

INTERVIEW M01: ANN GRAHAM

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley

Interviewee: Ann Graham [pseudonym]

Interview date: 24th October 2019

Location: Samuel Alexander Building, University of Manchester

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.

BH: Okay, that appears to be recording to me. Okay, so this is Barry and I'm here in the Samuel Alexander Building in the University of Manchester and it's the twenty-fourth of October. I'm here with Ann Graham. Ann, could you just say hello or introduce yourself for the tape?

AG: Yes, hello, I'm Ann.

BH: Hello Ann. Okay, so as I said, we're going to do a life history, so I'm just going to start at the beginning. So when and where were you born?

AG: I was born in Enniskillen in County Fermanagh and I, when I was born, I was born in 1952, and a strange thing about that, I was in Enniskillen, because, in Fermanagh, because my father was on the RAF base there, and so, we, my mother was a Belfast woman and she was there in the RAF married quarters, and so I was there for just two years as a child and then they went back to Belfast. So it's very strange that, and I didn't go back for a very, very long time until I was an adult to see where I was born.

BH: So you were actually born on the base?

AG: I was born in the hospital in Enniskillen, yes, yes.

BH: And do you have any memories of that period?

AG: Not at all, not at all. I think I was probably about two when we went back to Belfast. My father had come out of the RAF then and was, you know, in civvy street as it were, and so they went back. Home for my mother Belfast, but my father was a Scotsman, yeah, from Fraserburgh.

BH: Ah right, so was that his first move to Northern Ireland then, to Enniskillen or had he lived anywhere else before that?

AG: No, he was, he was in the RAF, he was, he joined up very, very young, eighteen, something like that, and left his hometown and was in certain bases and in 1935 he was sent to India and stayed there for four years, and he was in all over the sort of Middle East as well, so somehow he met a woman from Belfast [laughs].

BH: How did that happen?

AG: Oh it was very strange, he [interview briefly interrupted by knock on the door], he was in a, he was in Stranraer, there was a camp there where he was, an RAF camp. My mother went on a day trip to Stranraer and met him and this is before he went to India, so they corresponded for many years and then ultimately married, yeah, in 1944.

BH: Right, and what was his occupation in the RAF?

AG: He was a wireless operator and then he was involved in when the radar came in, so it was all electronics, you know, very cutting edge at that particular time, yes, and then he ended up, they ended up in, in Fermanagh at the base and I think that's where he came out and that's why they went back home and, but he was, you know, involved in, he came back I think about 1940, so he came back into the war.

BH: During the war.

AG: Yes, during the war and I think maybe he might have been there before.

BH: Right, okay, so they elected to move to Belfast then, as opposed to moving to Scotland or England.

AG: Yes, that's right.

BH: How come they went to Belfast?

AG: Simply because my family was there, you know, and her mother and three sisters, and they moved there and they spent some time living cheek by jowl in the house.

BH: All together.

AG: All together, and so my mother's aim then was to try and get somewhere else to live because I have an older brother, you know, who's seven years older than me, so that was two children and later there was a third child, Heather, and so we came back then to Belfast. Strangely enough, you ask why did they go there, actually I don't think they wanted to go there particularly, or they may have gone for a while and decided this isn't for us, and my father, he wanted to go to Canada and he was taking the whole family to Canada, all the papers and everything were done and then he went for a medical and they said that there was something wrong with his lung, so the whole thing stopped, you know. I've still got like, the little photograph for my passport to go to Canada and we never went, so we stayed there, yeah, yeah.

BH: And what part of Belfast was that?

AG: Now, my grandmother was up at the top of the Oldpark Road, up near Ballysillan, right at the very top, quite high up there and, so they were, they were there, and my mother, she told me that every day, I don't think it was every day, but she went time and time again, this is, this is to get us a council house, and they were building houses a wee bit further up. So we were even further up in Ballysillan then and we lived there for, I think, I think I was seven when we left there.

BH: This was living all in one house with your—

AG: With my mother, father and myself and my older brother, then the young, Heather arrived, again seven years later, so there's seven years between the three children, and at that time my mother was a bit, and maybe my father as well, I don't know, itchy feet again, and now she wanted to go somewhere else, my mother, she wanted to go to the other side of the city, to the south side of the lough, which we did.

BH: Yes, right.

AG: Yes, another council house, very nice, and so we stayed there for about, I don't know maybe, maybe about four or five years, I don't know, and then she took us again further out along the lough to Holywood, so that's where we came to within sort of, you know, the Northern Ireland houses and being there, so we went to Holywood, which was just such a beautiful place, you know, and all the hills behind us and everything and the beach and that kind of thing, so yeah, so we moved quite a bit even then.

