

## TAPE LETTERS – SCOTLAND

### EPISODE 1: PLAY

#### 00:00 INTRO CLIP

[00:12:41] Assia Ali-A: Oh, it was always excitement! Excitement of hearing their voice, what they're gonna say, and then it just kind of takes you back to where, you know, they would be sitting, would they be huddled around having a cup of tea, sitting while they're recording, what would they be doing, what sort of time of day it was, you'd have all these sort of pictures and images going in your head, and your sort of imagination would run wild, basically. But you probably wouldn't get so much with a written letter. Um, because if you're sitting there listening to a tape, you can see everybody else's faces and you can see their expressions and their excitement. And then maybe have you start talking about your own wee memories as well... yeah.

#### MUSIC + BRIEF CASSETTE CLIPS

#### TAPE LETTERS - SCOTLAND. EPISODE 1: PLAY

#### CASSETTE AUDIO

NLS\_TLPS-MI-1-2\_s2\_f01

NLS\_TLPS-SKY-1-1\_s2\_f01\_v1

TABASSUM (with a cassette tape):

**Can you imagine the feeling of pressing play on a cassette tape that's just arrived from some five thousand miles away? The anticipation? The excitement?!**

**It maybe doesn't seem like such a big deal today. We can send and receive files online, instantly. We can make audio and video calls, whenever we want.**

**But in the 1960s, 70s and 80s... hearing the voice of someone living so far away, must have seemed miraculous, and almost impossible...**

#### 01:50 NOVELTY AND EXCITEMENT

[00:07:40] Mohammad Farooq-A: It was a novelty. You know, it was a special event, getting an audio cassette. Whoever received it, then they'd be fighting to listen to it. My Mum and Dad would always listen to it first. And then, we'd get told, so now everyone else can listen to it as well.

[00:28:06] Nassir Elahi-A: Well, you were shouting say, look what's here, you know, mum, I got the tape! Come on, let's listen to it! And all that. She was said, well wait till your sister gets in and all that. And we would all listen to it in one go, rather than you listening to it. And we listen to it. Let's all listen together. We...let's have that dinner first and then we'll sit down and have that. That's what we did.

[00:41:12] Izaz Ur Rahman-A: Oh, I feel so excited to see it, you know... play it straight away. Yeah, I can't wait any longer!

### CASSETTE AUDIO

TLPS-SAJ-1-1 Side B Shavana Abdul-Jabbar  
NLS\_TLPS-KK-25-T3\_s1\_f01

[00:10:15] Khadijah Khurram-A: The tapes were so exciting because we get to hear our cousin's voices, our uncle's voices, and, um, we would record, I think, like, even silly things. I can remember, like, recording, like, nursery rhymes because that's what we learnt in school. Um, and my mum would, like, get all four of us to say whatever we could, and she'd record, and she'd send it to her family. And it was like a way of connecting with them, without seeing them. We, we, when we were little, we didn't go very regularly to Pakistan. It was just such a big cost.

### 03:30 OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION FROM PAKISTAN / THE NEW CASSETTE SYSTEM

TABASSUM (with a cassette tape):

**Compact cassette tapes, like this one - which is about 10 by 6 centimetres, or 4 by 2.5 inches – these were used for many years, to send audio messages between families in Pakistan and the UK.**

**It was after the Second World War, and the break-up of the British Empire, that migration from Pakistan became more widespread. In the 1950s, more and more Pakistanis were settling here in Scotland.**

### MUSIC IN

**Then, in the mid-1960s, the cassette tape system arrived. And that made home recording more possible.**

**Before most people could afford international phone calls - and long before Skype, FaceTime and WhatsApp - these tapes provided a way for Scottish Pakistanis to stay in touch with their families abroad.**

[PK - ADD ENGLISH TRANSLATION] - **"FROM PUNJABI"**

[00:04:07] Mirza Muhammad Saeed [PK]: **A1** We tried to sit together when we got the cassette from any family member. We used to invite everyone over a tea party where we could listen to the cassette by sitting altogether. ... [00:11:33] **A2** we used to gather everyone on a specific time to our home by telling them that we got the tape letter. Many times, our neighbours used to come as well in addition to our family because we had very much love for each other. They were curious about what was in the tape as well.

[00:26:29] Parveen Sajid-A: They were kept the cupboard, in a box, a long box, and they had, like, you, there was a compartment for each, each cassette. And then we used to write the date on it when it came. And who was actually on the cassette. So, my dad could pick that one up, and then listen to it. So, we'd say Maamu or, um Taya jee or whoever it was, and we'd put their, like, their names on it and then when the date, when that came in and we'd put them in that wee box and that was kept in the cupboard in the living room.

