

Transcription of an interview conducted 15 March 2018

Interviewee: BEN KNOWLES (BK)

Interviewer: ALEX BEARD (AB)

Kingston-upon-Thames, England

Transcription: []

AB: OK this is Alex Beard. And tonight we're here in Woking. It is the 14th of March I believe - or perhaps 15th of March. I'll check that.

BK: 15.

AB: 15. And tonight I'm joined by:

BK: Ben Knowles.

[00:20] AB: Brilliant. So I wonder if we could start with your memories, if you have any of learning to ride a bike when you were a kid.

BK: I don't really remember too much about learning to ride a bike. Actually that's a lie. I remember it was at Canbury Gardens. The small bike that I got for my birthday or Christmas and I went down there with my dad he'd do the classic thing of holding on to you and run behind you and let you go and you'd go twenty metres and sort of fall over and then sort of progressed from there. I used to cycle quite a lot which was good.

[01:05] AB: I remember we used to cycle to school didn't we?

BK: Yeah, so there was sort of quite a group of us that cycled to school. I remember I used to come round- I was sort of the first to leave, I'd go to the end of my road, the Alex would join, and we'd go and pick up the Philps twins, then we'd go a little bit along and we'd pick up Philip Bray and Fred Green joined us. Then we'd have a cycle along the river to school and sometimes we'd cycle back through Richmond Park. There was lots of different routes to take so it was quite fun and we'd race each other or we'd do like a slow race which is always good fun.

[01:47] AB: I remember you were one of the first to ride a bike with no hands. Do you remember doing that?

BK: Umm. I remember always trying new stuff: riding the bike one handed, no handed or lying down or trying to do a wheelie or a stoppie as we used to call them. Put the front breaks on. I remember going over the handlebars a couple of times and yeah, but I always wore a helmet though so I was alright.

[02:17] AB: What bike did you have back then?

BK: So my first bike, my very first bike which I learned to ride on which was a BMX a small BMX which I think my parents got from a charity shop and then I remember in Year 6, we did our cycling proficiency test and that was just after my birthday, and for my birthday I got this brand new bike from Evans Cycles and it was far too big for me at the time but I had it 7 years and used it every day so I quickly grew into it but that was good fun.

[02:55] AB: What brand was it - do you remember?

BK: Yeah I do yeah. I remember there was a choice between there was the Raleigh Firefly which I think Alex had and then there was the Trek A10 and then Alex got the Firefly and I ended up getting the Trek. Both good bikes and both lasted us a decent amount of time - definitely got our money's worth there.

[03:23] AB: So I wonder if you could tell us about how you first came to get a job doing a paper round.

BK: Absolutely yeah so we got some family friends and one of the son, so one of the guys I was friends with at the time he did a paper round at the local newsagents at Jays and I was 12 at the time and he asked – he was going away on holiday and he asked if I could cover him so I sort of shadow him over one weekend and then he went away for a week and I covered him. I'm not sure I should of, I think you're supposed to be 13 but at the end of it the guy Jay said come back to me when you're 13 and you can have a job you've done a good job, so anyway a few months later it was my 13th birthday so I went back to Jay's and I said 'Hey, you got any jobs going then?' and then shortly after that he offered me a job. And it was brilliant. When you're 13 years old and you're getting £20 a week you got nothing to spend it on you just end up saving loads and loads of money and all you do is buy a few little bits and bobs, go to the cinema maybe but I ended up saving loads of money and then a few of my friends started doing the paper round once they found out that I was doing it. Sort of the guys we cycled to school with ended up doing the paper round too so it was quite good fun. We were all **[05:00]** quite close doing it

[05:03] AB: So talk us through what you actually had to do. Did you have to get there pretty early?

BK: Oh yeah. So it was the early morning paper round we did, so 7 days a week. The only day of you'd get per year was Christmas Day so it was pretty hard work when you think you're only getting 20 quid a week. So you'd have to be there for 6 in the morning and then it would take about an hour or so to do the paper round Monday to Friday and then you'd have to go back to and from the shop 2 or 3 times to go and get more papers – you wouldn't be able to carry them all in one go. And then at the weekend I'd find it harder because more people wanted the weekend papers it would probably take an hour and a half and Sunday – you know was sometimes two hours just because the papers are massive on a Sunday seems like most people – that was the most popular day.

[06:00] AB: Tell us about which roads you had to do for your round. Do you remember your route?

