

**Name:** Nancy Stevens  
**Date of Birth:** 1966  
**Place of Birth:** Zimbabwe  
**Date of Interview:** 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2018  
**Interviewed by:** Dave Harris  
**Duration:** 00:13:40

---

00:00:00

*Today's date is the 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2018. My name's Dave Harris and I'll be doing the interviewing. If you can tell us your name and the year you were born, please.*

My name's Nancy Stevens and I was born in 1966.

*Okay. When did you first move to Milton Keynes?*

I moved here in 1998.

*And where did you live previously?*

I lived in London, so came over when my first child was nearly two.

*Do you still live in Milton Keynes?*

Yes, yeah, absolutely love it here.

*What were your first impressions when you first came to Milton Keynes?*

I did fall in love with it pretty much instantly. It very much...

*[Brief pause to discuss interview]*

*Okay, so can you tell us where you were born?*

I was born in Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia.

*Okay. So what were your first impressions of Milton Keynes?*

My first impressions of Milton Keynes were of wide open spaces. It felt very much like home. It reminded me a bit of Johannesburg. I liked the kind of tropical effect, the wide open streets, and it just felt very aesthetically pleasing.

*So you say it reminded you of Johannesburg. Anything in particular...[unclear 00:01:31]..?*

I just think it was...I mean, I'm not from South Africa, I'm from Zimbabwe, but it was the whole kind of...it felt quite colonial, it felt very ordered and organised and it just...it felt like home pretty much straight away. Milton Keynes felt like home pretty much straight away.

*How did it differ to life in Zimbabwe?*

Hugely. I mean, it's...you couldn't be more....it couldn't have been more different. The life that I led, when I left Zimbabwe, was very different to the life I lead here in Milton Keynes and I'm hugely grateful for everything that's happened to me since I arrived here. I had an amazing childhood: quite interesting; grew up in a war situation; went to school in an armour-plated vehicle, in convoy – crazy life – lived in the bush; my dad built the house from scratch. So yeah, pretty different.

*So was it...would you say that was a very different culture?*

Completely different. I mean, quite African, quite backward, in a kind of a genteel, colonial kind of way, but a war situation nonetheless but, as a child, you're not kind of aware of the situation that you're in, you just kind of accept it, so...but, you know, the war had been over a long time so, you know, I was living in, sort of...you know, relative civilisation but the reason I left Zimbabwe was we were getting burgled pretty much every week on a regular basis and I just did not want to live like that and, from the age of fifteen, I knew that I wanted to come to the UK. Didn't know about Milton Keynes obviously but, yeah, it was the next step from London.

*So would you say Milton Keynes is a very safe and secure place?*

Absolutely, I mean, for someone like me who comes from a third world country where safety is, you know, crucial. I love the fact that we have the wide open spaces but we have the fact that we can leave our windows open and, you know, don't necessarily lock my car at night – I'm not broadcasting that fact but, you know, these things happen – and I feel completely safe walking around in my village at night. I mean, I guess it depends where you are but I think, relatively speaking, this is a very safe city.

*What do you associate with Milton Keynes?*

I'm very proud; I'm fiercely patriotic; Milton Keynes feels like home. I associate it with happy childhood memories for my children; huge opportunities for me, as someone who ended up going into the arts and as a stylist running my own business. So it's been a fantastic place to bring my children up and also for me as a businessperson and as a broadcaster.

*So can you tell us a little bit more about your business, you know..?*

Well, I used to run a business; I used to run a styling business based on, sort of, the 'what not to wear' principle – personal shopping; basically, trashing people's wardrobes – and that's what I did for a living for a long time: loved that. And that kind of grew...that sort of went out of fashion a bit and, you know, I had to get a normal job, sadly. But I ended up in the arts, working...I've been on radio now for ten years and that's a huge part of my life, in the arts. And my father was an actor so that's why I sort of inadvertently fell into the arts, 'cause I have a huge love of the theatre particularly

*Okay, so what part have you played in the development, then, in Milton Keynes? How do you feel about your role in the development of Milton Keynes? Is there anything in particular...you said you were in media and..?*

I feel very privileged to be in the position that I'm in, as someone who is a platform for...I'd like to think I'm a voice for people in the arts in Milton Keynes, so I suppose my radio shows have been a platform for people to come in and talk about the arts, of which I'm passionate about.

00:05:00

*Any particular people that you've interviewed that you would like to share?*

Oh, I've been very fortunate; I've interviewed some amazing people. I get to interview some huge celebrities, people I really admire, like Elaine Paige and Priscilla Presley and Adam Ant, you know, some really big names. But, conversely, I get to meet people in Milton Keynes who have shaped this town. People like Rosemary Hill, [unclear 00:05:22] – people like that – Nik Arkham, who have been instrumental in making this town what it is.

*So, what special memories do you have of Milton Keynes? You know, since your time here, are there any special memories that you've got?*

I think, mostly, the memories that I have are of my children growing up in a very safe environment with a lot of exposure to lots of different sports and, sort of, entertainment and opportunities really; the redways, being able to go for walks: it's just been fantastic. And for me, personally, all the opportunities that I've had afforded to me, both running my business and also as a journalist, it's...the memories carry on. I'm very, very lucky. I've nothing bad to say about Milton Keynes.

*So what do your children think of it? How have they progressed and developed in Milton Keynes?*

I think, for my children, it's been quite varied, actually. I think my eldest son might say it's been a bit stifled, growing up in a village, but I think, in hindsight, they would both say that they have been very happy, they've had happy childhoods and, as I say, they've had exposure to skiing and walking and all the sports and entertainment that Milton Keynes offers. So I think they've been very privileged; really, really privileged.

