

HIP HOP

DANCE ALMANAC VOL.2

Edited by
Ian Abbott

FEATURING:

Lauren Filer

COPYRIGHT

First published by Ian Abbott in 2020. Design by felp.

Editing © Ian Abbott 2020

The interview content and views expressed are the copyrighted property of the respective artist.

The right to be identified as the creators of this work has been asserted by the creators in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Any redistribution or reproduction of part or all of the contents in any form is prohibited other than:

You may print extracts for your personal and non-commercial use only

You may copy the content to individual third parties for their personal use, but only if you link and acknowledge (<https://www.hiphopdancealmanac.com/>) as the source of the material

You may not, except with our express written permission, distribute or commercially exploit the content. Nor may you transmit it or store it in any other website or other form of electronic retrieval system.

LAUREN FILER

IA: Can you introduce yourself and what it is that you do?

LF: Okay, my name is 'Lar' or Lauren. Everyone calls me Lar or LaLa and I am a dancer. I came from a dance background and now I've moved into more...organising events, battles and running an agency. Sorry I'm just trying to think and teaching classes. So, literally everything in dance I've kind of done and now I've just had a baby; so I'm going more into the organisation side of things whilst I'm on maternity and that's how the agency came about.

IA: The idea of a crew as an alternate family - a kinship, a place where you choose the people that you want to be in your family. Can you talk about some of your experiences around crews and alternate kinship?

LF: I started breaking when I was about seventeen and I met my crew - Physical Jerks, my first ever crew - who I was with for ten years or so, at Bristol Dance Centre. For a while they tested me, because I was a girl, they sort of pushed my limits and were making me battle every week just seeing if I was there to stick at it you know. Because a lot of girls would come and go, then as soon as it got too hard they would just drop off. At first I found it...like,

really intimidating, the crew - they were all there together and I would just be in the corner doing my little thing, hoping they would teach me, you know...something. After a while they actually told me 'We've been testing you, we've been pushing you to see if you had what it takes.' From there I started battling with them, entering competitions and doing shows...all sorts of street shows around the area and further abroad; we became like a second family. We did everything together; as well the battling and the training, we also socialised together, so we would go out dancing, every night, just to have fun and let our hair down. It's like... it's like the family you would choose for yourself, you know, and you all share this common passion, this common goal and you understand each other and what it takes. If you're all creative and you're all after the same goal, you've got this zest for life together. So, yeah, they looked after me as well because I was the only girl, and I started when there weren't many girls around. They took me under their wing, so I never had any trouble - I could go anywhere and just know that my boys had my back...it just felt like you had your own little community, even though there was just seven or eight of you. You could do everything together and never get tired of each

other...it was nice. I became really close to Joel he was like my best friend, we just hung out and trained all the time. He helped me a lot! And after that Sunni, Izaak and Will started training with us, as that's what it's all about learning and passing it on. They are doing mad things now!!! I mean look at B-Boy Sunni!!

IA: How did you find them? Literally. How do you get that first 'in'?

LF: I was a little bit later than some of the original members, so...Desmond aka Ooze Des, Joel B-BOY Ressha, Kid Keir, G, and Awkward - they were there before me; then Splendid and Wilkie came later. Splendid was super smart and had some really interesting threads as he was so long, and Wilkie was like a creative genius! They kind of took the crew to the next level when they came along as they were also business smart you know, and then also Force, he brought the insane power to the crew. I just started off by going to a dance class. I remember...I remember I went to New York - that was the first time I actually got interested in breakdance when I was seventeen...that was part of an A-Level trip with school.

IA: What a trip.

LF: Yeah, we had an art trip,

**July
2019**

Watershed
Bristol

and I loved dance anyway - I used to dance around the house. I was quite...I was a very energetic kid...just somersaulting off things before I even knew how to - I was that kind of person. I had no fear, sometimes that was a great thing, but sometimes not so much hahaha, scared my mother half crazy most of the time! I went to New York and I saw the B-Boys in the street - I didn't know that they were the New York City Breakers at the time.

IA: New York City Breakers?

LF: Yeah. They were doing dancing in the subway, and obviously I was hyper so I joined in and started doing some flips off the wall and

“They were like ‘This girl is hyper - she’s running around tryna do things she doesn’t even know how to do.’ Nobody would teach me at first and I was getting so frustrated. But...they saw a spark in me.”

random stuff. They said to me ‘You really need to take this up, whenever you get back to England, go and find somewhere and do it.’ It just inspired me to go ‘Well yeah, maybe I could do this. It’s really fun.’ Then I found Bristol Dance Centre, which was the hub for B-Boying at the time - there wasn’t anywhere else - and that’s where I met the core members. They had a group - I think it was called ‘Superheroes’ at the time, before we formed. It was just a few of them that used to battle and train together and my way

in was just by being persistent, because people come and go. There was millions of people in there, so anyone could have been in it but it was more like, who are the people that are really dying for this? Who would really go above and beyond and come to training consistently? Who would actually pick it up and try hard to get the moves? That was where the crew came from, it was the ones that had something special because there was hundreds of them in there, but I just kept coming back, you know, for more, and no matter how much they pushed me and how much they battled me, I would do ten rounds at a time if I had to. Even if I had no moves...

IA: Again. I’ll go again!

LF: Yeah, I do some random things, you know. They were like ‘This girl is hyper - she’s running around tryna do things she doesn’t even know how to do.’ Nobody would teach me at first and I was getting so frustrated. But they saw a spark in me, you know, and ‘OK, she’s here for the long run. It’s not a little fashion thing.’ Then I got a windmill and I think that’s when I got respect. They were like ‘Oh my god, the first girl in this place to get it!’ They were just not really

taking girls very seriously when they were trying to do it a bit back then. I think they were like ‘OK, we need to give her a chance.’ So they just kind of invited me. It was about standing out amongst the crowd you know. Because everyone in our crew - which is what was nice about Physical Jerks - was very unique. They weren’t manufactured. They came from their own creativity, so like Desmond was really funky and had this old school vibe, Joel was very athletic and really free. Kier, he just had power moves at the time that nobody had, and we were like ‘Wow, he’s spinning on his head all the time.’ He did some really different stuff using his mouth and things. Gee was really Hip Hop to the core, it was his whole life, his nickname was stepchild and it was like his family was Hip Hop, a child of Hip Hop, so he had insane knowledge and passion, would do it all, you know graf, deejay, MC! He was an original Scarecrow. Oh and Awkward he danced so unique too, like had all these crazy threads and interesting movements, a real Hip Hop head too! These guys were really inspiring, they had their own thing, breaking the mould so to speak! Then I came in and I had this crazy energy with no fear, Desmond told me he used to get me to try a move first to see if it was safe because he knew I would try anything lol! I guess like a guinea pig. That’s what they liked about me. They used to say to me ‘Stay on target!’ Cause my mind was all over the place, full of ideas! It’s just by being persistent and showing that you’ve got a real real love for it, I think that’s how you do it. That’s how I did it. I battled my way in. Then they see your focus and you wanna do it. Our crew was doing a lot of comps and doing really well at

the time, and they didn't want anybody just to come and go... this is family, you know. You're either here to do it or not. It was quite serious actually.

IA: Are there other Hip Hop families that you've been a part of? I'm interested in the idea of kinship and relationships.

LF: Yeah. I've been...we've got a company, a big one in Bristol called 'Jam.' Jam Family, have you heard of that? It's like all Hip Hop styles, not just like B-Boys or crews, it's anyone who's freestyled, or are really good at freestyling and loves to go out on the street and do jams, one-offs, workshops or passing it on - the knowledge. It's a foundation of members who have given back, who have crafted their skill to a high level. That's poppers, house dancers, breakers, waackers, everything. We're called The Jam Family. It was started by some of the younger generation...Kieran and Frankie. Man you should see what these guys are doing now!!! They are literally killin' the scene. Anyway they were in more of a street dance group to begin with and then they started getting good. They went to Swindon Dance, started getting good at styles, and from there they've built The Jam Family. So we've been part of that now - me and my dance partner - for quite a few years. We all just really want to push Hip Hop authentically. We wanna make sure we provide classes that are authentic and jams that are authentic. We are working together...we've got somewhere to dance that's always open...an open place for people to do it and to be part of something. I think that's what it's all about...spreading it, spreading the love and the

joy of it, rather than it being too structured. Everyone in Jam has a deep love for Hip Hop and they are all making moves, doing big things, it's so great to see!

