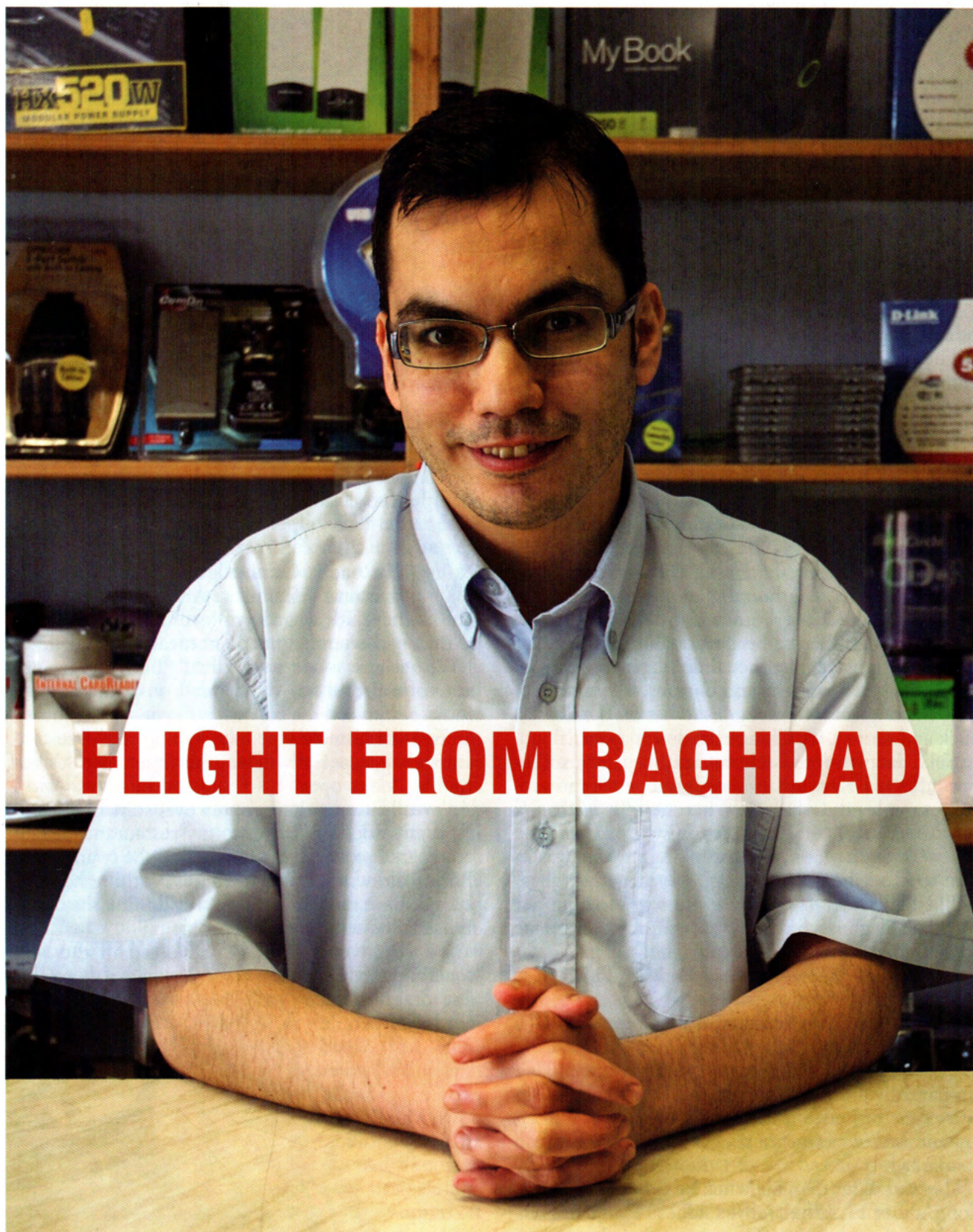
'We business owners work really hard and try our best to improve our road, but I wish the council would get involved a bit more. For instance, there's the issue of homeless people coming in the restaurant to beg, especially in summertime when it's hot and the door's open. It impacts on business. And I don't really want to have to step over someone sleeping in my doorway to get to my restaurant. About four years ago, we all complained to the council, but all they did was put our rates up! Nothing had improved so we raised a petition. I still think the council has failed to address the problem.'

Two years back, Kym got involved in the Mill Road Winter Festival.

'We had a big Chinese dragon dance which brought We wanted to for the festival. All sorts of people walk down Mill Road, all colours, all nationalities and classes. It's unique in this city.' ♦

In southern China, when someone comes to your house, you open the door with 'Have you eaten?' (Lei si fan mei?)





