

Name: James Bush
Date of Birth: 1993
Place of Birth: Rockingham
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Interviewed by: Lindsay Knight
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00:00:34

So tell me, what are the main manual tricks you've done over the brown bar?

So, in terms of like the manual tricks I think, in 2011, I did the switch ollie...sorry, in 2011 I did the ollie over to nose manual, that was the first one I did, and then, in 2016, for the 'Get Lesta' video, I did a front 180 fakie manual, front tail half [unclear] out; so that was for 'Get 420'. And then, in 2018, I did the switch ollie over to a switch manual – that was released late 2018, so that must have been like sort of mid-2018, when I'd just started riding for [unclear] shoes.

What was the hardest?

The switch ollie, switch manual, which is weird because it's not...you'd think that the frontside 180 one would be harder but I think I've always...like, I've got a stronger right leg than my left so like the drop down onto the right was a lot, like, easier than the drop down to the left. And the balance, as well, is a lot harder in the switch manual: I kept leaning too far back or too far forwards, which isn't as much of an issue with the...like, with nose manuals, I don't find. So yeah, definitely the switch ollie, switch manual.

[Break in interview]

Okay, so it's Lindsay Knight on the 21st August 2019; I'm interviewing James Bush. So if you start by giving us your name and your age and where you were born.

I'm James Bush, I'm twenty-five years old and I was born in Rockingham, just outside Corby.

Brilliant. Right, James, so tell me, what was your first experience of skateboarding?

That would have been when I was about five or so years old, when I went to visit my family in America. My cousin skated and, yeah, that was probably the first time I actually experienced it myself.

So what did you see on that first time?

My memory's a bit hazy but we went to a skate park, I believe it was, like a old, sort of rusty, metal and wood park and I can just remember him skating the little rail on the [unclear], doing some backside board slides. But, again, that's all a bit blurry so I'm not actually particularly sure what's, like, fact and what's fiction in that respect.

Okay, what did you feel like when you saw it? Did it excite you? Did you think it was interesting? Did you think you would start doing it?

Yeah, yeah well, like...yeah, I was very young but, like, I was instantly, like, really interested in what he was doing and kind of like, yeah, just like the whole – which made no sense but it was really cool, like, I don't know, I just was very into it. I think it was the sort of adrenaline side of it that got to me personally, you know like, but yeah, straight away it was like, very interested in it, like, from that age.

And how soon did you..? Did you do it then or did you take it up afterwards? When did you start doing it yourself?

I stood on the board a little bit in that experience but, like, that was about it but when I was sort of nine years old or so I got my own little cheap set up from, I think it was, WH Smith's. It had an alien with a hairdryer on it; that's all I remember. And then, within a year, I was like hooked and got my first proper set up and, yeah, completely fell for it from that moment onwards, but...

You mentioned the adrenaline thing, what...how did you feel sort of when you were skating then? What was it that kind of... 'cause people say that, people who have a go at skating with them, when you start skating, what makes you a skater is not being able to stop 'cause it's like, you know, it hooks you.

Yeah.

What was that feeling that hooked you?

Yeah, I think it was, yeah, like the not being able to stop, the...like, not having breaks, like, and not feeling so stable on it, like when you're going down a hill...like, we had a hill outside my parents' house and, going down that on a bike, you feel comfortable and you feel safe and it's like, whatever, you know, you can stop when you want, it's comfortable steering, you can take quite a steep steer but, you know. But on a skateboard you kind of like lose a bit of control and the adrenaline sort of just clicked with me, I guess, on some sort of level and, yeah.

00:05:02

[Break in interview]

00:05:23

So, do you remember the first time you fell off the skateboard?

No, I remember a couple of really early incidents but I don't remember the first time I fell off. I do remember at the age of about ten, trying to jump – I could scarcely ollie, like, you know, I could lift a board off the ground but that was about it – and trying to ollie off of this sort of makeshift ledge that I'd built in my garden, that was about yay high, and credit-carding my board. But obviously I was so small that my feet didn't touch the floor instantaneously and that was quite an unpleasant experience. And that's one thing that sticks with me from my childhood, so...

