

Leon Trimble

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Interviewer: Katy Wade

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R

00:00 I So Leon can you tell me about the first members of your family that came to Sparkbrook?

00:06 R So my great grandmother lived in Brighton Road on the corner of Brighton Road and Kingswood Road and I know that my great great grandmother was in that house to some extent as well. I don't think it was her house, I think she was just living with her children, and my mum was born into that house. My grandmother took it over after great grandmother moved to Redditch, so I remember going there, I don't remember a lot about it. My dad was from Hall Green and his family got there, maybe, I don't know, maybe wartimeish, after the war and they both moved to Sparkbrook together in the early 70's, I think they both lived in Coventry for a little bit and then they moved back to Sparkbrook and I think their first place together, but then they lived in Farm Road where I was born in 74.

01:25 I Can you describe the house on Farm Road?

01:27 R Not at all because I was only one when we left there and moved to Gladstone Road. We really didn't move very far like in Gladstone Road we lived at number 36 and then we moved to number 34 when I was about thirteen which was next door, so we'd moved from round the corner and then to next door, so we didn't go that far. My mum's still the other side of the park now, so only a couple of corners away from that, and strangely enough my dad's back in Brighton Road, so where it all began.

02:06 I Did you visit your grandma very much when you were little?

02:08 R Yea quite a lot. She might have come to visit us more actually. She was quite an interesting woman, I suppose she was quite strong, although she was quite depressive, but she would come and pick us up and she had a holiday caravan at Pershore so we spent quite a lot of time in the country and then when she retired and sold that house, in the early eighties, and she moved to Hopwood near Barnt Green, that's out towards Redditch again, I think originally we were from Worcester that way, so they'd sort of moved out eventually. So she would come and visit us and we'd spend a lot of time in the country, but in terms of Sparkbrook at that house, it was, I did spend a lot of time there but she'd come and visit us more I think in Gladstone Road.

- 03:11 I Can you tell me a bit about your mum and your dad?
- 03:14 R Yea, so my mum and dad were working class. My dad was the son of, my granddad worked in, he was an engineer and a mechanic and he had his own garage that used to repair the vehicles at the airport. Erm and it didn't last forever because when I remember him working my granddad, he worked for factories, like I think he worked for Lucas Engineer for a while, and then he ended up working for Mars, because I remember he used to bring out lots of chocolate to us because I think Lucas went down or disappeared eventually as manufacturing kind of went out of the city. And so my dad was a mechanic as well, he followed in his footsteps, he was quite good at that technical kind of stuff.
- 04:16 R My grandmother, I remember her being a waitress, I think she worked on the QE2 at some point, so I remember my mum and her would go out, obviously my mum was busy looking after us and she ended up going into nursing after we got a bit older, but she used to do waitressing as well. They'd go out on jobs together, they'd go and do Cheltenham, gold cup and stuff and they'd come back with big piles of cheese and that kind of stuff and we'd all be like kind of quite excited because we obviously missed my mum because she was away a lot and she'd always bring back prizes wrapped in tissue or in a pinny or whatever.
- 05:06 R So they were working class but they both kind of dropped out a little bit, they both almost did a university education but got into the music scene in the 60's in Birmingham and decided to kind of lunch out the kind of working class thing a bit because I think they were probably quite intelligent, more than the kind of stuff they were destined for, so they dropped out a bit. So they met each other through the kind of Moseley hippy scene, you they kind of aspired to the kind of more Moseley kind of thing. Although they're still living in Sparkbrook on the Brighton Road, pretty close to Moseley, it's at the bottom half, but yea so they got through that and there was a lot of kind of you know people who would kind of come out of society a little bit, they were quite intelligent, quite nice and they used to hang around quite a lot with us when we were young. And so they were kind of like minded and we were quite free as children, kind of slightly wild compared to some of our friends. Like we had friends, we went to an English Martyr school, so we had a lot of friends in the Irish community and they could be quite strict Catholics. We weren't necessarily, we didn't really believe in god, we were told we could believe in something if we wanted, but our parents didn't believe in that so we kind of had a belief in freedom from those rather than a belief in anything else, more than god or the work ethic and the kind of Sparkbrook kind of sort of thing that you get through the Irish and Asian community, it's almost like different in that respect probably.
- 06:58 I Can you tell me a bit about your first memories of your house particularly?