BH: Even within Belfast.

AG: Yes, yeah, that was it.

BH: What did your mother and father do at this stage then? What were their occupations?

AG: My mother didn't work until we came to England, when we were older then, you know, the children, so she didn't work. My father was into, it's quite strange really, you don't ask enough questions do you at the time, but I gleaned a lot and I remembered a lot. When he came out of the RAF down in Fermanagh, Enniskillen, he opened up a shop for wirelasses and that kind of thing, and I don't even know, I think maybe there was a TV there, because there was no TV during the war of course, and they were very old sets and things like that, and would mend people's wirelasses or whatever, because that's what he knew, and so he had a shop there and I think also that it didn't do very well. You're out in the country, you know, and how many people are going to come in with a wireless either to buy one or to, you know, and I think that's also why they came back to Belfast, it's a city, you know, so he came back to the city and he opened a shop on the Shankill Road.

BH: Is that right?

AG: Uh huh, uh huh, and that went for a while and I don't know what happened there, I think maybe it just folded, it didn't, he was ahead of his time in a way, you know, so he was trying to sell people wirelesses and televisions and, you know, and there wasn't a lot of money around then, it's at the end of the war, well, no, it's in the fifties then, '54 or '55 that kind of, so he, he had that for a while and beyond that, oh I, it's just a funny thing, my father always said that he thought I was the youngest child to see television in Northern Ireland [laughs] because he had one, you know, and we always had a TV because that was his, that was his trade. But then he, [00:10:00] after the shop on the Shankill Road, I remember even being in there, so I must've been sort of at least five, I would've said.

BH: And you've memories of that.

AG: I have because he found in the shop, it's very strange, a blackboard and easel, for a child to play being at—

BH: Chalk.

AG: Yes, the chalk, and for the, to be a schoolteacher, you know, and so he brought that home, he'd found it in the top end of the shop and he brought it home, so that's why I remember it, and I remember also, gosh, the house was full of boxes of valves, you know, there was no circuits, and some of these valves, you know, like, I would go and look at them they would be in boxes and things like that. There would be, in the house, there would be like, a big grama-, not a gram-, a gramophone, like this, and a radiogram and things like that that they'd pick up to try and sell presumably, I don't remember him ever selling them, and so that was that was what the house was like, you know.

BH: Sure, yeah, what about school then? Cos you've moved a few different places in and around Belfast, so what was school like, do you have memories of school?

AG: Oh yes, yeah. I remember when we were up in the Ballysillan and the school that I went to was just at the end of the road where my grandmother actually lived, Carrs Glen, the school, and I remember going there, yes. I remember once there was, I don't know if it was Christmas or something, and they did a bit of a show, but I was only in the first year, the infants, the primary one, as they said, and people got chosen and I got chosen for the young ones, I think there was two of us, me and a boy, and we had to walk out onto the stage, I think at the beginning, clearly, and we had to hold up our letters wel-, to say welcome, you know, and you had to be, say welcome like this [laughs], so I remember that, I remember that was good fun doing that, and I liked school.

BH: Did you enjoy school?

AG: I liked school, at that time, yes, I, I, yeah, it was good, good teacher and everything, and I enjoyed it, it was fun. My mother, because she didn't work, and a lot of women didn't work then, they stayed at home with their children, and she would give me, you know, I would have a jotter and she would give me sums and I would be coming back to her, this is before I get to school, and I'm trying to read, you know, but I always wanted the sums. If you ask me now if I was interested in that at all I would say not in the least, but it was just,

and it's an engagement with your mother, isn't it, all the time, and also when I'm in Ballysillan and I'm, you know, five, six, seven, my father was working in a shop in Belfast, so he was employed then.

BH: Employed by somebody else.

AG: Yes, and that was, you know, that was wider and he got quite, he, he had reasonable money at that time, as it's going on and more people are becoming interested in gramophones and things, and so he got decent money, and so he went, he was there, and he, I'm trying to get this right now, I think for some reason, I don't know what it was, maybe he got fed up with it, he wanted to do something, he wanted to go somewhere else, I don't know, from my point of view, he began then to go to England, and there would be, I don't know, I would say maybe six months, maybe it was three months, I don't know, because that still, when I'm, you know, seven, maybe six, seven, eight, and he would go away and we would get the envelope delivered specially with the money in it, you know, you had to, he would put, I don't know, but there's a name for it, I've forgotten it now, but you could send a, a envelope, special envelope with money in it that would be handed to you, you know, delivered, so every week we would get the money, and then he would come back and it would be, oooh here's presents, and you'd get the presents and things like that.

BH: Right, so this was, where was he going in England then? What was he doing?

