INTERVIEW G05-SG1: VALERIE KERR

Interviewer: Dr Jack Crangle
Interviewee: Valerie Kerr [pseudonym]
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Location: Virtual
Transcriber: Naomi Wells

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.

JC: Yeah, so that recording is just started there now. So I think I sent you the consent form in, by email and we can sort that out in a bit, but just for the purpose of the recording could I get your verbal consent that you're okay for this conversation–?

VK: Yes, I'm happy with, I'm happy with everything that we've discussed and happy to give consent.

JC: Okay, that's brilliant, thanks very much. Okay, so could we start off then, could you just tell me your name and today's date please?

VK: My name is Valerie Kerr and today's date is the twenty-eighth of June 2020.

JC: Yeah, and could you tell me then when and where you were born?

VK: I was born on the twenty-fifth of September 1964 in Helensburgh in, on the west coast.

JC: Scotland, right.

VK: Yeah, Scotland.

JC: And where did you grow up?

VK: And I grew up in Clydebank, West Dunbartonshire.

JC: Right, okay, so that's just sort of outskirts of, of Glasgow really?

VK: Yeah, yes, it is, yes.

JC: And what type of place was that, was that growing up, just describe it to me a bit, it's not a place I'm really familiar with.

VK: Clydebank when I grew up was quite an industrial town, had lots of heavy industry and I would say we had Singer sewing machine factory, the shipyards, yeah, it was a busy town, and certainly exceptionally busy to my mum when she came from Northern Ireland, it felt like a city.

JC: Really, yeah, mm hmm.

VK: Yeah.

JC: And what did your parents do for a living when you were growing up?

VK: So my dad was an engineer and he worked in the Goodyear tyre factory in Drumchapel, and mum did a variety of different jobs. She initially worked in Singer sewing machine factory when she first came to Scotland and that's where she met my dad, but after that she did lots of mainly shop work, really, part-time, but mostly was a housewife.

JC: Okay, so she kind of looked after you, and did you have any siblings, or–?

VK: Yeah, no, only child.

JC: Only child, right, okay, that's interesting, and so obviously part of the, part of the purpose and the reason we're doing this is because your mum was, was originally from Northern Ireland. Can you tell me a bit about sort of, about where she was from and when she first, or when she moved over to Scotland and if you know anything about that, I'm not sure how much she talked to you about it.

VK: So, yeah, mum grew up in County Antrim, in Cushendall, which is a sort of a small coastal village in the Glens, with her four sisters and her mum and dad and she came to Scotland, I think about 1951, '52, roundabout then, and she came across, her younger sister had come to Clydebank first of all and was finding it difficult to settle and contacted mum and asked her to come to keep her company, she was homesick.

JC: Oh right, so she was kind of the second person in the family to, to kind of come over?

VK: Well, not really because mum had an uncle who'd come previous to that and already settled in Clydebank, so I think that was main reason for choosing Clydebank. They had their father's brother, John Gormley, and he had come previously and settled and married a lady locally. So my mum's sister came I think initially and stayed with them, but then called for mum to come, that she was lonely, in fact she sent a telegram and asked her to come with some urgency, that she was finding it difficult to settle.

JC: Oh I see, and, so did your mum and her sister live together then for a while when she first moved over?

VK: Yes, they did, yeah, I think they lived in a variety of different places around Clydebank, but mostly they I think rented rooms and it was generally from Irish landladies and I think they did stay for some time with their uncle John and aunt Mary as well, so yeah, they came

across and found Clydebank to be, like, quite a big city which it certainly wasn't [laughs], but to them being so rural in Northern Ireland it was a bit of a culture shock I think.

JC: So they, yeah, so they were from a really, a really rural part of Northern Ireland then and then moved into the more industrial area, I guess it would've been–

VK: Yeah, it was, it was difficult to settle, but I think the reason they first came was really for employment. They had worked as chambermaids in the hotels around Cushendall and Cushendun, so there was lots of holiday trade so they worked in the hotels, but I think they wanted a bit more excitement, or at least my mum's sister did and she came to Clydebank with mum following a few years, or I'm not sure if it was a few years, it might be, have been earlier than that, but she came later.

JC: Right, okay. It sounds like there was, I mean, I don't know if you have any memories when you were growing up, if there was a big sort of Irish or, or Northern Irish community in that area at the time?

VK: There was, yeah. I think first of all when mum came across to Scotland, I think most of her friends were Irish girls in a similar situation, and yeah, when I went to school I think there was lots of mums and dads from Northern Ireland and, and the South too to some extent, but yeah, there was lots of people that I went to school with that had Irish parents.

JC: Okay, that's interesting, so it wasn't, it wasn't, like, unusual or anything?

VK: No, not at all, no.

JC: Okay, so where exactly did you go to school, Valerie, did you go in Clydebank?

VK: I went to school in Clydebank, yes, I went to a local Roman Catholic primary school and then onto the secondary school afterwards, so yeah.

JC: Yeah, and did you enjoy school, get on okay there?

VK: Yeah, I, I got on, yeah, I got on fine. I think as an only child in, in a school like that I was fairly unique because most of the other children had several brothers and sisters, and I had lots of cousins at the school which was helpful to me being an only child, but my mum's sister went on to have six children with her husband and, and we all went to the same school, so yeah, there was a bit of a community I suppose there.

JC: So most of your sort of friends and stuff would have been, would have been drawn from school and things like that, yeah.

VK: Yes, yes, they were, well, yeah, certainly in primary school.

JC: It sounds like you had a lot of ex-, extended family in the area as well?

VK: Yeah, mum only had the one sister, but they lived just a few yards away, you know, within walking distance, so lots of cousins that were always in the house and mum's sister and her husband were regular visitors.

