

## **MK People's Story Transcript**

**Name:** Rosemary Hill

**Date of Birth:** 1952

**Date of Interview:** 22/2/2018

**Interviewed by:** Victoria Holton

**Duration:** 00:19:27

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*So what we'll do is, I'll say who I am and then you just give us your name and your year of birth, OK? Let me know when you're ready, Dave.*

*This is Victoria Holton, the date today is 22 of February 2018 and I'm interviewing*

Rosemary Hill and the date of my birth is 1952.

*Hi, Rosemary, can you please tell us when you came to Milton Keynes?*

I came to Milton Keynes in 1989 to work for the BBC as a producer and director at the Open University. I had been a teacher, but I decided that I wanted to work in the media. So I'd worked in radio, Leicester Sound and Radio Leicester and I'd got some experience in television but not a great deal. But I applied for a job and I got a job at the BBC because they were making a series of programmes about the national curriculum, which was about to come in in 1989 and they wanted a teacher who obviously knew about and was interested in education. And they were going to train me as a filmmaker. In actual fact, they threw me right in at the deep end. I just shadowed one producer for one programme and then they said: "Right, here's your budget, go away and make the programme. So it was very much "sink or swim". So I said: "When you gonna train me?" And they said: "In a year's time, when you know all the right questions to ask."

*OK, so on your arrival to Milton Keynes, what was your sort of first impression of the place?*

I have to admit; I didn't like it. I thought it was...

*Right, can I just stop you there? It's my fault, I should say. Can you try and introduce it as a sentence cos we are going to cut me out?*

OK, that's what I used to do. No I always used to do that as well.

*So, is that OK? Can you give me your first impressions?*

When I first came to Milton Keynes, I have to admit I didn't like it very much. I thought it was a weird place. To borrow a phrase from Raymond Chandler, I thought it had all the charm of a paper cup. I thought it was lacking in any kind of excitement, I didn't find anything going on in the arts, particularly, I thought the road system was weird, I just thought everything about it was weird, because I'd come from London, and before that Leicester. And I thought OK, the job's gonna be interesting, but it's going to take me a while to get used to Milton Keynes. After I'd moved from an estate into a village just outside Milton Keynes, I found more of a community. I am not saying there is no community, communities on estates, but I didn't find it on my particular one. And then, I also tried to find things that were going on, and I found lots of pockets of theatrical activity, and lots of other things going on. And then I started to feel part of Milton Keynes and that's when I really grew to like it. So it took me probably several years to grow to like Milton Keynes.

*So you can't? So shall we talk about that next? Shall we talk about the opening of the Milton Theatre?*

The theatre opened in October 1999 and I remember being very, very, very excited about it. I was thinking of leaving the BBC and going freelance, so that I could not only do media work, but also so that I could follow my first love which was theatre, acting, directing, producing. So I knew that also we'd been talking about having a theatre for a long, long time and it seemed to me something we were severely lacking in Milton Keynes. So we were terribly excited about it, so when I was asked codirect *All Change*, which opened the theatre, I mean it was just amazing, and I remember standing on the stage with the co-producer Tony Coe and the stage manager Mags?? And we just sort of pinched ourselves, and said: "Are we really here, and is this really happening?" And when we did the show, I mean, it was incredibly hard work, actually getting in and setting up, and doing the show and actually taking the show down all within twenty-four hours. But I remember it was the most amazing experience. I also played Queen Victoria in the show, and I remember coming on to the front of the stage and saying: "What a charming little red brick town!" talking about Wolverton, and everybody (00:05:00) clapped and so on, cos they recognized I was talking about Wolverton. And it was just amazing, and at the end we got a standing ovation, and everybody was cheering and so on, and I just felt so proud that we'd pulled it off, and that everybody, you know, the place was absolutely packed and that people were really rooting for us all the way through and were so pleased, when we got to the end, that we were there, in this theatre and it felt as if I'd finally arrived, and it was this amazing community.