[00:10:12] Assia Ali-B: Um, there was a wee shelf in the kitchen, and they were all stored on the shelf, a wee glass shelf, and that was the tapes, all neatly piled up. ... [00:10:55] those tapes were like, gold. You were not to touch them or tape over them. And I think we were very conscious that these were prized possessions almost. Um, they were very special, so we were not to record over or to touch them or anything.

### 05:53 INTRODUCING TABASSUM / PLAYING WITH CASSETTE TAPES

#### TABASSUM:

**I'm Tabassum Niamat - one of the Community Engagement Officers for the Tape Letters Scotland project.**

**My family came here from Pakistan, my Dad was very young, and my Mum came over as his spouse. I myself am old enough to remember cassette tapes. I grew up with them in the 1980s, when they were everywhere. Not like now...**

#### **TABASSUM WITH IMRAN – experimenting with a cassette tape**

***\*\*not transcribed\*\****

**For our children now, this is all such a novelty. And it must have been like that for our parents, and for their parents too!**

#### **MUSIC IN**

TAB: Our Tape Letters project is founded and directed by Wajid Yaseen. Now Wajid - like me, you're old enough to have grown up with cassette tapes, right?!

(laughter)

TAB: You also have a son who's into sound as well - what does he make of cassettes, and does he show any interest in them?!

WAJID: He understands the cassettes [00:03:40] as a, you know, as a music media, and obviously through the Tape Letters Project, he's been exposed to it for a good number of years now. So he understands the significance of these things now. Of course, he would never use them, right? For me, it was that... cassettes were definitely part of that story.

TAB: Yeah, so Wajid, can you just briefly explain what the Tape Letters project is all about?

WAJID: It's, [00:09:20] a project, a social history project really. Uh, and it looks at the use of cassette tapes as a sort of, um, slightly unorthodox way for people to stay in touch. So they're like voice notes of the time. So audio messages really. And I've been looking into, um, the British Pakistani community specifically, just because that's my own heritage, uh, even though I'm [00:10:00] born in Manchester, but both my parents are from Pakistan, right? And the project is really started off initially as a sort of extended family inquiry in the north, and then turned into a national project and ... what I thought was essentially a practice that only my own family did turns out to be something that thousands of families did and, you know, Um, and it's just been entirely under the radar, you know, so, so the project, um, [00:10:40] essentially, we've been trying to, um, um, find these cassettes. They're very, very sort of few and far between, right? They're quite rare. And we've been also undertaking oral histories around people's memories on these cassettes and how they use them. That includes stories of, of our [00:11:00] generation, right? Who were pulled in to say, you know, hello to some auntie or uncle in Pakistan that we didn't know about, right? So it's a sort of a multi-generational insight into people's behaviours around the tapes as well.

#### 09:06 PLAYING + EXPERIMENTING WITH RECORDING

[00:08:39] Nadira Saddiq [PK]: - **"FROM URDU"** - [12:26] **A1** I used to store the cassettes aside, which came from Pakistan. So that they must not get mixed up with others or destroyed by the kids. The children were too young at that time. They used to pull out the strings from the cassettes. ... [13:32] **A2** they pulled it out and destroy once it came in their hands. Sometimes, when the cassette was left put somewhere, a small child used to play with it. ... I used to put that string back after fixing it and roll it back, round and round on that again. But the voice got distorted and I used to get mad at them as they would destroy it. ... my husband used to fix it by saying, "I will fix it, don't worry, I will fix it". ... there was a slight change in the voice but it started working.

[00:05:07] Assia Ali-C: I originally remember mum had this tape recorder. And when you think about it now, it was like, what a hassle because you had this big bulky tape recorder, then there was a separate wire to plug it in, then there was a separate wire to attach the microphone, and the microphone was like a proper handheld microphone, it wasn't any built or anything. Um, if you couldn't find the wire to that, then that was it, you had it. Um, and I also remember there was a wee light, and when you recorded your voice, the wee sort of gauge would remove, move up and down depending how loud or how quiet your voice was.

#### CASSETTE AUDIO

NLS\_TLPS-KK-25-T1\_s1\_f01\_v1

[00:32:20] Nassir Elahi-B: For us it was just fun. You know, something, this was something all new, remember. Uh, people have got a mobile phone nowadays, you know, they can send recordings and pictures and all that. At that time, this was a thing, you know, you could, a tape recorder would cost you, say, twenty pounds. And if you had a week, that was a, you get twenty pound a week, so you could afford one. Okay, I'm not getting anything else, but you lived at home, you bought a tape recorder and that was it, you know, your pride and joy. So, that was your sort of "in thing" at that time.