IA: What is authentic?

LF: Ooh, that's a hard question! It's making sure that people know the foundations of the dance, know where it came from and understand dance, do you know what I mean? You've got a lot of classes and I wouldn't want to diss any classes, because I think dance is great anyway you do it, but in terms of our movement, it's teaching the style the way it's meant to be taught. Not watering it down or commercialising it, but teaching it in its rawest form, from the roots. With my breaking where I teach it - I always make sure I teach all the foundations first, before jumping onto the harder moves or the classier moves - I go from the bottom up. I think that's what all the teachers in Jam do - they want you to know the core so you really get an understanding of that style. Rather than just doing a bunch of moves and putting them together.

IA: Or there's no musicality...

LF: Yeah. There's no style, flavour, musicality - all those different concepts make it authentic. I wouldn't knock them, because they're dancing and having fun, but for us we want it to be done in a way that you've got to find your own style and your own individuality. Musicality is really important - understanding the music as well as the dance. You know like you can do a move but have you added the sauce to that move, have you added style and incorporated

it into the dance, is it part of the dance or is it just a move? You feel me? So for us I think that's I think 'authentic' means. Then you know who's really into it, because if they're not, they won't stay long, because they wanna learn something flashy first...

IA: They want the tricks! Show me the trick!

LF: Yeah. And if they don't get that, they soon go, you know. So you establish the people who have got a love for it, for real Hip Hop. I've had people come and say 'I'll give you loads of money if you teach me how to windmill so I can do it at a party.'

IA: Really?

LF: Yeah, and then when they realise 'OK, I can't do this' they leave after a few weeks 'I tried, it's too hard.' But with our kid's class, they have to learn the top rocks, freezes and floor work before anything; they have to learn about style and finding their own individuality within the dance. They have to understand where they've come from and why they're doing it, and make sure they're on beat, that's massive for me. I hate to see a dancer off beat.

IA: They could be in silence otherwise.

LF: You're like 'You could be dancing to anything right now.' But it's making sure people understand that - that's a thing - if you've got a track on, dance to that track. Don't just do your moves that you've learnt. What track have you got? Be funky because this is a James Brown track. Or go fast, go hard because this is more of a powerful track - like a breakbeat track. It's feeling the music; trying to teach that

is hard but that's what I'm all about. I wanna see your style come out, and I wanna see what you get from this, rather than what I give to you. I see so many people who dance exactly the same set to totally different style music. I don't get that, it baffles me!

IA: I'm always interested in the origins of names. 'Hot Feet.' What was the origin of that?

LF: Oh, that is a good story actually. Well, first I was 'Little Lar' when I joined cause I was tiny and a little pocket rocket. It came from 'Little Lara Croft' because I was very athletic, like a little tom boy. I thought it was just my name shortened. I thought it was 'Lauren' shortened. But the boys said no. Cause, at the time, Lara Croft was out. 'So because of that, we called you that.' I used to have a long plait when I went training too. Then, as I got older, I thought...I feel like there's more to me than just 'Lar.' So I went to America and I danced with Skill Methodz and LA Breakers (Street dogz). I worked with them for about three months. I was breaking with them on Santa Monica and Venice beach and they do a street show every day. I learnt so much from them, and I've got quick feet. That's one of my styles, to have quick feet...so they used to call me 'Quick Foot' when I was dancing. Then at the end of my trip I actually got caught in a house fire and both my feet got third degree burns.

IA: In LA?

LF: In LA. I was out there dancing with Sony as well, and MSA. And they...so they took me to hospital, my crew - Marcos Flea, Yuri and Manuel. They're part of Skill Methodz

and LA Breakers combined. They took me to hospital and my burns were so bad I couldn't dance at all. So I had to stay in hospital and get them treated and when I came out, they used to take the mick out of me and say 'How you doing Hot Feet?' So it kind of caught on. I just thought it was quite nice, from then everyone used to just joke and laugh 'How's Hot Feet?' cause I couldn't dance for ages. I was like 'Shut up!' So that is where that came from.

IA: It's a great story but at the same time it's quite a trauma and a bad an injury for a breaker to not be on their feet. The feet are almost the most important part of the body.

LF: I know. I couldn't do anything because I couldn't stand up. I just had to lie down [laughs]. I had no family, I wasn't allowed to fly home because the burns were infected and I was having to pay for all my treatment!!! It was a trauma, especially because I was doing so well in LA - I was about to get a visa...I'd been approved for an artists' visa because I had so many write-ups from choreographers and stuff, that I had been approved, and I just had to finish that... but then I got the burns, and I had to stop. I had got signed by two agencies, and by Sony, but they had to drop it because of my feet, so it was quite a sad time. But I always make the best of situations - I see it as, that must have been a reason I shouldn't have been there, and I should have come home, because that's how I've got this family and my life's turned into doing other things for myself, rather than working for people. I see it as, one door closes, another will open. At the time I was devastated, but

as time's gone on it's like 'OK, well that must have happened for this reason. I learnt a lot from that and I still do.' Yeah, it was a crazy story.

IA: What were some of the things that you learnt when you were out there?

LF: I learnt that it takes so much more than doing one or two sessions a week. I do more than that anyway, but we were on the beach for six... no, maybe ten hours a day. We'd do street shows back to back to back to back. The original B-Boys - they were the ones that started this and this is where it should be done. Rather than the commercial shows, they were telling me that they keep it here on the streets. They actually make more money on the streets and that's how it should be - on the concrete. So I toughened up. My moves got so clean and so sharp, you know, dancing on concrete for three months. I realised like if I wanna be as good as I have always wanted to be, this is what it takes, whereas before I might do two hours a day. I was OK, but that took me to the next level. I learnt that grind, you know, you've got to put it in even more that what you did before.

IA: That's around incremental improvements isn't it?

LF: Yeah. It was ridiculous what I was gaining, and learning from some of the best like Style Elements, and B-Boy Remind - he mentored me. He took me under his wing taught me a lot about the feeling of it and the energy that flows from the body to the ground, and why we need the ground. I asked him 'Why are you helping me?' He said 'I'm taking you into Style Elements,

you know. I want to mentor you so you understand it, so wherever you go next you pass it on in the right way.' It was really interesting sitting with him, cause he's Native American and he was talking about the spirits energies flowing through your body, into the ground and out of your body again into other people. I learnt about connecting more to people...cause I can sometimes be in my own head. It taught me to share more, share my dance more and let go more, not be like 'Oh I've learnt this move, I'm gonna do it.' Just let my body go and do what it wants to do.

IA: You're not trying to make it do one thing...

LF: No.

IA: It's your body, listen to it

LF: Yeah and take it to the next level. I've always loved freestyling. Put a beat on and I'll fly off it, but to actually not be...not have any reservations and no inhibitions, cause sometimes you think 'They're watching.' You might try a certain thing or try to impress or do something slightly different, but actually just be free. That was nice to learn over there. For example, I was doing my power moves, I used to try them until I was tired, whereas over there they were like 'No, you have to try them past you're tired. So then you'll get them.' It was like 'You're gonna do twenty windmills today, and each one has to be ten rotations, and if they're not ten rotations, you have to do it again.'

IA: It doesn't count...

LF: It doesn't count. I learnt different ways of training that was hardcore, but it worked.

Little tips I got out there were amazing because they knew...they started that move, some of the people that I was learning from. I used to watch these guys on video tapes with Joel and Des, it was unbelievable that I was now training and street hitting with them!

IA: That origin of knowledge is right there.

LF: Right from the core. And Marcos he really took me under his wing, he was an original B-Boy from LA Breakers, Mexican guy, he had a kind heart, a genuine soul. Flea taught me a lot too. Do you know what, they were tough as well to crack, because I came...

