

Interview Transcript

Jaz Rogers Interview Extracts

Jaz: My name is Jaz Rogers. I have grown up and been in the Bideford area all my life. I am 25 years old. I was possibly the first black child born in Westward Ho! Both my parents are from Hertfordshire. They moved here about 20 years before I was born.

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Jaz: I'm into my graffiti and street art. They didn't have any of that here. I would only find places where I could really get along with it in big areas like London or Bristol. So here, over the past years I have worked with the Council to create things that we can use to do that. Through that I am building a large friend group as well, who are just getting into it, we've formed a scene out of nothing, basically.

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Jaz: Growing up, when I was young young, I was quite naïve really, to what it was like. But as I got older I seem to have noticed that there are problems with older Devonians, like OAPs. They were very wary of who I was, and my skin tone, and surprised when I would say 'hello'. Things like that. Then going to secondary school, I had problems with lads who were a few years older than me. They would try and cause problems. I guess it was partly to do with intimidation and confusion as to who I was, and what I was going to be like, so they caused problems with me. It's something I had to deal with through secondary school, a lot. I had to put up a hard shell, really, and just stand up for myself! If you don't, you end up getting walked all over.

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Jaz: Identity – it is what I do, more than my skin tone. A lot of people have this ... the colour of your skin comes before your name. So someone is trying to relate to who you are. They say, 'Black Jaz', or whatever. And that's what it's always been. 'Ginger Sally, from round the corner' and things like that, identifying people by their differences. But slowly it's starting to change more, people have started to call me 'Graffiti Jaz'. It's a new identity, I guess. If you can form your identity for yourself, once you make a big enough impression, and people will actually take notice of you. They don't care about identifying you for just your differences, rather than something that really stands out about who you are.

Jaz: I have always had friend groups that were classed as 'outcasts'. Different, like Emos and Goths, musicians, and people like that. People who would not be classed as the popular ones, I guess. And that was always my friend groups, and it still is now. The thing in an area like this, someone with a bit of colour, especially like myself, would try and stand out as something that is exciting, how can I put it? Like hard, they want to be strong: 'everybody look at me'. I am not that kind of person. I'm really grounded. And so I have always steered away from people like that, and it kind of annoys me, people who are like that! Because I don't see any point in that. Just relax, you are in a really nice quiet area, take the façade off and just chill out.

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Jaz: My Mum cooks more West Indian food than my Dad does, and my Dad is the one who has got the West Indian heritage. My Mum wanted to take it on and teach me as much about my culture as possible. Whereas my Dad, you will catch him listening to Classic FM, doing a Sudoku, drinking tea. Two completely different people, but they have both come from opposite ... it doesn't make any sense. I am very Western and my cousins laugh at me for how Western I am. But I am free. I am not trying to be anything that I am not. Especially living in an area like this. You meet people who have absolutely no connection to anything that I could be walking around trying to show about my heritage. I obviously don't even talk about, at all, what my past is, or my skin tone is, or anything like that. I am who I am, and from where I am.

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Interviewer: Do you have a message you would like to leave for people that are listening?

Jaz: Be yourself. Don't forget your past, but don't forget your future either. Be yourself, be bright, be beautiful, be who you are!