

**Name:** Robert Walsh

**Date of Birth:** 1971

**Date of Interview:** 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2018

**Interviewed by:** Louise Roche

**Duration:** 00:12:07

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*So, Louise Roche, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2018.*

Robert Walsh, 1971.

*Really?*

Mm, that long ago. *[Laughs]*

*Okay, so tell me a little bit about your earliest memories of Milton Keynes.*

Yes, so we moved here in the early seventies. My dad took a job with the Development Corporation and I think we moved in, initially, into Netherfield, so it was a bright, spangly, new, shiny estate, and then we ended up in Milton Keynes Village. Eventually my mum started to work for the Corporation as well and one of my first memories was of going to the shopping building. So one of our friends, Derek Walker, was the chief architect and we got access to see it before it was open and I just remember it just felt – someone that age – it just felt so different. It was steel and it was glass and it was spacious and it was an indoor street and I remember thinking, 'I haven't seen this before.' And I think that point is where I sort of realised there was something different about Milton Keynes. The other thing, as well, was my mum worked in an inflatable bubble so, again, that was not something I'd ever come across. So I think they were probably my earliest memories.

*Where was this inflatable bubble?*

It was...so, it was probably now where the church is. It was a temporary building for tourist information. It used to, every once in a while, it used to deflate and everyone used to have to run out but...

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*[Break in interview to discuss technical issues]*

*So where did your mum work?*

She worked in...she worked for the Tourist Information and they had a temporary building in an inflatable bubble, roughly around where the church is, the city centre, so... That was a bit weird and it did used to come down occasionally, people used to have to run out, so...*[laughs]*.

*Why did your parents come to Milton Keynes? I know you were saying for the job but how did that happen?*

I think it was...there's a long story with my father but essentially he got out...put forward for a job by Derek Walker. So my dad took a role with...he ran a department called...well, it's...(sorry, I'll have to...mouth's gone now; start again). My dad was put forward for a role with the Development Corporation and he managed the arrivals workers so, at the time of course, there wasn't much infrastructure, there wasn't hospitals, train stations, shopping centre, and people arriving to Milton Keynes kind of didn't know what to do. And he ran the team that looked after these people when they arrived, helped them settle in.

*Tell me a little bit about his story, 'cause it is fascinating.*

Yeah, well my dad was a Catholic priest and met my mum quite late in life and of course, you know, decided that he wanted to marry my mum and of course you can't be a married Catholic priest. So, although it was a massive change for him, it's interesting when I look back to the role that he took with the Corporation because I think that sort of pastoral care was kind of built into his DNA, so it perhaps wasn't as much of a leap, you know, as you may think but...yeah, he'd already had a life before he started his life with, you know, me and my mum, so...*[laughs]*.

00:05:03

*I think it's lovely, isn't it, that story? So yeah, so growing up and sort of watching them, did you realise what they were doing was important, that they were pioneers, did you..?*

I think it's something that, it started to kind of seep into me a little bit. I think initially, you know, you're very young, you're just following your parents round and, you know, following their lead but I think because there was such a lot of change – I mean, it was almost, you look out your window and something was either popping up or, you know, another road was going in. My dad always used to have this thing about...he'd say he'd opened most of the roads in Milton Keynes because he was a great cyclist and as soon as a road was, sort of, looked like it was finished, he used to get on a bike and go straight down and say, "There you go, I've

opened that road." And so that's what it was like all the time, there's just things happening, things popping up and I think, because we were such close friends with Derek Walker as well, we got to see a lot of the stuff behind the scenes that was going on. So yeah, I think, as I got older, I sort of realised that this isn't something that happens every day; you don't build cities from scratch. And I think, you know, a lot of people, they kind of...that worked in the Corporation almost went through a kind of almost bereavement when it all came to an end because it was such a fast-moving, exciting time and that's sort of the environment I was in, really.

*And you went away to university?*

Mm hm.