*And presumably, the critical reviews and things were good, and people were really in Milton Keynes?*

Oh yes, absolutely. People were really keen that we had a theatre and I think people felt really proud that, you know, a community show... there were other shows on as well, but that a community show had opened the theatre. It had a cast of 150, so from... you know, I remember my children were in it and they were sort of five and six, and I think the oldest person was in their eighties... so you know, it really reached the community, and you know obviously, the Living Archive were involved, and Stantonbury, people who worked at Stantonbury. Just... it was just wonderful, the way it was so joined up, and everybody did their bit. And it was the most amazing experience, I mean the theatre always is, but it was... it was a historical moment.

*And what do you feel about the Milton Keynes Theatre moving on from those days to now?*

The theatre is great and I go there a lot, but it's a receiving house, so it does really what's touring, and that's a lot of good stuff, but what I'd really like to see in Milton Keynes alongside Ambassadors Group running Milton Keynes Theatre is a producing house, like the Royal and Derngate, where we would produce new work and its origination would be in Milton Keynes. I think that is something that we must work towards. I mean, I've going on about it for years, people must be sick of me saying it, but I think that is key to theatre and to our cultural offer, really.

*So that's one of the things I think then you'd probably like to change in Milton Keynes, you'd like to bring that in. What other elements of Milton Keynes do you think you'd like to change if you had a magic wand?*

Well, to be political I would like not to see tents in the underpasses. I've been doing quite a lot of work with homeless people, running drama sessions with them to try and boost their confidence and talk to them about their CVs and that kind of thing. But also I'm doing a project at the moment with artist Anna Berry, which is working with homeless people and getting their views on things. I mean when I first came to Milton Keynes, you didn't see any tents. Now I walk past them all the time. I do counselling on a Tuesday evening in Central Milton Keynes and I walk past... each week it seems there is another tent. If I had a magic wand, I would do something about that.

*Now I was thinking, we were talking about the last 50 years of Milton Keynes, so how do you visualise in your eyes the future of Milton Keynes, the next 50 years. How do you see Milton Keynes developing and growing? Do you have an opinion on that?*

Well I think Milton Keynes is wonderful in the sense that it has wonderful, green open spaces, and I think that is something we should be really proud of. It also had a vision that, and I'm gonna go back to the homeless again, it also had a vision of housing for everybody, you know, no matter what their income, and so on. And I think that was a wonderful vision, I mean, I think the early pioneers... it was really quite something, and we must not lose that vision. So obviously, I think we must build more houses, and we've got problems there of green open spaces. But we need to try and find a balance, so as the place grows, that we still have green open spaces. I work in mental health now as well and it's really important to mental health that people can go for walks, that, you know, take their children out and look at nature, and go to parks and see lakes and so on. So all of that is

important as well as the arts. So I think that we have to have that balance of green open spaces and all of that, (00:10:00) as well as obviously, having affordable housing for people.

*So are there any other special memories that you have of Milton Keynes, apart from, obviously the theatre? Are there any special memories that you'd like to share with us?*

Well, lots of memories of working at the Open University, at the BBC. I mean that was an amazing job. I think the Open University is another wonderful place in Milton Keynes which does amazing work. Also working with places, you know, doing the living with the Living Archive, when we put on the World War I plays and you know worked in partnership with lots of people, lots of other arts groups and we put on Nelly and Albert, and two community shows which have been the heart of community plays for I think something like thirty years or so. That was a wonderful memory. Some of the other shows I put on in Milton Keynes. Also, you know, my children were born here. They went to school here. My son is, you know, he thinks that, the world, everything revolves, I mean he's got adventurous but he thinks Milton Keynes is the best place ever because he's a keen footballer so he thinks you know MK Dons... Milton Keynes has got everything that he wants sports wise, and my daughter trained as a dance. She now lives in Brussels. But they both had the most amazing childhoods and teenage years in Milton Keynes with lots for them to do and so on. So yeah, I've got... I've been very happy in Milton Keynes and have got lots of wonderful memories of living here.

*So if I said to you... you were gonna say what Milton Keynes means to me, could you sum that up in something... what would be your soundbite of what Milton Keynes means to you.*

Milton Keynes means to me opportunity.

