INTERVIEW L19: DAMIAN MOORE

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Damian Moore [pseudonym]
Interview date: 24th June 2020
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.

FR: Okay, I think that should be, that should be working now.

DM: That's great.

FR: Alright, we're good to go.

DM: Right.

FR: First of all, thanks very much for, for offering to take part.

DM: No bother.

FR: Especially on such a nice day, I'm sure you'd rather be outside [laughs]. Before we start do you have any questions about, about the sort of process or–?

DM: No, I just sent you back the, the consent form, it's no big thing, but yeah, if you, if you could keep, because of the position in the *Irish Post* and so on, if you could keep it, my name as a pseudonym that would be great.

FR: That's absolutely fine.

DM: Yeah, that's, that's the only, that's the only thing. Over the years you get so many lunatics contacting you that, yeah, I just wanted to verify that, alright.

FR: No, I can understand that, and if you would like to look at the transcript to make sure that it's all been pseudonymised properly, maybe you might want to change other names or something like that, like, other, other people's names then that's fine as well.

DM: Yeah, that's great, lovely.

FR: Okay, so the first thing is just a kind of a technical thing. I know you've sent me the consent form, but could you confirm that you're okay with this being recorded?

DM: Yes, I am, that is perfectly fine to record it.

FR: Okay, thanks very much, so it's just, it's going to be a kind of a, a life history interview, so we're going to start from childhood and then move through to sort of the present day.

DM: Right.

FR: Along with some questions about kind of how you feel about Northern Ireland now and, and about identity and, and so on. So just to start us off, could you say your name and today's date?

DM: Damian Moore and today is the twenty-fourth of June, midsummer's day, 2020.

FR: Midsummer's day [laughs], okay, thanks very much. So the first question is, where were you born?

DM: I was born in Scotland and moved to Newcastle, County Down when I was nine months old, so I have no memory of Scotland whatsoever.

FR: No memory of Scotland at all, no. Do you know why your parents moved?

DM: Yes, they, for work.

FR: Okay, what work did they do?

DM: And my father had lived in Donaghadee for some time and we had, I know we have Irish ancestry somewhere along the line, so it didn't seem like a big move.

FR: But were your parents both Scottish?

DM: Yes.

FR: Okay, and what did they do?

DM: Forestry, they were, my dad was a forester.

FR: A forester?

DM: Yeah.

FR: Okay, that's interesting, and did he move to work in a, in a forest?

DM: Yeah, Tollymore forest in Newc-, Bryansford, County Down.

FR: Ah yeah, it's a beautiful part of the world.

DM: It is, *Game of Thrones* has been, used it quite extensively as a location.

FR: So, was it, what, what kind of a place was it to grow up in?

DM: Yeah, it was absolutely fantastic, I mean, living in a forest is [laughs], you know, almost fairy tale, so yeah, yeah, we, we, I would say we had a fairly, there were six children altogether, so I'd say we had a fairly good upbringing.

FR: Six children and, and where you were in that, were you younger or older?

DM: I was a middle, middle child, sorry, so there's six, there was myself and my sister were the two, two middle children.

FR: And do you know what date it would have been when you, when you moved?

DM: 1950.

FR: 1950, okay, so you're growing up in Tollymore in the fifties, sixties.

DM: Yes, yes.

FR: Where did you go to school?

DM: In Downpatrick.

FR: Downpatrick.

DM: Down High.

FR: Down High.

DM: Protestant family.

FR: Protestant family

DM: Yeah.

FR: And a religious family, as in, observant, did you go to church?

DM: Yeah, yeah, went to church a lot.

FR: And what was, what was Down High like, what was school like?

DM: Down High's a mixed school, about six hundred pupils, it was a, you know, four hundred yards from where St Patrick is buried, but we never learned one day about St Patrick.

FR: That's interesting, so was it a kind of a, an anglicised curriculum, would you say?

DM: Very much so, it was a total British grammar school upbringing, at school.

FR: Quite strict?

DM: Very, everybody hit us, the prefects hit us, the teachers hit us, the headmaster hit us. Somehow they felt that the more they hit you the, they would get the right answer, I don't know.

FR: And it's, I always wonder when I hear about that kind of education, would you have told your parents or would you have complained to your parents or was it just so accepted that–?

DM: No, because they would've probably sided with the teachers to some extent, but no, I wouldn't, just said everything is going grand at school and left it at that.

FR: That's, that's the tricky thing about it, isn't it, I suppose if everyone thinks it's fine, how can you–?

DM: Yes, it's, it is, it's the, it really is the oddest thing Fearghus, you know, like, looking back on it, how much, how much violence there was really.

FR: Mm, and did you, it sounds, it's kind of a strange question after what we've just discussed, but would you say that you enjoyed school?

DM: Ah yeah, you see there's the funny thing, yeah, I mean, I did do, you know, I was average student and back then nobody wanted to stand out, so we just, you know, we got on with it really.

FR: You say back then nobody wanted to stand out?

DM: Yeah, I would say, you know, now there's much more room for, I think, I don't know, I don't have, I don't actually have children myself, but for my partner's children I think it's much more acceptable to, you know, be different nowadays, back then it wasn't, the public was very much, much more homogenous, I think.

FR: I know, I know what you mean. I wonder, do you think that that's something specific to Northern Ireland, that kind of conformity?

DM: Yeah, I, I, I, not, not specifically, I think it was emphasised, exacerbated in, in Northern Ireland cos, yeah, it just, it was a very close, closed society in a way, nobody wanted to give much away, so that bred that sort of not wanting to stand out from the crowd I think.

FR: Yeah, no, that, that makes sense, and what did you do outside of, outside of school, growing up in Downpatrick?

DM: Yeah, I was always interested in, I was always interested in music and folk music, heard the, well, the Clancys and then the Dubliners and then realised that even locally there were people who sort of played that music, so yeah, I got, got into playing the fiddle a lot, also did a bit of sport too, rugby was a quite a big thing.

FR: Always, always is in the grammar schools, somehow.

DM: Yeah, very much so.

FR: I'm interested in the, in the music thing, so was it a kind of musical household like, were your parents into music?

DM: They, they were actually, neither of them were, I would say were, neither of them were particularly gifted musicians, but my father made musical instruments and he was very good at that.

FR: That's, that's, he made musical instruments?

DM: Yeah, from bits of wood that, quite often that he found in the forest, so he made a couple of harps, made a guitar, he was always fixing up cellos or violins, you know, so.

FR: That's an amazing skill to have.

DM: Well, yeah, he was good at that, he wasn't, as I say, he wasn't a great musician, but he did, he did like music, so there was always old fiddles lying around the place, so I think everybody in the, in the family sort of played some musical instrument, myself and my younger brother got very much into fiddle music.

FR: And where would you have gone to hear it played? You said that there were people who played it around Downpatrick.

DM: By the time I was a teenager, yeah, there was a few pubs and I'd go. There was a little village called Leitrim, nothing to do with County Leitrim, I remember there's a couple of pubs there and, yeah, just round Downpatrick, Killyleagh, Crossgar, there was by then, by, this would be, what are we talking about, the early to mid-sixties, mid, no, mid-sixties to, sorry, mid-sixties to late sixties, by the time I was a teenager, yeah, folk music, ballad music, if you like, was beginning to really make inroads in pubs and some, yeah, some folk clubs, there was the Downpatrick folk club, so yeah, it was, it was beginning to become quite, I would say very popular, you know, just coming into the folk boom.

FR: And was that a kind of a mixed scene in the sense that Protestants and Catholics participated in it?

DM: Yeah, very **[00:10:00]** much so.

FR: That's interesting, so there wasn't any kind of, you know, Irish culture, kind of Catholic thing, no?

