INTERVIEW L26-SG7: RACHEL LEWIS

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Rachel Lewis
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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.

RL: Well, I've never been interviewed about my family history before, so, you are definitely more experienced at this than I am.

FR: [laughs] Well, if I seem a little bit like, stilted it's because I'm just remembering how to do it, but I think that it should be recording now, that looks like it's fine. So actually the first thing is, could you say, I know that you filled in the form, thank you for that, but could you just say that you know that this is being recorded and that you're fine with it?

RL: I know this is being recorded and I'm fine with it.

FR: [laughs] Thank you very much, and nice to meet you, thanks for, thanks for agreeing to take part.

RL: No worries. Jack was really helpful and I knew he would be, so I thought I should offer to do an interview as a kind of trade [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Well, since you've spoken to Jack already you probably don't have any questions, but is there anything that you wanted to ask me before we start?

RL: No, I don't think so.

FR: So how did you find out about the project first of all?

RL: Yeah, so I was, so I am a poet and I'm doing some writing about my family history and as part of that I am trying to research like, what it was like in my parents' generation growing up in the Troubles, specifically what it like, their different experiences. I know my aunt was, my aunt was a nurse, so then I was Googling stuff round that and I found the Writing the Troubles website because it has an article on nursing in the Troubles I think, and then I read a whole bunch of other stuff on there and one of the articles on there was from your research project, and at the bottom I was like, I was like, who wrote this, and then I saw at the bottom it had from this research project and obviously I was interested cos I think I'll be really interested in the results of your research and I wanted, and I thought you guys were

all kind of looking at similar stuff to me, but obviously from a completely different angle that, yeah, so talking to Jack was really helpful, he had lots of like, suggestions about people to talk to and books to read and stuff, so that's how I found out and why I got in touch.

FR: Okay, thank you, that's really, that's really helpful, and I think a lot of interesting things there. I'm especially interested that you're, you're writing something about, about your family. So the interview takes a kind of a, I suppose a, a two-part structure, sorry, my cat is doing something in the corner [laughs].

RL: No worries, my cat probably will as well at some point [laughs].

FR: [laughs] So I'll ask you some questions about yourself, about your childhood, about growing up, and along with that I'll ask some questions about your parents obviously, because we're interested in that kind of generational aspect, and then in the kind of second part I suppose we'll be slightly more kind of reflective or reflexive questions about your feelings and thoughts about Northern Ireland, from the perspective of the present I suppose.

RL: Cool.

FR: If you need to take a break at any point or stop or whatever just let me know and we can do that. Alright [laughs], so let's start, so first of all where and when were you born?

RL: I was born in 1995 in London, in St Mary's Hospital, yeah, that's when I was born.

FR: And where did you live in London?

RL: So I've lived pretty much my whole life kind of in the same area, so when I was born we lived in, do you know Swiss Cottage like, Finchley Road?

FR: I know, yeah.

RL: Yeah, so we lived on one side of Finchley Road and then when I was four we moved to the other side of Finchley Road, and then I went to university, I went to university in Cambridge and I lived there for a year and then came back to London and lived with my mum in Finchley Road, and now I've moved to Kentish Town, so I've basically lived my whole life in the south-east of England, mostly around Finchley Road.

FR: [laughs] I love, I love Kentish Town, I used to live in Archway.

RL: Oh nice, yeah, very close.

FR: Yeah, and what kind of a place was that like growing up in? I guess you liked it since you're still [laughs]–

RL: Yeah, I love London, I always felt like we were very lucky to live where we did, and I think my parents very much felt the same, and I had a lot of friends who lived in London

obviously, cos I'd been to school there my whole life, and a lot of them left for university, but then came back, so it's always felt like, I mean, lots of people say London's like, very isolated, but I've always felt like I have a really strong community of people that I know here and I just, I really like the fact that in London I feel like, in a world where you, it's so not true, but you kind of get to see the world without like, leaving because there's people from all over the place who live in London and you can get food from anywhere and like, exhibitions and music come here, and now that I'm into poetry it's like, honestly, a world centre for poetry, so I probably will never leave, so [laughs] yeah, I've always felt very lucky to live in London and really like living in that area, yeah.

FR: And so, are both your parents Northern Irish or just one of them?

RL: Just my dad, so my dad was born in Belfast in I think 1955 and left when he was in his twenties and never really went back, and his whole family, his bro-, he has a younger brother and a younger sister and they also were born in Belfast, they all grew up there, but then they all left when they were like, in their late teens, early twenties, and then I think cos his parents left when they retired, cos all their children were in England, and so his parents have also moved to England now as well.

FR: Wow, okay, and, and all to England, everyone left to England?

RL: Yeah, his, they all, his mum and dad, well, his dad's passed away last year, but his mum lives in Romsey, which is kind of south east, it's like, in Hampshire, and his brother and sister also live in Hampshire, but they also lived in London at various points, and my dad stayed in London.

FR: Okay.

RL: So yeah, I know a lot of people who've left Northern Ireland [laughs].

FR: [laughs] That's, that's interesting for the purposes of what we're doing I guess, and what about your mum, is she–?

RL: My mum is from London, she was born in Kingston and pretty much has always lived in London as well, yeah, I think she actually has always lived in London, she's a doctor, so I think she might have d-, lived like, six months somewhere else in England, but yeah, and her, we don't actually know anything about her dad, but her mum is also English from like, Kent, yeah.

FR: Okay, and, and what did your dad do?

RL: Dad do, my dad did loads of things, he, I think one of the reasons, so one of the things I'm trying to do is, cos my dad passed away when I was sixteen, is I'm trying to–

FR: Oh–

RL: It's fine, I'm trying to figure out the like, part of the project is like, I don't know, part of it is I just wanted to learn a bit more about him, kind of for my own interests, and I probably won't write that much about that, but that's been interesting, so I've been trying to figure out like, what kind of person he was when he left and like, why he left and what he wanted to do, and I think he wanted to be a musician because there wasn't, cos one of the things, he told me very, very little about his childhood, but one of the things he did say was I really loved music and we tried to do a lot of music and I was in like, the Belfast Youth Orchestra and stuff, but it was like, he grew up in the sixties and seventies and I think he always felt like, music was just not happening in Belfast like, music was happening in London and Manchester and like, no one would come to Belfast and play because of the bombs, so he like, I think he felt like he was missing out on music, so he moved to England and tried to be a musician and was in a band and did like, a whole bunch of rubbish jobs. My mum was always like, your dad used to be a travelling toilet salesman [laughs], just as an example of like, the worst jobs that he ever did, but by the time I was born I think he kind of realised he would never be a musician and got fed up with never having any money, so he taught himself like, worked with computers I guess in the kind of early days of IT becoming a big thing, and by the time I was born he worked in IT for ABN AMRO, which is a bank, and then they were taken over by RBS, then he worked for RBS, he also worked for EY for a bit, so he worked in like, the city of London basically for the whole time that I was alive.

FR: In broadly in kind of an IT function?

RL: IT, financey stuff.

