

Laura Graham: Hello, my name's Laura Graham, and I am here with the 60 Miles by Road or Rail Project, interviewing Tish from QSpace. Tish, can you tell us a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

Tish: So I was born in Worcester, spent about three years of my life in Worcester. I don't remember any of them. I remember we grew up in... I think I have one vague memory of me toddling about the house in Droitwich that we were in., But since then we moved, so about 1997, we moved to Northampton, and I've lived here ever since really. Yeah, yeah.

Laura Graham: Which part of Northampton have you, or parts have you lived in?

Tish: So literally, the house that I live in at the moment, is the same house that we moved into. I think there might've been a small interim where we lived in Moulton for a bit, but I just, again, can't remember for the life of me, and I was a wee bairn at the time. Yeah, so the house that we're currently in Abington, is the house that I've always remembered and grew up in, sort of all of my memories of growing up there. I remember literally, my school, when I was in primary school, it was Stimpson Avenue Primary School. It's like two blocks away from my house, so we'd always walk to school, that sort of thing. I remember growing up, most of my memories around my neighbours, they were all pretty much the same age as me. So some went to Barry Primary, some went to Stimpson Avenue, it was a small, I don't know, perceived rivalry between the two primary schools. But yeah, no. Yeah, so a lot of my memories, at least about growing up, are rooted there, where I still currently live.

Laura Graham: And tell me about your family. So who's in your family, who's in your household as a child?

Tish: So there was me, my parents, so my mum and dad, and my sister, Fauna, and she's three years younger than me. But then also who lived across the road from me was my aunt, so my mum's sister, and her two children. And they were similar age, about three, five years older than I was. So because pretty much every day, almost every day, we'd eat at each other's house, we'd visit each other's houses, that sort of thing. It was like we were pretty much siblings. And I remember a time when my sister actually went to school, or the school came back questioning, there was project around doing a family tree, and she'd put down as a sibling, she had two brothers and one sister. And the school were like, "Where are these other siblings from?" And it was actually, in fact,

they're my cousin's, obviously, but because we were so close, practically like siblings.

Yeah, yeah. And then towards, I think, oh, gosh, I can't remember exactly when, but my mum, and obviously, her sister, when their eldest brother passed away in Kenya, their mum was living with him at the time. And after he passed away, what they did is sort of convince her to move, to emigrate to here. So I was able to meet her, which was quite nice, my grandma, and she spent a good number of years here, about five years. She almost got her naturalisation process done, but unfortunately, she passed away before that could be completed. But it was nice that we had some memories with that grandma as well. Excuse me. Yeah. I mean, my other grandparents, they lived in Ilford, so in east of London. Excuse me. And that's where my dad grew up actually. They moved here when my dad was five. Again, they were from Kenya, so a lot of Gujarati Indians, you might have interviewed, I think, a couple others. A lot of them have immigrated to Kenya, and then moved here, so I'm part of that sort of legacy as well.

Yeah, so my mum moved here when she was about 18, so from Kenya, she emigrated later than my dad. So a lot more of her family are still back in Kenya, whereas my dad, a lot of his family are here in the UK. So yeah, I think in the family of it, I'm definitely closer with my mum's side of the family, because a lot of them lived in Northampton. My dad's side of the family predominantly live in London, either East or West London sort of thing, and I tend to meet them less often than my mum's side, which a bit more accessible. A lot of them, they live mainly in Ling's area, that sort of side, Weston Favell. But, yeah.

Laura Graham: And what brought your parents and your parents' family to England?

Tish: Oh, that is a very good question. So it's sort of two different stories here. So my mum emigrated with her siblings, a lot of her siblings, so I think it was three of her brothers and two of her sisters as well, so three brothers, three sisters. All together, there's six brothers and four sisters, so three of the siblings stayed behind in Kenya whilst the rest moved here. I think just for better opportunities. I remember a lot of them, because this is around the '70s at the time, they were able to get property quite cheaply. When I say cheaply, the prices that they quote, sometimes it's just unimaginable about house prices under £20,000. What does that mean? What does that even mean?