JC: That must have been nice to sort of have that big family–

VK: It was I think when you're an only child. I suppose to some degree it didn't feel like that and cousins would stay over on a regular basis, probably to the relief of my mum's sister to get rid of a couple for the weekend, so they were regularly around the house, or would come for, for meals, or as I say stay over for the weekend, or stay in school holidays and that kind of thing, so yeah, we were, we were close.

JC: And you said your mum met your dad at, was it the sewing factory?

VK: Yeah, Singer sewing machine factory, that's where they met, and my aunt also worked there for a time too, so yeah, mum came across and I think she got the job through someone she knew from home that recommended her, so that kind of thing, and went for an interview and was hired and then met dad there, but as I say dad was, was kind of local, he was from the Drumchapel area in Glasgow, so he wasn't of Irish descent, or had no Irish connections at all.

JC: And did, did, do you know if your parents met quite soon after your mum moved over?

VK: I **[00:10:00]** believe they did, yeah, yeah.

JC: I'm just interested, yeah, it's, it's interesting sort of cos I know a lot of people sort of moved over with partners and, and things, but your, your parents obviously met in Scotland, yeah.

VK: Well, yeah, mum had been engaged prior to coming to Scotland to a young man who had an accident and was unfortunately killed in a, in a farm accident, so she had been planning to, to marry and I don't know if that was a factor in her sister asking her to come to Clydebank, I'm not sure, but her fiancé had been killed and she came across to Clydebank, so, and eventually as I say met dad.

JC: Okay, and did they get married in, in Scotland?

VK: They got married, yeah, in, in, they got married in St Stephen's Parish Church, I think it was 1954 possibly, that's terrible, I think it was '54.

JC: Okay, and so presumably yours, yours was a Catholic family then growing up?

VK: Well, it was kind of unique, Jack, because mum and dad were a mixed marriage, and that was, I don't know, I don't know if that wasn't difficult for them at all, but I think when they got married, they were married during Lent which would be kind of unusual and they were also married in the vestry because dad wasn't Roman Catholic. But my grandparents, my dad's parents were also a mixed marriage, so the generation before was a mixed

marriage, so I don't know if that made things a bit easier for them, but certainly [pauses] I don't know, yeah [laughs].

JC: Yeah, it's interesting cos I know sort of back then especially for people from Northern Ireland mixed marriages were, like, a really big deal, they didn't happen very often.

VK: Yeah, it didn't happen often, and I have to say that, you know, the Irish family were completely accepting, as far as I'm aware, of the marriage. They were exceptionally fond of dad, now whether if that would have been more of a challenge had they been settled in Northern Ireland, possibly, but they lived in Scotland and in the Glasgow area, so it might have been easier for the family. That said, mum's background being quite rural I think there was less of a problem with religious divide being in a more rural environment. That's the impression I got from her anyhow.

JC: Yeah, okay, yeah, I suppose, I mean, there was possibly more, more violence and stuff going in the urban areas.

VK: Yeah, for sure. Mum went, she grew up in a, a very rural area as I've said and she went in, she went to a very rural country school and she said, you know, that the pupils that went to school there were mixed religion, it wasn't purely Roman Catholic, so I think that was probably unusual too.

JC: Yeah, okay, no, that is interesting and I suppose the time, you know, when she was growing up and even when she left that was, like, kind of before the Troubles as well, so.

VK: It was, yes, yes, it was.

JC: So, yeah, it's not like it was right in the middle of it or anything.

VK: No.

JC: And, so did you go to church growing up then, and did you–?

VK: Yes.

JC: Yeah, you went, you went to a Catholic church.

VK: Yes, we went to the local Roman Catholic church that was connected to the school.

JC: Okay, and, and what did you think of church, did you, did you enjoy it?

VK: [laughs] Probably not hugely, I'm not sure that any young child would say they enjoyed it, maybe that's wrong of me. I think it's always a challenge to sit through a long religious service when you're a young child [laughs], so yeah, probably from that point of view it was quite challenging.

JC: And did you, so, so you kind of felt that it was almost more of a chore, then?

VK: Oh yeah, for sure, yeah, yeah.

JC: And did you, did you carry on going until you were?

VK: No, that probably fell by the wayside when I went into secondary school and life becomes much more interesting at that stage and I think there was less pressure from school teachers in secondary school, I think it was something in primary school that was really strongly expected and, you know, you would go in to school on Monday morning and you would have to give an account of what happened at the Sunday mass, and you would be expected to have been aware of what had been said in the, during the mass and the gospel, etcetera, that kind of thing, so in secondary school no, that's when it all fell away.

JC: Okay, and what did your family think about that, were they, were they okay with it, or was there ever pressure?

VK: They were okay, they were okay with that, yeah. My dad didn't attend any church at all and I think certainly he had grown up in quite a Presbyterian upbringing, his mother came from quite a Presbyterian area of Glasgow, or Lanarkshire sorry, and she, she was, she found it a challenge, she didn't go to things like my baptism or my first communion, and I think she only went to my parents' wedding reception, she didn't actually attend the service.

JC: Oh really?

VK: But yeah, that said my mum and her had a really good relationship, and it didn't seem to cause any problem that I was aware of, but she just didn't go to some things.

JC: That's interesting. I suppose I'm thinking cos kind of one of the, one of the reasons we chose, like, the Glasgow area for this project was obviously, it's got that a kind of context of sectarian division that, although it's not the same in Northern Ireland, it's, it's kind of got parallels with Northern Ireland, if you know what I mean.

VK: Yeah, yes, uh huh.

