

YOU may well have seen Zanib around Rotherham town centre, or in many different neighbourhood settings because she has been working tirelessly in community development for over 30 years, and this is why she was awarded an MBE in 2014 for services for young people, community cohesion and contributions to football. Yes, you read that right — football, but more about that later.

Born in Newcastle, Zanib's father had a variety of manual labour jobs including dock worker and a milk man.. Like many immigrants the lure of the steel industry brought the Rasools to South Yorkshire and specifically to Masbrough, to join extended family with the promise of secure employment at Robert Jenkins blast furnace. Zanib remembers the snow and peel of church bells, playing in Clifton Park and listening to the brass bands on a Sunday, all of those early recollections have more recently been captured in a poem.

As Zanib got older, and no longer wanted to join her brothers in playing football and with her sisters being that much younger, she took to reading. She would visit the local library, despite it not really wanting "young people" hanging around, and devour the Famous 5, the Secret Garden anything that was available that provided escapism and excitement, away from her daily existence. That seems perfectly normal and acceptable, but I know my childhood daily existence was not the same as Zanib's and her siblings. Growing up in the 1970s racism was everywhere. You only need to recall the TV shows scheduled at the time, reinforcing racist opinions and behaviours. Zanib recalls how every day at school was miserable, with name calling, hair pulling and endless micro-aggressions. Even when the bus was empty the drivers would only let the white children on, leaving vulnerable children to walk home. There were National Front marches taking place and campaigns outside schools, not only targeting the Pakistani community but the Irish too.

Despite all the racism Zanib still believes Rotherham was a friendly town, and the community felt like a neighbourhood with Polish and Italian migrants on the street. All the same it is no surprise that skipping school happened as much as possible, but what is surprising is the school experience did not dampen a love for learning, and that the literature available that was not reflective of her culture or experience has not prevented a lifelong love of reading Catherine Cookson and the Bronte sisters, Shakespeare and the poetry of Sylvia Plath. The first book Zanib read was in Urdu and was the Enormous Turnip! Outside my bedroom there was a street light and when my mum switched the bedroom light off I was still able to read books and usually if it was a good book I would not put it down until I read the whole book and often did not sleep until dawn.

After leaving school, Zanib helped out at home

Community, words, football

Poet and community worker Zanib Rasool MBE has used her art to tackle society's problems and inequalities, such as racism. Here she talks to ROAR chief executive SHARON GILL about her life and work.

for a period of time until she started work at the United Multi Cultural Centre (UMCC) as a trainee community development worker to engage women into first step leaning and progress them on to accredited course. My role included interpreting for the women at the hospital and other places and admin week and also taking part in courses such as RSA typing. After attaining her GCSEs and A levels at college, Zanib took a job at RMBC in the education department followed by time at the legal department, before taking five years off work to recover from heart surgery.

Zanib says she read a lot of books while recovering. Zanib re-joined UMCC again and developed projects for women. Working at UMCC I learned about community life, human interaction and relationships, equality and poverty, it gave me good insight to community life and dynamics. After that I worked for a short time for the Almuneera Project, supporting young BME around exploring identities, culture and literacy.

So here we are returning to the football theme. In April 2008 Zanib took a job at Rotherham United Community Support Trust and is now their partnership and development manager, where she still works today. It is through Zanib's work that more BAME communities access opportunities that the Trust has to offer, and also why there are more BAME women using the facilities, many of whom have limited English language. "When I started there was no women or BAME working at the trust, the conversation was very much football focus and a big change from the conversations I had at UMCC. Now we have more women at the community trust. I have been there 12 years and I feel the football club has a central role to play in Rotherham life and some amazing people work there. I cannot wait to go

back to the stadium and to my desk. I think sport, culture and the arts should come together more."

It is rare to find people so driven to keep positively occupied and Zanib is one of those people. While working full time, she was also a community researcher on the Imagine project working with Professor Kate Pahl who was undertaking a research project with Zanib's sister's daughters "Writing in the Home and in the Street" in 2011, exploring literacy in South Asian homes. Kate mentioned she was working on a funding application and Zanib remembers sitting with Kate at

her sister's house discussing the project idea. Imagine was a five year Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project funded through the Research Council's UK Connected Communities programme. It ran from 2013-2017. Zanib recalls: "I loved the project, it really inspired me in to writing, I used to attend the women's writing group on Thursday mornings at Mowbray Gardens library organised under the Imagine project. A number of BAME women attended the sessions and we shared and read poetry and then started writing poetry ourselves. I also set up a girls writing group as part of the Imagine project and another group at Thornhill school where the women shared their knowledge about herbal remedies. Working with Kate made me more aware that knowledge is created in the community and not all knowledge is in Universities." This partnership led to co-authoring a book with community partners rather than just the academics writing the book.

