INTERVIEW L05: GARETH RUSSELL

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Gareth Russell [pseudonym]
Interview date: 16th November 2019
Location: London
Transcriber: Dr Jack Crangle

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type.

FR: Rolling now, so just to start, could you say your name and today's date?

GR: Right, well, are we using the anonymous name?

FR: Yes, if, if–

GR: Well, okay.

FR: Okay, actually, so don't say your name, that's a bit, it's easier, just don't say your name, just say, ah fuck, well, we need to say something, don't we?

GR: Let's say a name.

FR: Okay, yeah.

GR: My name is Gareth Russell and date, date of birth?

FR: Today's date.

GR: Today's date is the sixteenth of November 2019.

FR: Okay, thank you very much. So the first thing that I've been asking everyone is why were you interested in taking part in the project, or what interested you about the project?

GR: Okay, my girlfriend discovered it online and thought I might be interested, so she asked me to look at it and I looked at it and thought it was an interesting project, and I remember visiting London in the seventies and they still had signs on some digs that said something like no dogs, no Irish, no blacks and that always stuck with me, so weirdly that connected with the project, in my mind anyway.

FR: That's interesting. So we'll start with growing up in Northern Ireland I suppose, so first of all, where are you from?

GR: I'm from Rosebery Road in east Belfast and growing up it was working class, but I never thought in those terms when I was a kid, and I remember I was in a little gang from the age of about five till the age of eleven, and there was me and there was a link between my family and another family in the road, in the street, because my, my sisters and my brother were friends with my little friend's brothers and sisters, we had exactly the same number of kids and exactly the same number of girls and boys, so I was given a picture years later, when I grew up, with me with my, my little friend, his name was Billy, and I said to him as soon as I saw the picture, why are you in short trousers, but I'm in a giant nappy [laughs], he said I've no idea, I said neither do I, and he said what's funny about the picture, and I couldn't think of anything unusual about the picture, so eventually he said there are no cars in the street, and it was because when we were growing up in the early fifties there were cars, but not nearly so many.

FR: Not parked along the side of the street as you would see now.

GR: Very few, and in fact, in that photograph, cos it was a long road, but it went up a hill, so you could see in the background the hill, but there was only one car.

FR: Ah okay.

GR: So it was sort of interesting.

FR: So, sorry go on.

GR: Well, that, my earliest memories were all of being in this little gang, cos we had a gang leader, and I call it a gang because every now and again they would have fights with other gangs, but me and my friend Billy we weren't fighters [laughs], so, for example, the leader of the gang, Michael, said one day okay, Roslyn Street, which was the next street, have challenged us to a fight, and we sort of, me and Billy looked at each other [laughs] and we weren't really up for it, but Michael said it'll be okay, so we went to an entry, which was behind their houses, and we went up to the top of the entry and Michael said I'll just, I'll just charge them and then you can come behind, and so they came out and the first guy was wearing an army helmet and he had some sort of club or something, I don't know, and Michael just charged and grabbed the club off him and hit him over the head and put a dent in the helmet, and they all ran away, so we didn't actually have to do anything, which was just as well cos we would have been useless, and so, so we all sort of went to the same school and primary school, but I passed my eleven-plus and none of the other guys did, so I ended up going to a grammar school, to Grosvenor High School, which was off the Castlereagh Road, and they went to Park Parade, which was closer to where we lived, so I never really saw them for, for all those years at grammar school cos you just end up going your different ways and making friends at school and stuff like that.

FR: Do you remember having any kind of feelings about that or any–

GR: No, because, two years before the eleven-plus I was moved to a different school, and looking back, cos I don't really know why, but I think they must've worked out the people

they believed would not do well in the eleven-plus and the people they believed would do well, because none of those friends of mine ended up in the school that I was in.

FR: Right, right.

GR: That's the only thing I can think of, we, I think a lot of things that happened in those days you weren't actually told about, they just happened and you just went with it.

FR: No one actually mentioned it?

GR: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, and what, were your parents pleased that you'd got into the grammar school or how did they–?

GR: Yeah, but my, my eldest sister had also gone to grammar school. My brother, my brother, who was the eldest in the family, he didn't, he went to Park Parade, and the youngest sister who was older than me, but she was youngest of the two girls, she also went to Park Parade, but my eldest sister, she went to Grosvenor, and I, I was aware at about the age of twelve that there was a difference in what they knew and how they were, between my sister and my two brothers and that probably happened to me as well. I remember a girl coming up to me in the street one day and I think I'd been at the grammar school about two years and she said why do you not talk to us anymore, and I said oh sorry, I didn't mean not to talk to you, hello, how are you doing, and stuff like that, and she said we think you're a snob now, and I said really, and she said yeah, and I said well, I'm not, I'm not trying to be one, it's just like, I go to Grosvenor so my friends, more of my friends are at Grosvenor and I hardly see you, you know, especially because winter lasts so long, you're coming home in the dark and you're doing your homework and stuff like that, and I said but, but please believe me you're still my friend as far as I'm concerned, and all of my friends are still my friends, it's just I don't see yous as much, and she said oh that's okay then.

FR: It's a big change at that age really, what school you go to, it makes a big difference.

GR: Yeah, but I never really thought about it, in fact, I haven't thought about it until this conversation.

FR: How did you find Grosvenor, did you–?

GR: Well, some people there were middle class, it's the only way I can define it, and there were still some people like me that were working class, so it was a mix, and it didn't really effect anything at school that I recall, but I do remember making friends with this guy and he said come back to my place and we'll have coffee and a cake, and I'd never had coffee [laughs], it was a posh drink as far as I was concerned, and so I went back and he had a fridge, we never had a fridge, and his house was much bigger and stuff like that, so I became aware of that, and the one way it did have an effect, it didn't make me feel less good about my friend, he was still my friend and it was great that, you know, he had this, but it made me [pauses] a little concerned about having those friends back to my house.

FR: I see what you mean, yeah

GR: Whereas my friends who I'd grown up with, you know, I'd no problem, they came to my house and I went to their house and stuff like that, but I did, there was a thing in my head and there shouldn't have been, but there was.

FR: That it might be embarrassing or that it might be–

GR: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, no, I can, I can see that. What did your parents do?

GR: My mum was a housewife, she brought up–

FR: Of course, four kids.

GR: Yeah, and I remember later on, when all the kids had left and I was, I was still there, but I was maybe about sixteen she got a job as a home help, you know, that, where they go round and it's, it's not quite care in the same way that you get people that are care assistants or whatever their job title is, but they, they go round and they keep the house clean and maybe they do a few messages for people, stuff like that.

FR: Usually for older, for older people, yeah. **[00:10:00]**

GR: Yes.

FR: Yeah, that makes sense.

GR: And what was funny, years later when they, they were at a stage where their health wasn't as good and they needed a similar sort of person to come in, the person who came in was this lovely lady, but she wasn't very good at cleaning anything, so when she left they cleaned up after her [laughs], so yeah, that was always funny.

FR: Yeah, that's polite, that's polite that you wouldn't say, you'd wait until she'd left.

GR: That's it, but, that's it, and it because she was nice that they didn't want to offend here.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

GR: So it was good. What I discovered most about when my life changed and I went to Grosvenor was, I suppose the academic nature of it and those things that I'd started to become slightly aware of, but never really thought about its implications, but I started to realise, especially as I was getting to thirteen, fourteen, that I was a creative person and I was good at writing more than anything at that time, and it, it didn't distance me from my friends who I grew up with when I was a kid or anything like that, it just, I just became aware

of it and I became aware of I could actually enjoy things that I had to learn, whereas when I was in primary school it was always a chore, you know what I mean.

FR: Yeah, I understand that.

GR: So, so yeah.

FR: But you didn't feel any kind of incompatibility–

GR: No.

FR: With that and being working class or being from east Belfast?

GR: No, not at all, cos, as I say, you know, there were still quite a few people there who were also working class and from other parts of east Belfast, so one of my best mates who I started to go and watch football matches with, and then we played football, he was from a street, I think it might've been called Martin Street, it was just off Templemore Avenue.

FR: I know where Templemore Avenue is.

GR: Yeah, yeah, just past the baths on the right there.

FR: Yes, yeah.

GR: And so, again, very working class and stuff like that, so, so yeah, and his house was not dissimilar from my house, so again, I had no problem [laughs] about that transition over to his house, he could come to my house if he wanted and stuff like that, but yeah, if it was somebody who came from a more middle-class, or we would call them posh in those days, background and they had a fancy house there was just something in, in my head felt uncomfortable offering them to come to my house.

FR: And would it have been an all Protestant school?

GR: Yes.

FR: It would have been.

GR: Yes, yes, but that's also interesting because my street, although I come from east Belfast and everybody refers to it as being Protestant apart from the Short Strand enclave, which was of course Catholic, but in the street that I grew up in there were Catholics. My next door neighbour was Catholic, yes, really lovely lady, her daughter was much older than me, but just, you know, they, we would look after them, they would look after us and there were other Catholics in the street as well and there was never any problem.

FR: That's interesting.

GR: And also I come from a mixed background because my cousins were Catholic.

FR: Okay, okay.

GR: The ones that I mentioned earlier on, yeah, and ultimately ended up living around Cushendall, not all of them, but some of them, and we would go on holiday to waterfalls in Glenariff. They lived at one point off the Antrim Road, I think it was called Eia Street, and so yeah, they, they were our closest cousins, we saw them most and stuff, so, so growing up the Catholic-Protestant thing wasn't an issue.

FR: Didn't really exist for you, no.

GR: No, although occasionally you would hear adult conversations and you would get bits of it, but in the early stages I wouldn't have been really aware of, of a lot of it, but when the Troubles kicked off, I remember I was studying for A-levels and somebody said this, this woman's going to visit tomorrow, there's a few people, but it's led by this woman and she's going to talk to the upper sixth, so are you going to it, and I said I've just too much revision to do for my A-levels and it turned out that was, God, my head is very bad for remembering names now, but it was the famous [pauses], it was the lady who led the civil rights marches.

FR: Ah yes.

GR: And ultimately became a Member of Parliament.

FR: Bernadette Devlin.

GR: Bernadette Devlin is the lady.

FR: Now Bernadette McAliskey, but Bernadette Devlin then.

GR: That's right, with Bernadette Devlin, the thing I most admired her for [laughs] was slapping the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what he said about Northern Ireland, because when it did kick off like, my mates, most of my mates then, the other thing that happened after I went to Grosvenor was I joined the Boys' Brigade at my mother's church and that's where I learned I had a gift for football and stuff.

FR: Oh yeah, because you started playing football, yeah.

GR: Yeah, and also you did exams there and stuff like that, so I was learning all the time and got my Queen, what they call your Queen's badge, which means you have a certain number of badges of different types, and then became the top NCO, which is a staff sergeant by the age of eighteen, but also–

FR: Did you march? Did the Boys' Brigade march?