JC: I'm wondering if, like, when you were growing up if there was any kind of, like, Catholic-Protestant rivalry, or, or anything like that that you sort of noticed or experienced?

VK: I think that was probably just focused around football.

JC: Right.

VK: I think, you know, the local boys would certainly have supported one team or another and that's where the rivalry was, based around the football, that I was aware of. My dad he, he always supported the local team in Clydebank, which didn't have any religious connotations, and I think that was probably on purpose cos he was aware of the sensitivities with his own marriage and we had a family that were all mixed marriage, from his parents and through to his own marriage, so I think he purposely avoided anything like that, but as a

child I think I was only aware of that through football really and the local boys and the rivalry that, and then eventually understanding that that was connected with one religion or another in, in some aspects, but that was probably a realisation that came later when I was a bit older and possibly at secondary school.

JC: Oh that's interesting, so when you were younger it kind of just seemed, like, sort of fairly standard football rivalry?

VK: Yes, it did, yes, absolutely.

JC: Interesting, and so I'm wondering, like, growing up did your, did your mum or your aunt or any of your family talk about Northern Ireland much, or, like, either just as a place, or more specifically to do with the conflict or anything?

VK: Yes, they talked about it all the time, yeah.

JC: Okay.

VK: They talked about the conflict probably less, I don't think that was discussed a lot. I think certainly that that was something that was avoided possibly, but yeah, they talked about Northern Ireland a lot and obviously they had two sisters still there, their eldest **[00:20:00]** sister had emigrated to Canada a number of years before I was born. She'd originally gone to London to do, study nursing and then married a Canadian and, and went to live there, but the two middle sisters, they stayed in Northern Ireland, so there was a fair bit of contact and we visited regularly and it was discussed regularly at home, but not so much the conflict.

JC: So they were more just talking about, yeah, like, Northern Ireland as a place?

VK: Yes, yes.

JC: And did they, did they talk of it, like, fondly, or was it–?

VK: Oh yes, absolutely.

JC: Yeah, okay.

VK: So I think probably that was always seen as home.

JC: Right, yeah, no, cos yeah, that's, that's interesting–

VK: And referred to as home.

JC: Oh really, yeah.

VK: Yeah, and probably all through my mum's life was referred to as home.

JC: And you, you went to visit with her fairly regularly?

VK: We went probably every summer and we would visit her two sisters. Now, my two aunts lived next door to each other was hugely convenient for everyone. They lived in a kind of house that was semi-detached and, so they lived, they used to chat over the fence, but we used to laugh because we would have to take it in turns to decide which aunt to visit first, because the other would take offence or potentially take offence, so we had to remember if we'd missed, if we'd visited aunt Katie last year first of all, we had to visit aunt Sarah first next time because they would potentially take a bit of a huff. So yeah, we went, we went every year, as did my cousins that lived locally as well, they went regularly, they would tend to go for longer periods in the summer time, they might go for, like, four or five weeks, a whole summer break, or my aunt Betty would just go and her husband would stay, would stay home and continue to work, but she would go with all the children, so she would take all six across, whereas when I went it was with my parents maybe for a week or so and we would travel together over on the ferry and dad would drive, so we'd, we would go every summer almost.

JC: And what were your impressions of Northern Ireland as a place?

VK: It was beautiful, yeah, but we always went rural. I don't think I ever went into the city until I had grown up and my mum was very keen for me not to go into Belfast, or, or to visit Belfast, she, she was quite concerned that I should do that, that was not a good thing to do, but no, I enjoyed it and I enjoyed catching up with all the cousins, so there was lots, lots and lots more cousins to spend the summer with, so that was great fun.

JC: Yeah, I suppose just kind of, like, a family, family holiday vibe.

VK: Yeah, yeah, lots and lots of children and lots of freedom that probably we weren't quite allowed back home, so I think cos there was lots of countryside and we would run in the fields and, you know, play down at the beach and there was no rules really, so it was, it was quite free and wild [laughs].

JC: And this was up in Cushendall, was it?

VK: Yes, yes, it was.

JC: Okay, I can understand, cos I, I suppose we're probably talking, what, about late sixties, early seventies time?

VK: It was, yes, it was.

JC: Yeah, so you can fully understand why your parents wouldn't want you going into Belfast around, around–

VK: Yeah, I don't, I don't think I ever visited Belfast till I was, I don't know, maybe twenty years old.

JC: And did, did anyone kind of explicitly say that it was, like, dangerous or anything, or was it just sort of that you didn't–?

VK: Yeah, uh huh.

JC: Yeah, mm hmm.

VK: Well, mum used to say you, you really don't want to be going, why would you possibly want to go into Belfast, it's not safe, so we were absolutely discouraged, but when I grew up, you know, I wanted to visit, I was interested in what was going on there, but she was very nervous when we, when we visited, she wasn't happy about it at all.

JC: And was there any sense of any, like, conflict or tension around where you were staying at this time? I know it's obviously different in, in rural areas.

VK: Well, I, do you mean in Cushendall, when we were there, yeah?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

VK: Well, we didn't, we stopped going for about ten years, we didn't visit and that was, mum was keen that we should stay away during the worst of the Troubles, so that was a long time not to see her family and I suppose, you know, you've not got the same ways of contacting family as you do now, so we, we just stopped going for about ten years, and I think we went back again early eighties and that, that had, you know, from the seven-, some year in the seventies, I'm not sure which, for about ten years. I do remember one of the last holidays before we stopped going, and this might have been a factor for my mum to stop going, dad always drove over in the car as I've said and one night we had been visiting relatives and some armed men stopped the car in a very rural country road, pitch dark, no street lights, and we were asked to, to get out of the car and they opened up the boot, they had a look round the car, they asked us who we were, we had no idea who they were and that was pretty scary for everyone. There was other men, in, in the hedgerows, looking through the hedgerows from behind the hedges at us. There was nothing much said, but they had a good look at our car, it wasn't the army, and they asked us where we'd come from and where we were going and then said well, off you go, enjoy your holiday, and that was the end of it, and I think that really gave my mum a bit of a shake and we didn't go back, that was probably a driver for our big break in holidays to Northern Ireland.

