

Name: Nicky Kenny
Date of Birth: 1974
Place of Birth: Milton Keynes
Duration: 00:16:32

So, I just want you to say your name and the year you were born.

OK. My name is Nicky Kenny and I was born in 1974.

Gosh, aren't you young. So what was it like growing up in Milton Keynes?

So I don't remember a huge amount, unfortunately, because I moved away when I was ten. So I was born in the Westbury, in Newport Pagnell, and at that time, my parents lived in Wolverton, and then, when I was six or seven months old, they moved to Haversham. Now I remember living in Haversham and having a huge back garden. And I do remember quite a lot of Wolverton, because I used to go back to my nan and grandad's house most week-ends and most school holidays. And when I was four, I moved to Olney and unfortunately, my mum and dad split up, so then I used to spend a lot of my time in Wolverton, staying with my nan and granddad, so I have lots of lovely memories of my granddad's garden, where he grew lots and lots of flowers and...

Do you remember very much any impression you had of the city at all?

Yeah, I remember doing a school project when I was a child, so from Olney primary school. I think we got the coach in and looked round Milton Keynes Hospital which was only just built. And we did a whole project, all about the new city. So I remember that, and I remember being very interested, I remember conversations that my family had about the new city. Being in Wolverton, we were sort of slightly protected, because we were on the outskirts, but it did impact things. And I remember that route driving back from Olney into Wolverton, which obviously we used to go the Newport way, suddenly there was a whole new way that you could drive back with these brand new roads at the time were empty. So I remember that, and I remember, yeah, conversations, and they were positive ones. And I don't ever remember my family being negative about the new city.

So tell me about these

So my granddad worked for the Development Corporation. He was a town clerk [clerk of works?]. So he was in charge of a team building the roads. So he had a hobby of collecting a piece of wood from the grid road that he was working on. And in his own time, he would carve it and then he would write where he'd collected it from. So for example, this one is the A5... H4, A5, V5. So there are more than this; this is just a little collection of what he actually did, and yes... Oh, what a lovely thing to do! What a lovely way to remind yourself of something that of course, for me, the city, I mean I am quite passionate about Milton Keynes. I think it gets a lot bad press, and I kind of defend it and stick up for it quite a lot, cos I think it's an amazing place... especially for families to live. And so it's lovely to have these things. And I'm really fascinated about how it looked before it was built. So this is lovely, to take something like that. I just think is amazing.

So skip forward a little bit. What made you come back here when you were thirty?

So I came back primarily to support my nan. So by that time, when I was thirty, my granddad had died unfortunately, and my nan was living on her own. She'd moved out of the house in Eton Crescent in Wolverton because it was too difficult for her to go up and down the stairs there, so she'd moved to Greenleys, which she loved. So I came with two young children at the age of thirty. I'd still... I'd always come back in between those years, when I moved away at the age of ten, so there was about twenty years, I'd always come back because my dad still lived in Milton Keynes and obviously my nan and granddad and other relatives too. So the reason to come back at the age of thirty was principally to support my nan. But also because we thought that we could afford to buy a house here whereas other areas in the south of England we couldn't do. At the time, I was living in Brighton and it was too expensive to buy somewhere there. And so, yeah, the thought of being closer to family and at the time, the father of my children, he worked in London, so Wolverton was the perfect place to live and to commute into London which it still is for lots of people now.

Tell a bit me about Milton Keynes.

(00:05:00) I love taking pictures of Milton Keynes. I think it's got an amazing mixture of architecture and nature. And they are just so lovely, they're just interwoven in such a lovely way. I'm a really keen cyclist and I love cycling. You can cycle around Milton Keynes and not even realise you're in a city, which I think is incredible, you know. One day I saw a kingfisher and no cars for most of my day out. And I think that is amazing. You can hear cars on the road, but you can go from one side of the city to the other and not have to go on a road. That's incredible.

Tell me something about the picture behind you.

The Point? I love the Point. I think Milton Keynes has got some amazing architecture. I love the Shopping Centre. I don't like shopping, I love the Shopping Centre. I think it's beautiful. I think it's really stunning and I think it's a lovely place to be. And the Point, I think, is an incredible building. I really wish, wish that it was more, more looked after, and loved. Because I just think it's a great building. And for me, I remember as a child it opening and the first cinema showings there, and the buzz that that created. And unfortunately, moving away at ten, I've got friends who didn't obviously move away and they talk about how they used to go to the Point when they were teenagers, and so I missed out on that bit which was a bit of a shame.

Would you say it inspired you?

Milton Keynes, yes, yeah. It does. I want to stay living here, I enjoy living here. I think, I mean, I do think it's a lovely place for families. I think that for young generations there isn't as much to do. And possibly for the older generation too. I think quite often, the older generation, once retired, wants to move out of Milton Keynes. So I think we've got a bit of an issue where it seems to be a place for families, and we need to extend either end of those scales and bring more things for young people and old people to do.

Can you tell me something about those photographs there?

So most of these pictures, I've taken when I've been on my bike. I just... I love the lines and the angles in Milton Keynes, and the light. It's got an amazing light, because of the way it was positioned, so the city centre is built on the highest point of the ground, in overall of the land, and there aren't many tall buildings. You've got huge, beautiful skies, which are lovely. There's some sculpture in there, we've got sculpture all over the city.

