

Hilda recalls her experiences of racism growing up in Harare in Zimbabwe and how this impacted her concerns for her son, settling into Hertford.

I'd been a dental nurse in Zimbabwe for about 25 years, so going to Cardiff to do the dental nursing was to get a certificate to support my experience. And then from then, that's when the situation in Zimbabwe was getting worse, and then I was encouraged to stay.

When I came over, it was following my Dad's funeral and then my sisters were in Wolverhampton so since I was looking after my parents, they invited me to have a respite, that's how it all started. That's why I had no intentions of living in the UK, I was going to go back, but unfortunately because of the political situation in Zimbabwe made me stay.

Because that's when Mugabe then was targeting the people coming from the UK, thinking that they are spies and then I was going out with an army guy who was trained by the British people, and so my name was also on the list of being wanted to be questioned, since I know much about the army and, with my boyfriend then, being British trained, so I might be a risk to, you know. So that's when, he's the one who said, *"At the present moment, don't come back."* So, he must have had some intelligence that they knew that I was out in the UK. So at the present moment it was not safe for me to go back.

When we had our Independence, I was going into high school. So, we were the first group of black people, coming from the black education going into the English curriculum. We were the best bunch, they called them the trials. We were less than twenty, who were accepted at education, to learn with the English people. So that's when racism, I experienced highly. Because the white people did not want us.

My son didn't have that but when he came here. He experienced a little bit, of being *"Look at the black person"*, you know, *"What do you eat?" "What do you do here?"* and all that, but for us, for me, it was actually more, because it was a trial period... Like we are sitting right now, if I come and sit next to you, you move away. If I want to go to the toilet it used to be black only toilet, and you would queue knowing that the other toilet is free... I used to do sport at that time... and the oranges, the white people would have the oranges on break, on their tea time, you know, when you are having a sport, oranges first, and then the last would be given to you, if there was anything.

I'd go through a lot, and I'd experienced that discrimination and racism and mentally abused, you know, but when we were growing up, we thought, that's the white people's attitude, you know, and we've got our faith and my parents used to talk about it, even in our groups, when we were at school, we used to say *"Did you see that white girl? Did you see what she did to me?"* and we were free to talk about what was happening to us, in that time.

So was that a worry, having had that experience?

It was my biggest worry when my son came, joined. That was my biggest worry. I didn't want him to go through what I went through but then he came, he started in Cardiff where

there was also few black people and that school was also a good school, and they could tackle those kind of issues. Whereas in Zimbabwe, they didn't know how to because it was the trial, they didn't know how to deal with us, with our issues.

In the end we ended up being friends, getting to know each other, because it takes a while for a white person to come to know you than the black person... At that time the whites were too reserved, they're still too reserved. They want to know more about you, they want to know where you come from, they want to know who your parents are, which is great, which is the same with the African culture, but it's how you are spoken to. And we are very, very, sensitive. All the Africans are very, very, sensitive, you know, you could actually see someone walking and say *"that's a racist person, there"* you know. 'cos you can just see that through their eyes and their body language, you know, which we learned as we were growing up, until we come to know the person and then, you know, you say *"Oh, yeah. It is what it is. I'm not going to change my colour"*.

(Racism in Britain) wasn't perhaps at the level that you had been worried about?

Yeah, it wasn't. Hertfordshire, you know, was the safe haven, but it took me six months to know that we are safe here, through the church, and through the organisations which my son got himself involved in. And having a kind heart as well, it got him to be acceptable. And being patient as well. And he was also sporty. Sport's international, it's an international language. As long as you score.... then you are in! So, that's really eased a lot of my anxiety, knowing that what I went through, it wasn't compared to, not at all.