

The Mic Drop - Season One, Episode Five: Sam

Mo [00:00:00] Mic Drop podcast. My name is Mohammed. I work with people seeking asylum and refugees. And I've been working with the Many Hands One Heart supporting agency or group for the LGBT+ people seeking asylum refugees. Today, I'm going to welcome one of our oldest member, if probably the oldest member, Sam. And we're going to have a chat about, you know, some of the issues about his life here, and aspirations that he's got. Morning, Sam. How are you today?

Sam [00:00:28] Good morning, Mo, I'm good, I'm fine.

Mo [00:00:31] Can you just tell us first you know a little bit about yourself, where you come from and how old are you?

Sam [00:00:37] I'm from Malaysia. I'm 68 years old this year.

Mo [00:00:41] How long have we been living in UK?

Sam [00:00:43] I arrived in UK 2005. So I mean, 15 years in the UK.

Mo [00:00:47] Again, you got your refugee status now haven't you? Is that right?

Sam [00:00:52] Yes. I got my refugee status on the December 4th. So I'm happy and have been granted remain in UK for five years.

Mo [00:01:01] How long were you waiting for that? How long did it take you?

Sam [00:01:03] Four years fighting a battle with the Home Office. I was rejected 8 times, but I still kept on fighting and still appealed.

Mo [00:01:13] And you talk about that a little bit as well later on. And at first I wanted to talk to you about your life back home in Malaysia. And obviously, when did you realise that you were a gay man or you had you were homosexual?

Sam [00:01:29] I realised I was gay when I was in a primary school at the age of twelve years old.

Mo [00:01:34] How did you find, how do you realise?

Sam [00:01:36] Oh, because we at the time, we don't like to mix a lot with girls. So we have, I had a boyfriend in my same school, in the same class. So we got along very well.

Mo [00:01:49] And how did you feel about that?

Sam [00:01:51] Oh, we feel very comfortable, so we always check together and he used to come to my house.

Mo [00:01:58] But were you scared or were you scared that people find out? What is it like to if you, can you actually live openly as a gay man in your country?

Sam [00:02:08] No. In our country is absolutely not because it's a Islam country, Muslim. We can't explore our sexuality as a gay men. If we explore ourselves we are put in prison or we put in a public whipping.

Mo [00:02:23] So except your boyfriend, your parents didn't know anything about your sexuality?

Sam [00:02:29] No, we try to keep away from them, we don't let them know.

Mo [00:02:33] And just, I know that you got married and you had children. Can you just tell us a little bit about or how that happened?

[00:02:41] Yes. I got married it was, these were unforeseen circumstances. We went for a holiday trip, this one night stand, so she got pregnant and I was forced to marry my ex-wife. Parents say you've got to marry her because she's pregnant.

Mo [00:02:58] And did you carry on living, what did you live as as heterosexual or did you still have like hidden homosexual relationship with other man as well while you were married?

Sam [00:03:10] Not exactly because I still go to Thailand quite often to look for those the ladyboys in Thailand. So just to satisfy that, I still constue as a gay man.

Mo [00:03:25] But nobody, your wife didn't know about your sexuality?

Sam [00:03:28] Yes, she didn't know, I didn't mention to her, after that, she realised that why do I go to Thailand too often and I think she realised I'm gay. That's why she took my money and run away with my children when they very young. My older one was six years old. My youngest was only four years old.

Mo [00:03:47] So you haven't seen them since?

Sam [00:03:49] I haven't see them. And no connection until now.

Mo [00:03:51] Have you tried to contact them?

Sam [00:03:54] There's no way I can contact my ex-wife and my children in because they are in America. So unless if they called me otherwise, I go no other ways to contact them.

Mo [00:04:04] All right. And after your wife left you, did you have, what do you live carry on living in Malaysia or did you move from there to come here or anywhere else?

Sam [00:04:16] I still carry on my business because in Malaysia, I'm a businessman. I have an iron factory. I have two car, two house and more than ten workers, then when my ex-wife ran away I didn't couldn't concentrate on my business and I tried to get money from the loan shark and I can't pay back. They come and look after me and beat me up and want to kill me. This why I have to run away from Malaysia to UK.

Mo [00:04:50] When did you come here?

Sam [00:04:51] It was 2005, is 15 years from now.

Mo [00:04:55] When, and did you start working? Did you work?

Sam [00:04:58] Yes, I did. When I arrived in UK, I was in Chinatown. I look at a Chinese paper. So they said they can get me a work permit for three thousand five hundred pounds so I can start working. So at that time when I got a job, I couldn't get paid because I have to pay back the debts to the Chinese agent to get a job they also take 250 pound from my wages. So I didn't get any money until I finish my debts by one year then I left. I went to get a new job in Cornwall.

Mo [00:05:39] I believe you are quite popular in Cornwall. They used to call you Uncle Sam. Is that right?

Sam [00:05:44] Yes. And when my petition was online, I think some of my younger people, when I met them, when they're young, they used to come to my Chinese restaurant and they grew up. They also advertise on their tshirt 'Save Uncle Sammy' 'don't deport Uncle Sammy'.