07:03 R I remember my mum, I think this is my earliest memory. We lived in a flat and when we moved next door we lived in a flat, so it was a housing association, so it was very cheap. My mum is still in that housing association, so she's a long term tenant and you know I think you get protected rent price so she pays hardly anything for her home, she's got a house now. But I remember it was a flat and my mum used to hang the washing above the bath in the winter and I remember my mum hanging the washing above the bath and kind of balancing on bath and telling me that I was gonna have a little brother or sister, so that was my first ever memory remembering my sister or news of my potential sister.

07:57 I Can you tell me about any of your neighbours when you were younger?

08:03 R Yea they had, looking towards the Stratford Road and Gladstone Road because we could see it from the fire escape, we could see the Angel Pub and behind us we had there were derelict houses that were great to play in. On the left hand side we had an Asian family, I think that was an housing association thing as well and they would change every couple of years, every year or something and I remember they didn't always speak great English but they would invite us in for food and I remember eating apples and the woman asking me, she was I'd say Pakistani, there's a lot of Kashmiri kind of guys in Sparkbrook and she was like apple like? (*Pakistani accent*) and I was quite confused at first as to what she meant ,and on the other side there was a kind of shared garden and I think it was the same housing association, it was called Friendship Housing Association and it's still there, and it was a communal garden and they had a bunch of Irish guys who directly in the upstairs flat, the one we eventually moved into, and they used to keep goats and eventually horses and the left hand house was derelict eventually, and I remember them keeping a horse in there and my mum didn't like it because she likes animals a lot and I think she phoned the RSPCA in the end and they came and took it away. But they had goats and in the kind of derelict house behind, the goats would just roam around and there's pictures of me holding baby goats as a teenager and stuff and they were quite nice. I remember fancying the young niece of the people who lived there. But in Sparkbrook people do keep themselves to themselves, kind of an unspoken thing, you know if you walk down the road in Sparkbrook, people tend to kind of just kind of have that thousand yard stare a bit you know.

10:20 I But my mum was always really friendly with people and still is, you know she always becomes kind of a bit of a centre, she always took in animals, kind of kittens born to someone who didn't particularly want them, we'd always just end up with loads of kittens, so we'd end up finding homes, my mum would find homes, so there's loads of pictures of me with kittens and stuff around and whatever, and I remember different people, a lot of immigrants, Somali people came later, we made some good friends with the Somali ladies who lived downstairs and there were some horrible people at one point who had starved their dogs almost to death and she'd kept some puppies in a drawer

and my mum was really upset, she broke in one day and got these out, she knew there was something wrong and pulled these puppies out of this drawer, one of them had eaten it's baby kind of sister because it was starving, and went to court to kind of talk about these kind of people. So there were some rough people around as well you know. They weren't very nice some of them, but mostly they were kind of cool, the Asian people were really nice. You know to this day my mum gets like parcels of food, rice and samosas and stuff and she doesn't like garlic so she saves it all for me when I go round so it's really nice you know.

11:52 I Can you tell me a bit more about your school?

11:56 R Yea I went to Dolobran School for a year and I don't remember that much about it but my mum didn't like me being there because there were petty rules if you didn't line up straight you didn't get your milk in the morning, so she took me out of there, so that was my first year, and I spent the rest of the time all through junior school at English Martyrs on the Stratford Road and yea it was really very nice. I was a little bit unruly, but I remember you know sort of knocking about with the kids from Sparkhill mainly, one of which was my friend John Mark and it was never just John, I don't think his mom got on with his dad that well who he was named after, so it was always John Mark, which in the kind of Irish, it got shortened to Jomark (*Irish accent*) and he had another sister and brother and so I would go with my sister and we used to hang around pretty much all the time. And yea it kind of centred on the Stratford Road you know in kind of Sparkhill Baths we used to go to a lot and the library was there for the school. We'd both joined Cubs together, me and John Mark. Strangely enough it was from Hall Green so it was right up the Stratford Road and it was, my granddad had run that group for a while, years before which is why my dad had taken me there, and John Mark joined it as well shortly after, so it was the 279 up at Hall Green Church which is where my mum and dad got married as well.

