INTERVIEW L21-SG4: DANIELLE THOM

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Danielle Thom
Interview date: 3rd February 2021
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.

DT: If you don't mind I'm not going to turn my video on, purely because I'm, like I say, baby wrangling at the minute.

FR: [laughs] No, it's really no problem at all.

DT: Okay, cool.

FR: Okay, so I'm sorry we're just going to have to quickly–

DT: Start from, start from scratch?

FR: Yeah, just–

DT: No worries.

FR: So the, just quickly, your name, today's date.

DT: Yeah, yeah, so my name is Danielle Thom, today is Wednesday the third of February and to clarify, I'm, I'm aware this is being recorded and I consent to that.

FR: Fantastic, there you go, that's two birds with one stone, thank you very much, and so, again, sorry, where and when were you born?

DT: Yes, so I was born in January 1985 in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast.

FR: Okay, thank you, and your parents were both Northern Irish, is that right?

DT: Yes, that's right, my mother was born in Belfast and my father was born in Derry, although his family moved to Belfast when he was about four or five years old.

FR: And specifically, I think you said your mum was from Andersonstown.

DT: That's right, yes, so my, my mum's family, who are Catholic, lived and still live around Andersonstown and my father's family when they moved to Belfast they lived on Blacks Road, between Lenadoon and Dunmurry, they are Protestants [interrupted by crying baby], oh hang on a sec, sorry, no, I've just got to, I'll pick her up and she'll be okay, really baby, you choose this time, oh there we are, there we are, okay, let's crack on, we're good, we're good to go.

FR: [laughs] Okay, thank you, so you started telling me that your, your mum is from a Catholic background and your dad is from a Protestant family.

DT: That's right, yeah, so obviously, I mean, I, I don't think it's, I'm sorry, hang on a second, Saoirse, come on now, come on baby, yeah, I mean, that's, that's not especially unusual today, but I think back in the 1980s when they met it was, so, I'm just walking around with her by the way, and I'm holding onto my phone, can you still hear me okay?

FR: I can still hear you fine, yeah.

DT: Perfect, yeah, she will stop crying in a second now I'm walking.

FR: Oh don't worry about it, don't worry about it.

DT: [laughs] You just, you don't want it to ruin the call quality is all, yeah, so it was relatively unusual back when they met, and they met I think in 1981, and the way they met was my mum was working in a sweetshop, I think on the Andersonstown Road, and, you know, Blacks Road and Andersonstown are not that far from each other, and she, they, my dad went in to buy something, cigarettes probably, knowing him, I think he went in a few times and eventually, you know, asked her out, and I think that was, that was that, that was the, the origin story, as it were. Funnily enough, it was also the shop that my granda on my dad's side went into to buy tobacco, so my mum had actually, she actually knew my granda before she ever met my dad, just by sheer coincidence.

FR: That's really interesting, and, so it, at least for the two of them there was no issue about the Protestant-Catholic thing?

DT: I, as far as I'm aware, no, and to be fair I don't think that, I don't think their families ever had any direct issue with it, not that I've ever heard anyway, but then I, you know, their respective families, certainly I wouldn't, I wouldn't describe my dad's family as like, hardline loyalist, I mean, you know, they were Protestant and they lived a Protestant life and they went to church and all the rest of it, but, you know, I don't think they, they weren't, they weren't marching in Orange parades or anything like that. But my mum's family on the other hand, you know, even today, pretty, pretty strongly republican in their sentiments and, and actually, I mean, Andersonstown fought, you know, and that kind of top of the Andersonstown Road was a bit of a flashpoint, there was an army barracks just down the street from their house and, you know, they were, it was very, you know, my, my granny would bang the bin lids on the pavement outside when the soldiers came, that kind of thing, and I'm sure, I mean, I know we'll get into all of this, but I would say my mum's family were

probably more republican in their sentiments and their actions than my dad's family were unionist, if that makes sense.

FR: It does, it does make sense, and perhaps as a consequence of just living in Andersonstown, which as you say was a flashpoint kind of all the way through the Troubles.

DT: Exactly, well, I think as well there were, and I'm sure this is the case for many Catholic families, I think they had various experiences, initially with just scarcity of housing and things like that, and finding jobs and so on, and then later I know not only my mother but various aunts and uncles had run-ins with, with the army and with what was then the RUC, you know, just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, so there were, you know, it wasn't sort of out of the blue, there were precedents for their feeling, as it were, and I should say as well, just for context, cos I'm sure it'll come up, both my mum's and dad's families are or were very large, they both had six brothers and sisters each, so–

FR: Big family.

DT: Yeah, yeah, so I've got a lot of aunts and uncles and a lot of cousins and I just, I wanted to mention that because otherwise it'll get confusing if I go this aunt, that aunt, this cousin, there's a lot of them, on both sides.

FR: That's really interesting cos it means you've still got a really big family connection to the North I guess.

DT: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely, you know, that's where my extended family are, I mean, there're some of them living here, but they're almost all still living in and around Belfast.

FR: Okay, that's interesting, and so you were born in Belfast.

DT: That's right.

FR: Do you know where your parents, were your parents married?

DT: Not when I was born, they did get married eventually, that's apparen-, and again, this is all, I have this all at second hand mostly from my mother, so this is just my under-, my understanding of it, so as far as I'm aware they were due to get married before I, before my mum was pregnant even, and they, and my dad had agreed to a, a Catholic wedding and with the proviso that, you know, any children born of the marriage would be brought up Catholic, etcetera. They had a church booked and for reasons I'm not fully aware of it fell through, I think it may have been something to do with community tension, but I don't know the whole story, so it was their intention to get married, they ultimately, they didn't get married till we were living in England and they had a civil ceremony when I was six, and my sister, who was born in London, was three, I think, so that was 1991, so they weren't married at the time. Funnily enough though, my mother always, so Thom is my father's surname, my mother's McKinney, but my mother always went by Mrs Thom, even before she was married, I guess, I mean, the eighties, early nineties, it's not that long ago, but it's

long enough ago that whether you were married or not with a kid I think maybe made a difference to people's perceptions.

FR: Yeah, no, I, I can imagine, certainly in Northern Ireland in the, in that period I think it was still, there's still a little bit of a taboo or a–

DT: Oh God, yeah, totally, totally.

FR: Were they living together?

DT: Yes, yes, they lived together initially I think, they lived, I know they, well, where, they were living in Antrim when I was born and I know, so, so Antrim was my first home I guess, but obviously I don't remember it, and then we lived in, in a council flat in Dunmurry for a while and I, and I think it was, that's where we were living when we then decided to move to London.

FR: Okay, and you said your first home would have been Antrim, but you don't have any recollection of that.

DT: Not at all, I don't actually recall living in Ireland, I obviously, you know, we went back to visit grandparents every summer, so I know Belfast really well, I just don't remember the time when we were, you know, fully living there because we–

FR: You were so young.

DT: Very, very young, I don't remember the move, I would have been around twoish, so we moved in either late 1986 or early 1987. We were definitely in London by '88 because that's when my sister was born and she, as I say, was born in London.

FR: Okay.

DT: But I was, I was a toddler, basically.

FR: Yeah, and you don't really have any memory from that period. Do you–?

DT: No, my ear-, no.

FR: Do you know why your parents decided to move?

DT: Yes, so it was a combination of reasons, it was, I mean, the kind of, the catalyst, the main motivation at the time was to look for work, but I think wanting to escape the Troubles and, you know, that kind of, well, not even lingering, it was still very much ongoing at that time, I think that was the secondary motivation. That said, I always got the impression **[00:10:00]** that my dad was more keen on the move than my mum, and I think initially they only ever intended it to be for a year or two and it ended up being a permanent move, but I don't think that was the intention at the time.

FR: So they just thought they would go and maybe find some work and then–

DT: Yes, yes, and my dad had a couple of job offers, now I don't know how he got them, I assume, you know, friends of friends or hearsay. One was in Wigan and one was in London and he took the London one, partly because one of my mother's older sisters, I told you, a lot of aunts and uncles, one of my mother's older sisters, my auntie Pauline, had married an English guy and she was living in London, so we actually stayed with them for our first six months here, I'm in, actually in London at the minute as I'm talking to you, so I say here, and then they were able to get a flat back when it was actually possible to get social housing relatively straightforwardly, so yeah, that still, I think that was, you know, that kind of existing family connection plus the prospect of a job offer was what sealed the deal for London. In case it's relevant, before I was born my parents had actually moved temporarily to Bristol for work like, a couple of years before I was born I think, and they were only there for six months, but, you know, obviously they had, you know, they, they were willing to up and move, and I know that as a teenager my mother had travelled, she'd gone and worked in Scotland for a year when she was eighteen or nineteen, so this idea of going to, moving for work was definitely, it wasn't a new thing, it wasn't unprecedented at all.

FR: And what kind of work did your dad do in London initially?

