

**Name:** Kathleen Lake

**Duration:** 00:33:02

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*Could you just give us your name and also just say when you arrived in Milton Keynes?*

Yeah, my name's Kathleen Marney Lake; moved to Milton Keynes in 1974.

*Can you tell us, obviously again, when you came to Milton Keynes and why you came to Milton Keynes?*

Yeah, I moved to Milton Keynes with my family – that's my dad, my mum and my sister, Pauline – 1974 and it was with my dad had moved up here with his work: he was a site manager for a building company.

*What was he doing exactly when he...in Milton Keynes?*

Well, he was a site manager and he was basically seeing Eaglestone develop, being built, you know, handing over the keys to new people going in and that was the houses that were for sale down the bottom and then the rented ones for Milton Keynes Development Corporation.

*[Break in interview]*

My dad actually came to Milton Keynes with a job – it was with a building company – and, when we moved here, he was basically in charge of overseeing the building of Eaglestone and the private houses, which are down the bottom end, and the rented accommodation which is more around this area. Seeing people in, handing over keys, the snagging, making sure that everything was fine when they moved in, so...

*When your dad got given a place here on Eaglestone... Actually, how did your family come to Eaglestone? So, your dad was working here but how did the whole family come here? Why did the whole family come here?*

Well, we were living in...

*[Break in interview due to traffic noise]*

We were living in Letchworth at the time and it was...he was working at here and he was commuting and it was getting too much really, you know, the dark nights – it was fine in the summer – in the dark nights and so, as a family really, we decided that we would come up and live here. And it was all very new and, yeah, that was what made us really come up here, so that to save my dad commuting every day, backwards and forwards.

*Was your dad given any advice when he came to bring the family up here?*

Yeah, it was strange actually 'cause one of the first conversations that he had with the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, when I was a child, I remember him coming home and saying, "We have to pack wellington boots," because literally it was just mud and fields, that was it. And it was true because I remember I couldn't wear shoes for at least the first year, it was just...I had to go to school in my wellington boots and then change at school and then come home in my wellington boots. It was that...it was just so strange but I...you know, it was nice; as a kid, that's fun, in the mud. So yeah, that was a weird conversation but it was very true. So even my mum had to go and buy a pair of welly boots, which she'd never owned ever in her life, so... (Did I miss that, was it all right? Okay.)

*So what was it like, living in Eaglestone at that time then, when it was all new?*

I loved Eaglestone. Within I think it was two days of moving in, we...I made friends; it was lovely; we all moved in around about the same time, maybe a week or two between us all. It was a good mix, little girls, little boys, and we were all straight out on our bikes and it was just a really nice sort of community feel at that time and made some good friends; and have made a lifelong friend actually. She moved in slightly after us, around the corner, and I still...we're still in contact today, which is really...I think that's special, you know, from eleven years old to now... [Laughs]. So yeah, it's lovely; it's a really nice community spirit.

*So after school you worked for a number of different sort of companies that were related to the development of Milton Keynes. Could you just describe one of your first jobs as a... [Unclear]*

One of my first jobs was at an architects' office. It was called Roger Hobbs, John Corbey and Associates – I remember the name very clearly 'cause I used to say it on the telephone all the time; I felt very grown-up – and it was...it was a really good job. It was printing the A1 architect's drawings, the blue drawings, the blueprints, and typing on them different scales and taking those,

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delivering those, to the council at the civic offices. That was a really, really good job for me.

And then I went on to work for Milton Keynes Development Corporation, in the housing department at Lloyds Court, which was brilliant because it was seeing all the houses, you know, all the applications for houses, seeing...making sure that there was references done, showing people...in those days there was actually show houses so we could show them some houses that they could possibly have in Fishermead, which was being built. Am I waffling too much?

*No, no.*

When I get nervous I do waffle so please tell me to slow down or to...

*With the office junior job, do you want to just say something a bit about...I mean, I know you said to me on the phone that you sort of didn't really take notice of what you...[unclear 00:06:08]...like, talk about sort of how you felt about working in there and sort of...*

I didn't realise the importance at the time, yeah, I didn't. (Shall I start from the..? Okay.) One of my... (Shall I say, 'My first job...' or, 'one of my first jobs...'? Shall I say, 'My first job...'?)