13:40 R School, school was, everybody went to Archbishop Ilsley after English Martyrs and being a non-believer, it didn't matter so much whether we go to that and my mum and dad had noticed I was quite bright and put me in for the eleven plus, so I ended up going away. Everybody went to Archies and sort of started a new life because it was totally not up the Stratford Road or kind of anywhere else and I was travelling to Handsworth every day and going through town, so there was a whole kind of new world opened up to me, hanging around in town at night was you know, I used to hang around the library a lot which is now going. So there was sort of the Stratford Road the other way sort of opened up to me going into town at eight o'clock in a morning, it was a whole new world because they were kind of people who had office jobs, who I suddenly was traveling with to commute to a school when they were going to work, so that was kind of joining the hustle and bustle of kind of everyday adult life at eleven, so it kind of changed quite a lot.

- 15:02 I Can you tell me a bit about what you did when you were a teenager?
- 15:06 R As a teenager I got kicked out of Handsworth Grammar School for being fairly unruly, maybe because I was, I'd almost got kicked out of the school before, so I didn't go through town as much anymore, I went the other way to Moseley School and I used to wag it a lot, I wasn't happy there because I'd got good friends at the other school which I kind of kept and I used to hang around Sparkhill Park at lunchtime and kind of hang around and I got more into music and stuff and sort of introverted a little bit, so I was kind of educating myself, I used to read a lot and I got into kind of dungeons and dragons and fantasy stuff and I'd start painting miniatures and be more creative with my own thing, and it was weird because I never went to an art lesson once after I'd been kicked out of grammar school but I started being more creative myself, mainly because it was the lesson where they didn't notice if I was there or not you know. I didn't do a sport lesson after either so I think that's why I'm starting to run again these days.
- 16:18 R But I used to still hang around with my mates from Handsworth Grammar and we started going to gigs together a bit later on, and we'd kind of hang around the, I become a bit of a heavy metal fan and kind of got into Napalm Death which were from Sparkbrook actually, they lived at Sparkbrook so it was quite you know my idols would be on the bus because like Mick Harris the drummer would be on the number 2 and I'd be wow that's so amazing and yes I got more into music and creative stuff and I started going to nightclubs and getting into that kind of scene. And one thing that was nice about Moseley was there were girls there so I kind of gained a bit of confidence with girls and stuff and ended up, I was a bit different so I was kind of apart from the other kids but I was quite confident anyway, and I stood my ground, you know like the rockers who were there didn't kind of show it until they were much kind of older, but I was like straight away like well screw you then and I had my little kind of Iron Maiden badges all over my jacket and stuff and I'd, you know the kids were like what the hell is this and I probably got a bit bullied for it at first but eventually they kind of accepted me for it and when they all had parties and stuff when that sort of thing started when everyone was sort of seventeen and stuff, they'd always invite me, so you know I kind of started meeting girls and eventually I met a girl from, who went to Rose Hill which is Handsworth Grammar School for girls over in Handsworth, and she was half Asian so maybe that was the Sparkbrook influence, and her dad was Muslim and her mom was a Jehovah Witness so she was kind of slightly alien as well so we were two kind of slightly alien kids and we got a flat together when we were seventeen, Traff Road in Moseley and it didn't last more than six months because we were too young to be kind of living together, we had some fun though, we had some mad parties. I kind of got stoned all the time.
- 18:42 R And I met, I started going to Hall Green College, so I've done pretty much

every education establishment on the Stratford Road really, but I got A Levels there and I met some other friends and I met a girl, just from the heavy metal scene from Edwards, and kind of she lived in Hall Green so I was going up just past Hall Green Church, so kind of all up and down and she went away to Southampton so we split up eventually, but I hitched the whole thing, which the Stratford Road turns into whatever B road it is and goes all the way down to the south coast so, I hitched it a couple of times. So I've done like the Stratford Road, I should do the other way, I should do a road trip from beginning to, it ends up in Manchester or does it start in Manchester? It's a big long road so that's a project waiting to happen. So that was teenage years kind of and then by the time I was about twenty one all my friends had gone to uni and I had just about got my A Levels and I decided to go to uni, so that's teenage years I guess.