DT: Varied, so, so, for context, both my mum and dad, they both left school at fifteen and they didn't sort of stay for O-levels or anything like that, so it was kind of get a job and do what you can, so my dad, I know he initially worked for a, I think it was a wine importer as a kind of, sort of general assistant, seller, seller, you know, the guy who rolls the barrels in, you know, I don't exactly know the ins and outs, but it was near London Bridge, and he then got a job with a printing press, so he trained as a compositor, obviously this is all pre-digital, it was the like, old manual silk screen press like, he got a job in a place on the Old Kent Road in south London that, that made like, printed up T-shirts for bands, tours and merchandise and that kind of thing, and that's where he was working when my sister was born and he was there for a few years and then the place actually closed down, they ma-, they had to make him redundant because the whole thing shut down, and after that he got a job working for Coca-Cola, they have a big bottling factory out in Kent, so we, we lived in south-east London, but he would drive out to Kent for his, his shifts, and he worked there until 2008, it all ended quite badly, which we may, we may get to in the course of the interview, but he worked at Coca-Cola for most of our life in London, and my mother, my mother actually found work in London quicker than my dad did, she, so for a while my dad was a stay-at-home dad with me while my mum was pregnant with my sister, but before she was born, she worked in Asda as a checkout cashier.

FR: Okay.

DT: Yeah.

FR: So they both found work reasonably, relatively quickly.

DT: Yes, yeah, my, my mum's always worked actually, apart from kind of short bouts of maternity leave she, I mean, they had to be, we, you know, we needed the two incomes, so

she was never really a stay-at-home parent and my dad was only a stay-at-home parent briefly because he didn't otherwise have a job to go to for a while.

FR: Yeah, okay, that, that makes sense, and, and where in London did you grow up? Like, do you have a, when were your first memories of London?

DT: Yes, so we, we moved to, so my aunt that we stayed with lives, lives still in Woolwich, so we ended up relatively nearby in a place called Kidbrooke, which is sort of a, one of those places no one's ever really heard of, but it's near Blackheath.

FR: I was going to say, I don't, I don't know it.

DT: No, no, I don't expect you to, it's sort of between Elton and Blackheath, and we, as I, as I said initially my parents got a, a council flat there, where we lived for the first, well, we lived there until I was seven, and then they were offered, still a council rent, they were offered a house, just at the other end of the street from the flat and they eventually bought the house, they were, you know, it sounds incredible now that in London on kind of retail and factory wages that you could just buy a house, but it was possible then.

FR: Different, different times.

DT: Totally, and I think it was because it was like, a council property I think it came under the right-to-buy legislation.

FR: Ah yeah, okay.

DT: So they got a, quite a hefty discount, so I think, you know, they paid something sort of achingly silly for it, like forty thousand pounds, yeah, I know, now granted it wasn't a very central or fashionable area of London, but still, you know, it wouldn't, it wouldn't happen now, so, so we always lived in this, this little sort of tucked-away area, it was, it was council estate basically, it was like one of those, not like a high-rise council estate, but one of those kind of low-rise redbrick council estates built in the interwar years, it was, it was alright, it wasn't great, it wasn't terrible, it was just, it was just average working-class housing.

FR: And what, how, how did you find it growing up there, what, what kind of place was it like to grow up?

DT: Truth be told, I didn't love it and I think that that, it always felt a bit rough around the edges to me, like I say, it wasn't some terrible sink estate, it wasn't, you know, somewhere where you couldn't, you know, where you'd walk in fear of your life at all, but it, I think, for, for context, I, I was probably a terrible little snob at school, well, I was always very bookish and, you know, I did well in academia, but not really the social side of things and I think I just, I sort of recognised that this, it just wasn't where I wanted to be, it wasn't where I wanted to end up and I, I always had the feeling, again, you know, my parents didn't necessarily put this into words, but I always had the feeling that it wasn't quite where they wanted to be either like, it was fine, but it wasn't exactly the life they'd envisaged for themselves.

FR: Sure.

DT: Yeah, I mean, this, you know, in terms of like, how far your money stretches and your standard of living, London is obviously much more difficult than Belfast.

FR: No, absolutely, and you can–

DT: Yeah, and that, and that's the case still today.

FR: Yeah, I mean, you can, you can get a very nice flat or house in Belfast for fractions of what you have to spend in London.

DT: Absolutely.

FR: And so your sister was born, she's three, three years younger than you, did you say?

DT: Three and a half, yeah, so she was born in Greenwich, well, it's now been demolished, but in Greenwich Hospital in October 1988, so she was, yes, very much, she never lived in Ireland, which has always been a kind of half joking, not a bone of contention exactly, but there's always been a, well, there's always been a sense of, one of, you know, of an Irish sister and an English sister.

FR: That's interesting.

DT: Just, as I say, it's a sort of more a joke than anything else, but, but our extended family do, they comment on it because she has a London accent and I don't. Now I know, I know I don't sound like, you know, I'm not straight off the Falls Road, so I'm not [laughs], but and I think I probably sound more Irish talking to you because it tur-, you know, it comes stronger when you're talking to another Irish person, but even, but I–

FR: I would have read your accent as Irish for sure, yeah.

DT: Yeah, I just, my, I just, I never lost it, if you know what I mean, which is strange cos I was so small when we came over here, but I guess, you know, you learn to talk from your parents and by the time I was old enough to go to school I was, and the other kids I was mingling with, you know, were, were English, I guess it was just already ingrained.

FR: No, that, that makes perfect sense really, and that's kind of, that kind of leads into what I was wondering about, so would you have had a sense of yourself as like, Irish?

DT: Oh yes, oh yes, for various reasons, so for one thing of course, you know, as I said, my mother being Catholic, back then she regularly went to church, not really now, but my sister and I were brought to mass every Sunday and we were also enrolled in a Catholic primary school. Now that was as much pragmatic as anything because it so happened that the nearest primary school was a Catholic one and it had a good reputation, **[00:20:00]** so it wasn't only because of it being Catholic, but nonetheless it was, I don't think they would

have sent me to a, a secular or a Church of England school if it had have been closer. So being a Catholic school and being affiliated with the nearest Catholic church, a lot of the other families who sent their kids there were also Irish, so there was very much a little kind of Irish enclave in this part of south-east London, and so a lot of my parents' friends, you know, the kind of friends of the family, were also Irish or sec-, in some cases second-generation Irish, although we were the only ones from the North as far as I remember, I think, they were, and so there was that, you know, that sense of kind of a miniature Irish community, but also things like the, I mean, my dad played Irish folk music, even though he was the Protestant one he, no, I'm serious, we would, I would, so my sister and I shared a bedroom and our bedroom was over the living room, so some da-, you know, Saturday mornings, you know, you're thirteen, fourteen, you just want to sleep in and the hi-fi, my dad had sort of, it was his pride and joy, his hi-fi system would start up and you'd hear bloody Roddy McCorley goes to die on the bridge of Toome today blasting out of the speakers, blasting you out of bed. I always thought that was, well, I always thought it strange because these are, these are, you know, Catholic rebel songs, you know, 'Men Behind the Wire', things like that, but my dad's the one playing them, but then again, you know, he did marry a Catholic and I, I always, I always had the sneaking suspicion that he had very slight republican sympathies that, you know, I think my dad, oddly for somebody from a Protestant background, saw himself as Irish rather than British.

FR: It's definitely, it's not unheard of, either the republican sympathies or the kind of cultural Irishness.

DT: Yeah, I think it was more the cultural Irishness than, than, my dad wasn't especially political in any way, but, but certainly from a cultural perspective I, you know, I always heard him define himself as Irish and that was reflected in his tastes and, and tendencies, and also my sister and I were brought to Irish dancing lessons, like all good Irish children are, although I can tell you I'm not bringing my baby to Irish dancing lessons, I was tortured with them. Well, she was, my sister was really good at it, I have two left feet unfortunately, so I never got to *feis* standard or anything like that, but, but she was dancing all over the place, so, so yeah, there was very much the sense of Irishness being a, a very overt and very present part of our upbringing, it wasn't just a, a fact that faded into the background, it was, it was something that was I guess enacted in our lives in, in multiple ways, and of course as I, as I said earlier, we went back to Ireland every summer to visit my grandparents when they were alive and occasionally we'd go for Christmas as well and, you know, we'd go for, you know, several-week stretches at a time, so there, so I would say that there was always the sense of Belfast, Belfast was our other home, if you know what I mean, and it was always very confusing because, you know, my parents would say, you know, we're going over home for the summer, okay, and then towards the end of our stay there they'd be like, oh yeah, we're going home tomorrow, where, where are we going [laughs], which one.

FR: [laughs] I do, I do the same thing, I say home for Ireland, but then in Ireland I say home for here.

DT: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, it's confusing.

DT: Very.

FR: So what, what are your early memories then of going to Belfast I wonder like, as a child?

DT: So, so, as I say, we went every summer and we always stayed in my, my granda Jimmy, who's my mother's father, he's the one who lived in Andersonstown, he, we always stayed in his house and if, interestingly, the house is still in the family, although my, my granda died, you know, twenty years ago, but what, my mother's oldest sister, my auntie Brenda, actually bought the house for my granda, cos they, they rented in socially initially, and now one of my cousins lives in it with her family, so it was the house my mother was born in and it's, it's been in the family almost since it was built, initially as social housing then as, as I guess private ownership, anyway, so we, we always stayed with my granda because there was houseroom there because, you know, they'd had, they'd had seven children, so they had the space, and then we would, we would visit var-, you know, my other grandparents, my, my, my dad's parents and various aunts and uncles and I always remember that we, we wouldn't, we only flew there once or twice when I was very small, we almost always drove, which meant getting into the car at like, four a.m., driving up to Scotland, from London–

FR: [laughs] That's a long drive.