FR: So, so when you say he wanted to be in a band are we talking like, like, the Rolling Stones or something, or are we talking like, classical music?

RL: No, like, like the Rolling Stones [laughs], they called, they called themselves the Particles cos they thought it was like, party plus Beatles.

FR: I quite like that, that's quite good [laughs], I think that's quite good.

RL: It's not good. He made some really good friends who I met when he was alive who were in his band, oh your cat is so cute.

FR: Oh I'm really sorry, she's still–

RL: No, no, she's beautiful, I'm such a cat person, I have a cat and we're trying to get another, anyway, yeah, wanted, they would, I mean, yeah, they kind of wanted to be like a, I don't know, probably like a pop slash funk band, but they didn't, they didn't really get anywhere with that.

FR: Do, do you know what instrument he played?

RL: He would play the saxophone and the clarinet.

FR: Cool, okay, it's interesting to me I guess because I, my PhD was about the punk scene in Belfast.

RL: Interesting.

FR: And I've just been turning that into a book, so the idea of it being difficult to play music in Belfast is, I, yeah, definitely true, so that makes sense as a reason to leave.

RL: I think my uncle left for similar reasons cos I'd never talked to him about it before, before I started doing this research, writing stuff, but he, but he basically wanted to work in like, he wanted to work in poet-, arts and he wanted to be a musician like, he worked for the Arts Council in Belfast for a bit and I think similarly felt like it would be more exciting to work somewhere else, so then left and then they've ended up working in like, ended up working in like, oil and stuff like, [indecipherable] trajectory, kind of giving up.

FR: [laughs] It happens I guess to people, doesn't it.

RL: Yeah.

FR: So I'm kind of interested in, if, if, if you say your, your dad passed away when you were sixteen, it's quite young, how much of a sense did you have growing up of him as Northern Irish or as, maybe as not English or, you know, was it something that you were aware of, conscious of?

RL: Yeah, but I think, thinking back on it, I did have quite a strong sense of it because he never like, fully lost the accent, but **[00:10:00]** it was a kind of thing where other people couldn't really hear it unless you were from Northern Ireland, so sometimes we'd meet people who were from Ireland or Northern Ireland and his voice would completely change and it was like, a part of like, a secret club and they would be like, oh gosh, do you know so-and-so, and like, have you been to here and here like, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, so it always felt, if we met people that that side of him would like, come out, and also he was just, he was very different to like, I mean, it's obviously partly a personality thing, but like, he was very loud and he was very sociable and he was very like, he, he always wanted like, he kind of felt like he kind of wanted to live in a place where he knew everyone and he would like, I don't know, make a lot of effort to keep in touch with friends and like, he knew all of our neighbours and when I was younger I found him really embarrassing, but [laughs] like, friends in our close, it's just not normal like, you don't, you don't lean over the fence and invite them round for dinner like, I knew that was not normal. But I think now like, thinking about it, I'm like, oh, I think that was probably like, obviously partly his, he was very extroverted, but partly like, a cultural difference, and whenever I, whenever I go to Northern Ireland, or I have a couple of, I have a Northern Irish friend from university, whene-, or you, whenever I hear, or like, whenever I hear people with Northern Irish accents I'm always like, oh my gosh like, you sound like my dad, I don't know it, I find it, I find it quite weird. I think I always did know, but like, I was obviously a kid, so didn't really think about it, and he also took us one time to Belfast on like, a memory lane trip.

FR: Ah okay.

RL: So I feel like that was probably also a time when he was trying to be like, I'm Irish, or I'm Northern Irish.

FR: What, what are your memories of that, of that trip?

RL: Yeah, we went to, we went to Dublin first and we saw some friends of his that live in Dublin, and then we went to Belfast and we stayed, I can't remember where we stayed, I don't remember that much about that, I was only like, eleven or twelve and I mostly remember the like, really nice, going to the beach, we went to like, White Park Bay and we went to the Giant's Causeway, we did the like, rope bridge thing, and I remember all of that very clearly cos that was really fun, and I, and I sort of remember him like, taking us around Northern Ireland, it's like, taking us round Belfast and being like, this is my school, this is my home and us being like, cool, those are like, ordinary buildings, we don't care, but I do have a very vivid memory, which I think I'm going to put in the collection of, he took us to one of the peace walls and he like, tried to kind of explain the Troubles and we just, and it just, I just remember how much it didn't make any sense to me because he like, never talked about it at all and I didn't know anything about the history of the Northern Ireland cos it's not something you get taught in school and it's not something he'd ever talked about, and I, I remember thinking at the time, this is a very well-preserved relic, I was like, this is a really weird thing cos it's obviously from history and there's no way this wall is still in use cos that would be insane, but like, it's not got any holes in and it like, goes on for a few miles [indecipherable]. I felt like I was on a really, I felt like I was on a history trip where everything was just weirdly well preserved, yeah, that was–

FR: That's, that's funny, yeah, I know what you mean, it sounds like it should be from–

RL: Yeah, cos it felt like it should be from the past, and I remem-, I really remember the murals, but also, I remember feeling weird looking at them cos I was like, these don't make any sense to me, but he, they obviously made sense to him and he'd like, make up a reference, oh that's that, that's that, and it was like he could read this language that I couldn't read, which I found a bit weird.

FR: Yeah, no, absolutely, it, it makes sense, and I was just thinking if, if he left, I think you said in 1955.

RL: Oh no, he was born in 1955.

FR: Sorry, sorry, seventy-, '75.

RL: He left in like, yeah, '75, probably like, '78.

FR: Which kind of means that he, that he and I guess the rest of his family that emigrated, were growing up in Belfast during the Troubles.

RL: Yeah, definitely.

FR: But it was something that you, that, that they didn't talk about.

RL: Yeah, I just, I think this research project has made me realise how much they just never talked about it cos like, I've had to, I've had to really ask, and I've had to like, ask proactively, and then they tell you, it's not like they don't want to tell you, but I don't, I feel like I had to get through an initial layer of there's nothing to say, I was like, I was kind of like, would you, they were like, what do you want to know like, it was normal [laughs], we just lived there and then we left, and I was like, you lived in the Troubles, you went through it like, was it normal, was there really nothing about that experience that was a bit weird and like, slowly they have, the way it's come out is more in like, anecdotes like, they're been able to tell me like, they, they're not, especially my grandparents, they're not really able to, and I don't think that's a memory thing, I think it's more of a, even more like, a generational thing, just like, not, they don't think about themselves as much as people of my generation, I don't know, but they were able to tell me a few like, anecdotes about things that were like, said, it was like, when they were there or like, memorable things happened to them, and then my aunt and uncle also were more forthcoming once I asked more about it, but they really like, no one ever talked about it while I was growing up, except for this trip to Belfast, which didn't make any sense cos it felt completely out of context.

FR: Yeah, if you, if you, well, if you hadn't been told the history or if the history hadn't been passed on, then it's very hard to make sense of what the city's like I guess.

RL: Yeah.