19:59 I Can you just tell me a bit about what you studied at Hall Green College?

20:03 R I studied, when I was at Moseley School I didn't try and I missed a lot of art lessons, I kind of lunched it out and I had to take GCSE's so I chose all the ones that had no coursework whatsoever, and that was maths, physics, chemistry and biology and I had to do English, that's my five subjects and I passed, I was kind of clever enough to get them anyway, so I went to Hall Green and they put me on a course that was meant for people who had failed their A Levels and were doing an access course to university, and they were like yea you'll get funding. I hadn't done my A Levels at this point, I went to Cadbury College for like a term and I didn't get on, I was living in the flat at that time and I was probably just sort of partying too much, you know didn't really give a shit about keeping it up and getting in there so they kind of treated me like I'd done my A Levels and I started this foundation course and it was just too advanced and it was engineering, the kind of science I was into was biochemistry so there was a bit of it which I passed with flying colours, but when it got to the physics stuff I found it hard to keep my attention.

21:22 R So I went back and did A Levels and met some good friends who I've lost touch with a bit now, one of them went to live in Southampton, I think he was a Greek Cypriot and ended up running his dad's chip shop in Acocks Green and then I had another friend who he's a mad tramp now, he was from Moseley and you see him walking around with this big beard and I don't know, he was mad. We used to go on some mad skirmishes together at the time, but he's properly mad now, like most of the general public would avoid him and people have tried to engage with him since, but it never happened. John McCarren crazy. But we all supported each other quite well, we all got our A Levels through it and it was quite a nice time, I'd got my girlfriend in Hall Green and we were quite a close knit bunch of friends. Her sister, we used to go raving in town, we got into kind of dance music around that point, more than kind of rock. It was all a bit of a blur all that kind of oasis time. We'd go to Edwards on a Friday and kind of get drunk and kind of is it The Three Horse Shoes across the road from Hall Green College? We went there

quite a lot, but we supported each other, we all got our A Levels, yea so and it was all the sciences again so yea it was quite a nice time.

23:01 I Can you tell me what you did after the college?

23:05 R After the college, they weren't great results. We got our A Levels but I didn't get the grades I wanted to go to get to Sussex, so I got offered an access course to go to Chichester, and Chichester was totally different from Birmingham. You could walk across it in half an hour and I was sort of walking home one night thinking about this is daft and whatever and I realised I hadn't looked round once in a whole half an hour or anything. I'd sort of been in a whole dream and I was like wow this just isn't Birmingham is it you know like, you keep your wits about you when you're in Sparkbrook and wherever you are. It was quite an eye opener.

23:50 R And it was to go to Sussex University and I met a bunch of artists who were painting in the sixth form common room there, totally fell in love with one of them actually, started hanging around with her and it weren't the kind of science, I was looking for some sort of creativity again, and it was to go to Sussex who were kind have been linked with the Wellcome Trust and all that, so GlaxoSmithKline and bit pharmaceutical companies and it all looked very uncreative and whatever you know and this artists just doing some amazing stuff off their own back. They were at the Bognor Regis Art School, so I was like wow, erm kind of dropped out of the course but decided I was gonna, I kind of lolled and just went back to Birmingham and decided I'd go to Brighton anyway because everyone was at Sussex. I knew a few people, I knew a few people from Birmingham who were there. I went and hung around in Brighton for a while, sleeping on the floors of some of the people I knew in East Slope on Sussex Campus to start with. I don't know how much they kind of wanted me there, but they didn't mind, they were pretty cool. I found a nice house full of crazy people in Brighton and went to live in Brighton for a few years. I did another course whilst I was there, a multimedia course, got into the kind of digital creative side, the sort of technical side of stuff and that kind of I started, it was the whole kind of whole cyber thing that was happening in art and music and I got into techno sort of computers, had made an impression on me, I started to find that I could be really creative with them, so I did a quick multimedia course and sort of met some people putting on clubs, started flyer for other clubs and getting into that whole kind of music scene, organising that sort of party and whatever.