*It's up to you. Say it...if you want to say how old you were when...*

Okay, I was only sixteen so...yeah I know... *[Laughs]*...I was a baby and... My first job, when I was sixteen, was at an architects' office in Lloyds Court. It was Roger Hobbs, John Corbey and Associates. I do remember the name really well because I said it so many times on the telephone; it made me feel really grown-up. And it was actually dealing with printing and typing on the A1 architect's drawings for the new properties and the new city centre that was in the plans and everything. And at the time, being only sixteen, I didn't realise the importance of that and how, you know, how that is – or *is* now; *was* the future – but it is present now and it's funny to think that, you know, somewhere there's those prints with my kind of typing on that I done when I was just a kid really. And yeah, it was lovely, I really enjoyed it and it just...it does make me wonder, you know, like I say, I didn't realise the importance of it now but looking back as a grown-up it's lovely to be part of that history, I think, of Milton Keynes.

*That's really good. And then, with the housing one, do you want to say...you mentioned about, obviously, processing the application forms when you... Didn't you do showing people around some of the new estates as well, possibly?*

No, all I did was...no, I used to...sometimes it's overtime and it was sitting in a show house, like at Fishermead or somewhere, and showing them, you know, this could be it. You don't want me to say that?

*It's up to you.*

Shall I just say that I was in housing and processing and..?

*Yeah, and then talk about a little bit about what it...well, sort of the impressions of Milton Keynes from working in that...in the housing department and what it made you feel, or...*

Okay,

*How you sort of might have seen Milton Keynes develop.*

Yeah, okay. I worked for Milton Keynes Development Corporation in the housing department at Lloyds Court. It was starting from scratch: people would phone up and ask about Milton Keynes, the possibility of living here, how they would go about it and if they qualified – so, if they were coming with work, etc. We would ask some questions and then send out an application form. Then it would come back, we would look again to see if they...you know, if they qualified and if they could...we could help them and it was processing the application really from start to finish, so show...you know, people would sometimes get the opportunity to look around a show house, if we had them in the areas that were available, and seeing them into their new properties, handing over keys, and it was...it was a really good time because it was showing how Milton Keynes really was becoming so popular. More people were phoning, the office was extremely busy, the phones were extremely busy, we were inundated with applications and it got...the longer I worked there the more and more applications and interest we were getting. I mean there was an advert on the television, I remember, kind of at the time and it did literally boost the amount of people that were phoning and enquiring about coming here. So I did feel very privileged that we were already here and enjoying it. So yeah, it was...it is a privilege to have been part of that.

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*Maybe just talk about, you know, the kind of the people, why they'd come, was there like a common theme..?*

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*[Break in interview due to traffic noise]*

*So, from your work in housing, did you...what were the...where were people coming from and how did they feel about coming to Milton Keynes?*

Most of the people that were coming, or making enquiries to come to live in Milton Keynes, were actually with work, so they were coming here where they'd...they were coming with new companies – there was a lot of new companies moving to Milton Keynes at that time – and it was quite an exciting time because...also nerve-wracking for a lot of people because they'd...you know, they read things, they hear things about Milton Keynes: there was nothing here and what was going to be here and if there'd be any community spirit; also if there was any historical...you know, if there was any history to Milton Keynes. So there was a lot of excitement but there was a lot of nervousness as well and we saw that and we heard that quite a lot with people. I mean, obviously, I was very lucky, I'd lived here for a few years then and I just used to reassure them and say, "No, it's lovely, it will be fine and it's just going to get better because there's so much...just so much to come really." We were, you know, the city centre was nearly...or, being built, nearly built and it was...it was just an exciting time and I think, when people came here, most people realised that: that, you know, it's a great place to live.

*Did you see change from when you first came with your family to then, when you were working in the housing? Did you see a marked difference in the way in which the city was developing, any part of the city?*

Yeah, the change was dramatic. I mean, from when I first came, which was mud, fields and nothing, you know, there was...we used to just get shopping from Bletchley; look around Bletchley. And as the time went on there was just more and more, you know, the shops and the city centre, and there was a little bit of nightlife come in and more and more pubs and restaurants and it was just...it was blossoming really, it was just blossoming. And now, of course, I just can't believe we've got everything, to me, that you could want in a town/city, you know, I don't think you could get anywhere better. I mean, I'm biased but I wouldn't want to live anywhere else, so...

