

Name: Leo Sharp
Date of Birth: 1975
Date of Interview: 10th July 2019
Interviewed by: Nathan Lindsell
Duration: 00:44:15

00:00:05

Nathan Lindsell; its 10th July 2019. Can I ask your name and date of birth please?

My name is Leo Sharp and I was born in 1975.

Can you tell me how you got into skateboarding, how you first encountered it?

I got into skateboarding through friends at school, mostly due to my friend Damien [unclear] who had a Variflex Blast skateboard and for my birthday – after he got his, I got a Variflex Diablo skateboard. Yeah, and it just kind of progressed from there really.

00:00:40

[Brief pause to discuss interview]

00:00:55

When did you first start skateboarding in Milton Keynes?

Ooh, that is a really good one. I first started skateboarding in Milton Keynes (see what I did there? I did the question) probably when I got my first pro set up, which was a year after I got the Variflex Diablo and that was a Rob Roskopp with lime green griptape, Bullet 66 wheels and Indy trucks and that would have been on my twelfth birthday. Yeah and it was probably around then I'd say.

What was it that first attracted you to skating in Milton Keynes?

The fact that I'd heard it was really, really good for skateboarding. I grew up in a place called Pottersbury – where actually Zeta Rush is from – and there was not much to skateboard there, as you can imagine – a bunch of kerbs. Actually my friend Damien posted some stuff on Instagram recently of us kind of skateboarding down our local playing field where...exactly where Pottersbury skate park is now but it used to be a big kind of like tarmac car

park and we used to skate there all the time. And we'd heard it was really good for skateboarding in Milton Keynes and I think it was my dad or Damien's dad that first gave us a lift up there and dropped us at the bus station. Yeah, and that was, again, probably around summer '87.

Where were your favourite places to skate in Milton Keynes and what were the places to avoid?

My favourite places to skate in Milton Keynes... – wow, there was so many of them. Obviously, the bus station; probably I liked the train station more than the bus station because...especially in the summer 'cause it wasn't in the shade and it was kind of, you know, it was out in the sunshine and you could kind of cruise around and do loops there, and you had, obviously, the kerb – like, the little mini kerb – and then obviously the ledges, the [unclear] ledges on the left hand side and you had the bank and you could put a bin out the bank and do tricks over the bin as well. So there was kind of...it was just nicer I think.

Can you explain, sort of, changes over time, for skateboarding in Milton Keynes?

Sorry, can I jump in and can you just...you said about the worst places as well...

Oh yeah, sure. Yeah, no worries. Wow, the worst places. Probably...okay, so the worst places to skate in Milton Keynes, one of them was the Beige. Not because I didn't like skateboarding there but just because – and we were chatting about this earlier today – is the fact that we would usually get hassled for skating there. You'd usually have to take a broom with you because certain people that worked in the estate agent's there would chuck stones out all over the floor so you knew, if you were going there, you'd probably have to spend ten minutes sweeping up the stones before you could skate there. Is that a good enough reason? I mean, I enjoyed skating there 'cause it was a really smooth surface but, yeah, we'd usually have to clean it up first.

Did you encounter any, like, trouble there, like clashes with authority and things like that?

Yeah, we had clashes with authority at the Beige. Usually...I mean, you know, we never normally got moved on by police but if you mean authority, you mean kind of people that worked in the offices, yeah, we kind of...I remember James Jessop kind of like, you know, pushing around one of the guys that worked in the estate agent a couple of times. But that was 'cause he tried to

throw stones out whilst we were skating, so we weren't too pleased about that.

It's got here about changes over time. How have you seen Milton Keynes and – well, specifically the Buszy – how has it developed and changed over time since when you started skating it to what it is now?

When I first started skating it, it was kind of, you know, how it used to be – or how I remember it – you had the kind of the marble planters in the middle of the station, which were the same height as the ledges that still exist at the edge of the station, and we would kind of...you know, in the beginning we couldn't necessarily ollie up those as they were too high, but we progressed into being able to kind of cruise around the station, ollie up the block – as we'd call it – and then do a trick off the end. So that was kind of...once you could ollie high enough, that kind of opened it up quite a lot more. And that was kind of...if you could do a trick on that block, 'cause it was kind of, you know, the height of it, one at the edge, it was sort of...you know, that was kind of the sort of the proving ground: you could learn it on the train station 'cause it started at this big and kind of went up to that big, but if you could do it on the bus station block that was kind of like when you had it.

What made the Milton Keynes scene different to anywhere else?

Good question. I think it's different because you used to get a lot of people coming through from different towns who'd heard, through the grapevine that Milton Keynes was really good for skateboarding and they could arrive on the train opposite the bus station and come straight to the bus station. And, once they'd been once, people used to come back, you know, all the time, 'cause it was obviously great for skating. We used to have Matt Pritchard and the crew from Wales come quite a lot because they knew how good it was. We used to have Winstan Whitter, Johnny Wilson, some of the Southbank crew used to come and skate Milton Keynes. Alex Moul, Tom Penny, you know, Deathbox guys, before it was Flip, they used to come down and skate quite a lot. Yeah, they're the sort of three main crews I can remember but there were lots of random skaters would just turn up there and we'd skate with them just 'cause they'd heard that Milton Keynes was really good.