DT: And, it is, it is, and getting the ferry from Stranraer either to Belfast or to Larne, so it was always, you know, a journey of epic proportions in both directions and it was, it was always very exciting, you know, we were, my sister and I were always thrilled to go cos we wanted to see our grandparents, we wanted to see our cousins, cos I have a, there's sort of two tranches of cousins. My, so my mum and dad were both, not the very youngest, but nearly the youngest of their siblings, so I've got a bunch of cousins who are like, in their forties, maybe even pushing fifty, and then there's the next lot of cousins, of which I'm the eldest, who are in their late twenties to mid-thirties, so there were a lot of cousins around my age that, you know, we liked to see and hang out with and what have you, so yeah, going, going to Belfast, it was basically a lot of visiting and driving around, seeing places and my dad particularly was adamant that we should see, you know, the Giant's Causeway and we went to, we went to Derry when I was very young, but we didn't really go back there a lot, we went to Newcastle, Portrush, oh other, you know, there was a lot of driving out into the country to see places, if you know what I mean.

FR: Yes, I do, and then what about the, the Troubles? So if you're starting going back in the nineties I suppose–

DT: Well, the late eighties actually.

FR: The late eighties.

DT: Yeah, yeah, they were actually, it's funny cos you mention that and they were there, they were, it was apparent even to me as a kid, but it also, it just seemed like, well, that's Northern Ireland, that's normal for here, so quite a few times I remember, because we obviously took our, when I was seven we finally got a car and we therefore drove over in our

car on the ferry, and because it had an English registration plate it got stopped and searched quite a few times, and I remember once it was parked up outside, on the pavement outside my granda's house, and bearing in mind this is a car with an English reg in a Catholic area, and, and a couple of soldiers knocked at the door and said whose car is that and my dad, my dad came and said oh that's my car, oh would you mind if we searched it, sir, and it was, you know, it was fine, my, I mean, my mum and my dad they knew the drill, you know, you're polite, you cooperate, you don't create any flashpoints, you just get it over and done with and out of the way, so yeah, they, they opened, you know, the glovebox, the boot, under, looked under the seats and they were like, okay, thank you sir, we just had to check. I remember in, certainly in the early nineties we, if we went into the city centre for a look round the shops, say, they still had the security checkpoints on Donegall Avenue, so we still had to go through a turnstile and have your bag checked, I remember, I mean, even now they don't have normal police cars there, they have those armoured vehicles.

FR: Yeah, with the, the skirts, the kind of metal skirts.

DT: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, so just, just registering that and registering things, like, you know, the murals and barbed wire here and there and until, you know, until I was a teenager certainly there were still soldiers on street corners, but like I said, it, it, it registered as different to London, but it still was normal for where we were because my parents saw it as normal, so they didn't communicate to us any sense of oh my God, what is this, do you see what I mean.

FR: No, that makes, that makes total sense.

DT: Yeah.

FR: It's funny, it's funny how you can take it in your stride really as a kid.

DT: Yeah, yeah, I mean, as I say, I took it, took it in my stride, but at the same time I recognised that what I saw was nothing compared to what my, my parents were very much in the middle of it, but by the time we were going back there, I mean, yes, it was pre-Good Friday Agreement, but the worst of it had passed, it wasn't, it was nowhere near as intrusive on day-to-day life as it had been in the seventies and early eighties.

FR: Yeah, no, I, I understand that, and I wonder then, it's interesting that you say that about the kind of difference between your parents' experience of it, would they have talked to you about growing up during–

DT: Oh yeah.

FR: A more violent period obviously in Northern Ireland?

DT: Yeah, yeah, I mean, my mum talked and talks about it a lot, but my mum is like me, once you get her talking she won't stop. My dad, I mean, he talked about it sometimes but it wasn't just **[00:30:00]** a topic of general conversation, you know, he would talk about it in a more sort of contemplative way like, if he'd been thinking about it, it would come up

sometimes, so they, they both saw a lot of violence, I mean, bear, for, bearing in mind my dad was born in 1959, my mum was born in 1960, so they were teenagers through what you might call the absolute worst phase of it in the seventies. My, again, my understanding is that my mum, with both the location of her home and the kind of sentiments of her family and friends around her, my mum was more embroiled than my dad was, but my, but it was definitely a presence in their lives for both of them. I know [laughs], I know my mum was arrested on a couple of occasions.

FR: Oh really?

DT: She didn't do, she hadn't done anything, she was, it was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, so, but the thing is almost, almost all of them, her siblings and her were picked up by the army at one point or another, often just for, you know, walking down a street and, you know, vaguely matching the description of someone they were looking for.

FR: Yeah, for being a teenager in Andersonstown was probably enough to get picked up, yeah.

DT: Pretty much, pretty much, exactly, so that was, that was not an outlier, an outlier in any way, but yeah, I mean, where, you know, my, my mum did live in a hot spot, I mean, they had gun battles going on literally outside their front door at times, you know, they had people, they'd see like, the bushes in their back garden rustling and they'd know it was some, you know, young IRA guy running away from, from having taken a few pot shots at soldiers, that kind of thing, you know, they, my, my mum knew people who were killed, as did my dad actually, and my dad, as I say, was less directly involved, but he saw a lot. I mean, he, he was, I remember him telling me he was walking home from school one day and heard shots going off, he would have been about twelve, thirteen at the time, and all of a sudden he felt a hand on the collar of his school uniform and it was a, a British soldier dragging him down behind like, a rubbish bin or something to get him out of the line of fire, and it turned out that he'd basically wandered into an enormous gun battle, and that was up by, that was up at Lenadoon actually, and so that would have been 1972 or '73, so yeah, but bas-, I mean, you know, without kind of recapping every, every single example and eventuality, basically they were both very much in the middle of it. My mum refers to it still today as a war, she said I consider myself as having grown up in a war zone, and I think, although my dad didn't maybe couch it in the same way, I get the impression that he felt similarly about it.

FR: No, I mean, it, it seems like a reasonable way to describe it really.

DT: Yeah, yeah, and needless to say they, you know, they went to segregated schools, my mum went to a Catholic school, convent school, my dad went to, to a, a comprehensive, so ostensibly secular, but in, in fact a Protestant school, if that makes sense, and they, I always, you know, remember them saying the, the differences in terms of their curriculums. So my dad learned British history, now the convent school didn't want to teach British history, so they learnt Irish and French history. My dad's school they played rugby, my mum's school they played camogie, and I guess the boys' school down the road played hurling and Gaelic

football, so all of those difference were just expressed in, excuse me, in such ingrained and in everyday ways, you know, that just was your life.

FR: Yeah, absolutely, I'm, I'm thinking I suppose it must be quite strange to hear that from London, if you see what I mean, it must–

DT: Yeah, but as I say, because our, our kind of, our Irishness was always very, very much at the forefront of our identity I guess as a family and as individuals, and also, truth be told, now I can, I can say this sort of and you're welcome to, sort of reproduce this as needed, my father actually passed away a few years ago.

FR: I'm sorry to hear that.

DT: So it took, thank you, but it took, well, it took a toll on both of their mental health states, but far more so on my dad than on my mum I think, and my dad, I mean, a lot of it was to do with family stuff, but the Troubles also was a major factor. He had mental health issues for all of his life, and, and so did other members of his family, in some, you know, as I say, not exclusively caused by the Troubles, but definitely exacerbated by them. I remember when, you know, I start, I noticed when we moved from our council flat to the house down the road I remember that for a few years after we moved my dad, every night, would tape up our letterbox with brown like, parcel tape and I was like, why, why, why does he do that, he said oh, you know, you never know, kids around here might stick a firecracker or something through the door, burn the house down. He was, you know, he wasn't worried about kids with firecrackers, that was, that was, you know, I realised as an adult, that was absolutely a legacy of growing up in a place where somebody might actually stick a, you know, a Molotov through your letterbox to burn the place down, bearing in mind, as I said, that he lived in one of those little Protestant enclaves surrounded by Catholic housing estates, I, I rather think that he had a bit of a siege mentality from that and it rendered him very paranoid, as, as an adult, and I think, you know, in many ways, so definitely a lot of, a lot of the kind of mental health issues that he had as an adult can be traced back to his experiences in the Troubles. I mean, his older brother, my uncle David, was, for a while in the seventies he was actually a prison guard at Long Kesh, and he was paid, you know, he was paid danger money for that and he saw, I mean, his mental health was far worse even than my dad's, he was an alcoholic all his life, and I think he tried to kill himself at some, you know, he attempted suicide certainly at least once, when my dad was a teenager, so yeah, that side of the family is, you know, they battled their demons for a long time, have to say that. I mean, my, my mother's family had their own crosses to bear and issues, but it didn't, it didn't kind of manifest in such, in quite such a destructive and obvious way, if you see what I mean.

FR: I do.

DT: Yeah, I mention it cos I do, I do think it's relevant, it's not just, you know, somebody growing up in the Troubles who happened to have unrelated mental health issues. I think these were very much related and integrated.