FR: What about religion, was your father religious, are you a religious family?

RL: Not really, no, so I think my grandparents like, especially my grandma's a bit religious like, but they've become just progressively less observant, but my grandparents are much more like, culturally Jewish like, they don't eat pork [indecipherable], they have, they like, light the candles on, they do like, the easy, more fun bits of Jewish, being Jewish [laughs], but they haven't gone to like, synagogues in forever and my aunt and uncle and my dad all had like, their bar and bat mitzvahs and then were like, we're never doing this again, and like, talking to them about it, I think they found, and talking to other Jewish people in Northern Ireland as well, I think there's, I've heard this as well is that the com-, the synagogue there was an orthodox synagogue in Belfast and there were two, but they were orthodox, and so more assimilated Jewish people didn't, I think, feel especially like, like they could be part of that because they didn't want to be like, my family became like, more middle-class and more assimilated as throughout the generations and they moved to south Belfast and most Jewish people lived in north Belfast and they, so they went to the synagogue to like, raise their children a bit in that tradition, but I think they never really felt that part of the Jewish community cos the Jewish community was quite orthodox, and so you were either kind of Jewish, but part of, more part of like, the other, more part of the Christian community I guess, but just still Jewish because that was what the family were born into, or you were part of a more actively Jewish, but quite orthodox group, yeah, and I, so I think my, my dad and his, from what I've heard from his brother and sister they don't think they really enjoyed going to synagogue and they never like, felt like it meant that much to them and so then they never raised us Jewish or anything. But something I found

quite weird growing up was that I live in north London, which is full of Jewish people, so I like, in primary school like, half of my class was Jewish and they would do Jewish things and like, miss school for Jewish holidays and stuff, and so I always felt very like [pauses], I don't know, it's a very hard feeling to put into words, which is why I'm putting, trying to write some poems about it, it's like being [pauses], but I think it's a bit similar to being descended from someone who's Northern Irish, it's like a, it's like a thing that's not a thing, it's like, it's migration, but it's not really a migration, you know, you're different, but you're not really different, you're part of it, but you're not really part of it, like a thing that's not really a thing, but you kind of want to tell people, you almost want to be like, my, I don't know, the best way of phrasing it I always find is like, my dad's Jewish and my dad's Northern Irish, but people, some people hear that and they're like, oh so you're Irish, or oh so you're Jewish, and I'm like, no, that's not what I'm saying, it's like, a bit like, a bit different.

FR: It's a wee bit more complicated than that, it's not just a straight transmission or whatever.

RL: Yeah.

FR: It's interesting, I mean, I think when I was at school we went on like, a school trip to the orthodox synagogue in Belfast, it's quite a small community and I suppose–

RL: Yeah.

FR: Quite strange in the context of the Troubles to be to some extent not identifiable in the way that most Northern Irish people are identifiable as being on one side or the other.

RL: Yeah, well, one of the, basically the only things my dad ever told me about what it was like, and I've since become really annoyed that that was what he said, is cos it's like that really common joke that everyone says, but he told it like it was something that happened to him, he was like, I was walking home one day and some kids got me and they asked me are you a, are you a Protestant or a Catholic, and I said I'm a Jew, and they said are you a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew [laughs], and I was like, and since doing this research, cos he told me, I remember he told me that maybe when I was like, a teenager or something, but like, since doing this research I'm like, why did you like, that can't be something that actually happened to you, that, that's one of those things that people say.

FR: [laughs] It could be, it could be both, it could be both, I mean.

RL: [laughs] It could be both, I mean, maybe [laughs], but yeah, they were kind of, my family, my grandma has explained to me that they were basically Protestant Jews.

FR: That's interesting.

RL: Cos they went to a, a Protestant school and lived in a Protestant area, and the more that I'm reading about Judaism that doesn't really surprise me as a decision because lots of Jewish people feel like they want to fit into like, the, the mainstream of wherever they are, and that in Belfast probably, arguably would have been in that time Protestantism, yeah.

FR: No, definitely, yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, it, it makes sense as a kind of assimilationist gesture or decision or whatever.

RL: Yeah, like, my aunt's name is Elizabeth, which is [laughs] quite a royalist's name. **[00:20:00]**

FR: [laughs] That's my, it's my grandmother's name as well [laughs]. Okay, and so you've, you've got only I suppose quite limited memories of talking to your dad about Northern Ireland then, and this one visit to, to Belfast, which was, sounds like it was slightly kind of baffling [laughs], but you've been talking to his brother and sister, is that right?

RL: Yeah.

FR: And what kind of things have they been telling you? I don't want to pre-empt your poetry collection here, do you know what I mean, but [laughs]–

RL: No, no, it's a kind of a very selfish choice for me to ask to be interviewed in a sense because I was like, if I can explain it to you then I can pitch it to a publisher, it's a very self-interested decision on my part like, cos obviously, I mean, my partner's bored to death of it and, you know, other people aren't interested in hearing this [indecipherable].

FR: I can be a sounding board, that's fine.

RL: No, I'm really happy to like, just say everything that's going to be in the collection, if it makes sense to you then that's great, so yeah, what have they been saying, my dad's brother was saying he also felt kind of like a Protestant Jewish person, and he only had one Catholic friend who he met at music school, and he felt very much like he lived in a divided place and when he went, he had told me like, when he went to see his girlfriend and stuff he would have to take like, safe routes, but otherwise, and he had like, one, one scare when someone he knew was killed in a bomb after he saw them or something, but generally, and he was very, I don't know, I thought it was quite interesting, he was very keen to be like, it, he kind of phrased the whole, framed the whole conversation being like, there's nothing really to tell you here like, you're expecting to hear something more interesting than there actually is because I think, I think it just felt kind of normal for him and also that, and I think because, I think, yeah, cos he wanted to make it quite clear that he always sort of felt like he was Protestant Jewish, if that makes sense, so that's how I felt, and he said I should talk to his sister, which I should, cos I thought her, I mean, she had really interesting story about it which was that, oh–

FR: I think it might, it's okay, don't know what it was, but I think it's fine [laughs], sorry, please go on.

RL: Yeah, so her, my, my dad's sister was a nurse, so she qualified in, as an, she started doing, being a nurse in like, 1979 or like, 1978, so she like, literally left school at sixteen and went straight into nurse training in, in a Falls Road hospital.

FR: Wow.