GR: Yeah, and also they did, to get the ultimate badge that led to the Queen's badge and also led to me becoming a staff sergeant, you had to go to another Boys' Brigade company and, so with a group of boys you didn't know, and you had to get them to march by giving

instructions, so you had to get them to turn left, to turn right, to about turn and do a lot of things, so if you didn't do it right they could walk into the wall [laughs], so, so it's harder than it sounds, but once you get it you get it, so we practised a lot so, so I got that. But the main thing about it was I made great friends and if I hadn't come to, to London they would've remained friends I think for life, but I lost track with some of them, but in the last few years I've actually got in touch with a few of them again, so I'm pleased about that, that's important to me.

FR: Yeah, are they still in Northern Ireland?

GR: Yes, yeah, nearly all of my friends, all of my friends I grew up with are in Northern Ireland apart from, I think one or two went to America, but most of them are, there's certainly none of them that are in London that I know about.

FR: Yeah, yeah. So I wanted, before maybe we, well, actually help yourself to a coffee first [laughs; pause while coffee is poured]. Thank you very much.

GR: [pauses] The funny thing is when you do it like this I prefer it black, sorry, the coffee.

FR: That's alright, this is all we've got apparently, no machine. So I was going to ask what was it like, you said going to football matches as well as playing football.

GR: Yeah, so when I was in, before, when I was a kid a mate of mine said oh there's this thing, they call it the Cubs, it's sort of before you're old enough to join the Scouts.

FR: Before the Scouts, isn't it, yeah, yeah.

GR: Yeah, and he said, Michael, the guy who was leader of the gang was going, so, so why don't we go, so, so we went, I've forgotten his name, but we went and I quite liked it, and it's funny things are starting to occur to me during this conversation that I didn't think about before, and when I was talking about the Boys' Brigade I didn't really think before much about the level I reached and stuff like that, so in the Cubs, at some point I became a sixer, which is the leader of one of the little groups, it's like you've six groups.

FR: I think I, yes, I remember that.

GR: So you get a seconder and then you get a sixer who's the leader and there, there was a guy in the Cubs who had a medical condition and he was taken into hospital, so the Cub leader asked if I would go with him to see him, to cheer him up type thing, so I went and he said afterwards we're going now to watch the Linfield football club play in this very important match, cos if they win this match they've won the seven titles which have never been done before, and I didn't know what all this meant and I said okay, so I went and that was the first **[00:20:00]** proper match with a proper team that I'd ever watched, watching Linfield win the seven trophies, and then when I went to Grosvenor and made friends with the guy I told you about in Martin Street, he was a Linfield fan, so we used to go and watch Linfield play.

FR: Because I think, as I understand it the crowds were much bigger then, it was a much bigger deal in Belfast back then.

GR: Yeah, and the pitches were much better as well and, yeah, it was, it was a big deal, and as a kid you got this thing, he told me about it, I didn't know about it, my mate Sammy said to me we can get lifted over and I said what's lifted over, and he said well, you just, you don't go in, cos you have to pay if you go in, you just stand where all the crowds are coming and you ask people as they go by would you lift me over mister, and then, and you always got somebody who would lift you over, and because we were both small–

FR: It was no bother.

GR: That's when it happened, so we got lifted over every match until we became obviously bigger, and then, and then we started to pay cos we had to, but yeah, so, so that was interesting, but the thing about, because like, because I grew up in a street with Catholics and Protestants I, I didn't get the thing that happened later with this, I got civil rights, that made perfect sense, what didn't make sense to me was people being violent towards one another and there was another thing, I went to a Presbyterian church and I was comfortable with that, and in fact, I became a Christian in the sense of what that means or meant in our church and believing in God, but I remember in the Boys' Brigade one day the minister had been told something, so he became, he said I want to go and talk to them, so he came and talked to my Boys' Brigade company and what he'd been told was that some of the senior boys, and at this stage I wasn't one of the senior boys, had, had been going out with Catholic girls, and so he was saying things like you, you will burn in hell fire if you do this because what'll happen is you'll become Catholic because that's the way they see it, that if you want to marry them you–

FR: The children have to, yeah.

GR: You have to change and you have to become Catholic and you'll burn in hell fire, and as soon as I heard that, that didn't make any sense whatsoever to me and I just started thinking well, surely if you believe in a God and if you believe in a heaven and hell, I didn't, I didn't see the difference really, it seemed to me, and I'd read a bit about Luther, Martin Luther, and the whole thing about, really he broke away and that's how the term Protestant came into being.

FR: Yeah, protest, yeah.

GR: Because he was protesting because of things of corruption in the Catholic church, in the hierarchy and about things being sold as icons.

FR: Indulgences, yeah.

GR: Yeah, yeah, and as the real hair of Christ and stuff like that, and that made perfect sense to me, but the idea that somebody who was in that religion would be persecuted and there would be wars, like there were through the ages and stuff, none of that, none made sense to me because the main thing that got through to me when I was in church was love thy

neighbour as thyself, you know, the two great commandments, love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and the second one is love thy neighbour as thyself, and I just couldn't–

FR: It's a contradiction.

GR: Equate that with, yeah, so, so I didn't like that and it started to go downhill a little bit with my relationship with, not [pauses] not believing in God, but rather believing that people who were a different religion were in some way doomed and you weren't, because later on when all the violence started you started to realise well, it's, it's things, it's thinking like that that got it, which didn't surprise me that Ian Paisley was a leader of all of this, you know, somebody in the church, and I, I played football once with a guy who had, was a minister who ended up getting shot.

FR: Really?

GR: Yeah, because he was also an MP and it was the days when things like that happened, you know, so on the one hand I definitely didn't like that, but then when the fighting started it was, it was both sides, it was no, for me no-one was better than anyone else.

FR: And you felt already kind of slightly outside of the sectarian thing–

GR: Yeah.

FR: Because of your mixed neighbourhood, but also because you thought about it in relation to–

GR: Yeah, I was, I was in a play that was very successful in Belfast about ten years ago and ended up touring around Ireland and then touring England and Edinburgh Festival and winning awards and touring other places in the world, and it was about Long Kesh, the political prison, and I remember we did it in, we started it in a community centre which is Cliftonville Road, bottom of Cliftonville Road, so it was a Catholic area, so it was mostly a Catholic thing, although it was about both Catholics and Protestants in Long Kesh, so it had black humour, it had music, it had sadness, it had deaths, it had, it was a mixture of everything, it was just a brilliantly put together play. But at the end of it, at the end of opening night a guy came up to me and said hello Gareth, how are you doing, and I realised it was somebody I'd been to school with.

FR: Oh really?

GR: So I was surprised that I saw him in that particularly community centre, but he'd come specifically to see the play and he talked to me about it and he thought and he said that was just brilliant and he said it was like that and it was just, you know, and I don't know why I asked it, but there was something in his eyes as I was looking at him and I said were you, were you in Long Kesh, and he said yeah, I got involved.

FR: Strange to meet someone from your childhood, and then come back and do a play about something that's–

GR: Yeah, he wasn't in my street, but he was in Grosvenor.

FR: Yeah.

GR: And, yeah, and that happened to a lot of people I knew, you know, yeah.

FR: And you were never, it was never a possible path for you really.

GR: No, I don't think so, I think a lot of it was to do with being involved in church through the Boys' Brigade, and I didn't think of myself particularly as like, somebody who'd become a church elder or something like that, but I did believe in God and I did, and I was anti-violence, and when I was in that little gang I was telling you about, from the age of four or five until I was ten, eleven, you know, some very nasty things happened, even though they were only kids. Like, there was, there was a guy in the gang, we only, he didn't live in our area, but he came to visit his sister, usually at least a couple of times a week, and he, so he got involved in the gang, but I remember we went to the Ambassador cinema which is now the Wyse Byse on the Cregagh Road.

FR: I actually know where that is, yeah.

GR: Yeah, and we were queueing up cos we always went to a matinee and there were two guys in front of us and they were talking and they were, this guy, his name was Jim, and he was, he was, he could be nasty, but these guys were like, about four years older than us and when you're a kid that's a lot.

FR: Big difference, yeah.

GR: Yeah, so we would've been about seven or eight and they would've been about eleven, twelve, something like that.

FR: Which is a much more, kind of, grown up kid, yeah.

GR: So Jim got a bit mouthy with them, you know, he started saying a few things, and a guy pulled out a penknife and pulled out the blade of a penknife and said if, if you don't shut up I'm going to, I'm gonna stick you with this, and Jim grabbed the penknife and stuck it in the back of his hand and the guy screamed out and both of them ran away, two twelve-year-old guys ran away cos an eight-year-old with, with me [laughs], who was never going to do any damage, had taken his knife off him and stuck him with it, it's crazy, so, so yes.

FR: So there was kind of a violent theme, which is just, yeah.

GR: Yeah, yeah, and so I, actually I saw much more violence in those years than I **[00:30:00]** did from the age of eleven to eighteen and that may sound weird, but that's true and, and there were things happened like, I remember once my friend, Billy, who I talked about

before, who I've remained in touch with all these years, even though I live in London now, he, he fell out with the gang leader and the, it was at the weekend, so that's when there were more gang members, and so the gang leader chased off after Billy, who ran away, and he, he got him just outside my house and I didn't realise it was my house, I chased after them because I realised they could beat the shit out of Billy, so I tried to pull him off and then some of the other gang members sort of were pulling at me and trying to hit me and stuff like that, and all of a sudden I heard a noise and a slap and the biggest gang member had been slapped, and I turned round and it was my mother [laughs], and they all, they all ran off, but for the following month I, I was *non gratis*.

FR: You knew you were in trouble.

GR: Yeah, I was in big trouble. If I went to the cinema they would be in the queue, same as me, but they'd be pointing at me and hitting me and punching and stuff like that, but I just kept doing, it was, although I wasn't a tough guy, I, there was something in my head about, well, I don't care, I'm just gonna do what I normally do, so I would go to the cinema on my own if I had to and I didn't get beat up because they weren't tough guys either apart from the leader of the gang and the guy Jim that I mentioned, yeah, and they would do things like, I remember I had my bike outside a shop because I had to get a few errands for my mum, and when I got my bike to go down there was a big bang because they'd stuck fireworks in the saddlebag, stuff like that, so they would do things and throw things at you and stuff like that, you know, but yeah, it was more, it wasn't as much what happened to me, it was more things I saw that people did and, yeah, but obviously the violence that happened later on when the Troubles started, that, that's completely different cos that's killing people and blowing people up, that was, that was tough, so, you know.

FR: So what, to go back to, you're sort of sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, you're doing your A-levels, did you have, and you've had this sense already that you'd like to write, that you'd like to study, that you can be creative, what was in your head to do then, what did you do for your A-levels?