FR: Yeah, no, it makes perfect sense as, as you describe it and that kind of legacy of anxiety or, or whatever you want to call it.

DT: Paranoia and extreme anxiety, definitely.

FR: Yeah, no, that's, that's really interesting and I really kind of, it's interesting to think about this very kind of tangible presence of the Troubles in, in your kind of childhood and family home. So I gue-, yeah, I mean, what was I going to say, were your parents, you mentioned, you said they weren't very political or you said your dad wasn't political.

DT: Well, neither of them were, neither of them were political in the sense of having strong opinions on every-, everyday politics, you know, I mean, they, I remember, you know, they voted and I know, you know, my mother for what I assume are obvious reasons still has a, a kind of a spit in her voice when she hears the name Margaret Thatcher.

FR: That's a nice way to put it.

DT: Yeah, but a lot of people of that generation do. I mean, let me see, how can I put it, they weren't, I would say I am more political than my parents were in the sense that I follow politics more closely, I am probably more engaged with various forms of activism, I mean, not in like, a hardcore way, I mean, I go on the odd march, and I tweet angrily [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Don't we all.

DT: Yeah, yeah, exactly, but you know what I mean, I think my parents were more, you know, we need to earn a living, we're going to get our heads down and build a life for ourselves, and politics to a certain extent was seen as this kind of, this kind of sphere of activity that wasn't for them to be bothered, bothering their heads with, obviously they had and my mo-, you know, my mother still has political opinions, but they never, I mean, for example, they never at home they never kind of argued the rights and wrongs of Irish unification, for example, they never had that conversation, not in front of me anyway. They didn't talk, obviously by the time we were living in London, you know, the kind of traditional voting allegiances were irrelevant because you couldn't vote for Sinn Féin or the DUP or the UUP or whatever. I'm pretty sure when they voted that they voted Labour, again, I couldn't, I couldn't say hand on heart, cast iron that I'm certain, but I, I think that's correct, certainly they never voted Tory, I can tell you that.

FR: [laughs] That's, that's kind of what I was interested in really like, when you moved from Northern Ireland to Britain how did, what politics do you take with you, or how does it affect your, yeah.

DT: Well, I think, I mean, my, my dad was always very kind of vocally for the **[00:40:00]** working man, as it were. It's, it's interesting cos I think my parents both, but again, more so my dad, in terms of my dad vocalising it more, I think their politics and the way they lived their lives more generally was, it was a kind of, what you might call a, the aspirational working classes, as in we, you know, we weren't poor, we had food on the table and a roof over our heads, the bills were paid, but we were not middle class either by a long shot, you

know, our budget was very tight, our kind of cultural consumption was very working class in terms of the holidays we took, the TV we watched, you know, we didn't have money to burn at all, we lived on a council estate, so I think my parents were very much, you know, work hard, keep your head down and you'll, you know, you'll keep your head above water. They weren't interested in the kind of the theoretical aspect of politics and the ins and outs of who deserves what and what's the best way to govern the country and that kind of thing, they were interested in having bread on the table and they, they managed that, whereas I would probably, you know, and I remember as I got older I would, you know, debate especially with my dad and be told, you know, wait till you have life experience young lady, and I'd be wanging on about, you know, redistribution of rich people's money and that, you know, typical, typical gobby, smart-arse teenager stuff.

FR: That's interesting, yeah, that dynamic, wait until you've had some more experience.

DT: Yeah, totally, but I think, I mean, for them just, I know I'm, I'm slightly circling back here, but the, the kind of the, the move to London, although, as I say, it was never meant to permanent, I think in some respects it represented an opportunity to, for them to free themselves of those, those kind of Catholic-Protestant divisions, cos in London, you know, nobody, nobody gave a shit, are you this or are you that, I mean, there were other things they gave a shit about, but not that, you know, nobody was going to be quest-, you know, no one was judging you based on whether your surname was Maguire or Campbell or whether you had a Protestant-sounding name or whatever, or what school you went to, there wasn't that kind of subtle, coded, oh I'm trying to figure out who somebody is based on thing-, you know, their, what street they live on and stuff like that, and it is, it is so, even today in Northern Ireland I think it is so engrained you, even if somebody is not especially religious or especially political, you can tell if they they're Catholic or Protestant often, not always, but often, based on stuff like their name, the name of the street they live on, the school they went to, it's, it's like, it's still stratified and codified like that, that hasn't gone away.

FR: No, a hundred, a hundred per cent, and people still do it like, you can, and I, I do it without even kind of meaning to or, or wanting to, it's a strange kind of, I don't know what you would call it [laughs].

DT: Again, I'm just baby wrangling at the moment by the way, again, it's especially, so my, my mother lives back over in Belfast now and has done for the last ten years and, so I and my sister, you know, we, well, not this year obviously cos pandemic, but we fly over to visit her a lot and she comes over to see us, and we virtually always fly into International, which my mother still refers to as Aldergrove, still, in fact, I even call it that sometimes, although it's never been called that in my lifetime because of, well, she does, anyway, and if we fly into International it means if, if there isn't somebody to pick us up and give us a lift it means getting a taxi of course and there's something about like, in, in London taxi drivers just, they say hello when you're getting into the car and they, and they just focus on driving, unless you strike up a conversation with them. In Belfast, and I haven't even found this anywhere else in Ireland, only in Belfast, you get into a taxi and by the time you get out of the taxi they will know your life story, the names of your, you know, your first pet, your favourite primary school teacher and your blood type. I don't know how they do it, but they always manage to

wangle it out of you and, I mean, I'm quite happy, as you can tell right now, I'm quite happy to talk away, but I'm sure not everybody does, but, but I always get the, you know, the kind of subtle interrogation, cos they're trying to, you know, they can hear my accent, they're like, okay, she sounds Irish, but she also sounds like she's lived away from here for a long time, she's just got off a plane from London, you know, I'm trying, they're trying to, they're trying to place me.

FR: What's the story.

DT: Yeah, exactly, and it's, it's harmless and it's all perfectly polite, there's nothing sinister in it, but they're trying to work out where do I fit in the framework–

FR: Yes.

DT: Cos every-, you know, because everyone's got to fit in somewhere, there has to be a rationale. I remember once saying, asking the driver to take me to where my mum was living at the time, which was, not in Andersonstown, but very nearby, and we went past the place my dad used to live in and I said oh my dad used to live here, and he went hang on, you're, you're taking me to, you're, you're going to visit your mammy and she's here, but you said your dad lived there like, he's like, that's a Catholic area, but that's a Protestant area, I'm like, yeah, and I explained, he's oh okay, well, that's unusual, is it, okay, fair enough, but do you know what, well, my point is is that everyone's picking up on those subtleties, you don't have to be a skilled reader of Northern Irish semantics to, to understand the situation.

FR: No, and I think especially when you occupy a kind of ambivalent position–

DT: Very.

FR: As I guess you do in terms of Thom isn't a Catholic surname–

DT: Danielle isn't an Irish name at all.

FR: But, but you're going to a Catholic area, that you live in England, it's, yeah–

DT: Yeah, totally.

FR: You find yourself getting subtly interrogated quite a lot.

DT: Yeah, absolutely, no, it is, I mean, and I think that's an interesting thing that you raise, and again forgive me, it's a bit of a tangent, but I do think it's relevant, this sense of, so this, you're going to, you're going to be able to tell that I studied art history cos I'm going to refer to it as a very liminal form of identity.

FR: [laughs] No, I get, I get you, yeah.

DT: Sorry, that's, that's grad-, that's PhD speak coming out again, but it is, because being Northern Irish is, is kind of liminal and vague by default because you're legally entitled to consider yourself as Irish or British or both, and in fact, I, I have, I have dual nationality, I have both passports, but, you know, I'm, I'm Northern Irish, so some people see me as Irish, some people see me as British, but I also lived in London for a long time, for almost my entire life, so some people see me as British based on that, but also I don't come solely from a Protestant or Catholic background, so I'm in, in terms of national identity, for what it's worth, I've always felt slightly unanchored. On the other hand, it's given me the freedom to determine for myself how do I feel, do I identify as one thing or another, rather than having it kind of shaped and handed to me by my parents.

FR: Yeah, and I guess it can influence the way you think about the world more broadly, the kind of cast of mind that you have.

DT: Yeah, yeah, and I would say that that as well, and plus growing up in London which is arguably even today a far more diverse, cosmopolitan city than, than Belfast ever was, I think has given me broader horizons, not that, I'm not saying that nobody in Belfast has ambitions or an open mind, far, far from it, but there are, I think there's still a kind of a hangover of parochialism and conservatism among a lot of Northern Irish people, not, not necessarily my, my own family, but you do see it in attitudes still to things like, like abortion, for example, gay marriage. Funnily enough though, whereas, I mean, the whole Repeal the Eighth campaign in, in the Republic a couple of years ago was very much focused on the kind of pernicious legacy of the Catholic church, but in the North it's very much evangelical Protestantism that underpins a lot of that social conservatism–

FR: That's right.

DT: Which is, I've always thought is, is curious, but yeah, that's still very much, it's there, it's not as prevalent as it used to be, but it, it exists.