RL: She said that was a really weird experience for her because, again, her whole life she had been raised with Protestants, she'd never really met any Catholics at all and then, in the nurse cohort that she was with was a group of Catholics basically, and they were taught by nuns in the hospital and, and obviously it was really intense like, there have been some good documentaries about, about nursing in the Troubles that I watched after I spoke with her, and I was like, her experience kind of matched that experience like, they were, they were just kind of thrown into it because hospitals were kind of overwhelmed and also no one really knew what they were doing some of the time because doctors were seeing like, really bizarre injuries that you wouldn't necessarily train for because they were like, you know, trauma, accidental injuries, and they saw quite a lot of death and they would have weird experiences where like, the bomber and the victim would be on the same ward or like, and they'd know someone who was related to someone or you'd feel like you could sort of like, I don't know, she found it very strange. She started calling herself Eilís, this is my aunt Elizabeth, when she was hanging out with them, especially as they would like go out in the evenings because she felt like she had, but she could do that because she was Jewish, she felt like she could, and also because she was a nurse, and I think nurses were probably perceived to be like, a bit more neutral because obviously they were like, there to provide care, so that I think was quite a strange experience for her, and then she was sent to Gaza because if you did like, a break in her family like, if you go on kibbutz, that's like, a Jewish thing where you go to work in like, a collective farm, and they sent her, apparently they did this to my dad and his brother as well, because they were like, because you come from Belfast you'll be good in conflict, you should go on kibbutz in Gaza [laughs], and she said it was way, it was way more stressful, well, not more stressful than her nursing training, but more stressful than being in, in Belfast to go to Gaza at that time and like, she ended up like, sorting bullets at the kibbutz and like, serving soldiers with her, so she had quite an intense like, two or three years of nurse training, and then I think possibly the worst bit of it was, she was, she'd qualified as a nurse and her cohort of like, young girls they'd taken in all did it at the same, and then they were all fired and they weren't given permanent jobs because they felt that the hospital had become, this is my aunt's perception, they, it was felt that the hospital, especially with a like, group of Catholics in the hospital they had in training as nurses had become kind of seditious and were like, supporting the IRA effectively like, draining our resources. This was her theory, I don't know if that's true, but it was her theory that she was, the whole cohort were not fully like, they weren't given jobs, they were kind of asked to leave after they finished their training, which she was obviously very upset with, and she, so then she left Belfast cos she was just like, I need to start, this has been a very intense experience, I need to start over again, but what she did say, and again was validated by experiences of other nurses from the like, other research that I've done, is that the, it was a very like, adrenalin-fuelled time and it kind of shaped the rest of her life in terms of she then became, what she ended up doing in England was being a eating disorder nurse for like, suicidal children, which is obviously a very extreme thing to do, but she kind of said she felt like she was always kind of, in a way, looking for something that would be as demanding and as, in a way, exciting as like, working in the Falls Road had been. But she also burned out really quickly, so she's like, fifty-five and retired now, so she, was really exhausting, and again, yeah, and this, and this I found really crazy cos she's my aunt and I've obviously known her my whole life and she's always seemed to me like a very like, quiet, shy like,

mild-mannered person, I always thought she was really boring, I mean, if I'd known anything about like, she wouldn't, we could have gone our whole lives and she would never have mentioned this.

FR: Yeah, but it's that thing I guess is if you don't ask, people don't talk about it.

RL: Yeah, exactly.

FR: That's a, that's a really interesting story, and especially that thing about not getting contracts at the end, cos it must have been unu-, it must have been unusual, you would think, for a whole cohort of student nurses not to get contracts, yeah.

RL: I mean, I don't, obviously that's her recollection, maybe some of them did, maybe I misunderstood, but she definitely wasn't offered a job at the end and was very upset and left.

FR: Oh it's interesting, and what about the kind of, the experience of migration then? I mean, I don't know, did any of your family, your dad or, or his brothers and sisters feel like they were given a hard time in England for being Northern Irish?

RL: Yeah, so I haven't really, see my aunt always said, but I didn't really get into this with my dad's brother, my aunt said that she felt very welcome in London because she felt like London was somewhere where you could, there were so like, she didn't feel like, there were so many different people in London that she never felt like she stood out, and she hasn't, she never, she didn't mention that she'd ever had a hard time being Northern Irish, she has like, over her life had people say like, anti-Semitic things in her presence because she has a Northern Irish accent and she's blonde, so obviously no one thinks that she's Jewish.

FR: That's, that's a complicated, but that makes sense I guess, interesting, yeah.

RL: Yeah, so she feels like she's experienced more of that than discrimination being Northern Irish. There's something my dad did say, is that he, and it's not, it didn't really, again, didn't really make sense to me at the time, but now I'm reflecting back on it, is that he always felt like, he worked in the city for like, the last twenty years of his life and I, and he always felt like he never, he didn't like, know the right people or have the right accent or go to the right school or have the right background to do well, which like, probably was kind of true and he always like, if, my parents were really, they were both really, really pushy and they wanted, they sent all of us to like, the best private schools they could afford and like, spent all their money on that and like, really, really wanted us to go to good universities and come out like, perfect English people [laughs], is kind of what they wanted for us, so yeah, I think, I think it probably, I mean, it probably wasn't only being from, Northern Irish, but I think it probably didn't help in the career that he chose at that time.

FR: Yeah, that makes sense, and it's really interesting how as the children of migrants that, that the kind of, the idea that you will be the perfectly integrated ones because I guess for the people who migrate, maybe they always feel slightly imperfectly assimilated or whatever.

RL: Yeah, and like, thinking about my cousins as well, cos I've got loads of cousins, I think that my dad's siblings are kind of the same like, they've always been really, they're like, it's just, they're really pushy and they're really kind of obsessed with us like, I was reading some research about like, well, I was reading some research about family storytelling and it was like, telling me that research is some like, anthropological researchers just sit and like, listen to families talk to each other and like, what kind of stories do they tell, and I was like, oh that's really interesting, cos my family never tell any of these Troubles stories or like, stories about their history, what do they talk about, so I've like, thought back and like, paid a bit of attention when we've been hanging out and stuff, and they talk about us, they talk about our generation, continuously, endlessly, without cease, **[00:30:00]** they talk about our school, our jobs, how we're doing, our relationships, are we married, do we have homes, how, are we promoted, they, they are obsessed with us, with our achievements [laughs].

FR: Yeah, I know what you mean actually, yeah [laughs].

RL: That's literally all they talk about.

FR: It's interesting, I guess it's like a, a message into the future, right, when you have children.

RL: Yeah, I think so, I also think it's a Jewish thing as well in that like, they want, I think it's a kind of double, I think it's a kind of double desire for us to assimilate and achieve.

FR: Yeah, no, that makes sense, it's, it's really interesting. In terms of your life trajectory then, so you grew up in, in north London and went to school in north London as well?

RL: Yeah.

FR: Where did you go to school?

RL: So I went to, so I went to a primary school called Sarum, so I went to a Jewish nursery [indecipherable] and then I went to a primary school called Sarum Hall, which was like, non-denominational, and then I was taken out of that primary school because there were rumours that they weren't going to get us into the best secondary school, so age six I was moved to a more competitive primary school and then [laughs], and then I went to secondary school in west London, I went to St Paul's Girls', which is a private school in London, and I was there with a lot of girls from my first primary school, which was funny, yeah, but, and then I was there for seven years and then I went to Cambridge, that was what I did, then, shall I carry on?

FR: I was going to intervene and say did you, did you know any Irish or Northern Irish people growing up?