JC: Yeah, that must have been really terrifying, especially, like, you were a child at this stage, right?

VK: Yeah, so I don't know what age I would have been, but it would have been in the seventies. I, I'm not sure to this day who they were and I don't think my mum and dad really knew, but they, they were armed with guns and they were certainly not British Army, but that's all I can say, I don't know.

JC: I suppose it's, yeah, kind of a bit of a brutal reminder of, of the realities of, of the conflict there and stu-, and there must, yeah, coming over from Scotland as well.

VK: I think as well, possibly mum felt that we were vulnerable being a mixed marriage with my dad not being Roman Catholic, that that was quite obvious and people around knew that and I think possibly she had a nervousness about that, whereas she'd never been concerned about that before, but possibly things changed considerably in the mid-seventies, so as I say we didn't go back for a holiday for about ten years.

JC: And so, I'm kind of interested, as you were, like, sort of growing up, becoming a young adult, you said your mum didn't necessarily talk about the conflict that much, but presumably you would have seen things about it on the news and stuff and may-, maybe sort of become aware. I wonder if you, you were kind of forming your own opinions about, about Northern Ireland and the conflict at that time as well?

VK: I think, yeah, lots of stuff on the news, quite scary. Mum would just reassure me to say oh, you know, don't worry it's in Belfast, family are fine, but I'm not sure if she felt that herself. What I saw on the news, I didn't want to visit, it wasn't, like, I was keen to go back either. I think a few times, you know, in the seventies there would regularly be bomb scares so at school, you know, it could have been a call to the school to say there was a bomb planted in the school grounds and we would evacuate, that was not an unusual occurrence, it wasn't a regular occurrence, but it wasn't unusual, possibly hoax calls and stuff, but bomb scares did happen, not **[00:30:00]** infrequently, so it kind of felt a wee bit closer and I thi-, I kind of think maybe mum was kind of, I don't know, wanted to be a bit low key about being Irish at that point. I felt that anyway. I don't know if it was something that I just picked up on as a child.

JC: Okay, that's interesting, so you, you feel, like, there was maybe a bit of stigma?

VK: Yeah, I think, I think it was difficult for her. Now whether that was just her own perception, I don't believe that there was anything ever said to her about that, but it was maybe just how she perceived that she had a sense of embarrassment about it and the, the Troubles were something that she kind of could feel connected to that people would associate Irish people with, locally, so yeah.

JC: That is interesting, and it's interesting you say about, like, the parallels cos I know, I think there was some concern maybe at the time that the Troubles would kind of spread over into Scotland.

VK: Yes, yeah, definitely, and I think she, her Irishness was al-, mum's Irishness always was low key and what I mean to say is that she, she didn't flaunt being Irish, Northern Irish. I don't think she was embarrassed about it, but she was very discreet about being Northern Irish, all her life I'd say and I think, yeah [pauses]. It is funny because she, she was always, as I said she was very nervous about Belfast and because she lived in a rural community lots of people from Belfast would come in summer to the beach and to the coast where she lived, to the Glens, and her experience of people from Belfast hadn't been necessarily good. In, in her opinion they were quite brash and not the kind of people that she was keen to mix with, which we found incredibly funny because when she got older she went to a day centre and got to know a lady from Belfast who became an exceptionally good friend and we used to

laugh and kid her on and say surely you're not friends with a lady from Belfast, and she used to find this hilarious because they became absolutely great friends, so she had a nervousness about, and I don't know, that, that was only maybe reinforced by all the problems during the Troubles. So I think, yeah, she, she, her Irish, her Northern Irishness was quite low key, she didn't flaunt it through her life at all.

JC: But you're not, you said you're not aware of her getting, like, any kind, any specific, like, hostility or, or anything like that because of–

VK: When she first came to Scotland I think she got a bit of a hard time when she went to work in the factory and I think that happened, there was a bit of, a bit of annoyance with the local girls because mum and dad had started to date and she got a bit of bother then. Some of the local women weren't happy that she was seeing my dad and I remember her saying to me that one woman said to her, you Irish come over here and take all the best men [laughs], which she found hilarious, but yeah, that was, it kind of pleased her that somebody thought that my dad was a good catch [laughs]. But no, she did get a bit of difficulty then, I don't think it was very easy in Singer's, that was, but probably because of the romance.

JC: Yeah, and, and do you, was that because she was, a religious thing cos she was Catholic, or because she was Irish?

VK: I don't know.

JC: Or both perhaps.

VK: Possibly both, because I suppose the people that worked in Singer's with her knew that my dad wasn't Roman Catholic either. So yeah, the, the girls she worked with were not happy about it at all.

JC: Okay, but she, she managed to keep, keep a hold of your dad anyway.

VK: [laughs] She did, she did, she held on.

JC: She beat them all off.

VK: That she did.

JC: And, so I'm wondering, like, growing up in a, like, a Scottish Catholic school, did anyone, did anyone there ever make, like, comments about Northern Ireland, or was it ever discussed, or did you ever hear anyone talking about it? I know, cos obviously, you know, people in Scotland, because there were sort of some cultural links, were maybe slightly more in tune with what the conflict was about than maybe, like, English people, I don't know.

