

Name: Steve Martin
Date of Birth: 1964
Place of Birth: Bletchley
Date of Interview: 3rd August 2019
Interviewed by: Melanie Jeavons
Duration: 00:24:36

00:00:05

So, today's date is the 3rd August 2019, my name's Melanie Jeavons and I'm interviewing for Skate MK. Can you tell me your name and the year you were born please?

My name is Steve Martin and I was born in 1964.

And where were you born?

I was born in Bletchley, before Milton Keynes was a thing.

So, when did you first encounter skateboarding?

The first time I encountered skateboarding was on a entertainment programme on television called 'Seaside Special', or 'Summertime Special', and they were in, I think it was Bournemouth or somewhere like that, and they had these guys coming down like the Winter Gardens and I'd never seen anything like it. I think it was the Hobie Team or something and it just blew me away completely. And I'd never actually seen anyone in real life ride a skateboard before, so it just totally blew my mind.

So when did you get your own skateboard?

The day after. Sorry, yeah, I got my first skateboard the day after that, yeah.

So what was your first experience of skateboarding then? Where did you go?

Well, my first skateboard I bought from Neal's toyshop in Bletchley and they only had a choice of two skateboards so I obviously went for the cheapest one, which was a Surf FLYER, which had little black rubber wheels. So I went straight to the

underpass in the Brunel Centre, started halfway down, got a speed wobble by the time I got to the bottom, straight on my head and the board broke – the trucks of the board broke. So I thought, 'Well, this is just fantastic; I need a better board,' so I went back and upgraded to the next board which was a Grentec Coyote, which had urethane wheels and was about this big. I think it looked very much like the Penny boards, they call them now I think, yeah. So that was my first experience, was falling off and banging my head.

So, what was the sort of skate scene like then? So what year are we talking?

I think it would have been 1976 because there was...there was nobody skateboarding in Bletchley at the time and literally within weeks you just couldn't move for skateboarders in the Brunel Centre, Stanier Square; it was just...just went ballistic, literally overnight, it was just incredible. There were no proper facilities so we just skated around the streets.

And do you think, at that time, people thought it was like antisocial or did, you know, people in Bletchley...because, even now, people are sort of saying it's antisocial and they don't want to see people doing it. What was the reaction from bystanders at that time?

Well, I think we probably frightened the life out of a lot of the old ladies carrying their shopping back from Sainsbury's but, generally, I think people were quite supportive – they realised it was, you know, it was a very positive thing, it was a very exciting thing. But I think it was just the sheer volume of skaters, you know, in Bletchley at the time, it was just, yeah, a little bit out of control maybe at times. The closest thing we had to a ramp was a little loading ramp that we used to borrow from the back of one of the supermarkets and put in the Albert Street car park – I've actually got a picture from the Bletchley Gazette of 'Slim', who was one of my best friends back then, on the ramp – then we'd politely put the ramp back after our session at the end of the day. It seemed to work.

And so what sort of tricks were you getting up to in those days? 'Cause it's all really evolved now, hasn't it?

Yeah, totally.

What sort of things were you doing?

The tricks we were doing were the things that we'd seen in the American magazines: so it would have been wheelies, that people call manuals these days; 360s; kickflips; endovers; crazy

tricks like Daffy Duck, where you had two boards and you'd sort of nose and tail them; and yeah, that was about it, just going as fast as you could and try to stay alive.

And so how are you getting your inspiration? Because, obviously, we didn't have the social media that we have today so you were literally getting magazines. Was there anything on TV? You know, where were you sort of seeing it all to be inspired by?

Well, in the very early days, there was...it was literally just the American magazines but it just took off so quickly overnight. There was like a barrage of British publications. It was in every national newspaper; every television programme, every news programme, had something about skateboarding. And I think it was the magazine programme, 'Nationwide', that were the first British organisation to do like a little series about it and they were very supportive and did a lot to kind of forward UK skateboarding at the time.

So you were involved in a campaign to get a skate park in Milton Keynes. Can you tell us about that?

My memory tells me that we got a massive petition and we stormed up to the council offices in Bletchley with our helmets and pads, you know, en masse and went in there and delivered our demands... *[laughs]*...which weren't particularly well received. And yeah, we never really got anything officially in Bletchley. There was a period in probably about 1977, I think it was either in the Compass Club or somewhere in the Bletchley Leisure Centre, and they used to allow us to just skate around, you know, one of the areas and we'd adapt and we'd...I think we had some broken table tennis tables and made them into a very dangerous ramp, and that was our first kind of experience of inclines, if you like.

00:05:49

So can you give me some names of people that you were skating with at that time?