00:05:40

When you first started skateboarding did you have much contact with older skaters from Milton Keynes, people from sort of the generation just preceding you?

Yep, so – we were just talking about that today as well – so the generation, kind of the generation preceding us, so Matthew

Lindsay, nicknamed 'Doc' – who [unclear] got a picture of; it was one of his first pictures in RAD. Dean Jasper, he was another one, and a guy called Ian Western who was incredible as well and they were the self-dubbed 'RAD 3', the RAD 3 they used to call themselves, and they were kind of the, like the, you know, the iconic three who were like, we all really looked up to when we started skating. There's a guy called Steve Martin as well, I remember, he was a kind of...like, a part of a different crew but we didn't skate with him that much.

Get on to tricks, going back about developing tricks and learning them on small bits to new bits. Was there anything you saw, like people's progression over the years and stuff, that you want to mention, or..? Any notable MK tricks? Obviously there's loads...

From...I don't know, from that time? I mean, I'm sure...have you interviewed James Jessop yet?

Not yet, no but he's obviously mentioned...

Okay, I'm sure he will tell you that he did everything first. I'm kind of kidding but, you know, he probably will. He's lovely. But I think that, in terms of progression, you know, when we sort of first started there weren't that many tricks that you could do. Sort of flips, there was like, if you could do a kickflip you were doing pretty good; 360 flips, I remember they were kind of invented at that sort of, around that kind of like late eighties, early nineties time. And obviously we were riding kind of like nine inch boards then, so to actually... – you know, with big wheels on – to actually like lift that off the floor and get it around on the kind of roughish bus station surface is quite difficult. I remember a friend of mine, Mark Wright, used to joke that you'd pop a 360 flip and land on a pile of sawdust 'cause it had just eaten your board. But yeah, that...so, I think that that sort of...the progression that we had sort of progressed as the tricks were invented, as it were, sort of thing, late eighties, early nineties. So they weren't...there wasn't even switch because the noses on the boards were probably about that long. So, as noses got bigger, then people started doing opposite foot tricks, before we called it switch. So yeah, I don't know, you're looking for me to tell a story about like an iconic trick that was done. The first person to ollie boardslide the Trusthouse rail – we now call it the Holiday Inn rail – was Ian Western.

I could go down to all this bit; I'm going to go specifically into photography now. So you could start the sentence with how you got into photography and then specifically skate photography and go from there, or something, yeah.

Okay. I got into skate photography for a number of reasons – probably due to someone who's sat over there I'm not going to look at. There you go.

I did my best.

Thanks. Yeah, I don't know, I think it came from – I've been asked this question so many times – it came from kind of wanting to document what me and my friends were doing. So what we would do, we'd go and...we'd kind of club together and buy a roll of kind of twenty-four exposure Kodak film. We'd have, you know, there'd be four of us, so we'd have six photos each and we'd all take it in turns taking pictures of each other then take it to Boots, the one-hour processing, and get the prints back and just kind of look at them and, you know, just...you know, the fact that you could have an image of yourself at that time was kind of quite incredible, do you know what I mean? Like, now, you just don't even think anything of it: take a picture on your phone, film on your phone, you just...it's integral in kind of like skateboarding. But, at that time, it was kind of like, to have a still picture of yourself, or like moving image of yourself, was...it was a massive thing. So we used to rent out video cameras from, I think it was probably Curry's or Dixon's at the time, and they were these huge VHS things. I think the first video that we made – tell me Linds, I'm not going to look at you but tell me what it was called. The Fried Mushrooms maybe?

I don't know which one...Jessop will know the order 'cause I moved... [unclear].

Jessop will know.

But you used to rent them from Rumbelows.

Yeah, but...there you go. Sorry, the point was that the cameras were this big and you had them on your shoulder, so they were these massive, heavy things on your shoulder and you were rolling along trying to do follow filming. Don't know how I never hit a stone and went down on that but they cost a fortune to rent for the weekend so we would make a video in a weekend basically.

From that filming, could you describe, was there a process of anyone in Milton Keynes trying to be sponsored or sending off tapes, things like that?

00:10:02

I don't think a sponsor me tape sort of existed at the time necessarily, in this country, just because it was...you know, no one had video cameras (I find it really weird talking to you when I'm...but I'll carry on). Yeah, so...I'll start that one again. So, no one really put sponsor me tapes together at the time because no

one really had video cameras, so it was more kind of word of mouth. So 'Doc' had that photo in RAD and I think Jeremy Fox heard that he'd had the picture in RAD and he was really good, so I remember he got like a board and wheels from Jeremy Fox and like we were like, "Wow, Doc's sponsored!" But I think he just got the picture in there, Jeremy Fox had heard he was really good so he got [unclear] that stuff. And that was the first time I remember anyone getting anything for free and it being kind of sponsorship. But yeah, I think the sponsor me tape came a bit later when people sort of started to get video cameras and own them because they were a bit cheaper.

