

# **ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW WITH SIKANDER KHAN AT THE H J DALEY LIBRARY ON 30 NOVEMBER 2016**

**AA** Where were you born Sikander?

**SK** I was born in Bangladesh in the capital Dhaka. My dad used to work for the British government and then it became a colony.

**AA** What made you come to Australia?

**SK** Actually it is very interesting. When I was in Year 10 and going on to the HSC my brother left Bangladesh and my father died, so I was with my mother. My brother left to study in Norway so when he used to come to visit us and he was talking about studying overseas I was planning to go overseas. I am talking about the year 1984 or 1985.

From Bangladesh the United States was the most popular one, everyone wanted to go there. I actually was trying to go there but when I passed the HSC then I finished my degree and in the meantime my brother came to Australia as an immigrant. He finished his study in Norway and became a teacher and migrated here. He always talked about Sydney which was similar to Dhaka. I am not talking about winter and summer but he said the sun is always shining and in Bangladesh you will get mostly sun. It is hot but you always get the sun. He travelled a lot and my intention was to go overseas and study so when he was talking he said Sydney would be good because Norway was very cold and he didn't like a lot of other countries for study and teaching. He said to the best of his knowledge and his experience, Sydney was the best place for our people. If you think about the distance from Bangladesh, Sydney is less than the United States. So that attracted me a lot.

When I started in Library Science he said there was lots of opportunity and I was working there and then I applied for migration. It happened like that. In the meantime my mother died so I had no one left there.

**AA** What were conditions like in Dhaka when you were a boy? The city is pretty poor isn't it?

**SK** Yes Bangladesh was under poverty but in Dhaka and a person is doing a government job like my dad they don't feel anything because they are very secure. As long as you are in the service you get quarters to live, so this is a very nice area we grew up in, we know that.

**5 mins**

Because it was British rule everything was of British flavour, we had a servant to look after housekeeping and everything. We never felt it as a family. All through my boyhood I found out if you go out there were very poor areas and the buildings are poor. But if you go out into the rural areas and really travel outside of Dhaka you will see there are a lot of very poor people. Also out in the remote areas, but I have never been there.

People would come into Dhaka job searching. In Dhaka and Bangladesh it is not like in Australia or Europe or United States where if you don't get work in an office a person can get other work like in a barber shop or something. But in Bangladesh there isn't work like that, so it is very hard. Mostly the people who are poor I have never seen them. A friend at the Uni said that you have to live with them to know what it is like. A lot of them don't eat anything for two or three days, they just have water or rice or something.

**AA** The country is prone to flood too isn't it?

**SK** It was, but nowadays it isn't. I can't tell you the specific reason but the biggest one I saw was in 1988. Before it was tornado and other things it was 1974 or something like that. Now actually India put a dam in near the border of Bangladesh and that controls the water. When they get overflow and they release the water because Bangladesh is lower that actually causes the flood, unless from the natural like the rain it happens but it doesn't stay. It is interesting when they get the flood in the villages where they are cultivated for rice and other things one year, the next year they have a bumper crop because of the fertile things that are staying. In Dhaka we never had a flood only in 1988 and we were isolated.

**10 mins**

My mother and I used to rent one room in the government quarters. My brother was overseas and he used to send us money so we didn't feel it. I was lucky for that. In 1988 Dhaka and the whole country flooded and some people were leaving. The land was like floating and some people were living there.

**AA** What do you miss the most about Bangladesh?

**SK** I miss the people actually. Even when I got immigration here because I was working and my wife was working my brother said now is the time to take your position. When you come to Australia you will be living better. If you are working you will have your own house. Because I have a family here, we are very happy here. Even my eldest son was asking why did you leave. He is growing now and he is asking a lot of questions to his mother and she said she came because your dad wanted to come. Then he asked me why did I come and I didn't have an answer, it was always my dream. Those from Bangladesh who don't have an education naturally go to the Middle East for work. Some of

middle class like me after the HSC want to leave Bangladesh because they think that their future is not bright enough so they want to go and study and think they will leave the country to study and at the same time they can get an opportunity. For me it was something like that.

**AA** So you don't have any regrets coming here.

**SK** Actually when I think about me and my wife when we worked there we had a family owned apartment and we lived there. I worked in a foreign mission library and she worked for a foreign mission company as an accountant. We were not rich but we were very healthy in terms of money and other things. If we could live there we could make a lot of other things. When I came here I saw that a lot were brighter than me and could do a better job.

**15 mins**

I was lucky because of my profession I got a job real early. Where I live here I think I am very lucky, only I miss my friends and the people. I recently went to Bangladesh and met one of my friends after 12 or 13 years. He was one of my best friends in the Uni. He is a journalist and when I met him his first question was I never believed that you could leave Bangladesh and for that long a time. I was always with a social club and my friends and chatting there. I actually was like that which made it hard for him to believe that I would leave. He asked if I liked to be here. I said yes because whatever I wanted I got early on. I started feeling about the people when I started to settle down here. When I first came I had to settle down, how to do my job, how I would cope with my job workplace and then after that to get a house.