Mo [00:06:04] It wasn't your restaurant. You work in that restaurant you didn't own the restaurant is that right?

Sam [00:06:08] Yeah, I didn't own them. I worked for them as a manager.

Mo [00:06:11] And did you know, again, in Cornwall or when you came to UK working did you have any relationship with any any gay men?

Sam [00:06:21] Not at all, because especially I'm a Chinese and I'm also not don't have money. I only got five pounds a day to survive.

Mo [00:06:33] I'm just talking about when you were working the restaurant?

Sam [00:06:35] Oh in the restaurant? No, because my boss, didn't want people to know that I'm gay, so he say you got to keep yourself secret. I do go down to London, to the gay bar. They call it KU Bar in London. So I just went there hanging around during my day off.

Mo [00:06:56] And when did you apply for asylum? When you know what will happen, how, obviously you were working in the restaurant and you said there was a petition to save you, you know, not to send you back. What happened or what exactly happened that you all of a sudden you became sort of, you couldn't stay here in the UK. What did and when did you apply for asylum?

Sam [00:07:18] I applied for asylum in, I can remember exactly when I was in the detention centre in London and I found one of my room mate. So we also have a relation with him. He's from China, so he already popped back to China. So at that time, we are I applied for my asylum as a gay man,.

Mo [00:07:39] How did you end up in the detention centre?

Sam [00:07:42] Sorry?

Mo [00:07:42] How did you when you say you were in the detention centre, what happened? Wh, what happened that you went to the detention centre?

Sam [00:07:49] The reason that I was in detention centre when the enforcement officer came to the restaurant when I was working, they came and look for one Chinese man that he didn't report it to Home Office. So I was in the counter. So the officer asked me to produce my I.D. I told them I I didn't have my I.D. because I lost my passport. I couldn't renew it because I didn't have the old passport. I went to London to the Malaysia high commissioner. I can't renew it because the I don't have my previous old passport.

Mo [00:08:24] And I mean, you are very famous, aren't you? You've been interviewed on the television and you've been interviewed by Guardian newspaper and Liverpool Echo and a lot of people in Liverpool know you, especially in the people that work with the people seeking asylum. And, you know, it was about your case. What was a special about your case? What did they why why was your case was rejected? You know, did they say you're not gay or do they say that, what was the reason?

Sam [00:08:51] The Home Office rejected me because they say I didn't have a gay partner, so they don't believe I'm gay. At that time when I arrived in UK, I can't expose myself, I still keep myself hiding. When I came to know St Brides Church that they have the LGBT group, that's when I exposed myself, then I've come to know about...

Mo [00:09:14] You didn't expose yourself. You just told people.

Sam [00:09:16] I told people. And then I came to know about Many Hans One Heart. I come to attend most of the meeting if I can. And also on Hannover Street, The Armistead Centre, I do attend the meeting there quite often if they have a meeting.

Mo [00:09:33] You're very popular. Everyone likes you.

Sam [00:09:36] Yeah.

Mo [00:09:36] And you always make everyone happy, have you, just tell us a little about your life here, you know, like, you know, with your age, you know, your health and stuff like that.

Sam [00:09:47] At the moment I think reason I was popular because he was published in the Echo and the Guardian and quite a lot people all over the world, it just goes wild, everybody knows me, even people I does know them when they come and see me. Yes. 'Oh, yeah. Sam, I saw you on the telly. I saw in the newspaper' and people in Kirkby also know me, they treat me quite well because they know that I'm gay, they didn't fight to set against my offense my sexuality.

Mo [00:10:17] So you're live in Kirkby outside Liverpool?

Sam [00:10:20] Yes. And at the moment. Sorry, you know, at the moment I'm quite happy because I'm studying in the city of Liverpool College. I'm in Level 2, I'm doing Travel and Tourism. Which I used to do before in Malaysia is my ex-job, so I really love it. And I've enrolled for my next year, two more years in Liverpool for Level Three for the Travel and Tourism. Then I want to become a qualified Tour Guide.

Mo [00:10:48] That's what exactly was going to ask you. My last question was, what are your aspiration in next five years? Where you where do you want to see yourself? Where are you going to be five years? So you already answered that you're going to be a a tourist guide. Is that right?

Sam [00:11:01] Yeah. You may see me in front, standing in front of the St George's Hall one day! Welcome to Liverpool! I'm your local Tour Guide. After seeing, because I think if the people from China I'd be expecting to give them a tour, because I can speak multi-language especially Chinese and also at the moment I work as a volunteer at AsylumLink, I work on the front desk and do some interpretive jobs, so people who come from China doesn't speak a word English I do an interpreter for them for two days, Thursday and Friday. I used to go there for what is a little four hours a day.

Mo [00:11:42] You're a really, really really inspiring person. You give a lot of people hope. OK.

Sam [00:11:49] A lot people like me, even when I was in the college, my teachers all like me, they assigned me as a class rep. And after they assigned me as a student rep, so I'm qualified to go to the parliament to speak on behalf of the LGBT group as well.

Mo [00:12:04] Oh, fantastic. Thanks very much, Sam.

Sam [00:12:07] Thank you. You're most welcome.