Was that around a similar sort of time that your photos started being taken, or being published at least, or..?

The first photos I had published were RAD Magazine in 1991, that was a Milton Keynes article – and I think Jessop will probably have that; I don't think I've got that issue – and there were pictures of me in there as well as pictures of everyone else but that was just a three-page thing on Milton Keynes; and that was kind of just wanting to highlight the fact that we were skating in Milton Keynes and, at the time, RAD never used to have any photos of anywhere except London usually so...but yeah, that was kind of like the first time I had pictures published.

Did Milton Keynes break the mould, in that sense of RAD not publishing outside, or would there just be bits and bobs here and there... [inaudible]..?

I mean, you know, I'm being a bit unfair 'cause they did...Tim Leighton-Boyce did come outside of London to take pictures. We were just talking earlier on about the bus station competition, so between when Chris Ince closed the café in the bus station and when he opened Radlands he used to come down in his car – a Fiat Panda – and sell boards out of the back. And I think – Jessop will know – but I think that bus station competition was summer '92 and Radlands opened in November '92.

Did the lack of exposure for places you'd skated, like Milton Keynes, have any effect on your further representation... [unclear]..?

I think you're probably...I think...okay, so the fact...

Sorry, I'm trying...

No, no, I've got it, I've got it. So the fact that Milton Keynes didn't have any exposure in the beginning was probably good for myself and Wig because, you know, we would take photos there and people would be like: "Wow, where's that?" "Where's that?"

“Where’s that?” and we were kind of the first people to take pictures there. So it probably helped our careers ‘cause people would just...we knew where the spots were, people would come to Milton Keynes to skate, you know, quite iconic people and we’d be like: “Oh, I’ll show you some spots,” – you know, because it was stuff we’d skated for years ourselves – and we’d take them there like, you know, the brown bar, the courts, the Beige, whatever, and they’d be like: “Wow, these are amazing,” and we’d kind of like just ollied the stairs or kickflipped them and then someone would, like Pritchard – tell that story in a minute – but you know we took him to the Beige and he destroyed it, that’s why the gap’s named after him.

My own personal question would be, what’s the Milton Keynes photo that you are most proud of that you..? I know that’s probably a hard question but...

[Unclear], switch heelflip over the ledge at the theatre. Sorry. I don’t know, that’s a really difficult one. I don’t know, not...not sure about my like favourite picture, it’s really difficult to say, but probably one of the best things ever done was Jody Smith, switch heelflip over the...down the Beige over the bar, which was pretty amazing.

Did you shoot the Cairo nollie hardflip as well?

Yeah, that was the same session.

Popwar?

Um-hm, Popwar Tour

Could you describe the filming of that hardflip as a full sort of sentence?

Yep, so that was a Popwar tour in 2006 – 2005, 2006. I think we went to Bristol first, then we came to Milton Keynes. And I think it was fairly soon after the bar had been put there in the middle of the steps so it was still kind of like people were still doing stuff over it, people’s stuff still being done. I think...I’m trying to think, someone had switch-flipped it before. Not Justin Eldridge; who was the other Eldridge?

[Unclear] switch-flipped, didn’t he?

No, he switch heelflipped it. Or was it...no!

Pete Eldridge switch heelflipped it.

There you go, look, see, Peter...okay, shall I start again? *[Laughs]*

[Inaudible]...you know what you're talking about, yeah.

I don't know what the hell I'm talking about. So yeah, okay, so there was a Popwar tour in 2005; it started in Bristol; we came to Milton Keynes. In the session were Cairo Foster and Jody Smith. Pete Eldridge had already switch heelflipped it. Jody Smith, in that session, switch-flipped it and Cairo nollie hardflipped it. So yeah, that was a pretty iconic session for Milton Keynes.

00:14:53

[Break to discuss interview]

00:15:22

So what role do you think Milton Keynes has played in skateboarding in the UK, in the era that you've been photographing it?

Okay, wow. I think Milton Keynes has played a really significant role in the UK skate scene because of what I was talking about earlier when people would come from far and wide to skate there in, you know, in the UK scene but also because, you know, any American tour that would come through in the kind of late '90s, 2000s, they would always come to Milton Keynes because they knew that there were spots there that you could skate kind of any time after office hours, you know, and they could get tricks there – you know, it was steps, it was rails, it was just that kind of thing that would...that, in that era, was skated a lot. You know, any video you watched then it would always be kind of like, not many lines, it would be like trick, trick, trick, like steps, rails, you know, like the Zero videos, all of that kind of stuff. That was...Milton Keynes was good for that era. Skateboarding's different now, like, you know, people do...you know, I mean, I don't know if you...did you watch the Mike Arnold part that came out, the Adidas one? You know, that is kind of the epitome of what skateboarding is at the moment, it's kind of a bit more progressive and it's kind of...he tries to do completely different stuff but at that time it was like, who could ollie the most stairs, who could kickflip the most stairs, who could do the gnarliest rail, rather than it being a bit more sort of progressive, as it is now?