VK: I don't really recall the, the conflict being discussed in school, no, I can't say I do. We were just as young children delighted to be out of class for a while if we had another bomb

scare and it did seem kind of far away, it didn't feel as if we were going to experience anything in Clydebank area. I don't really remember it being discussed at school, not, not even in secondary school to be honest.

JC: Yeah, no, that's, that's interesting, because, yeah, as I say there was kind of this fear that things would spread over, but then on the ground maybe people weren't that interested, you know.

VK: I, I don't really recall any conversations with, you know, any concerns discussed with my friends or teachers or anything like that about it, no.

JC: And so what did you, what did you do when you left school then?

VK: When I left school I trained as a dental at Glasgow Dental Hospital and I trained there for two years and then I left there and worked in an orthodontics specialist practice for about a year and then I returned to the dental hospital again and I've worked there ever since.

JC: Right, okay.

VK: So yeah, I now manage the nurse service at Glasgow Dental Hospital.

JC: And you, you're still based in the same sort of area then?

VK: Yes.

JC: Have, have you ever been tempted to, like, move anywhere else, or are you, you kind of happy in that area of Scotland?

VK: I think because I'm an only child there was some responsibility not to move away. I think certainly, I don't think I would have ever considered that because I knew how difficult it was for my mum having her sister in Canada and she never saw her sister for thirty-three years and as an only child I wouldn't have really considered leaving the area as long as my parents were around.

JC: So do you think your mum ever considered, like, moving back to Northern Ireland at any point, or was, was she fairly settled as well?

VK: Well, that was strange because my dad as I said worked in the Goodyear tyre factory and he was offered a job in Northern Ireland, there was a tyre factory there and he was offered a job there and he was really keen to go. I'm not sure what year that would have been, it might, it would have probably been before the Troubles, but he was really keen to go and for us all to move and pack up and my mum wasn't. I'm not sure her reasons for that, but she didn't want to go and we stayed. I don't think she ever considered moving back, I think she had her sister here and nieces and nephews and I never, ever heard her say that she wished she could go back, she was obviously in Scotland much longer than she ever was in Northern Ireland because she was **[00:40:00]** in her twenties when she left, so

Scotland was, was second home. As I said earlier, you know, she would say that she was going home for the holidays and the family would say when are you, when will you be home and all this kind of thing, but I don't think seriously she ever really considered it. I think my dad would have done, he was so fond of Northern Ireland, I think he would have happily have moved, but my mum wasn't hugely keen to go back and live there, no.

JC: That's interesting that your dad kind of, even though he wasn't from Northern Ireland, maybe almost had more of a, an affinity with the place than your mum.

VK: Yes, well, he used to, my mum, mum would go, you know, would say talk about your summer holiday and dad would say oh well, we're off to Cushendall and my mum would say oh, you know, could we not consider something else this year. It was my dad that was the driver, he loved the opportunity to go fishing and to walk in the countryside and, you know, it was such a relaxed atmosphere, and it was my dad every year that wanted to go more, more so than mum [laughs].

JC: That's interesting, presumably he got on well with your mum's side of the family then, yeah?

VK: Yes, exceptionally well, yeah. They were very, very fond, my dad died probably about twenty-three years ago, so when he died I think the family, there was, I don't know at least twenty family came from Northern Ireland for the funeral which was lovely, but they were very fond of him.

JC: And you, so you said you, there was a period of about ten years when you sort of stopped visiting.

VK: That's right, yeah.

JC: You, so you started going back then, maybe in the eighties?

VK: We started going back in the eighties when we, I think mum felt more comfortable. I think there was a bereavement in the family and that was possibly the driver for her to return as well and things were better, so she went back with dad for a funeral and then that kind of instigated the return for holidays and she, she kind of felt confident that things were okay, at least, at least, you know, in Cushendall, she, as I said earlier, she wouldn't have considered for a second going near the city.

JC: And did you, did it feel like it had changed at all as a place or was it sort of the, the same?

VK: It was the same.

JC: Yeah, I know a lot, a lot of Irish villages are kind of, like, frozen in time a lot of the time, sort of thing.

VK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was just the same.

JC: Yeah, I suppose if you weren't visiting the city then you might not have as, got as much of a sense of, like, how things were changing in terms of, like, the conflict and stuff, and I'm interested, like, obviously you grew up in Scotland, but you, you visited Northern Ireland a lot growing up, did you? Did you have a sense of yourself as being Irish or Northern Irish at all, was it, was it, like, a part of your identity in any way?

VK: Yeah, yeah, I'd say it was, uh huh. I don't how I would quantify that, if that's the next question [laughs], I think, yeah, I would agree with that.

JC: Yeah, no, I'm just sort of curious cos, like, I've spoken to, you know, a few different people from, from Northern Ireland and they've talked about their kids and some are really, like, keen that their kids, you know, think of themselves as Irish and they, they do things, like, you know, make sure they play Gaelic sports and listen to Irish music and stuff, and then I've had others be, like, we're not really that interested.

