

MR MOTIVATOR

STILL MOTIVATING

after all these years!

Mr Motivator, who has made exercise videos exclusively for the U3A, tells Joanne Smith how determination and the **Boys' Brigade** made him a TV star

I wouldn't have thought that I'd get slightly out of breath doing eight-minute exercises sitting in a chair. But following Mr Motivator's new bright and cheery workout, developed especially for the U3A and now on YouTube, is easy, fun and you can feel those muscles working and your heart rate increase.

Mr Motivator - aka Derrick Evans - made his name in the 1990s as the fitness guru on GMTV's breakfast show, did not have the easiest start in life. Born in Jamaica, he was adopted at three months old and moved to Leicester with his adoptive parents when he was 10. Within a year, his mother had returned to Jamaica.

"I stayed with my father here in the UK and did my schooling, and **The Boys' Brigade** was a pillar for who I am really," he says. "I went camping with them and I was the mace bearer at the front of the parade. It was the foundation stone for who I am. The standards it taught me were important and they have remained with me.

"How I am with people and how I behave with people is down to the **Brigade**. It taught me that if you ask someone how they are, you should wait around to hear how they are, and always be as helpful as you can because you will get it back tenfold. The one thing about life is the more you give, the more you get back."

Derrick moved to London when his then girlfriend, aged 20, became pregnant. He lived on friends' sofas until he managed to get a job and accommodation in a homeless family unit.

The young family eventually moved to a council flat, but that wasn't much better because it was near wasteland and rats.

"But, all the while, I believed that hard work would pay off and all I needed to do was be patient," says Derrick.

He was just 23 when he found himself looking after his young daughter on his own. Having never met his real mother or father, he was determined to do whatever it took to provide his own daughter with a loving home. For many years, he worked in stock control for Green Shield Stamps, and then for Argos and Rank Hovis McDougall. "Whatever I had to do, I did it to put food on the table," he says.

Then came a chance visit to a leisure centre that was to transform his life. "I saw women doing a pop-mobility class," he says. "I stood there transfixed, watching them do this. I thought, 'I could teach this'."

NO QUALIFICATIONS

Derrick set up a class in a church hall in Neasden, North London, and recruited two women to run it for him. After three months watching them, he decided to take the classes himself.

"The more I did it, the more confident I became," he said. "One day, the British Heart Foundation said they'd like me to go around the country talking to people about exercise. I didn't know any more than what I had researched - I didn't have any qualifications. I bought every single fitness video I could find. I went to an international dance and fitness exhibition, I read every book I could, just so people couldn't throw stones at me and I would be as good as I could be.

"Then Gloria Hunniford heard how popular my classes were. People would travel 20 miles to come to my classes. We'd have 120 people in a hall working out."

Hunniford hired Derrick as a personal trainer and, subsequently, he was invited on to the TV show Going North where he met her friend Eamonn Holmes, Mad Lizzie and the Green Goddess, and ended up training Holmes and other presenters at the TV studios.

His next big break came when he persuaded the producer of GMTV to join in the training sessions. He told Derrick that if he could persuade someone like him to keep fit, he'd be able to persuade the entire nation to do the same. So began Mr Motivator's daily appearances on GMTV, where he stayed for ten years.

Mr Motivator has been back on our screens during the coronavirus lockdown on BBC HealthCheck UK Live with Angela Rippon, giving advice on staying mentally and physically healthy and happy. He also started his own YouTube channel with his wife, Sandra Evans, who does the exercises with him. "People underestimate exercising in a chair," he says. "When you are in a chair, you can isolate a particular muscle and work on it. You will be surprised how good exercising in a chair is."

Derrick quotes figures that 80 per cent of people aged over 65 think there is no point in exercising.

"Exercise helps you maintain your independence," he says. "You can't wait around for someone to look after you. You have got to take control."