So yeah, I think they were more fortunate. They moved here to look for better opportunities. My dad's side is a bit of a different story. So my grandfather, he's been a very shrewd, he was a shrewd businessman. And when he emigrated to Kenya, he was always community-minded, but also business-minded. So at one point, he set up a co-op of local dairies in the area he grew up in, it was called Fort Hall at the time, and so this was just to enable better business for dairy farming essentially, in the area. And no one person was the boss, but he managed that co-op. And this was around the time of the Kenyan independence. So in the independence movement, once Kenya was an independent, there was a large emphasis on taking back into ownership of Black people, land, businesses, that sort of thing. And often, Indians, or South Asians, were caught in a bit of a limbo there.

And so this is how I know the story, is where the authorities came to the office that my grandfather was working at, and they just asked who owns this place? And because he was in the senior management, he just said, "I do," not knowing that the next thing that was done is they looked for his passport, they saw it was a British passport. They sent him on the next plane to the UK. Yeah, so it was a bit more of a violent exodus for my grandfather, and my grandmother and dad and uncle went shortly after. So yeah, I think you might have heard there was a large history around the East African sort of independence movement, so a lot of, especially South Asians and Indians were basically, like in Uganda, for instance, everyone was kicked out. Kenya was a bit more of a bit diplomatic process. Tanzania, not entirely sure of that process, but I think there's a similar diplomat saying, "Okay, we're not really welcome here. So the next best thing is we've got British passports, we emigrate to the UK."

So that's how they came here. And so my mum initially, with her siblings, they found a place in, I want to say Wealdstone, or it's in London, and close to central London. And my grandfather moved to sort of the Ilford area. They've moved in, various houses across Ilford. But yeah, they both moved to London. And then my parents, after they got married, my dad had found work in Birmingham. So that's why I said I was brought up in, well, I was born in Worcester area of Droitwich. And then when my dad quit that job, we moved to Northampton. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Laura Graham: Never looked back.

Tish: No. Yeah, exactly. It's a strange thing. But yeah, just trying to map out everything, I sometimes forget specifics and exactly when things happened, but the general gist is that, yeah.

Laura Graham: And then can you tell me about school? So you mentioned your primary school.

Tish: Yeah, primary school. Yeah.

Laura Graham: Yeah, so what was school like?

Tish: School was interesting. Okay, so I actually initially to, when I was in nursery age, or just above nursery age, I went to Great Houghton, the preparatory academy, the private school, and I did not have a good time there apparently. So again, these are just these things that I've been told from my parents that I said, but apparently, I experienced quite a bit of racism there, and just a feeling of just not being welcomed. These were from the teachers and the staff. I remember the friends, at least they were friends, but then as soon as they heard something quite alarming. So I said one time, apparently, that I just said, "I want to be a white man," when I was young. And they were really alarmed by that, and they were like, "We're not sending you to that school anymore." So that's when Stimpson Avenue came into the picture, and they had a very different attitude towards multicultural... Because Abington itself is very, there's a large Bangladeshi community, there's Somalis, there was Eastern Europeans, a lot of people from what used to be Yugoslavia living in that area.

So Stimpson Avenue was right in the center of that, and they were really accepting of... Their whole ethos was around sort of accepting these multicultural backgrounds. I remember literally, in the assembly hall, the one wall was just like, literally, they were doing small profiles of the students and where they're from, and also how they say hello in their language, and things like that. And it just was a completely different attitude towards people from different backgrounds. And I think due to that, I think I must have felt a lot more comfortable there than at my previous school. Yeah. So Stimpson Avenue, and then I was one of the first years where they were changing the system from the three-tier to the two-tier system. So I spent year five and year six at Stimpson Avenue, and then I moved to NSB for secondary school. And during that time, they were still using the old Cliftonville site, just while they were doing the refurbishments to the school, so spent years seven and eight

there. You could see it was a very old school, it was on its bare bones essentially.