FLIGHT FROM BAGHDAD

NATHER AL-KHATIB is an IT consultant from Iraq. With Iranian born Shapour Meftah, he runs Cantab Millennium. Their neighbouring countries fought a devastating war between 1979-88, but this has not stopped them running a successful computer repair business together and forming a lasting friendship.

I was actually born in Britain in 1979 because both my parents were studying here. They returned to Baghdad when I was only a few days old and I grew up there. Going to Iraq just then wasn't brilliant

timing because the war had just started between Saddam Hussein and the Iranian Ayatollah. It was a terrible war which lasted until 1988 and *continued on page 51*





STREETS OF REVOLUTION

SHAPOUR MEFTAH came to Cambridge from Iran and runs Cantab Millennium opposite St Barnabas Church in Mill Road. His story is one of massive upheaval on a personal and national scale.

It's coming up to six in the evening and Shapour Meftah and his assistant Nather Al-Khatib are still busy in Cantab Millennium. 'I'll be with you in a minute', Shapour signals to me, still negotiating

with a supplier on the phone. The shop counter is loaded with computers awaiting repair. Nather is patiently explaining to a distraught Italian student why she hasn't been able to contact her mother on MSN messenger. Every time *continued on page 48*



continued from page 47 the door opens a high electronic tone sounds and a harried looking customer comes in and heaves another uncooperative computer onto the laden counter.

Eventually the last customer is seen, the closed sign is hung in the window, and Shapour is free to be interviewed. We descend to a cluttered underground workshop where several computers in a state of disrepair spill out their guts and mother boards. 'This one is water cooled', says Shapour pointing to a particularly large machine on the bench top. I think he is joking until he shows me the water pipes snaking around the thing's innards. 'The guy built it himself; it's supposed to predict the winners at Newmarket. People expect me to fix everything.'

I clear a tangle of snaking cables off a chair while Shapour brews us a cup of Typhoo tea in the kitchen cubby hole. When I remark on his taking sugar, he says 'Ah, but if this were Iranian tea, I wouldn't need sugar. It has such flavour...' He is still standing with the used tea bag suspended on its string above the steaming mug. He knows I have come to hear his story and perhaps it is this that has already put him in the mood to reminisce about Iran.

Shapour's family comes from Teheran. His father had been the Shah of Iran's Minister of Defence and they led a very comfortable life in a large house in a good part of the capital. The word *khan* attached to their surname marked them out as a kind of nobility, something equivalent to the title 'Lord' or 'Sir' in Britain. Gilt-framed pictures in the high-ceilinged drawing rooms bore witness to his family's links to the Peacock Throne: his grandfather shaking hands with his Imperial Majesty, his father being received by the King of the Aryans, his mother attending a glittering reception with the beautiful Princess Shanaz Pahlavi. In 1975, Shapour, the youngest of four children, was 12 and had just got into the prestigious Kharazmy School for boys.

'We had a very loving family, my mum and dad, my older sister, my two older brothers and me', Shapour remembers. 'But my mother had taken in a young girl to look after. My dad was never into having her in the family and my parents argued about it. After several years living with us, she was like a sister; the girl stole from the house. Money, jewellery, valuable rugs and carpets, she took a lot and ran off to get



"One day Bibi and my sister called me and said 'We want to talk to you. You're wasting your time and you're not getting an education, we're going to send you to England'. I didn't want to go, but looking back, I'm glad they convinced me."

married. My mother was shocked and betrayed. My dad felt he'd been right all along. They argued a lot about her. To set things straight my mother decided to go on a pilgrimage or haj to Mecca and return and make a fresh start.'

It was only a few days after his mother had left for Mecca that the radio broadcast news of an extensive tent fire that had swept through the Iranian section of the haj. Later broadcasts reported the cause of the fire as an exploding gas cylinder. Two hundred pilgrims were dead, and listed among the missing was Shapour's mother. Because of the millions of pilgrims already gathered in Islam's holiest site, the Saudi authorities allowed only one member of each family to come to identify relatives and collect the luggage of loved ones. An uncle was chosen to undertake the grim task, while the family waited, desperate for news and fearing the worst. 'My uncle stayed only a few days. The authorities started bulldozing the ground to continue the haj. So he found nothing. My mum was so looking forward to coming

back and starting afresh. But it wasn't to be.'

His mother's death was a massive upset for the family and was fraught with consequences. A year later, Shapour's father flew to England to visit the eldest boy, Shah, who was studying in London. 'My dad had only been here a month when he had a heart attack and died. He couldn't cope without her, they were in love with each other, you see.'