RL: Yeah, so my dad had a couple of friends from work who, again, I only, I'm piecing this together in retrospect, but they, they were like, really close family friends when we were

growing up and they were one friend from one of his, one friend from EY, and one friend from like, the second bank place that he worked at, and I'm like, you were friends because you were Irish, they're two Irish women, they're really loud, they're very similar to him, and so I've known them my whole life, and their families, but they are, they're both from the Republic, so obviously it's, it is different, but again, something I read in I think the article from you guys on that blog was that sometimes coming to England would make everyone seem Irish and those distinctions mattered less, and I feel like that was probably it a little bit. They were the only Irish people that I knew, yeah, but, I mean, I know them really well like, grew up with their kids and stuff.

FR: No, it's interesting, yeah, that thing about the, just Irishness on its own being enough to kind of mark a connection is interesting, and then Cambridge, what did you study?

RL: I studied English.

FR: English.

RL: Yeah, English literature, yeah.

FR: Which is, which is a good assimilationist [laughs]–

RL: Well, that's true, I never thought of it like that [laughs], yeah, I always felt like it was a bit of a rebellious choice because I think my family would rather I had done a science, obviously.

FR: More, more vocational, yeah, okay.

RL: Yeah, they would rather I'd done something more vocational, but yeah, it's a very assimilationist thing to do.

FR: And were they happy that you'd gone to Cambridge, obviously a prestigious–

RL: That was kind of the deal, it was like, because you're going to the best university you can do what you like, as long as you get in.

FR: [laughs] Okay.

RL: You can't do English anywhere else, but yeah, yeah, but no, I think they were very proud of that, I feel like, obviously my dad wasn't actually alive when I got in, but I feel like my whole, my whole extended family were very proud and they were very like, your dad would be so proud, I don't know, they were very, felt like a thing.

FR: Oh yeah, sorry, you mentioned your dad had passed away when you were sixteen.

RL: Yeah.

FR: It must have been, it's difficult, it's quite young.

RL: Yeah, it was not very fun, he got skin cancer, so was, he was ill for quite a long time and then he passed away, yeah, no, and it's going to be like, yeah, it'll be ten years in November.

FR: Ten years in November, yeah, okay.

RL: Yeah.

FR: Have you got brothers or sisters? I should have asked, sorry.

RL: I have a younger, two younger brothers, called Andrew and Charlie, they are, how old are they, twenty-three and nineteen.

FR: Oh wow, okay, yeah, younger.

RL: Yeah, yeah, Charlie's a lot younger, yeah, I don't think they would be interested in any of this stuff [indecipherable].

FR: I'm always interested in that question like, why do some people start pursuing it and some people don't really.

RL: Yeah, I mean, I think, I think it's temperamental like, I am, I don't know, I've, I'm quite an introspective person [laughs] cos I write a lot, or I write a lot because I'm an introspective person.

FR: Yeah, it's hard to, yeah.

RL: Yeah, I don't think they would be interested in this stuff, I also think they, I don't know, I think it would be interesting, I think they might, I think like, Andrew would probably want to like, I think he'd read whatever I wrote about it, but they will never have, I don't think they will have any, ever like, really thought about this very much.

FR: Sure, okay, and is it something, so, okay, first of all what was Cambridge, what was Cambridge like, how, how was that?

RL: What was Cambridge like, how was Cambridge, yeah, it was, it was good in that like, it's an amazing place to learn, learned a lot, it's also, it was kind of just a continuation of like, the extremely pressurised private schools that I'd been to my whole life and I don't think it was necessarily very good for me in that sense like, I think it might just have been better if I'd gone somewhere that was just a bit more relaxed, but I did go and it was, I mean, I learned loads and I met really good friends, I met my partner there and, and obv-, I don't think I would be doing writing in the way that I am now if I hadn't done it, so I'm glad that I did it.

FR: Okay, so kind of a, positives and negatives.

RL: Yeah, but from a like, migration, fitting-in perspective, I do feel like all the work my family had done had prepared me perfectly like, I got there and I was like, just like school, with people that I've spent my whole life around, I mean, I didn't, I found it very comfortable as an environment, which is a bit, I know that's like, a not, you're not supposed to say that, you're supposed to be like, oh you know, oh it was weird, I was out of my depth, everyone there was so snobby, but it was a very comfortable place for me to be [laughs].

FR: But no, it makes, it makes sense of what you're saying, a similar environment to kind of high-end private school, yeah. I think you mentioned earlier that you met, you made some Irish friends at, at Cambridge, is that right?

RL: Oh yeah, my friend Caislín, I met her on like, the first day and we lived in the same house and, yeah, I really liked her, I mean, it was only two years after my dad died and I, honestly, she reminded me of my dad, and so I was kind of like drawn to her cos she's really loud and Northern Irish and oh God, the kind of person who goes and leans into your room and it was like, do you want to be my friend, after like, one day, yeah, so, but we're still friends, we're really good friends and I've been to her families in Belfast a few times now and that's always really fun, yeah.

FR: Well, how, how have you found going to Belfast, slightly older presumably, with a, a wee bit more of a kind of contextual sense of the history and the city?

RL: Weird, it's still weird because I still feel like [pauses], it's that feeling of a thing that's not a thing, it's like, I feel like I should feel some kind of connection to this place, but I kind of don't have any connection to this place, except the fact that I don't have something and feel like I should feels like in itself a thing.

FR: Yeah, I can see why, I can see why you're writing poetry about it because I get [laughs], I, I get what you're saying [laughs].

RL: Yeah, but I'm not, I'm not explaining it very well, yeah, I did always find it weird and kind of emotional and also very like, I found it in a way funny to go with Caislín cos like, it is her home and like, she does know all this stuff and I feel like, it's, it was kind of a feeling that I also get around Jewish people sometimes where I'm like, I would like to have my step closer than the average person's connection to this acknowledged by you, but I don't think it will be because I don't know how to express that.

FR: That's, that's interesting, that kind of a, a distance that you'd like to, to bridge or whatever.

RL: Yeah, I think so, yeah, and it was interesting that we went to like, the museums and stuff, so I feel like I started to learn more about it, being there with her, and her dad also has, is really interesting, he is a, what does he do, he was a youth worker for a long time in Belfast, he has like, an interesting perspective on the Troubles.

FR: Yeah, if you were a youth worker you, you would have seen a, a particular side of it I suppose.

RL: Yeah.

FR: Okay, so Cambridge is, is a three-year, three-year degree?

RL: Yeah.

FR: And did you have a, a plan or anything after that, did you have any thoughts about–?

RL: No [laughs], no, I didn't, I knew I just didn't want to do what my dad did, that was like, the only thing I knew that I didn't want to do, cos I felt like, I felt like he'd worked really, really hard to make a lot of money and I feel like that had been worth it for him because he could give it all to us, but I didn't want to then just do the same and give that to my children, I don't know, it just, that would have felt weird, and also he really didn't enjoy his work, he found it very stressful and like, I don't know, he died really early like, he was always like, oh, you know, I'll really enjoy my retirement and he never got to retire, so I think just seeing made me feel like I really want to have, **[00:40:00]** I really want to do something that I'll enjoy, so that if I don't make it to retirement I won't have felt like, ahhh [laughs].