We are four in the family, I have two boys and we are pretty happy. My wife felt it a lot because she left all her entire family in Bangladesh. For me it was a bit easier because my parents had died and my brother lives here. My sister lives in Spain with her family; they are in pretty good shape as they own two or three properties, so it was easier for me. An interesting thing when I took my eldest son in 2007 he was crying when we came back. In the middle of the night he starts screaming and crying, he was asking for his cousins and everyone. Now he is grown up and every time he does that. The last time we went back in 2014 he was crying. I asked him why he was crying and he said he was feeling it. I asked him if he wanted to go back and he said if he could work in an Australian mission or something he would be happy. I asked him the other day how did he feel about it he said the same thing like me he wanted the people. I asked him if he had a choice what would he like to stay here or go back and he said to stay here but he wanted the people. That is very interesting the second generation but my little one he doesn't feel it. When we go there he enjoys it and then comes back, that's it. He likes to go there but happy to come back, that is interesting.

## 20 mins

**AA** How is your wife now, does she still miss it?

**SK** Yes, she misses her family. She still has her parents and big brothers over there.

**AA** When you came here, how did you find the language?

**SK** At first it was hard to catch the accent. When I first came after two or three weeks my brother told me it was time to go outside by myself. Because I didn't have a driving licence I had to catch public transport. His advice was to always take the train it is easier. He said the Sydney network was a very good network so I would never get lost. That was his advice. I was in Parramatta and I didn't understand the announcement because of the accent. I mentioned to my brother and he said it happens to everyone even to him and he was a teacher. It would take a few weeks because the Australian accent was different.

**AA** I suppose we also use slang which you wouldn't have learnt.

**SK** I still don't understand some of it.

**AA** Where did you first live when you came out here?

**SK** I came first to North Parramatta with my brother.

**AA** Did you experience any racism when you came here?

**SK** I did from a Campsie neighbour, but I don't know if it was racism or not. It happened in Campbelltown actually a car was coming and when it was passing it would do a beep. It happened to me a lot of times. When it first happened I thought it was fun. The other day there was a beeping and it was a signal. They were beeping and the car is staying for the signal, I looked inside and they were young and one of the young was actually doing something to throw at me. It wasn't like a stone it was maybe a chocolate cover and he was making a ball. I never thought about it, but still I found that sometimes they beep and I asked my wife and she said don't look at them. I don't know if it is only me but I am not very certain about it, but I think they do it for everyone, not for me only. When I was walking it was only me on the footpath but it never happen to me when I am going to Marketplace or shopping Mall or somewhere else.

**AA** What do you like about Australia?

## 25 mins

**SK** Actually I don't know how I explain it. It is not very fast like the United States that I like most. I know that in the world Australia and Canada is like that. They are slow going. I have not a lot of ambition like to have a lot of money. I like a

quiet life, easy going actually that is what I like most and at the same time systematic like organised. If I compared it to Europe or very fast country maybe we are not in Australia. But if I compared it to Bangladesh it is definitely faster. When I saw the other day that the government is planning in the future to build and make more money I don't like that. I don't like cities actually. Personally I don't like cities. I had never lived in a city. I never intended to live in a city in Australia. This is one of the reasons, but not the main reason, that I moved to Campbelltown to live.

I used to live in Campsie, but when it came to buying a property at that time, when I was looking at places it was not in my mind. One of my wife's relatives lived in Ingleburn and they asked us to their place to a party. When I first came I didn't have a car and they asked me to come on the train and they picked us up. When I saw the place I liked it. I said this is the type of place where I want to live. He said you can buy here; you have a job and everything. You can buy a standard house. I was talking about it was very expensive in Campsie but I could buy nearby but I didn't like to stay near the city. I definitely was looking for a house not an apartment because I wanted a back yard. I think in five to ten years Leumeah and other places will be a little bit crowded.

**AA** So you think that Campbelltown is headed that way.

**SK** I think so. I am not 100% sure that some people in my area are happy but they think that house prices will go up. It has gone up in the last one and a half years very dramatically. I heard that the Campbelltown Stadium will be like the Sydney Cricket Ground type. If it is like that and I heard that the Campbelltown CBD will be like a proper CBD like Sydney. The people are coming. If I drive from my home to Macarthur Square I can see a lot of apartments. But still Campbelltown isn't bad. I shouldn't say bad, a lot of people like that. It is only my personal view.

**AA** What are the worst things about Campbelltown, anything that you are not fond of?

**30 mins**

**SK** No, because we have everything here. Some of my colleagues say in the night the city is different. In Campbelltown on New Year's Eve we always come to Koshigaya Park to watch the fireworks.

**AA** Do you have much contact with other Bangladeshi people in Campbelltown?

**SK** Oh yes, we normally have two festivals in our religion, so we meet. Actually I have to because of my sons. In their schools in the classrooms especially my older son has a lot of Bangladeshi friends. We mix with the parents especially for festivals like the Bangladeshi New Year. In Bangladesh the whole country observes that so we try to observe that ourselves. There are other festivals and

the Bangladeshi Fair is held in the Campbelltown Stadium. There are a lot of Bangladeshi people in the Minto area and Ingleburn and Macquarie Fields. A lot of them have left the Macquarie Fields area and moved to Edmondson Park. Some people bought a house and paid that and bought some new land and also some moved to Macquarie Links.

**AA** Thank you Sikander that is all that I wanted to ask you and I thank you for your time.