Kate's persistent encouragement eventually led to Zanib studying for a doctoral in language and literacy with the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. It is here where you can hear the passion in her work, the importance of

capturing the knowledge created in communities especially the first generation migrants before it is lost. The importance of storytelling through objects, like the Suitcase and the significance this has to the Pakistani women whose whole life came with them in one piece of luggage.

"It comes to me straightaway, quickly or it doesn't," Zanib remarks about her poetry. It is a kind of therapy. "Poetry draws out emotions and my best poetry comes when I'm angry." It's a way of getting your everyday experiences on to paper. My grandfather used to write poetry and some of my nieces write lovely poetry. Often when Zanib re reads her own words she does not recognise them. It can be painful too, when revising experiences such as racism at school but also she can write about her happy childhood growing up in Rotherham and the memories of Rotherham.

Zanib has contributed to several academic texts such as chapters in the Imagine project book "Re-imagining Contested Communities: Connecting Rotherham through Research" and further book chapters in "Re-theorising Literacy Practices", and the "Object Medleys — Interpretive Possibilities for Educational Research". Journal articles include "Collaborative working practices imagining better research partners", "Poetry as method- trying to see the world differently", "Co-producing research with communities: emotions to community research" and more recently with Zlakha Ahmed, "Power, Bureaucracy and Cultural Racism". "I like writing and I like to take community voices with me in my writing and collaborating with Rotherham people."

This ambition for published academic writing will run alongside Zanib's poetry and creative explorations, having recently had her poems published online at Dwell Time, and a recent commission to create an art installation around the significance of the suitcase for Wentworth Woodhouse with Shaheem Shah who was the visual artist on Imagine and Mariam Shah, who was the oral historian on the Imagine project. Shaheen did an image of a suitcase that is in the Imagine co-authored book.

This new found confidence and identity as an artist has manifested itself in the development of another community based initiative for Rotherham, the BAME Creative Network. This is in recognition that there are creative skills and talents, both everyday and professional, that are not being given opportunities or commissions, and by supporting one another they will have a greater voice. This new network is supported by REMA and ROAR to celebrate the rich diverse culture and will be led by its members. There are so many talented BAME people who are great art practitioners but don't see themselves as such.

It is remarkable to consider the achievements in Zanib's life and total commitment to her community. We have not even touched on chair of the Hate Crime Scrutiny panel and other voluntary roles she occupies such as involvement in schools. All of which I have no doubt will be feeding her imagination that will eventually find itself expressed through her words.



Memories of a Yorkshire Street by Zanib Rasool

A narrow street with terrace houses that all looked the same, home to new immigrants from Pakistan, Ireland, Italy, Yemen, and Poland. We brought diversity to good old Yorkshire, the languages, the culture, the music and the food. Chicken biryani, Yorkshire puds, fish and chips wrapped in old newspapers never tasted so good.

I remember mothers pushing their reluctant children outdoors so they could get their housework done. The rain always unpredictable in Yorkshire but the people had their routine and everyone hung their washing out on a Monday, Tuesday was cleaning the window day, and so on.

Children played outside, hopscotch, marbles, the boys played footy at the corner of the street. The

girls pushed their small brothers and sisters in prams up and down the street, pretending to be mummies for the day.

The church bells rang loudly across Rotherham calling worshippers on Sunday mornings. The Salvation Army band marching up my street to the sound of "Onward Christian Soldiers" as we walked behind them leaving them at the church door.

We could hear the loud clanking sounds coming from the steel factories, smoke billowing from tall chimneys making the April sky dull and grey, hiding the sun that never really came out. A short distance away the midday train whistling past at a speed with its steel cargo on its way to the south like clockwork, we always listened out for it.

A milk float drives down the street in a hurry fighting to pass a large coal

lorry in its way coming up the street. A grumpy looking man gets out of his lorry and picks up a sack of coal and empties it outside each house. Whilst a tired-looking horse trotted down the street with a cart full of scrap metal, "Any Old Iron", shouts the Rag and Bone man. We follow him down the street, teasing him.

We played in the street until it was almost dark. Soon the street lights came on, one by one and you could see shadows walking down the street from the pub making their way unsteadily home to their streets.

Years later I come back to find there is no street or factories, all gone. As I walk away I can still hear the laughter of children playing; the feel, the sound, sight and smell of my Yorkshire Street stay with me, that Yorkshire Street was always home.