*That's a great one liner. Have you got any questions you'd like to ask, Mel?*

*I think we sort of covered the arts, I think what we asked other people, I mean, you know, more independent venues in Milton Keynes not just for drama, but for music, so maybe something on those lines.*

*So, if you'd still address it to me. What would you like to see in Milton Keynes, apart from the corporate stuff that we all know about?*

What I'd like to see in Milton Keynes, I've mentioned the theatre and an independent venue, a producing house, but also a place for music. I know the gallery are going to have a special place which will have a place for music... a performing space for music, and dance and theatre. But I would like to see everything that goes around that with an independent place for the arts, so you get independent coffee shops and independent outlets and so on, because the centre, it's really difficult for any independent retailer to survive. They're all chains and so on. We need a bit more quirkiness, I think, in the centre. We're getting it in certain places outside of Milton Keynes, I mean Stony Stratford, and Wolverton, and Olney is a bit further out. I mean yes we need sort of independent social enterprise businesses as well. So I'd like to see more of that developing. You know, I think that would also do a great deal for our reputation, because people do see it as a bit of, a sort of, you know, a chain, corporate sort of place. And actually it's not, but we need more of that.

*Yeah agreed, agreed.*

*I think we've got some nice stuff there.*

*Is there anything you'd like to add?*

*If you went back fifty years, and you were designing Milton Keynes (unclear) You got now, is there anything that you would change to what they provided for?*

*You can direct your answer to me.*

Oh, OK. If I were thinking about building Milton Keynes fifty years ago, I would have included... I know they did try with the estates to build places which were little communities. And I think, you know, they have succeeded in many, many areas, but I think I would have done more of that. And also, going back to the theatre, I would have straightaway had a theatre and, you know, more art centres. I just think you know, (00:15:00) people keep saying: "Oh, let's cut the arts, the arts, we can't afford the arts, the arts are an add-on." But actually, the arts are part of the solution, you know. There's been a recent publication, all-parliamentary committee that

have published you know the effect the arts have on people's health, and it's only good. And also, the arts bring money into the whole place. So you know, the creative industries, I'm not sure of the exact figures, but the last time I looked, a few years ago, it was something like 72 billion that was brought in the economy, and in the south-east, one in five jobs was in the creative industries. So I would like to see Milton Keynes lead that, really and be a frontrunner. And I think we could.

*Great. 92 billion now and it's one in eleven jobs UK-wide.*

*I have a question. You mentioned you lived in London and in Leicester. So what kept you here?*

The reason I stayed in Milton Keynes is obviously the job when I first came, cos I was in that job for 12 years. But then my husband who is an intellectual property lawyer, he worked in London, but wanted not to commute and he found a job in Milton Keynes and enjoys his job, and then my children went to school in Milton Keynes and now they've flown the nest but we are still very attached to Milton Keynes, because we feel very at home here, you know, we've been here since 1989, and we feel, you know, we've got a nice house in a nice village. We've got a nice community of people that we work with, we've got friends. I'll probably stay here until I'm carried out in a box, so, I can't see myself moving now.

*You're not the first one to say that!*

*Anyway you mentioned, you know, that when you first arrived here it was a bit difficult, but you found your friends and a community? In terms of the Milton Keynes, is there any changes or anything that you sense of belonging here?*

I feel obviously very much at home in my village, which is just outside Milton Keynes. I feel also that I am very much connected to other communities that I can quickly get to. Not just in Central Milton Keynes, like Wolverton, New Bradwell, Stony Stratford and so on. I would like to feel that there was perhaps more connection with all these different communities, and again, I go back to the arts, I think the arts do that, you know. They look at different estates; they bring people together. Living Archive does that all the time, looking at the history, bringing communities together. You know I can't overemphasise how important that is to people because it is, you know, what makes us human. We're naturally social beings. So ok, we've all got our computers now, we're all on line and so on, but there's nothing to beat face to face with people.

*Lovely, it's not gonna be in the film, but where do you live, Haversham?*

Cosgrove.

*Ah so it's a bit further out, then?*

No, it's only about 10 minutes on the road.

[Indistinct chatter, not related to the topic]

So well, thank you very much.