So within one year, Shapour lost both parents. His twenty-two-year-old sister, Shahnaz, took over and their Bibi (grandmother) stepped in. 'We missed our parents terribly, but we made a family again. It was beautiful. That's something very important in Iran, respect for the family, for your elders. It's what got us through.'

Respect is a theme which is to crop up several times in our conversation. Its apparent absence in Britain shocked the young Shapour when he first arrived. It is one of the reasons he is standing as local Conservative councillor in his local ward of Arbury. 'Old people are afraid to leave their house after dark. When I go canvassing at six or seven o'clock in the evening, I have to show my badge before they'll open. They have three locks and a chain on the door. I ask them if they have any problems and they say 'Lots! Come and see what the youths have done to our fence...' I just want to do something to change

this and I think if you can address the problem of lack of respect among young people it will help.'

The reduced Meftah family pulled together and managed to make a stable family life. Soon, fourteen-year-old Shapour was excelling at maths at school. But more upheaval was on its way. 'There was a growing movement against the Shah's regime. My older brother and I would attend massive demonstrations. The Shah's intelligence police would be taking photos and footage of the crowd. For us it was exciting and we just wanted to be where the action was. The government imposed a curfew in the city after seven o'clock, but my brother and I used to sneak out. We'd see the Shah's soldiers coming to our neighbour's houses. A lot of people were rounded up and taken away. We thought we could stop them. One time, soldiers came after us. We ran off and my brother jumped into a kind of deep gutter or culvert which we have in Teheran on the sides of the street. He hid under the grille. But the soldiers started stabbing their bayonets through it, trying to get him. I'd run home by this time so I didn't see it all, but when my brother got home he was holding his side and blood was pouring out. We couldn't take my brother to hospital because they would have arrested him on the spot as a revolutionary, so we patched him up at home.'

It seems remarkable that the teenage sons of an ex-minister of the Shah should be in the streets protesting against him, and risking their lives to defend their neighbours from the regime's soldiers. 'I was a kid. It was exciting. And we thought it was wrong to be arresting innocent people.'

'The Islamic Revolution itself happened in a strange way. Everything went quiet. There were rumours and whispers around my college that something was happening, that the university students had protested against the Shah. Some students had been killed. Then they closed the university down. One day we heard police sirens, shouting and crowds running away. The revolution had started.'

'You've got to understand that at this time it was an uprising against the Shah's authoritarian regime we were joining. We were very young and, to be honest, it was fun! Everyone was talking about change. The mojaheddine (fighters of god) started the revolution, and no one foresaw that it would be taken over by Islamic hardliners. I remember once I was marching with one group who had asked me to be like a reporter for them because I was into writing. The hardliners saw me and laid into me. Being a journalist, even at 14, was dangerous because you were spreading ideas. An uncle of mine was editor-in-chief of a big Teheran daily, Etelaát. The new regime arrested and imprisoned him. They put a hood on his head and said they would shoot him. It was

a kind of torture. He was actually released in the end, but he could never leave Iran again. So what I was doing, marching along and taking notes, was extremely dangerous, even if I didn't realise it.'

During the revolution normal life shut down. The schools became no more than a gathering place from which hoards of young pupils would be organised in rallies.

'We chanted "Death to America!" The TV broadcast denunciations of the Shah and his government. It was impossible to tell what the real situation was in Teheran. At night our family gathered round the radio and tuned to the BBC Farsi service to find out what was going on in our streets.'

The Meftah family continued living in the large house, fearful of the knock on the door which could herald arrest, torture, disappearance or death. The framed pictures of the family members with His Imperial Majesty were taken down and hidden in the attic.

'One day Bibi and my sister called me and said "We want to talk to you. You're wasting your time and you're not getting an education, we're going to send you to England." I didn't want to go, but looking back, I'm glad they convinced me.'

Little did they realise another cataclysm was looming. The Iran-Iraq war. The Iran-Iraq war is considered one of the deadliest wars since World War II. It started in September 1980 when Saddam Hussein invaded Iran and lasted eight long years.

'If I'd stayed a few months longer, I could not have escaped conscription. They closed the borders so no one was getting out. Looking back, I think I only had a few months to live. I'd probably have been among the one million Iranians who died in that war.'

Shapour left Teheran with fifty other students. His first experience of Britain at Heathrow was a rude customs official. 'What does your father do?' he asked. Through an interpreter I said, 'He's dead'.

'What about your mother?' he snapped, I answered 'Dead as well'. 'Well, who is going to support you?' He demanded my bank statement. It was only because it had a healthy balance that he eventually stamped my six month visa, and I was in'.