VK: Well, I don't think that was, like, encouraged or discouraged by my parents at all. My dad absolutely loved Irish music, but he just loved music anyway, so he, he would listen to that regularly. I think after he died my mum was, she couldn't bear to listen to any of it. I think, you know, any time I see my cousins they'll always say things, like, don't forget you're Irish and laugh, and that's always a reminder. But I don't think it was, I think in a subconscious way it's there, but I don't think there's any, I've never participated in any Gaelic sports or anything like that, my mum, she used to play camogie as a child, but yeah, I suppose it's things, so I've got two daughters myself, the eldest one, we called her Erin, from Ireland [laughs], and the, we called her that, we had chosen another name, but we decided as she was born the day before mum's birthday, we thought that we should change it and call her Erin. So mum was really pleased about that and she, my mum babysat for me, to allow me to work, so she had Erin five days a week until she went to school and then she would see her every day after school, and then my second daughter, she came along five years later and my mother-in-law did most of the childcare, and I would say that out of the two girls Erin's got such a strong connection with trying to be Irish. She really tries to develop that and understand that, and she's got, she almost goes out of her way to make Irish friends, or friends that are Irish, out of the two girls, and she has been on holiday a few times, and I don't know if that's because she had so much exposure to my mum as a young child whereas my other daughter was with her Scottish granny most of the time. So, but it's very, very, I think it's more obvious in my daughter than it probably is in me because she almost seeks that out, if you know what I mean.

JC: Yeah, I think these days there's almost a bit of, like, a coolness around being Irish, I think that it's almost, like, a bit of a thing that people find interesting.

VK: Yeah.

JC: And did, did you take your, presumably you would have taken your daughters to Northern Ireland fairly regularly as well?

VK: Yes, yeah, we've been lots and lots of times, and my husband is Scottish and, in a similar way to my dad, is absolutely besotted with going on holiday to Northern Ireland and he just said to me the other day, we'll need to get over to Ireland once we can, and all I, I thought I heard my mum say oh not again, you know, and it's my husband that's, like, really super keen, I said oh it's a bit soon. Anyway, so the children would go over and then they would mix with my aunt's grandchildren, so the extended family again would, all the kids would get together and kind of recreate how wild we used to be when we were on holidays, and my husband bought them both hurling shirts and camogie sticks, so they, when they were little kids and they used to, you know, play around with a ball and, and do that, but they never had the opportunity to really do that in a kind of a, any more formal way. But yeah, they, Erin in particular's super keen to be Irish and has got her passport, so that's another story, she's, my mum was actually born in Waterford.

JC: Oh right.

VK: And we're, we're not sure why, I don't know if her parents had moved for work, because they came from the North, but nobody seems to know why mum was born in Waterford, and they obviously went to Waterford, we think for work, and then moved quite quickly back to the North again. So Erin's keen to get the Irish passport out at any opportunity, so yeah, I think, I suppose it's even things that you do subconsciously that I'm not aware are different to how a Scottish person might do them, I can't really think of an example, maybe, I don't know, terms that I would use or words that I would use or expressions, and I wouldn't really be aware that **[00:50:00]** that was something that wasn't, that was unusual unless my husband would laugh, or, you know, a colleague or friend would laugh at what I'd said because it, it was probably something that was kind of, an expression used in Northern Ireland, so it probably gets in in a way that's subconscious, that I'm not aware of.

JC: Yeah, well, I suppose with that much, like, extended family and stuff from Northern Ireland you're inevitably going to pick, pick some things up.

VK: Yeah, expressions and things that, that we all make, but my daughter has picked that up as well and as I say she was with mum all the time. When she was a young child, she had quite a strong Northern Irish accent and that was just being with my mum so often, but as soon as she, she got, went to school that disappeared, but she certainly had quite an odd accent for a couple of years.

JC: That's interesting, and you said you did visit Belfast eventually, is that right, you, you did make it into the city?

VK: Yeah, yeah, I did, we did.

JC: Yeah, when did you first go there?

VK: I would be in my twenties then, visited with my husband because he was keen to see it and, you know, he was going to drive and we would find our way round the city, just to, to visit and see the sights, so that was my first visit really to Belfast and as I say mum was exceptionally nervous. She, she was in Cushendall I think at the time and we travelled

through in the car for the day and she was adamant that I let her know immediately when I was home and things were much calmer and much more settled then, but yeah, she wasn't.

JC: What did you think of Belfast as a city?

VK: It was lovely, yeah, it was interesting and very different to what I knew from being in Glasgow, yeah, yeah, I liked it.

JC: Really, so this was, like, I suppose this would've been, what, eighties, nineties?

VK: Yes, this was probably, yeah, mid-eighties, yeah, I think maybe I liked it because I wanted to go back to mum and say it was, it was a great day out and you're being ridiculous and it was lovely and you should come. She would never go, I don't think she, she wouldn't have been in Belfast at all, probably since she was a young girl, just wouldn't have travelled to Belfast. No, I found it interesting, I think certainly I was cautious when I went there because of my mum's concerns and I thought, well, you probably best mind your P's and Q's and be careful of what you say and who you say it to, so there was some element of caution when we went for a visit, but yeah, I went back and told her what a lovely day I'd had and, and all was well.

JC: And in Belfast at this time was there, were there, was there still evidence of the conflict, cos I mean, obviously this is before the peace process, so I'm just wondering if, if there are any things like checkpoints or military that you noticed at all?

VK: Not that we came across, no, not, not on that visit, no.

JC: Okay, well, you obviously got Belfast on a good day [laughs].

VK: Maybe, maybe, yeah.

JC: Yeah, okay. I guess another thing that I wanted to ask, cos again as I say it's, it's kind of why we're looking at Scotland as, like, like, a distinct area in, in terms of these case studies cos I've looked at quite a few of the interviews that my colleagues have done with Northern Irish people in England and the overwhelming thing that a lot of people have said is that English people don't really understand Northern Ireland at all and they just don't have any clue, like, what the Troubles is all about.

VK: No, that's right.

JC: I'm wondering if, if you think people in Scotland are the same, or if they, maybe because of that, like, sort of slightly shared culture, if Scottish people maybe have a bit more understanding of, of what the Troubles is?