But they were like, "Yeah, we're not going to do anything because they're going to knock it down soon." Yeah. And then moving to, when I was in halfway year eight and year nine, because they'd redone it, NSB looked so swanky, and it was a nice school to go to. I liked the drama, so I was in all of the drama theatre productions, that sort of thing. I played the violin, I sang, so I was part of the orchestra and the choir, that sort of thing. I liked those extracurriculars. And in the curriculum, I was good at maths and science-y things. Again, I didn't feel too uncomfortable there. Now, this is during that time, that's when I came into realization around my sexuality, and I was one of the first people to come out in my class, in my year.

And it was a really weird way. Coming out, I was really nervous about everyone knowing. I didn't really want everyone to know, so I only told a few of my friends. And I remember one, I think, I can't remember what it was, I think it was a sports day, or something like that, I told one particular friend. And then the next form, I sat in, and someone random asked me, "Tish, are you're bi?" And I was like, "Yeah." But I was so confused as to how people knew. I didn't even put two and two together that that certain friend had only told that other person, and it just spread in that class, because I thought as soon as that person said it, I was like, "The whole year knows. The whole school knows." I'm like, "I have no idea how they knew it, but they know." So yeah, I faced a bit of... It's weird, because a bit of homophobia, but at the same time, I didn't think of it too much as that because it's a boys school.

I'm not excusing any behavior, but every single person, there was banter that goes across, like everyone teases everyone sort of thing, and there's always one thing. But for a lot of the people, it was things that they did that was either a silly thing, or something like that, that got stuck with them for the rest of their school life. But for me, obviously, being queer, being not straight, is something of who I am. So I think the bullying... Well, yeah, I'd call it bullying, but that sort of teasing or whatever, had a different tone to it. Yeah.

Laura Graham: What year was that, 2000 and-

Tish: Oh, gosh, now you're making me do maths, and I just said I was good at maths.

Laura Graham: You're good at maths.

Tish: Yeah. So wait, so I finished school in 2012, so that was year 13. So counting back about year eight, five years ago was 2007, yeah. So being gay, or being bi or something, wasn't a new thing, or wasn't like there was a lot of taboo around it. Obviously, there was things like, obviously Section 28 was still in effect, not still in effect, but definitely, the aftermaths of that were still in effect. So you wouldn't hear much around even the sex health. There wasn't really a lot around queer relationships, there isn't really much around it now. But it definitely wasn't a thing that you would associate with the school having a definite policy around LGBT students. You wouldn't think that any school would think about having that during that time, and maybe they should have, but... Yeah. So yeah, it was a strange time to grow up in, I think.

I don't know, there was a whole thing around the political climate, and growing up in the aftermath of 9/11, things like that, things changed a lot, I think. Yeah, there was a lot of changes during when I was at school. Obviously, there was 9/11 when I was in primary school, but then the stock market crashed in 2010, didn't it, or 28, so 2008, so when I was in secondary school as well. So significant things happened, and that definitely changed, I don't know, the general feeling. But yeah, definitely for LGBT people, early-2000s, we saw a bit more acceptance, I think, but I definitely didn't see that level of growth in young people at the time. Yeah.

Laura Graham: And did you tell your family at the same time?

Tish: No. No, no. I didn't come out to my family until I was 20, something like that. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Laura Graham: How was that?

Tish: It was a strange experience, I was like bricking it. But actually, so there's a funny story. I was actually going to give blood, and I ticked that I was sexually active within the past 12 months. And the nurses were like, "Yeah, no, we can't accept it because it's an at-risk lifestyle." And it's now reduced to three months, but still it's just ridiculous. Yeah, the words, yeah, yeah. I think they probably changed their words now, but the at the time, I was just like, "Oh, okay." I mean, probably Tom, Dick, and Harry around me has just got whatever, they could have any STI,

and they'd accept them, so anyway. Essentially, when I got home, I said to my mum that I wasn't allowed to give blood, or I couldn't give blood, or whatever. And she was really worried. She was like did the nurses abuse me, or something like that, or "What happened," essentially. And so eventually, I drummed up the courage to just come out to her, and she was like, "Okay, fine." So it wasn't a big deal for her. Yeah, yeah.

Laura Graham: Because it can be a sort of in South Asian households...