GR: I did ancient history, modern history, English lit and English language, but actually, although I enjoyed being creative I enjoyed doing it for its own sake, I never thought of the possibility of becoming a writer or an actor or anything else creative because I suppose I didn't look upon those as jobs, or at least jobs that I could get. I had no desire to be an actor, for instance, which was what I became. The acting thing was just somewhat ridiculous really. What happened was I was, I was in the lower sixth at Grosvenor and I, my form teacher said Mr Ross wants to see you, and Mr Ross was the Greek teacher, I didn't do Greek, so I had no idea what this was about, so I said do you know what it's about sir, and he said no, he just wants to see you, so I went to see Mr Ross, the Greek teacher, and I came in and said hello sir, I believe you want to see me, that's the way we had to address them, and they called us all by our surnames.

FR: Quite formal.

GR: Yeah, and he said you're in the school play, and I said sorry sir, he said you're in the school play, and I said well, what do you mean, and he said you're in the school play, and I

said but why am I in the school play, I haven't volunteered for the school play, I don't know anything about the school play, and he said Cuthbert recommended you. Cuthbert was another pupil [laughs], who was playing the lead in a production of *Much Ado About Nothing* and he recommended me for a part, even though I had not volunteered to be in the drama society or anything like that.

FR: That's interesting.

GR: So I said to him is there any way I can get out of this sir, and he said no, so I had to go along, and part of the reason, I suppose it goes back to the thing I said earlier on about middle class and working class, most of the people who were in the school play were middle class and so when I went I felt slightly an outsider, but I did what I had to do, and I was very nervous about the whole thing, I was very nervous about going on stage, I didn't mind playing football in front of crowds, but I was very nervous about this whole thing, and the only thing that was in my head was, we're only doing three productions and then I never have to do this ever again, and I remember when it was all over I, I said, my friend said to me how are you feeling, I said I'm feeling great, he said you enjoyed it, I said no, I feel great cos I nev-, I know I never have to do this again. So the idea that I ended up becoming an actor is just bizarre, all those things taken into consideration, so it was a series of things that happened that, that were just co-incidental. But years later when I did become an actor and stuff, my mum, she didn't say it to me weirdly, she said it to my niece, who later told me this story when my mum had died, she said when your mum was watching you doing that, and by the way I'd only a small role, after it was over when everybody was applauding she was all proud, so she said oh that's my son, and this man turned to her and said my name is Mr Lee, I am a music teacher and I, I teach Gareth for music, he's going to become an actor.

FR: [pauses] That's so interesting, right.

GR: Yeah.

FR: People, it seems like people around you thought that you were an actor and you didn't feel it.

GR: No, I didn't.

FR: Yeah.

GR: There was nothing [laughs] that suggested it to me. I had, we had a speech class which would be the equivalent of a drama class today, and they had lots of fun in it.

FR: Was that in English language, kind of?

GR: No, it was called a speech class, it wasn't English language, but it was a variation on what is now known as a drama class, she would talk to us about plays, we never put on anything, but she would talk and she would get us to, to do what's now known as improvisation, but it was just, it was just like playing in those days, and I used to enjoy it and have fun, but I just thought it was a laugh, just something to have a laugh at, but anyway.

FR: And so you seem, you said you played football as well.

GR: Yeah.

FR: To a highish level.

GR: Well, highish level in, in Northern Ireland without being the highest level in Northern Ireland, so, so I knew I was quite good at it and I, when I was playing in the Boys' Brigade, because you did trials for the Belfast Battalion, so each company were in the league.

FR: Very militaristic [indecipherable], yeah [laughs].

GR: Yeah, that's right and there were, there were different leagues, there was junior I think it was called, intermediate and senior, senior you could play any of the boys in the Boys' Brigade, junior I think they had to be under, fifteen or under, and intermediate, which is what our company did, the total ages of the eleven players had up to, had to add up to a certain number.

FR: [laughs] That's a complicated method isn't it?

GR: I know, I know, but what it meant was you could have older boys and some younger boys to balance out.

FR: I see.

GR: So it was always a, so when, seemingly our company had got to the final, but been beaten the year before I joined the Boys' Brigade, but most of the, there was a lot of older players and they, they left because they were too old for the Boys' Brigade so, so it ended up with a lot of young people and for some reason they chose me to be captain, and so the team got better and better and then when you reached a certain age you would, your company would be told that if you want to submit anybody for trials for the Belfast Battalion team, so there was me and another guy who, who were put forward and we got to play for the Belfast Battalion **[00:40:00]** and then the next year I was made captain of the Belfast Battalion team and stuff, so you go and play like, Glasgow Battalion–

FR: Right, right, right across–

GR: You'd go to play Liverpool or whatever, all across, so, so when I reached sixteen I realised that I loved football, there was just something about it that I loved, so there was a guy who sort of mentored me, he was like a coach, and I asked him if he could get me a trial for somebody and he said I'll get back to you, and he got me a trial for Glentoran, so I did well in the trial, so I got to play for Glentoran's youth team when I was sixteen and I did a couple of games for the reserves, and actually that was, that was a good reserve team because Tommy Cassidy, who later went on to play for Newcastle and Northern Ireland, was in that team, but I, I only played, actually I was sub, I was bigging myself up there [laughs], I was sub for a couple of games for the reserves.

FR: Ah still.

GR: Yeah, and then later on I, I, I fell out of love with it for a while and then the scout in Belfast for Ballymena, who was the father of a mate of mine, he said would you go down and have a trial for Ballymena because I think they, think you'd do well there, so I went down there and ended up getting through and playing for the youth team for just a couple of matches and then I was promoted to the reserves, so I played for Ballymena United reserves, but then I had a bad injury and got my knee broken.

FR: And you gave it up?

GR: Yeah, cos when I came back, cos it's a joint it's hard to come back from a joint, and when I, I did come back, but I realised I, I didn't have the same speed and, yeah, and there's certain things I couldn't do as well, so.

FR: Yeah, and so you finished school, you'd been in a play or a couple of plays.

GR: One, just that one thing.

FR: Just the one play.

GR: Just that one thing.

FR: And around the same time you're playing football, but not really–

GR: Yeah, so I went, I had to get a job because I wouldn't, I didn't want to go to university because I was fed up with, even though I've talked a lot about learning and enjoying it, I just got, there was just something in my head about academia I didn't, I just, so I got a job in the *Belfast Telegraph*, and it's funny because my careers advisor said you should become a journalist, cos that's a way into writing, but I didn't cos I kept thinking journalists do odd hours and they're, they, I wouldn't be able to go to a football training, so.

FR: [laughs] Okay, priorities.

GR: Yeah, yeah, so, so I joined the advertising department, the classified advertising department.

FR: And what was that like to work, what–?

GR: It was sort of fun originally because I worked in tele-ads originally which is where, mostly girls, which is enjoyable [laughs] when you're young like that, yeah, and there was a couple of guys and we were all young, you know, the guys, there was a particular procedure they were going through, the guys they hired, they were only hiring two guys, so it was me and another guy got the jobs and you had to be eighteen and you had to have A-levels and stuff like that. So you'd be at the front desk in those days and people would come in and put

in, pay for adverts to go in or do what we called BMDs, births, marriages and deaths, and that was difficult cos sometimes people would, you know, be emotional and cry.

FR: That's quite a hard thing to, yeah.

GR: Yeah, yeah, but, but you learnt a lot and it was interesting and it was good fun, and then you, after a period of time you had to go into tele-ads, which is, means you were on the phones and you were answering calls for ads, but you also had to phone people out to, to try and get them to do ads.

FR: To like, solicit?

GR: That's it, that's it, and then eventually you ended up classified advertising reps, which was funny cos originally I didn't see myself being a sales rep, which is ultimately what it is. I saw it more as a chance to get into copywriting because that was a creative area and I would've found that fun, and actually before I joined the *Belfast Telegraph* I phoned a couple of advertising agencies and I, I got to speak to what would now be a CEO, but in those days was a managing director, and he said well, copywriting is good if you are a creative person, he says you need experience, so if I were you I'd try and get a job in the advertising department of a local newspaper.

FR: Right, which is what you did.

GR: So that's how I ended up there, yeah. But I remember the day that I knew I couldn't keep working there, and it related indirectly to the Troubles. The area I had been given included Smithfield in central Belfast, which is in the days when it was a market and almost everybody who worked there was Catholic, and I, I just learnt so much because they would talk to me about politics, they would talk to me about everything and we'd have a great time, and those guys were really cool cos it didn't bother them that I was a Protestant.

FR: Ah ha, so this is like, the people working in the market?

GR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I got, there was a guy that worked in the pet shop, which is just outside the market, and he, he said to me one day, cos we were having a discussion and he, he said [laughs], we got into a barney one day about a particular point about politics and I got on my high horse and said I studied, I studied history at A-level, and he said, he said you studied English history, cos the way you were taught history was from an English perspective, you want to go and read some Irish history books which will give you the same era, but from an Irish perspective, and he was right and I went and read and realised it's just how you look at it, and I just learned so much from those guys, and they were really good fun as well, really interesting guys and great characters, just, just brilliant.

FR: There's a beautiful photobook of Smithfield market from before it burned down. I can't remember who wrote it, but really beautiful photographs of the market, cos I'd never seen it–

GR: It's brilliant.

FR: Only as it is now, you know.

GR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's just brilliant, and I remember the first time there was an explosion there, and I was in one of the shops, and I said to the guy in the shop why has your shop survived and the shops each side of you are completely blown out, and he said I asked one of the soldiers that, he was one of the bomb disposal soldiers, and he said it's a weird thing, but when an explosion happens they travel in straight lines, the impact of it, but it's not, it's not solid across, so it might be whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, so there's spaces in between sometimes, so that's why sometimes a place is blown up and the place beside it's not touched–

FR: Still standing.

GR: And then two further along's also blown and you can't really work it out, but that's the reasoning, you know, but anyway, to get back to the thing about me giving up the working at the *Belfast Telegraph*, I was becoming more and more disillusioned and I remember being at an IRA funeral on the Falls Road, cos the Falls Road was part of my thing as well.

FR: But you're not reporting though?

GR: No, I'm not reporting, but nevertheless I'm just aware of the Protestant-Catholic thing at that time, and if you're among extremists, extremists on either side, you really don't know how they'll react. So I was working up to go to a few shops to encourage people to do ads.

FR: Oh I see, okay, yeah.

GR: That's what I meant, and they were shouting instructions for how the, they were all, and it said that night there were twenty thousand or something and they all started to march after the instructions were given, so this was like, about ten feet from me, and I just kept walking straight, you know, and just went in, but that, that wasn't the thing. I remember, that stuck in my head for some reason, but a few weeks later I remember I had to visit somebody and I was walking back down the Falls Road, and completely disillusioned with what I was doing, cos selling advertising is what I had ended up doing and that's not really something I enjoyed, selling anything, and I remember this thought came into my head. The thought was, what if I got caught in crossfire and it didn't kill me, but they just wounded me, that would solve my problem.

