



>> Film director and screenwriter Segun Oguntola arrived in Milton Keynes in 2007 after growing up in South East London and spending five years developing a film industry in The Gambia, West Africa.

>> He was immediately struck by how so many backgrounds and cultures were represented in the new city's population – and set out to find why so many people come here to make a new start, and become part of the MK mix.

>> The people Segun meets feature in this regular Citizen First focus.

the mk mix

Who are you and what is your background?

I am married to Roger Baker who is my best friend, companion and the love of my life. Art is my passion and nature is my inspiration, there is so much beauty in this world of ours. The sky declares the glory of the God and the sea his power, and the flowers, birds and trees. I love photography, it's arguably one of the best ways of capturing the wonders around us. From my photos I make birthday cards and other items.

My parents came from Estonia as refugees after the Second World War, it became very dangerous when the Russians took over.

They met in a refugee camp in Lancashire, and from there they moved to a hotel near Stratford-on-Avon to work as gardeners.

They married and I soon came along, and then we moved to Newbold On Stour where my brothers Lembit and Aruo were born.

I was educated at Shipton High School where I enjoyed art and pottery, graduated to Leamington School of Art and from there to Nottingham College of Art to study photography.

I became pregnant and had to leave before my wonderful little boy David was born.

I found it hard to cope and became very depressed, and a friend started to take me to church and I found my faith, which came into my heart and changed my life forever.

When David was seven he was diagnosed with cancer, and within a year had died. The emptiness inside was an awful void that seemed as if it could never be filled.

The grace of God and the love of Jesus gave me peace and joy through my grieving and brought me through many sorrows.

Now I remember the beautiful gift God gave me for a short time, a life so blessed my David.

I have travelled a bit, mainly to Estonia, Sweden and Denmark to visit family.

Estonia is a small but very beautiful country with 1,500 islands, 1,400 lakes, many rivers and the land is about 40 per cent forest.

The capital Tallinn is an old medieval town, the streets are of cobbled stone and the buildings are fascinating especially as the new buildings are mixed in with the old.

The most memorable trips we have been on were to Zambia in 2001 and 2002 to help build houses right out in the bush in a poor village. It was an awesome experience, the people were wonderful and it was inspiring to be able to give to others.

When we arrived home the experience had affected me so deeply that I had to paint to express my feelings. That's when my oil painting started and I have sold many of them.

What attracted to you come to MK in the first place?

We heard about this fantastic church called Faith Dimension Ministries (then

Word of Faith) and came to see for ourselves. We loved it, it was all we were looking for in a church with awesome ministry from Pastor Glen Ferguson, friendly people. We felt the call of God so we moved to Wolverton to be near the church. Originally we were looking to move to Cornwall but that all changed.

What's the most striking difference you've found between MK and the place where you've lived the longest?

We came from village life in Twyford near Banbury and found Milton Keynes overwhelming at first but now really enjoy living here.

MK is big and spread out and the road system is very good, allowing easy access to most places.

Because we are country folk we enjoy the open spaces, lakes, rivers, parks and canals. I find the planting of the trees and shrubs very enjoyable.

Sometimes driving along it does not seem like a large town, because of the lovely trees and no visible houses

Please tell us about all the ways in which you are involved in MK life.

We are mainly involved with church life and have got to know many people. Our church is very large, with more than 500 members of many nationalities.

We have a team that goes out ministering to the homeless on the streets and anyone who is down and out.

We give food, clothing, sleeping bags and often furniture to anyone in need when they are housed.

This is a growing ministry and we are aiming to do much more for people in need in the future.

I have also been on a very useful course at the Living Archive in Wolverton where I learned many creative computer skills and about the heritage of the area.

How easy have you found it to settle here?

Once we got used to the grid system it was easy to get about. We bought a street plan and from that we could find any street or house.

We have made many friends and got to know the town well in the last 4½ years we have lived here.

The services are good and we have found a good little garage near us and they fix our car well.

I have found someone who has mended my camera, a good hairdresser, had IT lessons – I believe if we really looked and asked we would find all we needed here and know we still have much more to discover.

We're interesting in highlighting ways in which MK's diversity is working in practice, so how far have you spread your net so far?

In our church there are more than 30 different nationalities and we get on well together.

This is what I enjoy about MK – the diversity of people and cultures. Our church includes people of African, Russian, Polish, Indian, Pakistani,



>> Artist and photographer Marie Baker, who has Estonian roots, has been through challenging times, but has found profound inspiration in her faith, art, and of course, Milton Keynes.

Jamaica, America and many others. It makes life very interesting.

My husband Roger is a gardener and for the last three years he has been gardening for many people all over town.

I have worked with him many times and have made many new friends.

We have some really wonderful clients and regular customers all over town.

Are you planning to stay in MK for a fixed time for work or family reasons, or do you think you're here for good?

We are planning to stay and fulfil the purpose in which we have been called here by God.

If someone who had never been to MK before was considering moving here to make a new life, what's the best piece of advice you could give them?

That is difficult, because it depends for what reason they want to come and where they are coming from.

I would advise anyone to keep an open mind and give yourself time to get used to MK because you will grow to love it.

Tell us something about where you come from which only a local would know, which you wouldn't find in the standard guidebooks.

Estonian people are very resilient because they have been through so much pain and kept their language and culture alive through many years of occupation and ethnic cleansing.

Music is in their blood for they sang their way to freedom. Every village, town, school has its own choir and they all came together about every four years for a song festival in Tallinn.

The choir then consists of about 24,000 singers. Every area has its own national costume and when they all come together for the dance festival it is very colourful.

A lot of it is embroidered and made by hand. They are very practical people and there is a lot of art and craft in galleries and for sale in shops. Many wooden objects, paintings, pottery, amber and silver jewellery and leather work. In fact Estonia is an artist's haven.

10. You're probably aware that MK has a mixed reputation in the rest of the UK. You've got a fresh pair of eyes, what would you say to people who can't find anything good to say about the city?

In its own way MK is beautiful with so many lakes, parks, walkways, cycle ways where you can relax away from the hustle and bustle of town life. There is even a church made of trees.

There's Gulliver's Land theme park, a lake where you can waterski, real snow in X-scape for skiing, many cinemas, art galleries, theatre, the new football stadium and much more – these are all places where people gather together.

At night from certain high points, looking down when it is all lit up, it looks quite beautiful.

But in the end the people make the city, not the buildings.



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The MK Mix is supported by the award-winning Jaipur Restaurant at Grafton House, 599 Grafton Gate East, Central Milton Keynes, MK9 1AT. Phone: 01908 669796 Email: info@jaipur.co.uk

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