BK: I remember the route I'd be able to show you on Google maps but I'd struggle with the names, so there was St Albans Road, Durlston Road, which was one section then I'd have to go back get the papers; i there would be Woodside, Eastbury and another road I've forgotten. Lower Ham Road as well. There's Osborne Road, Windsor Road and another road so. I remember most of them and I'd be able to take you back there and show you which houses they were and stuff. We wouldn't have to remember which house got which paper, Jay the owner would write on the top of each paper: number 14, number 16, number 18 or whatever, and then you go and just deliver papers to those houses but it always caught me out when someone went on holiday because you get so used to being on a set route and suddenly you realise you'd delivered a load of wrong papers.

Interruption

[08:12] AB: So if someone was on holiday it meant you got a bit out of order. Was that the problem?

BK: Yes, that was the problem. We'd get so used to just remembering you gotta go to door 8 then you go to door 20 door 40 and then you sorta get into pilot mode and you don't always look down to

make sure that paper is for that house, so if someone went on holiday I remember a couple of times delivering the wrong paper and then realising and then having to knock on the door because the owner, he'd make us pay for the paper if we made a mistake, so yeah, I wasn't afraid to - well yeah I was afraid at the start to knock on the door, but then I didn't want to lose 50p, especially when you're only getting 20 quid a week.

[09:00] AB: So old Jay – if something went awry, Jay would not shy of docking it out of your wages sort of thing.

BK: No. He was a really good boss. He was fair but after a bit if you consistently made mistakes then he would dock you a little bit. He was good to me and a few of the guys because we were long term standing paper boys. I did it for 3 years and Todd Philps, he did it for about 3 years as well and then Adam did it for a year, Alex Devereux - quite a few of us. Whereas before, his turnover of staff was pretty high so I think he was thankful that we were there.

[09:46] AB: So there was a bit of a gang of you?

BK: Yeah, we were all really good friends and we were lucky, because if one of us went on holiday the other one would be able to cover us. It was harder when I first started cos I'd have to try and find

[10:00] other people and they wouldn't know what they were doing but it was fine so if we had sleepovers or holidays other people, our friends, we'd just cover each other.

[10:13] AB: So I wonder if you could tell us about, obviously you were getting up pretty early and it must have been a pretty big cycle before school was that ever an issue at all?

BK: Not really, I think at that age you seem to have endless amounts of energy. It was tough getting up at the weekend. During the week it was OK because I'd have to get up early and get ready for school anyway. Our school started early at half-past eight so it was sort of only getting up an hour earlier. It was at the weekends and when you're at the age of sort of 13, 14, 15 you start having like sleepovers with mates and you'd be going to bed really late and you'd have to leave early the next day to go off and do my paper round while the others would just be in bed, so that was pretty tough and you know you wake up and sometimes you just don't feel up to it or you can't be bothered but we'd always turn up.

[11:13] AB: I wonder if you could talk us through the cycling aspect of it because you see some people doing paper rounds and they're pushing a trolley. Why was cycling the mode of transport of choice for you?

BK: It's just so convenient - very quick. We'd have the little kickstands on our bikes, so we'd be able to - you know; we had Royal Mail sort of satchels and we'd sling those over our shoulder, cycle as fast as we could to the first house, jump off the bike, kick the kick stand, and then we'd run into the house, deliver it and then if the next house wasn't too far along we wouldn't cycle we'd just sort of scoot on the bike. So we'd just sort of kick up the kick stand and then just on one side, scoot along, kick the stand back down, run in. A couple of people, their parents helped out and they did it by the car - by car. And they were so much slower - getting in and out of the car, stopping, blocking any cars on that road as well and Jay used to deliver papers all over Kingston, so walking it - it would never - it would take at least twice as long.

[12:37] AB: Did you ever have to worry about things like your bike getting pinched?

BK: No. I was thinking about that earlier when I was reminiscing about doing the paper round, I never for one second thought about my bike getting stolen, whereas now I'm a lot more cautious. I mean we just used to just leave our bikes obviously at the end of each house, while we were going

to deliver the paper but we leave them just outside on the floor propped up outside his shop and they'd be 5 or 6 bikes and sometimes the papers would be late delivered to the newsagents, Jays, so we'd be sat there waiting for 20 minutes and we leave our bikes and we'd just be reading the magazines, not a care in the world but now I'd be a lot more cautious about leaving my bike and think someone would just come along and pinch it.

