



# #MyBirminghamStory



In partnership with



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

## Frankie Rhodes's Birmingham Story

### 1. Background Who are you, and what is your connection to Birmingham?

My name is Frankie and I came to Birmingham for university, but then adopted the city as my home (or it adopted me?) and I've been here for 6 years now. I instantly fell in love with the University of Birmingham campus on my open day with its cobbled paths and redbrick buildings – my parents made me visit 4 more universities just for comparison but I was certain of my choice straight away. On my first trip into the city centre my friend and I turned out of New Street station and immediately walked up to a grand-looking building, which turned out to be the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, giving me the perfect introduction to the city's culture.

After studying English Literature I went on to do an MA in Shakespeare at the university's Stratford-Upon-Avon campus, but I kept living in Brum and commuted for a year as I didn't want to leave the place where everything was happening. Now I work in heritage in the city centre and get to spend all of my time interacting with tourists, locals and first-time-visitors, and I'm very proud to call myself a brummie. My workplace, book club, library and favourite cafes are all less than 15-minutes away and I'm so lucky to live in such a haven of creativity.

### 2. A specific place What is one place in Birmingham that holds particular meaning to you? Why?

This would probably be Brindleyplace, where I live and work. There is so much urban nature right on my doorstep, and on a morning walk I can see Canada Geese, herons, moorhens, ducks, and cormorants, right in the city centre. Many

of the canal bridges still have rope-marks from horses that originally pulled the boats, and I love looking at the names and paintings on the narrowboats moored up today, changing every few days. The industrial heritage is so interesting, stretching back to the 1700s, but still with local people who worked in a factory nearby and remember horse-drawn carts. Now of course it's an entertainment district, but still has such a historic character amongst the new high-rise buildings and restaurants.

### **3. An important personal event Tell the story of one moment that shows why Birmingham, or your specific place from question (2), is important to you.**

I had a wonderful friend, who sadly isn't with us anymore, who made Birmingham her home for a few years. She was Egyptian and knew my mum after working with her in Kuwait, and of all places that we would meet - it was Birmingham. She lived in a small flat near to St Paul's Square and every few weeks we would meet up and go to Damascena, and she knew all the best things to order (falafel, Arabic coffee, Baba Ghanouj...) She volunteered at the Midlands Art Centre every year for their Social Justice Film Festival, and one year arranged for a film by a Palestinian filmmaker to be put on as she knew how important it would be. Of all the places she'd lived, she found the Midlands to be the most welcoming, and she never had to fight to belong here.

Whenever I eat the best falafel in town or pass the serenity of St Paul's Square, I think of her.

### **4. Reflections on Birmingham Why did you choose to share a story? Why is Birmingham important to you?**

I wanted to write this because I owe so much to this city and the friends, relationship and job opportunities it has given me. I spend all day at work talking about how great it is, which wouldn't be convincing if I didn't really believe it! Living here allows me to have the kind of life I want, where I don't have to drive, and can walk or take a bus to all the exciting places across the city, and have enough heritage on my doorstep to last a lifetime. When older visitors at work have told me that Brindleyplace used to be a dangerous and derelict place, I find that hard to imagine, but I enjoy helping them to see the city differently now, and

most want to start by just sitting down by the canal with a cup of tea and enjoying the view.

Without a proper Brummie accent or a family connection to Birmingham, I have sometimes felt like I'm not a true local, but this is a city who accepts everyone and particularly welcomes young people as part of its future. And the other day, my grandmother randomly mentioned that her father lived most of his life in Birmingham, and that she grew up in Small Heath visiting his bakery, which made the best cakes in town. So maybe this is where I was always supposed to be...