Again, that's going back to how you've seen Milton Keynes evolve over the years, sort of like. Do you think it's still relevant now or do you think, as you said before, skateboarding's very...it's not really... [unclear]. Do you think Milton Keynes is still relevant now? I know a lot of the spots are skate-stops or crusty.

I think Milton Keynes is still relevant now because you've got people like James Bush, you know, and I think he's a great example of someone who doesn't necessarily do kind of like wavy tricks like, you know, hippy jumps or walleys or whatever – although he can do that stuff – but he, you know, he can do really,

really incredible, really difficult ledge tricks that nobody else can do, like, he'll do manual tricks that nobody else can do, you know – he genuinely kind of amazes me every time I watch a new Instagram clip of him – so, in that respect, Milton Keynes is still progressive and I think other people do still come to Milton Keynes and see the spots in a different way: it's not just like, oh, there's some stairs, I'm going to do a trick down the stairs or a trick down the rail, it's like how can I use the kind of street furniture around that spot to do different stuff?

Do you feel like the architecture in Milton Keynes has kind of steered the scene in a certain direction trick-wise or style?

Yeah, I mean, kind of like I said before, the architecture in Milton Keynes has steered skateboarding just because it is, mainly, is kind of steps and handrails, you know. I guess, you know, that with the recent addition of the new bollards at the bus station it's kind of like, you know, people did stuff off the block before over a bench – remember there's a load of stuff of [unclear] doing stuff over a bench – but now the bollards are there and they're really high that's kind of like opened up a whole new world. It's like the Beige all over again, isn't it, do you know what I mean? So it's like, you know, with the addition of new stuff obviously pushes the limits of people skating and makes them think a bit differently. But yeah, it would be nice to see people kind of...everything in Milton Keynes is a bit modular, isn't it? You know, like it's all kind of like, it's on a gridiron road system. Richard Ferrington was talking earlier on about Midsummer Boulevard and the sun shining down it, kind of like Stonehenge, and hitting the train station and it kind of reflecting and all of that. But there's never...it's not like an urban sprawl like London, is it? Like, London has loads of different kind of crazy bits of architecture because it's...every building is different, whereas Milton Keynes is always... We met the – what's the name of the head architect we met today?

Andrew Ames.

He talked about kind of painting some of the overpass structures purple one time just 'cause he could and that was the craziest thing he'd ever done but everything is really, really modular, isn't it? That's why there's nothing there that's kind of really different to skate, I guess, apart from like the bar over the dirt gap maybe down behind The Point or something like that; that was a bit crazy but you don't really get that very often, do you?

What do you think of the Buszy being sort of in danger, at the moment, of redevelopment?

Yeah, that sucks. I thought...I mean, you know, I sat in the room with a member of the council today, with Richard Ferrington, with – sorry, you just said his name; it's gone out of my head.

Andrew Ames.

Yeah.

00:19:43

[Break to discuss the interview]

00:20:00

What do you think of the Buszy being endangered?

I think the Buszy kind of is endangered. I sat in a room today in the council offices with a member of the council, with Andrew Ames, with Richard Ferrington, you know, with the people that are doing the MK Skate project, which is great and they all seemed you know, really positive about skateboarding but, actually, you look at what the council is doing physically at the bus station, you know, and years ago they kind of built the Plaza which was great and it was kind of open for everyone to skate but now they're gradually kind of cornering the skateboarding into one little area and that's not progressive at all. You know, I look at...there's other cities around the world like Malmö where a friend of mine, Gustav Eden, is...he works for the council, for the parks and recreation department, and his job is to build new plazas where skateboarding is an integrated activity with dog-walkers, with cyclists, with people that are just pedestrians. And he builds ledges and stuff that you can skate that people can sit on, and everything else, into one place and you can skate around the city to different places and they embrace skateboarding there. Bordeaux in France, Leo Valls is doing a similar thing there. For somewhere like Milton Keynes that has been so long...progressive for so long, it just seems weird that they're kind of like hemming skateboarding into a little place.

Going back to that whole Leo Valls thing, that stuff he does in Bordeaux, what...I was imagining the other day, like, Station Square having a similar sort of thing. What would your sort of vision for the, like, the Station Square and Milton Keynes in general be, for skating?

I would...so going back to the question earlier on about kind of everything in Milton Keynes being kind of steps, rails and it being very modular, it would be nice to kind of to see, you know, areas designated where you can build kind of like weird and wonderful obstacles to skate – kind of like what Leo Valls is doing. I mean, he's...that stuff's all built out of wood; be nice to see kind of like permanent structures built out of, you know, granite or marble or, you know, Milton Keynes-like-esque materials but with kind of different shapes that there are more possibilities for, for like kind

of, you know, modern skateboarding. I remember kind of...I was a bit of a kind of a hater of modern skateboarding when it came along because it was like, well, this is going backwards surely 'cause it's not as good as it used to be. But actually, that's just how people skate now, I guess. You know I look at what Bushy does, going back to that, and I just...I'm a real fan of his skating. I love it.