Amazing skies...

Amazing skies, and we've got sheep everywhere, right in the middle of the city, canals. I just, I think, you know, we're just very lucky, and I'm gonna talk about the redways again, because I just think that... I worry that the people that have lived here a long time have a certain apathy towards what Milton Keynes has to offer because we're sort of used to it, we take it for granted. And I think that's a dangerous thing, because I think the redways are incredible. I don't know of anywhere else in England where you can bike from one side to the other and not have to hardly go over any roads. It's just...

So how long do you think that you can go on photographing Milton Keynes?

This is interesting, because I've not been taking as many photographs in the last year, mostly because I've been working full time. So I have not been... I've not had the free time to be out on my bike and to take pictures you need the light, and I spend a lot of time in an office unfortunately. I do get to wander round the city centre... I took some today actually. But it continues to inspire me. I took a lovely one today of the underpass, but then suddenly become a bit obsessed by underpasses. I just keep seeing different things, and I think that's what I like about Milton Keynes. There's always, there's so much to see... And we were growing. It's growing and it's nice to see some of the new things appearing. I'm not so keen on others, but...we're still young, it's a young place, and (00:10:00) I think mistakes are gonna be made. I think that's natural for any town in its... we are like a sort of teenager really, trying out a few different things.

Do you develop your own photographs as well?

I don't, I get them printed, but I frame all my own pictures.

Yes, I think I've... what about the future?

I would like to think that Milton Keynes holds quite a lot more of my future. My girls love growing up here. They feel safe and happy. They've been to all the schools, the local schools in Wolverton, and I don't know whether I will always stay in Wolverton. I really, really love Wolverton, but I'm beginning to think there might be somewhere else in Milton Keynes I might like to live. I really like Great Linford, so who knows...

I think I am... that was great.

What can you see happening in the next fifty years in Milton Keynes?

That's a good question, yeah.

OK. The next fifty years in Milton Keynes. I would like to think that we champion new technology, and sustainable methods of transport. I want to see more people using their bikes. That's what I would like to see. I would like to see more... the communities connecting a bit better. I sometimes worry that people are living in their little estates, and as a whole, we don't gel very well. I hope that because, as I said earlier, we are still in our infancy, I hope that as the city grows and develops and matures, that will be a natural evolution. That's what I'd like to think will happen in the next fifty years.

Good answer.

So my granddad was a really, really keen gardener, and had a very, was lucky to have a very big garden in Eton Crescent, cos they were thirties houses and the gardens were bigger, and he grew lots and lots of flowers. And of course, back in the day, there were lots of flower shows. So he used to exhibit his flowers, which was great. Dahlias were his speciality. And my other granddad, who worked for the Development Corporation used to, he was in charge of building the roads, and so he loved to collect a piece of wood from the roads, and in his spare time, he would carve them into carvings, walking sticks. And as you can see, he marked where he'd collected the piece of wood originally from. So I think that's just a little collection. I think there's about forty altogether. And then, this some of my work. So I'm quite keen in documenting my children growing up, so I like to take lots of images of them and this is one of them in Wolverton. I quite like the idea of documenting not only their childhood, but also the town as it changes as well. And this a trip to Milton Keynes Museum, which we really enjoy coming to. And I'm lucky because my girls do as well, so they keep making me come back. And over here I have a picture of the Point. I love the Point, it's one of my favourite buildings in Milton Keynes. I think it's sad that it's being ignored and allowed to deteriorate. But I sort of hope, I've been hoping that one day, that'll change. And here is an example of lots of my work. Which way should I go?

If I come more this way, is that all right?

So I'm a keen cyclist and I love Milton Keynes, I love the mixture of nature and the city around it, I think it's lovely, it's done really nicely, and it's just a great place to explore, and there are lots of lovely things to see... we're really lucky to have clouds, and parks, loads of parks and lakes. And I love all the architecture, I particularly like the Milton Keynes lights, in fact I am a little bit obsessed with them, I take pictures of them all the time. I just never get bored of them, I think they're great. This a picture of my mother's father, my granddad who lived in Wolverton. This is the back garden in Eton Crescent, so that's my nan and my granddad there, on their wedding day. My granddad worked at Wolverton Works, he was a carriage fitter.

*Sorry, there are a lot of people walking past
Screaming kids
Let them go*

*How dare they when we're having fun
Sorry about that*

They don't want to go home.

Are they refusing to go this afternoon? Ha, ha, that's brilliant. Oh I love that. This is a picture of my girls outside Maisie's. And actually, this wasn't... most of my photography is accidental. It's something... I don't plan a lot of my work, I sort of stumble across it. But this, a friend of mine rang me and said: "Quick, quick, quick, they're taking the sign down!" and you can see the original sign underneath. And so I rushed down to Church Street to have look. And it was lovely to see the Wolverton Provident Cooperative sign underneath, only briefly, before they put a hideous horrible plastic, new plastic one up. But I was lucky to get there and take a picture, while they were, while it was unearthed, so.