DM: No, not in, I think if you realise you are interested in folk music, I got the feeling, I kind of got the feeling that somehow Protestant people in general were being cheated out of something that was just priceless, was precious, you know, and, you know, we weren't taught, we weren't taught hardly a single day's Irish history or culture, and worst of all Irish music was just, you know, not on the curriculum whatsoever, I mean, Irish poetry wasn't on the curriculum, I mean, I, so with regard to music that was something you could right yourself, you could actually go out and, this is, this is good music, you know, and then, yeah.

FR: It goes back to what you were saying, St Patrick being buried just down the road, but–

DM: Yeah, absolutely, you know, so yeah, there was, I imagine, I think you [interrupted by barking dog], you could, these, these are, these are dogs that, two stray dogs that I've tried to put some manners on, the, yeah, that whole thing just, just being totally removed from your, your education, from your life, you know, it's really strange, really odd.

FR: And I wonder with your, with your parents, because they were Scottish, would they have encouraged you in a kind of awareness of Irish culture, Irish music, Irish–?

DM: No, they didn't really know much about it, but they certainly would've known a lot about Scottish music, and as you probably know yourself like, there's very little difference between, you know, in terms of the actual structure of Scottish ballads, Scottish reels, jigs and so on, very little difference, so they would, they would have been aware of that and I suppose in that way they would have been odd, that they actually had an appreciation of the music which an awful lot of Presbyterians in particular wouldn't have had.

FR: No, absolutely, absolutely, I guess there's that kind of Celtic connection between Scottish–

DM: Yeah, yeah, that's right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

FR: Would yous have gone back and forth to Scotland, did you go to Scotland a lot as a child?

DM: Not a lot, but we, we did, we did from time to time, yeah.

FR: And still family in Scotland I suppose at that stage?

DM: No, we'd, we'd no family in Scotland.

FR: Oh really.

DM: Yeah, yeah, I have no, no knowledge of any, any cousins or any family whatsoever, it seemed like–

FR: No, no grandparents?

DM: No, it seems like when we went to, when we came to Ireland, we cut off all ties with anybody in Scotland.

FR: Okay.

DM: Yeah, odd.

FR: Yeah, that is, that's quite unusual.

DM: Yeah, very unusual, but I never really got to the bottom of it and, yeah, that's the way it was.

FR: So thinking about kind of growing up in Downpatrick in the sixties, what about sort of politics, would your parents have been political at all? I suppose again it's this thing where they're not from there, so they can be kind of removed from everything.

DM: Yeah, I would say they were, even so I would say they were pretty, pretty unionist, yeah, I mean, more south Down, south Down was probably, probably predominantly Catholic, I'd say most of our sort of neighbours and most of the people that worked in the forest, not most of them, but a majority would have been Catholic, so I think where Protestants live in, again, you, you know much more about this than I do, but I get the impression that where Protestants live with a large number of Catholics they tend to be a bit more, you know, easy about it, and while they might still be unionist there probably wouldn't be quite the same sort of Bible bashing, you know, the, the Ballymena type, you know, but where are you, where are you from?

FR: [laughs] I'm laugh-, I'm laughing because I'm from Ballymena.

DM: Yeah, ah right, yeah, ah right, my God, because my, it was odd because my parents then they eventually, my dad got a promotion and relocated to, to Ballymena, so, I mean, would you say, I mean, that's right, where there's–?

FR: Aye, I think it's obviously easier to be kind of bitter, as we say in Northern Ireland, or like, very sectarian, if, if you don't ever meet any Catholics and if Catholics are just a kind of a fantasy that you have in your head.

DM: Yeah, I never got the impression in, yeah, that, that our parents were sectarian in that way, but they certainly, they certainly thought that, you know, believed in Northern Ireland as a, a political entity and, and believed unionism was, was better, so, but, you know, for the country.

FR: Yeah, and, and lots of people I guess, especially at that time in Northern Ireland, are unionist without being sectarian, because unionism is just the, the mainstream kind of–

DM: That's right, yeah, exactly.

FR: But, but you would've, Catholics would have worked on the, on the sort of forests, in the forests that your–

DM: I would say almost, looking back on it, yeah, pre-, predominantly, I mean, it was, as you know, the Mournes, it's in the Mourne country, so it's, it was probably overwhelmingly nationalist really, so yeah, yeah, they're mostly Catholic, and, and, you know, I still, I still know some of the, you know, some of them.

FR: Yeah, well, I was going to ask actually because, so would you have had Catholic friends growing up?

DM: Not at school because we, we were, we were sort of, we weren't even allowed to take the same bus, but yeah, I, I did branch out because of the music, but also because funnily enough I was very interested in basketball and I went to, you couldn't–

FR: Basketball, that must have been, that's unusual for Northern Ireland in the sixties I imagine?

DM: It was and it was, again, it was a sectarian thing, it was mostly Catholic schools who played basketball and, so I had, I actually, there was a club nearby called St Malachy's in Castlewellan, and so I went along there and, you know, said look, you know, I'm not that good, but I play rugby, will you give us a few games and they said yeah, fine, so I got to know them okay, you know, I wasn't much good at it, I was never tall enough to be a good basketball player, but yeah, I loved, I loved the sports though, yeah, so I made friends out of that and some of them would have been into their music as well, so that's a very long answer to your question. Through school, and having to go on separate buses and so on, wouldn't ever have met any Catholics, but because I was interested in music and then latterly with the, with the basketball, yeah, I did get to know quite a few.

FR: No, that's, that's really interesting and the sort of separate, segregated schools thing is obviously a big, a big factor.

DM: Oh yeah, I mean, the buses didn't even go at the same times, you know, to make sure that the Catholic kids and the Protestant kids didn't, you know, didn't have to have any influence on each other.

FR: That there wouldn't be like, a clash, yeah.

DM: I don't remember, don't remember ever there being a clash, you know. It wasn't, it really wasn't like that back then, I just, I don't remember any, any sort of, you just didn't see them, you know, you just went to a different school and you, you, there was no point of contact.

FR: What, what about yourself then? So we're coming into the sort of mid-sixties and in some ways kind of unusually maybe you know quite a few Catholics from basketball and, and the music thing, would you have any, do you remember having any thoughts about kind

of the politics of Northern Ireland then, or would it have been something you would've discussed or just not really?

DM: Not, not really discussed, I mean, I was sort of quite, I was quite interested in history, so I prob-, probably did start reading round it for a while, but in terms of actual politics, no, it probably wasn't until I went to Belfast where, you know, where I really had my eyes opened, you know, again, through the, through the mu-, through the music, so it was, yeah, it was quite a, quite an awakening going to, going to Belfast, but while, before that, before, while I was actually in Downpatrick and Newcastle, no, I, I probably didn't think that much about politics, no.

FR: No, well, I guess, as you say, it's, it really depends where you are like, there's a different thing in Ballymena, there's a different thing in Downpatrick.

DM: Yeah, no, I mean, when you were growing up through, through, in **[00:20:00]** Ballymena, I mean, was there much sectarian, you know, between the, the, what school did you go to?

FR: I went to Ballymena Academy, which is–

DM: Oh God, yeah.

FR: Yeah [laughs], do you know it, yeah?

DM: Right, yeah, well, absolutely, yeah, so how did that, how did that, cos that's predominantly, or was predominantly Protestant.

FR: Yeah, I think it was completely Protestant apart from one family who came from England and who were kind of English Catholic, which in a strange way doesn't count [laughs].

DM: No, yeah.

FR: So I didn't, I mean, until I was sixteen, a bit like yourself, I, I was interested in drama and I went down to Belfast to be in a play and I made some Catholic friends there, but until I was sixteen I wouldn't have had any Catholic friends, not because I was sectarian and certainly not because my parents were sectarian, they were very explicitly anti-sectarian in fact, my parents, but just because I didn't ever have the opportunity to meet any.

DM: Yeah, that, as you said, as I say, that's, just rings such a, such a strong bell, it's exactly the same, yeah.

FR: And I don't know, yeah, the school, and I played football and, but all of that was just done among other Protestants, so it's kind of hard to think about it politically because you're so in it I suppose.