FR: No, it absolutely does, yeah, it's definitely still in the atmosphere, for want of a better word.

DT: Yeah.

FR: I was just going to ask, you mentioned earlier that your parents had initially thought Belfast would be, oh sorry, London rather would be temporary, and your mother has now moved back. Did they ever think of moving back while you were young?

DT: Oh it would, it would come up in conversation all the time, usually like, as I said before, my dad had various mental health issues and that would often manifest in him, you know, losing his temper quite spectacularly and whenever something happened that he felt was like, he was a very anxious and even paranoid man and if something, if something kind of assailed his sense of safety and security he would blame it often on being in London and say we're going home, sell the house, you know, he was, as I say, **[00:50:00]** he was never formally diagnosed with anything, but I wouldn't be surprised if he had had some form of bipolar disorder in hindsight, I mean, like, I, don't take that as gospel because he was never

diagnosed, but, but his, his behaviours would add up to that. Anyway, so if, oh, for example, if, as we were, as my sister and I grew up and teenagers allowed to go out and about a bit more there were still a lot of constraints on what we could and couldn't do, and arguably we were brought up quite strictly and, and very much under the thumb, and if, I don't know, if one of us ran into, ran into trouble with a group of kids, you know, and came home and to-, and told our parents about what had happened my dad would, would go off on one and go, this place, this bloody place, you know, sell the house, Claire, we're moving, we're going back, not living in this shithole anymore, etcetera, etcetera. Of course if we were in Belfast and we had got into any kind of bother he would have had the same response and said we're not living in this shithole anymore, we're going somewhere else.

FR: Let's move, let's move to England.

DT: London, yeah, exactly, exactly, so I always think it was a bit of a double-edged sword for my dad that London represented simultaneously a kind of a freedom, but also something very scary, very unf-, very, you know, unfamiliar. I do remember actually when, so I, I mentioned that my dad died a few years ago, he was, you know, he was only in his fifties, he had cancer, now I was with him, you know, in the last few weeks of his life in hospital I was visiting him and my sister was visiting him every day and I was thinking to myself, you know, this is, if there's anything I've ever wanted to ask my dad that I haven't before this is my last chance, and I remember, you know, wanting to kind of make conversation with him and, and keep him, keep him kind occupied and not terrified, and I asked him, you know, about, just lots of questions about his early life before I was born that I didn't know about, and one of the things I asked was, what was the first time you came to London and what did you think, and he said I remember it was 1980, so it was even before he'd met my mum, and I thought he would have been twenty and he actually came over with, so he, if, before he met my mum my dad had an English girlfriend, who I think was a daughter of somebody in the army, who was over there and they, they were, you know, I mean, they were teenagers, so it never turned out to be anything serious, but for the time I guess they felt it was, so my dad visited London with his then girlfriend and her family, and he said I remember I got on the tube and we got off the tube at Oxford Circus and I'd never seen so many people in my life all in one place, and I got the, you know, he, there was really that sense of wow, this is, this is overwhelming, this is really a lot, you know, it's exciting, but my God it's terrifying was, was the impression that I got from the way he talked about it, and I think that never fully left him, even though, you know, we, you know, by the time he, by the time he died he'd spent half, you know, more than half his life in London, but I think that sense of it being a bit much had never really left him.

FR: Yeah, no, that, that makes sense and it, it's really interesting I suppose that that gets expressed sometimes through anxiety about your children, so like, the idea that, I suppose it's something you can't control like, your children are growing up in London.

DT: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, it's very interesting.

DT: Yeah, and like I say, we, my sister and I, more so me I think, I think being the eldest you tend to get treated a bit more strictly and then your parents ease up on the younger kid.

FR: Yeah, I agree, I'm the eldest as well [laughs].

DT: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, solidarity, there's, I think there's definitely, yeah, I felt very, I mean, all teenagers feel that they, you know, however much freedom they have it's never enough, but I really felt like I was constrained in a lot of ways, so yeah, I wasn't, wasn't allowed anywhere on my own after dark. I remember once when I was, I was in sixth form, I would have been about seventeen and I was asked to stay late at school to give a presentation to some evening thing, and I mentioned it at home and I was told I couldn't do it because my dad was working a late shift, so he wouldn't be able to pick me up, and I said that's no problem, I'll get the bus home like, no, you can't because by the time it finishes it'll be, I don't know, seven, seven-thirty and you have to get the, you know, you're not going home by yourself in the dark. Now granted the school I was going to at the time was, you know, a bit of a trek, it was like, a two-bus journey each way, but it was, you know, it wasn't in any sense a dodgy or a dangerous journey or anything like that, it was, go to the bus stop, wait for the bus, get on the bus and, yeah, even at kind of seventeen years old I was still being told, no, you have to get picked up or you can't go. So I don't know if that was, you know, I can't say that that's all attributable to the fact of my parents being from Northern Ireland, but it's definitely a contrast to how, you know, how I know their teenage years were lived, you know, I mean, that's partly a function of their generation as much as anything else, but they, you know, were out and about wherever they wanted, and my dad moved out and got a flat on his own at eighteen or nineteen because you could then, it was affordable, he had a, he had a full-time job, he didn't want to live under my granny's thumb any longer than he had to, you know, he like, up and out and living his own life, so it was, the kind of, the rules they applied for us were not the rules that they had grown up under, it was like, they were determined to do it a different way, if that makes sense.

FR: Yeah, it does make sense and it, it makes sense also maybe in terms of like, them not feeling entirely at home say in London, makes it feel less safe than, say, if you were in Belfast.

DT: Yeah, and I think there's a reason that they gravitated towards making friends who were also Irish because, you know, that, that sense of community, that sense of solidarity and of being able to talk to people who get it, as it were, who know where you're coming from in terms of your, your cultural reference points and your values and so on.

FR: No, absolutely, and so how about for you as you started getting a wee bit older, so into your teens, would you still have identified with the kind of Irish element of your–?

DT: Oh yeah, yeah, definitely, that's, I've never, I've never shied away from that. It's funny because as I said earlier my sister was born in England and she sounds English, and I think for her it's, it's always been more ambiguous, I think it's been harder for her to kind of say openly I'm Irish and that's it, because people will say but you don't sound Irish, you weren't born in Ireland, it's like, whereas I'm, you know, if somebody's, if somebody's taking notes I tick the boxes, it's harder for her, and I know that for a while she, I don't want to speak for

her, she's not here, but I, but she did very consciously try and de-Irishify herself [laughs] for a while, as in as a very small child she had a very slight Irish accent from our parents and I think as she went to primary school and mingled with other kids more she consciously tried to lose it, as in it wasn't, it wasn't a purely natural process, she made a point of trying to sound English, whereas I think I consciously tried to keep my accent, I don't think, I don't think it's sheer accident that I still sound like this, I, I'm, you know, I can say to you because it's relevant to this interview that I worked on it, if you know what I mean.

FR: No, I do, I mean, it's, it's such a weird thing with accent, there's definitely something conscious and then there's always lots of kind of unconscious things going on as well.

DT: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but yeah, in terms of Irishness and, and getting older, it was definitely a factor in my kind of experience at school. I mentioned earlier that I was, you know, arguably much better at the academic side than the social side and, I mean, that's a nice way of saying I was a nerd and I didn't have many friends, but the Irishness I think wasn't the cause of that, but it compounded it, I mean, you know how kids are, in that they latch on to anything that makes somebody different.

FR: Any kind of difference, yeah.

DT: Anything, yeah, and if it wasn't Irishness it would have been something else, but in primary school I was definitely a bit of a, an outcast and bearing in mind, and I didn't really register at the time, but in hindsight I realised, this is, we're talking like, the early 1990s here, we're talk-, you know, so it's a period where IRA activity in England is actually kind of at its height, you had the, you know, the Canary Wharf bomb, the IRA ceasefire was broken, I think it was 1994, so I would have been nine then, and I remember at school being asked by the other kids things like are you a terrorist, are your parents terrorists, and it wasn't, as I say, it wasn't the **[01:00:00]** main focus of any kind of bullying, but it, but it obviously permeated, you know, the other kids' awareness, it seemed relevant to them. I know my mum, who by this point was working, she always worked retail, she was working in Argos at this point, I remember on a few occasions she would come home having had maybe a difficult customer, who having heard her accent would make an issue of it and, you know, got the whole, go back to where you came from you bloody Paddy, this, that and the other. My dad got it a bit at work, but that was more kind of laddish ribbing because by his de-, by his description it was just the kind of workplace where everybody got made fun of for something, so there was the Irish guy, the Italian guy, the Nigerian guy, it wasn't a problem for him, it was just something that was referenced, but that sense of Irishness being I guess seen as somehow undesirable, I think it, it was, it was, it was in the background, if you know what I mean, and at the same time it was, oh how can I put it, exotic doesn't quite seem like the right word [laughs], but it was a point of difference and a point of interest. Funnily enough, as I sort of, as I went to secondary school and then sixth form and then university, the kind of Irish identity in some respects was very useful to me. I mean, when I say useful I mean not consciously at the time, but I've realised in hindsight that it was useful because as I've said I grew up in a very kind of ordinary working-class environment, and we didn't have a lot of cash and we didn't have, you know, the only, the only books in the house were, were my books, there wasn't, we didn't have that kind of stuff, but having, you know, kind of, kind of got the bug for academic stuff at school and, and being, you know, being quite

ambitious and kind of having this vague sense of wanting to go somewhere in my life that was beyond my environment at the time, I realised fairly quickly that, you know, England, well, they say, you know, there's a British class system, really there's an English class system, being Irish and being identified as Irish was helpful because it always allowed me to slightly sit outside English people's understanding of social class and the kind of, your relative position in the hierarchy, because, I mean, it is entirely plausible that I'm talking utter bollocks here. I'm sorry to have said the word bollocks in your interview, but there you go.