26:05 I What did you do then?

26:07 R Then I probably had enough of Brighton and partying too much, came back to Birmingham and with the kind of new found skills I lived at my dad's for a little bit but he was just working a lot and he'd kind of come home and drink and we weren't getting on so I moved in with my mum back to Gladstone

Road and stayed there probably for another eight years or something, and got a job at the cricket ground in corporate hospitality company doing web design. I was an in-house web designer, so you know I kind of started earning money and I'd got this passion for creating, doing it for a job and started to play with video cameras and stuff I'd learnt in college and filming stuff and I found, I started buying music and VJ equipment and vjing on computer rather than on actual records, I'd actually bought some record decks but I didn't use them, I ended up carrying whole desktop pc's into the Bulls Head in Moseley, and people use to look at me, what are you doing with that? I was like the first VJ programmer had come out and I was like I could be a VJ now because I know what I'm doing and I'd got quite a large music collection because you could suddenly download stuff like MP3's, there was a program called Soul Seek I remember, no Audio Galaxy.

27:56 R Audio Galaxy was cool because you could set it off to download and then you could go to work and you could check the webpage and it would tell you how much had downloaded during the day, so I'd get quite excited about like what I'd come home to at night and so I was quite into that sort of thing. So it was quite fun, I was you know kind of starting to perform in public a little bit and use this digital technology to do their websites and stuff and then I found a VJ program, and the VJ program was Resolume and it was everything suddenly came together, all of the sort of rhythms and stuff I was playing with the vjing and the kind of animation stuff I was doing in my spare time, the video work, the design skills all sort of came together and you could do it all live rather than having to render it and make film, that you've got one piece of work you could just sort of do it live, so that kind of happened for me and I kind of reached the creative limit at the cricket ground job and resigned and decided to make a go at being a VJ and yea.

29:17 I When you moved back to Birmingham, was there any noticeable changes in the Sparkbrook area that you saw from when you left?

29:25 R No I don't think Sparkbrook has changed really, I can't see from walking up Ladypool Road in the 70's with my mum, it's pretty much the same. You know there was a little toy shop. There used to be an English butchers, there's not many English shops there anymore, but we didn't go to that many, we'd use the butchers and maybe the toy shop, but like Uncles Home Stores, that's been there ever since and is still there now. I think the Irish have kind of all got a bit more wealthy and moved on, there aren't that many Irish anymore, they kind of moved to Acocks Green and if they're all going to Archie's school and stuff, it kind of moved out and the Asians crept up the Stratford Road towards Hall Green as well so everybody kept breeding and moving out really. The Somalis came in and replaced the kind of poor Asian shops, the kind of markets for 50p shops and stuff for the less well-off people who had just arrived. So it's kind of an epicentre like that, people land in Sparkbrook and sort of social mobility bomb, so the sort of the epicentre of the explosion of people coming in and moving out and if you cut a slice

through Sparkbrook like a tree grade, you can see the ages of it kind of coming out. But it still feels the same, you know people get scared "oh you live in Sparkbrook, oh you want to watch it." And I've said before, there are rough characters but it's pretty safe really, I know how to do the sours and the odd stare walking down the road and people leave you alone and whatever but you know, hardly ever had that much trouble more than anywhere else, so.

31:29 I Did you ever experience any political tensions because obviously you were around when there was quite a lot going on?

31:37 R Erm occasionally, there was a big family across the road from us in Gladstone Road who were kind of doing dodgy things, like kind of changing car plates outside the house, and kind of carrying guns in occasionally and stuff, they looked like kind of people you wouldn't mess with, and you know the other end of Gladstone Road they'd be kind of Asian people who might be doing the same there have been occasions when they've sort of clashed and made a lot of noise, but I never really saw any actual kind of violence, so you know it never really kicked off, like I know Handsworth off and I was at school the day that Handsworth riots happened, I was too young to really kind of take in what it meant and it meant that we went home early so we were all quite pleased really and we didn't see anything even though we were right in the heart of it, I think they'd pre-empted it or it kicked off at another part of town and it hadn't spread, but we just sort of went home and we missed it but Sparkbrook never seemed to do that, you know people tend to get on, so no not really.