There...I mean, there were literally hundreds of skaters around but the guys that I hung around with, there was a few guys from the Lakes Estate, there was Dave Bulmer, Paul Cooper, Mark Dack, Keith Parker and we used to...I used to skate from Far Bletchley to the Lakes Estate because they had some amazing brick banks – which are probably still there actually – so we used to skate round there every night. And then there was a load of guys from West Bletchley: 'Slim' was one of my best friends... – too many to remember really. So that was the very first wave of skateboarding.

And so how did it make you feel when you were skateboarding in those early days?

Well, for me, skateboarding was an absolute revelation because I'd suffered with self-confidence and I was never any good at any sports, any traditional sports, and suddenly I found something that I was good at and it just...it gave me so much confidence and just freedom and, you know, suddenly I was being respected and it was just...it was the biggest thing that happened to me in my life; it just totally changed my life, it was amazing.

Moving to Milton Keynes now, the architecture of Milton Keynes, at that time when it was being built, had a whole new genre of skating I suppose – that's what other people have said in interviews. Did you come to Milton Keynes to skate then, after Bletchley?

Not so much but I think, by that time, I'd moved out to Northamptonshire. Even though I was still skating it was more like the concrete bowls which I'd been used to, which we had to travel to skate. So yeah, I was aware of the street skating culture in Milton Keynes and that...I think I was introduced to that by an old friend, Phil Chapman, who contacted me in the mid...probably the mid-eighties and invited me to go skateboarding with him and, bearing in mind I've not seen him for about twenty, fifteen years, maybe, he was just off the scale of skateboarding – he was doing stuff that I didn't even know could be done. And I was like, okay, I'm now officially an old-school skater. There's no way I'm ever going to be able to do this, so I'll just, you know, stick with my wheelies and...*[laughs]*...my 360s. But yeah, it was just amazing to see how skateboarding had come...how far it had come at that point.

So what do you think about skateboarding becoming an Olympic sport?

Skateboarding in the Olympics, the jury's out for me and probably a lot of other old-school skateboarders because, for us, it was just self-expression, it was non-competitive. I get that it's really good for exposure of the sport but, yeah, I'm personally not sure about that.

And do you follow...still follow skateboarding now? Do you follow people's Instagram and do you still buy magazines, watch films?

Yes, I still follow skateboarding, more to do with the older generation that are still skating, you know, I'm always...I love to see new skate parks that are popping up because, you know, I can't believe what they're actually doing with concrete these days, it's amazing.

00:10:05

That's fine yeah. So, going back to your skateboarding days, what was your claim to fame, your trick that you were famous for?

Probably most people that would remember me from Bletchley would have been 360s... *[laughs]* – I couldn't get enough of them. At one point, I think, I almost broke the world record but there was no one with me to witness that. I think it was twenty-eight and the world record was twenty-nine at the time, or something crazy.

So were you sort of filming each other or photographing each other in those times?

Not very much, I mean, you know, we were kids and we were lucky if our parents had a little Instamatic camera so there's...for me, there's not much evidence really. I've got a few sketchy photos and...and video cameras just, you know, didn't exist, I don't think, 1977 – not personal ones anyway – and it wasn't till later on, probably the mid-eighties, I've actually got some classic footage. We...a few of us hired like a big camera from a shop and took it around like on a little road trip thing. But yeah, there's not much evidence, unfortunately. I don't think many people probably have many photographs from the seventies.

I was just going to say, on the 360 thing, could you explain what a 360 is, as opposed to a 360 ollie, 'cause you're talking about something slightly different from what some people might think of?

You're talking about a continuous spin?

[All talk at once]

So would you explain that to Mel please?

So can you tell me what a 360 is?

So, an old-school 360, the back wheels don't come off the ground like a 360 ollie these days, you literally just rotate on the back wheels as many times as you can until you run out of steam.

So what would be your best memory of skateboarding?

My best memory of skateboarding was when my mum and my sister took me and my best friend, *[unclear]* to Skate City, which was just next to Tower Bridge, and it was the first proper skate park we had in this country and it was just amazing; I mean, really just mind-blowing, you know. The first thing you heard was Jean-Michel Jarre being pumped out and then, as you got closer, you just saw this queue from hell and there's no space for anyone in

the park, it was just, you know, overrun with little kids like me...[laughs].

Were your parents quite supportive of your skateboarding?

Yeah, my parents were very supportive. I think they were just pleased that I'd found something, you know, physical that I could focus on. It wasn't the cheapest of sports back then so they must have possibly gone without a few things so I could have my new Vans or my new Kryptonics or whatever, but yeah, they were great and they used to...Dad used to take us to skate parks outside Milton Keynes, you know, that we couldn't get to on trains and things. So yeah, I was very lucky.