FR: [laughs] Don't worry about it.

DT: But in a, in a sense it allows you to be kind of familiar, but different, and I've definitely found that since, more so since going to university, not so much at school, so I, so I, I went to, I went to Oxford for my undergraduate degree, which is about as English as it gets and about as, and about as upper crust as it gets, and I definitely felt very out of place there, not so much for being Irish, cos actually Oxford's pretty cosmopolitan place, lots of international students, but being somebody from a less well-off background in a university populated very heavily by wealthy students, who, you know, had much more privileged upbringing than I did, but I did find, as I say, that if people go oh, oh I can't quite place your accent, oh you're Irish, oh okay, that you wouldn't get, you wouldn't get kind of treated as this kind of working-class oik in the same way, oh I'm just going to have to pick up the baby, sorry.

FR: That's quite alright.

DT: Come on baby, it's alright, there you are.

FR: I was going to say, I mean, the English class system isn't unlike the sectarian system in Northern Ireland.

DT: Yeah, yeah.

FR: It works in the same way, you know, verbal cues, where you went to school, stuff like that.

DT: Yeah, absolutely, it's just it's, I'd say it's more subtle, but yeah.

FR: And it's, if, you can be ambiguous, maybe more subtle, yeah.

DT: But yeah, definitely, definitely helpful, it's basically, as I say, allowed me to kind of, you know, if, if we're all on some kind of overlapping Venn diagram, I'm in a, a little circle that's sort of touching on the main diagram, but slightly floating off by myself in the corner, and it's been helpful in my line of work as well, cos professionally I work in the arts and that is heavily populated by people from privileged backgrounds and, I mean, I would say today my current circumstances are pretty privileged, you know, I would say I'm now living a middle-class life, but in a sense I've been able to kind of segue into that and inhabit that environment in part because I haven't had the, the same kind of class hang-ups as I might have done if I identified as English.

FR: Yeah, no, I, I completely understand what you mean.

DT: Great, I hope I'm articulating that kind of clearly because it's, it's quite difficult to put it into words because it is quite a nebulous feeling, but nonetheless very real.

FR: I mean, I think for me as, as a Northern Irish person in England you, you do sit to some extent outside of the class reading [laughs].

DT: Yeah, yeah.

FR: Like, people aren't sure where to put you.

DT: Yeah, and I think to a certain extent that's, that derives from a lot of English people's ignorance about, well, Ireland generally, but the North in particular, I mean, I know it was a kind of a running joke in the aftermath of Brexit the degree to which English people hadn't got a clue about Northern Ireland and its history. I don't know if you remember seeing, there was a news segment on *Channel 4 News* where they asked people on the street to draw the Irish border.

FR: [laughs] I think I did, yeah.

DT: And, yeah, there was one, there was one where some guy had drawn a straight line from like, Galway Bay to Dublin like, literally divided Ireland in half down the middle like, come on. But I, but I don't know if you've ever found this, but I've certainly had people going oh Northern Irish, you're not really Irish then, are you, excuse me, or Northern Ireland, where's that, or do we own that like, piss off, no, you don't, that kind of thing and also, I don't know, I don't know, if you, if you only came to England as an adult maybe you wouldn't have got this so much, but people hearing your accent and asking you to repeat particular phrases, the most popular one being how now brown cow.

FR: How now brown cow, yeah [laughs].

DT: Yeah, or do, yeah, or do you want a towel for your shower.

FR: Shower, shower is the one that people enjoy to do, yeah.

DT: Yeah, I mean, my, so my husband's also Irish, although he's, his family are from Cork–

FR: Oh that's interesting.

DT: And he couldn't understand a lot of the, a lot of my pronunciations at first, so there you are [laughs].

FR: [laughs] How did, how did you and your husband meet?

DT: We actually met on, via online dating.

FR: Oh wow, okay.

DT: He's at the other end of our flat working from home, so he, I don't know if he can hear me, but if he does, you're lovely and it's all good, it's all good [laughs].

FR: [laughs] I just wondered about the kind of Irish thing.

DT: That was, that was actually coincidental really, it wasn't that, you know, we weren't like attending an Irish night or anything like that I think, but, but nonetheless, although, you know, we met online, it obviously, I'm sure it gave us this kind of point of reference to, you know, something to connect over.

FR: No, that, that makes sense.

DT: We actually, we actually got married a couple of years ago and we had our wedding in Ireland, so.

FR: In the North or the South?

DT: No in, down in Cork.

FR: Down in Cork, yeah.

DT: Yeah.

FR: Okay, so I was going to ask, kind of moving into the nineties, you mentioned obviously the, the various kind of IRA bombings in the mid-nineties, and then we've got the peace process in '98 or so. I wondered if you had any memory of that, if it was something that was like, your parents talked about it or–?

DT: Yes, in fact, this was coincidental, when the Omagh bomb went off we were in Belfast at the time, we were over on a visit, and I remember, I mean, obviously I, I saw it on the news and I thought oh my God, another bomb, how terrible, but from the reactions of the adults around me there was a real sense that this was somehow orders of magnitude worse than some things that had gone before, partly because of the numbers of people killed, I think it had an unusually heavy death toll of civilians, partly because I think they were getting so close to the Good Friday Agreement, there was a fear that that would dis-, derail everything [coughs], sorry, but there was definitely a sense of, of the momentous nature of what was happening, you know, it, it was, it wasn't something that just sort of slid by in the background without comment.

FR: No, thank you, that, that's interesting and, and you remember the reaction to Omagh **[01:10:00]** as being particularly kind of, people were upset about it.

DT: Yeah, and, as I say, there, there's this sense that, you know, that, you know, any bombing is bad, but this was particularly bad. I think as well because for my parents, for their siblings, and for some of my older cousins as well, I think because there had been a

gradual de-escalation of violence through the nineties, compared to their experiences in the seventies and early eighties, there was a sense, you know, it's getting better, we're getting there, slowly, and I think Omagh felt like the possibility of a return to the bad old days just as, just as the, the peace process really felt like it was gaining momentum and was going to lead to something, I think that's why, because there hadn't been a bomb of that magnitude in terms of the death toll for some years, and so I think it felt like a, a throwback as well as being, you know, a horrific occurrence in its own right.

FR: Yeah, no, I, I follow you, that makes sense. I wondered about, so, so going to Oxford, were your parents, what did your parents think of that, what did they make of that?

DT: They were very proud and–

FR: Because it does feel like, the kind of, it's the most English thing [laughs] you can do is go to Oxford or Cambridge.

DT: Yeah, and funnily enough, and I'm aware of the irony, but, so under the, the UK kind of university system then, obviously you had to go through UCAS and pick your–

FR: Yes.

DT: Oh of course, you will have done it as well.

FR: Me, me too, yeah [laughs].

DT: Yeah, yeah, so you know you had to pick your first choice and your second choice, so Oxford was my first choice and I put Queen's as my insurance choice, and so there was that sense of, well, if I don't get my grades for Oxford at least I'm going somewhere where I've got family, somewhere that's, you know, it's not complete new place to me, but I, well, I actually didn't get the grades for Oxford, I slipped up one grade by a couple of points and called them and they let me in anyway, so they, they snuck me in by the back door, which definitely didn't lead me to feel like a massive fraud through all my time there, but yeah, so I, you know, through the application process I was very nervous, and I remember the day I got my acceptance letter I was actually at work, I had a weekend job, and I called home on my break and said is there any post for me, my dad had answered the phone, he said yes, actually there's a letter here for you, oh can you tell what it is, and he said oh it's, it's got a University of Oxford stamp on the envelope like, open it, open it, tell me, tell me, and the letter said, you know, subject to the following grades we are pleased to offer you a place, blah, blah, blah, and do you know what, it's, you know, it's over twenty years ago and I still remember the kind of elation, the pure kind of unadulterated joy I felt because it felt like a ticket out like, out of what exactly, you know, would be, would be difficult to define precisely because of course you go to university, you still come home in the holidays, you know, you don't stop being part of your family, you don't shed your skin and become a new person, but it still felt like a major opportunity, and I remember, you know, both my parents were incredibly proud, but I think, it's funny, I always think for, for them they were proud because I was going to university, the fact that it was Oxford was a nice bonus, but no one in my family had gone to university before, a couple of my, one of my uncles and one of my

aunts had gone to a teacher training college in, in Belfast, but no one had sort of gone off and done a degree, if that makes sense, and all of a sudden it's like, oh she's not just the first person in our family to go to university, but here she is going off to Oxford. I think for them it was, it was a sort of, you know, this is, this is lovely and we're proud and we're happy that you're happy, but it didn't quite register that it was a big deal, if that makes sense.