Tish: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Laura Graham: So was that a surprise, her reaction, or-

Tish: It was and it wasn't. Mum's not really been a conventional person when it comes to tradition and beliefs, and all that. So a lot of households, you'll see that either the parents are quite religious, or their specific roles that they play, mum didn't really conform to that. She paves her own path, really. And I remembered even before that, she didn't even care about if I married someone outside of my culture, it wouldn't matter to her. So it was a bit of a relief that it wasn't a bigger deal to her. But at the same time, there was a bit of surprise, or something like that, like "Oh, okay. Okay. She's just accepted it," which is fine.

Laura Graham: And what about your dad?

Tish: So, yeah, dad, I'm not quite out to my dad. Yeah, yeah. But at the same time, if he found out, I wouldn't really care. It's just something I've just not done, and I don't think I intend to do either.

Laura Graham: So your parents still-

Tish: Yeah, yeah. My parents are still together, but it's a weird thing because, I'm jumping around a bit, but my grandfather passed away in 2013, I think, so my grandmother has been living by herself for quite some time. And before the pandemic, she was really resilient, she was outgoing. She'd go on the bus, she would go on the trains. She'd use her freedom pass wherever she could, visit her friends, that sort of thing, go shopping by herself, all that sort of stuff. And then when the pandemic hit, she spent eight weeks by herself in the house, and that did a number on her own resilience, her confidence in going out, all of that sort of stuff.

At that point, she's almost 90 now, she was in her mid-80s, so obviously, the old age is catching up to her as well. But staying in the house for so long, it can really catch up to you. You can really realize that your body's just like, "Oh, okay, now's the time for me to not work as well as I used to." So my dad made the decision to move down to live with her, and he's been doing that since. Yeah, so my mom still lives here, my dad lives in Elford, but they're still together. Yeah, yeah.

Laura Graham: So they didn't think about moving her in with you, or-

Tish: So my grandma has been in that house for 35 years. She's not changed anything about that house, and I think she envisions that she's going to die in that house as well. She does not want to move. She doesn't mind spending the odd week or two up here when it's the school holidays and dad's not working. Dad's a teacher, and so dad would move up, back here for the holidays, and she'd come with him. But yeah, she won't consider moving. Plus I don't think my mom wants to live full-time with my grandma either. She is a piece of work at the moment. Yeah, yeah.

Laura Graham: So when you had the conversation with your mum about your sexuality, your mum hasn't discussed that with your dad, or wider family?

Tish: No. Yeah, it was a weird thing. So initially, she accepted it, but then also she was like, "Don't tell your dad," or like, "Don't tell anyone." That was a weird thing for her to say. And initially, I thought that mum would take it worse than dad. And when she said that, then my sister, so she knew, my sister also agreed with mum saying that dad would take it worse than mum. So I was like, "Okay, fine." Yeah, yeah. Yeah, there was no sort of chat amongst them. I was 20 at that time, so I was an adult, so it didn't matter to me. I don't think it mattered to them too much. It's not like I was under their care still, so it's not like they have to discuss about every aspect of my life, nor my sisters at the time. I think she was 17, so she pretty much... She was still growing up, she's still a teenager, but still. But yeah, they just didn't have that discussion really. Yeah.

Laura Graham: Do you feel that that is a difficulty in the relationship with your dad, or are you just kind of not fazed?

Tish: I'm not really fazed by that. I mean, I get on with my dad, but we argue all the time, and I think that's just because of there's levels of... So yeah, there's other things. So I definitely think I've got undiagnosed autism, and dad definitely has undiagnosed autism, and we just clash a lot



because we just see things very differently, and can't see it the other way. But yeah, it's not like... Yeah, I don't think it's affected the relationship. I think he's come to the fact that, because neither... Well, so I've not had a partner, and I've not had a long enough partner to bring home to my parents. So I've never had a partner essentially, and they're just like, "Okay, fine. If you do find someone, great. If you don't." So I think they both consigned to the fact that I just might not find a partner. Yeah.

Laura Graham: So there's no pressure to settle down, or they're worried-

Tish: No, not really.

Laura Graham: Or have kids.