*What did you study?*

I did structural engineering which was, probably, does somehow tie back to that a little bit because I...again, I worked with Derek for a little bit before I went to university and that's the direction I was recommended to go in. It didn't actually turn out like that; I ended up doing something completely different. But, you know, I went off to Bath for a four-year course and then stayed there. It was only because of work that I came back to Milton Keynes.

*So what is that? What do you..?*

I'm an IT manager, so I work for Volkswagen. So I've been here...three years ago I came back so I had a twenty-year gap and it's certainly changed in that time.

*Tell me about that.*

Yeah it's weird, it's...chatting to one of my friends, I said it's a bit like if you've ever had a dream where maybe you're in your house but your house is in a different location. I get that all the time. I'll be driving down the road and I'll see something I recognise but I don't recognise its context because, you know, in twenty years everything's developed, all the housing's grown, all the roads, the infrastructure's grown. And it kind of, sometimes it makes me...it gives me a little start. I had one of my friends used to live on the Broughton Road, which is just outside Broughton, Milton Keynes Village, and he ended up...his parents ended up leaving that house because it was so remote that basically they had problems with security and what have you. And now it's still there but it's surrounded by, I don't know, thousands...thousands of houses but it's still there and it's kind of really weird when I drive past it. It's really strange.

*Do you find you still have a sense of belonging?*

I think it's kind of coming back. I think, when I first arrived, it was a bit of a shock how much it had changed. It had changed an awful lot. It had become busier, you know, there's more people, there's more cars, there's more going on. It does feel more like a city now and I think I've had to kind of readjust, reset a little bit, but then I'm starting to get the familiarity back again so, for example, one of the things that was really important for me when I grew up was the redways. I lived on the redways, I cycled everywhere, and as a kid I could go anywhere I wanted – I didn't need to be driven anywhere I could just go – and that's becoming important; it's becoming important for my family as well so I sort of...it's those key things which I think of Milton Keynes, those...the grids and the roads and the redways. These are the things that are sort of starting to seep back into my world again.

*You have how many kids?*

Two, two: twelve and nine.

*And what do you hope for their future in Milton Keynes?*

Well I mean, I think, when...you know, when we moved back here, it was a big decision. We had to...we lived in the south-west, we had to sell up, uproot and everything and, you know, take the plunge but I think the thing...when I think about Milton Keynes for them, I think it's a place which has a lot of opportunity. A lot of opportunity to do things, to experience things, you know, it's quite a...it feels very fast-moving, very technology-focussed, which I think is important for them. So I don't know what they're going to end up doing but I think, you know, just putting them in that environment where they have these opportunities is...I think it's a good thing for them.

00:10:18

*And what do you hope for the city, if you like, that your parents were so... [Unclear 00:10:26]...and very big figures actually?*

I think...I mean, I think the city is almost...it's kind of almost a teenager at the moment; it's fifty years but it's sort of, in city years, it's a teenager and I think...I think there's people who live now have a real responsibility. I think, you know, it could go either way and I think what we don't want is an unruly teenager; we want something that's going to evolve but at least try and keep to the ethos that was put in place at the start. I hope it retains its uniqueness. I think it needs to mature. I think it need...it does need that bit of organic growth, that sort of unexpected growth and things popping up but I think the...you know, we should really try and keep to the principles that were put in place because I think that's what's made it successful.

*Anybody think of anything else?*

*We could do the, what...fifty years thing: what, in the next fifty years, what would you like to see? But look at Louise. So, to say what would you like to see in Milton Keynes in the next fifty years.*

I think I'd like Milton Keynes to get the recognition I think it deserves. So I think, in certain groups, you know, it's seen to be a big success – people in the know, if you like – but I think it still has the concrete cow syndrome a little bit, the...you know, and I think that's really unfair and I'm hoping that as it does grow and as it becomes more important, that perhaps it'll get the recognition it deserves.

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END OF INTERVIEW