I can imagine you've probably done that a few times since, maybe.

Hand rails I've sacked. I've luckily never taken a board since then, to my memory but...

[Unclear]...you don't, yeah, once your feet touch the ground either side of a board, you're out of the danger...

Yeah, exactly, yeah... *[laughs]*...to some extent.

All of the internet's full of people doing that like down steps and stuff. Okay, tell me about Milton Keynes then. When did you first...what's your first memory of skateboarding in Milton Keynes?

I remember...so, I'd already skated there a couple of times but I can't really recall, you know, I was probably just going around on my board or whatever but the first legitimate memory, I would say, was, I was eleven or twelve – twelve, maybe – and me and my friend went up for like a music festival thing in Campbell Park called 'Music for You' and we decided to cut out and just kind of skate around town; and the first spot on the way into town was the Theatre District, so I...and I'd already kind of got this taste for ollieing steps and whatever, so it was like a dream that the first spot was just a perfect eight stair. And I remember like ollieing it a few times and then trying to kickflip it and like sandwich, like,

pop kick down a hundred miles an hour 'cause I can't pop the board high enough to clear the steps; and Giles Brown was there and he started filming me trying the kickflip and eventually I did it and I...yeah, the footage was in 'Yesterday's Reality', his full-length video, about probably nine years...eight or nine years later. He intentionally put the kickflip in the friends' section alongside my other footage to kind of mess with me 'cause my hair was down my arse, I was wearing like a Quicksilver T-shirt, I think, and like...

So that was literally the first time? I just need something from you quickly that...because it's an oral history we need the questions in the answers. So you don't need to repeat that answer again but maybe you could start...I'll ask you the question again, 'What was your first memory of skateboarding in Milton Keynes?' If you could start with – tell me a little bit of this, maybe a short version of what you just told me – but start with: "The first time I remember actually skating in Milton Keynes..."

Okay, yeah, yeah.

Whenever you're ready.

The first time I skated in Milton Keynes was when I was about twelve years old or so and me and my friends went to go to a music festival called 'Music for You' at Campbell Park and we cut out and went to the Theatre District on the way to the city centre, to go skateboarding; and I was skating the eight stair doing some ollies and started trying to kickflip and Giles Brown started filming me attempt it and then put the video...the footage in his video, like, eight, nine years later, which was nice of him...*[laughs]*.

How come you skated Milton Keynes so late because you didn't start here, obviously? Where were you skating? Were you living in Milton Keynes back then?

Well, I mean, I was on the outskirts. I was living in a place called Wicken which is like... – towards where Leo Sharp actually is from originally – and I'd started skating just flat ground and skating down my hill and stuff for probably the first year of me properly skateboarding; and then between like eleven and twelve I was skating a ramp just down the road in Old Stratford – it was like a mini ramp; really good mini ramp – and then, yeah, when I was around twelve was when I started skating street spots in town and stuff.

What year would that have been? What year are we talking?

Okay, so I'm twenty-five. *[Talks under his breath]* Like around 2005 or so. Yeah, it would have been 2005 that I started skating in Milton Keynes.

Which leads me onto my next question really: how did you...what was your first experience of, like, the bus station scene? People have been calling it the bus station scene. I mean, you could start by saying something along the lines of: "The first time I actually skated at the bus station..." "The first time I got involved with skaters at the bus station was..." yeah.

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The first time I skated at the bus station I remember I was on the way back from seeing a film with my folks, and my friend, and we'd heard that the Buszy had been created and, like, I asked if we could swing by and that was like, yeah, the first time I ever skated there. And I remember being really...like, struggling a lot because I'd never had to jump up things before really so...I remember skating the little pier ledge on the side and that was the only thing I could really ollie up and, yeah, it was a interesting experience, like going from ramp to street, but I knew I wanted to get better at the ledge skating, and all that stuff, instantaneously; I was like: "That's what I..." 'cause I was watching Montoya in 'One Step Beyond' and stuff, at the time, so that was like what I'd always been into, so it was like annoying to me that I wasn't great at it, like...