Tish: Not from the parents at least. So yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, strangely enough, whenever I go to see my dad's side of the family, loads of people ask me, "When are you going to find a girl," or "When are you going to get married? When are you going to settle down," and that sort of thing. And albeit, they do it more to my sister, they're like, "Oh, when are you going to get married? Tick-tock, tick-tock," that sort of thing. But then it never came from my dad, but then recently, my dad's like... I think it was grandkids, I think that's what it was. So I don't think he cares if I get married. He's like, "When am I going to have grandkids?" Yeah, so he did mention, like "When are you going to get married," sort of thing. I'm like, "This is strange coming from you." If my grandma said it, it's like every other conversation. But from him, that was the strange thing to hear, yeah.

Laura Graham: So moving on from school then, did you do further studies, or did you go to work?

Tish: So after I did my A levels, I took a gap year, because I really didn't know what I wanted to do. So I initially thought that... My thinking was that if I got a degree that had some sort of promise of good job afterwards, so dentistry or doctor, or something like that, then I'd be okay. I'd be set. And I applied to do dentistry. I didn't get it the first time, that was when I was doing my A Levels. I had my A level grades, I got good grades, A's pretty much, and I still didn't get dentistry. So funnily enough, I went through, it wasn't quite clearing, but I kept one space open on the UCAS thing, for another thing.

So I opted to do chemistry and maths at Leeds. And looking back, I am so glad I did that. I went to Leeds, spent three years of my life in Leeds, had an amazing time. I loved the course I did. I wasn't just pulling my hair out every other minute. And the friends I made, there are friends that I still meet up once or twice a year now. The social life, the night-life, it was all good fun. There was loads of different university societies I could join. I got to do a bit more sort of choir, Bollywood dancing. I did orchestra for a bit, then I was like, "I can't be bothered with violin anymore," just threw it away or something like that, metaphorically.

And yeah, yeah. No, I just had a great time in Leeds, yeah. Yeah, it was really nice to... It's strange how things happen in your life, where you're like, "What if I did something differently," but then I wouldn't have known this person, or I wouldn't have met this person, or I might not have likely stayed in Northampton and met all these amazing people. So it's strange trying to look back and say, "Oh, if I did that differently, what would've happened?" Because kind of glad, it gives a new sort of form of appreciation of all the small decisions that I took. So after Leeds, I came back here, again, with no prospects of... I didn't want a job in chemistry, because all the options were either working petrochemicals or pharmaceuticals, and I was just like, "These are a bit soul-draining works." I'm just like, "Yeah, I kind of don't want to work for these huge firms that take advantage of whoever."

At that point, I was done with academia, so I was like, "I don't want to really do another year, like a masters or PhD, or whatever," So I came back here. And yeah, I've been in various jobs since then, here.

Laura Graham: Tell us about your jobs.

Tish: Oh, gosh. Yeah. So initially, when I came back, I was trying to look for graduate roles, and I couldn't find anything initially. So I was working at an off-license for a bit. One of my family friends had an off-license, so I worked for them for a bit. Then I also spent a year working at Caroline Chisholm as a learning support assistant.

Laura Graham: Caroline Chisholm being a secondary school?

Tish: Secondary school, yeah, yeah, yeah. So Caroline Chisholm is a secondary school, and that was the first time I sort of worked with young people with, albeit they had special educational needs. So

whether that was that they were autistic, or they had some sort of other diagnosis, or there was just some other sort of access requirements that they had that needed support with. And it was quite fulfilling, but I just felt like I couldn't carry on. One, was because at the time, I actually did have some plans to go teach abroad, because I just wanted the experience of moving away, and then going on holiday essentially, but then having some sort of income to back me up for that, however long I'd go for.

But that didn't work out, or it sort fell through, or I can't remember what it was. I might have just said, "I don't want to do it in the end." So I then worked for various companies as data analysis roles. So one, they were a research company that supported people in the automotive and airplane, and sort of defense industries. And I looked at what funding was there out there, and matched up their research plans and development plans to what funders were looking for, and things like that. It was an interesting role, but again, I don't like staying in one place at any one time, for too long, I've noticed.