DM: Yeah, yeah, I mean, I think it was the same in our school. I think there might have been one family of Catholics and I don't, I don't know how, how it, how it, I don't know how it arose that they were there, but yeah, weird.

FR: So, it is weird [laughs], so what about, you s-, you mentioned Belfast, so what, is that after you left school?

DM: Yeah, I went to Queen's then and, yeah, got into the music there and that was just completely mixed and it probably wasn't apolitical, it was probably more nationalistically minded.

FR: This is coming into the late sixties?

DM: This is the late, I went to Queen's '69, no, no, sorry, I went to Belfast Tech first, can't quite, I can't remember what happened, anyway, yeah, I, 1969, 1970, yeah, I was, I lived in Belfast from '69 till '73, nearly 1973, '74 in fact, yeah.

FR: So really the height of the Troubles as well?

DM: Yeah, yeah.

FR: And do you remember your, your first impressions of moving to Belfast, a big change I suppose from the forest?

DM: Oh God, yeah, well, I, I, I, but I did, I did, I mean, I absolutely loved it, you know, it was, it was just such a, just such a strange place, the, as you say, the, you know, the Troubles were at their height, funny enough I was just reading Paul Theroux's book about, about Belfast and he just said, I mean, not about Belfast, about the, *The Kingdom by the Sea*, so he went on a walking tour of Britain and, and in Ireland, and he just said about Belfast, it was just so awful I wanted to stay, you know, it was just so, so demented and sick that, you know, it was the most fascinating place he'd ever been to, so yeah, I kind of thought, I identified with that, it must have been around about the same time he was there, in the 1970s, oh it was just such a strange place, you know, and fascinating really and then of course the music was, I mean, probably the Troubles really gave music such a kick up the arse really, you know, it would be, you know, it was, people, people didn't like to travel round the city that much, so there was little clubs and pubs everywhere across the city, but people didn't actually travel to them, so they just, you know, attracted local people, so it was great, yeah, it was a, was a fascinating time.

FR: There's a, there's a great book by Ciaran Carson called *Last Night's Fun*.

DM: Ah yes, yes, I, I think, yeah, I've, I've, yeah, I've read that, yeah.

FR: Which is about–

DM: Quite a long time ago, yeah, course he's, well, Ciaran's dead now, isn't he.

FR: Yeah, that's right, he, he passed away I think last year, but yeah, there's a, there's a lot in that about the folk scene in sort of early seventies Belfast, then it sounds, it sounds amazing.

DM: Aye, it was, it was a fantastic time and, as I say, did obviously, it did overlap with republican clubs and prisoner defence fund clubs and things like that, you know, so there was a big overlap, so, you know, if you did have any sectarianism left in you, you were, it would, you know, it was soon ironed out, you know, it was just, you know, the music was just all-encompassing really.

FR: And so you played the fiddle?

DM: Yeah, yeah.

FR: Yeah, and would you have played in the clubs or, or as an audience member or–?

DM: Yeah, oh no, I would have, yeah, I played yeah, yeah, with different people.

FR: But you moved to Belfast to study, so you went to Queen's.

DM: Yeah, that's right.

FR: Yeah, what did you study?

DM: Botany.

FR: Botany, oh interesting.

DM: [laughs] I, I thought so at the time, yeah, I've never used the degree since, but I still, I'd still be, do have a keen interest in flowers and trees and so on, so yeah, probably my da's interesting really, you know.

FR: Aye, it makes sense I guess, if your dad's a forester, and, and you said that Belfast opened your eyes, I think, was the expression.

DM: Yeah, I mean, really poverty first of all, Jesus, it was incredibly poor, you know, Ballymurphy and Turf Lodge or over into east Belfast and so on, it is, I mean, it really was, I mean, what is it about fifty, sixty years ago now, but, no, thirty, fifty years ago, yeah, it was a subsistence economy really, so from that point of view and also as I say from the point of view of the politics. There was a substantial number of people who actually didn't want to be British, you know, and that, that comes, I don't know if you experienced that, but if you, I mean, would you say your, your, would you say your education at Ballymena Academy was, was similar to my own, that it was a purely British grammar school?

FR: Yeah, to a ridiculous degree, so I knew more about the Stuarts and so on than I did anything about Ireland.

DM: Yeah.

FR: I knew about the Russian revolution, but not, not the Irish [laughs].

DM: That's, that's exactly the same, yeah, yeah, yeah, really strange.

FR: So it's interesting that when you moved to Belfast you, you started to fill in some of those gaps I guess?

DM: Oh yeah, very much so, I mean, a lot of it through, through the music, but yeah, I suppose I would have started, I would have started reading things like the *Irish News* instead of the *Belfast Telegraph*, which would have been round the house, and I suppose in general just, just getting to know more and more people of a different, you know, different persuasion.

FR: And I guess the music is a history in itself in a way, there's so many songs that are about the kind of Irish past.

DM: Oh yeah, I mean, it was just totally, I mean, it's, it's, it is, I mean, at that time I think it was, you know, there were just, as you, as you will know, there was just a huge awakening, not just for Protestants, but for Catholics too, on the actual canon of music they were sitting on, you know, a priceless sort of harvest of music, if you like, that, that was, that was available, and I think that was a, you know, a bit of an awakening for a lot of people.

FR: So where, where did you, where did you stay in Belfast?

DM: Mostly flats and, you know, what, what do you call it, the–

FR: The sort of student accommodation?

DM: Yeah, yeah, to start with, but houses and flats in Cromwell Street and I'm trying to remember some of the names, Rugby Avenue, I probably stayed there, and then on the other side up towards Tates Avenue, which was at the top, that direction, then in fact stayed in one place that was quite close to Linfield football, football ground.

FR: Ah I know, I know where you are, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DM: Yeah, so, so I sort of, on both sides of, of the university.

FR: [laughs] And just in terms of your sort of everyday life, was it, were you, were you frightened ever living in Belfast, did you feel threatened ever or–?

DM: No, I never, no, I, I'd have to say I think that's probably when I started getting the, the interest in journalism cos I, I mean, I know it's a terrible thing to say, **[00:30:00]** but I loved it, you know, loved the excitement and if I heard a bomb going off and it was possible for me to get to it I, I went, you know, and if there was, if there was, do you know, anything going on locally.

FR: That's, that's really interesting to hear you say that. I think, for my, my previous piece of research was about the punk scene in Belfast, and I think some of the people I interviewed for that said something similar about how actually it was quite exciting [laughs] sometimes.

DM: [laughs] Yeah, I mean, obviously it was tragic too and, you know, I feel even terrible sort of taking enjoyment out of it, but that's, that's the way it is, I mean, war or whatever you want to call it, civil, civil mayhem is very exciting, you know, I mean, a riot is one of the most exciting things you'll ever come across, you know, a full-scale riot, it's, you know, that's it.

FR: And again, very different from a kind of rural Downpatrick I suppose.

DM: Absolutely, yeah, I mean, you couldn't get a bigger, I suppose a bigger difference between the two, you know, calm, bucolic forest and the backstreets of Belfast, but, but yeah, it's exciting.

FR: And would you have been, were you think-, you mentioned sort of journalism in connection to this, were you thinking at all of writing or anything like that or were you just sort of–?

DM: No, I, at that stage I hadn't, I think I did a couple of things for the local, the university mag and things like that, but I hadn't really, you know, it hadn't really crossed my mind. I was always really interested in newspapers, you know, so I was clip-, clippings, so yeah, it was beginning to, I think it was beginning to gel with me.

FR: And what, what did your parents make of you living in Belfast, do you think they were worried or–?

DM: Yeah, yeah, they would have been, so if there was a particularly bad day I would always phone up, get a, get a phone box that was working and phone home yeah, yeah, they would have been worried.

FR: And phone, phone boxes of course, I, I suppose [laughs], it must be much more worrying back then when you don't have this kind of constant contact that you can have now.