Can we just talk a little bit more about the skate fashion, 'cause I know the shoes are expensive, in my own experience of having skateboarding sons, but what were you wearing at the time and, you know, like I say, the fashion's sort of evolved as well, hasn't it, and the shoes? What sort of things were you wearing at the time?

Skate fashion, back in the seventies, it didn't take long for Vans to appear in the country but, as I said, they were very expensive, plus they had to be imported as well, but we had to have them. I used to wear the black plimsolls from Woolworths that cost a couple of quid and it didn't take Mum to realise, you know, that I'd be getting through two pairs of them a week, that it was worth spending the extra on a pair of Vans which would last me for months. But it was...yeah, it was pretty much the same: skate T-shirts; I've still got a pair of Vans on now; dungarees was a big thing, in the seventies, it was a massive thing which, again, I saw at Skate City for the first time, you know, all the really good skaters just had dungarees and sneakers and that was it. It was a good look. [Laughs]

So why have you had this lasting commitment to skateboarding, do you think?

I think my lasting commitment to skateboarding is literally because it had such a profound effect on my life, such a positive effect. And also the camaraderie you had, you know, I'm still in touch with some of the guys that I was skating with back in 1976. Just over the years, all the skateboarders, all the old-school skateboarders that you meet, they're just lovely people, generally, really nice bunch of people. And it's something that stays with you. I think, if you were a proper skateboarder, it will always be in you, even though I haven't skated for a few years. You can't pass an underpass with a bank without mentally riding up it; you know, seeing a drainage ditch and you're in there in your mind. It's just...it's in here and it's in here.

00:15:07

Could you...going back to you saying your best memory, do you have a worst memory, perhaps an injury or anything like that, and just explain it to Mel?

Yeah, what's your worst memory, an injury maybe?

I think my worst memory, it's not an injury but I went down to Alpine Sports in Knightsbridge or Kensington, somewhere like that, and spent all my pocket money on some new wheels, with 'Slim' and I think it was Keith Morley, and then we decided to go to the Southbank to put the new wheels on and, you know, have a good scoot around. And we were having a little mooch around the upper levels of the Festival Hall and we got mugged. But the worst thing about it is, we saw the guys that took the stuff and they were throwing them in the Thames because it obviously wasn't anything of interest to them. So my brand new green Kryptonics ended up in the Thames... *[laughs]*. But that was very upsetting for me but yeah, injuries just, you know, that was just all part of it really.

Could you describe to people those injuries, I mean, I'm interested to know?

Okay...so okay, injury. So the worst injury was the most recent one – which is probably about nine years ago now – I decided that I wanted to try longboarding and I hadn't skateboarded for quite some time. 'Yeah,' I thought, 'no, no problem at all.' I'd literally been on the board about two minutes and there was the loudest bang I'd ever heard and I just went straight down; and turned round to see who'd knocked me off my board, then realised that my foot was flapping about and I'd snapped my Achilles tendon. So three months in a cast and about a year before I could walk properly. That was...that's the worst injury, yeah, without a doubt... *[laughs]*.

I know your other big interest is music. Was there a certain type of music that you were listening to that skateboarders listened to at that time?

I think music and skateboarding, in the early days, probably the first influence I saw was reggae in the skate parks in London. And then punk came along very quickly after that and the two were very much linked anyway. So there'd be, yeah, a lot of punk and a lot of reggae played in the skate parks. And yeah, that kind of took us through like the halcyon days of skateboarding into the eighties.

Has anyone in previous interviews explained the difference between the styles of skating like, you know, Steve's..? There's a massive difference between that kind of street skating that goes on around the station now and the old Kryptonite days where, as Steve says, it was all about speed and slalom and all that kind of thing.

How did your style of skating fit into Milton Keynes...architectural Milton Keynes context? 'Cause that's different from what it is now, like you say. Like, how did your style...what was your style of skating and how did it fit in Milton Keynes, in the early days?

'Cause that skateboard there bears no resemblance at all to the days...you know, that was my...

That's massive compared to the ones we had.

Yeah, I mean, my first board was a Surf FLYER as well and that was literally like a couple of old roller-skate wheels on a bit of plywood, wasn't it?

Yeah, well if you could go into maybe the style of skating at the time and then how it fitted in Milton Keynes.

