

In spring 2017, the South London Gallery (SLG) invited artist Jessie Brennan to collaborate with residents of Pelican Estate on a project titled YOUR WORDS. Jessie spent time listening to residents' experiences which, in different ways, celebrate the value of public housing and speak to the broader challenges often faced by those on council estates or in places undergoing rapid urban development.

A broader context of the project, including Jessie's introductory text and examples of further conversations between Jessie Brennan (JB) and Pelican residents, can be found on the South London Gallery website:

<https://www.southlondongallery.org/projects/jessie-brennan-words/>.

Elvis (b. 1962, UK), Peckham resident

JB How did you come to live in Peckham?

E My great grandfather was a slave plantation master from France and he married my great grandmother. He was white and she was black, and they had one child. That's how all this comes about.

JB Earlier you said your parents moved to the UK from St Lucia in the late 1950s, how does what you've just shared with me resonate for you now, here?

E When I look around now and I see people coming into the area [Peckham] and they've got this thing, they think, because there's few of us left.

JB When you say 'us', who do you mean?

E Us black people. I'll be honest, I'm not gonna lie to you. They look at some of us like 'you shouldn't be here'. If we shouldn't be here, what are you coming for!? You gonna turn Peckham into Brixton!? Yeah, go ahead, take what you want, but at the end of the day will you be happy? You're not going to be happy with what you get, 'cause it's a multi-racial society, Peckham is, and we all live together. And the ones that are coming in today, it's like they don't want to live with us. [...]

Back in the '70s and '80s, when we were getting attacked by everybody – National Front and everybody – nobody said or thought, 'do you know what, these people are being treated bad'. Everybody laughed. It was like it's a joke. [...]

When I was growing up, I worked for Royal Mail. At [age] 17, I'd be going down the road and getting stopped [by police]: 'Oh, you look like someone who has done a crime'. I said, 'look, I'm just going to work'. And I remember, I told one of the union guys, I told him what had

happened. [He] said, 'show them your pass and they'll let you go'. So I literally had to take my pass and show them I'm a Royal Mail worker. And they literally let me go. Without that, they never let me go. [...]

I would say it's not even class. People have not moved away from racism. [...] My house was always open, with my parents, whether you're white, black, doesn't matter. Wherever you come from, my house was always open. [...] And from that I think there was a learning process – that I don't care what colour people are, don't care where they come from, everybody is a human being. And I think because of my parents, that made me, and I think I'm fortunate because I experienced everything at an early age. Maybe if I'd have grown up and the house wasn't opened up there would be a completely different story. [...]

As a single parent, you want good for your kids. If I can do it as a black male [...] I'm living proof that it can work.