IA: Did you have to prove to them as well?

LF: Oh yeah. I remember I

"They were just seeing 'Oh, is she tryna hook up with us?' I'm not interested in any of that...not at all, so...I don't care who you are. I don't have that 'Ooh, status people.' I don't get that, you know? I was there to train and work, and come back way better, not to mess around with B-Boys."

went to Venom's workshop. My idea was to get as much knowledge as I could. I don't just want to know what I've got here, I want to know the source and I seen Venom's workshop was on and so I

went...no, first of all I went to Style Elements' jam. That's when people noticed 'She's got something.' Either that or they thought she's having a lot of fun ha ha. I know cause I battled. And then they got in touch...then they realised I was Zulu Nation, cause I was with Zulu Nation long before that. They got in touch with other Zulus cause they knew...once you're a Zulu, every other Zulu from any other country will contact you and start passing on information, so they were like 'You're a Zulu, come and join this, come and join that.' So they asked me to Venom's. I went to Venom's, did his workshop, and they were like 'Oh, she can actually dance.' So, one of the guys (Marcos) said to me 'We go to the beach every day to dance, you need to like come down and do some stuff.' But a couple of them were like 'Who is this girl?' And 'scuse my language,

but they just thought I might be tryna get with them.

IA: Really?

LF: Yeah, you know? They were just seeing 'Oh, is she

tryna hook up with us?' I'm not interested in any of that, not at all, I don't care who you are. I don't have that 'Ooh, status people.' I don't get that, you know? I was there to train and work, and come back way better, not to mess around with B-Boys. But that's what they thought. They were like 'Let's see what this girl's about.' They do label you like that if you're a girl.

IA: Really?

LF: Yeah. It took ages for them to realise 'Oh, she's not tryna get...' People would try it with me too...the fact that I turned them down and just kept coming and training and saying 'I'm not interested', then they realised 'Oh she is actually serious. She's pretty good and she's coming back every time.' Then they said 'Okay, you can perform, but we can't get you much money.' They wouldn't give me it.

IA: Do you get a share of the hat?

LF: Yeah, and they make a lot. So after a while I said 'You know what, I need to be paid similar to you guys because I'm doing as much work as you. We're all doing back sums on the concrete, we're all doing windmills on the concrete, we're all hurting our body.' So, eventually they started giving me a proper cut, but it took me battling them each, it took me proving myself in the shows - that I wasn't tired by the tenth one, you know?

IA: You had to earn your stripes.

LF: ...and make sure I wasn't there to gain notoriety or to use their name. They were very guarded but they soon realised I was there for the right

reasons. They started passing knowledge then, Flea was all about style, and he was like 'Every move you do has to be styled out.' He was like 'I wanna see your footwork, show me what you're gonna do with that. How are you gonna style each step? Six-step is not a six-step unless you've got style on each step.' That was nice from Flea. Venom was all about power. He was helping me 'If you use that leg more, and push with the ground, pull...' He helped me with that. Then some of the other boys from LA Breakers, they were more about the style side of it and music, making sure you listen to music. But, they're hardcore, honestly. I thought I was hardcore when I started training with them, do you know? I trained a lot with B-Boy Machine and B-Boy Morris and Flex too, they helped with with power a lot!

IA: It's a different level of hardcore?

LF: Oh my god, yeah. Real hardcore. I went to Brazil as well, because I became friends with B-Boy Nequin in the UK and LA we would hang out and train, and he's also very spiritual so it was good to talk to him about that and gain knowledge. He put me in touch with his family and friends in Brazil so I could go and train out there too. I met a boxer out there. That was a different level of training...if people want to be elite at something, or at least make a living out of it, the training that you have to do is like incomparable. You can't just sit back and do a little bit of it here and there.

IA: How did the boxing inform your breaking? Was it the physical prep?

LF: I went to Brazil cause I

wanted to train. I did a bit of capoeira and I did Latin. I went on my own and I met a Thai boxer...no, Brazilian jiu jitsu actually, but he was also a boxer. He saw me training on the beach everyday, because I do a lot of fitness as well as breaking, I find it helps my body to cope with the breaking. He noticed I was training and said 'Let me do you one session with you.' I thought I could out-train anyone when I'm in Bristol, or when I'm in classes at home, I don't often break a sweat, cause breaking makes you so fit and strong. You go to an aerobics class or something like that and it doesn't really touch the sides. I thought, 'That'll be fun.' This guy made me run six miles on sand in forty degree heat; my feet were shredded by the end of it, burnt from the sand and heat.

IA: More hot feet?

LF: Yeah, more hot feet. Then he was doing boxing drills for another hour after that, then he made me swim two miles in the sea after all that. My feet were ripped to bits - the salt on the bottom were like...then after that he was like 'Let's flip.' So, we were tryna flip on the beach. I wanted to cry and I've never wanted to cry during training before. I was actually the one who suggested going in the sea cause I couldn't do any more on the sand. I was like 'Let's do some swimming fitness.' Then I regretted that, cause he was 'Yes! One mile!' It was torturous, and very humbling! But, amazing cause it showed me that there's much more you can do. There's so much more you can put into things than what you think; you've just got to grit your teeth. I actually learnt to flip in Morocco.

IA: Tell me about that...

LF: Before I started breaking, I think I'd just started, but I'd only been doing it for maybe six months. I met a Moroccan guy who used to come to the dance centre and he said, if you ever come to Morocco, we're the Moroccan circus, come and find us on the beach.

IA: [laughs]

LF: Yeah? This is a mad story, innit. I know, I've had a mad story. I actually did. I went travelling on my own, through Europe, for six months and I ended up in Morocco...and I did find them on the beach. I didn't find him, but I found the Moroccan circus on the beach. [laughs] I said to them 'If I go in your circus, will you put me up?' So they did and they let me train with them. Again, like I said, anybody who I found in this world that is...really loved something, or is really high level at it, the training is insane. The love that they have for it. I worked on the beach every day, and they make you do a hundred of every move from the beach platform, before you can go home. So, it was a hundred somersaults, a hundred back flips, a hundred side somersaults and if you can't do it they throw you over. It was mad and I learnt a lot.

IA: It's endurance training...

LF: It was, but on sand, it's crazy. I did loads of training with them, joined them for a while. And they burnt my feet... oh see I've had my feet burnt again!

IA: What?!

LF: Yeah, if you didn't do your training on time that day, they would burn your feet at night

as a joke, with a lighter. It was horrible. I'd go sleep, hoping... put my socks on, hoping they wouldn't do it...but they would catch you and I asked them 'Why do you do that?' They said 'If you don't put in as much as what we put in, this is our life, then there's no point you being here. You'll soon be jumping once your feet are hurt.' It's true, you can't stand still if you've got burnt feet on sand.

IA: Were you already Hot Feet at this point?

LF: No. See, it must have all been there though. I was Little Lar. It all made sense, you know? Hot Feet stood out to me.

IA: That's three interesting... Moroccan circus, Brazilian martial arts, and West coast breakers...

LF: Well that's the thing, it's amazing. A lot of breaking and B-Boys took some of their moves from martial arts, so that's another reason why I wanted to learn more martial arts, and see some original martial arts, you know. You can see the influence from martial arts in a lot of B-Boys...and acrobatics helps your athletic side, and these Moroccan boys, it's just their street is the beach. It's all interlinked, you can learn something from people who make their living by doing...by entertaining people on the street or by learning together as a family. I always think until you get out of your comfort zone and experience other people in their world, you really never know how much you've got in you and how much you can give. I've always said I wanna know what it is like to live with nothing, so I appreciate everything I have. That's

why I wanted to go to these countries and live minimally, not have a lot, but get back to the grind and push my body to it's limits with. The circus guys were poor. We all slept on a floor, concrete, but look how amazing they are. Again in Brazil, I was living up in a favela, which I didn't realise, but that was crazy...I actually got... we got held at gunpoint and that was a bit mad. It doesn't matter your background...it doesn't matter where you're from or what you've got, if you've got passion and fire, you can do anything. That's what I've learnt from being around the world. You see all these people - they don't have a lovely dance centre or lots of money to go to all of these...