DM: That's right exactly, that's, I mean, I mean, everybody's in sort of lightweight contact with everybody else now, it's, you know, I assume parents don't have to worry quite to the same extent, you know, it could be just that you can't get or find a phone box that's working, you know, and of course your mother worrying her, her heart out because she, you haven't rung, but yeah, it was worrying from that point of view, you know, but they'd have, they wouldn't have known even a quarter of the places I went to, you know, that there might potentially have been problems.

FR: And so your, your kind of social life was is around the kind of folk music scene.

DM: Yeah, that's right, absolutely.

FR: And you made friends and stuff in that.

DM: Yeah, that's right, that's right.

FR: And that, and that gives you a kind of a, a political, would you say that it changes your politics or–?

DM: Ah yeah, yeah, definitely, I mean, it certainly, just opened your eyes to the fact that there was huge swathes of people who felt they'd had a, and rightly so, had had a poor deal from the Northern Irish state and who didn't actually want to, you know, or as Gerry Adams once put it they'd been born into a state that basically didn't want them and, yeah, that became more and more apparent.

FR: Absolutely, and then I guess you have soldiers on the, on the streets as well, from sort of '69.

DM: That's right, I mean, it was, yes, I mean, and they would've had that, that habit of trying to identify you through the rifle side, so yeah, you got used to a certain degree of, a certain degree of military activity everywhere really.

FR: Yeah, and I guess roadblocks and the ring of steel and stuff like that.

DM: Roadblocks, yeah, exactly, yeah.

FR: Okay, so you're in Belfast for four years, you–

DM: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, Tech and then Queen's.

DM: That's right, aye.

FR: Botany.

DM: Botany, yeah.

FR: Botany, but it sounds like really quite a lot of pubs and music.

DM: Yeah, yeah, that was certainly the, that was certainly the curricular, the, the extra-curricular activities was round the pubs and that, yeah.

FR: And did you have any sense of what you wanted to do?

DM: No, I think I was, at that stage I was, I was just more fixated on the music, you know, and what that was, yeah, that was the most, that was probably the biggest part of my, whatever ambitions I did have, yeah.

FR: Did you ever go down south to play?

DM: Only to Dundalk, Mark's bar, back then the pubs in Northern Ireland didn't open on a Sunday–

FR: Huh.

DM: So we would go to, there's a place called Mark McLaughlin's bar in Dundalk and go there, yeah, regularly, also with a band I went to, played in Dublin, played in Cork with a band from, I think they were mostly from the Falls Road and they were looking for a fiddle player, so I went with them, that was, and, yeah, that was good fun too, yeah.

FR: I'm not, I don't know an enormous amount about sort of traditional Irish music, but a thing that I do really like about it is the kind of sociality of it, the way that people just show up and play, or someone'll just stand and sing, I think there's something really lovely about that.

DM: Yeah, it's a very, what's the word you could use, it's a very easy social entry system, if you like, you know, you can get into a, a crowd very easily and if you play an instrument yeah, there is, there is value added to your, to your presence, so yeah, yeah, it, from that point of view it is, it's a very inclusive music.

FR: Yeah, inclusive, inclusive is the word I guess. I can't play [laughs], I can't play anything, so it wouldn't work for me, but, so would you, at what, are you still, are you thinking of leaving Northern Ireland at this point or are you still thinking you're going to stay?

DM: I, I think at that stage, by 1974 it looked as if the Troubles were going to go on forever and I was interested in, in playing, so I had, I'd been told that there was a lot of work in music in London, so that was, that made the, that made the decision, so I went to London and started playing in a band there and did that full-time actually for, for about the next ten years.

FR: Wow, okay.

DM: I mean, back then in, in London you could, you, you could easily play seven nights a week, you know, to high ratio audiences and in an odd way it was actually more Irish than, than the Ireland I'd left behind, you know. I mean, it was back, I, I suppose back then there were, would've been very large numbers of people from Kerry and Cork and Clare, you know, from the western and south-western Ireland, Mayo as well, that were, they were really big, and of course they brought their music with them and the, you know, the sessions had really started by then, but there was good money to be had for ballad bands, you know, for, I played in a duo with just the two of us and, yeah, we got a lot of work, so I did that for about ten years.

FR: That's, that's really interesting, so you moved over with, did you move over with the person you played with or did you meet them?

DM: No, no, I met him in London, he was, or he is a guy from County Kildare, I mean, he's still, funny enough I was just in touch with him yesterday as it happens, so yeah, and met him, I can't quite remember how we met, but it wouldn't have been difficult to meet other musicians I would've thought, yeah.

FR: So, so would you just, you, you moved over with your fiddle I suppose–

DM: Yeah.

FR: And you just, did you just go to Irish pubs or how did the–?

DM: That's, back then Fearghus it was just, that was really it, you know, you just went into a pub and said if, you know, if they did live music, which an awful lot of them did, there was no competition back then, there was no gastropubs, there was no, you know, there was nothing else for anybody to do and a lot of these Irish people lived in really, you know, substandard lodgings and they just wanted to get out to the pub at night and that was it, you know, and they wanted to be entertained and a lot of them had a few quid in their pocket, so yeah, it was, it was, for a while it was a really buoyant market.

FR: Yeah, and I guess the pub is almost a kind of a community centre sometimes.

DM: Very much so and, I mean, you know, it was, there's a big ethnomusical argument that the, the Irish session as we know it today really did come from these pubs in London from about the **[00:40:00]** 1950s onwards, you know.

FR: It's really, it's really interesting that you say that it almost felt more like Ireland than Ireland where you'd been living.

DM: Yeah, I mean, I would say yeah, you probably, probably learnt more about it, I probably learnt more about Ireland than I did because again, growing up in the North, you would, this is something you would know about, people are much more circumspect about, about what they say and, Seamus Heaney, 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing', and, you know, I think that whereas once you're, once you're back, once you're in Eng-, in, in London in the Irish areas, I mean, they're nothing like that now I think, you know, the Irish have been supplanted by subsequent waves of emigration, but yeah, it was quite, quite something.

FR: No, that's, it's, it sounds amazing really, I'm trying to, so, so what was your parents, what did your parents make of you moving to London, did they have any thoughts?

DM: They were sorry, but they were used to it by then because my oldest brother had gone to live in America by 1966 and my second oldest brother, he had moved to, well, funnily enough he, he had moved believe it or not to Mayo, County Mayo, yeah, but and then he'd relocated, I can't remember at what stage, he worked for Bord na Móna, for, for quite a while and then moved to, I can't recall where he moved to then, but yeah, they were used to, they were used to their kids, I think, I think most, an awful lot of people in Northern

Ireland back then would have been used to people upping and, and leaving, in very fact the whole of Ireland.

FR: Yeah, and still, and still I guess.

DM: Yeah, yeah, I mean, I doubt if you would find, you would hardly find a, a family without, I mean, where are you based now?

FR: I live in, I live in Brighton.

DM: Ah lovely, yeah.

FR: Aye, south coast, and before that I lived in Manchester, I lived in London for a wee while, so yeah, I left, I left Northern Ireland when I was eighteen.

DM: Right, yeah, God yeah, Brighton's lovely, Brighton, yeah, so that, so yeah, so, so that was, that was basically it. I think by that stage I'd started writing small articles for the *Irish Post* and, but journalism didn't really take a hold for another, I suppose till the end of the 1980s really.

FR: And so throughout this period you're, you're playing in, playing music in pubs.

DM: Playing, play, yeah, basically, that was it.

FR: And what, what did you make of London in general?

DM: I guess I was, I would then, I would stick with, I did think London, probably always been, it's a great place if you're young or if you've got a lot of money, I, I think, whereas, you know, I think if you don't fall into either of those categories it can be a hard enough old place, you know, so I'd like to, I probably on balance, looking back, would say I stayed there overlong.

FR: That's interesting.

DM: I didn't, I didn't leave London till the end of the 1990s.

