

Name: Moss Bancroft
Date of Birth: 1991
Place of Birth: Milton Keynes
Date of Interview: 11th January, 2018
Duration: 00:17:56

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So, I think it's the 11th January, 2018. My name is Moss Bancroft and I was born in 1991.

So, can you tell us how you came to Milton Keynes or when you came to Milton Keynes?

Well, I was born here. I was born in Milton Keynes Hospital in 1991, like I say, and went straight, basically, from the hospital where I was born – wasn't in there for long – to Spencer Street in New Bradwell, which is North Milton Keynes, and I lived there until I was eighteen and went to university.

So can you tell us a bit about your life in Spencer Street because it's, you know, a different place to grow up, shall we say?

Spencer Street is definitely not your average childhood home. Variably, I've lived in number eleven, number one and, for a short time, number three, in Spencer Street, which not many people move around the same street that often but it's because it's a housing co-operative so nobody owns the house that they live in, they all rent it, but they're not renting it from a private landlord or directly from, like, a right to buy or anything like that, they're renting it from themselves, basically. So the co-operative's almost like a company. They were given – I don't know the details on all this. You'll have to ask, like, my parents or something but... – they got it from the council, at least, sometime in the seventies and they paid a very small amount of money for the street 'cause it was total disrepair, they were going to knock it down, but it's kind of a historical street. It's a... I think somewhere around a hundred and fifty years old and all the other streets identical to it had all been knocked down. So they wanted to conserve that and save a bit of local history and it was an opportunity to get, sort of, a different type of social housing in Milton Keynes, 'cause there was council places – like council flats and council houses – but this

was a bit different. It was somewhere people could come maybe for a short time, if they didn't have other forms of housing, so...

What was it like, growing up there?

Growing up there? Yes, so there's a lot of history to it, obviously – like I say, I'm not an expert on that part – but growing up was definitely a strange experience. Not strange to me but to explain to others. When I was eight years old I went into school and told everyone, "Oh, we've just got a television."

And everyone said, "Oh yeah, we've all got one."

"Oh right."

So it was quite an alternative upbringing I think, you know, no TV when I was a kid, sort of 'hippy' is a good word for it, I guess and everyone down the street was all...they were all different people, so...I can't think of examples of characters but, you know, I think, incense and dream catchers and all that sort of stuff was definitely featured; people with crystals hanging in the windows. Yeah, it was a very colourful place. I mean, the co-operative was called 'Rainbow Housing Co-operative' so that gives you some idea. But I mean, when we were kids, none of the...all the back gardens on the side of the street that I lived on, none of the gardens had fences between them, so everyone's back garden just joined onto the next, which is obviously not very common and, beyond that, there was one long fence but that led into what was called 'the backlands', which is another huge area of garden that was just communal – so, there was a fire pit there, a climbing frame, a set of swings, when I was growing up. We all built, in about 2000, a thing we called 'the structure' which was just a huge, wooden thing, not quite a house but a, sort of like, a little tree house on stilts, and we all got together to build that and stripped off all the logs. I think some architect or artist or someone sort of designed the project and everyone who lived there sort of helped out and got involved with building it; and we all carved lizards into the handrails, so it was something each child, or each family, someone would do something to contribute. And there was all sorts of projects like that over the years. That's just one that came to mind.

How do you think people perceived the environment that you lived in and were brought up in? How did outsiders from..?

Yeah, like I say, I mentioned, like, not having television: that was just one example. I mean, when you say that you don't own your house but you're not really renting it either, technically, then people get a bit confused and they ask a lot of sort of strange questions and you say, "Well I don't actually know the answer," to a lot of them, when you're a kid. But yeah, going to school, it was strange, like, if anyone asked, you'd get a, sort of, few funny looks and then, 'Okay, not sure about you anymore.' And even teachers

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sometimes, you'd...one of my teachers had heard about the co-operative and knew a bit about it and just sort of...when I said I lived there he'd go, "Oh okay," and just give me a little bit of a funny look. So yeah, you definitely get a bit of...it's not even suspicion, it's just sort of complete misunderstanding, you know. If anyone gets labelled as a hippy, there's all sorts of things they might think but...*[laughs]*...I don't know.

So what does Milton Keynes mean to you, having grown up in Milton Keynes?