Sounds like the normal skating...so I'm just going to, like, nollie heel noseslide the handrail and...

Yeah, yeah, nollie heel, front nose like...

So what years are we talking? So maybe you could say, like: "So, born in '94, started skating this age...started skating in the city this age..." yeah? Maybe a progression. Can you even remember the years...? [Unclear]?

So I guess...so, I was born in '93, then started skating in...like, properly in like...about 2003 and...

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[Break in interview]

00:11:55

Yeah, so...yeah, see if you can remember the dates, so: "Born '93..." yeah.

Yeah, so I was born in '93. I started skating properly in about 2003 – I'd already sort of been trundling around on a board for a little while but started properly skating in 2003. Then started skating in Milton Keynes in around 2005 and kind of got into street skating from that point onwards and that's kind of where I stood after that,

you know. And it's been, what? What's that been? Fourteen years now? No. Is that four...that's fourteen years, isn't it?

You said 2003? Yeah, it's sixteen. Sixteen?

Yeah, so sixteen years of skateboarding overall; like, fourteen years of street skateboarding.

Okay, right, so who did you skate with? People never skate alone – some people do; there are some really rare examples – but who was your...did you skate with and who were the guys you looked up to then?

It switched up quite a bit, in terms of who I actually skated with, 'cause there was three or four people from my area that skateboarded and...But I carried on after they quit – they all quit a couple of years after I'd sort of got into it. And then I started skating with my friend Ollie in Milton Keynes and met a bunch of new guys that are my...like, the same age as us but most of them gave up as well after a little while. And the whole time I'd been looking up to like the EGC – so like Sean Smith, Jay Bancroft, you know, that whole crowd, like John Aldrich – and then I think, when I...like Andy King put me on the [unclear] Arkology and sent some footage to Rob and Rob started sending me Motive boards, like, from that point, I started skating with those guys as well. And that's like sort of when I kind of got immersed in like the Milton Keynes scene, I'd say, like, you know.

Okay, cool. So, tricks, 'cause your trick vocabulary is ridiculous, even compared to almost anyone I can think of. [Unclear]...it's phenomenal. When you started skating, what was your focus? 'Cause some people say, "My focus was tricks," "My focus was style," "My focus was I just wanted to be really good at it,"... [unclear]. When you started skating, what was it that you wanted to do?

Well, I mean, I was like...I never really understood style as a young kid, you know, I just saw...as I said, I was watching Montoya and he had a fantastic style but I didn't perceive that, I didn't understand what that was, but he was doing things where the board flipped over and I thought it looked cool... [laughs]...simple as that. So, from a young age, I just wanted to flip the board over and, you know, like, I wanted to land on stuff and flip it over and just go as technical as possible, I guess, but I hadn't, at the time, perceived what style was and didn't realise that, for example, Montoya had a fantastic style as well. So that kind of didn't really process with me as a young kid, I was just like: "I want to flip it over and I'll flip it as much as possible." [Laughs]

And of the tricks that you were doing, sort of when you were starting, what was the first thing you learned? A lot of people have told us, during this process, that there's something they learned... [unclear]...the cornerstone of all their skating for a while, then they learnt something that was on the next level. But do you remember any moment of skating, like that?