FR: What problem would it solve?

GR: The problem was I didn't want to work in that job any longer, but for some reason I couldn't work out to just go and tell them, so.

FR: First job I think it can be really hard to, yeah.

GR: Yeah, but that night I remember thinking this is madness, if I'm having that thought I have to leave this company, **[00:50:00]** so I just went to, and said to the boss the next day this is not for me, I've decided to move on and he was fine with it, he had no problem at all, he said no, that's fine, as long as you've thought it through and you're clear about it, you know what you're going to do, and I said well, I've had a few thoughts, but I'm not certain, and I realised looking back on it years later that those first few years, cos in, when I was twenty-three I went travelling for a year, guts of a year, and that taught me a lot as well, but those first few years after I left school and I did a couple of jobs, I realised I was working out what I didn't want to do, in order to find out what I did want to do.

FR: Sure, and were you living at home still?

GR: Yes.

FR: Yes, and this was during, the Troubles have started–

GR: Yeah.

FR: I think.

GR: The Troubles have started. I remember when I was with the *Telegraph* they had a, they had this day where the populace went on strike, well, the Protestant part of the populace went on strike.

FR: Ah yeah, '72, '73, right, was it?

GR: Yeah, and I tried to go to work and I, in those days I would walk, no I, I had to walk to work, but it was no big deal, it's only about twenty-five minutes to walk to work, and I walked to work, but as I walked down My Lady's Road to get to the Ravenhill Road there was a barrier and these guys, and one of them came up as I was approaching the barrier and he said alright, and I said yeah, and he said can I ask where you're going, and I said well, I was going to go to work, and he said who do you work for, and I said the *Belfast Telegraph*, and he said sorry, it's not an essential service, so just go back home, enjoy the day off, and I remember Paisley said something that night, these people all voluntarily did not go to work that day and that was not true, so nobody threatened me or anything like that.

FR: But that was it, just–

GR: Yeah, cos, you know, there's a lot of guys standing there.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

GR: And when you're told just enjoy the day off you're not, you're not going to work today.

FR: You're not going to argue.

GR: Yeah.

FR: And so how was living in Belfast in general, I mean, like, social life, did you–?

GR: Well, the main thing I was aware of was that it got to a point where it shut down after about five, half five at night, and the thing was you were sort of used to that happening in some scenarios in terms of shops, in terms of buses, that was fairly typical anyway, but the pubs started to do it and that was unusual, but the reason pubs started to do it were, it was that there were shootings in pubs and that had started to occur as well, so I was aware of that. You could, socially you tended to spend most of your time in your local area or the centre of Belfast, where you didn't go was, what you didn't do was go to another area that you weren't known in, particularly if it was for the other side, so, so that was difficult. I remember my mum and dad wanted to visit my Catholic, his sister and her husband who were on the Catholic side of the family, and at that stage they had gone to live in Andersonstown, which is a more extreme area, but it was safer for Catholics to live in that area because, of course, extreme Protestants were causing lots of problems for Catholics as well, so my aunt and uncle said well, sure we'll come and collect you in the car and we'll take you there, and they said are you sure it'll be okay, and they said yeah, yeah, yeah, and going into Andersonstown, I never did this, but my dad said what happens is, it'd a bit like some parts of east Belfast where I lived, where there'd be boys parading or something and they would stop you and just check that, and they would have a look in and see who you were, so, and they saw my uncle, they just said alright Jimmy, and he said yeah, just going back home, usual, and so that was it, you know, but, but yeah, it, it was like that. The other thing that I remember happening, I remember my brother-in-law, my eldest sister was married and her husband was a policeman and, he didn't tell me this until years later, but he told me when he'd left the police, but he said at one point he'd been told, he'd been told he had somebody that would give him information, so he'd been told to meet him at a certain place, and he went to meet him at that place, and he was in an entry, and the, cos it was dark, it's always dark in the entries, it turned out not to be the person it should have been, it was somebody else, and it was somebody else with a gun, and they put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger, but it didn't, it misfired, I don't know enough about guns to know how it works, but it, but it didn't, the guy pressed it again and it still didn't work, so the guy ran away. So things like that would happen.

FR: And that's something you found out about afterwards–

GR: Oh yeah.

FR: But would you have been, were you afraid living in Belfast then?

GR: No, it's a strange thing. I think I might've been afraid if I'd got involved, because if you get involved you're going to be asked to do things and you're going to be, so you're going to have the potential for being both a murderer and a victim, but that's not why I didn't join, I didn't join because I, I don't think people should kill each other, I don't think that people should be violent towards each other, I think that you should strive to make things work, and I realise the people that talked about the need to get the attention of the British government you needed to do certain things to do that, but I still wouldn't have used violence, you know, and even if you're not a hard man, you see, you can be taught how to

make a bomb and then all of a sudden you've killed a lot of people, it was that aspect of it that I would never like, I suppose if somebody had threatened to kill my family if I didn't join an illegal organisation I might have found that impossible to say no to, but luckily that never happened, so, you know. There was also a Catholic guy played on a youth team I played for and he told me one day he was, cos he was the only Catholic in our team, one day he was walking down the Castlereagh Road and these two guys shouted something that made him realise that they were after him because he was a Catholic, and he ran down and luckily the street where the manager lived was just off the Castlereagh Road, and he ran down it and knocked on the door, the manager's dad came out and he said there's these two Prod guys are shouting things, they're after me, the manager's dad shut the door closed and said come in, go out the back, there's a toilet outside and just stay in the toilet outside, that's all you've got to do, and so he did, and then there was another knock at the door and these two guys said we know he's come in here, and he said sorry, what are you saying, and he says we know, we know that Catholic guy, probably said worse, they probably used an expl-, and he said we know he's in here and he said who do you think you are, and they burst past him into the house, and so he went into the house after him and he said who do you think you are, and they said we know he's in here, where is he, it's going to be easier if you tell us where he is, and then one of them noticed he had a picture of Dr Paisley, and he looked at it and the manager's dad clocked that he'd looked at it and clocked that there was a change in his, and said Dr Paisley wouldn't be too pleased if I tell him that you were here today, and one of them said something like you'd better start thinking about kicking that bastard off your team or whatever, and they walked out. Things like that happened, you know.

FR: So you were aware of that kind of going on around you, but–

GR: Yeah, like, the worst story I heard was a guy that had been a goalkeeper for a team I played for, **[01:00:00]** and he wasn't my best friend or anything, but he was, he was a good guy and we got on well, and another mate said did you hear about Paul, and I said Paul who, and I can't remember his name, his surname now, but he said, you know, and I said goalie Paul, and he said yeah, and I said no, what happened, he said he's dead, and the thing is you're so used to people that you know, like, everybody knew people who'd died, and probably all of us knew people who'd killed as well, and I said what happened, and he said well, you knew he was in, and he mentioned one of the Protestant organisations, I don't know if it was the UDA or the UVF, whatever, I don't know what it was, and I said no, I didn't know that either, and he said well, he was, but they gave him a job, and I said, a job, and he said yeah, and I said what's, what do you mean, and he said well, he worked, the place where he worked there was a Catholic guy that worked there and they knew about him, and they wanted him killed, so they told him to do it, and he said look lads, I've never killed anybody, I'm not sure I'm your man for this, and they threatened him. I don't know what they said, I'm not sure, the guy that told me the story knew, you know, whether they threatened his family or something, I think he said something, but I'm not sure if it's true, he said, I think they said, it was one of those things, I think they said to him it's either you or him, something like that. So the problem was not just that he couldn't kill somebody, but more that he was actually a friend of this guy.

FR: Cos he worked with him, yeah.

GR: Yeah, even though the Catholic-Protestant thing was going on, and I think this was true probably of more people than you would realise, and so he committed suicide, he shot himself.

FR: Jesus, that's a horrible story, that's sad.

GR: That's probably the worst thing that I heard about.

FR: It's an impossible situation to be in.

GR: Mmm, and I knew, I knew people that also left the country because of that.

FR: Well, that's, I was going to ask you, so is this the stage that you're starting to think about leaving, while this is going on, or–?

GR: No, it's a funny thing, right, I left in '74 to travel.

FR: Oh yeah, you said.

GR: I travelled the guts of a year, we, we went to see a mate, it was me and another mate and we went to see a mate who lived in Sheffield, for about a week, and then we went to London, cos we always wanted to see London, I'd seen it before on holiday, but I wanted to just be there for a little while, so we spent about three weeks, four weeks in London, and then we went across and we spent most of our time in France, but then we, we had to come back at a certain point, his, well, we didn't have to come back, his mum died, so he had to come back, so in, I said well, I'll go back to London for a while, but I won't come all the way back, I'll, I still want to, I stayed in London for a while, and I came back probably after about ten, eleven months, something like that, away, but I learnt things, I learnt simple things, I learnt that we're all the same no matter where we are, you know, like, I ended, for short periods I was in places like Holland and Belgium and stuff like that, but given where I'd come from and what was happening, that's the main thing that stuck in my head, we're all just people, it doesn't matter what our religion is or, or what our politics are or what anything is, you know, we don't have to hurt each other or kill each other or whatever, so that was the main thing that, that I learnt, but I wasn't thinking of leaving at that point. What happened was, I didn't know what I wanted to do, and then, so I did various jobs, then a guy came on local television and his name was Sam McCready, and he worked at, he was a teacher, but he also was a director at the Lyric Theatre.

FR: Yeah, I know the name actually.

GR: Yeah, and, a great man, and he said because there's no drama school in Northern Ireland I'm starting a drama studio, which will be for people aged between sixteen and twenty-six, I think it was, and if you're interested come along. Now I'd been recovering from the broken leg thing at that point and I just thought well, I'm not as good at football anymore, so why don't I go and just for the hell of it and see if there's anything in it. I don't know why cos I still wasn't thinking of becoming an actor, it was more a case of, for some reason, let's just try this and see, and I came along and there was twenty-nine people there,

I was probably one of the older ones, cos there was, you know, people sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, but I loved it, there was just something about it, people were young and full of ideas, there was Protestants and Catholics, there was noth-, it had nothing to do with the Troubles, everybody had fun and we'd go and have a drink after, we used to meet on Saturday afternoons and he would get us to do improvisations, he would get us to read texts, he would get us to, to dance, he would bring in ballet dancers to train us and teach us, not ballet, but just, just things to do with movement, your posture, yeah, everything, and I loved it, and after a relatively short period of time, I can't even remember, but I'm guessing it was probably about five or six months, he said okay, we're going to put on a play, and it was called *Saved* by Edward Bond, and it was about young people and mostly they were in a gang type thing and stuff like that. So he had us just doing different things and then he, he had us play particular parts and, over a period of a few weeks, and then he said okay, we're gonna go and have a reading at my house, you all know the sort of parts I've put you in, we'll have a go at this and then afterwards I'll tell you the parts that you're going to be playing, and we sort of guessed they would be the parts he'd put us in, and the part I'd been in at that point was the father of this girl in it who was sort of accidentally funny, he was funny to watch and what he did, but he didn't, he wasn't trying to be funny.