It's a funny one because Milton Keynes is always, sort of, said to be like this new city, or whatever, and it kind of was but, when you are born when I was, it might have been new to other people who were already here or who moved here but it was just where I grew up. So it wasn't new to me, it was just natural growing up here, so I had no concept of other places, like...I learnt to drive in Milton Keynes, for example, and it was really easy...*[laughs]*...there's roundabouts everywhere and...I mean, they had to take you to Bletchley in order to give you a lot of the skills that you needed to pass your test because, other places in Milton Keynes, there's no need to do all those things, you know. I mean, bay parking is quite common but, I mean, street parking, you have to go somewhere like Bletchley or Stony to learn those kind of skills. So, I don't know, it never seemed strange to me in the way that other people might see it 'cause I grew up here, you know, it didn't seem alien to me at all.

So what part have you played in the sort of building of Milton Keynes? Have you been involved with any sporting organisations, clubs, cultural things?

Well yeah, I've attended all sorts of things that are sort of on the fringe of Milton Keynes culture. So, as a child I would...I mean, I'd do all sorts of things. I'd go skateboarding at the Milton Keynes bus station, for example. That was turned into a...called a 'skate plaza' in the time that I remember going there and, I mean, my dad was kind of involved with working with the council on that 'cause he was a skateboarder here in the eighties, you know, before I was born. So that was something I was involved in: not heavily, but I saw that change at least; that's one change I did see.

But also, I mean, I go to a...there's a local circus skills and juggling club in Great Linford at the Memorial Hall and so that's its own little culture there that, they meet every week and... Growing up I think, in a co-operative like I did, gave me all these interests like, someone who lived down the street, my friend's dad, was a juggler and a street performer and it attracts those kind of people, so it leads you into all these other interests that you may not

otherwise have had. And I remember one time a friend of mine had a relative's friend over from Hungary and so we would make...play a lot of jokes on him and one time he came into the street where I was living and I think...I was juggling, I think, out on the street – something that you'd do, you know, on a nice summer's day – and he came along and said, "Oh wow, that's pretty cool." And then my friend came along – Felix – and I said, "Oh, do you want to have a go?" And he took it and he could do it. And then my mum and dad were outside and I said, "Oh, you can have a go, can't you?" And then my mum and dad could both do it and my friend's dad came over and he could do it as well, and it just got this guy from Hungary so confused. He thought, 'Can everyone in England do this? Is this just like part of the culture here?' you know. It's really strange, you know. That's just a good memory, I think. I got off topic; sorry.

That's fine. So what do you think is good about Milton Keynes? Or what's bad about Milton Keynes?

Okay.

Where do you think it's been a success or a failure?

Well, I think Milton Keynes is a success in a lot of ways because it's got, what you call, like leisure opportunities, right. Like it's got the Snowzone and the Xscape, things like that; there's two cinemas (there used to be, I think, three at one point, when there was one in The Point); they've got parks and all those sorts of things; they've got...there is actually a lot of opportunity for skateboarding, which is sort of an alternative culture here – although that's not necessarily created in the original vision of Milton Keynes, it's become part of it. And it's got loads of things...good things for kids to do; it's a good place for families. So, Rollers, or...when I was younger I used to go there quite a lot. That was a great time, you know, roller skating and it's got like a...it was called Activity World at the time, that was attached to it, you know. And there's still things like that. There's Bounce now, in...I think it's in Bletchley.

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So there's great things for kids to do and, for adults or whatever, it's a...you can commute to London in a short amount of time; it's got great things for adults, but I think there's a sort of a gap there, which I would say is the failure, is that, there's no university. There's the Open University but not many people from Milton Keynes go there to university. So there's kind of a gap where education kind of drops off and there's not much to do; you have to go somewhere else. And there's a point where there's not many alternative venues, going into your twenties, I think. I found it quite hard here when I moved back from university, and I moved away – I moved to Leeds – because there's a bit of gap where your

twenties, maybe early thirties, I think, would be a difficult time for a lot of people to live here, 'cause there's not much opportunity for that age range. So I'd say that's something that could be improved in Milton Keynes.

So what would you change? If you could go back and change something about Milton Keynes and say, "That isn't good, let's get rid of that or let's change that." What would...is there anything you would change?