I remember learning to kickflip very well. So, I had been skateboarding for probably a year – it was when I was about eleven – and I was really comfortable with ollies and 180s and shove-its and stuff but I just hadn't been able to do a kickflip and it was the one thing that I wanted to do. And, yeah, I'd been ollieing stairs and...But I just couldn't flip the board over and that's all I wanted to figure out. And I remember the day that I learnt the kickflip, I was landing on them, shooting out, getting wheel bite, falling forwards, like, for ages but I was finally putting my feet...both feet on the board, the correct way up, you know, after flipping the board, and eventually I learnt...I'd learnt it that day and I did just hundreds of them 'cause I was like: "I need to make sure I can't...like, I don't forget this," you know, "I need this trick." And then, from that point, I mean, I just learnt like a huge...it had been a year of no change and then, within a month, I was, like, learning backside flips and shove-it flips and, like, fakie flips and stuff 'cause I just was like: "I can flip the board; I need to do everything with the flip," like and just took every trick I had and put a flip into it, you know, a kickflip; and then, yeah, that was like the point when I kind of started progressing rather than being in this like, sort of chamber, of boards staying under your feet and not flipping over, sort of thing.

Yeah, yeah. When was it that you thought to yourself, like...or you realised that you were good? So I mean, if everyone's been skating for a long time, most of my friends, we got to a certain level just with skating for years, and then there were a few people – I think you're one of three – [unclear]. There have been lots of amazing skaters... [unclear]...three people that, one from each generation that was like...there was actually a skateboarding champion... [unclear] who was famous in the eighties? But when was it that you..? Did it..? Was there a moment when you realised, "Oh actually, I've got talent, I'm really good at this," or, "I'm getting good at this"?

No, I don't...like, I think...obviously, like, from the point when I learnt to flip my board, like, in the circle that I skated not many people could do it, so it was like...I was like: "I want to progress with this, I want to push it further," but I never kind of felt like, "Oh, I've got good," you know, I was just like, had the sort of drive that clicked in me, like a sort of, "I want to do better stuff and I want to get better at what I'm doing," and then, gradually, over the years, I just put more effort into it and noticed the results, like, you know,

the more time I spent on my board, the more tricks I'd learn and just kept doing that for years. And then I think, like, from...I guess from when I got...started getting Motive boards I was like: "Oh, I can get Motive boards, that's pretty cool," like, but yeah, I don't think I ever kind of was like: "Oh yeah, I'm getting good," I just...I don't know, yeah, like it...'cause obviously I was skating around people that were leagues better, like, at that point so it was just like...

Yeah, so in Milton Keynes there were, you know, even the scene there, like watching it... [unclear]...informed us a lot, 'cause we'd always watch stuff even if we're not around, like stalkers. So we were always aware of who's who, although we never met...meet people. But yeah, there was a scene in the mid-noughties that was like incredible.

It was amazing, yeah.

Yeah, I mean, Sean Smith is an example but also Rob, I think Rob did the same but he was very pernickety about who he...what tricks he did when he skateboarded... [unclear] and everything like that. He was also, I think...[unclear]...his team most, like, he chose...he was really good...really good at talent spotting and he only took really good people on, or people that he really believed in, 'cause he was kind of interested in young people and he noticed you quite early and put you on the team. Who were you looking up to?

Well yeah, I would say Sean would be like the number one, like, for me, at that age, because I'd watched...you know, I wasn't particularly well-off and I didn't have money to like be buying...I'd saved up for a long time to get my 'One Step Beyond' VHS and so, you know, I had...I'd buy one video a year after my birthday, you know. So like, other than that, it was like the free DVDs I'd get and magazines and stuff, you know, so I'd get like a 'Day in the City', which I think Document had back then, and like stuff like that. And I remember seeing Sean on a couple of those and just being like: "Wow, this guy's from Milton Keynes," like, it's just insane to me. And he was obviously young at the time as well so it was like, someone is that good at that age, you know, and it was really interesting to watch, sort of thing, you know.

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For the benefit of future generations, when you say Sean, who are we talking about?

Sean Smith, sorry, of course.

That's okay. Okay, cool. We heard this a few times but it's really weird to me, 'cause skating was so small when we skated. There were...when I skated like four...like three...like four, there was

eight of us. The idea of seeing someone in a magazine who was in your city and then that's kind of crazy, the size of the scene and everything. People have said that a few times, about Rob and about Sean and about other people as well 'cause obviously lots of really amazing skaters around. When was the first time you skated with those guys and what was that like?