00:22:09

[Break to discuss interview]

00:22:44

Would you like to see the block that was at the Theatre District reinstated?

Oh yeah. Do you guys know about this?

I know where it is in the park...[unclear]

Oh, you guys already know about that; we had no idea. Do you know about this?

No I don't.

Yeah, the silver triangle thing's there as well, so yeah, it's all in the same place.

Yeah, yeah, so...

So yeah, what do you think of that?

So, the curvy ledge that used to be at the theatre now resides... (sorry, I'm going to have to start again. Where does it reside?)

In just a park... [all talk at once]

Do you know where that is mate?

[All talk at once]

I'm kidding, he took the photo of it, yeah.

The photo you were looking at earlier where you shot the statue.

So that's just it, like, what, just on the floor in the park there, yeah?

Apparently it's like way deeper than it...yeah.

It took two forklift thingies to get...you can get forklifts under it and then it just sat there.

Richard was saying, is there like one of those blocks is like two tonnes, or something like that?

Yeah.

You're never moving it, yeah.

Yeah, so... [unclear]

Okay, so that...the curvy ledge that used to be in Milton Keynes Theatre now resides in a random park just in the middle of all the office blocks. I would love to see that, first of all, integrated into the exhibition in the shopping unit 'cause, I mean, Cat was saying today that, you know, we can't skate in there because we don't want to annoy them. Once they give us it for free I reckon we should have something in there that you can skate. First of all put in there – I mean, Richard was saying we'd never get it in there 'cause you can't get a lifting equipment – but, second of all, it should be installed, if not at the Buszy, then somewhere else around the city where you can actually...it's a designated place to skate. That's kind of one thing that did annoy me about the bus station when they first made it. It was like: "We'll give them that and that's where they should go skateboarding." Whereas what I've always said is you should have various spots around the city that you can skate to, that are for skateboarding.

That was actually the original idea.

Yeah, it was supposed to be this...the honeypot technique where they...they did do the second bit.

I don't like that name. I think it's [unclear] to be honest with you but...

Well yeah, it's very odd but, yeah, Sk8 MK, with an '8'. Anyway, that was the old days.

See look, you're already talking about the old days. How old are you guys now?

I'm twenty-eight but these guys are older.

Thirty-four.

Thirty.

I'm going to turn thirty-four soon.

Twenty-one.

Are you twenty-one?

Sorry, you've already said your date of birth so you're..?

Forty-four mate, yeah, yeah.

So here's an issue more about...it's about photography and video stuff. How do you think Milton Keynes' representation has changed due to online and digital media taking over from magazines?

So, Milton Keynes' representation *has* changed due to online media and taking over from magazines. I think it's good and bad. The good of it is the fact that a lot more people can see what's happening there due to Instagram, due to MK Skate Scene – which I think is amazing 'cause I'd look at that every day and see a new James Bush edit and I cry a little bit and you know, wish I was back there. I think it's bad because I love print media and, you know, the sort of ongoing death of print media is kind of like stabs me in the heart every time another magazine goes – like, Transworld went recently and, you know, obviously Sidewalk went quite a few years ago now, out of print. You know, you've got magazines like Vague which are pretty good – we were discussing that earlier on – Free magazine, Grey magazine, you know, they're all great but the problem is you can only get them in skate stores, so a finite amount of people see them, whereas everyone sees what happens on the internet. But the problem with that is, if you don't follow the various accounts that kind of show what's happening in a city, then you won't see it. And I think this is kind of endemic in any sort of like youth situation at the moment: you only see what's happening on your feed. So sometimes, if it's not outside it, you wouldn't even know that an earthquake had happened in San Francisco recently 'cause you're too busy looking at what f***ing Rihanna's wearing so it's like, you know, that is my gripe with the internet at the moment. (Sorry, I swore.)

No, it's all right. It's only...

Was it justified?

Yes. [Laughter]

Trying to think to cover anything else.

Do you think...'cause you obviously started...where did you start filming? In Milton Keynes?

Yeah, pretty much. I mean that was, yeah, when we'd kind of used to buy the roll of film and just put it through the one hour print service at Boots.

Do you think that affected like how you take photos now? Like, do you ever..?

That's a really good question. So I started photography with a Reko camera that I got for my seventh birthday. I don't think I shot any skate pictures on that 'cause I didn't start skating till I was ten but that kind of, I guess, influenced the way that I take pictures, 'cause it was a rangefinder camera – so it wasn't single-lens reflex; you don't look through the viewfinder and look through the lens but it had a focussing wheel on it that had like a...it had, rather than the distance in numbers it had kind of like half a human, a full human or two humans, so you knew where to focus it. It was like, okay, I'm taking a picture of half body so I'll focus it on that picture, or you know, so on and so forth, full-length or kind of a group people. So I guess I'm sort of almost a bit autistic in that way 'cause I would always try and frame my pictures kind of exactly framed horizontally or exactly framed vertically and I kind of didn't escape that for years and years and years because that was how I started and how I thought that you were supposed to take pictures. But then, obviously, you start looking at a bunch of other people's images and you think, okay, you can hold the camera diagonally or you can kind of like hold it like slightly off vertical, or actually it doesn't really matter, you can kind of do what the hell you want. So, yeah, I could probably talk for a long time about that; I'm just going to finish it there.