FR: So that's quite a long time really, it's–

DM: I was there too long, yeah, yeah, yeah.

FR: I don't know if you know it, there's a book called *I Could Read the Sky* by a, it's by a guy called Timothy O'Grady.

DM: *I Could Read the Sky*.

FR: And it's about I suppose kind of London Irish life, in the, maybe in the sixties, and it, it sounds really hard [laughs], these kind of labourers and builders, it sounds like a hard life.

DM: They would have hard time of, just remember, yeah, I mean, life would have been very hard for them, you know, a lot of them made, made good money, but a lot of them, Jesus, a really hard time.

FR: Lonely.

DM: Very, I mean, again, that's why the pubs were such an attraction because at least you, you know, you had company of some sort or another.

FR: And would you say that then you mainly mixed with other Irish people?

DM: Oh back then yes, certainly, yeah.

FR: I suppose, I suppose if that's what you do for your work then those are the people that you're with.

DM: There wasn't, yeah, having said that the Irish pubs by that stage were probably getting quite a reputation among European peoples, you know, Germans in particular were very fond of Irish music, so there was usually, I would say quite a cosmopolitan, quite a cosmopolitan crowd began to come, so–

FR: It must be quite a strange life in some ways to be a professional musician like that because you, your days are your own, right?

DM: Yeah, I mean, from that point of view it was great because I would have, yeah, I would have enjoyed just being out and about in London, you know, obviously it's one of the most exciting cities anywhere, so yeah, from that point of view it was, that is to say as the, as the eighties moved into the nineties and, yeah, there was various sort of, London, London is, like any big city, it's a hard place, you know, there's always a, there's always a sort of a, whether it's the traffic or there's the absolute huge numbers of people or the fact that it's a bit too expensive, whatever, yeah, by the, by the end of the nineties I'd had enough and, and left.

FR: And where did you leave for?

DM: I went to Spain actually and spent a couple of years in Spain and then I came back home to Ireland, yeah, sort of closed the door on England as I thought, but then subsequent to that after living back home in Ireland for ten years, ten, eleven, twelve years, I met somebody from nearby Bath and I live down here with her now, so, so I've been living back in England and near Bath for about seven, eight, eight year, nine, eight or nine years now, eight years, yeah.

FR: There you go, you can never, you can never tell.

DM: [laughs] So yeah, that was, that's it, but yeah, the main thing, I mean, I suppose I saw London in its heyday of Irish, well, no, you probably can tell me, I mean, I would have said there's not as big an Irish community in–

FR: In London.

DM: In London.

FR: I, I think, I think you're right, it's maybe not quite as kind of coherent.

DM: That's, yes, that's the word, yes, yeah, I mean, I know there are other, there's Luton and Coventry and so on, and obviously Liverpool and Glasgow, but yeah, in terms of, of my impression from, you know, working with the *Irish Post*, yeah, I would say it's not nearly as coherent, it's a good word.

FR: There's a still a wee bit of a kind of community there I think and a kind of second-generation, third-generation community.

DM: Yes, it's funny that, some second-generation Irish people, you know, are, are totally involved, or totally, you know, into their heritage and some, some really just become probably the most, what's the word, totally integrated into English society and would have no more thought of, of buying the *Irish Post*, for instance, or flying in the air, you know, so it's a, yeah, it's an interesting, you know, whereas I suppose other immigrant groups, maybe they're the same, I don't know, could well be.

FR: Yeah, I don't really know enough about it, but I, I know that the last time I lived in London I would occasionally drink in the Irish pubs around kind of north London. I lived in Archway.

DM: Oh yeah, yeah, the, the Archway Tavern and so on.

FR: Yeah, that's right, a lot, a lot of Irish pubs, and you would meet people who I would take to be English, but who would then tell me a story about their kind of Irishness.

DM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, that's, that's the odd thing, and I think if you go back, some of those people who go back to Ireland with English accents, they're never fully accepted, isn't that odd.

FR: It must be quite hard for them.

DM: Yeah, whereas you or me being Protestants and we went to live in west Clare we'd probably be accepted more because it sounds like we have some sort of Irish accent [laughs], it's, it's, it's very strange.

FR: It is, I was going to ask you actually, did you ever feel like a Northern Irish or a Protestant person in this kind of London Irish scene, was it ever an issue?

DM: No, no, never, **[00:50:00]** it never was, no, again, it's the old musical thing I think. I think if you can play an instrument that's, and you're, you know, you obviously know your way round quite a few ballads then that's, yeah, it's not an issue.

FR: That's the main thing, that you, that you can do that.

DM: Yeah, yeah, that's what I definitely found, yeah.

FR: And what about, so we talked about the kind of politics of the folk scene in Belfast, was there a kind of a politics in the trad scene in London?

DM: Yeah, but again, as you know, it, it was an odd thing because the IRA were carrying on their bombing campaigns until, I suppose right into the nineties, you know, and then it, but it didn't seem to have a huge, I mean, I, I know there were some communities that were very, very put upon, in Birmingham, particularly after the Birmingham bombings, but I think the Irish population in London was so big and so diffuse and, you know, occupied so many different sectors that being, you know, being discriminated against, I didn't, all I can say is I, I never suffered from it, from, you know, from having a, you know, an Irish, Irish, an Irish accent or anything like that.

FR: So no discrimination and–

DM: No, no.

FR: Was there ever any, I've, I've heard some people talk about how, that there could be a tension in the Irish community itself between maybe more kind of politically minded people, say, say, republicans, and then, and then maybe a slightly older generation of Irish immigrants who just kind of wanted to keep their head down and, and not draw attention to themselves and not really get involved in politics and especially not show kind of support for the IRA in the context of, of the bombing campaigns as you say?

DM: Yeah, yeah, I'd say that's, I'd say that's true, and, and I think you're right, it would have been among the older people and there's probably most of the people that came to our, that's a good question Fearghus actually, I can't give you a definitive answer on, on that, again, it would, you know, playing in places in the, like the Holloway Road and so on, I mean, there would have been collecting tins come round for the, for the prisoners and so on, never saw a huge amount of any trouble being shown to them, I think it was, I think it was just accepted, you know, that was part of the fabric of the, of the life back then, I'm just, I'm not that, I'm not that qualified to say, I can't remember from my own point of view, I don't remember any overt problem.

FR: I have heard of the sort of collection tins coming round in pubs, yeah.

DM: Oh yeah, that was a, definitely a, that was part and parcel of it, yeah, definitely.

FR: Would you, would you have played, I suppose, I don't want to say republican songs cos I think that's maybe a wee bit simplistic, but do you know what I mean, nationalist.

DM: Rebel son-, yeah, definitely.

FR: Rebel songs is probably what I mean, aye.

DM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely, 'Boys of the Old Brigade', 'Men Behind the Wire' and so on, they, they were, again, they would have been, without, you know, all Irish people would have probably, you know, sung along with things like that, I would say they went to, anyone that went to sort of folk, folk clubs or any of the Irish pubs, so yeah, yeah, they would, they would, they had I think by that stage, by the 1980s, late seventies into the eighties, rebels songs had almost become part of the, the national canon, the national repertoire.

FR: Yeah, it was part of the sort of fabric of the, of the folk songs, yeah.

DM: Yeah, you know, even if you'd never seen, even if you'd never been within a hundred miles of the border or, you know, you're from County Mayo, you would still sing 'Men Behind the Wire', you know, things like that.

FR: Yeah, it kind of, it kind of gets decontextualised I suppose.

DM: That's, yeah, exactly, yeah, yeah.

FR: And then moving into the, the eighties in London still, does that kind of, do you see the kind of Irish culture changing a wee bit, getting less coherent and kind of breaking up a little bit compared to the seventies or–?

DM: Yeah, I think it was the, it was a, it was a steady, in that direction, I think partly, as I say, the entertainment scene became much more fragmented then too, so yeah.