I kind of...I wouldn't really say there was a first time because it was sort of a amalgamation of like slowly going to the bus station and slowly...you know and being...becoming a regular there, you know, and I'd skate Buszy alongside them more than with them and just gradually kind of started, you know, exchanging more and more with them. I think...like, I remember trying a trick for hours and Rob Selley...I always had the most destroyed, chewed up set ups you've ever seen in your entire life, you know, like a board that's five inches shorter in total than it should be, wheels are just flat spots and, you know, basically I...you know, forty mill' left on them you know, it was...like I was just atrocious set ups and I was trying a trick for a long time and Selley was like: "Oh, if you do it this go I'll give you some wheels." And I didn't do it that go, obviously, but I carried on trying it for like twenty minutes, half an hour, more and eventually did it and he gave me the wheels anyway, even though it was like hundreds of goes later than he initially said, but that's like the first key memory of experiencing, sort of like, Rob and, like, that sort of crew, I would say, you know.

Who do you remember then and who were the guys and, like, full names actually we'll need, yeah?

Ah, so punk Paul Norris, back in his sort of red and black stripy top and Mohican days, John Aldrich, Sean Smith, Josh Lock, who was amazing, really, really good... (I've forgotten who I've said now.)

Yeah, Josh, Norris, John Aldrich...

Sean...

Sean.

...Selley, Troy Wilding of course – Troy was really good. Who else was there? My brain is just...I'm really bad at like cataloguing names, like...

Yeah, no, I understand, it is quite difficult, when you're actually put on the spot, to do it. What was it...let's focus on Rob for a second...

Oh, Andy King, sorry, as well, of course and...

Carry on, no, sorry.

Andy King was a big one because Andy was the first one to sort of like give me stuff in exchange for skating – you know, he'd give me his shop Ts and stuff and some Cityscape DVDs, which I'm sure a lot of people will enjoy... *[laughs]*. Yeah, he was the first one to start giving me products, you know, like...it was like the Arkology skate shop.

So when you started skating, there's like generations of people above – like there's the generation above you, the generation above that; they're kind of industry, almost, industry figures at this point – the guys above you are really good and influencing you, what was your perception of the different people? Did you see them like that, like a group of older guys, a group of young guys, and was it intimidating? Was it hard to get on with them? Like, what was it like, engaging with so many people from different age groups?

I was kind of...I think I was so much younger that I kind of...yeah, I was just a bit like intimidated by...because even the younger of the older groups were upper teens, so they were, you know, like, Giles Brown, Jamie Harold, [unclear] that sort of...that crowd were... – Robin Lee, for example – they were all early teens so they looked two foot taller than me and the older guys and them, to me, seemed the same age and the same size, just 'cause I was like a child, so I just kind of...yeah, I would just like stay off in the corner sort of, or skate flat ground or whatever because I was a bit like scared. It was like in school, you know, how you don't want to talk to the year tens 'cause you'll get beaten up, sort of thing...*[laughs]*.

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What tricks were you doing then, like, what were you focussing on? You strike me as just a ridiculous all-rounder, like, on anything but were you, like, drawn towards anything in particular? Was there something fashionable at the time that you were sort of drawn towards? What were you doing?

I never really found like a...like, at a young age I never really had like a fashion, I'd just do whatever kind of worked – like, with the way that I flipped the board, or whatever, you know. I remember at that sort of age really liking shove-it heels and nollie and switch heels. I guess they kind of...all three of those have sort of stuck with me over the years – I've been doing them, like, since that point – but I also like to try and [unclear] flip stuff a lot as well. I couldn't do them on flat 'cause I couldn't pop the board high enough but like...well, I didn't have the leg power to flip it 360° and...you know. But I remember trying it down the five, even though there was no way in hell that...like, I remember landing on one and shooting out and just slamming, like, relentlessly but like

just being hyped that I'd flipped it, had done the 360 flip, like, you know, even if I didn't...(I just got attacked by a bee).