FR: Yeah, well, I, I guess if the fact of university is even of itself quite a big deal, that's–

DT: Exactly, I think, I mean, which is, it's great because they weren't, they weren't pressuring me in anyway, they weren't saying you've got to do this, you've got to do that, you know, or what do you mean, you only got ninety-five per cent on your test, where's the other five per cent, it wasn't like that at all. I think they were content, they saw that I was doing well, they were content to just let me work away at it without undue pressure, but, but yeah, definitely proud and I think my dad in particular, I think he kind of got the, the kind of, the upper crust nature of Oxford and I think he, you know, it satisfied some kind of inner snootiness in him, but the, but the thing is my, I mean, my, both my parents families, but my dad's family in particular, were very kind of Sunday best kind of people, you know, they cared what the neighbours thought, they were very, you know, best clothes on, best foot forward, don't air your dirty linen in public and to have, to be able to say oh actually my daughter's at Oxford University, I think was quite, you know, my dad enjoyed that to the extent that he, I remember when they, when they brought me up at the start of term and we walked round Oxford city centre and my dad was really taken with all of the, the kind of fake college, you know, the sweatshirts in the souvenir shops, and even I was like, dad nobody actually wears those, but he, he really loved them, so for Christmas that year I bought him one of the university rugby shirts and he wore it constantly, and it was like, a little like, oh, oh this thing, oh my daughter brought me that, yes, she's a student there, you know what I mean.

FR: [laughs] That's, that's so sweet, that's lovely.

DT: It was sweet, but I definitely, you know, I definitely had this sense of not, you know, of coming from a different background to the majority of the students there. I remember when we went even for the open day before I'd got my place, you know, my parents obviously they knew, they, they knew Oxford was posh, so we turned up and they were, they were dressed in their best, my dad was wearing a suit, my mum had a, they were dressed as you would for, I don't know, maybe not, not as formal as like, a wedding, but they were dressed for a social event, like a garden–

FR: Sunday best.

DT: Yeah, Sunday best, exactly, and we turned up and there were all these, you know, posh English kids there, who, their parents had brought them in their beaten up old Range Rovers and they were wearing their, you know, their, their tatty old jeans and their, their beaten up old wax Barbour jackets because, you know, people who came from money, so they didn't care what they looked like.

FR: You don't dress up when you're posh, do you?

DT: No, exactly.

FR: Unless, well, maybe for a wedding or whatever, but not, not to drop your kid off at university.

DT: Exactly, and there was that, and yet at the same time whenever my parents, cos, you know, Oxford's only like, an hour and a bit drive from London, so sometimes they'd come up for the afternoon during term time, and again, they'd be dressed in their best, but then they'd say oh we'll take you for lunch and we'd go to Burger King cos they couldn't afford anything else, and I knew that I'd overheard other people say oh my parents are coming and we're going to, you know, insert name of posh restaurant, so I'd be sitting there with like, you know, my mum in her fake fur coat eating a Whopper and going oh my God, I hope nobody I know sees me because this is so incongruous and it's [indecipherable] and I feel bad saying that now because they were doing what they were doing out of love and I know that, but it, yeah, it was, it wasn't, it wasn't the easiest to navigate socially.

FR: No, it must, it must have been quite strange. Did you know any other Irish people at Oxford?

DT: Yeah, actually, yeah, there were, there were quite a few, I mean, not, not that I was close friends with, but I knew a lot, but again, you know, it's a, it's a pretty diverse, well, not as diverse as it could be, but it's a relatively international student-heavy student body, in fact, one guy I, who was more like a friend of a friend, was Mary Mc-, no, not one guy, one guy was Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor's nephew and he was going out with Mary McAleese's daughter, Sarah McAleese, yeah, and they were like, friends of one my friends, I didn't really know them, know them, but, you know, we hung out, so yeah, it was, it was the kids who would otherwise be at Trinity, like something out of a Sally Rooney novel.

FR: [laughs] I went to, I went to Trinity.

DT: Ah I won't hold it against you, like.

FR: [laughs] So would you have still gone back to Ireland in that period, when you were a student or did that sort–?

DT: Yeah, again, again, we were, we were still going back. So my, my granda Jimmy, my mother's father, he died in 1999 or 2000, I was fifteen, but my paternal grandparents, granny and granda Thom were still alive, through, throughout all my time at university, so we were still going to see them, although it was, it was around this time, when I was in my second year my dad's mental health started to deteriorate quite considerably, and then one of his sisters got cancer and was sick and then in remission and sick again and she passed away when I was in my final year, so we were still going back, but not as frequently and it wasn't the same, it really wasn't the same, and then there was a long period of time in my twenties where dealing with my dad's kind of mental health crisis and the fact he, you know, he basically lost his job for reasons connected to that, **[01:20:00]** we were very

strapped for cash. I was a student still, cos I'd gone on to do a master's and then PhD, so I was strapped for cash, so we, we didn't go back, apart from for a couple of funerals for, you know, years, and then my parents separated about ten years ago and my, that's when my mum moved back to Belfast, and it was only then that my sister and I started going back regularly, to visit her obviously, so we reconnected with cousins I hadn't seen since I was a teenager, and aunts and uncles as well, and then we didn't, we still didn't see my dad's side of the family, purely because my dad wasn't really in contact with anyone, he hadn't deliberately broken off contact, but he was in a, a kind of a bubble of his own and just, I don't know, it's a, you know, that, that could be an interview in its own right, to be honest, it's a long story, but it was only when my dad was sick that, you know, my sister and I basically forced the issue and said we're, we're, you know, we're not going to let, you know, we're not going to not let our aunts see their brother before he dies, you know, so we kind of forced the issue, told them what was happening and they insisted on coming and visiting, so there, you know, that, there was that contact at the very end of his life, but yeah, our regular visits to Belfast only recommenced when my mum moved back there, and since then, as I say, we've been back and forth, you know, a couple of times a year usually, and my mum'll come and see us once or twice a year as well.

FR: Yeah, it's, I, I think it's interesting the kind of reconnection after the big gap like, you, you were still, kind of cousins around the same age and, yeah, and they're mostly still in Northern Ireland.

DT: Yeah, virtually all of my cousins are apart, I mean, my only cousins who aren't in Ireland are the ones who were born in England, so my, my mum's sister, who married an English guy, obviously her children were born in London, and my dad's brother, who himself passed away a few years ago, he had a son from whom he was always estranged, but, so I've actually never met the guy, my cousin, but he grew up with his mother in England, she was English, but other than that they're all, yeah, they're all still in Northern Ireland, they're all still in Belfast actually.

FR: So still quite a kind of big family network there.

DT: Very much so.

FR: So I think I'm just going to ask a few more questions–

DT: Yeah, of course.

FR: About kind of life, questions [laughs] about your life.

DT: Yeah, absolutely.

FR: And then there's a few more kind of reflective questions, but we're coming into the sort of final stretch.

DT: Sure, gotcha, the baby's looking at me like, come on mum.

FR: Yeah, okay [laughs], we, we won't keep you too long.

DT: Oh no, she's fine, don't worry.

FR: So you said you did an MA and then a PhD.

DT: That's right.

FR: Art history, did I understand that?

DT: Yeah, so my first degree was history and then postgraduate was art history, and I kind of moved all over the place, so I did my BA at Oxford, but I didn't stay there, cos I couldn't afford to, so I did my master's at Birmingham and then I did my PhD at UCL in London.

FR: Okay, yeah, with, did you have a kind of an academic career in mind or were you just kind of following, studying until the end or–?

DT: A little bit of both. It was initially my intention that post-PhD to try and get an academic job, but as I'm sure you know that is not an easy prospect.

FR: I do indeed.

DT: And, indeed, so in the end I realised I was getting no, I was getting no interviews for postdocs, but getting a lot of interviews for museum jobs, so that was the, that was the, the course that I went down, so I ended up, my first proper post-PhD job was at the V&A Museum as an assistant, as an assistant curator and now I work at the Museum of London as a curator, I've been there for the last, oh coming up for four years now.

FR: I love the Museum of London.

DT: Yay, although when, when we're allowed outside again you must come and visit us.

FR: Yes, absolutely, yous had a punk exhibition a few years ago which I really enjoyed.

DT: Yes, yes, we've, we've actually, all that stuff is still kind of in the archive, we've actually got a really important collection of London punk material, but we need to get it back on display again.

FR: Yeah, there was, there was a kind of oral history aspect to that, that, that exhibition which I was really interested in.

DT: Yeah.

FR: Well, okay, that sounds like interesting work.

DT: Very much so, yes.

FR: And kind of, it's interesting because I guess, I don't know if you would think of yourself as London Irish, but that's quite a London job obviously, the Museum of London.