FR: You're not always wait-, waiting for like, a def-, a deferred future.

RL: Yeah, exactly, I just wanted to do something that I would enjoy and find meaningful rather than like, wait for a while and–

FR: Sounds cool [laughs].

RL: Save up enough money, well, I'm an achiever, not according, I mean, my family are very, this, this pressure thing just continues like, my, I don't know, my family's favourite child now, the extended family, would be my cousin who's an accountant, she's an accountant with KPMG, she's made it, you know [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Yeah, I know, I know what you're saying [laughs].

RL: Yeah, and like, I don't know, and like, [indecipherable] went to a like, take your daughter to work day and my dad was like, [indecipherable] from McKinsey, this is what you'll do [laughs], I don't want to, yeah, I just didn't want to do any of that, and obviously I really loved, I really loved English, so I did a grad, but I don't know, I'm [indecipherable] to a middle ground that like, keeps me happy but like, keeps my family happy as well, so I have, I did a grad scheme at Cambridge University Press, which is a publisher.

FR: Oh yeah.

RL: It was awful [laughs].

FR: [laughs] I know a little bit about academic publishing and that doesn't surprise me whatsoever.

RL: Yeah, no, it's a very dysfunctional organisation, it sounded really good, but, I mean, there were some good things about it, but like, overall I really didn't enjoy it and also I wanted to move back to London, which I didn't really realise, then I moved back to London and I actually do, and I got a job where I still work, I work in a management consultancy, but, so I am kind of doing the thing, but we are a really small organisation and we're also a social enterprise and we work for only the NHS and social care, and I have a really good work-life balance that also allows me to do poetry, so yeah, I feel like I'm quite happy with the balance of stuff I do at the moment.

FR: Yeah, okay, that's interesting, and then, I mean, I guess I'm going to ask some kind of more reflective questions about Northern Ireland, but in this context I'm kind of interested in them through the lens of this poetry project.

RL: Yeah.

FR: So when did you start thinking about this idea, this idea, this idea for this collection?

RL: Very specifically, I was at my, I'd just written my first book, I'd kind of just finished it and I was at my grandparents' house, at my dad's parents' house, and they were reading, my dad, grandpa, got something in the post and he opened it and it was, was it called like, the *Belfast Jewish Record*, I think, yeah, the *Belfast Jewish Record*, and he, they subscribe and they get it mailed to them and he opened it.

FR: That's, that's amazing that they, that they still get it, that's amazing.

RL: Yeah, yeah, and he, well, this was like, a couple of years ago, but presumably they still get it, he opened it and he was like, ugh, it's not even worth reading this, it's only full of obituaries and like [laughs], and I was like, what is, what is that, and they explained it to me, they were like, oh well, you know, we were Jewish in Belfast and we were part of the community and lots of people of left, so they have this newsletter and they send it round and they tell us about, you know, being Jewish in Belfast and what people are doing, but really old people have left, it's an ageing community, so most of our friends that are still there are dying, so it's full of obituaries, and it just made me, I'd never thought about it as a thing before like, because no one had really ever talked it, but it just made me realise that oh there is this kind of unusual experience and connection to this unusual community and my family that I know nothing about, and at the time I think I was like, looking for a project, cos I'd just finished my project, so that was what made me think of it.

FR: And what, so I'm kind of interested in this because obvi-, I'm an oral historian, right, I interview people for my job and latterly I've been interviewing lots of Northern Irish people, but I've never really spoken to my parents about the past, about, I mean, they were, you know, they, I guess they were in their thirties during the, twenties and thirties, during the Troubles, but I've never really spoken to them about it and I, I still don't, even though I think I, really I should because [laughs] I'm interviewing all these other people about it, but there's some-, I don't know, there's, for me at least there's a kind of a difficulty in broaching it, not even that I think that they've got anything terribly traumatic to say, you know, but

just, just something about it, the, the intimacy or something of it I find quite difficult [laughs], so I, I wondered, first of all, how people reacted to you expressing an interest in it?

RL: Yeah, my grandparents were completely baffled and, and I th-, and like I said, I think they re-, I think they did find it, I think, yeah, that, I think they sort of did find the intimacy a bit weird and wouldn't, didn't want to tell me a lot, but told me a couple of anecdotes that they'd never told me, so, and I say anecdotes cos those are like, they are like, framed stories that they'd, I'm sure they told a lot of times before, just never to me, and so they were like, very safe things for them to tell me–

FR: Totally.

RL: Which was still really useful and interesting for me to know, but I don't think like, they would not have, I would not even have known how to ask for them to share any more than that, and I really didn't want to cos obviously I love them I don't want to make them uncomfortable and, you know, I don't want to prise things out of people and put them in my writing, that would be awful, and then my aunt and uncle, I just said, I, I do think like, if you had a, even if you were to say oh I'm, I want to include you in my research project I think having, cos I was like, oh it's for my writing, gives you like, a reason, I think that they, if I'd just said I just want to know, I'm just curious, I think they would have been less open, but just to even have something that, to have something that it's for I think is good like, one of the main stories that I actually did know, this is slightly going back on myself, but something I did know is when I was in year seven I had to do like, a presentation at school and I had to do it about someone in my family, so I asked my grandparents and they told, that was when they told me one of these anecdotes, which was how my, how their grandparents came to Belfast, but they told me that very willingly because it was like, for a reason, cos like, I, I needed it for this project, so they told me that story.

FR: So their grandparents came to Belfast, which is like, nineteenth century, late nineteenth-century emigration.

RL: Yeah, it would be like, yeah, they arrived in like, late nineteenth century, early twentieth century.

FR: From, from Europe?

RL: From Poland.

FR: From Poland, yeah, okay.

RL: Yeah.

FR: I've been, I've been reading about the Jewish community in Belfast on the internet today, before the interview [laughs], so I've got some very sketchy–

RL: Yeah, yeah, from Poland, so yeah, so they told me that story and, and then they didn't tell me other things like, there are other things I had to find out and, yeah, because, and I

have, and there's definitely like, a limit to which my family are willing to tell me and there are obviously things that would be really interesting for me to know, even like, silly things like what did you eat, like what did you wear, like who did you hang out with, that I just feel are kind of too like, too personal and invasive, so my approach has kind of been ask my family to share whatever they're comfortable sharing for a specific reason of this poetry thing, I've been very open like, I'm not going to put your story directly into the poems, but like, I want to know what the context is, and then I've been filling in the gaps by talking to other people, so like, I've contacted some people in the Belfast Jewish community like, who did I contact, contacted like, Steven Jaffe and Michael Black, who are like, very active in trying to preserve the history and they were again quite happy to talk to me, but only like, up to a point, but it's all helpful and I've been like, reading memoirs where I can find them and like, watching TV because I think, cos the way I want to write it, I wouldn't want to write anything that's like, you could a hundred per cent attribute that story to that person, so everything, but it's poetry, it doesn't have to be true, so everything, that's the other thing, I guess if you were going to use your research, even if you used a pseudonym, it's like, true facts, whereas I'm going to use it to create something that's not true.