I know, it's gone, it's here. It's crazy.

What is going on there?

Were there milestones for you back then, in terms of things that you achieved, can you think of, skateboarding-wise?

I think the day that I 360 flipped the five stair was like a huge like...I was like: "Yes! I've finally..." I'd probably tried it on ten plus different occasions 'cause the first one was during a competition – I think it was the Plan B comp' in fact, like – and, like, the energy was the reason that I'd tried it because it was like everyone was going crazy and it was like, you know, there was just like a huge atmosphere, so I was like: "I'm going to try this." And then after I'd landed on it but didn't do it that day I just kept trying it; like, every time I'd go down until eventually I did it. And that was like a big milestone for me. That also was the point that I started wearing insanely baggy clothes because I'd worn like a...I think it was a double XL T-shirt in that comp'. I did a kickflip down the stairs first and, yeah, I got a double XL; and I was probably five foot on the dot then, or something, so it was like below the knees. And I don't think I turned back for like a lot of years after that: it was just double plus XL, it was like, for a good five, six years.

Thank you. Okay, I think I saw a, like, not...I saw a video that [unclear] did of you, like one... [unclear]...when you were really young. What struck me about it was that it felt like...[unclear]...but it felt like you were really young and that you had pretty much started off with a load of really complicated, like, stuff that I'd seen the best people do, and you were doing it already. And the thought that I had at the time was, what...where else...what else can he...he's going to get bored, like, what else is he going to do? Like, it was quite naive 'cause I was thinking very much...I think very much in the nineties' mind-set where we were aware of how many tricks there were but people only wanted to do five...[laughter]...and that was...it was a weird time. And I remember at the time just thinking, 'Well, everything's been done in Milton Keynes; it will be really interesting to see what, as James gets older, what he ends up doing.' And when I started skating again, which was about nine years ago, I was on Facebook and I was talking to Andy on Facebook, he started to talk about you. He introduced me to the idea of an [unclear] like, I'd never heard of what that was, and he said last weekend he was in Milton Keynes with James Bush and he nollied the brown bar into a [unclear] and I was like: "What!" And I had to get into...I was typing, messaging, I had to get him to say...I had to say, "Explain to me what you're talking about, like, there's nothing to manual...there's nothing to

manual..." [Unclear]...and he said...he was saying he was really amazed by it 'cause he was saying like: "How the hell did he think of it?" 'Cause basically he was saying to me in the email... [unclear]. So at that point I was really excited 'cause I remember thinking like: 'This dude...' – I think I didn't know you – I thought, 'He's thinking of stuff that no one's ever thought of before,' which is...I thought it was impossible and I'd never thought of it 'cause it was quite narrow...I had quite a narrow view on things. So my question is, like, in terms of you, you're learning a lot of...[unclear]...tricks that you were being shown, a lot of these like pretty much professional skaters...[unclear], what's your thinking...how did you approach that creative...how did you start thinking up that stuff? 'Cause that was so long ago, people weren't... – 'cause it's really crazy now and everybody's doing anything but it wasn't like that then. So where is... [unclear]...when you started being creative with your skating... [unclear]..?

Well, I mean, I've always been quite abstract minded, like, as a human being, since I was a child, you know, like I've always been...I was drawing when drawing was not a thing, I was, you know, like, I've always been really, like, into looking at stuff differently and I think, like, it takes being put into a spot for me to...like sometimes for that to trigger. So, for example, with the brown bar nose manual, I was...I've never really been great at popping flip tricks very high, like there's like one or two that I can do but, most of the time, I can't do much...like, do many flip tricks with a height, so that spot for me has always been a bit of a, like, option less zone and I'd already ollied over a couple of things into a nose manual. I think JT Olds actually, I watched him do it over a picnic bench in, I think it was, 'Roll Forever' and I kind of like was hyped on that so I learnt how to ollie over stuff into a nose manual and...

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END OF INTERVIEW