32:54 R There's a little bit of kind of, there was some stuff at Moseley I remember, white kids from areas like Sparkhill and wherever they kind of clashed with some of the Asian kids in there and there was trouble between, they'd bring their uncles and stuff down and I saw a couple of ugly things happen, but I was always outside of that you know. I remember them asking me if I wanted to kind of join the fight and you know do you want to come give us some backup, I was like no I'm alright and then the Asian kids knew that I was slightly different as well so I remember one kid, he was kind of mates with the other kids, he was gentle, didn't really want to fight, but because he was more mates with them he got a good kicking one day I saw and it was quite horrible but I was always sort of slightly different anyway on the edge, I had long hair and kind of probably flowy shirts and stuff at the time, I just didn't kind of look like I was interested, and so they both left me alone. I was like the geek. I got a bit punky later on, maybe it was a reaction to kind of maybe so people would leave me alone a little bit more, you know, but yea I've never really had that much tension because I never got involved with that, it was always a little bit stupid for me so I know that people do but I think it was more just poverty really, you know being poor and letting off steam and blaming someone for their own situation even though they're in the same one anyway, so no nothing too bad really.

34:40 I Did you ever go to any of the gigs at the Mermaid or the Angel that happened as you were into that scene?

34:45 R Totally missed it. I was totally too young by a couple of years. I've been looking at the Birmingham Music Archive and seeing a list of people that played there, quite amazing, and there's a band who are still going today Omnia Opera, like the psychedelic rock band who have got members of Hawkwind playing with them and I did visuals for them in Malvern, they're called Techno DJ Neil. So Neil invited me to it because he's the drummer, there aren't many people who know, some people do actually but maybe more now, maybe the day of the hay day techno scene, they didn't know he was a prog rock drummer at the same time. I saw that they'd played there recently and that was quite an eye opener, there were some like a legendary American noise band Big Black played there, the guy ended up producing Nirvana, Steven L Beanie and stuff, they had some proper legends and no I missed it, just about missed all that. The Angel maybe, I don't know my mum and Stuart used to drink there, that's my stepdad, they used to drink in there and they had this great jukebox and it was like 10p or 5p a go and it just had really old Irish folk songs and there was a particular one called On the Dole, singing about kind of getting over from Ireland and not being able to find work and being on the dole and it was just joyously singing about "*On the Dole*" (*singing in Irish accent*). And yea there were some crazy characters in there, there was one guy called Les who was always pawning his leg to buy beer and I think my mum and Stuart befriended him a little bit but he turned out to be a penter, a pain in the arse, he couldn't get his leg back for a good reason I think a lot of the time. They sort of helped him get it back a few times and then he'd never pay them back so it didn't last that long but he was crazy, more like a Billy Fury character, it was very Irish in there I used to go into buy KitKats a lot, kind of from the outdoor takeaway bit or whatever.

37:03 I Were there any other places along the road that you went to or remember in particular?

37:11 R The Barrel Organ, the Barrel Organ was in Digbeth and it had been a goth pub since the early 80's and it was quite a legendary, The Birds played there when they were early, and they became a really sort of grunge venue and all the goth and punks and kind of people used to hang out there. First time I ever got drunk was in there I think. My mum gave me some money to buy electric and me and my mate went and bought like two points of cider each and we were drunk, drunk as lords on two pints each (*laughs*) and that was on the way to town just past the coach station, now the Dubliner, so that was pretty legendary. I met some good friends actually there, I met a guy from Five Ways School, King Edwards Five Ways and I just ended up talking to this kid one day at the bar and then bringing tapes the next week and swapping tapes and I was just talking to him on Skype last week and were talking about the new Aphex Twin material that's been released on the internet and he's over