I was going to ask you a bit more about, you know the original RAD article; there was a bit more to the story than you told. So my understanding – it happened just after I moved to Milton Keynes – I remember you were taking photos all summer and they were floating around...

Nosebump bigspin.

Yeah, there was one of me in it, or... [unclear].

It was a nosebump bigspin.

Yeah, have you still got it?

Probably.

But there was like a real kind of...almost looked like a zine-y element to that, like you...I think either you or Mark [unclear] wrote the article and two main boys basically took it in, edited it but put

it out as a kind of reader's own thing. You didn't try and pass it off as a RAD article?

No.

But it was very much like, to me, it was very much typical of the kind of sub-cultural, all in it together kind of atmosphere that it was there; it was very small-time and very personal. I wonder whether there was a way... 'cause that's very different to now so I thought that story might be quite a good one...

Yeah, how could you phrase that as a question? That's a tough one.

So, that was 1990, summer of 1990; it came out in '91.

It was '91.

No, it *came out* in '91 but was it...was it that summer that we shot it?

You set off in '91 and it came out in November or December – it's one of the two, isn't it?

I'm glad someone remembers. I knew it was '91. Okay, so yeah, so the Milton Keynes article in RAD that I *helped* shoot – I didn't shoot it all – came out in November 1991 and we kind of shot the pictures for it in summer '91. What was the question? I've forgotten; completely gone out of my head.

00:30:17

I'm trying to phrase it as a question, so...you're saying it's basically sort of a self-contained thing, you said...

Okay, no, I know what to say. Okay, so yeah...

Tell us the story of it.

Yeah, so that's...yeah, okay I'll start again. So there was a Milton Keynes article that came out in RAD Magazine in November 1991, which I shot the photos for and a few other people shot the photos for, during the summer of 1991 and we didn't kind of shoot it for an article, I think we were just taking pictures of each other and we ended up – or I ended up – sending it to Tim Leighton-Boyce at RAD Magazine. He published it, it was a kind of a three-page article and I think he titled it 'My Kind of Town' – even though that's not what I called it but he just sort of kind of changed it into that – and it was kind of...it's sort of reminiscent of the time because there are probably only, I don't know, maybe like...at the time, maybe fifteen of us skating in Milton Keynes, you know, in that sort of early nineties kind of like dark era and it was...the way

that it looked in the magazine it was kind of...it looked that there weren't sort of many of us there and it kind of...you could see that Milton Keynes was a bit of a ghost town – and it kind of still is, I guess, you know, compared to London – but we were kind of like, we had sort of solidarity 'cause there were very few of us but we all skated through the dark years, we all met up every weekend, every Saturday and Sunday, we would meet at the bus station and we would go skating round all of the spots in Milton Keynes and we tried to kind of show in the article that there were actually quite a lot of spots there. And I think that's what Tim really loved about it, was the fact that, you know, it wasn't London; it was street skating and it was like, you know, I guess for the time, sort of like fairly good photos of good tricks on good spots.

You just used the term there twice, 'the dark era', can you tell us what that means exactly?

Yeah, yeah, could you...

So I guess for me the dark era in skateboarding was kind of like, yeah, late eighties, early nineties, before videos like Eastern Exposure came out in kind of like '94 – Eastern Exposure 1, I think – when jeans got really big, wheels got really small, tricks got really slow and shit, because you can't really do fast tricks with 38mm wheels. Yeah, but one of the good things for our scene, at the time, was the fact that Radlands opened in November 1992 and that was kind of a bit of a saviour for us, definitely in the winter, because we would kind of get the train up to Northampton, walk up to Radlands and, you know, go and skate at this kind of amazing indoor park which at the time, apart from Wakefield, was one of the only like decent skate parks in the entire country. So we were really lucky that we had great skate spots in Milton Keynes for the street and a great skate park in Northampton to skate at the kind of cold, indoor, wintertime's.

Do you think that the roof of the bus station also helped?

Yeah, so yeah, we were really, really lucky to have the bus station; we were lucky to have a roof over our heads for when it did rain. Sometimes it got really windy and it blew under so there was only a bit of dryness but that's like kind of first-world problems really because a lot of other towns didn't have anywhere dry to skate. We had marble ledges under cover at any time of the year. I remember kind of, I think it was probably maybe, I don't know, like early nineties as well when it snowed a couple of times. The snow blew under and there was kind of probably about a ten foot by ten foot dry area that we could skate and we used to play a game called 'Add a Trick', so it wasn't like skaters now, like you get a letter, but you would kind of have to do like, I don't know, an ollie and the next person would do an ollie and a kickflip, then it

was back to you and you had to do an ollie, a kickflip and a 360 flip. As you can see, it probably took quite a while to complete. But yeah, it was...we were lucky to have that canopy over our heads.