So I moved on from that, and I worked for a different data analysis role, at a company that... Again, they looked at sales of various products that wholesalers were providing for their local off-license stores, and things like that. And so they worked with big brands like Mondelez and Cadbury's, and all that sort of stuff, because again, that sort of data is quite useful to them to know where all their products are going. And so yeah, worked, again, data analysis type role, reporting for them for quite a bit. And again, I was just like, "These private sector jobs are really just not for me." By this time. I think I had been volunteering for quite some time.

When I was younger, I volunteered for the IHWO. I did a lot of things for them, just helping out at various events. And throughout the university, and just after as well, I played a big role at the Diwali celebrations, helping do the performances, arrange the performances there on the stage. It was a good experience, and I liked it. And around the time that I was working in these other companies, I also started volunteering for QSpace. I joined QSpace in about 2019, yeah, yeah, yeah. And yeah, that was the first time I actually felt connected to community that I wanted to be part of, contribute to, and the first sort of experience of LGBT community as well, in any setting, which was quite life changing for me, definitely. Yeah, yeah.

I am very glad that I became part of this wider community. And we're not only just a group of volunteers, we've become friends. We've bonded on a much deeper level than I think I've bonded with anyone before. So yeah, being part of QSpace has definitely been like a... I don't know what the words I'm trying to think, but hopefully I'm conveying the feeling. Yeah. And so I volunteered alongside them, part of the youth group, but then events that they did, the training, all of that sort of stuff, that was all good. And then in 2020, I said to all of my other jobs, or whatever I was doing, I was like, "I don't want to do any of this. I want to pursue a role in the arts," and things like that. So I took up work at the Royal & Derngate for a bit, behind the box office. And again, it was great. I loved it. I got to see good shows as well, got see some free shows as well.

And then the pandemic hit, so I was put on furlough. And basically, after I was put on furlough, I was like, "Okay, I'm just chilling. I'm not really doing any work, I'm getting a bit of money for it, so I'll just wait it out." And then I was recommended for this role by Jack Ruthie Patel, for Support Northamptonshire. So it was a combination of data analysis, but then also they were developing a platform, like a sort of sophisticated, like CRM platform that measured outcomes and reporting, and all that sort of stuff that I seem to be quite interested in, so I went for it. And that role grew into so many other things. So I basically kept getting more experience in doing various different bits in the roles that I was doing, so I moved on to doing a bit more project management, project support for the various activities that were running, things like that, that I eventually became this operations manager.

And yeah, I know, fancy me. But in that role, I learned so much in terms of project management, in terms of what it might take to run a charity, or charitable organization. And it's one that I stuck with for three years. So from the day I started, to the day I finished, it was three whole years, and that's the longest I've been with any company. And that takes me to 2004, 2024 even, yeah, which we're here now. Now, having had all these experiences, I've been teetering on the idea, but I've now committed to this, like I was saying to you before, so opening up a community cafe in town. Yeah, I think it's something that I think the community definitely needs, and it's something that I can almost put my stamp on, say that I did this, sort of thing. Yeah.

Laura Graham: Because you mentioned it being a sort of safe space for queer people and for Black and brown people.

Tish: Yeah.

Laura Graham: And I'm interested in your kind of intersectional identities and how that's impacted your life choices, your experiences. Do you have anything to share on that?

Tish: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, oh, gosh, yeah. Yeah, there's been a lot. So obviously, growing up Black and brown and queer, it can be very isolating to find community, to find things that you can relate to, or find support in, or find other people like you, without fear of what the consequences might be about being outed. One big thing to me when growing up, was that a lot of things that I saw on TV, for instance, where kids would just go outside of the house when it wasn't school time and just hang out with their friends, and things like that, without worry of anything. And if you're Black and brown, a lot of the times, you're either saying that... You have to ask permission from your parents to go out the house, and they'll be like, "Why do you want to go out the house," or like "No, you can't. No, you've got chores to do," or whatever.

My parents were slightly different, but they still were too inquisitive to be like, "Oh, what are you going to do? Are you going to meet up with friends or whatever," or whatever, I don't know. Yeah, so trying to find, or meet up with people, trying to find community wasn't a thing if you're Black and brown growing up. I don't think much has changed. Probably things have changed, some attitudes have. But for me, definitely it was the only way I could find community was actually growing into an adult, and actually sort of being able to at least have some sort of autonomy in saying, "Actually, I don't have to ask my parents to leave the house."