DT: Absolutely, it's something I've always been quite grateful for actually is that you can call yourself a Londoner and it kind of transcends nationality because the city is so diverse. I am, I will never ever call myself English, because I'm, as far as I'm concerned I'm not. Yes, I've lived here for a long time, but I'm not English, it's not where I'm from, it's not where my cultural reference points are from. I don't love calling myself British, but I recognise it as a kind of a legal, you know, I have British nationality along with Irish, that's, you know, if I'm talking to people who are from other parts of the world sometimes British is a convenient shorthand, but if you ask me where are you, you know, where are you from, I will generally say I'm Irish cos in my, you know, as far as I'm concerned I am, but you can say I'm a Londoner and it doesn't negate I'm Irish, it doesn't mean you're English, I mean, legally it might, but you see what mean, you can say that, you can identify as a Londoner and it doesn't immediately place you in a kind of an English identity bracket.

FR: No, absolutely, it can, it's the thing with the hyphen, right, it can be hyphenated to anything really, London whatever.

DT: Yeah.

FR: Which is kind of freeing I guess in a way.

DT: Very convenient, very kind of elastic terminology, which I like, liminal, again [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Liminal again, yeah, well, that, that kind of takes us to the final kind of tranche of questions, so you, you do, you would, would you think of yourself as Irish, do you call yourself Irish?

DT: Yes, very much so, yes.

FR: And you fin-, but, I suppose it's kind of situational, I mean, you mentioned your accent maybe gets stronger speaking to an Irish person, which certainly mine does.

DT: Yeah, yeah, when I'm on the phone to my mum or, or talking to you here now in fact, whereas at work, I mean, it never, it never completely goes away, but I guess the, I guess it gets smoothed out a little bit, the edges get rounded.

FR: Yeah, and your, your mum has moved back to Andersonstown or near Andersonstown.

DT: Yeah, she lives on the, she lives on the Glen Road, nearby.

FR: Do you find a big change in Belfast, going back now?

DT: Huge, it's been cumulative over the years, but yes, absolutely and it's not just the kind of de-escalation of signs of the Troubles, you know, the fact that the army's pulled out, the fact that the, the kerbstones aren't painted anymore, mostly, because it used to be green,

white and gold on, outside my granda's house in Andersonstown, they're, they're plain now, you know, the bunting's come down, mostly, that kind of thing, but also stuff like, Belfast is, I still think it's a bit parochial, but it seems a bit more open to the world than it used to be and it just, I mean, you go into the centre of Belfast now and it's the same globalised chain shops as you'd find anywhere, which is not necessarily a good thing, but it, it creates a feeling of kind of normality, it's more homogenised, and also the fact that there has been increasingly migration into Northern Ireland rather than out of, which in my view is only a good thing, obviously there are people there who don't think the same way, but the fact now that you can walk through, you know, walk to Victoria Square or somewhere like that and there's teenagers hanging out from all ethnic backgrounds, you know, all colours of skin, all talking with the same accent, which, you know, I shouldn't be surprised by that because I live in London where, you know, it doesn't, it doesn't raise an eyebrow, but somehow Belfast always felt very homogenous, very white, and the fact that that's breaking down, as I say, in my view is a good thing, but it does, it does register as different, so yeah, I think both, you know, cosmetically, but also culturally it's, yeah, it has changed a lot. I think a lot of that sense of it being different has come from a difference in our own family circumstances like, you know, the fact that my grandparents aren't alive anymore, family dynamic's changed, but also the city in the abstract I think is definitely a very different place to what it was, say, twenty years ago.

FR: Yeah, okay, yeah, absolutely, I think that's interesting about the city changing, but also your relationship to the city changes I suppose.

DT: Yeah, definitely, yeah, I don't think it's, I don't think it's one of those ones that you can really judge objectively.

FR: No, and okay, so I was going to ask as well, you mentioned being politically engaged yourself, occasional marches, angry tweeting [laughs].

DT: Very much so.

FR: And **[01:30:00]** I wondered if you thought that your Irishness or your family history has influenced your politics or your kind of, yeah, your politics?

DT: Yeah, very, very much so, I would say that, as in I, you know, I consider myself to be left wing. I, well, as I say, I'm a Labour voter for lack of a better alternative, to be perfectly honest.

FR: [laughs] Yes, sure.

DT: But, you know, I, I, you know, consider myself progressive, you know, I'm probably your classic, what somebody on the right would call a woke social justice warrior, but I think a lot of that does come from that, that familial legacy of being born to parents who witnessed a great deal of violence, a great deal of injustice, social inequality, sectarianism, and of being born to parents, you know, who were themselves working people who, and, you know, had to build a life for themselves rather than having it handed on a plate. I would say in terms specifically of Irish politics, I am in favour of a united Ireland, I would certainly be like, you

know, that would be the direction in which my sympathies lie. I certainly wouldn't regard violence as being a justified means to that end, but I do understand the context from a civil rights point of view in which, you know, the kind of the Troubles brewed up as they did, so yeah, I definitely have a point of view politically when it comes to the Irish, the Irish question, as it were, but that, for me that kind of fits into a broader worldview of, of kind of social, racial, economic justice, it's not some, for me it's not the kind of, the one issue that needs to be addressed and screw everything else, it's part of, it's part of something bigger.

FR: Yeah, no, I, I totally understand you there, and then finally I was just, we talked about the Channel 4 thing with the people drawing the border.

DT: Oh yeah.

FR: [laughs] But I wondered if you thought that the way that Northern Ireland is viewed or the, people's sense of Northern Ireland in Britain has changed since the peace process or after. I mean, even just something like Anna Burns winning the Booker, you get a, at least I had a sense that maybe Northern Ireland was a wee bit more visible to British people than it, than it has been.

DT: Do you know what I, I think, you say since the peace process, but I think what's really, what's really accelerated it has been Brexit, the fact that Northern Ireland is once again in the news, constantly, and this time it's not, you know, bomb scare or so-and-so, you know, soldiers shot or whatever, it's to do with, you know, more theoretical politics and economic questions. People are waking up to the fact that Northern Ireland exists and that, and that it has been dealing with this kind of quandary of self-identification and where does it belong for decades, and the, that's put it on people's radar. The other thing, and I'm sure I won't be your only interviewee to mention this, the other thing's *Derry Girls*.

FR: [laughs] Absolutely, no, yes.

DT: I'd say in terms of cultural impact that more so than, than *Milkman*, just by virtue of being more widely consumed, has, has made a difference, I think there are, there's a whole, I don't know if you browse Reddit, there's a whole sub-Reddit dedicated to *Derry Girls* and it's populated entirely by baffled Americans who post things like can anyone tell me what catch yourself on means.

FR: [laughs] Okay, yeah, it's had a, it's had an impact, right, *Derry Girls*.

DT: Definitely, definitely, I think because it was, because it's been so unashamedly vernacular like, there was no attempt to dial down kind of the way people talk or the issues that they face, it was just unashamedly this is what it was like in Northern Ireland, there's a level of verisimilitude here and if you don't like it you have to go and look up what it means. It's not like, oh what's that God-awful show, *Mrs Brown's Boys*, which honestly, you know, if there's an eighth circle of hell it's for whoever devised that show, but that, you know, although apparently it's incredibly widely watched, it has unfathomably good ratings, but it's not had the impact in terms of putting Northern Ireland on people's kind of radar in England in the same way.

FR: No, I mean, I, I think you're, that thing about unashamedly vernacular is totally right, but then the fact that they also have very normal, for want of a better word, lives, teenage lives, is kind of a good way to make people think oh Northern Ireland was [laughs] kind of the same as here, but also kind of different.

DT: Exactly, it's relatable, but specific at the same time.

FR: That's, that's brilliant Danielle, I won't, I won't keep you, I just, before we finish wanted to ask if there was anything that we haven't talked about that you thought that we might talk about or that you wanted to talk about?

DT: I think we've at least touched on everything, I mean, as I said, there's, there's definitely things we've mentioned that could in theory, I could wang on about for another hour, but I think we've, we've covered all the main points, so, no, nothing, nothing springs to mind that hasn't already been touched upon, so I'm, I'm happy to leave it there if you are.

FR: Okay, no, that's, that's great and that was a really, really interesting interview and really, really useful I think, so–

DT: Good, thank you.

FR: Thanks very much.

DT: What, what form are your, your research outputs going to take?

FR: [laughs] Right, you can tell you've got a PhD. The, the research outputs, we're going to write a book, which, yeah, it's still kind of in the relatively gestative stages, but there's going to be a book in the next hopefully two, three years. Other than that there's going to be hopefully some papers and there's the possibility of a, a radio thing as well.

DT: Oh fab, yeah.

FR: I've sent you over a consent form which has got a kind of a tiered consent, so, say if you thought I'm fine with the book, but I'd rather not be on the radio, for example, then that's, that's fine, but yeah, I mean, the book is the main thing really.

DT: Sure, sure, all-important REF entry [laughs].

FR: [laughs] That's right, yeah, but I'm happy to stay in touch and if you'd like a copy of the transcript I can send you that as well.

DT: That'd be lovely and if there's anything I can help with, if you need any kind of follow-up information, you know, you've got my email address, just drop me a line.

FR: Yeah, absolutely, I'll stay in touch, but thank you so much.

DT: Oh pleasure.

FR: Enjoy the rest of your afternoon.

DT: And you, thank you again, it was, it was interesting, thanks.

FR: Okay, good, I'm glad, okay, take care Danielle, cheers, bye.

DT: Bye, bye.

INTERVIEW ENDS