The group of young Iranians was taken to Ramsgate where they were enrolled in a school to learn English. Within a few months of arriving, Shapour passed his maths O level. 'I got a B although I hardly spoke any English, but I could recognise the equations. We're very good at maths in Iran, and of course chess which we invented. In physics I got D because I couldn't even understand what they were asking me about Newton's Law.'

Within six months of being in Britain, Shapour moved in with his older brother *continued on page 50*

"It did get very lonely in the van on my own on a roadside in the middle of nowhere with no customers. I'd say to myself 'What the hell am I doing here?' "

continued from page 49 and managed to renew his visa to stay on. But with the Iran-Iraq war raging, the Iranian Embassy made it difficult for funds to be transferred. The visa extension ran out and with no funds from Iran, the Home Office were serving deportation orders. It looked like Shapour would have to return to Teheran, which would mean being cannon fodder in a war which was daily consuming thousands of young men on both sides. It was not easy studying for A levels, uncertain if he would still be in the country to sit the exams, or fighting Saddam Hussein's soldiers on the front.

'I've still got that Home Office letter somewhere. You have two weeks to leave the country. I couldn't study anymore and they were after me. I went into hiding in Cambridge, joining an Iranian friend who was here. There were six or seven of us young Iranian guys living in a room in Coleridge Road, we couldn't afford anything else. We did what we could, cleaning jobs, hotels, delivering pizzas, everything.'

At this time Shapour, aged 19, married a British Iranian girl, Annette.

'The Home Office detectives were after me and some other young Iranians. One local language school agreed to give us lessons and we cleaned for them in return. The school was very good to us. We actually pooled our earnings and tried to hire an immigration lawyer, but she was too expensive.'

Then, when things were looking bad, the European law changed: as the husband of a British national, Shapour was allowed leave to remain. There followed a hectic period where he worked twelve-hour night shifts as a panel beater on an assembly line in Bourne. After that, he worked in a Haverhill factory as night shift leader making electrical trunking for the channel tunnel. He and his wife managed to save and buy their first house. Determined to go to university with the excellent A levels he had gained, he completed a diploma course in computer technology at the Technical College (now Anglia Ruskin University). Seeing his top grades, his tutors encouraged him to get the full degree.

'To support myself through my degree, I bought a kebab van. I used to go to university in the day and be up till all hours selling kebabs by night. My wife did all the vegetables. I wouldn't get through till about one or two in the morning. Then it was back to the Tech in the morning at nine. I did that for three and a half years. Most of my assignments had grease marks on them!'

It was a far cry from the life trajectory expected of the son of a high ranking minister to the Peacock



"I'd love to open an Iranian restaurant, somewhere like Regent Street, or why not Mill Road. We have such wonderful food in Iran."

Throne. 'I couldn't tell my family I was running a kebab van', Shapour shakes his head. 'That's not what they sent me to England to do. It did get very lonely in the van on my own on a roadside in the middle of nowhere with no customers. I'd say to myself "What the hell am I doing here?"'

He has come a long way from the days of cleaning and delivering pizzas. His brother helped him set up Cantab Millennium in 1992 and any time spent on the premises will tell the casual observer that business is thriving. Shapour's can-do approach to the most challenging of computer glitches, and his Iraqi partner Nather's remarkable pa-

tience with computer illiterates, has made Cantab Millennium place customers swear by.

In 1991, Shapour returned to Iran after over 20 years' absence. 'I remember stepping off the plane in Teheran when the aircraft doors opened. I thought, Oh my God, I'm back in Iran... My heart was pounding and I didn't know what to expect. It was just after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. It was wonderful to see family again. And the food, the familiar smells of spices and pastry shops! I don't know what it is, but if you pass a florist in Teheran, I tell you, the smell is so overpowering, you'll die. And when you walk past rose bushes, you think you are in heaven...'

It may be years of absence and longing that make Shapour convinced Iranian roses smell like no others. Psychologists tell us that the memory of smell is governed by the hippocampus – that primitive part of the brain buried deep below the temporal lobe. It is here that our emotional states are generated from a lifetime of stored memories. An encounter with a particular scent not smelt since childhood is bound to trigger powerful memories and dispose us to lyrical reminiscence. Nostalgia endows the distant past and the experiences of a faraway childhood with an intensity that makes the present pale in comparison.

Shapour remarried this year, his second wife Tina has not yet been to Iran. 'Neither have my two children Ali (17) and Soraya (14) from my first marriage. I'd love for them to visit my homeland. We were all set to go a few years back but it didn't happen.'