IA: I've gotta have my mirrors and my barres...

LF: Yeah, they've just got what they've got and they're the best in the world. I learnt a lot. My first trip was actually in Africa, where I started learning about...pushing myself to the limits and appreciating everything.

IA: Where did you go?

LF: This is what stopped me breaking for three years. I went to Africa, travelling on my own, and I caught a parasite. I went and lived with some tribes, did some cattle farming and toured around the coast. I did a lot of African dance and I taught in orphanages - I wanted to do that. Then right at the end, I caught a parasite, which eats your muscles, it's a muscle wastage disease. That turned to...it affected my immune system so I had no muscles left and I went into intensive care; then I was given medication that I was allergic to so I had really, really bad reaction. So they rang my

mum and said 'You might need to come out, we're not sure if she'll make...'

IA: Where were you?

LF: Yeah and my mum got a passport for the first time - she never used to fly, but she thought I wasn't gonna make it home. That was the scary thing. Then when I got back I couldn't dance again for about three years because I was so ill from that parasite and I had no muscles. But I came back again and back to 2012.

IA: You were out there teaching breaking?

LF: Yeah, teaching breaking in orphanages, and we were also making basketball courts. Building them outside of the orphanages, or outside of the villages so that the kids could play when they got home. Then I would go and teach, get them worked out, put up the basketball court, so that was really nice. They were amazing dancers as well, I learnt a lot from them as well... they just feel it. They can just move. I love...it was amazing doing that cause my style's a bit random so having all those different influences...

IA: Three years without dance...can you talk about that? That must be have been tough.

LF: That was horrible...it was during my uni years as well. I was just tryna recover, so I got my head into the books and do my degree, just to have a backup because I realised anything could happen, you know. I got myself a teaching degree and I focused on that... but I would try and dance, but then I'd be ill. So it was a sore subject for me for ages and I had to focus on my

own work for that time, and realised it could be an end to this. It's just waiting it out. It was tough because I was in hospital every other week with something. A flu would turn into something really serious, you know...or a cut would turn into septicemia.

IA: If your immune system has been wiped out...

LF: Yeah, it was...and people didn't understand either, you say 'I'm ill' and they're like 'Oh you're ill again.' I had a really hard time.

IA: You're like, 'I'm not playing. This is...'

LF: They didn't understand you know? They'd say 'What do you mean, you're ill again, you will ill three weeks ago.' I was like 'I can't train this week, I'm in hospital again.' I don't think people got it, and even now when you tell them, 'I caught a parasite in Africa.' They're like 'Really?' It's like a bit of a weird story isn't it? But that was a hard time because I felt people thought I was not taking it serious anymore, which was never the case. It was just, I think, I couldn't...I think I went in myself for a while there. I just got my head down and tried to block out the negative thoughts and go 'Well I'm ill, what can I...I can't do anything about it until I build up again.' It was a case of eating all the right food, being really careful, everything had to be cleaned, sterile, you know. I got there, got there in the end.

IA: You're OK now? All fully back?

LF: Yeah, took about three years, I'd say. That was probably in 2009 and then 2012 I was ready to go back in again. That's when I started

Breakin' Motion. See when I got back into it I realised there wasn't much of a scene or at least people weren't training together. Physical Jerks were no more and there were no jams or anything like that. I got in touch with the guys who run Motion night club, luckily they remembered me from my Physical Jerks days, they were Hip Hop heads too and they agreed I could use the space during the day. Big Tom was running things and he was so nice, he gave me keys and was so happy to help because he loved it! So I spoke to Sunni's mum, Lady Jane and asked if she wanted to help too because she was also noticing we had nowhere to train and was good at organising things. We got it up and running and got some flooring down, got flyers made and started creating this group, asking everyone and inviting everyone we knew to be a part of it. It was a massive warehouse, really cool space and word got out. I started setting up regular workshops and jams there. We managed to book lots of B-Boys and dancers from across the globe to come and hold workshops. I booked Machine, Tino and Born, The Ruggeds, Mouse, Ivan and many others. The good thing about that is that it encouraged B-Boys from all over the UK to come down and learn from these amazing dancers, because for me that's what it was about. I always felt that if I have the resources or knowledge then what good is it unless I share it, I wanted to share what I could with as many people as I could reach, I believe in that, like if you have a skill or anything like that then you should always try to help others, I have been so fortunate with the opportunities in my life that I wanted to give as many

people as I could similar opportunities, That's what Breakin' Motion was about, a place to share, to vibe, to laugh and to learn, as well as B-Boys we had popping workshops with Brooke and Shawn from Plague locking, house workshop with Frankie and many more. Anything I could think of that would get people engaged! There were open jams, fitness sessions, styles sessions and one off workshops, it was brilliant and Jane really tried to help with the funding and planning etc. Everyone helped it became a big family of creatives trying to help and do what we love. I was so grateful for that and for the people that always helped me that I wanted to give back it was great to see that a scene was building and people were united. And instead of it being territorial it was open to all, all people, all styles, all crews. Whoever wanted to learn or help!! I've been fortunate to learn from amazing people and I wanted everyone to be able to have a place to get together.

IA: If there are three people that Lar goes to...who are they? The three most important people in your circle and why those people?

LF: Do you mean dancers?

IA: People who have helped you, people you go to time and again. It's about recognising others on your journey.

LF: I would say it's...it's a hard one really. I would say... [long pause] Desmond. I don't even see him as much anymore because he's got a family and a child and he doesn't dance as much. He was definitely someone who helped me all along the way...like a big

brother. His name was Ooze Des and he was Physical Jerks. He took me under his wing, and showed me tough love as well. I think he really understood B-Boying, cause he did it the first time around. For him it wasn't like this is a competition. It was his life and it was his heart. I think I learnt that way to keep my own style, through Desmond, because I was poached a lot, to go to

"I always felt that if I have the resources or knowledge then what good is it unless I share it? I wanted to share what I could with as many people as I could reach, I believe in that, like if you have a skill or anything like that then you should always try to help others."

London. I remember after one battle, Tuff Tim's wife from UK Rocksteady came to me and said if you battle for us right now you can become part of the crew but I was like na I got my crew, I ain't jumping ship. And I didn't because of Des, because I wanted to learn from him. I wanted to stay real to myself instead of becoming too taught. I didn't want to be coached. You know how there's some super coaches out there? Then you feel it's a little bit, for me, manufactured. It's amazing what they can do but I really like the good energy and style that came with breaking and your own creativity. That's why I stayed in Bristol. Desmond was a massive part of that, and I could watch him dance all day long. He was different to the

other B-Boys I would watch. He didn't have power, but he had soul. Do you know what I mean? I would say he kept it right for me, you know, kept it real. He's a big influence and it's a shame I don't see him anymore. I have to catch up with him. I would say I learnt a lot from Remind when I went to America. Because he is a guru. He knows so much, and instead of just teaching me

moves, he spoke knowledge and spoke wisdom to me, so that I could be my own self still. I think that's who I tended to go towards - people who allow you to find your own creativity, rather than 'I'm gonna coach you a move.' I think he's been a big influence. I'm just tryna think back...ooh, do you know what, I've always...the thing is, I've always done a lot for myself and I've always tried to lead more than follow, so it's hard to think...I've learnt a lot through myself, or just going out to different places. Is it people that I'm in touch with now?

IA: It doesn't have to be. It can be someone from your past that had a profound influence but you may not have realised it at the time...

LF: Do you know, I would actually say my crew, all of them. Physical Jerks. But I would also say Floor Technicians. They're like a jazz group, they're old school jazz boys and we used to battle them all the time and train with them, and they're like your...I was gonna say like my dad, but not your dad! They were like...they're so much full of flavour and life, and they're still at it now. I learnt from them to just be free, and let yourself go even now, they check in on me and they were really supportive of my journey. Every time I would do something or do something well, I would hear from them. It kept me going because I would think 'Oh my god, like, they still remember'. I would say they had a big impact, and they dance from the heart.

IA: Was there anyone in particular from Floor Technicians?