[00:05:49] Fariha Khan: It was kind of adrenaline filled, wasn't it?

[00:05:57] Saima Begum: Yeah, it was like, it was like the ending of the night on Eid day. Um, we were gonna have like a chance to go into like our front room, um, and we were gonna be able to use dad's special.

[00:06:09] Fariha Khan: It was, yeah.

[00:06:10] Saima Begum: What was it called?

[00:06:10] Fariha Khan: Hi-Fi. Hi-Fi system. So, it was like, uh, this sort of tall tower almost. About a metre high.

[00:06:17] Saima Begum: Yeah.

[00:06:18] Fariha Khan: Yeah. And dad used to...

[00:06:25] Saima Begum: He used to have a mic.

[00:06:26] Fariha Khan: Yeah. Dad used to tune it up. He'd put the sort of, uh, into the mic, into the Hi-Fi, (laughs) bang on the mic say testing, testing. It was, it was just such an exciting thing. Like, we, what are we doing here? And then, you know, they'd explain to us that it's for the family back home. So...

[00:06:49] Saima Begum: And we'd never gone to Pakistan. Yeah. We'd never met this family, didn't know who they were.

[00:07:01] Fariha Khan: No.

[00:07:55] Saima Begum: But you kind of, you say the, you were like, hello, and you were kind of waiting for that [00:08:00] reply, but...

[00:08:00] Fariha Khan: For the reply, reply, you wouldn't get it. So, it'd like move on to the next bit, the next bit! So, it was a fun thing, but then it was quite, um, sometimes you'd feel, um...

[00:08:13] Saima Begum: Anxious.

[00:08:14] Fariha Khan: Yeah.

[00:08:14] Saima Begum: As to like what we're supposed to be saying.

[00:08:17] Fariha Khan: You'd get embarrassed. It's like, why are we getting embarrassed?

[00:08:20] Fariha Khan: You're holding a mic in your hand to do it. Uh, but used to get embarrassed thinking that they can't, we didn't realise that they can't see us.

[00:08:29] Saima Begum: How weird was it when we used to hear it back though? Our voices used to sound so different.

[00:08:33] Fariha Khan: Yeah. It was so funny with the voices. Yeah, definitely.

12:45

## CASSETTE AUDIO

NLS\_TLPS-SKY-1-1\_s2\_f01\_v1

[00:36:59] Nasreen Ali-A: I heard my own voice; I couldn't recognise it! (laughs) Is that myself who's talking?! It's really... it was totally different, and I said, "That's not my voice"! (laughs) When my mom checked if it was recorded or not, I said, "That's not my voice, Mum". She said, "it is you!" I said "no, that's not me!"

[00:17:35] Akeel Ahmad-A: It's different when you hear your own voice. Because you're so used to hearing your own voice inside your own head. And to hear it from an external source, does sound weird. But you don't have that feeling with everyone else, because everyone else's voice is external. You know, and it's only your own voice that you feel weird hearing.

## MUSIC IN

[00:09:41] Fariha Khan: [03:55] It was weird just to think that we're talking on this thing... and they're just gonna hear and they can't reply. And it was like, well, they're gonna reply, but it's gonna come back in like another month, two months. It wasn't something you're gonna get an instant reply. It was like we had to wait. And then as kids, you wouldn't even remember what you asked.

[00:10:06] Saima Begum: That's what I was thinking. I don't think I'd remember actually waiting for a reply. I didn't think I needed one.

[00:10:11] Fariha Khan: Mm. I used to get excited. Nani used to, uh, they used to, you know, put the tape on and then Mum would be like, oh, there's a tape here, let's go, let's go quickly. So, everybody would sit, and then obviously get in trouble because Mum would want to listen. So, it's like, be quiet, be quiet. And it would be very, a very different vibe. They would be very serious where we were like quite giggly, like, 'cause we're kids...

[00:10:53] Saima Begum: Yeah.

[00:10:54] Fariha Khan: But it was that thing you'd, you'd record and then it's like, pause it, pause it, pause it, you know, stop. And then it was like, why are you stopping it? And I was like, I forgot what to say. ... And there was sometimes a, a thing between us brothers and sisters, like, get out the way. Get out the way. Let me do it first. Let me, I wanna hold the mic. I wanna do it first!