FR: He was unself-consciously funny.

GR: That's exactly right, so, so we did a bit, the funny thing was, the last thing we did in the studio before we went for the reading a few days later, I'd, I'd watched somebody play with a particular scene, that one of the two leading male characters did and there was something about it that struck a chord with me and I just loved it. So when we went to do the reading we, we all read our pieces and after it all he said okay, very good, I'm pleased with what I'm hearing, anybody anything to say before I tell you who's playing which part, and I just thought oh just say it, so I just said can I have a go at doing the scene for this character, and he sort of looked and paused and he went mmm, okay, and I did it and after I did it he went okay, and then he announced the parts and he gave me the part of the lead character, yeah, and we put it on in, the Lyric used to have a, we used to rehearse in an old church hall in Cromwell Street and we put it on there for three nights, and the artistic director for the Lyric came to see it one night and after we finished he came up to me and said what do you want to be, and I said what do you mean, and he said what, what is your ambition, what, and I said I think I'd like to be an actor, and he said why have you not written to me, and I said I don't know if I'm any good [laughs], and he said write to me, he said just write me a letter applying for a job, and then that's how I became an actor, yeah. Going to, to London happened after my first, I was given a contract for six months and I also worked for the four months after that at the Lyric exclusively, but everybody thinks that's why I went to London, that I wanted to work with different people and different directors, and it's true I did want to do those things, and I think I would have gone to London anyway, but actually I went to London because I was in love with a girl and it broke up and I just felt awful and I thought I've got to get away from here, so. **[01:10:00]**

FR: You didn't want to be in Belfast.

GR: Yeah, it had nothing to do with the Troubles, nothing to do with my family, it had a little to do with acting cos I knew I was going to do that at some point anyway.

FR: But it was an emotional thing.

GR: Yeah, and she was Catholic. That was not the reason I went out with her [laughs], no.

FR: But did that have any bearing on the breakup or was it just a–?

GR: No, no, her mother had said something to her which made me laugh, but looking back on it it probably had a little to do with it. We'd been going out for a while and at one point she told me this, she said at one point her mum had said to her, you're, you're not serious about Gareth, are you, and she said well, actually I am, and she said, but he hasn't even got a real job, so acting wasn't perceived as a real job as far as her mum was concerned, and she'd previously gone out with a doctor, so I suppose I was–

FR: Which is a more, a more [indecipherable]

GR: [laughs] I was a way down the, the food chain as far as, yeah, that was concerned.

FR: What did your family make of the acting or the contract at the Lyric and that?

GR: My mum and dad were always supportive of anything I did, and my mum in particular when she heard, cos I never told them that I belonged to the Lyric Drama Studio, I only told people that I did this when, when I got my equity card, which you needed to be an actor in those days, so in other words when I became a professional actor then I realised well, people will get to know anyway, so I better tell them because I don't want to offend them, so I told my mum and dad, look, I'm now a professional actor and then I explained what happened.

FR: And they were pleased, they were happy?

GR: Yeah, yeah, they were happy about whatever I did. If I'd been a binman they would've been happy because they, they always said to me if you're happy then we're happy, yeah.

FR: That's good, and so then you've been acting at the Lyric for about nine months you said, about a year?

GR: Yeah, yeah.

FR: And you'd been in love with this woman and you moved to London.

GR: Yeah, I'd been, I'd been going out with her for most of that time.

FR: Okay, and you'd obviously lived in London before this point–

GR: Yes.

FR: When you were travelling, so did it, did you have a sense of it as a permanent, you thought I'm leaving, I'm not coming back, or–?

GR: No, I never, I never thought that, and to this day I, even though I've lived here now, just recently it passed the point at which more than half my life has been lived here, but I, to this day I've always thought of myself as a Belfast boy. I never think of London as home, I always think of Belfast as home.

FR: Right, that's interesting.

GR: Always, and, and always feel better when I'm home. The difference is I, I enjoy, I have more choice with acting here, in terms of so many different types of character, play, film or television, it doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't mean I'm always in work, cos I'm not, but I have, I have much more choice. I did a play in Belfast a couple of years ago and it was brilliant, and the thing I've become aware of, especially over the last fifteen years or so, is the quality of writing, particularly back home, and also the quality of acting. Writers and actors back home are really brilliant now, but there's so much more range here, there's more different things going on.

FR: More possibilities.

GR: Yeah, and I like, like, I've so many friends in acting back home, but I like the fact that sometimes I'm doing something and I don't know anybody, I don't know the director or the producer or any of the other actors, the stage manager, I don't know any of them. I like that for some reason.

FR: Whereas in Belfast I suppose–

GR: You end up knowing everybody.

FR: A lot of the time it's the same people, it's the same–

GR: Yeah, you know, I don't know everybody there now cos they're, I'm out of touch, but I know a lot of people, especially people my age and the younger ones I get to know as I, as I do more stuff back there.

FR: Yeah, so when you left, you came to London, obviously you kind of knew London already, but what, so what did you, what did you do?

GR: I phoned a mate who, I'd a few English mates who I'd met through acting at the Lyric.

FR: Oh right, okay.

GR: So I phoned one of them and said you haven't got a bed I could sleep on for a few days, and he was a really nice guy and he said sure, he said, and he gave me the address and it was in Chiswick, which is a really upmarket area, and he was lucky because, and I was lucky because his best friend, he came from, I can't remember the actual town, but it's

somewhere, it's Carlisle or somewhere near there, and his best friend owned a record shop on the Chiswick High Road, and above it were rooms, so his best friend and his best friend's girlfriend lived in one of the rooms, he lived in one and an actress lived in another one, and they just set up a bed in one of, in a different room where they usually, I can't remember what they kept in this room, but, anyway.

FR: A spare room.

GR: Yeah, loads of spare, loads of records and stuff like that and there was a little camp bed that I could stay in, so he said just stay here until you've sorted yourself out, and I found that among the acting community there's a lot of help, especially when you're younger and stuff, and it's exciting like that, and, you know, you get to meet a lot of people, which is good fun.

FR: Yeah, and did you start acting almost straight away? Did you find work when you came over?

GR: The guy that did this, Tim, was a great guy and he got me my first job, he just said oh I'm doing this little fringe job and it's going to be in the Hammersmith Lyric Studio, and he said it's only a wee small role, but if you're interested, and I said sure, cos I'm normally very fussy and ask to look at scripts, but I couldn't be fussy [laughs], I said yeah, just get me on a stage somewhere, so, so I did it and everybody was really nice and the actors were not only really nice, but they were really good and they were helpful and I learnt a lot, and I thought this is part of the reason I wanted to come over here, you know, cos in acting terms I was still relatively young, so, so that was the start and then you start doing other things and then the first really big break I got was, cos you had to find work to do to pay the bills while you're doing this all, most actors do that unless you're what they call a star. So I found a job in market research where everybody in this particular company who worked for the bosses was either an actor, a writer, a director, a dancer, a singer.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

GR: Yeah, so, and it was casual, so if you got a job you just went off and did it, and a guy said to me one day Gareth you're from Belfast, yeah, Gareth, I just auditioned for this job, don't think I'll get it, but I'm not, it's okay, but he said they're looking for a Belfast actor because the last part that they still have to cast, and they've been looking for a year and they haven't been able to cast it, and I said so, he said so phone them, and I said are you sure, and he said they've been looking for a year and they can't find somebody, phone them. So I phoned up and a girl answered the phone and I told her look, I'm from Belfast, I heard you were looking for an actor for this play from Belfast, and she said yeah, just hold on a second, she came back to the phone and said can you be here by two o'clock, and I said yeah, and then I came off the phone and I said to the guy, how do you get there, and it was the Theatre Royal Stratford East, which is a famous theatre in London because of Joan Littlewood, who's a very famous director, had started that theatre, and so I said to the bosses, look, I have to go for an audition, they said okay and I went and I did the audition and got it. The director was there and he said you'll have to come back cos the writer is very specific and he said the character has to be really stocky and you're not really stocky and, and I sort of said well, he's

from Belfast, he said yeah, and I said what part of Belfast, and he told me and I said that's the same part of Belfast as me, and he said really, and I said yeah, and he said okay, come in on Monday I'll get him to come in and look at you. So I came in on Monday and they got this actor who had already been cast and they said do you mind improvising that scene we did the other day, and I said yeah, cos I like improvising, so, so that's how I got it, and that was sort of a breakthrough cos a lot of casting directors came to see that, so I got an agent out of it and the, the, one of the **[01:20:00]** people, one of the casting people at the National was there and sort of, so I got to audition for her, so I got to audition for a lot of people because I'd been in that, so that, that's how it worked. So I suppose that's a large part of the reason why I went to London, that you can end up doing something that lots of other people can see.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and it can kind of ripple.

GR: Yes, whereas that, that happens if you're in TV or film or you're in London on, on a theatre where people go, that can help your career. It doesn't happen so much in Belfast, it does much more now–

FR: But not then.

GR: But still not as much as London, London remains, in the UK, the big place.

FR: That makes sense. So right at the start you mentioned, I'm not sure if this was during this time in London or the previous time in London, but seeing those signs, the no Irish, no blacks, no dogs signs.

GR: Yeah, yeah, that was when I went on holiday I think.

FR: Okay, and sort of following on from that, what was it like to be Northern Irish in London?

GR: It was a lot different when I went back to work there. It's, the funny thing is, when I passed the sign when I saw, you know, actually wait a minute, it wasn't holiday, it was when I went travelling with my mate for those ten, eleven months, that's when we saw it, because, actually we spent a week in Romford in Essex, which is not far from London, and that's where I saw signs saying no blacks, but I also saw one in London as well, near Tufnell Park and it was in that period, but the funny thing is when I stayed for a week with my mate in Romford, further down the road they had a big sign saying only Irish, and the people that owned the digs were Irish and they only wanted Irish people there, so we got in, they were all mostly labourers and stuff like that, you know, but friendly.

FR: And you felt Irish enough in that sense.

GR: Yeah, but I also, I also, it made me think oh people are segregated here then, but when, because when I was travelling the period in London was relatively small, so I'd nothing much to base it on apart from those two things, the sign that said no Irish, no dogs, no blacks, whatever order it was in, and then the Irish digs where everybody was Irish, so, but nothing

really to base it on, well, one of the things I did find is that, we tried to get a bit of work when we were in London through an employment agency, just to make money and so you ended up working for all sorts of people, and I was aware you could mix with anybody then, and that was the beginning of me understanding that no matter where you go in the world, you know, it's about getting on with people and we're all the same, yeah, so yeah, what was it you asked me, I've lost track.