LF: Hmm. I don't know, that's a good...there's a guy called Marcus Hopkinson, and he's the one who has followed me all the way through. So, Oscar - he to me was like...the one I would look at...he's a Bristol legend. He danced for ages, but Marcus came on a bit later and I got to know him a bit later. He's encouraged me constantly along the way. He's sent me messages along the way that have been really encouraging and I think those little things that people go out of their way to do like 'You should be really proud of yourself, you always make things happen for yourself, rather than waiting for them.' He's always seen that in me, and I think that when people notice those things it's nice instead of having to ask. Definitely my crew and then my family. I know they're not

dancers. But my mum has been the one person that kept me grounded and supported me to do all of these things, you know. She's encouraged individuality, so I look up to her more than any other dancer; I know that sounds weird but she has got a really sound mind and a really creative mind, and that's helped me to be who I am...to help me start things of my own. She's given me the tools as a person to be brave and I think that's why I look up to her more than anyone else because even the times I was sick she has been there. It's hard to do cause there's so many. To do just three and then you think 'Oh, have I missed someone?' I met some...Zulu Nation, Afrika Bambaataa - I met them when I first started dancing. They taught me a lot, the B-Boys from there. But it's hard to pick them out. If we are talking about now, that would be my sister and my fiancé!! They are seriously so supportive and encouraging of me, they listen and they always believe in me. My partner poor guy has to put up with me chatting his ear off about ideas and he's right there behind me, backing me all the way. My sister holds me down, no matter how hard life gets, she's there without a doubt!

IA: What is it about Bristol? Why are you still here? Why are you giving back to your community?

LF: Bristol is probably one of the most creative cities I've ever been to, and I have been to a lot. Without even knowing I've had huge support from Bristol, it's almost like it's got my back as a city, and I didn't even know that. It was like...this is why I bought a few of these things, I've been on the Bristol Cool list. How cool of is

it that? I was ranked in the top ten of the coolest Bristolians!!!! This year and the year before. I didn't even know I was up for it. You know what? I actually came 7th, I beat JK Rowling lol and she's a legend and I'm Lar HAHHAHA how funny is that? I love that though. It's obviously Bristol are thinking...they're saying 'Look what she's doing.' I've been doing stuff in Bristol for so long, and loads of local communities in Bristol have helped me as well along the way. I've been sponsored with clothing from certain shops or I've have had free photo-shoots to help with my new business because they've known me for so long. I was born here. I did an Inside Out interview when I was young, and a lot of people seen me on that. Also when I performed for Pharrell Williams it was shown on prime time TV so a lot of people seen it and got in touch, they were really proud, I guess people follow your journey, and you don't even know it.

IA: 'Oh there's Lar again.'

LF: Yeah! I find it mad, and then I'm like 'How did you know about that?' They're like 'Oh my god, social media.' Do they really wanna see what I'm doing? I'm just in my own world and I didn't realise people are actually getting behind you and backing you. The amount of response I've had from different events and people that have got in touch saying 'You've really inspired me.' And I'm like 'Have I?' That's really nice. You don't know they even know about you sometimes, but obviously when you see the feedback, and people get in touch with you, you think 'Oh, you are doing something then.' People are encouraged by what you're doing. What was the question? [laughs]

IA: Why Bristol?

LF: Because of that support. Because of the network. Because I believe in the creativity here. The dancers here are a different kettle of fish. They're real. I bet every city says the same thing, especially because I live here and I'm gonna love 'em. But again they've got their own style.

IA: What's the Bristol style?

LF: I think it's really free. I think we've got a lot of spiritual people in Bristol. I've seen that in dancers, the spiritual side, especially a lot of Jam fam - they're very spiritual, they're very good people and they're very humble. You go to some places and you've got a bit of an attitude, that comes along with the dancing. But you don't have that here. Everyone wants to back each other. Small businesses help other small businesses, dancers help other dancers; nobody wants to copy or imitate, they just wanna be themselves. I find it very individual here, you see the artwork around the city - it's so creative, so much graf, there's so much real Hip Hop that comes from Bristol. Massive Attack come out of Bristol, The Roots come from Bristol so you feel...you feel again that word 'authentic.' You feel it here. I think there's a massive love for Hip Hop in Bristol too. Whenever I come back, people get in touch and I'm like 'I'm doing something else and I've had a baby. I've been on maternity leave. I thought I'd be out of it, completely.' But people make you feel so included when you're from here. I think that's what I like - the creativity and the individuality.

IA: One of the things that I

don't see much talk about, is this idea of self-care and mental health in Hip Hop. I'm interested to know your relationship to that, and how do you practice self-care?

“I think for me dance and training is an escape, it helps me to feel good, if I'm feeling low it helps me to pick up or if I'm feeling great I use that energy in what I do. A healthy mind also starts with a healthy body, they are interlinked.”

LF: Do you know what? That's a good question. [pause] One thing I am very happy about is that my mental health has been great...throughout all of the challenges, I don't struggle with anxiety and I don't struggle with depression, any of that. I've got an inner confidence that dance has given me, I think. When you do...when you build yourself to do things for yourself like, setting up events or running something or having your own projects, it's like I'm always enjoying life because I'm always working on something, I'm always creating, I always have passion. I think for me dance and training is an escape, it helps me to feel good, if I'm feeling low it helps me to pick up or if I'm feeling great I use that energy in what I do. A healthy mind also starts with a healthy body, they are interlinked. So I think that is what self-care is about, looking after your body and your health which will in turn help your mind. Taking time to do things that you enjoy

and keep you balanced, giving yourself time to be free, let loose or work on yourself. Those things are important. Finding your expression and using that to keep your heart happy. For me it's music,

dance and fitness. I use those things to keep me balanced and to keep my heart happy. They also bring me peace. We can have power over our own minds and we have the ability to not let external forces affect our moods so by doing the things that make us feel balanced and believing and trusting in ourselves, well you know it keeps you from becoming depressed or burdened. We can choose happiness we just gotta find the things that aid that. It's a choice. I think for sure that the best way to stay healthy in the mind is to do more of what we love. Also setting goals and having things to focus on and work towards, it helps you to feel empowered and it gives you something good and positive to work on. All this things can help you mentally! I'm quite lucky that my mental health is quite stable...but I've noticed that people come to me for help with their mental health. A lot of my friends...it's like I attract people because they wanna know where that

strength comes from.

IA: That positivity?

LF: Yeah. That 'How do you feel happy when you wake up all the time?' or 'Why are you always happy, even when something goes wrong?' You do feel like a counsellor. It's fine, I like, I enjoy it but it's sad to see how many people are dealing with mental health issues especially in the last few years. Since I've not been so busy, I've had more time to have long conversations with people and I've just noticed how many people deal with anxiety. But dance can help them. I do try and speak that into people, and I try and encourage like...manifesting what you believe in and speaking it into the universe. I try to tell that to my friends, the more you think about these negative things, the more you will be pulled down with them. If you talk more positivity and you highlight more of the positive parts of your life, it will generally follow on like that, getting better and better. It's hard to understand it, if you haven't had it yourself. Most of my friends have got anxiety and some of them are on medication. And sometimes it's hard for me because I feel so happy. I have to try and figure out how to help them best, without sounding dismissive because you could just say 'oh, get over it' if you feel so fine every day. But I have to realise, OK step into someone's shoes - they might not feel like you do. How can you help them in a way they need to be helped? That's what I've learnt as I've got older, it's like, it's not just OK to say 'Get on with it, just be happy. You're fine, look at your life - it's amazing.' It don't work like that, the brain. There's chemical imbalances,

or everyone deals with pain in different ways. I think dance is an amazing way to help people out of that. But, again different things work for different people. It's a big epidemic.

IA: Yeah, it's massive. It's growing across all parts of society.

LF: I would say that eighty percent of the people I know have something to do with mental health, and there just needs to...it just needs something, doesn't it? But dance, dance helps. I think people use dance as their freedom, but then when as soon as they stop they go back into that bad space. How do you do it cause you've gotta go to work, you've gotta deal with money in life as well as dancing. I just don't even know how to tackle it. My mum's a counsellor and a lot of my friends have ended up signing up with her cause she's really, really good. Really, really good, but...she'll know much more how to deal with that than I do. I just try and be positive. That's my outlook... from this situation what good can I take from it? So, even if it's a bad situation...