*What is it about Milton Keynes that's so special for you?*

I think it...I mean, for me Milton Keynes is...

*[Break due to traffic noise]*

Milton Keynes, to me, has just...I think that you can tick every box. It *has* got history, even though a lot of people say it hasn't got history, or it hasn't got much history. I think it's got a lot of history. It's got lots of...so many attractions, so much to do, we still have so much greenery and the fact that Milton Keynes Development Corporation and the council spent so much on the trees and the

shrubs and just the landscaping is just brilliant. It's very green, very open, I just think it's a very safe place to bring up kids and to live now, and it does have a lot to offer in the future too, I think.

*[Break in interview]*

*So where are we looking now, Kathy?*

That is my very first house in Milton Keynes that I came with my parents and my older sister. I was just eleven years old and my sister was eight years older than me. Very happy memories. One of the first things that we... (Shall I take it from happy memories? Okay.) Very, very happy memories of living in the house. Literally spent a lot of time out with friends that I made straight away, on bikes because we had all this lovely redway, still...there was actually quite a lot of redway then but mostly round the estate which was being built, so we used to go on our bikes. We did used to play in the mud, I did used to come home really dirty, but that was part of living here then, it wasn't...you know, my mum and dad didn't mind. And just generally very good happy memories with really nice people, all nice new...the people, kids, everything, it was a nice happy time.

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*What was the community like? How did you feel about living here?*

It was great, it was great. I mean, those days, the mums were mostly at home, they didn't work, and I remember my mum and the other mums popping in for a cup of tea, a cup of coffee; us kids would be up in the bedroom. In the summer holidays we would all just play together and I think it helped for the mums – and the dads, obviously, saw each other at weekends – but other mums particularly, they were coming from out of area and it was really good for them to actually have that connection with the other mums. They were all in the same boat so they would have cups of tea and have a chat and talk about any issues and problems and missing where they came from, etc. So it was good, it was a nice time, I just remember it being happy really.

*What the view like was from...when you looked out of the windows of your house?*

Well, when we used to look out from the bedroom windows, particularly at the front, there was nothing here at all. I mean, those trees...well, there were no trees and it was just literally mud and fields across there. There was no Peartree Bridge, no Springfield, Fishermead was...I think it was probably just started with diggers and things and it was just a wash of mud really. And we could see the canal; we could actually see the canal from the bedroom window, which was great 'cause I used to have a little pair of binoculars and I would watch the boats go by. And it is just

so different now. You know like, when I look now and I just see the trees that are so big and so tall, it just shows the time that...how long ago it was really.

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*[Break in interview to discuss questions]*

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*Obviously everyone was coming from different locations to come and live in Eaglestone. What was it like when people first arrived? Did people feel lonely, or how did people get to sort of create that community feel?*

I think...I think sometimes some were lonely because a lot of people came from London and they missed, you know, the busyness of London, and their families. But I can only talk about the ones where we lived over here. Some of them did come from London and Stevenage and places like that and we all really made an effort and the parents really made an effort to try to make that community there, you know, and we all supported each other. They even used to look after the kids, you know, for each other, if needed be.

*Can you talk a little bit about the traditional communities that had been there and established a lot? So, you would normally have, like, you know, your grandparents that would help look after the children but a lot of families were coming and they just had themselves with young children.*

Yeah, I don't really know what to say though, because I mean, I know...

*I was just thinking, 'cause you said most of the people that lived near you were also working on the...were working for MKDC were they, most of them? No?*

No, no. One of the guys...none of the mums worked, none of the guys...one of the guys was a printer but I don't know who 'cause I...you know, I don't know, I was only eleven. I know he worked for a printing place here. There was another dad that worked at a factory down in Bletchley. I don't really know...I don't...

