

Name: ALEXANDRA LARGE

Date of Birth: 1943

Date of Interview: 7.12.2017

Interviewed by: Dave Harris, plus questions from Victoria Holton and Moss Bancroft

Duration: 00:16.57

(00.00.00) Today's date is 7th December 2017. My name is Alexandra Large and I was born in 1943.

When did you first move to Milton Keynes Alex?

Erm, it would be about March 1972, I'd just returned from Australia with my family. I had four children then and my husband was a carpenter and at the time they were crying out for builders and because he was a carpenter we got the house on Galley Hill.

So, do you still live in Galley Hill?

No, no. I live in Old Stratford and I had to move out of area because I worked for the NSPCC in the Child Protection team here in Milton Keynes and it was wiser for me not to live in the vicinity where a lot of our clients lived. So that's why I moved county.

What were your first impressions of Milton Keynes when you moved back from Australia?

It was very muddy! But it was wonderful in a way because all the people that moved in near to us, we were all from different areas of the country, us had come back from Australia, there were people from Scotland, north, south, everywhere. And of course nobody had relatives living nearby, we didn't have mum and dad round the corner anymore and we developed this wonderful community spirit amongst us all. And as people moved in, we welcomed them and of course the Development Corporation had a Community House on every new estate that they built. And the Community House housed Arrivals workers and community workers who set up children's centres, nurseries, senior citizens' clubs and that, you know, that sort of thing. So it was a lovely community spirit and we'd have lots of parties! And believe it or not in 1972 we used to do 'chalet patrol' where we'd all be in a house at a party of an evening and then we'd all go round to different houses and do a patrol to see if all the children were fine!! Yes, so it was good fun.

So what do you associate with Milton Keynes, what does it mean to you?

Erm, I didn't like Australia very much, because of the mosquitos, flies etc., and I was quite happy to return to England. But Milton Keynes, because I had a young family at the time and lots of other people had young families, there was a sense of wellbeing, you know, it was a really kind place to live. And, you know, if you had any problems there was always somebody that would help you; and vice versa, if they needed help, we would help them. So as I said before, there was a wonderful community spirit which I'd never experienced before, and I'd lived in a new town before this, Stevenage, I watched that develop from the '50s when I lived there so I knew that ... it was going to be ... it was very different from Stevenage. So, yes ...

What special memories do you have about Milton Keynes?

Lots of memories – this is my daughter – [NOISES OFF, PAUSE]

What special memories do you have of Milton Keynes?

(00.05.00) Special memories ... we had so many ... doing two jobs of a week - I worked for the Development Corporation as an Arrivals Worker. I also worked in the local surgery part time, both jobs were part time, but we survived – we didn't have all the technology that you have these days but it was a happy life and the children were happy, and there wasn't the expectation of buying goods all the time. ... And we had colour television, you know, this was something that's taken so much for granted these days! But the special memories, the children were happy, my parents, who lived in – my father was a social worker in Great Yarmouth – they used to come down of a weekend, it wasn't too far for them to travel. And they loved it here, they really did, and eventually when they both – when dad retired – he moved to Milton Keynes so I had – I was blessed with having their presence here as well.

All the family ...

All the family here, yes.

*What part have you played in the development of Milton Keynes?
How do you feel about your role in the development, you know?*

Well, in 1972 I became an Arrivals Worker and I worked on Two Mile Ash – sorry, not Two Mile Ash, Stacey Bushes. We had a Community House, every estate that was built had a Community House and our work as Arrivals Workers, was to go in to the people who had just moved in to the house and give them information like doctors, buses, the nearest town - because our town wasn't built then, we had to go to either Northampton, Aylesbury, Bedford or

Luton, they were our nearest Marks and Spencer's! Erm, so we gave them these visits when they first moved in and then about three or four months later we would give them a second visit to see how they were settling in. And of course problems used to arise, you know, maybe sometimes with neighbourly disputes, and we'd sort of mediate between, and then when our work was completed on that estate we'd move to another estate and my next estate was Stantonbury from ... erm ... Stacey Bushes. And that was just before the Campus was built. And I have many funny tales from that!!

Any you'd like to share with us?