IA: Like burning your feet or having a muscle-wasting disease or... [laughs]

LF: Yeah! What can I take from this that can help me learn to do something better next time? That's what I try and do. I try and see the great in everything, or in everybody, instead of pulling down the bad things, you know. It's glass half full, you know. I live by that.

IA: An entirely different topic. Glastonbury. I'm interested in your relationship to Glastonbury...you did the Bee Gees flash mob, you

took Just 4 Funk there this year through your agency. What's your relationship to Glastonbury, cause it is a massive, massive thing?

LF: Do you know, I...the Physical Jerks got an agent when we were young and we were the only dancers on their books cause they were more of a theatre agent, they were more like street entertainment, like clowns and random crazy stuff. We were the only dance crew but we got really popular and so, I remember one year we had to send out two separate teams because we were getting two shows a week. That was when Wilkie and Splendid and everyone was a tight crew. We got the Glastonbury gig through Fools' Paradise the first time and then we did that for maybe seven years I think with Physical Jerks.

IA: Really? Whole crew?

LF: Yeah, we would go, we did that and then it kind of fizzled out. Physical Jerks went separate ways because Wilkie and Joel wanted to do their own projects, and we still wanted to B-Boy but we weren't interested in that at the time. I got on really, really well with the lady from Glastonbury and she would always come to me to organise things and she said 'Are you gonna come this year? What are you gonna do?' So, Physical Jerks weren't together and I said 'I'll bring another group.' So I brought random groups each year. Then eventually they said 'We're just gonna come to you, and you can decide what you wanna bring.' So, I formed a relationship after about ten...I reckon I've done it for fifteen years you know. One year I bought Olivia down from Just 4 Funk and she

ended up being my dance partner. Originally, I wanted to set up an all-girl breaking crew that were not taken as a joke or sexualised or anything...just really raw B-Girls. I've been sexualised in battles and I hate it. I wanted something that people would respect and there was loads of people that was in touch - I was acting as an agent already. I didn't realise it, you know, I was just getting work.

IA: 'Can you do this? Can you do... ?'

LF: Yeah, and so they were saying 'Have you got ten girls that could come to our event?' I was like this needs to happen, you know. So I asked loads of girls but there was nobody that was committed enough and that had enough high level skills at the time, that I could find. Especially down here. There was some more up in London and other places up north, but in Bristol... so it ended up being three people and one of the girls had a head injury, really bad. So it ended up being me and Olivia and we said 'Let's call ourselves 'Exception-Elle.' I'll set up the business side and we'll push it to be professional, happy, on time. We wanted to make sure that everything we did was, you know, legit. We started getting lots of shows as Exception-Elle, but we used to try and do twenty-minute breaking sets, me and her.

IA: Just the two of you?

LF: Just the two of us, because that's what they wanted at Glastonbury. We laugh about it now because we're like 'What were we thinking?' Because when you try and do twenty minutes of full on B-Boying, you're dead! We would turn around at the back and literally

wanna cry and be tryna breathe. Just like this...just standing there like [gasps] 'I can do it! We can do it! You go back, you go back.' Be telling each other 'I can't go, you've gotta go, you've gotta go.' It was drama, it was honestly the hardest thing we'd ever done. We said 'Something's gotta change like, this is, this is unbearable.' So yeah, we were doing those crazy shows and then we decided we needed to make it more of...less B-Boying, more dance theatre, so we could actually manage it. We said 'Let's get some teams - two of us doing forty-minute shows is not enough, it is not working. So I decided to set up the agency officially.

IA: What year was that?

LF: Maybe 2016. I went to watch Rudimental cause I like them. But actually I preferred Nas, we were watching Nas, but Rudimental were on and had just came off stage. I was just dancing to Nas.

IA: What? Where?

LF: Just in the field. He came and tapped me on the shoulder and said 'Are you enjoying Nas?' I didn't know it was him cause I wasn't as interested in them. So I said 'Yeah, I'm enjoying it.' He said 'Do you prefer Rudimental or Nas?' I said 'Definitely Nas.' And he was like 'Great, I'm Rudimental.' I was like 'Sorry about that.'

IA: No.

LF: I said 'You were good though, you were good.'

IA: Pulling back, pulling back.

LF: Yeah, and then he was like 'what do you do?' cause he'd seen me just dancing around.

I said 'We do a show here, come and watch it. Bring the group.' So he did, the next day! He came and watched our show, and then he must have sent a message and he sent me a message and said 'Your passion is ridiculous, we would love something like that. You should come and perform with us.' We just became friends. He ended up coming down for my birthday.

IA: Sweet.

LF: Playing some music. We just got to know each other as friends talking about music and everything. He said 'You're gonna have to perform for us, we have to get you onstage. I don't know when, but we have to do it. We're gonna speak to the manager, here's his email.' So, eventually he's like 'We got a space in New York, do you wanna come and perform at Times Square? Just your own set.' So I performed for them at Times Square summer stage.

IA: What?

LF: Yeah, and I performed for them in Bristol and at New York, amazing show. That video got so many views and followers, you know. It was an amazing achievement for me, to just go out there and throw down on my own in front of like, hundreds of thousands. Actually, the year before that, I got Pharrell. He was about in Glastonbury and that was...

IA: How?

LF: Cause I'd bring groups there all the time, and cause I knew Rudimental, they gave me a backstage pass so that I could come backstage. They were talking about me doing a show, and they weren't sure about this year or the year

after. They were just tryna figure out how to do it, cause there's so much onstage, and Rudimental have millions of band performers. They were like 'We're just tryna figure out the logistics of getting you on and everything, we just want you to hype it up.' So they were thinking of doing it that

dance?' Pharrell was like 'You dance?' And I was like 'Yeah.' 'Okay, thirty seconds - show us what you got.' And I was like...

IA: What? Backstage?

LF: Basically, it was a non-stop audition. Do you know what

talk to management, and see what they say. The fact that it happened was so weird, and they were like 'Do you wanna go onstage, you could just throw down and kill the stage.' I was like 'Really?'

IA: Let's do it.

LF: Yeah, so I ended up onstage, and I didn't know I was going on, people were like 'Why didn't you tell us you were performing with Pharrell?'

IA: 'Because I didn't know five minutes ago!'

LF: Then from there, Pharrell said...his team and him said 'You need to go to America with what you've got. Don't just stay here, there's plenty of opportunities for you to be doing stuff like this, there's more.' And that's when I went to America. So it all happened. And eventually, me and Olivia said 'No more twos, let's get a team.' She said 'Bring my crew.' I loved them guys anyway, cause I knew them through battling and through the scene...they've got they're own style and stuff, so I said 'Would they do it?' They did it and we had a great year. That was 2017. Then this year I booked them properly through my agency, now it's set up. I worked with Dom before, so I said could he come as well. I just booked them without me, cause of the little one. They love 'em now at Glastonbury so they'll probably go again. I'm gonna look to send another team there. I meet them outside of Glastonbury, the organisers, you know. I'm good friends with them and you get good friendships, even Leon from Rudimental - still good friends and we chat about dance and creativity and stuff. You know, when you just got that

"I had a backstage pass...I went back to Pyramid and I saw Pharrell, just by off-chance. This is weird innit? People think it was set up, but it wasn't. His management, one of them said 'What are you doing back here?' I said 'I've just been dancing, I've just come to see the show from the back instead.' And he was like 'You dance?' Pharrell was like 'You dance?' And I was like 'Yeah.' 'Okay, thirty seconds - show us what you got.'"

year, but he said when they looked at the stage, it was too many people on there. They had a whole group of people. So I didn't do it but I had a backstage pass...I went back to Pyramid and I saw Pharrell, just by off-chance. This is weird innit? People think it was set up, but it wasn't. His management, one of them said 'What are you doing back here?' I said 'I've just been dancing, I've just come to see the show from the back instead.' And he was like 'You

though, this is the thing about manifestation - I had it in my head that I was gonna do that. I thought to myself 'I'm gonna go backstage and see Pharrell. I reckon they'll want me to perform.' I just had a feeling. You know when you're just feeling good? I felt so good, I'd just got...I'd just like got the information to work with Rudimental, I was thinking 'I'll be doing that soon.' The show had gone really, really well. 'I'm gonna go back here, I wanna watch it, maybe I could

mindset, with people who are similar to you. That was how I got to do that. I again learnt loads from there, and the contacts, they really like me as a person, cause I was reliable and provided them with good stuff, they could count on me. The main guy was like 'Do you wanna do the flashmob for us? We like your character, you've got good energy, and then you would go on with the Bee Gees.' I was like 'Oh my god.' You know, so it just kinda happens when you believe, when you put the right foot forward each time, then people start to trust you, and like your spirit. It's more of that than skills, I reckon. It's been a blessing, but it's because you make a nice name for yourself around there and people started to wanna help. I've had some great experiences through Glastonbury, some of the best ones have been through that little gig. I even ended up performing for Chic on the Pyramid stage as well!!