FR: Yeah, I, I get you, it's, it's passed through a kind of slightly different filtration process than, than ours does.

RL: But it has been weird and I was nervous about it and I did write interview guides to like, psyche myself up for it, that I didn't use, but yeah.

FR: Well, that was going to be my second question actually, so I asked you how they responded, but how have you found the process, has it been weird?

RL: Way more emotional than I thought, I don't know if it's just cos I've mostly been doing it in the last year, so like, through Covid, and so I've had like, more time just to dwell on it but yeah.

FR: [laughs] Yeah, I know what you mean.

RL: [indecipherable] it's very hard to say, yeah, I found it, it's honestly changed my view of myself in a way that I didn't think it would because when I started this I was like, actually when I started the project I was like, the project is going to be much more historical, it's going to be, I'm going to do research on the Belfast Jewish community and I'm going to find out what their stories are and I'm going to do some like, kind of historically situated poems, and there's a guy who's done that, his name is Simon Lewis [laughs].

FR: Is it?

RL: Yeah.

FR: There you go [laughs].

RL: Not, and I don't think we're, well, I mean, we probably are related, but not like, very closely, and he did it for the Jewish community in Cork, he used the census and like,

imagined himself back into that time period, he wrote a lot of poems like, set in the 1800s about the Jewish community there, so that is one way of doing it and that's what I thought I was going to do, but I actually think the project will be more interesting and I feel more able to write a project which is more like, about my connect-, about this process of connecting is actually what my poems are going to be about, because I don't want to put words in the mouths of people and like, try and describe experiences I haven't had, that's not how I like to write, so I want to try and, I think the, it's going to be more about this experience of, it's going to be about the thing that is not a thing like, that is what it's going to be about, and it obviously is going to have some like, stories that I've found and like, a bit about the history and stuff, but it's not going to be nearly as historical as I thought because it's definitely been much more of a process for me than I was expecting.

FR: That's really interesting, it sounds really, really **[00:50:00]** interesting [pauses], what was I going to say [laughs], sorry, this is what I mean, I'm a bit, I'm a bit rusty.

RL It's fine, don't worry, I have to interview people all the time in my job as a consultant, so I've, I've been on the other side and it's weird.

FR: [laughs] Oh yeah, I was going to say, did you say that your grandparents lived in Belfast for longer than their children and then they, they retired and moved?

RL: Yeah, my grand-, my dad's dad was born there and his dad was, moved there when he was like, no, his dad was also born there, but my mum, my dad's mum was born in London and moved to Belfast when she was twenty cos she married my grandad.

FR: Right.

RL: So they lived, my grandpa lived there for like, sixty years and my, my grandma lived there for forty years.

FR: Wow, okay, so really quite a long time.

RL: Yeah.

FR: Do you know what he, what he did?

RL: He, they had a factory, they made children's clothes, they made school uniforms.

FR: That's interesting, okay, so it must have been quite a big thing really for them to leave, maybe more so than the, the children.

RL: Yeah, but I think that it also felt for them like, I think they kind of felt cos they, my gran-, I think it must have been a big thing cos my gra-, I was going to say they retired, but actually my grandfather kept working for like, five years or so after they moved to England and he'd some jobs he really didn't like and was like, overqualified for, I remember them talking about it, but I think, yeah, I don't know why they left, I think they left partly cos their children were like, having kids here and they wanted to like, see their grandchildren, and I

think they left cos like a lot of, I think the Jewish people leaving thing, I think even though they weren't necessarily fully tied into the Jewish community, I do think like, their friends left like, people they knew left, their children left, I don't know, like, the reasons to stay diminish.

FR: Sure, yeah, and, and as, and as you were saying earlier the community gets smaller and smaller and–

RL: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, okay [laughs], I was going to say, so how long have you been writing the poems for, a couple of years?

RL: Yeah, probably like, yeah, since, since this sort of time in 2019.

FR: And would you say that it's made you newly or freshly aware of, say, what's going on in Northern Ireland, in the news–?

RL: Oh definitely, definitely more, cos I didn't know, I kind of knew it was bad like, I knew it was, I knew it was bad, I knew it was a bad thing, but I didn't really know very much about how, where it came from, so, and I've obviously tried to learn more about that, so I feel more informed, and I feel, I think I feel a lot more outrage about the whole Brexit thing now than I would if I hadn't done this project, and I also feel like, horrified by the lack of outrage in like, my peers and also the government, I don't know, I feel like people don't, I feel like people, other people that I know are not very aware of this like, everyone, everyone on my social media is blowing up about the Israel-Palestine thing over the last month, not a single person has mentioned that Brexit has threatened the peace process, I mean, people argue how much it has, how much it hasn't, but like, I just think it's quite, I don't know, I just feel like people don't really talk about it.

FR: No, I mean, it's something that you said at the very start, but because it's not taught in schools, it's not really a presence in the British media very much at all, people just don't really have any frame for it.

RL: Yeah, like, quite recently there were those riots and like, police were hurt and stuff like, if that had happened in London that would have been a huge news story and like, it did make it into the BBC, but like, you know, it's technically happening in part of the UK, but like, it's just not, it's not perceived in the same way, I don't think.

FR: No, and it's just not as, not as visible, I mean, it's on the BBC, but it's a little bit further down the running order or whatever.

RL: Like a little side thing, front is like, Harry said something about Meghan.

FR: [laughs] Yeah, I mean, there's a, there's a whole other problem. I was going to ask, I'm just sort of trying to think of some strands that we haven't quite finished, were your parents political at all, either in terms of Northern Ireland or in terms of England, whatever?

RL: [pauses] Not really, not, I mean, it's also difficult cos do I remember.

FR: Sure, sure.

RL: I don't know, I honestly think maybe I don't really know cos I feel like they wouldn't really have talked to me about that stuff. My mum now, I can tell you, my mum always, yeah, I mean, I assume, I assume my parents didn't have wildly different political beliefs, and so my dad and my mum were probably both quite Conservative when I was growing up like, they probably voted Conservative, but my mum really hated Brexit and I think that's when we started talking more about politics and she swing like, swung a bit more left, but I don't think they were, they weren't like, actively political, at all.

FR: No, I mean, it's another one of those things where I ask the question, but like, it's not something I would talk to my parents about, you know, it's–

RL: Yeah.

FR: I guess the, the sort of historical question is like, do people who come from Northern Ireland take politics with them, which they then express in England.

RL: Well, I think my whole Northern Irish family are very unionist.

FR: Hmm, still?

RL: Yes.

FR: That's interesting, yeah.

RL: I would say they are political actually, in that they are very like, not that they really talk about it, but when they did, or if they ever mentioned it, they're very anti-IRA, they think the IRA are terrible, they are very pro-Union, yeah.

FR: Well, that, that's interesting, there you go then, yeah.

