

Memories of the 1970s

Raju Vaidyanathan



Raju Vaidyanathan was born and brought up in Brick Lane. In the 1970s he was a teenager, but was old enough to witness the horrifying incidents of racial violence that were regular occurrences.

My Memories of 1978 takes in the period from 1975 to 1979. Those 5 years were quite dramatic for me personally and Brick Lane where I was born and still live at. The young generation were now growing up and getting politically aware and were not going to take racism without a fight. I still remember an incident in 1975 where in the middle of the night over a 100+ local youngsters walked down Brick Lane past where I was living and challenged a group of racists. That incident made me aware that I was not the only person who faced racism. (I was young and just assumed that racism was something that only affected me.) In 1976 me and my father along with a family friend were set upon from a group of men in a car (I still remember the white Volkswagen) coming down the wrong way down Brick Lane.

By 1978 the air was filled with tension. As a young lad I was probably less aware of it as much as the politically aware young men who were ready to challenge racism head on. Attacks were getting common and I along with other friends just stuck to Brick Lane and occasionally Bigland Park off Cannon Street Road and played football 24/7. We heard about Altab Ali while playing football and was shocked that it had happened at the end of our street. We were too young to take in fully the arrivals of police, media and demonstrators and were just happy hanging around the back or side watching events unfold. We heard about rumours about the police wanting to play football with us and that took over my life during the Altab Ali demonstrations. I was the only Asian goalkeeper in East London and wanted to make sure that I played in that match if it ever happened.

As things happened the Police just used to kick about with us at the small football pitch in the Chicksand estate (we called it The Ghat) rather than play a full match. We youngsters went into the meeting inside the Naz cinema more of hiding to see a film after the meeting because we were not too politically aware and that was left to the 19-24 year olds. Sadly to me those weeks in May 1978 meant recognition as the first Asian goalkeeper in the East End more than anything as my life was football all day and everyday from morning till night. It would be another 2 years in 1980, when us footballers had reached late teens and were attacked in New Road that I became politically savvy.