*So would you say Milton Keynes is a good place to bring up children and especially..?*

I absolutely cannot recommend Milton Keynes as a place to bring up children more highly than I already do. As I say, no regrets at all. I'm glad we left London when we did and absolutely...I never gave it a second thought. I know they say, when a man...he's tired of London, he's tired of life but I would say that about Milton Keynes, actually.

*What do you think has made Milton Keynes a particular success, or any failures?*

I think the things that have made Milton Keynes successful are the fact that we've mostly stayed true to what MKDC had in mind right back when it was just a twinkle in, you know, the Corporation's eye, in terms of, sort of, the development of keeping, you know, not too many high-rise buildings, the open plan system; and I think, in the main, we've stuck to that and I don't think there's too many failings. I think people may disagree. Personally, there's nothing that's affected me that is a failing. We have...you know, we have a fourteen hundred seater theatre, we have an art gallery, we have somewhere to ski, we have redways that means you never actually have to go on the roads; so I think it's a huge success and it should be used as a model for the rest of the country but, unfortunately, there's no new towns being built but, if there were, I think Milton Keynes is a perfect model.

*If you could go back in time, is there anything that you think would be nice to change about Milton Keynes?*

If I had to go back in time there's lots of things I'd do differently but moving to Milton Keynes is not one of them. I absolutely have no regrets at all. It was absolutely the right thing to do and I cannot...I've travelled all over the world, I've been to Japan, Israel, Russia, you know, pretty much...you know, most of Africa, Europe but Milton Keynes is home, so no, no regrets; wouldn't change a thing.

*Okay, and what do you think the next fifty years has got in store for Milton Keynes?*

I think, the next fifty years, I'd like to see things stay the same but also we need to progress. That's how...you know, that's the way that the world has to be. But I do think, if we can stick to the principles that MKDC had in the beginning, I think Milton Keynes will continue to be the success that it is. There are some situations and decisions that get made by various council, or whatever – the Newport Road, for instance, is...you know, it's been closed for three months and getting to Kingston's going to be absolutely horrendous. So there's things like that and you think, 'Well, was that really thought through because that's going to make it really difficult for people to commute from Woburn Sands to Kingston for the best part of three months; going to cause huge congestion. So that's frustrating but I guess they have their reasons.

*So, is there anything else that you would like to add? I mean, I've got notes here about your son being a successful dancer.*

Yeah I mean, again, Milton Keynes has been a great platform and a forum, you know, for my children to develop and, I think it's like anywhere, you make the most of the opportunities that you have but, for my son, the opportunities for him to become a successful dancer have been numerous and last year he won best support...er, best male dancer in Milton Keynes at the Milton Keynes Inspiration Awards and he, you know, he'd only been dancing for five years. And it's purely down to the opportunities afforded to him in this wonderful city of ours.

00:10:00

*Where did he learn to dance? Where did he go?*

Well, he kind of...my son taught himself to dance, initially. He was inspired by, sort of, watching 'Singing in the Rain', Michael Jackson, YouTube, all those sorts of things, so he kind of taught himself; and then he joined a dance crew; and then he's at Dancebox now, second year of dance, and hoping to go to performing arts college in London so, yeah. But it's...yeah, he's taught himself, a lot of discipline, but also there's a lot of opportunities here. And even for boys now, even better.

*I would just like...I mean, keep looking at Dave but...previous interviews, particularly around arts and culture, we've had some...you know, we have got a theatre and some bigger places but how do you feel about small, sort of, grassroots arts? Do you think that's flourishing here or do you think there's some work to be done?*

I do think, in terms of grassroots, sort of, fringe theatre, I do think there is work to be done and that's what I'd like to promote on my show. I'm very much about promoting people who don't necessarily have the money or the budget or the...you know, the, sort of, the voice to get themselves heard. So yes, I think there is work to be done. I think we maybe need a...some sort of holding house or something like that where we can...there's a point of contact where people can go to find out about all the different things because I don't think we necessarily communicate with each other properly here. So we've got all these incredible little theatres and offshoots of this, that and the other but I don't think we necessarily all talk to one another. So I think, yeah, there's definitely work to be done but I'd like to think that, on my show, when people come to talk on my show every Sunday, that it gives them that voice and that opportunity to share in that.

*You haven't actually said where your radio show...what channel it is, or where...*

*Let's talk about the radio show, what it is and how it came about.*

Okay, do you want me to just talk for a bit off the top of...off the cuff?

*Whereabouts is the radio... 'cause I don't know, is it...what channel is it?*

Okay. So, yeah, so my radio show, I've been very lucky, as I say, I've ended up with my own radio show called 'Stevens on Sunday' and that's on Secklow 105.5 FM and I've been on Secklow for about nine months now. I actually started on BBC Three Counties as a fashion stylist on the Helen Legh breakfast show; and then I got poached by Secklow who gave me my first show; and then MKFM poached me, which was all very flattering (I say poached, it's community radio but it sounds very grand). I was on MKFM for five years with my arts show and I'm back on Secklow now and it's, you know, very community orientated. It's community radio so I can, sort of, talk to whomever I want and play the relevant music and it's a fantastic platform, as I said.

*I think we'll just have one more question about where you go for your entertainment.*

Okay, the places I go to for my entertainment, I'm in an incredibly privileged position because I'm a theatre reviewer so I get to go to the theatre every single week. I also review books as well so I basically can be out three or four nights a week reviewing. But yeah, Milton Keynes Theatre once a week and then fringe theatre as well. So, as I say, two or three nights a week. So that's kind of my entertainment. That's a thing I love best, really, is theatre and the arts and obviously I get to, you know, review books for the authors that I have on my show, so I'm never bored. I've never got enough time actually, that's probably my only complaint. But yeah, it's not a bad life.

*Very good. Lovely. Great. Thank you.*

00:13:40

END OF INTERVIEW