FR: There was just more to do I suppose.

DM: Yeah, very much so, you know, pure and simple and, you know, simple things like people started having decent stereos at home and, you know, things that we don't even think about by now, I mean, it's, you say, people could rent televisions, it sounds as odd now as renting a toaster or something, you know, but suddenly all these things became available and, so yeah, yeah, the pub scene definitely under-, underwent a bit of a, yeah, I would say, downward trend.

FR: And I suppose these, I think there's probably fewer of those kind of single male Irish migrants and maybe it's more like, younger, younger people that migrate, the kind of–

DM: Very much so, yeah, yeah, no, that's right, yeah.

FR: And what about writing for the *Irish Post*, so what kind of writing are you doing for the *Irish Post*?

DM: Well, I've always just written a sort of a column, but, you know, print journalism nowadays is, it's fairly–

FR: It's tricky, I, I trained as a journalist before I–

DM: Oh did you, did you work for any–?

FR: I did, I did, I worked for a wee while for the *Edinburgh Evening News*.

DM: Oh right.

FR: But I couldn't get a full-time job and then did copywriting for a few years there in Manchester and tried and tried to get into print journalism, but never quite cracked it [laughs].

DM: Aye, it's really hard to get into the, into the nationals, as I say, mine is just basically confined to the *Irish Post*, then a few Irish newspapers, but yeah, so, I did around, and then I by, I think, 2009 I, I, no, 2010, I'd become editor of the newspaper, so I did that for about two years, then left, or didn't leave, but decided I didn't really want to be editor, it's a horrible job actually, but then went back for another year to be editor then, just 2017, and still were writing for them, still writing a column, writing the odd like, *Post* story, whatever, you know, so yeah, I, I love writing really, so.

FR: Oh I, I didn't know, sorry, that you'd been the editor, I, I knew that you'd written for the *Irish Post*, but that's, that's very interesting.

DM: Yeah, for about, as I say, yeah, two, I suppose about a total of about three years altogether. I wouldn't say I was their greatest editor, it's an, it's an odd job, it really is, you know.

FR: Do they have any offices, the *Irish Post*?

DM: They, they have, they're in, near, near the Tower of London actually, they're in east London now, yeah.

FR: And what, what's the kind of makeup of people who write for it, is it, is it mostly first-generation Irish people, second-generation?

DM: Probably, let me think, would it be, it, probably fifty-fif-, yeah, probably fifty-fifty, I mean, there's very few people work there now at all, you know, I mean.

FR: Ah same everywhere.

DM: Yeah, it'd be a staff of maybe half a dozen, but yeah, probably about, it's that Cork guy, Elgin Loane who, who has *Loot*, the magazine *Loot*, and a few other bits and pieces in the printing world, he owns it, he's a, he seems a, I've, I've only ever met him half a dozen times, he seems a nice enough bloke, you know, but I don't know. At the, at the height of

the *Irish Post*, probably during the Trouble, well, you know, maybe late eighties, as far as I can remember they were selling something like ninety thousand copies a week.

FR: Wow.

DM: Between eighty to ninety anyway. By the time I was editor there in 2010 that had sunk to, on a good week, twenty thousand, now we're not even ABC audited, you know, so you can draw your own conclusions from that.

FR: It's, it's a, I suppose it's a really tangible way that you can see how that kind of diaspora has disappeared or, or changed anyway.

DM: Yeah, changed, yeah, bit of both actually really, you know, I mean, all those, all those missing people, they haven't all gone back to Ireland or died, you know, a lot of them must just be, yeah, as you say, the changing face of the, of Irish society, yeah.

FR: And I, and I suppose to be fair it's also that people don't buy papers **[01:00:00]** anymore, generally, right?

DM: Nobody under the age of, I have, you know, the last time I was, public transport, seems a long time ago now, I don't think I saw anybody under the age of about forty reading a, a newspaper they'd bought, maybe even under the age of fifty, so yeah, it's, it's, having said that I suppose the only one thing you can say Fearghus is people have been predicting the, the demise of the newspaper for the last twenty years, I, they're still around, so yeah.

FR: Yeah, still hanging on.

DM: Yeah.

FR: I'm, I'm trying to think, so London, did you sort of, would you have kept up with the news from the North in this, in that sort of period?

DM: Yeah, again, it would have been a bit more difficult back then, you know. Yes is the answer, I would have, I would have tried to keep up with the news in the North as much as I could, yeah.

FR: And travelled back ever?

DM: Oh yeah, regularly, I mean, really, half a dozen times a year really.

FR: To see family?

DM: Yeah, yeah, to see, to see them and–

FR: And were they in Ballymena at this stage?

DM: They were, yeah.

FR: God, that makes the trip back a wee bit harder [laughs].

DM: [laughs] Yeah, yeah.

FR: Was it strange to go from, I'm asking this as someone who does this myself quite often, is it strange to go from like, London, quite a bustling kind of place and then back into Northern Ireland, Ballymena?

DM: Oh yeah, I mean, really, and again, it's a, it's a bit of a rest cure really, you know, it's, it's I enjoyed it. I never actually, myself, I never lived in Ballymena, by the time my parents had moved I'd, I'd long since left, so, but would always, nearly always have a, have a trip down to Tollymore, down to Newcastle going home, so yeah, it was, and then when I returned to live in Ireland I, I located near Carlingford, so just across, just across the water from, from County Down, so yeah.

FR: That's a beautiful part of the world as well.

DM: Oh it's beau-, yeah, really, it's really lovely, you know, Carlingford's a lovely little village.

FR: What, what about Spain? So you said you went to Spain for a couple of years.

DM: Yeah, I went to live in Cádiz for a few, variety of reasons, you know, and I liked it very much, but the internet wasn't nearly so, so this would have been 1999 and 2000, year 2000, it just, working as a journalist, an Irish journalist, became progressively more difficult, the logistics of it, so I stayed for two years. I actually really, I always sort of felt Fearghus unless you could speak another language, you couldn't really call yourself any way educated, so it was as much to learn Spanish as anything and, to be honest with you, I didn't really do that well, I'm just not a born linguist. I mean, I really wanted to learn it, I only ever got as far as holding very halting conversations.

FR: It's, it's really hard, I, my partner is French, so I spend a fair bit of time in France back and forth with her family, and I've been trying to progress beyond the halting conversation stage for a few years now and I just am still there really.

DM: It's amazing isn't it, it's so difficult and, as you say, when you've got, even with huge motivation like that, a partner or a huge motivation of living in the country, and I couldn't even listen to the radio and, and after two years I was disgusted with myself, but still try to, still try to do a bit, you know, learn a bit, you know, from tapes and so on, but it is, it's very difficult.

FR: And did you, you were working as a journalist for the, for the *Post*?

DM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, doing a column, doing a trav-, the travel section and various, what-, whatever, you know, so I, I was on the retainer, but it was, it was hard going back then what with the internet, you know, dial-up internet.

FR: Yeah, I can imagine [laughs].

DM: In the, you know, in, yeah, in rural Spain, and I loved the, I loved the country, I like Spanish people, I like Cádiz as well. Have you, have you ever been to Cádiz?

FR: I don't, I don't think I have, no, I've been to Spain, I've been to Madrid, but–

DM: Ah I like Madrid actually, Madrid's a great place, but Cádiz is right, maybe at the end of the line, you know, it's right out on the Atlantic coast and it's, yeah, I would, I'd recommend it to anybody, it's a lovely old place.

FR: I would imagine no Irish folk scene in Cádiz.

DM: No, no, there was not, there wasn't, but the thing is, I mean, it's amazing if you, I went to a few Spanish sort of weddings and, you know, a baptism and people would say oh bring your fiddle, and you would, you know, take the fiddle out and people would be absolutely entranced. They'd plenty of guitar music there, I mean, flamenco is a big, you know, that, but they absolutely, you know, loved hearing somebody playing there with the fiddle, they, I suppose they associate the violin with, you know, classical music or, or opera and whatever, but to see somebody sort of just playing a slip jig or something, they absolutely, so yeah, it was, it was interesting from that point of view, but no, the answer to your question is there wasn't much, there wasn't much to do with–

FR: But it's really interesting that having the, still having the fiddle has got a kind of a social effect.