When asked about future plans, Shapour's eyes slide over the dozen or so computers in ongoing states of repair. He smiles. 'I'd love to open an Iranian restaurant, somewhere like Regent Street, or why not Mill Road. We have such wonderful food in Iran. The smells of Iranian spices, you have no idea...'

Shapour Meftah ran in the local elections and became a Conservative candidate in 2004. ♦

continued from page 46 killed millions. As a kid growing up in Al-Azamiya suburb of Baghdad, I used to see rockets going over and we'd hear sirens going off. In spite of the war, I had a really happy childhood. What I remember most is playing football, that's what I loved! Until recently I played here in Cambridge at Cherry Hinton club, but work and studying for my PhD has left no time for football.

I was about 11 when the first Gulf war started in 1991. Iraq invaded Kuwait so America and the coalition forces attacked Iraq. The Americans destroyed absolutely everything. Up until then, life in Baghdad was good. I'm certainly not defending Saddam but at least we had water and electricity. My dad was actually the Director General of the Iraqi national grid. We had no freedom of speech, but materially we had everything we needed. I would say Iraqi education was the best in the Arab world. After the first Gulf war it was hell, we couldn't get medicines because of sanctions. Iraqi children were dying for lack of antibiotics.

Still we managed for over a decade. For the Iraqi people, the latest American invasion in March 2003 definitely made things worse than the 35 years under Saddam. I know, I was there. I'm gutted when I see Baghdad every day on the television. All they show is burnt out cars and bombs and streets with human body parts. But I can't tell you how wonderful my city really is. We have a fantastically ancient heritage. Every schoolchild has heard of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Well, they're right there in Baghdad. It is really the cradle of civilisation. A lot of really ancient artefacts disappeared from our museum in the war, imagine 7000-year-old Sumerian writing, beautiful pottery. Thank God some of it is safely preserved in the Fitzwilliam Museum here in Cambridge.

It saddens me to see the terrible state my country is in. Especially as all my family is stuck there. Because I happened to be born in the UK, I was eligible for a British passport. I couldn't stand seeing the American presence in my country, soldiers walking in my streets. I can't see them as liberators, but invaders. Killing 700,000 innocent civilians is not liberating them.

Two days after Bush's invasion, I was driving home with some friends. As we approached the Al-Azamiya Bridge we could see that there was a control ahead.



"After being shot at like that I knew I couldn't remain in Baghdad, not with trigger-happy US troops occupying my city. I'd end up doing something I'd regret."

About 200 metres behind the barrier was a massive US Army tank, its turret pointing right at us. There were only a few cars, we thought they might search us and let us through. I got out talking to them. I remember a black marine in the tank scrutinizing me through binoculars. The barrier made it impossible to talk to them so I raised my hands to show I had nothing to hide and started to call out that I lived on the other side of the bridge. As I did so I heard bullets ricocheting off the bonnet of the car. Then I heard my friends were screaming at me to get back in. I didn't know what was going on, I stood looking down at blood gushing from my lower arm. Thank god, my friends yanked me back in and we turned round and sped off. If they hadn't, I don't think I'd

be here talking to you now. I've now got a scar on my arm where the bullet went through.

After being shot at like that I knew I couldn't remain in Baghdad, not with trigger-happy US troops occupying my city. I'd end up doing something I'd regret.

So, I took a 4x4 taxi and crossed to Jordan. It's a nightmare journey Iraqis still have to make to get out. Not exactly National Express! You never know if you're going to be stopped by insurgents. It was chaos. In Jordan I took all my papers and my UK birth certificate to the British Embassy and applied for a British passport. It's only the accident of my birth that got me out.

Before I left Baghdad in 2003 I managed to get engaged to my wife, and left the day after. Then I had to find a way to get my fiancée out of Baghdad. In 2005 I flew from London to Syria and she managed to get there too, just so we could fill in forms to submit to the British Embassy in Jordan. They wanted proof that we were not an arranged marriage. We had to produce our birth certificates, passports, the engagement ring and even our private emails! In 2006 I flew back to Jordan for the wedding. Both our families made the difficult journey from Baghdad. Incredibly, we had just 24 hours to arrange everything, but we did it the Arab way, in great style in a good hotel with musicians and wonderful food. The very next morning, I rushed to the British Embassy with the wedding photographs, the final proof we were genuine. Only then could they start proceedings for my wife's British visa. I'm delighted she's here *continued on page 52*

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S DIVERSITY AND ARTS AGENDA

Cambridgeshire County Council is keen to promote and co-ordinate an effective partnership and joined up working with a wide range of public, community and voluntary sector organisations in setting out a common and broader diversity agenda that will be reflective of the needs of local communities in Cambridgeshire.