RL: Yeah, they are, I think they do take it with them.

FR: That's really interesting.

RL: Well, I think it feels interesting from their Jewish connection, cos again the IRA have links to like, historically in the World Wars have links to like, fascist organisations apparently, some of the research that I've done.

FR: Yeah, the, the, not so much the Provisional IRA in the North, but the, the Irish Republican Army.

RL: Yeah, that's what I'm trying to say.

FR: In the sort of mid-, like, interwar years, tried to, tried to make this kind of misguided connection with the, the fascists, yeah.

RL: Yeah, but yeah, I don't think, it's not a huge player in their history at all, but I was just interested when I was reading this and this like, Jewish [indecipherable] and stuff, oh okay.

FR: There's a very strange thing in Belfast as well at the minute where because some nationalist communities will fly Palestinian flags, a lot of, not a lot of, some working-class Protestant communities you see in east Belfast will have Israel flags where it–

RL: Yeah.

FR: I'm not sure how much it's–

RL: I've seen that.

FR: I don't, in my opinion it's not really based on a very thoughtful [laughs], you know–

RL: It's not the most considered response to Israel that there's ever been [laughs].

FR: Not on either side, to be honest, I don't think, it's a, it's a, you know, but, but yeah, there is a, it's a strange connection.

RL: Well, yeah, and I guess also my grandparents are like, quite Zionist like, they were horrified that anyone I knew, or me, would ever vote Labour as soon as that like, anti-Semitic stuff came out and they're very like, pro-Israel and stuff.

FR: You mentioned that your, your aunt had been on a kibbutz.

RL: Yeah, and my dad as well and my, and my uncle.

FR: I mean, this is probably, it's probably a topic for another interview [laughs], but I'm, I'm really interested in the kibbutz thing, I think that's such a fascinating piece of history.

RL: Yeah, I don't know all that much about it, my dad did a like, at one point, he was like, oh you should do it, it's amazing, and you actually still can, I think.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think so, yeah.

RL: But I never did.

FR: I think maybe it's, it's changed quite a lot over the years, but, but I've read some really interesting stuff about kind of socialist kibbutzes back in the day.

RL: Yeah.

FR: Alright, well, I, I feel like I've gone through my questions. Was there anything that we didn't talk about that, that you thought we would or that you thought might be interesting?

RL: [pauses] No, I don't think so. Can I ask you a question?

FR: Yeah, absolutely [laughs].

RL: [laughs] How much do people who are like, in my position like, I guess though that maybe you've not talked to that many people who are children of people who've left Northern Ireland.

FR: I've talked to five or six.

RL: Yeah, how much do they also feel like it's a thing, but, I mean, presumably they do cos they volunteered to talk to you about it, but like, what's the sort of general, is there any kind of consensus in how people feel about it or do people feel about it very differently?

FR: I mean, I think you've described it very well when you say a thing that's not a thing. I'm trying to think, sorry, I've spoken to five or six people, a couple of them probably have described quite similar things to you, which is a kind of, excuse me for paraphrasing your words, but a kind of ineffable sense of slight difference in England, but also a sense that the kind of connection with something in Northern Ireland is not quite real either, so this kind of strange ambivalent affect or whatever, which you can't quite grasp hold of, which I think is what you, kind of what you were describing there.

RL: Yeah, no, that's, that's way more articulate [laughs], yeah.

FR: [laughs] And then I've, some people have slightly different things because they've kind of moved back and forth more, so they feel a slightly more tangible connection in that sense, but still not really at home in either space, but maybe with more of a direct sense of like, I am an Irish person or a Northern Irish person from this part of the world. **[01:00:00]** I mean, I, in general I always find it very hard to draw connections across interviews, cos I always think they're all so different [laughs].

RL: No, that's helpful.

FR: But I think a sort of like, ambivalent attachment, which is not always kind of very, I think especially what you said like, it's hard to make it visible to other people.

RL: Yeah.

FR: I think that is something that–

RL: Especially cos my dad has passed away I think like, it's like when someone tries their, it's like they, for, after a while, after a long time it's almost like they weren't ever there, in some ways like, people have met me and known me and never met that person.

FR: Absolutely, yeah.

RL: So yeah, no, definitely, that's interesting.

FR: And I guess when you have a parent living it's easier to use them as a shorthand for this thing where you're like, oh my, my parent is N-, my parent is Irish, my parent is Northern Irish, but it's maybe a little bit of a harder thing to do when, when, when they've passed away for a few years.

RL: Yeah, but that's, but no, I was just really nosey about that because I, yeah, again, it's introspective, I'm like, is it just me, it's not just me [laughs].

FR: No, I think, I think there's some quite similar, I mean, I've only done five or six, but Jack has done some and our other, our colleague Barry has done some, so there will be a fairly substantial body of them at some point, so we can definitely stay in touch cos I would also be curious to hear, I mean, what stage is the poetry at like, what, are you–?

RL: Yeah, so I've done a first draft and it needs a lot of work, I'm also sort of reflecting that I need to be, I probably need to do some work to like, create interest in the book before I try and take it anywhere because obviously it's quite a niche topic and I actually think it touches on a lot of themes that a lot of people are really interested in at the moment like, there's loads of poetry around identity and migration and belonging and grief like, those are really big poetry themes, but I don't think people, I'm uneasy that my lens for it is like, quite niche, but I think I need to do some work to like, generate, I need to do some work to raise my own profile and like, generate interest in the project and then I can try and get it published, so I would say probably like, a few years, maybe like, hopefully two or three years away from publication [laughs].

FR: Alright, well, I, I look forward, I'll keep an eye out for it. I just read *RENDANG*–

RL: Yeah, yeah, Will Harris.

FR: Which has got a kind of a diaspora, second-generation thing, yeah.

RL: Yeah, I'm applying for him to mentor me.

FR: Is he? Oh there you go.

RL: Yeah

FR: I loved, I loved the book, so.

RL: He's really good.

FR: Yeah, and I can see how it fits with your, with, with the kind of thematics of what you're thinking about as well.

RL: That's what I think [laughs], will Will Harris think the same [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Well, that's the, that's the question, but good, good luck.

RL: Yeah, thank you.

FR: And, yeah, as I say, I mean, at some point all of these interviews are going to be archived as well like, publicly available, so if it would be useful for you we can make sure that you get told, notified, whenever that happens.

RL: Yeah, no, definitely, I'm really keen to stay in touch like, at some point I'm hoping to get some funding for this project and then like, you guys are experts in this, I'd love to get you to talk a bit, I don't know, I'm really keen to have made a connection with you guys and I'm so interested in what comes out of your research, and I'll keep you posted on the poems.

FR: Okay, great, well, thank you, thank you so much for the interview, it was really interesting and–

RL: Well, that's very kind of you to say [laughs].

FR: [laughs] It was, it was, and enjoy the, enjoy the rest of your evening.

RL: You too, thank you.

FR: Nice to meet you, bye.

RL: Nice to meet you too, bye.

INTERVIEW ENDS