in Japan, he's a manager for Conversational English and American Express Tokyo now, so that's kind of crazy. I met quite a few other interesting people in the Barrel Organ and the girl I ended up living with was probably through that kind of scene, yea. Unfortunately I missed the Mermaid. I don't know, there's never been that much of a scene, there was the Mermaid, I've seen like little bands and stuff like Elvis impersonators in some of the Irish pubs like the Antelope and the Bear and stuff along the way, but I've never kind of frequented those. I always went into town, it would be the Barrel Organ on a Friday night and then go to Edwards and then on a Saturday night I'd go to the Pot of Beer at Aston Triangle and they were all kind of more middle class kids, Cadbury College kind of and then go to the Humming Bird which was more kind of Indian dance music and stuff.

39:43 I So can you tell me what you did after working at the Cricket Ground? What did you move on to?

39:51 R So I started, I became self-employed and I accidentally, my sister's boyfriend at the time saw that I was interested in kind of more off the wall music kind of broken beat African afro beat rhythms and stuff I'd got into and he wanted to start a night at Custard Factory and he started doing visuals and stuff. He'd seen someone saying how unoriginal his night was on a forum for Left Foot who are still going and now run the Hare & Hounds etc, and this guy turned out not to be a very nice guy, he was like right we're gonna go to this meeting at this new club, because they've been saying I've been unoriginal so I went down with him and he didn't turn up so I just was in this kind of meeting of this new club and people were like what do you do? I was like, I met John Harrison in fact, he goes what do you do? I was like hi I'm Leon I've just started vjing, oh like wow this guy Jim has started vjing as well and kind of that was the beginning of Jigsaw Music, John Harris now runs the tech for all the AV at the BMAG venues like the Science Museum and the Millennium Point and whatever and Jim works for, he does tours for like Portishead and stuff, sorts out all their AV and I've been on some crazy adventures with those guys. So that just sort of happened, you know we started this amazing club night and it was quite sort of posh kids who start of started it. John Harris had sort of teamed up with Dave who was quite well off and there was a guy who's now a barrister who was really good at writing press releases and stuff, so it all kind of kicked off. A guy called Woody who was just brilliant at bringing everybody else, he was a brummie boy, sort of bringing everybody, he had the biggest grin ever so he just managed to bring everybody in. Me and Jim did the visuals and were in the Guardian Guide before long saying how good it was which was kind of the real break for me, kind of spurred kind of stuff. So I'd kind of made it on this kind of club scene, always what I was doing. We started doing Left Foot gigs, did Charles Peters and that, and I approached Vivid and started saying I want to do some actual art with this technology and they were like well, I said I want to tell stories so they were like make a film then, come back with a story board. So I don't think they were expecting me to come back but I'd got a friend who's an illustrator from

Moseley School, comic artist, I don't know if he really did much with it, I know he's teaching now. But he drew me a story board and I took it and they were like wow let's do it and we met some other guys who were vjing and they were quite, kind of, they frequented the VJ forums site on the internet because it was kind of happening all of a sudden as well, kind of all forums and stuff for advice, it wasn't just kind of the first wave of the internet really just starting pages, it was communication and all these vj's had got together and decided to have their third incarnation of the Have It festival and it was massive, they had that at the Custard Factory and people from Japan and America and all over the shop and I ran the gallery for that. So all in a short space of time it all kind of happened and I started doing more stuff with Vivid and I did Creative Alliance so I'd kind of done some creative stuff, I didn't quite feel like an artist and there was a Creative Alliance which was through Capsule and Rhubarb, Rhubarb and Friction Arts, and it was kind of a club to put on shows and kind of exchange ideas and sort of be taught how to kind of survive as an artist in Birmingham and it was kind of post graduate level and I hadn't done any kind of graduate stuff because I was doing interesting stuff in clubs, they were perfectly willing to make me part of it and that's where I met my long term partner Arlene as well, so I kind of felt like an artist, and I started working with dancers as well. I met a kind of African dancer there who we did a live performance, kind of live VJ and I managed to do some photography as well, I got quite into a couple of the strands rather than just the one.