FR: [laughs] I was asking you what it was like to be Northern Irish in London in that period when you'd moved to live and sort of–

GR: Yeah, it didn't–

FR: It wasn't really a–

GR: No, it wasn't an issue because London is so multicultural and in fact, the thing about Londoners being Cockneys and stuff like that, that's not strictly true, it would've been at one time I believe, but a lot of Londoners moved to Essex and so in London you find as many people are Irish, Scottish, American, Canadian, Australian, from any of the countries in Africa, from the West Indies, from Finland, from, from all over the world, you get, you know, and it's just like that, so people will say oh you sound Irish, are you Irish, or some people that know, have got a good ear will say oh you sound like you're from Northern Ireland, are you, and stuff like that, but they're just as liable to say to your mates oh you're Scottish, whereabouts in Scotland are you from and stuff like that, so yeah, so that automatically makes you feel welcome.

FR: Because lots of people are from somewhere else, I guess, in London, that's the–

GR: Yeah, yeah, that's it. There is a thing though, this is an oddity, the thing that people not from London, it takes them time to get, is that they, the expression a lot of people use is they're not as nice as anywhere else in the UK. I don't believe that's true, they, they don't talk as openly if they don't know you, so it's sort of like, where I come from in Belfast, people catch their eye they're going to say hello, and you know that coming from Ballymena, people will just say hello, how are you doing, even if they don't know you, so when you're in London and you say that people will blank you [laughs], they'll think you're weird or something like that, and that takes a while, and I, I'd mates from places like Sunderland coming down and saying why do people not talk here, and eventually when you get it you explain, but it's this thing, that usually in London when people who don't know you talk to you, they're usually after something, that's what Londoners think, and unfortunately they're sometimes right, they're not always right, but sometimes they are, and unfortunately sometimes you become like that a bit as well, so in other words I remember walking across Waterloo Bridge when I first came to London to work as an actor, and a guy came up to me and said hello, how are you doing, and I said hiya and, you know, I wasn't, he was about twenty metres from me and it's the sort of thing of, I'd say and maybe move, keep on walking and stuff like that, and he suddenly went oh mate, you're from Ireland, and he grabbed my arm, and I said I am, and he says where are you from, and he was so smiley and so nice that I started being the way I am back home and said yeah, I'm, I'm from Belfast and stuff, and we were talking away, but then eventually he said, have you

got some money, and I said, have I got some money, and he said yeah, I need some money, and I said well, I've only been in London a short while, I haven't really got any money, you know, I've just started a job, I might have some money soon, and he said could we meet up then when you have the money and stuff, and I said look mate, I don't know about this, I'm just, I'm just going to go on, but that experience made me start to understand why, because it is, it's not always the way, but unfortunately it is often the way that when people stop you in the street they are trying to get something out of you, and that, that story I told you, that's happened a few times, you know.

FR: You learn this kind of eyes straight ahead kind of thing.

GR: Well, not totally because sometimes if there's something in their eyes that tell me a different story or there's something about them that tells me a different story, maybe I will give them something, you know, but who am I, I don't know if, if you're a person I should give some money to or not, you know, so.

FR: Sure, you don't want to be in that judgement position of–

GR: No, but at the same time you do sometimes get a feeling about people and sometimes you don't.

FR: Sure.

GR: It's a bit like, a girl once stopped me and said to me, in London, could you, could you let me have a fiver, now normally they're not as blatant as that, you know, they just take whatever you give them, but I, I sort of said no, I haven't got that sort of money to give, but I tell you what I can do, cos it suddenly occurred to me, you know, I'd thought about this before, I said I work in this place and they, they take people on a casual basis to employ, you know, and they pay you money, so it's just down the road from here, I can take you there, and she went ah fuck off.

FR: [laughs] Okay.

GR: So sometimes that happens as well.

FR: [laughs] It's a different, a different kind of help from what she wanted I guess.

GR: Yeah.

FR: So I think, I'm trying to, I don't quite have a timeline in my head that you've moved to London, I suppose it's the eighties?

GR: Yes, it is the eighties, yeah, it's the early eighties.

FR: Would you have been going back to Northern Ireland at that time?

GR: Yes, yes.

FR: Yeah, regular?

GR: I would go, well, because money was thin on the ground, especially in the first year, I went back I think twice in the first year and then I would go back always at Christmas to see my mum and dad, and obviously if I got a job back home cos I, I still got offered things from back home, so I'd be able to come and then I could spend time with them, but I was getting more work here than there, so that wasn't happening as often and, yeah, so it got to a point where, yeah, it became Christmas for sure **[01:30:00]** and then when I got work back home, but that kept going on until my folks died, sort of, there was a, I had a bad time at the beginning of the nineties, if I remember it correctly my eldest sister died in '91, then my mother in '92 and my dad in '93, and, and so I didn't go back as often after that, especially when my mum and dad died.

FR: What was it like going back to Northern Ireland in the eighties?

GR: Well, I had always had the same feeling, I always felt good about the journey. I don't particularly like travelling, but I always felt good when I was going home cos it felt like going home, a combination of seeing my family, my friends, but I remember once, and I suppose this sums up how I feel about Northern Ireland and Belfast in particular. I arrived in the airport, I got the bus to the city centre, talk, actually the Oxford Street bus station in those days, I got off the bus and started to walk home cos it's not a million miles from where I live, and there was these two young girls in front of me and they were walking at a pace like, I would have overtaken them after about two, three minutes, but when I heard them talking I just loved the accent, I loved hearing the Belfast accent again, cos of course you can't hear your own voice the same way, and I deliberately walked slowly so that I could just listen to that tone, and then I started to realise well, they may think I'm a stalker or somebody scary, so at a certain point I did overtake them, but I just loved listening to the accent, the voice, and then I walked on home, but I felt warm all over just hearing the accent [laughs].

FR: And were you sort of aware of the political situation in Northern Ireland then, or the violence or–?

GR: Yeah, yeah, cos I was in regular touch with, over the phone, with my family and so yeah, so it was pretty close to home in terms of hearing what was going on and, yeah, oh there's another thing about home, God I can't remember his name, he's a famous director, the guy that directed *Cal*, the film *Cal*.

FR: I know it, I can't remember offhand.

GR: Yeah, I auditioned for the role of Cal in those days and the guy that got it was a really brilliant actor, so I'm pleased that he got it, but I really enjoyed talking to the director, he was a really nice guy and he was an Irish director and he's well known, it's Pat somebody I think, but I can't remember.

FR: I've seen the film, but I must admit it's some time ago, but yeah

GR: But he said to me early on, he says you're from Belfast aren't you, and I said yes I am, and he said how long have you been here, and I can't remember how long I'd been there, but I told him, and he said tell me something, do you think of London as your home or Belfast as your home, and I said always Belfast, and he says why is that, and I said more or less what I've told you, I said I'm from Belfast, I just, it's in me, it's who I am, so I'll always have that feeling and it won't change, and he smiled [laughs].

FR: [laughs] And then, thinking about living in London in the eighties and nineties, there's the kind of, the Troubles here as well in a sense, the IRA bombing campaign, the different bombing campaigns in London. Was that something you were aware of?

GR: Yeah. It never scared me in London because I'd been through so much of it in Belfast. If you think civil rights march was '68, '69.

FR: Yeah.

GR: And I, I came over to London to be an actor in 1980, so yeah, apart from the ten, eleven months away, so that's the guts of twenty years, so I'd, yeah [pauses]. The friends that I was with before I got into acting, and I'm not talking about school, I'm not talking about the guys in the little gang when we were kids, I'm talking about the Boys' Brigade, and then the people in work, none of them were connected to organisations that I was aware of and none of them openly tried to recruit anybody, and none, nobody in, I lived in an area where there would have been recruitment, you would have thought, and I heard stories, but I don't know things for facts, but nobody ever came to my house and tried to recruit me or any of my family, and I, I think from what I hear most of the organisations knew most of the families, because number one the areas were relatively small, and number two they would I suppose make it their business to know, if they were an extreme organisation, as to whether you were a Catholic or Protestant family or whatever, whether it was through work. I'll give you a for instance, one of the things that, that may seem odd to people is there was, a lot of the Catholic fraternity hated the B-Specials because they'd a reputation, now that reputation may be warranted, cos I don't know what they got up to, but there was a guy that lived opposite me and he was a B-Special, and I told you before that there were Catholic families in our street, given that most of the street was Protestant, but there were Catholic families in the street.

FR: Did they stay, you know, all the Catholic families?

GR: Well, this is the thing, when the Troubles really kicked off in 1970, '71, it was really bad. The B-Special guy formed a vigilante group, he organised a vigilante group to protect the Catholic families in the street, which they did by simply walking up and down at a certain point in the early evening and always being aware of, cos he, our next door neighbour was a Catholic family, so he lived more or less opposite both of us, so he could see if there was anything going on and stuff like that, and ultimately the families left the street, and the reason, cos, cos we asked why are you leaving, you know, we'll stick with you and stuff like that, the reason they left was that, no, it's not that, we're hap-, we're okay here, it's in work we're having the problems, they were being intimidated at work.

FR: That's really interesting that a member of the B-Specials would do that.

GR: Yeah, because, because it's, because he didn't think well, I don't know what he thought, but because there was a sense of community and he'd lived a lot of his life, you know.

FR: Yeah.

GR: Cos I think, I grew up all my life, and him and his family were always opposite and our neighbour was always beside us, so he had to have been there for twenty years, something like that, so.

FR: It's something I think that people don't always understand about Northern Ireland that there's other connections and other relationships and other things beyond the Protestant-Catholic.

GR: Yeah, yeah.

FR: That also matter, and mattered.

GR: It's when people become extreme and act in a certain way, and I don't think everybody's the sa-, I don't think everybody that the IRA recruited felt that, the same way, they certainly felt in favour of the, what the IRA were trying to do in terms of politically what they were trying to get, but in terms of how strongly they felt about a thing or what they were prepared to do or whatever, and I think the same is true of all the loyalist paramilitary groups, I'm guessing that a lot of them were, did want to do bad things, but I don't believe everybody did. The story about the guy that committed suicide rather than kill his mate is an example of that, but yeah.

FR: And so you were fairly unfazed then by the bombing campaigns in London.

GR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, given how, what I've explained, I don't like violence of any sort, but it didn't impact on me and I'm guessing that is because it'd been happening so much.

FR: And you didn't, did anyone say anything to you as a Northern Irish person or an Irish person or an Irish person?

GR: Nothing bad.

FR: Nothing bad.