I don't know whether they'd go...??? Well, we started ... the community workers like Roger Kitchen ... started senior citizens' clubs up and my job during the week was to pick up two or three elderly ladies and take them to – because they couldn't walk – was to take them to the venue. And one particular day, I put my handbag on the top of the car, put the ladies' legs into the car, took them to the venue, came back and I got a phone call from Wolverton Police Station to say "Alex, we've got your handbag here", because we were quite friendly with all the different professionals, so I said, "Oh", I said, "that's wonderful, I'll come down and pick it up". So I was in this queue in Wolverton Police Station, I got to the sergeant and he said "Oh hello Alex", he said, "nice to see you". And I said "Oh, thanks ever so much for my handbag". So he said "well we've got to go through it first". I said "No, no, don't do that please, please don't do that". He said "Oh yes, we've got to do it". And I looked up on the wall and there's me that the Milton Keynes Gazette had taken a photograph of me, with the immersion heater cover over because the Corporation were encouraging people to use covers for their heaters, and I was with my leg out, there it was up on the wall! And I said "that's me up there" and he said "Yes, I know, isn't it good!" Anyhow he went through my handbag and ... he got to the bottom of my handbag and I knew what was there and he pulled it out, he said, "Oh lookee here, three prophylactics, black ones. Haven't been very lucky have we?!" And the rest of the people that were in the queue behind me fell about laughing, I thought, oh no, let me get out of here! So yes, it was a very embarrassing time!

(00.10.00) *So, have you been actively involved in any other organisations, social clubs, outside the world of work?*

Well, I was an active member of the Conservative Club in Stony Stratford, used to go there quite regularly ... but ... various children's ... you know the school projects they used to be on etc. But ... working sort of bringing up four children was quite - quite hard work, it was a full time job, yeah!

So, what do you think has made Milton Keynes a success or failure in your eyes?

I think it's a success because of the people coming here. I don't think it's down to buildings, I think it's the people that live here that have made it what it is. And, you know, most of the people that I know praise Milton Keynes.... It's different ... I mean the laugh is that we have all these roundabouts, but we love our roundabouts, you know, it wouldn't be Milton Keynes without them! So, we've got straight roads as well, I know, like the A5, but erm I believe the people've made the town. I don't call it a city; until it gets city status, it's a town to me, it always has been.

So if you could go back in time, is there anything you would change about Milton Keynes?

Erm, no I don't think so, no. I love the way ... I mean the film they did on Milton Keynes, I was really annoyed about because you'd have thought it was a blank landscape, that there was nothing here until they started building new houses. But we had all these lovely little villages that were incorporated into it and that also makes Milton Keynes, it isn't you know a blank canvas, you've got all these historical places within it.

So, this is the last one I've got, what do you think ... the next 50 years have got in store for Milton Keynes? What will we see happening to Milton Keynes?

Well, I believe it will expand even further, I think it's got to because of the controversial homelessness that we have in the town, it's not just our town, it's all towns. It's got to expand and I can see it going further towards Northampton, Luton, I think it's gonna get... grow and grow and grow. As long as they put the facilities in like doctors' surgeries in etc. to go with it, cos I think that's a bit of a bugbear in a lot of towns at the moment where they're building and they haven't got the facilities, you know, like doctors' surgeries.

[Interviewers discussing whether there are any more questions]

[Second male interviewer] *Given the issues that Milton Keynes is having, obviously it can expand but do you see there being a healthy way of that expansion?*

Well, I think there's got to be more money from government put into Milton Keynes as other towns as well, for this to happen. It's dreadful the, you know, watching all these homeless people, in fact I nearly took two home the other night! I felt so sorry for them thinking you know I've got a lovely warm home and there's these two chaps sitting there with their duvets round them and, you know, you can't help but feel like that. So hopefully more money will come from somewhere to be able to, you know, house all these homeless people.

[Female interviewer] *I was going to ask about your large number of people you've contributed to Milton Keynes ...*

[Jovial discussion about another question to ask]

(00.15.00) *So, how has your family expanded since you've come to Milton Keynes?*

Well, I had four children when I came here in 1972. I went on to have a fifth one, a fifth daughter, and subsequently those five children have produced 12 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren. So I'm a very glamorous ... great-grandma!! So I've been told ...

That's nice. Would you say family is important to you?

The family is very important to me and as I said before my daughter Michelle has delivered quite a bit of the population here in Milton Keynes! And she sends ... when she became a private midwife just for a while ... she sends all the children that she's delivered a birthday card every year! It costs her a fortune. So ... but yes they're very important to me, yes.

And have they all stayed close?

Yes, they're all in Milton Keynes, they've all stayed close and I'm lucky enough now to be able to have my youngest granddaughter for school holidays now that I'm retired. And I pick her up from school on Mondays and Wednesdays and we have *such* fun, you wouldn't believe it! Which I wasn't able to do with my other grandchildren, so ... yeah.

That's great ...

I think that's all, OK ...

All done?

END
(00.16.57)