Representatives from the County Council's Cambridgeshire Race Equality and Diversity Service (CREDS), Policy and Diversity Team, and the Arts Officer are actively involved in Momentum Arts 'Untold Stories' Steering group.

Through the arts, the rich heritage and history of the county and of the people who live in the county the partnership approach can be brought to life by encouraging awareness and understanding of the diversity and enabling learning through sharing our cultural heritage.

The County Council strives to embrace new and existing partners, values what they bring and strives to play a leading and influencing role in ensuring that equality and diversity is embedded within partnership working.

If you require any further information please contact:

Community Inclusion Manager (CREDS)
mahbubur.rahman@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

County Arts Officer
joanne.gray@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Policy & Diversity Officer
patricia.crampton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk



**Cambridgeshire
County Council**

continued from page 51 now with me and we're over the moon with our new baby boy.

My other great love is computer technology. It's what I do every day here in the Cantab Millennium. People bring their computers in and I love solving their problems. I'm just doing a PhD at Brunel University in wireless communication systems. It's the future.

How did I end up working for Cantab Millennium? I used to come in as a customer myself. One day, I asked Mr Shapour if he had any work going (I always call him Mr, it is a respect thing). He told me there were no vacancies, so I offered to work for him for nothing to get some experience. My English wasn't very good then and I was studying at the Regent School here in Mill Road by the bridge. Mr Shapour took me on and I'm so grateful to him for giving me a break to prove myself. Who cares that he's Iranian and I'm Iraqi and our countries are sworn enemies? Governments waste their resources and millions of lives on war. I believe if you leave people alone, they get on brilliantly.

I miss my family an awful lot. I worry about my nineteen-year-old sister. In Baghdad people are kidnapped every day, especially pretty young girls like her. Can you imagine? She's trying to study for a degree. My mum is a physics lecturer at the same university. There was recently a massive suicide bombing at their campus. It was on the British news but for most people here it's not real. When you have family there, believe me, it's real.

Just before Christmas I got news that my father had been injured in a car bombing. He had critical head injuries. Baghdad hospitals have power cuts, there's a shortage of medicines and most of the doctors left in Iraq are trainees. I was doing everything to get my dad out; I so wanted him to get proper medical attention and see his first grandchild. Sadly, a few weeks before the baby's birth, we got news that he had died of his injuries.

I'm extraordinarily lucky to happen to be born here. I love Britain because here you believe in freedom. I'm less keen on a lot of the TV though! I mean, I can't see the point of a programme like Big Brother. Locking people up and observing them like animals, what is that about? I'm sorry, but I really think it's rubbish. I think it's just a way of making money through the voting by telephone. Don't get me wrong, I've learned a lot here in other areas. English for a start. But what I really learned was tolerance. Britain, and especially Cambridge, is so multi-cultural. I meet people from Spain, Russia, Saudi Arabia, wherever. People are very accepting here.

It's my greatest wish for Iraq to become a safe place. I feel so sorry for the innocent Iraqis who are dying every day. It's impossible for anyone who has not been through it to know what I feel because I know how wonderful Iraq can be. ♦



STEPPING UP THE LADDER

Carrying his ladder, a bucket and a chamois leather, ERROL CHISHOLM cut a familiar figure in Mill Road until his recent return to his native Jamaica. He talked to me from the guest house he now runs in the verdant hills outside Santa Cruz.





It wasn't easy getting hold of Errol Chisholm. When I called his home in Jamaica and spoke to his wife Doretta, he was bound up with getting a sick goat to the vets.

On my second attempt, he had phoned home to say he would be late for lunch. He was out on his three acres picking bananas and papaya.

It is a far cry from Mill Road where Errol was once a familiar figure up a ladder with a bucket, cleaning shop windows. When I do eventually get him on the other end of the line, he cannot hide his astonishment that a Cambridge magazine has tracked him down to hear his story. He need not have been so surprised; Mill Road business owners and residents still remember the cheerful Jamaican fellow who made their windows sparkle.

Errol Chisholm came to Britain aged just six, and then forty-five years later, returned to live on the island of his birth. Besides running Chisholm's Retreat with Doretta, he is kept busy pasturing his 30 goats and looking after a large flock of free range chickens.