VK: I would say that yes, they do, they certainly do. I think it's, well, my dad, his sister married an Englishman, so I've got lots of English cousins and relatives there too, but no, I would agree completely with that, I think the west of Scotland with religious divide that can continue to this day to some extent, yeah, people are quite clear on what it means and the

difficulties that it causes, and certainly yeah, I remember mum saying, this is not really about Glasgow, but she had said that she remembers many years ago when there was some discussion about having a, a march within the town, within the village, now whether that was loyalist or republican I have no idea, but she said that she remembers the local men of both religions turning up and seeing these people off and seeing that there was no place for this kind of thing here. So the local men of both sides of the religious divide saw them off, and I don't know whether as I say it was loyalist or republican marching, but they were keen to have some kind of presence in the Glens and that was not acceptable to the local people at that time. So I suppose yeah, the marching season in Glasgow is, is another difficult time for people and that's why Glaswegians are very aware of that, or more aware of that than anybody south of the border would be, I think.

JC: Yeah, I think, I think you're right cos I, I was, sort of spectated and at the Twelfth a year or two ago and the amount of Scottish accents I heard was, was just crazy, it was, like, busloads of people sort of come over.

VK: That's right, yeah, and from certain areas of, of Glasgow and, and beyond too, but yeah, it was always the time that we were kind of kept indoors and there was a real nervousness if there was any loyalist marches, that was something that we were hushed inside, it was dangerous, yeah, it was not anything that we would have ever watched or stood by or looked even out a window to see, there was a nervousness there certainly from mum.

JC: It must've been strange for, like, your mum and your auntie sort of coming over from a place where that, that existed to somewhere else where it kind of existed in a, in a different form, it must, I don't know, if it was, like, a bit of a reminder, or–

VK: Yeah, I mean, because they never saw that in their rural community, but when they came to Scotland they saw then again in their own streets and there would be marches within the local area and they were exceptionally nervous about it, it was real nervousness and it kind of intrigued me because I didn't understand as a child what on earth was this all about because you picked up on the anxiety of my mother, so it was, like, my goodness, what can this be, I suppose over time as you got older you understood, but yeah, that was something that you had to stay indoors and best avoided, huge nervousness around that.

JC: And so when you got older then, presumably you did become more aware of the kind of the sectarian divisions that do exist in that part of Scotland?

VK: Yeah, absolutely. I think when, when I met my husband, now we're a mixed marriage again, so third generation, and I think there was a real nervousness on his part about dating me, which I didn't know about at the time, which I would have been off on the next bus probably [laughs], but I think he had, he said that, that he had a real nervousness about telling his parents that he was seeing **[01:00:00]** me, being a Roman Catholic and he had a nervousness about the whole thing when we got married and I, we got married in the Church of Scotland and I remember we went to see the, the minister, sort of pre-wedding classes or whatever it's called and he said to me, you're Roman Catholic, and I said yes, he says, and how are your parents about this marriage, and I started to laugh and I said they're a mixed marriage themselves, as are my grandparents, so there's no problem, but actually it

was only afterwards that I think my husband had his own nervousness about it, so yeah, I think he obviously went to the non-denominational school and I went to the Roman Catholic high school and I probably think that we weren't, we, we didn't mix with the other school very much, there was no opportunity to mix and then, probably that made them much more interesting because we didn't know them at all, but I met him at a local dance and as I say we started to go out and I think only latterly did he say that he had some concerns and nervousness about it, what, what will people think and, you know, what would his family, how would his family view marrying a Roman Catholic. But all was well thankfully, and he didn't tell me that before the wedding [laughs].

JC: Probably for the best by the sounds of it.

VK: Yeah, yeah.

JC: So there wa-, there wasn't any backlash from either family then?

VK: No, there wasn't, no, not at all, accepted, everybody accepted everyone else. I think, you know, my husband's father's from the Isle of Lewis, so they had a similar difficulty, the people from the islands came down to live in, in Govan in Partick and they lived closely together in those communities, and found support there because, you know, my husband's granny couldn't speak English, so in some ways it was a similar background because my mum's local community in Scotland was Irish and his dad's local community in Glasgow were from the islands, you know, and they had their own language, so they was those similarities, they were almost outsiders and yet they were Scottish, just, like, I suppose in some ways mum was an outsider, but she had her own community in her Irish friends.

JC: And was your mum or, or anyone in your family, like, at all political, like, did, were they, you know, involved in, in the kind of, in any of the political side of the Northern Irish situation?

VK: Not that I know of, no, not that I know of, possibly, I mean, I'm not sure why, I mean, my mum used to always refer to the South as a free state and I think that's quite an old-fashioned term, but it was only years later that I understood really what that meant, but everybody, all the family would refer to the South as a free state, but there was no one that I know of that was particularly political or strong in their views in an obvious way that I could see.

JC: Out of interest, how did people refer to Northern Ireland if they called the South the Free State? Was it, was it Northern Ireland, or, cos I know some people use terms like the Six Counties or the North and things like that?

VK: I don't know actually, Northern Ireland I think, probably, yeah, but yeah, free state was the South.

JC: And did you kind of start to form your own, like, opinions of, of the Northern, like, political opinions of the Northern Ireland conflict, sort of, you know, what was going on there, or did you not really follow it particularly much?

VK: I didn't follow it particularly much I think because it wasn't something that was mentioned or discussed a lot at home, so when I obviously got older, you know, I was a mixed marriage again, I didn't have any strong opinions, no, not really.

JC: Have you been involved at all in, like, Scottish politics or anything like that, or is it just not really something that's on your radar?