So having that sort of level of freedom, the first time I felt it was at university. But then at university, I didn't really make an active effort to find community. I think I was just a bit... In my head, the whole sort of the LGBT society at the time, felt a bit like it was a political movement. It probably wasn't. It was probably just a chill time, like any QSpace meet up, or whatever. But I just felt that it was just so political, and I don't want to. So there was just, yeah, various things around being that. Yeah, yeah. And a lot of the times that I think when you're growing up, even if you aren't sort of queer, being Black and brown, the parents would

always need to find some sort of utility as to why to go, "Why are you going outside of the house?"

It can't just be to have fun, or whatever. It's got to be things that they wouldn't matter now too, it's like things that you can put on your CV to be like, "Ah, yes, yes. This is something that I can sort of show that I've done so I can get a good job," or whatever, or it will improve my chances of getting to a good uni, blah, blah, blah. So those sort of casual meetups that people had, I saw it on TV, and other people were just meeting up, and I'm just like, "This is not an experience I got." So even that affects things like me not having a longer-term, or finding a relationship outside of whatever my small circle was, of friends. Yeah, it's a strange experience. And I think other people would have different things, but that was a stark thing I remember as a huge difference, and probably a bigger barrier into why I might not have found community or a relationship earlier on.

Laura Graham: And you spoke about QSpace, which is the LGBTQ, primarily youth charity, am I right, or is it more-

Tish: Well, actually, it's an organisation that supports LGBT people in Northamptonshire. So, yes, there's a large emphasis on youth, I think, from an external factor, is because our regular thing that we do is a youth group, but we support all LGBT people, whether that's through the training we do, so in education and work settings to help improve attitudes towards LGBT people in either people you're supporting in your organisation, or actually staff as well, improve awareness of inclusivity, and how to imbibe those sort of values into your organisations. But we also do one-to-one work, helping people, albeit whether it's your school, or whether it's your work that you're facing issues with, and you want some advocacy, QSpace offers that as well.

So yeah, I do see that there's a large external perspective that people think it's still a youth group, or a youth support group. And although that is a large part of what we do, it's not the only thing that we do. And I think because of the history of it as well, that it stemmed out from Lowdown, or there was a history with Lowdown, which is a mental health charity for young people in Northampton, that also, that sort of history carries with it that understanding of it's just being a youth charity. But where it's not, is it's for anyone, anyone LGBT or allies. Yeah.

Laura Graham: And you spoke about your friendships that you've sort of formed through volunteering with QSpace. Tell me a bit about the importance of those friendships and how they've developed.

Tish: I'm a big Grey's Anatomy fan, and one thing that the main character says is that "You're my person." I found multiple people that are my people in QSpace. The sort of friendships that you feel like you can rely on, or if you're... I've never been fortunately touched with any sort of sticky situation, but those sort of things that you can definitely think that, "Okay, they've got my back," or I can go to them and just be myself only, not worry that they might see me in a different light, or anything like that. I can just be myself with them. Which I think it's really unique.

And that's something that I don't think I was ever afforded with any of the friendships I had growing up. The union was slightly different, I could afford to be myself a bit more. But QSpace, definitely, the people that I've met through that have been people that are just like... They're essentially this extended family. They're that, what you call that, chosen family. And I don't say that lightly, it's literally people that you just envision not ever not being part of your life. So yeah, that's sort of what I mean by that. Yeah.

Laura Graham: Lovely. And I'm interested to know your thoughts on chosen family, and in the LGBTQ community. How do you feel about chosen family as a concept for us, and how it's developed?

Tish: Yeah, it's a weird notion, because obviously, everyone will have some sort of version of a chosen family, whether that's what they call their friends, or whatever. But I think it's quite different with the LGBT community because there's been so much oppression, so much suppression, so much repression that we've not been given a chance to naturally find that community. So you're going to have to actively seek out these people.