Do you feel like the architecture in Milton Keynes was sometimes so perfect that when you visited other places you would actually think, 'Oh my God, this ledge is quite bad,'...[unclear]?

Do you know what, it was really good to...? (okay, I'll start again). So the architecture in Milton Keynes was perfect for the kind of skateboarding that I mentioned before, like kind of stairs and rails and things like that and, you know, it was I guess sort of fairly smooth with the slabs. But it was great to go to other towns and actually skate things like banks and transitions and, you know, like other kind of weird and wonderful street furniture that we just didn't have in Milton Keynes. You know, I guess we haven't talked about kind of Willen ditch or Caldecotte ditch, so we did have those transitions, but they were really tight and you couldn't necessarily do too many tricks on them, so it was great to travel around. We'd go to Fairfield Halls down in Croydon in London and we'd skate the ledges there and they were kind of completely different to the ledges in Milton Keynes – they were different slabs, different material – you know, going to skate Shell Centre, going to skate Southbank, you could literally jump on the train at Milton Keynes, be at Euston in forty minutes, get the train to Waterloo and then skate those amazing spots. And that was another good thing about living in Milton Keynes, the fact that you could kind of do that in a day. You'd get a Travelcard for probably a fiver at the time, I think it was, go all round London. My dad would give me a tenner, I could buy lunch, go to London, skate the spots and come back in the evening, he'd pick me up from Milton Keynes. There you go.

00:35:15

There was a question I was going to ask actually. It's like, going back to Southbank, I know a lot of people put...obviously Southbank was considered by a lot of people the centre of British skateboarding and it's got all that heritage and petitions and people to save it, like, I...I know that obviously the Buszy's not in that...quite got the same...

I think it is.

I know to us personally it's probably like our sort of version of that. How would you..?

We were talking about this earlier on, yeah, I think...yeah, so the 'Long Live Southbank' campaign, the save the Southbank campaign, I think that's really, really important, in terms of skateboarding's like British heritage, it's kind of like, it's almost an

icon and, you know, a reason for other people to kind of like, you know, take back their own cities for themselves and skateboarding, as it were. But I think the bus station is just as important because, you know, you get...the people that you get in American tours coming through to skate Southbank would come and skate Milton Keynes anyway. Like I mentioned before, you get people from all over the country come to skate Milton Keynes 'cause it's so good, just as they would come to skate Southbank. So in that respect, just because Southbank is in London, you know, I know that's the capital city but it doesn't mean that Milton Keynes Bus Station is any less important in the skate scene – in my eyes anyway but I'm biased, so...

Well yeah, quite a few people, was it last year or the year before, for the [unclear], Yuto Horigome and, who was it, Shane O'Neil and Luan Oliveira all came to the bus station on the day before they went straight to...

Street League.

Street League, so...and then I remember seeing in Sidewalk, there was photos of, was it the girl team, at the Caldecotte ditch? And what's the guy's name who runs that, again?

Rick Howard.

Yeah, Rick Howard, so what do you think of all these people coming to, like you say, off the track even, like the Caldecotte Lake? I mean... [unclear].

Well, so I guess the girl team coming to Milton Keynes, you know, they didn't know where to go, we sort of showed them around and I think we went to Caldecotte ditch because we wanted to skate somewhere that wasn't steps or rails – 'cause that tour I think we went to the brown bar and Jeremy Rogers did a bunch of stuff over the brown bar, Brian Anderson did that line where he kind of, what was he, a frontside nollie, the small brown bar, switch tre, half cab flip and then pushes up, up to the top and ollies over the rail at the end next to the brown bar. That was incredible, you know, we got a bunch of good street stuff there but it was like, okay, Rick Howard's not going to be able to do that stuff, where can we take him to get photos? So yeah, we went to Caldecotte.

It was kind of more, a point leading on from the last one, is that we were talking about another interview that, it doesn't really matter what the spot is or where it is, it could just be this one small little thing in a small little town and just because it's perfect for skateboarding it can be iconic within the British scene, so...

I mean, that's hard to put into a question. [All talk at once]

That's all right.

The kind of thing I was thinking of – you may not have anything to say about it but just as an interest – we've already interviewed my dad and he was one of the first people who first discovered the Caldecotte ditch in the early eighties and they were just pumping up and down there and then, thirty years later, you're getting millionaire world pro people coming over and skating it. It just seems a sort of absurd sort of clash to me but I don't know, I'm not wanting to put words in your mouth, so...