DM: Very much so, really strange, you know, yeah, I just remember like, even the kids flocking to you and saying God, you know, is amazing.

FR: So thinking about sort of that brief time living in Spain and the sort of twenty years or so in London, did, I've, I've been asking everyone this because I'm kind of interested, did, did you think of yourself as a migrant when you lived in London?

DM: No, I, I didn't really, you know, I don't really think I did, isn't that odd, I think of, I thought of my brother who went to America as an emigrant or a migrant–

FR: That's interesting.

DM: But I never saw myself as that. I think back, even back then it was becoming an awful lot easier just to get back home to Ireland, you know, even from Spain or from, you know, it wasn't a big deal anymore.

FR: Yeah, I know, I know what, exactly what you mean, that's, yeah.

DM: There was a time in the eighties and into the nineties where it was, cost a week's wages to fly home and you had to do these odd things like stay a Saturday night, or not stay a Saturday, I can't remember, but, you know, there were so many, you know, really

expensive and, but by the, what was it, the mid-nineties I suppose, I think, air travel was becoming a lot cheaper, yeah, must have, that must have been about it, and so that's a very long-winded answer to your question, I think I, I felt that the ease of getting back to Ireland, I didn't think of myself as a, an immigrant, I just thought of myself as a sort of a, oh I'll be going back one day anyway.

FR: That's interesting, so you always thought you would go back one day.

DM: Yeah, yeah.

FR: Which you did then in the end.

DM: Yeah, yeah [laughs], later than I, later than I probably should have, later than I'd hoped to, but yeah.

FR: So it's, that's, do you think you kind of, it felt like a temporary kind of a life in London?

DM: I would say so, yeah, yeah, definitely, I, and I think that's probably not unusual, although you would know better than me, but I think a lot of people, I know the guy I played with always felt the same and again, wishes he had gone home sooner. The very fact that we still talk about it as home is unusual, you know.

FR: I think, I think London is full of people having those kind of temporary lives that end up lasting for a very long time.

DM: Yeah, yeah, for some people sadly it comes too late, you know, for them to go back. I think the health service thing is a big issue isn't it too, if you're under the NHS the thought of going back to the Republic–

FR: Aye.

DM: You have to do your sums very carefully in terms of the Health Service Executive over there and whether, what treatment or prescriptions are going to cost you.

FR: No, that's right, it can be quite a big, quite a big deal really.

DM: Yeah, yeah, so there.

FR: So yeah, you, you had obviously thought of going back and then eventually you did go back.

DM: Yeah, yeah, I, I think I, yeah, probably, here now, but I would certainly, had it not been for the lockdown and so on I probably would have been over this year much, you know, at least a few times anyway, so.

FR: Do you still have family in Ireland?

DM: Not, not directly, my mother and father are both dead, and I think my sister was the last one, she lived in Derry and she moved to, she moved to England, so no, there's no immediate family, but there is, there are some outliers live there, so, but it's just a fantastic place to go back to, you know, I mean, Tollymore is, probably didn't fully appreciate it when I was young. Have you been there ever, **[01:10:00]** Tollymore forest?

FR: I think I have as a child.

DM: Yeah, it's a, just a, it's like a, it was like a, it really is like a fairy tale, I mean, really wonderful place.

FR: And did the, did the end of the Troubles have any kind of impact on you liv-, were, you'd have been living in London I, I think, if my–?

DM: Yeah, I think I did, I think there was a big, big relief, yeah, yeah, definitely, I mean, I think, and, and then it, then, one of the, I think one of the side effects of the end of the Troubles was, talked to a few people about this, was the fact that English people started to become more interested in what was going, you know, in Ireland, and most people up until the nineties, most English people would've been much more likely to have been to France or to anywhere in continental Europe than they would have been to think about going to Ireland, and that did slowly begin to change towards the end of the nineties I think, I think there's quite a few reasons for that and it, yeah, it certainly helped business, so yeah, it did ha-, it did have an effect alright.

FR: Yeah, that's, that's interesting. I wondered like, do you remember it happening, do you remember following the news? I think–

DM: Yeah, oh very closely, yeah, yeah, absolutely, and wondering what way it would, what way it would go and, yeah, yeah, we would have been avidly following it, yeah.

FR: Cos I always think that's quite, that's one of the strange experiences, even if you don't think of yourself as a migrant, this thing of being so attached to something that's happening.

DM: That's right, yeah.

FR: You know, two hundred, three hundred miles away.

DM: Oh I know, yeah, I know, absolutely true, yeah, just being very, very, yeah, very, very aware of that, yeah, definitely.

FR: Okay, I think we're sort of moving to some kind of slightly more reflective questions, coming to the end of the interview, so, oh no, actually, sorry, I've got one more sort of factual, chronology-type of question. So you moved then to, to Bath, did you say?

DM: Yeah, yeah, near Bath, yeah, just outside, yeah.

FR: With your partner?

DM: Yeah.

FR: Are they English?

DM: Welsh.

FR: Welsh, okay.

DM: Welsh, Welsh lady.

FR: And what do you make of Bath?

DM: If I wasn't with my partner I'd, I'd be back home in Ireland [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Okay.

DM: No two ways about that.

FR: Yeah, okay.

DM: Here's an odd thing. I play the fiddle and my neighbour plays, I think it's the French horn or something, and my neighbour on the other side plays the guitar, and do you know we've never got together to play together, we're all friendly, you know, and we keep on saying oh we must, we must, you know, get together, and in all the years we've never, isn't that odd, that could, that wouldn't be possible in Ireland.

FR: Something about the kind of, the, the way that English people are friendly.

DM: There's a distance.

FR: A distance.

DM: There's always a distance, yeah, isn't that strange.

FR: Yeah, I know, I know what you mean, there's a kind of a reserve.

DM: Yeah, yeah, I mean, do you find that?

FR: I found it different in Manchester, when I lived in Manchester I felt like it was a bit more like Belfast, easier to make friends.

DM: I imagine that's true, yeah.

FR: Also I was younger I suppose, which is always a–

DM: Ah that's, I mean, that's a very, very, very good point, yeah, I, I think, yeah, that does make, that does make a difference alright.

FR: Yeah, but in Brighton I do find the people quite reserved often.

DM: Yeah, I, yeah, that's the, that's the word, yeah, they're kind and they're pretty thoughtful, I live just in a wee village, you know, called Freshford, but yeah, that's, that's what I found alright.

FR: No, it's interesting and I wonder do, so thinking about sort of your sense of Northern Ireland now, would, you think of yourself as Irish I suppose.

DM: In so much as I can't think what else I would, could call myself. I mean, I've no knowledge of Scotland, you know, I've lived in England, but I don't really regard myself as English, so I, just purely by default and almost a shorthand if somebody says what are you, it's easier to say well, I, you know, I was born in Scotland blah, blah, blah, so it's, yeah, it's easier just to say, you know, my whole life has been spent with Irish people and I have an Irish passport. Do you, do you travel on an Irish passport or what way do you travel?

FR: I, I've got an Irish passport, I, I had an Irish passport when I was young, my, my parents, my, my father was kind of a, a Protestant nationalist I suppose and so he got me an Irish passport when I was young, and then I had a British passport for a while, but now I'm back to the Irish one, largely for kind of practical Brexit-based reasons rather than kind of identity reasons I think.

DM: Yeah, yeah, I mean, it's, I think, yeah, I think I've seen an Irish passport, continental Europe is probably a lot more used to you now anyway, but yeah, I, so I just say Irish as it's, you know, it's easier and I can't think what else I probably am, so [laughs].