[13:29] AB: Absolutely. Were there any other hazards or mishaps? I'm thinking about things like dogs or crotchety neighbours about making noises or anything like that?

BK: Yeah. So I remember covering for Todd and we'd deliver a paper, I delivered one paper and the dog ran up to the door and pulled it straight out in his - and scared the living daylights out of me. Not too many problems in regards to cycling. I remember a couple of people got a bit funny cos we used to cycle on the pavement if the house was too far along and then a couple of times getting a puncture and then you'd have to wheel it and that just took ages. You'd end up slower than walking.

[14:19] AB: So I see that cycling was the method of choice. You mentioned a couple of times that you had to go back to Jays to refuel. Do you remember how many papers you could carry at once? Was it a set amount or did you try if you were feeling brave, to carry as many as you could.

BK: So on the weekend I used to carry two satchels and they sort of crossed over my body. I'd load up one on one side and one on the other, just so that I didn't have to come back and refuel and yeah it was quite hard work. You know it was heavy papers. I know someone - he made a little trolley off the back of his **[15:00]** bike and then he stacked all the papers on there, which was a good idea. I shoulda done that really. It might have been a bit quicker and carry more

[15:10] AB: Was there any particular paper that was like really thick or really heavy that was your least favourite or any that you easy to do?

BK: Financial Times or The Sunday Times. Those papers are an absolute nightmare. Any Sunday paper in fact was a nightmare. I mean most of the tabloids were fine you know: The Sun and The Daily Mail. During the week they were fine, it was just the weekend broadsheets and they were so heavy. You wouldn't be able to carry more than 10 or 15, whereas during the week, you'd be able to carry about 60 in one go.

[15:54] AB: So you said you'd managed to save quite a bit. As you started doing it, did you start saving for anything in particular?

BK: Not really. I mean I would save so much, I mean at that age you're not really going out that much, so I ended up just saving and saving and saving and I bought so much stuff out of it - the money from the paper round. It's amazing really, thinking I was only getting 20 pounds a week. It went up to 30 when I took on more houses, but I saved up over five thousand pounds I remember but one time. So I bought I remember buying a TV, a surround sound system but the big thing I bought was a small boat. So I found out my parents had bought a property by the river and then I had a bit of money saved up and then I thought I'd keep saving and try and buy a small boat and so yes, whenever I went out on that boat I always thought - all of this is money from the paper round. It's just amazing really.

[17:09] AB: Yes that is amazing. So seriously you just got that from the paper round?

BK: Yeah I mean, I'm 28 now and it's the most money I've ever had was when I was 14, 15. I was about 15 years old and I had five thousand pounds from my paper round money and I blew it all on a speedboat. It was incredible.

[17:30] AB: Some people I know that did paper rounds, their favourite time of year was Christmas because they got Christmas bonuses from their customers. Was that a thing?

BK: Oh yeah. Christmas was amazing. So bearing in mind we'd only get 20 pound a week, at Christmas we had – everybody would write cards to the houses. You'd write a Christmas card saying: To number 18, Merry Christmas, Love your paper boy, Ben. And I remember the first year, getting about a hundred and fifty pounds. People were giving 5 pounds 10 pounds even some people would give twenty pounds because it was a nice neighbourhood. So that was really good. Such a great Christmas present and made it all worthwhile. And then I think once, I built up a bit of a relationship with these houses and they'd seen it was me every day for 3 years, I started getting more tips at Christmas and ended up getting quite a lot of money.

[18:32] AB: So I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about when and why you decided to stop working as a paperboy.

BK: I didn't really want to stop to be honest, I mean I think I started when I was as soon as I could start at the age of 13 I started, and I stopped to focus on my GCSEs in Year 11. So I stopped a month before my final exams. Just to study and make sure I did well and that and then I went back after and did a little bit over the summer and I moved house. I moved away and it was too far to go really. So I didn't really want to give it up. I loved it and I often went back to Jay's and I'd catch up with him, see how he was doing. But I heard the other day that he'd sold the shop which was really sad news, so I'm not sure what it's going to be replaced with, but it would be good to speak to him again and see how he's getting on but-

AB: Yeah. It was in the local paper.

BK: Really?

AB: There was a picture of Jay outside his store.

BK: Yeah my mum told me he was closing down. I don't know if it's for flats or something? Yes it's a shame. He was a legend in the area, Jay - Jay Dodia and Sonia his wife **[20:00]** and their two kids.

