

MK People's Story Transcript

Name: Ruel DaCosta

Can you just say your name and how long you've lived in Milton Keynes for?

My name's Ruel DaCosta and I've lived in Milton Keynes for thirty-two years.

Do you just want to say a little bit about where we are and why it's important to you?

Yep. So today we're here in Fishermead. This is important to me because I grew up here. It's where my first house was. My mum still lives just over the road there and this is where I learnt and started all of my parkour movements.

And what is it, particularly about Fishermead, that got you into doing parkour?

Fishermead is like a condensed version of a city. There's lots of old-looking walls and bricks, whereas the rest of the city can be quite futuristic. Fishermead's very much brickery and walls that are quite low so it's perfect for starting out in free running.

What got you into free running in the first place?

I got into free running because, I think, mostly seeing things like 'The Matrix' and 'Running On Walls.' So I started running on walls over friend's heads and sort of became like a thing that I used to do. I think we all used to do free running as a kid, jumping and climbing on walls. I think everyone does that. It only really become free running after seeing a TV programme, which was 'Jump Britain' or 'Jump London' and then it, sort of, put a name to what we was already doing. So then it became free running.

Were you doing it just on your own or were you with a group of friends that were trying it out?

So starting out I had my two best friends, which was James and Damien and we literally just went round Milton Keynes together, just ... like I say, just kind of climbing on everything and jumping off everything. Not really having, sort of, directive path and then, when it became free running, we then decided we'd meet up with some friends and made some new friends and just sort of made ... created a sort of team and then went round together as a team.

Are there any particular aspects of the area where we are now that ... are there any particular areas of where we are now that, sort of, helped you develop your free running?

Around here I've ... there's, obviously, all the little walls. Because they are small they're nice and easy to work with. There's a lot of areas you go, particularly like in London, the walls are quite high so they're never very good to start off. So most of

the areas around here with the small walls, just ... you know, a nice route to the shop would have been walk along a little wall that might have been so high. So these areas are all really, really important for my development in parkour running and starting out.

Can you just say a bit about what you did over the other side of the trees and also what you were doing ...

Which bit?

I thought when you said just over there you ...

Like climbing trees?

Yeah, climbing the trees or did you climb any of the walls over ...

Yeah. You mean on my way to the shop type-thing?

Yeah.

Ok, yeah. So, on the way to the shops ... when I would go with my mum to the shops ... I would often ... we'd walk down this strip all the way to the shops and along that way I would always find some kind of little wall to jump off. It was never just a straight path to the shop. It was always jump on a wall, climb on this, climb up a tree on the way, come back down again and these particular trees behind me ... often remember climbing to the very tops of them and I'd sort of see my mum going to shop. I'd be shouting out the top of the tree, 'Mum. Hi, Mum.' And, obviously, she wasn't particularly happy about that most of the time and she'd have a go at me and tell me to get down.

So what is it that makes Milton Keynes so special for doing parkour free running?

I think Milton Keynes for me is special. Just, obviously, growing up here. There's a lot to do in Milton Keynes but it's ... I don't know. A lot of the sports in Milton Keynes, when I was growing up, were very much football or rugby. So doing parkour in Milton Keynes was quite difficult because there was no one really doing it and it's a new sport. But it's important for me to ... I don't know really. I've lost my train of thought there. I'm trying to think what was actually ...

What makes Milton Keynes a good place to do free running? Or do you want to talk about particular parts of the city ... say, how you've got the old and the new and what ...

Yeah, ok. I think what makes Milton Keynes good for parkour is the different types of areas. So, in some areas you've got a sort of an older-type, like Fishermead can be quite older looking and then you've got the newer estates or the city centre, which looks quite futuristic and that makes it quite a nice contrast for videos and things like that.

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And then what do you look for when you're, sort of, trying to do free running? Do you think you have a different view of Milton Keynes compared to how other people see Milton Keynes?

What we look for in parkour is firstly obstacles to actually jump off, climb on, swing on and kind of use in a different way either, you know, to use it over, cross it, under it.

Are there particular areas of Milton Keynes, perhaps, that are better for parkour or ... I know you said about the old and new aspects of the city so do you like (unclear) walls in the older parts of the city or are you just looking for something interesting in terms of architecture?

So, generally ... generally the older places for ... generally the older places in Milton Keynes are normally better for the actual free running aspects of doing parkour so just the jumping and climbing on things but some of the newer areas are great for the picturesque parts. So, like, as you're looking for a nice shot on a camera, the newer areas and some of these cool buildings that are being built now ... they make really nice videos and nice backdrops to a video. So they're always quite nice places. They're quite important for a video obviously.