GR: No, they would say things like, you know, so this is what happens back home, and I, I would say well, not, not every day, but yes, it does happen and you're used to it and stuff. There was a thing, **[01:40:00]** and I don't know if I've got this right, but this is how I understood it, there was a phrase used at a time in the seventies, the, we've reached the acceptable level of violence, and what I understood it to mean was we've reached such a level of violence that we're so used to it that we just get on with our lives now, it doesn't really matter anymore, so that there was that thing where, I worked very briefly for a couple

of organisations where there would be bomb scare warnings, but it had got to that point where some of the warnings were just to get the workers to stop work and just, you know, make, make work suffer accordingly, so there was a couple of companies I worked with where there was a bomb warning, we all had to get out and you were out for about three hours, and I remember being told oh you can go to, go to a pub, make sure you're back for two o'clock or something like that, you know, and nothing, nothing had happened, it was just to disrupt.

FR: Just a hoax, kind of disruption.

GR: Yeah, so we got, we got used to that, so I would say things like that to people, but I'd say, but also people did get killed in bombs, I'd friends who were killed and everybody I knew had friends who were killed, and I think everybody I knew also knew people who'd murdered, even though in some cases we only discovered it later on, yeah, but given how small our little country is I think it's not unusual, so yes, I did say it wasn't unusual and it's true it didn't impact on me as much.

FR: Yeah, and it's interesting because you maintained this very strong connection to Belfast and, but it sounds like you must've been quite happy in London as well.

GR: [pauses] I, I was, I sort of, I've grown to love what I do, I love acting, I mean, it's like a passion, so strange though it seems I, I, I don't do jobs for the money, I do jobs because I really want to do whatever that job is, so, so I find that exciting and I think it's very satisfying and also I, I've been lucky enough to be in different relationships that at different times have been incredibly loving and so, so, so that's, that's the thing. There have been times when I've been very tempted to go back home, but those are the two things that stop me, that if I'm in a relationship or the, the acting side of things and how that's going, otherwise I would be living back in Belfast. Whenever I go back I just feel so much at home and so much happier.

FR: That's interesting.

GR: Yeah, so even now I don't feel, happy's the wrong word to use about living here.

FR: Settled or–?

GR: Yeah, it's the work and the relationship that, that do it, so yeah.

FR: That's interesting. Right, I mean, I think we've covered, we've covered quite a lot [pauses]. I suppose there's a few sort of questions that we might kind of wrap up with. So something that I've noticed as a Northern Irish person living in England is how in the last two, three years, with Brexit partly, but I think also with things like Anna Burns winning the Booker and *Derry Girls* being on TV and all of that, Northern Ireland seems suddenly much more like, visible in England again.

GR: Yeah, yeah.

FR: It's a bit strange, and I wondered if you felt that, if you felt any differently about being Northern Irish in England now, or–?

GR: [pauses] I'm not sure I do. The thing is, I think you're right, I think we're more visible in a way as you always are if you do something that's internationally recognised, but whenever I'm speaking to people in work, if I'm doing, if I'm doing an acting job people don't talk to me about those things or about, oh Belfast seems to be the place to go or Belfast is producing all these great writers and stuff like that. I'm thinking that, but, but people aren't coming up to me and, you know, and saying that. I think people in the arts are aware of that very much, but I don't think your average punter in the street, which is what the populace is made up of more than any other segment, is thinking that. Like, when I was, when I was a kid growing up my first visit to the theatre was when I became a professional actor.

FR: Really?

GR: Yeah.

FR: That's interesting.

GR: And, and my mates who I grew up with and play football with I, I never try and encourage them to come to the theatre because by and large I know they all feel like me, it's, before I became an actor I kept thinking it's, it's not the sort of place a working-class person would go, I'd feel out of it, I'd, there'd be a lot of middle-class people and I would feel embarrassed, and in fact, when I did that, when I did that first professional play and I, I got changed after the show and came to the foyer where everybody was mingling and having a drink and stuff like that, indeed everybody was dressed what I would call posh [laughs], yeah, and, and mostly spoke in a posh Belfast way, so I, I didn't come across anybody that was particularly working class. Now that's a very big generalisation, the thing I notice here is that lots more working-class people go to the theatre.

FR: I was going to ask about that in terms of being in plays, did the class thing–

GR: No.

FR: Feature in your experience of it in London at all?

GR: Loads of working-class people are actors. In fact, the thing, when we did that first play one of the things I said to the lads back stage, well, the lads and girls, actors and actresses, was, yeah, the most working-class part of the auditorium was what was on stage. In Northern Ireland, at that time certainly, more actors would be working class than audience.

FR: Sure, that makes sense, yeah, yeah, yeah.

GR: And that would be an interest, that would be an interesting thing to, to check into, what percentage of an audience, certainly back home, would be working class, what percentage would be middle class and what that means anymore anyway.

FR: Yeah, it's changed, how people understand themselves I guess.

GR: Yeah, but it is to do largely with, with money and, yeah, what you have when you grow up.

FR: So I've got a few more questions, kind of thing, so did you, you've been in some plays about Northern Ireland and talked about it.

GR: Yeah, in the eighties in particular most things you were cast in was Northern Ireland.

FR: And did you meet a lot of Northern Irish or Irish people in London?

GR: Yes, but auditions are funny things.

FR: So if there's one role for someone [indecipherable].

GR: Yeah, they are by nature competitive, yeah, yeah, yeah, so you, eventually if you go to enough auditions you start seeing the same faces sometimes, so you do get to know some people and sometimes you get to a point where you say you fancy going for a pint, and if you're getting on with somebody that's, yeah, the acting community is very communal and, and that's very, that's the sort of thing that happens a lot, but the reality, if your situation is in an audition, is you go for the audition, first thing you check is are they running behind, because if they're running behind you need to know how long am I going to be here, cos maybe there's something you can go out and do and come back. If it's on time then you're in, you, if it's for a play the auditions can be ten minutes, fifteen, yeah, very quick, sometimes longer, you can be there for half an hour or so. I did an audition one day with a guy, auditioned me for about an hour and said to me at one point how'd you get here, and I said my girlfriend drove me, is she waiting outside, yeah, bring her in, but that's unbelievably rare. Mostly it's, you arrive, you tell them who you are, you wait for a bit, you go in, you do it and you go out and go home or you go somewhere else, and sometimes you have more than one audition so that's why you have to check are they running behind, but, but now and again you meet people and of course when you work with people, then if you see them at future auditions you've already created the friendship so you end up going to a pub or going to a café or doing something, so it's, it's also a great way of making friends, yeah, the acting fraternity's really good for that.

FR: Yeah, that makes sense, probably just a couple more questions. So you were saying that story about doing the play in Belfast and the guy that you knew from back in the day coming up to you, the play about Long Kesh. **[01:50:00]**

GR: Yeah, yeah.

FR: Do you think, what do you think about Northern Ireland now? Do you think it's changed, do you find it different when you go back?

GR: Yeah. I've got lots of nephews and nieces and lots of great-nephews and nieces, so it's, so my information comes from a younger generation more often than not. So when I speak

to my great-nephews and nieces, who are all, who are all, who are mostly late teens, a couple are early twenties, life to them is about enjoying what life has to offer, so they tend to work hard, they tend to look for good jobs, they tend to enjoy life, so they look forward to weekends, they go and, like most people, like we did as far as we could when we were young, which is go to the pub on a Friday night or go to a nice restaurant if you're with somebody or go to a club just depending on what your tastes are, go to the cinema, and of course when I go back I see that Belfast has much more of that than when I was growing up and much, much more of it than of course the Troubles stopped it being, and it's better, everything's better quality, better quality restaurants, they're all trying to get Michelin stars now, and, and so it's cool because when I first came to London when I was travelling and then later when I went across in the eighties, people of course would never ask you would you recommend Northern Ireland as a place to go, cos they'd seen so many bombings, so they didn't even ask the question, and of course when you talked about it you ended up talking about the problem and, and whatever, and I never liked talking about it a lot because I would, I would sometimes overhear some people talk about it and they were enjoying the kudos of talking about a place where they had been and grown up in that was this scary place, there was a weird sort of kudos to that.

FR: Sort of like, glamour.

GR: Yeah, oh my God, so you, you've lived through that and you know people like, and–

FR: I know what you mean, yeah.

GR: And, yeah, I, one person in particular I overheard, who I never met or knew, but he spent hours in this place and I, I had to wait to meet somebody who was late, and this conversation just, and he started elaborating on it in a way that made it untrue and self-serving and I really didn't like that, so yeah, if you, I have talked about it to people who were generally interested, whether it was a writer who, who wanted to explore somebody from there being in something they were writing or people who thought about going there, there was just lots of different things, so it became a talking point and I think that was much more of a talking point than the good things that you were just talking about, about, you know, somebody winning a prize for writing, a TV series that's very successful, you know, those awards that, that came out over the last few years, yeah, all of that's brilliant, but I ha-, I think it has less of an impact on the psyche of people in the UK outside of Northern Ireland than it has on the people in Northern Ireland.

FR: So the image hasn't actually changed that much.

GR: Well, I think the image has changed, you know, you're not hearing about bombs all the time, the only thing they know is oh they want a backstop or they don't want a backstop and oh my God did somebody just said if they do away with the backstop then that means terrorist groups may pick up again and there may be all of this stuff happening, that's when it picks up, but most of them don't take it that far, they just, they just, oh there's this thing the backstop that they're complaining about, they're always complaining, whatever, you know.

FR: [laughs] Always complaining, yeah.

GR: So it depends on your politics of course, if you, if you live in England, as to, you know, whether you're for or against that, and again, it's to do with your politics and the religion thing in Northern Ireland as well. I'd be very strongly about not wanting violence to flare up again, so anything that stops that I'll vote for time after time after time.

FR: Right, so a last question. I've been trying to ask everyone this question and we still haven't really got a form for the question that I'm entirely happy with, but I think in terms of your kind of trajectory of emigration, journey of emigration, are there any moments, any events, any particular things that stand out particularly strongly to you as being important in that movement?

GR: [pauses] My problem is that I like talking, so I'm, I may go off on tangents here.

FR: That's very much encouraged [laughs].

GR: Okay [pauses]. When I started to make friends in London when I first came here to work, although I didn't rejoice in telling stories about coming from somewhere that there was so many problems, I was asked questions mostly by friends or people who had become friends or were in the process of becoming friends, and they made me feel good by asking. I don't know if that's what they were trying to do, but by getting me to talk about it, somehow that made me feel inclusive in, in the group, and made me feel, just something extra to make me feel worthwhile, it's not that I didn't feel worthwhile, but it was just something that, that helped the relationship, the friendship grow, it's odd but, but I think that's true.

FR: So kind of an interest?

GR: Yeah, like, certainly when I did acting jobs, weirdly most of the theatre work I did, not always, but mostly my character would be the only Irish character in the cast.