IA: There's not many people who can say 'I've performed for one hundred thousand...'

LF: ...on the Pyramid stage. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't breathe.

IA: From Glastonbury to Zulu Nation.

LF: Yeah...

IA: I've read a bit about your time in the Zulu Nation but it's gotta be the ultimate endorsement for Hip Hop heads? Can you talk to be about your time with Zulu Nation and the Kings and Queens?

LF: Yeah, I've been blessed, haven't I? When I think about it, I have been lucky. It started with Physical Jerks. I'd been

dancing for about six months and loved it. We'd go to every Hip Hop event you could imagine back then, and we realised Afrika Bambaataa was coming to Cardiff. So me and Joel, we was like best friends at the time, we decided to go to the event and he had a whole bunch of dancers with him...the Zulu Kings and Queens who were dancing for him. But at the end, they did a cypher. So obviously I went in the cypher, I was like 'I'm gonna go in.'

IA: Why not?

LF: And I had a great time. Because I was having such a good time...I think, if you're happy, it shines and people get that vibe, don't they? I was just having the time of my life and one of the B-Boys said 'You wanna come on tour?' Literally, from there.

IA: From a cypher?

LF: From a cypher. That's what I mean, it's random, innit. They said 'We're doing a UK tour, do you wanna come along? We'd love you to dance at the rest of our events, cause you bring a good energy.' I said 'I'm down.' So I just started going... and at the time, the only way I could do it was actually to drive there myself, because I couldn't get on the tour bus cause there was no space. I was so into it, I'd drive to every event around the UK to meet them. We'd have food and then we'd dance. I learnt so much from Afrika Bambaata himself, he took me under his wing...I actually drove him around in my car, cause sometimes he didn't wanna...

IA: You were a taxi for Bam?

LF: Yeah.

IA: [laughs]

LF: He didn't...the funny thing is, I had a car and two doors wouldn't open, so we had to climb in the boot. And Bam was quite a big guy at the time, he had to get in through the boot.

IA: No way.

LF: Yeah, me and my friend Raul. We'd take him out to get pastries cause he liked pastries. He wanted to go out, when the tour bus wasn't there, so we'd be in a little red Fiesta. After a while, he said to me 'I wanna make you a part of Zulu Nation, and we want you to be a Zulu Queen. So they initiated me in and I had to read this green book. I also then toured in Florida with them after that! It was awesome, I ended up doing a tour with Debo from Friday! I love that movie!! Have you seen it! That was epic, he was scary but a softie at the same time and he was inspiring kids and youth offenders to do better. We also worked with Redman, Method Man, Birdman and Mos Def, that was super cool cause I loved those artists and to be dancing at their events was dope!!!

IA: Had to read what?

LF: It's like a long green book and then prove myself by setting up events...and battling. Once I'd done that they wanted to make me a Zulu Queen, so then, part of that was to make sure that I push Hip Hop where I am. I went on tour a couple of times with them and I went every year back to America to train with them for the three or four years, and I learned from them. That's how that happened, and then straight away I set up an event a big battle over

here and it had every element - DJing, graffiti, MCing, Hip Hop...cause I wanted to show what I was doing. Giving back. All the stuff I've been learning along the way, I wanted to be able to pass that back in my town. That's what got me inspired to start setting things up myself and pushing things... cause I had the energy for it. Some people would rather just go and like do things...

IA: What was the show you performed in? In the UK?

LF: With the band?

IA: Yeah.

LF: That was battling. There was no straight show, we just had to throw down to his songs and hype up the crowd. Luckily I didn't have to learn... there was a few little chopped up things that we'd do, like entrances and exits. But it was easy for me to fit in straight to be honest. They were doing this thing called 'hip step' at the time, which was a mixture of Hip Hop and house. Some of his tracks were hip step. So I had to learn some of those steps cause he had a few tracks with that on. But yeah, it was well easy to fit in, again just learning from the source. I had a real, real love for it, and they were really helping with the foundations... cause at the time, it was stuff I taught myself, and some of the Physical Jerks, and they were saying 'Match that' but I didn't know how. I could do a six-step and some freezes and stuff, but to actually get a breakdown of all the different movements and stuff...they would show me everyday and we would learn. It was really helpful because you can only learn so much in one place, by yourself. I was just tryna do it for myself, so a lot of my

moves were disjointed; I had a couple of things that I liked but I didn't really know how they were supposed to be put together. They showed me loads of go-downs and things like that, but at the time I just didn't know. Then I did a battle, and got in the final to Mouse, and I think that's when people started taking me seriously. Cause I'd learnt a bit more and I actually held my own. That was really what I did with them, with those shows.

IA: You mentioned the sexualisation of you as a woman...can you talk about that?

LF: Yeah. The first thing that happened...I can remember this like it was yesterday. I did a battle in Gloucester in 2003. It's a long time ago. Me and my crew were gonna enter, all of us as solo, but they didn't do it for some reason, they didn't enter. So I ended up being the only one out of the crew to enter this solo battle. I don't know what they were thinking but they chickened out...so my friend said to me at the time 'You're not gonna win...these people are really good, just have fun.' I thought 'I'm gonna go out first round.' I ended up doing really, really well and got to the final with Mouse. Then my friend said 'Wow, this is a joke like, he's Mouse, he's the best in the UK, just laugh it off.' I was just like 'Do you know what, I'm gonna have fun.' I ended up getting one vote to two, which is impressive against Mouse. People were like 'Oh my god, who's this B-Girl? We haven't seen her before.' Then this boy said to me, one of the B-Boys - I won't mention his name - but he said 'You should check this...you should check your stuff out on the internet, the B-Boy forum have got some really good

comments about your battle.' I was so excited to see what had been written, and do you know what had been written?

IA: What?

LF: 'Can't wait to see this on freeze frame?' Or 'Have you watched it back in slow-motion?'

IA: What?!

LF: All of that. That was my first ever achievement and it was belittled.

IA: In the forums?

LF: In the forums. There was nothing saying 'Wow, she did good, she got to the final.' It was all 'Have you seen her splits?' I couldn't believe it and they were laughing. The boy was like 'Go check what your stuff is like on the forums.' I thought I was gonna get some good comments, but it was all to do with my bum or my leggings, so that was the first and that is what it was like. It was really disappointing! My achievement was overlooked! I think it's no way near the same now, but in the beginning that was all it was.

IA: Really?

LF: Yeah. It was so nice to be with Zulu Nation for a while because it was none of that. They would have never tolerated that. That happened a lot at UK events for me at the beginning and that's something I did not like. I've had opportunities lost because people wanted something else out of you, more than just your dance. That's happened a lot, but in the long run, most of the time my passion has shone through and that is what has got me work, rather than anything else. I've never

had to use my body, I've never had to sell myself, I've always done it through my expression and my own self. I'm glad that I've done that.

IA: What is your strongest memory of dance?