Have you got a favourite place that you always come back to in terms of free running?

I think my favourite place to free run is actually in the Milton Keynes Theatre District. We called that our training ground. It's changed a lot now but it is actually still quite nice. Around the back of the Art Gallery was a really cool area to train in. It looks great for videos. There was, like, an underpass there, that you could climb up on to that. There was big walls to climb on. So for me that was what we used to call our training ground. So all the way there we'd run ... free running from here to there and then round the back of the Xscape and all those areas are really good for free running.

Do you think as a free runner that you have a different view of Milton Keynes compared to people that are just walking round the city or driving round the city?

Yeah. As a free runner we definitely have a completely different view to what most people see the world as. We call it our parkour view or parkour vision. So we would have like a ... you may see just a simple wall that you could maybe sit on but we would use that wall to flip off or to jump off or to land on or to do a cartwheel on or something like that. So we use the world or the whole environment completely different to how normal people use it. So what our parkour vision would be is you use it this way, we use it in several different ways.

Often people can think that we damage property or, you know, we'll jump on something and we're trying to sort of ... criminal damage and things like that but actually we have more respect for the stuff we have than most people. Most people just see it and don't care about it. We actually care about and we'll actually go to a place and look after a place because we like that place and we want to be able to use it for longer.

So when you started out as a kid doing free running did you, sort of, see yourself as a free runner at that time? Was it a natural thing?

It was definitely a natural progression ... free running. So, free running for me was definitely a natural progression. I would never have said when I was a kid that I'm gonna be a free runner. There wasn't even free running about and to see it as something to do as a career was definitely not an option. So I kind of fell into the career of being a free runner, if you like. Just naturally evolving from what I would normally do as a kid to teaching it and it becoming a sport, I suppose.

What does it feel like when you're free running?

When I'm free running it kind of says it in the name. Free running ... I feel free. Some people go to a place to meditate or they'll sit down. They think meditation is only to be done when you're sitting still or in some sort of stretching yoga pose. For me meditation is movement and when I'm free running my mind is clear and I'm focused on what I'm doing and there's only what I'm doing in my mind. So, therefore, there's no place for what I might have to do later on or any other stresses in my life. So, for me, free running is the ultimate freedom of my mind.

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Do you look for certain patterns in bricks or is it more to do with, like, setting up shots?

For me ... to be honest, for me it's not really the pattern of the bricks. I suppose that would be for the person who's filming. For me it's just the shape of the bricks. Like, there's the height of them to be honest. I'd say, in terms of architecture, we look for more the shape of a structure rather than what the actual structure looks like. On camera that's quite important so when we're doing, like, a filming. It's quite important to have a nice, picturesque background or something like that but in terms of when we're training on it we want to have a nice shape or structure that we can actually use in many different ways rather than just having one plane on that piece of apparatus. You want to have several planes and several things to be able to do on that piece of apparatus.

Do you think with how Milton Keynes is developing and changing ... do you think it's only going to make free running more exciting?

Do we think Milton Keynes, as it's developing, is going to be better for free running or not?

Obviously, you've lived here thirty-two years so do you think your approach to how you use the space has changed?

I think Milton Keynes, as it develops, in many ways is actually going to get better for parkour. Mainly because the parks have changed so we had, like, a place ... a time ... where the parks were becoming sort of ... obviously, there's futuristic-type parks where they were spinning parks. We had lots of spinning things on them and lots of

roundabouts and stuff like that. Now they're starting to put more climbing apparatus in the parks and just massive block boulders and things like that. That's perfect for what we like to do, so just using ... so the parks are just really amazing for that kind of thing.

The landscape itself has always ... always changing ... and that's perfect for any free runner because you never want something to just stay the same. It's quite nice when you see a change and you might think you've just put this little structure here and it's nothing but then when we look at it we see it ... 'Oh, look! Now we can do this.' And it kind of opens up a whole new doorway for us so change is always good although you do miss the old but change is always nice because it's just something new to do.

Can you just say about the ...

The video?

I don't know if you want to introduce her?

Yeah, I can do. This is Jada, my daughter. She's eight years old.

Has Jada become involved in ... is Jada involved in doing free running as well?

Jada's very much involved in doing parkour with me. We recently done a video, that went viral, around Milton Keynes. Using all of my old spots of where I grew up and it went really good. She's very much involved. She teaches classes. She's actually taught her own class for charity. Managed to raise £100 for that. So, yeah, she's very much ... although she has a choice but it's in her blood anyway.

What do you like about doing it?

Jada: I like jumping around the place and ... I like jumping around the place.

Is there a particular area of Milton Keynes you really like jumping around?