*That's fine.*

I know there was some lonely ones. I remember my mum saying that some of them that did come from London were lonely because it was...how London was, compared to here, the shops...no shops, you know; not just being able to jump on a bus or tube; missing their parents, missing that family support unit. I know it was difficult for a lot of people. We were okay, I think because, you know, we were older – I mean, I was eleven and my sister was older – so we didn't kind of need that immediate

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support I suppose, you know, like some of the ones with the little babies, the little toddlers.

*How did everybody sort of get together and try and support people through that? Was there a good community spirit?*

There was a very good community spirit where we were; lots of help out with the children. My mum was very, very good. She would help out a lot of the younger mums with younger children, babies. In fact, so much so that there was a lady there that actually went into labour and she had a little toddler and, you know, we hardly knew them but it was necessity, she'd gone into labour, so we ended up having her little boy, who was two or three at the time, for the night and I remember coming home from school and this little chap was sat there and the next day he had a little baby sister born. So it was...yeah, my mum did used to help and a lot of the...

*Sorry, can we just go from, you remember waking up the next day and the little..?*

Yeah, yeah. The little boy from next-door, he stayed the night with my parents and the next morning we woke up and the dad was knocking at the door and he had got a little baby sister, which was lovely. So yeah, it was very much, you know, the older...the kind of slightly older mums helped, I think, with the new mums that had come here, that had lost that support from their maybe parents or siblings. So yeah, it was good. I enjoyed helping with the little children as well. In fact I did end up babysitting for those two little children in that very house there. *[Laughs]*

*[Break in interview]*

*Okay, so Kathy, can you just explain where we are and what your dad did that's important for this place here?*

This is...or this was the pub called the Starting Gate. My dad actually entered a competition for the local newspaper at the time, in the early seventies, and he was picked – I think there was more than about five hundred entries – and he was picked as the winner and he got to name this pub the Starting Gate. He came up with the idea really because of the Lloyds Bank and the connection with the horse and everything and it being one of the first new pubs in Milton Keynes. He won; it was a lovely time. It was just before Christmas, so we actually got a beautiful presentation from the Milton Keynes mayor and his wife, a great big...it was a lovely great big Christmas hamper with a turkey and all the goodies. We got treated like VIPs for the evening, which was wonderful. I was only...I think I was thirteen and my sister was twenty-one so we weren't allowed the champagne but my mum and dad had some



champagne and they were awarded this. And then, I think it was another day, they came actually outside the pub and there was a Shire horse and cart and they had taken...had pictures taken and put in the local press and everything, so they made them feel very special and it was a lovely thing, you know, right at the start of us moving here. My dad really felt proud to have won that and the name was on the pub for quite a long time.

*How did you feel about your dad winning the competition?*

I was very proud of my dad. It was lovely. Felt like a little star, having my photo taken at thirteen, even though I was quite embarrassed when I did go to school and everybody was, you know, talking about it, but that's what kids do. But yeah, I was very proud and it was nice when we used to drive to the city and actually see the name and know that my dad had named that. It's rather sad now when I look and see it's like this but it has been lots of things during that time. You know, it was...it wasn't just a pub, many years after it was a nightclub and I believe a snooker club so, yeah, it was a very proud sort of time for us really.

*Could you just talk about the photograph that was taken and who was in that photograph that went into the newspaper?*

Yeah, the photographs that they took; there was two photographs that the local press took. One was of my mum and my dad, myself and my sister and that was in a pub, I believe, in Wavendon somewhere and we had a photograph taken being presented with the hamper, the Christmas hamper, full of goodies. And then the other photograph, we weren't in that one, it was just my mum and my dad, and that was taken outside here for the local press with the Shire horse and my mum and dad actually holding a pint of something, a beer or something.

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*Did they get presented anything by the mayor?*

I'm not quite sure if they did get presented, I think it was literally a drink and some food at that time, from in the pub, outside but I was at school so I wasn't quite sure what happened. But I know that they did enjoy a drink in the new pub and everything, at that time.

*So what was this area like at the time? So, why was it important to sort of have this sort of naming of the pub?*

It was really important 'cause it was the start almost of somewhere social, somewhere to go...