'Looking after animals wasn't completely new to me', Errol explains. 'You see, I was 14 and living in England when my mum died in a car accident. We kids were too young to look after ourselves. I was sent to live on a farm in a place called Tonypandy in Wales. It was a Salvation Army orphanage-farm for boys called the House in the Trees and had about a hundred acres. We used to have to get up at five o'clock to milk the cows and look after the chickens. I had the job of killing the chickens and ducks when it was time. They trained me up and I got quite experienced at it. I learned a lot about farming in those three years.'

Little did the adolescent Errol think that the skills he was picking up on a Welsh farm would one day stand him in good stead on his own smallholding back in Jamaica.

Untypically for 1962, when West Indians boarded slow steamers in Kingston and disembarked at Southampton or Tilbury docks a week later, Errol was whisked by plane to the new reality of Britain. 'I went to school in Stratford, East London. I remember the teacher used to spoil me because she liked me, and the other kids used to get jealous. To be honest, I don't know why she liked me so much. I think it's because I behaved myself. In Jamaica you

had to respect the teacher. My new school was pretty mixed, but the kids used to pick on you. I remember they'd call you "gollywog", and sometimes "black nigger". Even later when I was an adult, workmates might have a joke with me and call me a "black bastard". That's how I saw it, as a joke. I never used to take offence as some people might. It all depends on how you approach people, doesn't it?'

Errol comes from a large family with 10 siblings, some of whom came to Britain to join their mother, while others stayed in Jamaica with their policeman father (some now live in Canada and the States). Once an emigrant leaves his home land, he is on the move, constantly beckoned on by the search for security and the next job opportunity, never knowing where he might eventually fetch up. So how did Errol end up in Cambridge?

There was this contractor who came to Tonypandy to put up milking sheds. He said "Do you want to come and work for me?" and I said "Yes" and I travelled back with him to his firm in Ely. I used to live in a caravan in a pub on the A10...' The long distance telephone line hums and buzzes as Errol casts around for the name of the pub. People who leave one reality to take up residence in another often show signs of 'emigrant's amnesia'; they lose immediate access to the names of precisely those places and people they referred to daily in their former life, all the while having to learn the names of new places and people in the new life they are forging. 'The Slap Up!' he shouts down the line as it comes to him. 'The Slap Up pub. That was it. I

bought a little scooter to come into Cambridge to see friends and maybe meet a girlfriend, you know? After a while I moved to Cambridge and rented a room for £3 a week, I don't know what people are charging now. What's the name of the road again?' he says to himself and the line pops and hums again as Errol tries to access the name not used these several years. 'St Philip's Road! That's it...number...no, the number's gone. But the fellow who rented me the room has just returned to live in Jamaica too, a place called Newmarket.'

It has not occurred to Errol until I mention it that there is a Newmarket near Cambridge, no doubt the Jamaican Newmarket owes its name to the original in Suffolk. The West Indies is dotted with exotic places with ill-fitting names: Kensington, Plymouth, Speyside, Scarborough.

'I remember there was a woman renting a room in this house in St Philip's Road just over the bridge', Errol says warming to his reminiscences. 'Oh, she

So I said to myself "I'm going to buy myself a ladder and a bucket..." and made myself known as a really good window cleaner. I'd do people's shop fronts and before long I'd be doing their houses.

had about five daughters and I saw a picture of one of them, a girl aged about 17, on the woman's dressing table. Who's that girl? I asked, and she told me it was her daughter. I asked if I could marry her daughter, and she said I'd have to ask the girl back in Jamaica. So I wrote and sent her my picture and proposed... and she accepted. So I went to Jamaica, aged 19, married her, and brought her back to Cambridge.'

Happily married, Errol settled down and worked driving a fork lift truck for Cambridge Waste Paper. When this was taken over by Ridgeon's Builders Merchants, he got a job as a welder in Newmarket Road. When they started making workers redundant, he got work laying sleepers on the railways. 'In the eighties you couldn't be sure your job would last and by now I had three kids of my own and an adopted daughter from Jamaica, as well as a mortgage to pay off on a property over the bridge in Cavendish Road. It cost £10,000 which was a lot in those days. So I said to myself "I'm going to buy myself a ladder and a bucket." I got myself a little yellow Hillman Avenger and made myself known as a really good window cleaner.

I'd do people's shop fronts and before long I'd be doing their houses. I had ads on the Avenger: All odd jobs taken. Doretta and me made a good team. We used to do the big houses on Hills Road and on the river, we cleaned for barristers and lawyers, principals running private schools, all sorts. They always trusted us to enter their house even when they weren't there, and lock up afterwards. Twenty one years we did that for. That's how we could return and build Chisholm Retreat'.