Okay, so the style of skating in the seventies was very much influenced by the American surf skate style and it was...Milton Keynes was perfect for it, with the underpasses and, you know, they just conveniently put banks underneath the underpasses and, like I said, the Lakes Estate was almost designed for skateboarding at the time; they were just ornamental, if you like, but they were just perfect for skateboarding. Plus, unwittingly, Milton Keynes created one of the best ditches in the country, which I know we weren't supposed to skate but, you know, how could you not, really? At Caldecotte, that is. So yeah, Milton Keynes was very kind to skateboarders and obviously, as it grew it was...and streets getting evolved, it's become even kinder to skateboarders. But then they had to contain them by building the Buszy, you know, to keep the peace, basically. (Is that any good?)

That's lovely, yeah, that's perfect 'cause no one's really talked about Milton Keynes in terms of banks before; everyone's mentioned ledges, no one's mentioned that. Excellent.

I'll just ask about...did you skate Caldecotte?

Yeah, oh yeah.

Let's ask about that then, 'cause we haven't...

Yeah sure, so...

Yeah, can you tell us a bit more about Caldecotte and skating there then?

Yeah, maybe how you discovered it, because I don't know...Will's the only person who talked about it, from the earliest days. I mean, who found out about it first?

So, the Caldecotte ditch, I've got absolutely no idea when it was built and we certainly weren't aware of it in the seventies or even the early eighties. I think it was when Phil Chapman contacted me and said, "Are you going to come and ride the ditch?"

I was like: "What ditch?"

And so I couldn't believe it when I saw it, it was like the perfectly formed ditch that had probably been sat there for years undiscovered and people did used to come from miles to ride that. Yeah, and it was quite a special thing, as long as you didn't fall off and your board went over the top into the lake, which several did, yeah.

00:20:30

Did yours go over the ledge?

No. No but I did see a few, and I won't mention the name because he's quite a well-known record executive now, but he was a student at the time and he jumped into the lake and rescued someone's board for a fiver. *[Laughs]* I've got photos to prove it.

That's lovely, yeah, that's really covered a lot of bits that are kind of missing.

Is there anything else that you think that you should talk about?

(I'm loving this, Steve, by the way. And there's a great photo in there of him in dungarees.)

No, 'cause a lot of it...a lot of...yeah, my memories are because we had no proper...oh, there is one thing that this...put it in if you...or not...but I've never...Milton Keynes has never had a proper skate park and I think that's a disgrace.

Okay yeah, tell us about that definitely.

So, do you think Milton Keynes should have its own skate park?

Definitely. I think, you know, Milton Keynes, being a very forward-thinking place, I'm shocked that it never has and they've really missed an opportunity. I know, you know, funds aren't there for everything but, back in 19...I think it was 1978, we almost got like a proper, proper skate park in Milton Keynes just before the craze died, so the developers pulled out of that, obviously. But even more recently they were talking about building a big, pukka skate

park at the Milton Keynes Bowl, as part of that development – so I've got photos which I can give you of the plans for that, which looked amazing – but that...that's all gone quiet as well. And the Buszy is, you know, it's a fantastic thing but it doesn't cater for all skateboarders and I think, with a...with like a world-class skate park, you're going to bring people in from all over the world and it's something that really...it should have happened before.

Yeah, brilliant. I think that's great, yeah.

So, can you tell me about any other skate spots in Milton Keynes that you used to favour?

One of the most exciting skate spots in the late seventies was the Rocla pipe factory just near Newport Pagnell – which has all been developed now – but they built big drainage pipes, which was just a skater's dream. So we used to sneak in there, past the security guards – (on a slightly squeaky chair...) *[Laughs]*

So you said, "We used to sneak in..."

Yeah, so we used to sneak in there, past the security guards, and try and make as little noise as possible until they rumbled us and then we'd hide and then come back; and, yeah, it was just a dream come true, basically. They weren't the biggest pipes in the world, not like the Arizona ones, but they were enough to keep us happy, yep.

So did you skate inside the pipes or the moulds that were made...like, the steel moulds or the pipes?

Well, they had the pipes but then, further down the site, we realised they actually had the moulds which were about a foot bigger, so we used to ride them but they made more noise so we didn't normally get very long in them before we were caught.

Did you have any sort of bad encounters with like security guards, or just general public, when you were skating?

No, not... (I'll start that again.) The only time I had hassle with security guards was when I'd actually got into roller skating for a while – 'cause you could have skateboard wheels and skateboard trucks on roller skates which, in my case, were Monkey Boots – and me and a couple of friends used to go to Middleton Hall, sneak in through the door, go as quickly as we could, and then it would be like cat and mouse with the security guards in the city centre. But they never caught us. *[Laughs]*

Did people used to skate through the city centre in those days?

We did. Again, we'd always get chased by security but it was a good game.

Okay, lovely, thank you.

00:24:36

END OF INTERVIEW