LF: Do you know what, I can't say, there's been too many...Physical Jerks, they're probably my fondest memory you know, fondest because that was family and that's what got me into it. That's where it all came from. Even though I used to dance before, but in terms of B-Boying. I'll never forget dancing with Pharrell, that was like...because I love, love Pharrell. In front of those two hundred thousand people, just being free and realising that you got here because of your love. I won't forget that day because the support just flooded in after that, it was like...everybody I'd ever known got in touch and was like 'It was so nice to see you up there, smiling,' I think...even though I've been to amazing places, and worked with the best like Skill Methodz, LA Breakers, Style Elements and Physical Jerks... that day, having support from everyone, not just B-Boys, old school friends and family and I think that was one of my best memories, to see it all come together. After battling through the parasite and the burns, to have that you know...

IA: 'Here I am.'

LF: Yeah and to come out stronger. For people to recognise it and say 'You looked so happy.' I think that's what I like, when people say 'You looked so happy up there,' It's more important than what they say about...

IA: Not how clean are you or...

LF: Yeah. Just saying that you look like your best. And her - having her [points to daughter]. That's not in doubt. Just being able to pass it on now even more because I can't dance. I don't see it as a bad thing, I see it as a different journey that I'm on. I don't see it like, when people are like 'How are you coping?' I say I'm fine because I know I'll get to it when I need to, and I can keep my hand in it in other ways, that's why I'm doing the agency and pushing that, because it's another path. I still wanna be part of it, I still wanna help other people, I still wanna pass on what I've learnt and be the best mum to her without stressing that I can't do this or I can't do that.

IA: What's it like to be you?

LF: Oh my god. Crazy. Wild. No, I feel like I'm...I think being me is unique. I feel like my life has been so unique and...it seems like a story, you could write a story on some of the things that have happened and so I feel blessed. I have had the bad times to make me really realise the good. It's not just been smooth sailing, there's been horrible stuff that made me really appreciate life. I haven't even on touched on some of the really bad things that have happened because they are too painful but they've taught me a lot and I feel like my life's special and it's different and I love that, and it shows in my character. I don't like to follow the crowd or do what everyone else does...I like to start things and make things happen. I think that's because I've taken different steps along the way, to get to this place so I feel like, amazing. Like, I'm a mum, I got this beautiful little girl, she's absolutely brilliant I love it. I just want to inspire her! My partner's a basketball player

so he knows what it takes to train and work hard; we now travel the world together because of his contract and he's such an amazing guy!! I'm blessed. being me is like exciting, I find it exciting. I have so much gratitude for my life and the people in it who make it special.

IA: Is there anything that you've not spoken about that you think I want to mention this, that is important to me or that was a special time. Is there anything else?

LF: Yeah. Working with on the duet with Olivia, when we created Exception-Elle, I think that was an amazing moment because it was two girls and we were determined to do shows that were, again, authentic, high energy and well respected. I think, having her, she became like my sister as well as my dance partner. Exception-Elle. We created that and we actually done well out of the back of it, just from, you know, saying 'Come down here and we'll put this on, we're gonna get shows.' Trusting me. Having someone say 'I do.' I think that was an amazing time for me because we had four, five years of shows and performances and people backing us, so Exception-Elle has been brilliant as an accomplishment, because it's meant to be exceptional females. That's where the name comes from. She's half French so "Elle" was the French part with "Exception." So now we use that to pass that onto the kids...trying to be exceptional, not just settling. That's our motto, so that's been a big part of moving forward definitely. There's obviously so much I could go on for ages. This is my whole life. Then having a baby. I know it's not to do with dance...

IA: But it's a big part of you...

LF: It's a massive part of me. It's changed me and it's made me not take anything for granted. I hope I can pass on to her what I've learnt, and she'll have that positivity and making the best of each situation. She is the biggest gift in this life ever! I wake up with a smile on my face every day because of her, and I used to wake up with a smile, but it takes me a while now because I'm tired! Setting up the agency means that I can still be part of dance, the dance world and help others, even though I've got a baby, so it's like, really dance is everything, for every single part of my life. I dance with her to get her to sleep. She's loves Hip Hop, she loves basketball and she loves reggae, because my life has been so full, I have no regrets and I am able to give her my full attention whole heartedly. I love focusing on her and watching her grow, my family is wonderful, we are a great team and I am so thankful for that! I've never had a guy look out for me the way my partner does, that is special!

IA: What a childhood. Hip Hop on one side and basketball on the other.

LF: She's got it all, and we travel. Travelling has been a big part of my life and it hasn't been easy but it's been adventurous, you know. She's gonna have a lot of fun, probably end up a wild child like me lol. These things that have happened have made me realise how much I love it, and how much I couldn't live without it. So, you know, getting the burns or getting ill, I didn't feel right, I didn't feel myself. It was part of my identity. I think, I'm glad I had those hard times because it

really makes you cherish it more. We've got kids classes set up and I've been teaching for twelve years as well. So that's something I like, and I've set up quite a lot of events along the way, so yeah. We've touched on most of it.

IA: What are these articles and ornaments you have brought along?

LF: I just brought a few things. This is an article from Bristol. This is what I love about Bristol, they really back you. This is an article Bristol wrote about me 'Breakin' the mould.' I actually had Bristol doing a documentary on me, which was really good, the stuff I've done. Now this is really cool. If you can find it, here's like moves you can do in the home and it's got a whole two-page spread - have a look.

IA: Let me see...

"These were given to me in Zulu Nation, by the guys, when I joined. They were original medallions that they make for the crew. They gave me...they gave me my first medallion once I'd finished the book and then as I'd done different events they give me different ones to put on the chain."

LF: You'll see me. It's two pages. I did a lot with Colston Hall, so they did two pages on me, for people to be inspired to do stuff at home.

IA: You've got all your Bart**Simpsons and...**

LF: Yeah, that was the Hip Hop side of it, the breaking side of it. This was when I was asked to be Breakin' Convention rep, it included loads of press interviews, TV appearances and things like that to promote Hip Hop and to promote the event. This was Glastonbury and I also was asked to go to London to become a part of a conference with fitness and breaking cause I'm a fitness instructor as well on how that helps. These were given to me in Zulu Nation, by the guys, when I joined. They were original medallions that they make for the crew. They gave me my first medallion once I'd finished the book and then as I'd done different events they give me different ones to put on the chain. We did Tommy Boy Records - that was from the Tommy Boy Records tour. This was from LA, when I

went there and battled...I just thought I'd bring them so you could have a look.

IA: Thank you. What a life you're living.

LF: I'm living it, like anybody else who goes out and lives their life. Then when you look back and you talk about it you think 'Wow.'

IA: How many other B-Girls in the UK have done what you have done?

LF: That's what I mean, people say to me...when I went to LA, they said 'We need to do a film on you. We should do a movie cause you've literally been...'

IA: It's not like you've been like just sitting around the fish pond for twenty years.

LF: Or just dancing every day. I have tried to really fill my life with a lot, so that I can really get a broad view on what it is to dance, what it is to be a B-Girl and how lucky I am to have these experiences...I've really tried to put myself out there to learn from the source and to love every day. I'm really grateful for you asking me to do this because, like I said, I don't think I'm different to anyone else, or I'm above anything or...it's just nice that people recognise you are tryna do stuff and you're life is a bit different.

IA: It's about trying to ensure that this set of people share what they've done and demonstrate that Hip Hop isn't just one thing - it has enabled people to do X, Y and Z.

LF: For me, it's completely changed my life to be honest with you. If I hadn't been able to do some of these things, performing at Glastonbury in front of two hundred thousand people, working with Skills Methodz in LA, or working with Rudimental in New York, or having crews that have been my family for the whole way

through...those little things at the start, it was something I loved about it, and then having people support you all the way, especially in Bristol. Imagine, I could have just been working behind a desk. It's been the reason for all these opportunities that I've had, and the reason why I've travelled so much, because I wanted to seek out Hip Hop in its rawest form, so I think my life would have been so different without it. It's opened this whole world out there, which you wouldn't think, would you? I just want to thank everyone who's been a part of my journey and I'm sure there people I've missed as there is too many to mention, but that's Hip Hop, it's a community of people that make it what it is.