Errol insists I have a look on his website, and bel-lows out the name of his thirteen-year-old son (Dun-can!). 'He'll tell you what it is, he understands technology.' Duncan comes to the phone and I immediately tap in the site he gives me.

Listening to Errol talk about the guest house, I was seeing in my mind's eye a pleasant but modest B & B. What pops up on my laptop screen is an impressively large white mansion with red tiled

roof and large breezy terraces fringed with feathery coconut palms. The savvy advertising copy runs: In 1992 I decided to share the peace of paradise I discovered here in Santa Cruz, Jamaica... Scroll down and you see a luxury swimming pool, Jacuzzi and poolside bar with glimpses of lush hills in the back-ground.

'Hello...? You like it?' asks Errol, a little anxious at my gasp. 'Take a look at our barbecue nights. And we do weddings too.' I click on Sun, Sand & Vows.

The text is studded with evocative Caribbean names which need no picture or further description: Montego Bay, Blue Lagoon Beach, James Bond Beach...

Not surprisingly, Errol had no regrets about returning. 'I do miss having ready money in my pocket, I've spent it all on this place! It wasn't cheap, but that's what we were saving for all those years in Cambridge, cleaning all those windows. I used to return to Jamaica every once in a while and I bought the land a while back, always hoping to return one day and do this. It took years of planning and a year and

a half to build Chisholm Retreat. I believe that if you want anything in life you have to work for it. I took a ladder and a bucket and I achieved what I wanted in life...

We had guests from Canada and the States last week. I like to cook for them with all the local foods, like jerk chicken made with our own fowl from the yard, and fantastic fresh lobster and king fish and snapper. Most of the vegetables we grow ourselves like pumpkin and okra and plantain, pak choi or callaloo. I remember in Cambridge if I wanted the very hot pepper we call bird pepper, I'd go to Raj's place on Mill Road, what's it called again? Oh yes! Mace Stores, that's it!

And we are back in Mill Road, with Errol turned interviewer asking after Aristo who runs Fagito and what about...ah, yes, Al Amin stores and ABC run by a Greek-Cypriot fellow called...Simon, and his favourite Indian restaurant whose name won't come now... ♦



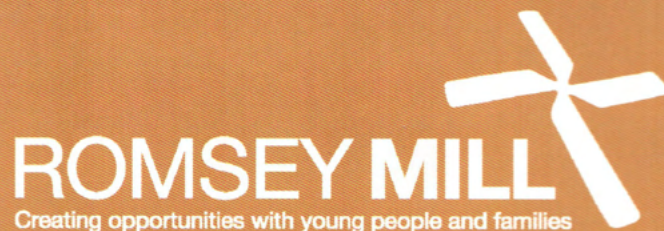
Once an emigrant leaves his home land, he is on the move, constantly beckoned on by the search for security and the next job opportunity, never knowing where he might eventually fetch up.



“Mill Road is the backbone of the city of Cambridge. It’s where the notion of Cambridge meets the notion of real city – alive, multivocal, always alternative.

If you don’t know Mill Road, you don’t know Cambridge!”

ALI SMITH
Cambridge Resident and
Booker Prize Nominee



“Romsey Mill has always been there when I needed them”

Romsey Mill is dedicated to creating opportunities with young people and families in Cambridgeshire, including those experiencing significant disadvantages. We further personal, social and spiritual development through a pioneering range of programmes and activities.

The **Young Parents Programme** is the lead response for teenage parents across Cambridge. It provides intensive personal, educational and parenting support, equipping young parents and their children for a positive future.

The **Social Inclusion Programme** works with 13-21 year-olds who are not always positively involved in their communities, and who may not be in education, training or employment. We work with them to fulfil potential by developing their skills, self-esteem, confidence and aspirations.

The **Under 5s Programme** provides information, advice, and support to parents of children under five years of age. It promotes well-being, healthy living and effective parenting, and encourages children's development and education in their early years. It includes groups for parents with babies or under 3s and a playgroup.

The **Transitions Programme** helps 10-14 year-olds to increase their self-esteem and confidence, raise their aspirations, and develop their skills. This includes supporting children in the move from primary to secondary school.

The **Aspire Programme** creates social space with young people on the autistic spectrum. It promotes mental well-being, and the development of social skills and friendships through group settings, 1:1 support and life skills development.

To find out more, to get involved, or to support the work please contact us (details below).



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Our heritage is shaped by our family roots, our community, life experiences and the places we value. Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund gives grants of £300 and above to projects that help communities celebrate their unique heritage and share it with others. In the East of England we have awarded more than £244 million to over 2,500 projects since 1994. If you have an idea for a heritage project, get in touch to find out how we can help.

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