I think...no, I think that you've just kind of described skateboarding in a nutshell, in terms of like, you know, the famous pros, or the rich pros, or the people from America that either own companies or ride for big companies, you know, skateboarding is one...you know, it's kind of going back to the kind of the small family that we had in Milton Keynes in like, you know, the early nineties, skateboarding is one big family. It's like a cliché and it sounds cheesy to say it but it is. You know, we just had the Super Tour last week and for example, like, Chad Muska, he's got this kind of great big personality and seems like he's kind of like really loud and kind of unapproachable. We did a signing at NOTE skate shop in Manchester for two hours and he signed everything from people's spliffs, to people's grinders, to posters, to copies of [unclear] video from the nineties and all of this stuff. Then he went outside, and he couldn't skate 'cause he'd hurt himself the day before, but he got on the megaphone and kind of like was the maestro for the session for about three hundred people in the street for about two hours, and then he ended up signing and doing kind of like little video clips and all of that till about midnight. So he must have put in a sixteen hour shift that day and that, for me, is kind of like why skateboarding is a family 'cause he's not this unapproachable kind of like pop star, or whatever, he's just a normal dude who has...you know, yes, he's made a bit of money out of skating but he is a fully approachable guy.

Can you think of any examples in Milton Keynes, from your earlier days, where you were sort of, not star struck, but someone came along and you were like: "That's them coming to where we skate." Was there any example of that?

Sorry, say that again.

Was there any example, from your earlier days, of something happening in Milton Keynes like that, so, seeing a pro come and be surprised that they're there?

00:40:04

Okay, yeah.

So, you're seeing someone...you know, was there ever any experience like that?

Um...trying to think. Did we have anyone that would..?

[Unclear], you remember [?] in '95, at the Radlands competition, like, for Radlands competition.

Oh yeah.

And there was just...that was weird 'cause it was like all the pros.

That's not Milton Keynes, that's Northampton.

No, you're right.

Yeah, did anyone...when we had the Radlands competitions on, did any of those lot come to Milton Keynes, can you remember?

They did but I never saw any. I was always at Radlands but there were always reports of people skating.

Yeah, I know what you're looking for, like the kind of pre...

[Unclear]

Yeah, no I...

...sitting on a block next to Tony Hawk and I'm thinking... [all talk at once].

... [unclear]...come to Milton Keynes, do you remember that? He jumped over your car in one of the...was it a Krooked video?

Yeah, that was the Krooked Tour, yeah.

[All talk at once]

Probably, yeah.

He done a little hippy jump over...

He jumped over...was it your car?

Who did it? Where was this?

It was actually '94...

Who was it that did this?

Mark Gonzales.

What!

Yeah.

I don't remember this thing.

There's probably a photo of that somewhere.

It was in Sidewalk, yeah, John sent me a little clip that he tore out of it...

Oh man.

Is there any way of checking if that was you?

I think it probably was, yeah. I've got a lot of stuff to scan in so if that exists I'll find it.

Could you just briefly describe that and then say either you or someone else might have taken it, you don't know who...

So yeah, it was...there was a Krooked Tour, it was around the country, and it came to Milton Keynes and I think that was probably around 2006 – that's when most of the kind of big American tours happened, in the mid-2000s. (You're kind of going: 'Hmm, it's not 2006.' When was it?)

2004, 'cause I've got the t-shirt.

2004: completely wrong. I'll start again. So there was a Krooked Tour to Milton Keynes in 2004 and Mark Gonzalez jumped over a car and it was Jay's car and it was at the bus station and I think he did it clean over without even touching the car – am I correct?

He might have his hand on it.

Oh, it's rubbish then. *[Laughs]*

That'll be dug out and put in.

Yeah, no...Yeah, that was...yeah, he did some amazing stuff on that trip for...I think he was...2004, would he have...how old would Gonz have been then?

Mid-thirties probably, 'cause he's just turned fifty hasn't he, so..?

Has he now? Okay, yeah well.

They did the edit, didn't they, the 20/50, with Tyshawn?

Yes, I haven't seen that one. I need to watch that.

Were you around when there was the Plan B? Was it Plan B were there, you know, the... [unclear]?

Probably, that was...they did a big tour...

I don't know if you were aware of anything at these events or if...

I was there...I did the Plan B trip so...

Well, there you go.

...Paul Rodriguez and PJ Ladd skating the bus station – that was pretty good. I'm trying to remember...

Could you elaborate on that?

I'm trying to remember what anyone did. I think, so yeah, on the Plan B trip, Paul Rodriguez, PJ Ladd, skateboarding the bus station. I think PJ Ladd must have done about...probably about ten fakie flip switch crooks in a row, off the T-block, till he got one that he was really happy with that he popped out properly. It's pointless kind of going on because I'll just ramble on about other...
[All talk at once]

It's pretty clear, concise, that's fine mate. Yeah, I mean, I'm just trying to think of like events that happened at the bus station 'cause we know we wanted your angle on the bus station specifically and photograph...photography, wasn't it? Excellent.

00:43:24

[Break to discuss interview]

00:43:44

Okay, I'll finish on that one then. So yeah, skateboarding has given me friends, it's given me my life as it is now. It's probably given me my family 'cause I probably wouldn't have met my other half if it wasn't for skateboarding. I probably wouldn't have gone to the university I went to if it wasn't for skateboarding. Wouldn't be sat in the room with you guys now if it wasn't for skateboarding. It's given me pretty much...it made me who I am today.

00:44:15

END OF INTERVIEW