Anything I would change about Milton Keynes? Hmm...that's a difficult one because, like I say, growing up here, I don't...it's hard to see it from another perspective, from a fresh perspective. It's so...I mean, apart from the small changes I mentioned, Milton Keynes seems very static to me. You know, it seems very just, sort of...it's how I remember it growing up and since then I've been to university and moved other places. I don't really see it as a place with great change, you know, and it's hard to see it from a fresh angle. I couldn't say; sorry.

What would you think the next fifty years has got in store for Milton Keynes? We've had fifty years already, what do you think the next fifty years holds?

I think there probably will be much more of a development of culture here because there *are* older places, like, I'm from New Bradwell which is a hundred and fifty years old, say, and Wolverton the same, so they've been going, say, a hundred and fifty years and they're full of their own little cultures and their own quirks, and if Milton Keynes was going fifty years...in another fifty years it would be a hundred years and I think a hundred years is long enough to really build a bit of its own internal culture, so I think that will slowly develop after generations of people living here. So, my brother has kids and he was born here, so that's second generation born in Milton Keynes, so I think, as that goes down the line, say third, fourth, fifth generation, as long as enough people hang around I think culture will develop here.

Okay.

Could I ask a question?

Yeah of course, yeah.

How do you see your personal future?

My personal future? That's a very difficult one, it's something...I'm in quite a period of change at the moment. I moved from being a teacher up north and I'm still working in education here in Milton Keynes but...my family are here, so that's a strong connection and

that will never disappear, you know. I think a lot of my family will live here forever. But I'm quite happy to visit Milton Keynes. I mean, I could move somewhere else and, you know, I wouldn't feel a personal loss, you know. I could easily live somewhere else but I mean, like I say, it's good to be an adult here. Maybe as I leave my twenties and into my thirties then I might get quite comfortable here; you never know.

So you've got itchy feet right now, is that what you're saying?

Yeah, yeah, well yeah, I'd say right now, having lived in Leeds, which is this huge, old, ancient place that's got all this history and an amazing nightlife and so many different things to do, it is a slower pace of life here and it can be easier to sort of want to jump ship.

I've got another question, which is, having lived in a co-operative, do you see that as a potential way of living that is positive, or would you rather have your own flat...

Okay, yeah, yeah.

...with nobody else in it, built by an architect or, you know?

That's a very good question. Having grown up in a co-operative in Milton Keynes, I know that's it not a stand-alone thing. Within Milton Keynes there's Rainbow Housing Co-operative, there's one...oh, I can't remember where it is now. There's another housing co-operative in...(you'll have to remind me here and then I'll rephrase it). There's a...it's opposite...it's near, like Pennylands. What's that place called, what's that estate called?

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Coffee Hall?

No, no, no. I'm totally wrong here. If you don't mind waiting I will get the name of it.

Downhead Park?

No, not... Giffard Park, Giffard Park.

Giffard Park?

Yes, right okay. We'll do that again.

Do the whole sentence.

Yeah. So I don't see...having grown up in a housing co-operative, I don't see it as a stand-alone thing. It's where I grew up and I haven't really lived in one since but there are other ones in Milton

Keynes. There's Giffard Park, there's a housing co-operative there. There was one directly opposite Spencer Street, which was called The Laurels. That was closed amidst a sort of a flurry of confusion and different reasons I don't know the back-story of really, but... Yeah, they can be quite vulnerable to things like that where, if a co-operative isn't living up to the sort of the expectations it needs to, then it's quite easy for things like that to get closed down, especially smaller ones. I think it's a really positive thing and I think, going forward, living not just in Milton Keynes but generally, it is quite a healthy thing to have that option. I mean, I know homelessness is a thing in Milton Keynes and there are some empty spaces, empty buildings, that could be used and a co-operative is a great model for things like that, where...let's say, for example, people might be worried about, once you give someone a council house they've got it forever and, you know, they may not deserve it. There's all sorts of quite big social conflicts around that at the minute. I mean, there's things on telly about that quite frequently, different programmes, people have got all sorts of opinions on it. But a co-operative's quite good because it's like, when you become a member of the Spencer Street co-operative, you pay a pound as your sort of nominal share in the co-operative and when you leave you get that pound back; you take nothing with you apart from, you know, what you brought there. So it's a...it can be a really helpful, stable place for people to live but it doesn't necessarily entangle you to, like, then buy that house because it is a co-operative; it's its own thing. So I think it could be a really good model for social housing in the future, you know, it could be really useful.

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END OF INTERVIEW