This programme was first broadcast in 2001.
This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript of the programme.

Muriel: After the war years Britain was a much happier place for people regardless of your colour. There were prejudices. But, it was not shown. It was hidden.

Andrew: We had a ball really, we enjoyed ourselves being new Britons here and trying to learn the language and customs, and getting to know the girls...it was all great fun.

Presenter: Voices of immigrants remembering their first days in Britain. Our first speaker, Renate Thornton, arrived from Germany in 1964, and she went to live in Wales.

During her early days, Renate says she was ‘startled’ to find that most homes, even the poorest, had a television set.

Insert 1

When I came to Britain in '64 everybody seemed to have a television set. Even the poorest families. If they had nothing else but there was always a big television set in the front room. A television set was not regarded as essential. Essential, was in Germany, a fridge which lots of people at the time did not have in Britain and a washing machine but not a television set.
But everybody, the focus in the front room, was always the television set.

Presenter: Renate, was surprised to discover that a television set was generally thought of as ‘essential’ - it was thought of as a necessary part of British life at home.

When our next speaker, Mushtaq Muhammad – better known as Mushy - first arrived in Britain from Pakistan, he was only 14 years old and already, a successful cricketer. So what were his neighbours like during those early days?

Insert 2

In my early days in England there were obviously all English neighbours and they were very friendly. When they came to know that he’s the chap who is playing for the county here. And they used to read the local newspaper, and every now and then my photograph used to appear in there and all this and they said: “Oh! He’s the chap who lives next door.” So, when they come to know. They were very friendly and used to come and chat. We formed a very good friendly circle and we used to visit each other. I wouldn’t say there was hatred or anything like that. Well, obviously they would say “Oh..they’re different.” Because they’re not used to people living next to them who are coloured or from West Indies or from Asia or somewhere. They’re not used to it. But once they know… you’re all right. A lot depends on you as well. How you present yourself. How friendly you are and how confident you are to have them realise you’re friends. And once you break the ice, I think things start getting better.

Presenter: Mushtaq had never really used English before he came to England. So, it wasn’t always easy for people to understand what he was saying. But he believes that, even if their English isn’t very good, being friendly and confident can help immigrants make friends. He said that, once you ‘break the ice’ - once you take that first step - things start getting better.
Eventually, Mushtaq and his English neighbours got used to each other and became friends. Of course, it also helped that he was a cricket star and sometimes appeared in the local newspaper.

Next, we hear from Muriel Hunte, who came from Guyana and arrived in Britain soon after the end of the Second World War. At that time, food and other items were still being rationed – there were limits on how much each person could buy.

Insert 3
After the war years Britain was a much happier place for people regardless of your colour. There were prejudices. But, it was not shown. It was hidden. But people were nicer to each other because we were all in the same boat. Everybody seemed to suffer a loss and everybody was at the same level of living. As we all had the same ration book and given the same amount of foodstuff. There was no him and her or them and they. You either had it or you didn’t have it. And it was happy.

Presenter: Our next speaker, Andrew Zsigmond arrived in Britain in 1956 as a refugee.

Insert 4
Well, I was a product of the 1956 Hungarian uprising. As a 21 year old third year medical student, got involved in politics. After fairly long deliberation, a few of us decided that the prudent thing was to leave the country. And we escaped over three days of very arduous January walking to Austria, where we reported into a refugee camp and we were awaiting our fate. When on the third day..a red, London double-decker bus arrived in the middle of the refugee camp. And this London bus was converted into a recruiting office for the National Coal Board, as it then was, for coal miners for Britain. Well, we decided that anything was better than staying in the camp and we went to the bus, as I said this was a little mobile office, where a Hungarian-speaking fellow was extolling the virtues of the National Coal Board. And a few of us, including myself, decided to sign on the dotted-line. Three days later we were in England.
Presenter: So, for Andrew and his friends, the decision to leave Hungary was not an easy one to make. It was only ‘deliberation’ - careful consideration and discussion - that they agreed to leave. As Andrew says, they thought it would be ‘prudent’ - wise - to leave [and so, after a long and difficult walk, they ended up in a refugee camp in Austria. After a few days in Austria, a Hungarian-speaking man who was looking for new employees – came to the refugee camp. This man was “extolling the virtues” of the British National Coal Board - he said it was a good company to work for. And as Andrew wanted to leave the refugee camp as soon as possible, he ‘signed on the dotted line’ – he signed a contract - to go and work in Britain for the Coal Board. Was this a frightening time for Andrew?

Insert 5

Oh! I think the experience was exciting rather than frightening. At the age of 21, you're not going to get frightened too easily. Having just been involved in a revolutionary situation, this was utter heaven to arrive in Britain. Well, Britain just started prospering after the restrictions of the Second World War and the rationing was over by then. And suddenly, good times came to Britain anyway, and we were part of that from the word go. So, we had a ball really, we enjoyed ourselves being new Britons here – trying to learn the language and customs and getting to know the girls…it was all great fun.

Presenter: So, when Andrew and his friends arrived in Britain, they began to enjoy themselves – as he put it – “we had a ball!” Britain had just started to
‘prosper’, to do well economically, and ‘rationing’ was over. Also, Andrew and his friends thought of themselves as ‘new Britons.’

We’ve heard from immigrants whose early days were interesting and happy. But for Mojtaba Amini from Iran, arriving in Britain in 1998, was a different experience. He came as an asylum seeker and couldn’t speak any English. And when he tried to find somewhere to live, he says he felt ‘like a football’ – he was passed from one office to another.

Insert 6

In the beginning I was homeless about three weeks and really...every office. They passed me from this office to that office same ball in the football game. They passed me from here to there and social security said to me you have to go in housing benefit. Housing benefit say to me no, no, no, you have to got in social security. And when I return and come back there they say: “Yoh!”... you have to find yourself room. We pay for you and really I couldn't speak English. And that's why I promised myself I have to learn that language and I started from 7 months ago.

Presenter: Frank Ndjukende also arrived as an asylum seeker at Heathrow airport. He came from the People’s Democratic Republic of Congo - in 1990 - which was then known as Zaire. But Frank wasn’t allowed to enter Britain. His early days were spent in a ‘detention centre.’ This is where people, who don’t have permission to come to Britain, must stay. They must remain in these centres until the government decides whether or not they should be sent back to the country they last left or, to their own countries. It can be a very lonely experience but in Frank’s case, he managed to get in touch with a friend by
telephone.

Insert 7

I rang that person and the person said to me: "Oh! He'll call me back." After that, he didn't call for five days.......you can say one week. The following week he rang me when I was sleeping and he rang me in the office because in detention all calls go to the office. And they phone me from the office to come and pick the phone, and they said after you left, your brother was persecuted. So I say: “What!” I say, “I don't have money here.....how can I get in touch with them?” And they said to me. “Me too, I don't have enough money. I just give you the message.”

So, I was crying and they come to ask me: "What's wrong with you Frank?” And I explain to them. I said: "Look. I'm here as a refugee.....with my family down there. One is being persecuted. So, I don't know who am I and where I am. I want to know exactly why you keep me here in detention. I want to be out. I want to get in touch with my family and know exactly what is going on."

Presenter: So after Frank heard that his brother was being persecuted in Zaire he told the officials at the detention centre. And based on this new information, the Home Office decided to release Frank and he was allowed to stay in Britain.

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