[20:02] AB: So he was a big magnate in the Kingston paper delivery game?

BK: Oh yeah. He was a big player. I remember there was a newsagents that was closer to me and they were – they had nothing on Jay. It took 10 minutes for me to cycle to Jay's, but it was worth the cycle to go over there and be part of the big players instead of going to the one at the end of the road.

[20:35] AB: Since you stopped working for Jay's have you done much cycling since? Have you been a cycling commuter or anything like that?

BK: No. So it's strange really, I absolutely love cycling I mean I cycled probably 3 miles, 3 or 5 miles for the paper round each morning and then I would cycle to school there and back. So I was probably doing 15 miles a day and did that every day for and then when I went to college, it was about half-an hour walk from where I used to live, so I just walked to college and then I didn't really cycle much. I've bought a bike recently, so I've started cycling to work now and again. Not as much cycling as I would have liked to have done.

[21:33] AB: How far is your cycle to work at the minute?

BK: So it's 6 miles each way. So it takes me about half an hour. I'm a bit of a fair weather cyclist at the minute. Not like the paper round days – any weather we'd be there cycling every morning: rain, snow, sun. Now it's just a couple of times a week in the summer.

[21:59] AB: Thank you very much for sharing your memories. Just so I can get a few things for the record, would you mind telling us which school you went to?

BK: Yeah, so I went to Grey Court secondary school which is in Ham above Richmond and we used to live in Kingston. It used to take us about half an hour to cycle to school. Do you remember the helmet bluds?

[22:27] AB: Yeah and I remember yeah we became a bit infamous for wearing helmets but it wasn't quite so cool. Shall we say?

BK: Yeah. So we were always very conscious of - we were all very cautious cyclists so we'd always wear a helmet and yeah when you were that age, teenagers at the time it wasn't cool so people used to bully us and chase us down the street shouting 'helmet bluds' and hit us on the head but yeah, We're the real winners.

[Both laugh]

[23:05] AB: Yes, absolutely you can't put a price on cycle safety. Yes, I was remembering that on my way here and wondering if you remembered it.

BK: Yeah, I remember it was Ben Gerzier wasn't it? I remember a couple of times we'd actually come out of the school and having the helmet on the handlebars and wait til we got past them, then put the helmet back on. Yeah we were always really good with the helmets.

[23:37] AB: That's funny. And then finally could you just tell us, where was Jay's newsagents?

BK: Jay's was on the main road – Richmond Road. It's the big road that linked Kingston, Ham and Richmond. I used to deliver to the sweet shop opposite Harrisons - Mr Harrison who was a legend in Kingston. We used to go there for pick and mix sometimes on a Sunday morning, he'd give me a small bag of pick and mix and say thank you for his paper, free of charge which was lovely. When you were a kid, sweets were amazing aren't they. I think that's it I remember Todd Philps cycling into the lake.

[24:45] AB: Oh yeah absolutely. I wonder if you could tell us about that quickly.

BK: A couple of stories cycling after school which are quite funny. I remember **[25:00]** a small group when we used to go to the park after, for whatever reason they introduced a points system. If you annoyed someone then you'd like get docked a point. If you get too many points then you'd get kicked out the park club and it was my first time there and I tried doing a wheelie and I fell off the back and remember getting a few extra points – I got bonus points. And then another story, there was Todd Philps. I don't know what it was, I think it was a dare or a bet and it was at Ham Common and basically Todd Philps cycled as fast as he could into Ham Common pond. It was fantastic and they had to wheel his bike out of the pond and cycle home soaking wet. Me and Philip Bray found the bike in the Thames as well and we fished it out of the Thames and we walked it to Kingston Police Station, and it was quite a nice bike actually, and then about two years later, they phoned us saying we've got this bike and no one's claimed it, if you want to come and get it. And then I think Philip Bray, he went back. He went to the police station and collected it. I think his sister cycled on it.

[26:20] AB: Happy days! What I remember is when I crashed into a car when we were cycling next to each in Locke Road. A car braked in front of us and I went straight into the back of it. I remember getting a stern telling off.

BK: I remember going through the Keep. Was it the Keep? You remember that little cut through? and then we got shouted at a few times. We always used to try and find shortcuts to school, and some of them used to be cutting across people's estates or cutting across people's land and we kept trying to find the fastest possible route. A couple of times getting told off by disgruntled house owners.

AB: Awesome. Thank you, Ben.