## CASSETTE AUDIO

TLPS-SAJ-1-1 Side B Shavana Abdul-Jabbar

[00:25:12] Shavanah Abdul-Jabbar-A: You always notice that kids started acting... they would start acting wide! [laughs] And, or they would get like noisier and stuff. They would just make like random noises and then it's like, do you have to do that?!

[00:20:54] Seriya Iqbal-A: Me mum and dad would be trying to record a tape, and because me mum and dad had five children, see us lot when we were messing about, they'd get so angry. Normally they wouldn't get angry, but they get so angry if we, if we would disrupt them. And we'd find it quite funny. Because they'd be pressing the buttons on, off, on, off. ... Me mum used to bribe us to sit quietly. ... She'd give us, you know, they'd go to the market, and they'd get Smarties. And when she got Smarties, we knew there was a tape recorder about to come out. So anyway, she'd bribe us with Smarties, so we'd sit quietly.

## CASSETTE AUDIO

TLPS-SAJ-1-3 Side A Shavana Abdul-Jabbar

15:43 TRANSITION CLIP, from excitable to emotional

[00:19:23] Mohammad Farooq-B: We found it more, sort of like a joke. You know, uh, we were thinking, ah, it's time to record, great, you know. Whereas mum and dad, they were more emotional, you know. They had more to say than we did.

[00:28:30] Aqsa Mohammed [PK]-A: - **"FROM ENGLISH, URDU AND PUNJABI"** - My mum was always crying. She would listen and tears would fall. She is always crying. The entire tape, she would do crying. And when she would send it, she would also be crying.

And um, I was a bit careless. I was very excited... but my mother, she's always crying... Very emotional time. Emotional for her. Excitement for us.

## MUSIC IN

**TABASSUM:** That combination of excitement and emotion - lots of people talk about that, when you ask them about the Tape Letters they sent and received. This involved so much more than just playing around with cassettes... this was tapping into people's emotions, in a way that written letters and telegrams never could.

## 16:54 EMOTIONAL AND PERSONAL

[00:11:30] Kausar Arshad [PK]: - **"FROM URDU (AND SOME ENGLISH)"** - **A1** When I heard her voice while sitting, I felt that my mother was sitting in front of me and talking to me. I deeply remember kissing the tape recorder as if it were my mother. So, I felt perfect. I felt too good to listen to my mother's voice.

[00:32:47] Kausar Arshad [PK]: **A2** My mother was a very strong and confident woman. I got the confidence from my mother. She was a brave lady. Her voice was normal when I listened to it. It was all normal.

[00:12:22] Kausar Arshad [PK]: **A3** Mother told me that... at first, she said the greetings and asked me, "How are you feeling? And that everything there was all right. Your siblings are all right, too." She told me not to get worried or be sad.

[00:20:15] Kausar Arshad [PK]: **A4** It was so much dear to me. I kept it safe in a drawer on my bedside table so that I could listen to it whenever I wanted. I was always afraid to lose it.

## CASSETTE AUDIO

TLPS-RA-1-1 Side A Rehana Ahmad (DENOISED)

[00:16:47] Khadijah Khurram-B: My mum used to get really excited ... but I think, when, um, the tapes kind of came back, my mum was really emotional. When she'd hear her siblings' voices, her father, her mother. My Nani, bless [00:18:00] her, she was a lady of very few words, so whenever her voice, it was always really touching whenever she said something to my mum. Because she just wasn't a very big speaker. But she would occasionally send like a Nasheed or some poetry. And it encouraged us to learn things so we could send it back to Pakistan. I think it was, it's always been associated with like positive memories and happiness and excitement. I think we, we did see my mum cry, but we were still too young to fully understand why she was crying. And, um, I think as an adult now, you know, it's the fact that she didn't, she couldn't, you know, she was like so far from her family. You know, she couldn't be there at good times or bad times, and she couldn't share her good and bad experiences with them.

[00:18:06] Assia Ali-D: It was a mixture of emotions really, isn't it? You're happy to hear their voice, you're having all these visions in your head of how they are, what their health is like, they're sitting there, oh, what's happening in Pakistan now? How is everybody? But then there's also that, um, sadness that you're missing them. And you're kind of here on your own, and they're all there.

19:40 OUTRO + CREDITS

## MUSIC IN

### TABASSUM:

What was happening in Pakistan? And, what was it like for people beginning to settle here in Scotland, back in the 1950s and 60s? We'll come to that, in our next episode...

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This podcast series is produced, and sound designed, by Steve Urquhart – and narrated by me, Tabassum Niamat.

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*(Thank you to everyone who's shared their stories, their memories, and their cassettes.)*

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20:45 ENDS