FR: That's interesting.

GR: Yeah, there were ones that were Irish plays in which we were all Irish, but, but for some weird reason I often was cast in that scenario and, and of course again, directors would say can you tell us a little bit about what it would be like, so the other people would know, and again, it's, it, it's maybe just a general thing with people. If you ask people to tell stories it, it's a very inclusive thing, it's a way of knowing a person and that makes the person feel good as well. I remember going to an audition once and the director was English, and so I auditioned for both him and the female producer, and there was somebody else in the room, and so it seemed to be going quite well and then the other two people, not the director, but the other two people, they had to go out to take a phone call or something like that, or talk about something, and so I was left with the director and he said you know that they're just going out to take a, to take a phone call, it's not that they don't like you or anything like that, and he said it's going very well at the moment, but I just, I'd just like to ask you a question, would you be able to do this in a Northern Irish accent, so, so I sort of

looked and smiled and said I'm from Belfast, which is the capital of Northern Ireland, so actually what I've been doing has been in a Belfast accent, and he went oh my God, I'm so, I'm so sorry, I thought you were Canadian, and I think you mentioned it earlier on, people think you're Scottish or, and Canadian is another one of those things, but it was just that like, if he wasn't sure then he just, all he had to do was say so where are you from, and I go Belfast, and he says right, I knew it was somewhere like that, but to actually be so strongly that I wasn't from–

FR: [laughs] Could you do this in a Northern Irish accent [laughs].

GR: [laughs] So yeah, I certainly haven't had too many bad experiences because of where I come from, in fact, I'm not sure I can think of one at the minute, you know, where somebody would say you fucking Irish bastard or something, but I've, I've heard stories from friends who, who've got that on occasion, but **[02:00:00]** I've never had it, no. There was, I was in Leeds once visiting a friend who lived there and he took me to this pub, it was sort of like, a club for football supporters, and these two lads told an Irish joke which was offensive, and I'm not that easy to offend, and Irish jokes are mostly boring or stupid, but it was offensive, and I didn't say anything, but I didn't laugh, I just looked at them, and so I went to the [laughs], I went to the loo almost immediately, I sort of gave a look and then just went to the loo, and my mate came in and he said you okay, and I said yeah, and he said you're, you're not offended by the joke, and I said well, it was an offensive joke, I'm not that pleased about it, but fuck them, I don't really care about them, you know, and he said but you're not upset, and I said no, I'm okay, and he said they're a bit worried because of where you're fr-, that was the other thing that happened, people were scared of you because you came from Belfast.

FR: That's interesting.

GR: So they'd all sorts of things in their head.

FR: Because they thought you were like, a hard man or they thought you were–?

GR: Yeah, when in fact, where I live now, when I came there first I'd an acting friend and she said to me at one point, she said you know of course you can do this anywhere in London, but particularly here because this is sort of a rough estate and, you know, there's a lot of knife crime and stuff like that, she said if anybody looks dodgy at you or, or you're, you just feel this could escalate badly, she says just do a loud Belfast accent, but the funny thing is I'd worked that out already, I'd worked that out already.

FR: People found it intimidating.

GR: They did, I'm not sure they do anymore. It's a long time since there was bombs and, well, I know there have been a couple actually, but in terms of the level of it and the fact that it was on the news every day, that's, that's been a long while since that, so people don't think in those terms anymore, but when I first came over yeah, yeah, you were scary just because you came from there.

FR: That's interesting, I never thought of it that way round, I suppose I thought of anti-Irish stuff, but I never thought of people being–

GR: Yeah, like, actually I have to confess I have used it to my advantage if I've been in a bad situation.

FR: Loud Belfast accent?

GR: Yeah, cos it, there was an image in people's head, as soon as they heard that they linked it immediately to a bombing or something like that and they thought you were a scary person, you know.

FR: That's really interesting.

GR: Yeah, I remember like, I wasn't in a lot of dodgy situations, but I remember once when I was, and somebody was saying you want to fucking watch yourself, something like that, and I said, God, I can't remember, it was something stupid and it, but it sounds more stupid now because we're not in that period where we were supposed to be scary, and he, he said something else, he'd said something about you don't know what it's like being in fucking London, and I just went nah, you're right mate, I fucking grew up in Belfast, I know what it's like to be there, and just kept the look, and obviously cos you're an actor you can–

FR: Sort of do this, yeah.

GR: Yeah, and in your head you're thinking I hope he doesn't fucking take a swing at me [laughs], but, but yeah.

FR: Did that work, did that defused the–?

GR: Yeah, yeah, he just went away muttering things, but yeah, it, who knows, who knows what people will be like, but certainly it did have an effect of sorts, but, you know, I think if the person you were, who was in the dodgy situation against you was a proper scary person themselves then it would've made no difference.

FR: It doesn't always work, yeah. That's been brilliant, thank you so much. I think just before I finish I should ask is there stuff that we haven't talked about that you wanted to talk about? Is there anything that you–?

GR: It's funny cos I, I know I tend to go off on tangents, so I don't have everything in my head that I've said. There was a great story that has nothing to do with anything, but I've always enjoyed it because it reminds me of my childhood, when we were in the little gang. One day the leader of the gang, Michael, said okay, we're going to this place, it's called the Botanic Gardens, and it's a bit of a long walk, when you're a kid it's definitely a bit of a long walk, so we went to the Botanic Gardens and of course being a very cheeky person Michael got into trouble with the porter at the museum, so we all ended up running, running away, so on the way back, we went back going through the Ormeau Park, so there was, there was this part of the Ormeau Park when you just first come in from the Ormeau Road where, at

that time there was a little grass hill going down and there were trees, and so Michael, the leader of the gang, was being clever, so he just lay down and rolled down the hill, and my mate Billy, who I told you about before, he, he thought oh I'll do the same thing, so he lay down and he rolled down the hill, but his head banged into a tree and he was unconscious. Now the thing is we were kids, I don't know what age we were, but we were, we were kids, so we knew that this was probably serious, but we didn't know what that meant or anything, so I remember distinctly exactly what happened. What happened was we sort of went, as kids to, we tried to wake him up, Billy, Billy, Billy, but nothing was happening, so somebody said what are we going to do, and I said we'll have to move him, and Michael said we'll carry him, and I thought oh God, I'm by his head, I'll never be able to lift that bit of him, and Michael said let me swap places with you, so I didn't say anything, but he automatically realised, so, so me and the other guy, whoever it was, grabbed a leg and Michael grabbed the arms, the back, so we walked through the park, but we had to go past the football pitches, and there was football going on, and it was the summer, and I said wait a minute, wait a minute, can we put him down, so we put him down and I started to become engrossed in the football match, we must've watched the football for about twenty minutes with this poor sod lying unconscious [laughs]. So somebody said we'd better get Billy home, so I said okay, okay, let's, so we started to continue on our journey, and anyway, so we came to Imperial Drive, which is just round the corner from Rosebery Road, which is where Billy and I both lived, and Michael said wait a minute, stop, let's put him down, I should have said that we did stop and put him down every now and again if he became too heavy, so Michael said–

FR: And he's been unconscious this whole–?

GR: And Michael said I think, I think we could get into trouble here, and we're going what, what, what trouble, he said if we knock on the door and tell his mum this story she's not going to believe it, she's going to think we did this, we threw him down the hill or something, and so everybody's going so what are we going to do, what are we going to do, and, the thing is, it sounds like the sort of thing I would say, but I can't remember if I did say it, somebody said knock on the door and leave him there and run away, so that's what we did, we brought him into the passageway, we laid him down, we knocked on the door and ran away [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Jesus, I bet his parents got a shock.

GR: And later that day, no, it wasn't, it was the next day, I came to his house and knocked on the door and I said is Billy coming out, which is what we would always say when we were asking for the other kid, is so-and-so coming out to play or whatever, and she said oh well, he'll come and see you, I'll get him to come and see you, but he can't come out and play, he had a bad knock on his head, had to go to hospital, and Billy came out and I said what happened Billy, and he said oh I just, mum had to take me to hospital, got a, hurt my head and stuff like that, and what happened to you, remember what happened, can't remember, oh dear, that's terrible. None of us ever told him.

FR: [laughs] That's wild.

GR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's a story of growing up in Belfast.

FR: I actually just thought as you were talking there, a very quick last question. You mentioned that you'd started, you'd met some of those friends again, or you'd started to–

GR: Yeah, yeah.

FR: So how did you do that, how did you–?

GR: Well, when I would go back I would always keep in touch with Billy, who's the one that, cos he's my earliest friend, the picture of me in a nappy and him.

FR: Oh of course, yeah.

GR: So, the others, a few years ago, **[02:10:00]** when I was back doing that play I talked about, a friend of mine who, another guy who I always phone when I go back, he was a good friend through football, he said oh Bob was asking about you, and Bob was a friend that I met in the BB, one of these friends, and I said really, and he said yeah, yeah, and I said have you got his number, and he said yeah, do you want it, and I said yeah, so I phoned Bob and said, look, Bob I, you know, I'm back and I haven't seen you in ages, would you, how do you feel about meeting up, and he said yeah, that'd be great, and I said well, listen, I'm doing this play, so it's hard for me to meet up in the evenings, and he said oh God, it's hard for me to meet up during the day usually, and I said well, I can give you a comp for the play and we could go for a drink afterwards if you want, and he said okay, so it was that play, that same play, so I met him through that, and he said, I forgot to ask about the others cos we were so engrossed in our conversation, but I phoned him only earlier this year and mentioned, I, cos when I was last back, I was back in May and I got in touch with somebody I hadn't seen in years who was a friend, and he was also, he wasn't one of these people, but he was an older guy who I met through my friends and he became a friend, and that got me thinking about the friends, so when I phoned Bob I said what about the other lads, cos I'd spent from the age of eleven to the age of eighteen with these guys, and he said yeah, we all meet every Saturday, but unfortunately I'd already passed Saturday and it was Tuesday or something and I was about to go the next day, and he said, I said well, when I come back is it okay if we meet up, and he said yeah, yeah, yeah, we'll all meet up, cos he says every single Saturday they meet up, they just meet up and chat and have a laugh and stuff like that, so yeah.

FR: And was that strange then to meet them all again?

GR: No, I haven't.

FR: Oh you haven't done it, you haven't done it.

GR: No.

FR: Okay, but it's–

GR: It's on the agenda.

FR: It's on the agenda.

GR: Next time I'm back.

FR: Okay.

GR: So I'm not going back at Christmas cos people always go with families and it's always harder to organise, but I intend to go maybe March, April, something like that.

FR: Okay, that's great.

GR: Yeah, also I promised my family I'll try and get back at least once a year, yeah, I think that's the thing to do.

FR: Yeah, I'll just press this to stop.

INTERVIEW ENDS