FR: But I, I think there's something really interesting about someone from a, a Protestant, quite churchy you said, quite unionist–

DM: Oh yeah, God, absolutely, yeah.

FR: Background, kind of being so immersed in Irish culture and surrounded by Irish people, it's a really interesting kind of trajectory.

DM: Yes, I blame the music really [laughs], but yeah, yeah, so it's, as I say, just by default, you know, it's, it is fascinating music, it's fascinating, well, and that leads you into the rest of the fascinating culture. I'm always intrigued by the fact that, you know, Ireland's literature, what, what did you study at, at university?

FR: I went to Trinity in Dublin and I studied history.

DM: Oh fantastic.

FR: Although I wanted to study English, but I didn't get in [laughs] for English, so I did history instead, aye.

DM: Yeah, yeah, but, I mean, you know, it's intriguing that, you know, all the, the, Ireland's sort of conveyor belt of writers.

FR: Absolutely.

DM: You know, and yet none of them are really, there's not really a common thread, is there, you know, like, Joyce was a middle-class Catholic and Yeats was basically Anglo-Irish, wasn't he.

FR: Yeah, absolutely, very posh.

DM: Seamus Heenan, Seamus Heaney, a working-class Catholic from Derry, there's no, there's no big thread sort of connecting them all, which is I find a fascinating thing, but yeah, there you are.

FR: So there's a, I, I, the kind of interest in Irish culture more generally, not just the, not just the music.

DM: Yeah, would do now, yeah, definitely, yeah, but I guess, and, yeah, I think, I mean, the, you were studying history, did, was most of, would a lot of that have been Irish history?

FR: Do you know, I, coming from Northern Ireland, when I went to Trinity I actually really didn't want to study Irish history, strangely, it was a kind of a, kind of the opposite of what you're describing for yourself I think, I was, I really wanted to think of myself as European [laughs].

DM: Aye, no, I, that, listen, I wish I'd thought of that actually, that's probably what I should have said, I like, I like that, that's really good, that's what I, yeah, you've, that's what I should have said, default to be a European.

FR: Yeah, and I, and I just wanted to kind of escape Northern Irishness I suppose.

DM: Yeah, yeah, that's, that's good, I can, I can definitely identify with that, that's excellent Fearghus, yeah.

FR: Yeah, and then, actually funnily enough then when I moved to England in my early twenties I, I started to feel myself to be more interested in Northern Ireland for some reason, especially meeting English people who didn't know anything about it [laughs].

DM: Yeah, no, I think that's, yeah, that, that makes sense, utter sense to me.

FR: So would you say that you, what about the kind of Brexit stuff around Northern Ireland, did you follow that?

DM: Yeah, I mean, it was fascinating, wasn't it, because it meant, you know, I mean, there must have been quite a few people like us, Northern Protestants who, who voted to, you know, who voted to stay in the EU which was heart-, I don't know if you're a Brexiteer or, I found that heartening, I assume you probably aren't, but you would have voted to stay–?

FR: Yes.

DM: Stay in Europe, so yeah, it was fascinating, I mean, you know, Arlene **[01:20:00]** Foster's party really didn't speak for the majority or anything like it.

FR: No, but it's, I don't know, it's kind of strange to look at Northern Ireland now and wonder how much has changed really and how much people's views have changed and so on.

DM: What's your, what's your sort of gut feeling, do you think, has it at all?

FR: I suppose my, my gut f-, you mentioned when you first to Belfast being shocked by the poverty, and then my feeling is that that actually hasn't changed nearly as much as it should have done or it might have done.

DM: Yeah, yeah.

FR: And more than the peace process, I think the sort of continued poverty of those parts of east and west Belfast is, is something that, I don't know, hasn't, hasn't been resolved.

DM: Yeah.

FR: And I find that worrying, I think.

DM: Yeah.

FR: What about yourself, what do, what do you think?

DM: Yeah, I'd probably go along with that actually, I think, there's some, it's probably a mixed bag, there are some signs of optimism, people do mix.

FR: Aye, definitely.

DM: Better than they did and it's hard to say, I mean, I suppose a problem, there was, looking at it from a historian's point of view, you'd say a problem that was eight hundred years in the making is probably not going to be solved in twenty years.

FR: [laughs] Sure.

DM: So any, you have to take any improvement, but I think the economic thing is, is, it's absolutely paramount, that's a really good point, you know.

FR: Would, would you think of yourself as a, as a republican?

DM: No, no, definitely not, no.

FR: Cos it's interesting to sort of play the rebel songs and so on.

DM: Yeah, but, as I say, I think that's, it's, you know, do you remember there, there was that Alan Partridge sketch and he was singing 'Come Out, Ye Black and Tans'?

FR: [laughs] Yes, I do.

DM: It was horr-, and people didn't realise, I mean, you know, somebody, you know, he was a Kerry farmer meant to be or whatever and, as I say, they probably would have no conception of where the border even was, you know, and, and those songs just have just become part of the, the Irish ballad canon, you know, so they don't mean anything, I would say, it was fascinating to see that, so yeah, I, I think a lot of those songs, in so much as any meaning, in so much as the younger generation, you know, sings these songs anymore, sings folk songs, they are part of it, part of the, the national repertoire now.

FR: Actually, actually just quickly on that, just before we finish, I don't know if you, there's been a sort of a revival of folk music in the South of Ireland at least in the last few years, it seems to me, sort of younger bands.

DM: Yeah, it's, it's certainly not, I don't think it's ever actually disappeared, but yes, there are, there are definitely, there's definitely a renewal of it, so, but again, bec-, you know, because there is so much el-, there's so many other avenues open for entertainment it, I couldn't see it ever, you know, folk music ever again having the, the influence it did or the hold it had at one stage, say from the late sixties for the following twenty years, but I could be totally wrong, you know.

FR: No, I guess that those kind of scenes don't really exist anymore.

DM: I don't think so, but it's hard, it's hard to know really, and also like, you know, the fact that festivals, well, now it's hard to see how they'll start up again in, you know, in the near future.

FR: Aye, well [laughs], that's true, that's, the current situation is a whole different thing, aye.

DM: Yeah, I mean, gosh, just who would have thought, you know, it's been the most fascinating and, you know, again, looking at it just purely with journalist hat on and not the tragic, the tragedy of it all, it's just incredible, I mean, God.

FR: Interesting times, as they say. So last couple of questions, I think you've kind of answered this one already actually, but do you, where do you think of as, as home?

DM: Yeah, probably Ireland alright, yeah, no doubt about that.

FR: And do you think specifically Downpat-, or Downpatrick?

DM: County, yeah, County Down, County Down, yeah.

FR: Okay, and would you think you would still hope to move back?

DM: Yeah.

FR: Hopefully once all of this is [laughs]–

DM: One day.

FR: Yes.

DM: Whether that'll happen or not, I don't know, but yeah, certainly, I'd love to.

FR: Okay, do you, is there anything that you wanted to talk about that you think we haven't talked about?

DM: Not really, I think it's, I suppose it is a, when, you know, when you think how few people actually live in Northern Ireland that it has caused, you know, headlines across the world, that, it always fascinates me, but I think maybe that's why it has such a grip on people, because it has everything, it's got the strangest history, it's got an amazing culture behind it, it's, in both literature and music, so no, I think we really covered most of it. It'd be great to sort of chat to you about, about so many, many things that we've covered in detail, so, as I say, hang on to my email address and if you're up this way anytime or–

FR: Absolutely, absolutely.

DM: Give us a shout, it'd be great to meet up.

FR: No, absolutely, it's such a shame to have to do the interviews like this cos I much prefer being able to meet, meet people in person of course.

DM: Definitely.

FR: So, but I'll, I'll stay in touch and–

DM: Stay in touch, yeah, do Fearghus.

FR: At the very least I'll let you know what, what comes out of the interviews, but maybe if, maybe if travel becomes feasible again [laughs].

INTERVIEW ENDS