VK: No, and probably, probably that fits with your last question, not a hugely political person, I think probably my politics would reflect what was going on in, in the world at the time and I wouldn't assign myself to any political, strong political views. If a Conservative government, for example, had policies that reflected what was good for the country at the time then that's how I would vote, if it was a Liberal or Labour policies that were good for the country at the time then I would vote to reflect that too, so a bit of a floating voter.

JC: Yeah, sure.

VK: Just to see what does the country need right now and who, you know, who would lead it well and what are the best policies for the country at the time, so no, I don't have any allegiance in that way really.

JC: Fair enough, absolutely, and have you, have you followed, like, the peace process at all, has that been, obviously it was probably on the news loads in the sort of mid- to late nineties, I'm, I'm just wondering if that's something you sort of were interested in and, and kept up with?

VK: Not hugely, you know, I'd watch it on the news, but I wouldn't seek it out or anything, I wouldn't seek it out to read about it or find out more, but if it was, you know, if it was a news report, absolutely. It wouldn't, I wouldn't go out of my way to seek information about it, no.

JC: And do you still visit Northern Ireland regularly?

VK: Yeah, yeah, yes, we do, so.

JC: You go, is it mainly to see family, or do you just–?

VK: Yeah, we go to see family, so my mum's oldest sister, older sister's still there, she's ninety-four, so she's the only sister that's left now, and she gave birth to sixteen children, so she has, and her sister as I say lived next door, she had eight, so you can imagine the amount of family that I have still there and I do keep in touch with a few of them, and I don't know whether, I don't expect that to disappear when my aunt dies, I don't think it will, I think we'll still go, but, you know, that's my mum's sister and we feel some responsibility to visit as well, but we also want to go, so I think that would continue even if my aunt wasn't around anymore.

JC: It must be almost impossible to keep up with everyone if you've got that much extended family.

VK: Yeah, it is actually, so as an only child it was quite overwhelming to visit in the summer, as I say, sixteen children in one house and eight in the other, and the six local cousins as well would turn up, so you can imagine, I mean, how many children that was and it was just fantastic [laughs].

JC: You enjoyed it then, yeah?

VK: Very much, yeah, it was fabulous.

JC: I can see though as an only child myself how it would be pretty overwhelming, that kind of situation.

VK: Yeah.

JC: Do you think, obviously you've been going to Northern Ireland pretty much your whole life, do you, have you noticed it changing? I mean, it's obviously, it's a very different place in a way than it was in the early seventies. I'm wondering what your impression on that is?

VK: Yeah, from, from rural Northern Ireland, I think it's much more affluent, it's very smart, the village is, you know, the village of Cushendall is a beautiful village, it always was, but now it looks exceptionally smart, it looks picture box, you know, the town is painted, the buildings are painted beautifully, I think it's got so much to offer. We would speak to friends who, I mean, I, **[01:10:00]** I hardly know anyone that's ever been, even now, on holiday and we kind of liked it that way, and we didn't want the crowds to go, but, you know, the country needs that, but it's much more affluent, there are some beautiful houses, I think the employment's better, so yeah, I, I think it's a really kind of smart place to visit now. I think you said earlier it's quite, I'm not sure of the words you used, but it's quite, quite fashionable and yeah, people seem to be more relaxed and, and they seem better off as well.

JC: Yeah, certainly, and, like, I, I lived in Belfast for quite a few years and I, you know, when I first moved there I was surprised the amount of, you know, like, well, tourism and things and, like, just the nice, nice coffee shops and restaurants and stuff as well. I don't know if you visit, visit Belfast much itself, but–

VK: Yeah, yes, it's lovely and with the Titanic museum and everything, it's really smart, lovely.

JC: Have you been to the Titanic museum?

VK: I have yes, we thoroughly enjoyed it.

JC: I went last, went last year, it's quite good.

VK: Yes, and hugely busy which was great to see, but yeah, it's, I think there's an affluence there, I think, still challenging employment issues, now, I have a cousin who trained as a radiographer and she ended up having to go to, I think it was Birmingham to, to find work and that's been the case for some of my other cousins and, you know, there's still a lot of migration to, into America and I've got cousins in Boston and things like that, so that's still happening, which is a shame, but maybe that's the way it's always going to be, there's just not probably enough employment in the country anyway, but it's, things are much better.

JC: Are there still, out of interest, are there still people from Northern Ireland moving to your kind of area at the moment or not particularly?

VK: I don't think so, no, no, not that I know of.

JC: Yeah, no, it is, it's, I think some people are starting to stay and, and well, they're trying to promote Northern Ireland as its own, like, powerhouse, and economically–

VK: Well, I work, I work with a number of people who come from Northern Ireland, but they're usually on a training programme, so in the dental hospital they will maybe come to train in a specific speciality and then they're tending to go back, so I know one person who came from the area and now she's gone back and has got a job as a specialist in dentistry in, in Belfast, so that's good, but yeah, I think probably people are coming for some aspects of education and then they're going back again from what I can see, which is good.

JC: Yeah, cos I know a lot of people have worried about, like, like, a brain drain and that sort of thing happening, yeah.

VK: Yeah, but that's only my own personal observation, I'm not sure if that's wider, but, you know, I see people quite often that come from Northern Ireland and then they, they go back, come for training.

JC: Sure. Well, listen, I think I've got kind of pretty much to the end of, of the question list that I had, I was wondering if, if there was anything that you felt like you wanted to talk about, or we may, might have missed, or that you think's important to add, if not that's absolutely fine as well.

VK: Let me think [pauses]. Probably not, no, I don't think so, probably once I end the call then I'll think of something that I should have mentioned to you, but no, I don't think so.

JC: Sure, no worries. Well, you can always send me an email, right I will–

VK: Sure.

INTERVIEW ENDS