*[Break due to traffic noise]*

I think it was important at the time because there wasn't many new pubs and somewhere, you know, sociable to go and something new and fresh. And it being actually at the city centre with the start of everything that was happening here, they were building...currently building...or starting to build the city centre and it just...it was nice, it was a nice new place to go and have a drink and, yeah, I suppose just the start really of the things to come in Milton Keynes, somewhere for people to go. (Is that enough, or was that..?)

*We'll just stop for a sec.*

00:26:42

*[Break in interview]*

00:27:00

*So Kathy, what do you think of Milton Keynes from, sort of, how you saw it from when you had your photograph taken here, to what it is now?*

I think it's amazing. I think the change is so dramatic. I just remember I suppose – like you do; childhood memories – of this just mess of mud and fields and now it's just...there is just so much here. There is so much social life. There is so much leisure facilities, so much to do. We've got the ski slope and we've got ice skating and the multi-cinema complexes and I do find it difficult to actually think that it's the same place in lots of ways, when I look now. But the opportunities and the places and things for my daughters, and my granddaughter, to do compared to when I was here – which literally was on my bike and riding round and things like that – is...I just think it's lovely, it's just brilliant, so much to do and see here.

*And have you got a particular, like, affection for Milton Keynes? How do you feel about it, as a place? It's not an easy question but it you have.*

Milton Keynes is home to me: that's it really. I think I've been here for so long now I've seen it grow from a tiny little acorn to this massive oak tree really and to me it has got everything that anybody could want a place, you know, to actually live in. It *has* got the history, it has got new-builds, it has got new buildings, it has got landscaping, it's just...I think it's just beautiful really and I am very passionate about it and, luckily, my two daughters, who were born at Milton Keynes Hospital, and my granddaughter, even though she's only three – I hope she feels the same – but my two daughters are very passionate about Milton Keynes as well and I just hope, you know, they will not ever want to go anywhere else, or live anywhere else, the same as I do.

*Do you think that's part of the change, that people came here as single...not single families but, you know, like just, you know,*

*mum, dad, feeling they were kind of on their own and then now there's this building of like extended families and that's what kind of creates the legacy of the city almost?*

I do, yeah. I do feel...I think now, yes, now, that this is my home because I was a child when I came here and our family, you know, the rest of our extended family, was in London, was in Stevenage, was other parts of the UK –Yorkshire. And now I suppose, having got my family here, my own little family unit of my children and my grandchild and another one on the way, yes, I think that has made me have the roots that I have in Milton Keynes that is very much home to me.

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*[Break in interview]*

*Does Milton Keynes...well actually, what about if...does Milton Keynes still feel new? Do you think it's still changing or developing?*

I mean, Milton Keynes has still got a lot of developing to go – it's still got a long way to go, I think – and I think just that the more it goes on the better it's going to be because of the, you know, children, first generation children, like myself, we were sort of pioneers, if you like, first kids here. And then we've had children and then our children will have children and obviously, as it goes on, I think there is going to be more of that love and of that connection and the whole feeling of, yes, of pride and it's something to be proud of really. I hope so anyway. Yeah, I hope so. (Did that make sense or did it not make sense?)

*Yeah, it was brilliant. Thank you.*

*[Break in interview]*

*If you're ready, if you can explain that and where everyone was.*

Okay, this is actually a scanned picture of the original newspaper that my mum and dad were pictured in, proudly holding a pint from the Starting Gate pub and behind them is the mayor of Milton Keynes and his wife, and beautiful horses, dray horses, and a cart. And it was a very nice afternoon, apparently, and they got given drinks and food and celebrating the opening of the Starting Gate in Central Milton Keynes, Lloyds Court.

*Do you know what year that was, how old you were, and how you felt about being in the paper?*

(I was thirteen, so what year was that? '63, '73, it was about '76; I think it was about '76. I might have been twelve or thirteen. Does it matter if I say..? I think I was thirteen.) I was thirteen when my

dad actually won this competition and I did feel extremely proud. I did have my photo in the paper with my parents and my sister as well, actually being presented with the Christmas hamper, which was great and I was very proud but I also did get quite a lot of Mickey taken out of me the next day at school when they...all my friends actually saw my face in the paper but it...yeah, it was a very proud day really. (Was that okay?)

00:33:02

*Right, so we'll just get a close-up on that then. So we'll just cut...*

END OF INTERVIEW