And because these people know you, because they know what you've gone through, because they've gone through it as well, they know what ways in which to support you well. You don't have to worry about trying to over-explain yourself to these people because they are you. They know what you're going through. And that sort of bond that's formed there is something that I don't think you could ever find anywhere else, and it links you for life, essentially. Yeah. So I think that concept of chosen family there, where the family you grew up with, they're going to

be there, but they may not always accept you. I know definitely, for some members of my family, they would never accept me for who I am. But chosen family is people that you're almost curating your own bubble around you, of people that accept you, know you, love you, and you don't have to sacrifice any part of yourself to try and be part of their lives.

Laura Graham: In terms of your heritage, I mean, that's a big word, spanning lots of different things and elements, and we've touched on that as part of our other project linked to this, which is the comic book anthology. What, for you, do you think is the most important elements of your personal heritage?

Tish: That is a very good question. So most important elements of my heritage are definitely the story of how my family came here. That journey from India to Kenya to here is very sort of... That's built part of who I am, so it would be very different from someone who'd emigrated directly from India. Elements of our culture, my culture, are adopted from East African culture, and so that would be one very important thing about my whole heritage. Another key thing around my heritage is finding community in LGBT spaces. And yes, I'll allude to QSpace in that, but also just me also finding community, especially in Northampton. I initially found community by just going to the Boston every Saturday, literally.

Laura Graham: The Boston being the local gay club?

Tish: Yeah, gay club. Yeah, in Northampton, the only gay club in Northampton. We'll see about that. But yeah, that was definitely a big part of helping me find my way through coming back to Northampton and looking for, I'm going to say community again, looking for community. So heritage is a big word for me, since I'm only the wee age of 30, it feels like heritage is this 100 years-ago thing, in my head at least, which maybe I can think of it as a forward-thinking thing, where I'm still building a legacy, or trying to start to build what may look like a legacy for years to come.

Laura Graham: What kind of legacy would you like to leave then?

Tish: Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh. I'd like to sort of lay down roots of where people can easily find community, no matter what sort of barriers they face. But also, I'd like to have been... I guess there's a bit of ego in there.



I'd like to have been known to be someone who was able to bring people together. And a big part of why I'm opening up the cafe as well, is I'm trying to bring community back into Northampton. I've seen Northampton, when I was growing up, is it's been quite a big busy hub in the town center.

I've seen it decline over the years. And I've known it to have such a rich history already around queer spaces, around a lot of activism behind anti-racist movements as well, and I want to bring that element back into Northampton. I wanted to see it thrive again, the way that I've seen it in pockets before, have that effect. I love the fact that Northampton has such a rich history, even around shoes, and things like that. It's just quirky little things like that that I'm just like... Northampton, it's got a vibrant history. Its current state is a bit 'eurgh', but it's something that I want to bring back into Northampton and see it flourish again. Yeah.

Laura Graham: What a lovely place to end.

Tish: Yeah.

Laura Graham: That's such a lovely forward-thinking, you want to leave some heritage

Tish: Mm-hmm.

Laura Graham: As much as you recognise elements of heritage that are important to you. And I think maybe that's something that's prevalent in the LGBTQ community, because we want to keep our history and everything alive.

Tish: Exactly, exactly.

Laura Graham: And not hidden and not forgotten.

Tish: No, no. Yeah, precisely. Yeah. I think, there's a lot more people that think like me, in terms of you don't have to go to London if you're queer now. You don't have to escape the perils of Northampton. Even I've heard from people my age, especially brown people my age as well, they move out of Northampton once they can find a job. And it's mainly to London really, either they find some financial job, or whatever big, big, big wig type job there, and they don't ever come back. And I think that's a shame. That might be me thinking that... Well, I don't know. I think I might be warped by my own perspective, or a bit jealous, but I honestly think that there's a lot more that Northampton can offer. Yeah.

Laura Graham: Yeah, and I see you being a big part of that.

Tish: Thank you.

Laura Graham: Thank you so much, Tish

Tish: Thank you, Laura.

Laura Graham: It's been amazing to speak to you. And yeah, I wish you luck with your community space, your cafe.

Tish: Thank you.

Laura Graham: I know it's going to be amazing.

Tish: Yeah. Oh, God, thank you.