Jada: No.

You don't have a favourite spot?

Well, you're favourite spot was probably here, where you did your video ... down there. So you can say my favourite spot is Fishermead.

Jada: My favourite spot is Fishermead.

I don't know if you want to say what your favourite move is and what you like doing the most when you're ...?

You like doing ... I'll just sort of prep her ... well, you like doing cartwheels and roundoffs and then you're learning backtop. So you could say, 'My favourite move is a cartwheel and a roundoff and I'm learning backtops.' Reckon you could say that? No, ok. Well, do your best. Ready?

00:15:00

Jada: I like doing cartwheels and roundoffs and I'm learning to do a backtop.

Is she aware of the sort of the space that she's using ... I don't know ...

Probably not. She's actually only been out a very few times. Most of her stuff's done in my gym to be fair.

Shall we get some shots ... just say where we are and why this bit of the street's important.

So, we're here on Fishermead. My mum's house is over there. This is where I used to walk to the shops and this bit's important to me because this is literally ... these walls would be the walls I would literally run on every time we'd go to the shops and this poor lady's house ... I used to sort of run off the walls and run on the wall and her house and then jump back to the walls here, all the time, going to the shops. I feel sorry for this lady. Hopefully, she's forgiven me. But, yeah ... this area here is particularly important. There used to be a tree here actually. We used to swing on the tree as well when we used to come here. It's been cut down now.

Did this feature in the new, recent video that we ...?

This bit features in our video of me and Jada so we did a cat grab from this wall to this one. I think this was quite important to put this area in to that video because, obviously, it's a new generation. She's my child and this is where I started and this is where her first video was so it's quite important.

So how it came into being.

So I set up the Paramount Parkour gym because Milton Keynes, the way it was, there wasn't enough things to use in one simple area. So there would be great places but they'd be kind of spread around Milton Keynes. So we used this as a kind of condense all those areas into one place. There's never been a very good bar section so something to swing on, around Milton Keynes either. So adding in the bars into this gym and, obviously, allowed us to add in other things like the angled walls and things like that.

So is this a sort of unique offering for Milton Keynes or even for the country?

Yeah. This is definitely ... this is definitely a unique thing. Parkour, in itself, is quite a new sport and this was the first gym in the UK to open. So, obviously, there wasn't many of this kind around. There's now a few more but this is the only one within a fifty-mile radius of Milton Keynes.

Is there anything in terms of the equipment that you've sort of tried to replicate from, sort of, things that you see out in Milton Keynes?

It is but not just ... not really in Milton Keynes. It's just walls in general. But, yeah,

we try to replicate Milton Keynes and every city within one area. So we just ... using walls and different levels of walls so try not to have everything, sort of, as one square level. Lots of different levels and lots of different sizes and shapes to try to create an interesting way of training and interesting amount of obstacles, to be able to do it, I suppose.

So was there a need for this gym in terms of ... was there a sort of demand?

Yeah. There was definitely a high demand. In starting parkour ... I started parkour about fifteen/sixteen years ago and then, from there, I started teaching it about eleven years ago. Our classes quickly grew from just doing once a week, we then ended up doing twice a week and then we just really built up and now we have over four hundred members within this little gym here. So there's definitely a huge demand for this gym and we're looking to expand still further.

Do most of the people come from Milton Keynes that are, sort of, members of the gym?

Yeah. A lot of our members ... I'd actually say probably 40% of our members, maybe even 50%, come from outside of Milton Keynes. So we actually haven't hit the whole Milton Keynes market yet. We have people that travel in as far as Oxford just to come and use this space because there isn't anything around near them. Northampton way, we've got several people. Bedford ... so it's actually drawing people to Milton Keynes rather than just the Milton Keynes people.

Based on the things that people get to learn while they're here ... do they go and get the opportunity to go out into the city and try for themselves?

Once people have learnt their tricks and their skills within this safe environment. We've got a nice soft floor, we've got the coaches teaching them. We've got people supporting them. Then people can then take it upon themselves to use the actual, real, urban landscapes of Milton Keynes or of their own local towns and their own local villages, which is what tends to happen. So they'll learn their skills here, perfect them here, then go outside and now they know they can do them in a much more safer way really.

So do you think from here you've also, sort of, developed ... sort of changed people's perception of how they view their environment from just coming to parkour?

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I think people's perception has definitely changed due to joining in parkour. From coming to this gym you suddenly see that, actually, what we've got here is only just a few walls and a few bits to stand on and then you go outside and think, 'Oh, it's the same.' So then you can, sort of, replicate what you've done inside outside. So it is just the same as outside. It's just ... you use things differently.

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End of Interview