45:07 I What do you do now then?

45:08 R Well that kind of developed, so from that I put on a few shows with my, with Arlene and her friend Paul Newman, they were already in a little artist group called Behind Closed Doors and I came in to help them with their technical stuff and started making work as well, and we did a couple of projects, one which was in a derelict tower block and we had the whole kind of eighteenth floor and we filled every room with different artists from the local scene for graduates from Margaret Street and stuff and then we had a space in the Custard Factory and the VJ stuff I kept doing, I was doing a lot at the Custard Factory, in the Med Bar which was probably one of the busiest spots at that time and I was kind of doing a lot of bits and I started doing festivals, I started traveling round more and I did a really nice piece of work with a choreographer from Stoke which the guy from the Planetarium Mario Di Magio had asked vj's to come and look at ways of doing stuff in the kind of 360 degree digital theatre which the Planetarium was and I'd been asked to do this screen dance piece, I was like wow how can I make this work because there weren't any cameras that could film that and digital SLR's had just about been invented but you couldn't film on them, you had to have kind of huge video cameras and you couldn't really put fish eye lenses on them, they didn't really exist, so I kind of built my own camera array so this sort of hacky business sort of started as well, the VJ thing was always a little bit hacky anyway using musical instruments to control video programmes and stuff but

this was something totally invented for a job, so that sort of thing started. And yea I just kind of grown out of that sort of period, what I do now you know is, have I moved on a lot since then? I don't know I mean people have caught up with me a bit like I'm now here in BOM, so I set up surround sound studio here and I'm working with kind of that immersive stuff. People have caught up with that kind of idea of hacking stuff. You know it's people, commercial jobs that you know how are we going to make this different? How can we hack things to be creative and before I'd go to stuff and be hacking the hell out of something and it would be is this gonna work? What the hell is it and they'd be quite scared of what it might be. But once stuff worked, people would be like wow you know and people are looking for that now because there are so many people doing digital creative stuff because it's quite cheap. You know you can buy raspberry pi's for twenty five quid, you know it's a quad core computer, you know my first quad core computer I thought was amazing, you know more than one processor in a computer, it was like wow. So yea people ask kind of how you do it now and it's like quite cool.

48:54 I Have you got anything else you'd like to share, either about the Stratford Road or any memories that stand out?

49:00 R Stratford Road, the Sparkbrook is the food, definitely, I'm quite a fan of the Lahore the Ladypool Road, I quite like the sort of taxi driver hangouts. Some of them are quite of a little bit off limits to white guys you know you can get some funny looks and it's a little bit moody, but some of them are quite nice and some of them are just made and white people kind of eat there, and there's a quite nice healthy mix and Lahore's a nice balance, it's open til really late, it's kind of more snacky grill food rather than a big dish of curry, but they do have that as well. There's a few in Sparkhill as well I've been going to for years, Adils on Stoney Lane and yea the food you know, I've grown up being a spicy addict really, you know I can't even have hummus without sticking West Indian hot pepper sauce in it. Yea I have sweet chilli sauce on toast for breakfast, that's quite nice, it's like jam, so things are getting spicier as well, you know you can buy a bunch of scotch bonnet peppers in Tesco now for 50p and it's like the only place you used to be able to get that sort of stuff was in Sparkbrook.

50:19 R So the supermarkets are great as well. I'd be going in as like a teenager and there'd be a woman behind the counter who couldn't even speak English and I was this mad punk with dreadlocks and big boots and she'd be in stitches, but then I'd be buying like ten bags of spices and she'd be impressed, she was like "*oh one mix?*" (*Indian accent*). And I'd be like "*yea just one.*" So I kind of explored that sharing of food and I was kind of, people come together in Sparkbrook. Like I say some places are a bit moody but no one would ever not serve you, some places are welcoming, so yea that's kind of where it all comes together, you know English people do actually kind of welcome foreigners even though there are certain aspects, certain groups of society

would moan about it. They'd still not dream of never eating a curry again, kind of doing those sort of things.

51:22 I Anything else?

51:23 R I think that's it.

51:25 I Cool thank you.