AG: He had a brother in Woking who owned a café, I think he went there first of all, but then he went to Kingston and I'm not sure about Kingston, letters came from Kingston and I don't know why that was, but then he would, he would come back regular times and there would just be mammy, just with the children then.

BH: Okay, so there's three, two of you at this stage.

AG: Two of us and yes, and then—

BH: Is there, is there at this stage, is there her sisters and her mother still nearby?

AG: Yes, yes.

BH: They are, yeah.

AG: Yes, oh except for one sister who married a soldier and they were all, they were Libya, Aden, all over and then they came back to Germany, to a base, and they were in Brussels so that, you know, there's movement in our family all the time, you know, I do remember them coming back on leave and arriving and that was wonderful cos they brought all these things like, from Germany, you know, I remember getting things, German things like, little things with pfennigs, I think that it was we called then, and little things that they brought from Germany, which was lovely, it was exciting.

BH: Yeah, what about these new housing estates which were being built sort of in the fifties and sixties in and around Belfast or outside of it? What were they like to live on? What kind of places were they?

AG: The houses themselves were very good, they were good family houses and it was, you know, you may have felt a bit far out, I mean, it wasn't really that far out, but it was on the edge of the Cave Hill, do you know what I mean?

BH: I do, yeah.

AG: You know, you get up, you get up the top of the Oldpark and the Ardoyne's, you know, there as well and then beyond that you've got the Ligoniel and then you've got up here, to Bally-, Silverstream was the other one, and Ballysillan and that, and you're way high up above the city, you know, very good clean air and you know, that kind of thing, and that, it was a nice house.

BH: Yeah, do you have good memories of—

AG: Of that house?

BH: Of that estate and of that area?

AG: It was, it was, yeah, it was good, I remember that very well, yes, yeah.

BH: And these estates, were they mono-religious or were they mixed?

AG: I think they were mono. I couldn't be sure but I think so. If not they later became of course, but no, I, I, I think there was prob-, I don't remember Catholics from the Ballysillan, to be honest, but I may have been very young, but I was pretty sharp, I remembered a lot of things, but I don't, not sitting here now, at that point. It was different, certainly, you know, with the council house we went to was, after Ballysillan, was right down now where the airport, the George Best Airport and it's Knocknagoney, and it's up on a hill and it's got greenery and everything around it, and I don't remember there being, playing with Catholics.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

AG: But once I get to Holywood, it's completely different, completely and utterly different, but my mother always said that she did have good Catholic friends. My mother was a woman who always, always had friends here, there, you know. She would be writing to people in Enniskillen when she was in Ballysillan, she'd be writing to her family and his family in Fraserburgh, she wrote to everybody and she had, she always maintained that she had friends who were different religions.

BH: Sure, yeah, and what about religion? Was religion an important thing when you were growing up in Northern Ireland at that time?

AG: I would say, looking, looking back, yes, but it was the same for everybody, in that, this is what I think, this is what happened in my family. My mother, [00:20:00] my mother would've gone as a young woman, and her family, they would've gone to church quite regularly on Sunday. The girls, the four daughters, my aunts and my mother, would sing in the choir and, you know, so there was that, this going to that, but they jumped about a lot for some reason, at some-, cos I was, I would be going to the Sunday school, every Sunday you would go to the Sunday school, but I can remember going to a Presbyterian church and then I would find myself in a Methodist church and they kind of went a bit between, and certainly when my mother got to moving around a bit, and her preference in the end was the Methodists because it was, it wasn't high church and they were, they sang a lot, you know, and they seemed very friendly, the Methodists, so I spent quite a bit of time in Methodist Sunday schools and that kind of thing, I did that. My father, completely different of course, if you asked him, on his marriage certificate it says Church of Scotland, well, you know, you put that down anyway, don't you [laughs]. He never, he never bothered.

BH: He didn't bother with church at all?

AG: He never bothered, ah he wasn't interested in it at all, so we did, and we all were christened and, so that was okay.

BH: And were there like, social clubs and activities associated with the churches?

AG: Yes, yes, of course the dances, you know that kind of thing, that comes later obviously, for me, but the girl, no, I was in the Brownies, I was in the Girls' Brigade, you know, I loved that, I loved the Brownies and of course that's, the Brownies and Girls' Brigade are all about the church, you can go out and go on a march, you know, and that kind of thing, and it's all about the Queen and, you know, you have to swear allegiance and you learn off by heart all these things that, and you got badges for it [laughs], so it was absolutely, and my mother, my mother's sisters, churchgoers, not so much Peggy who went away, you know, overseas, but her husband went, you know, when he came back, when he came out of the army, he was, you know, going to church, so yes, it did, it went on through that generation, when my, I think it kind of stopped, well, I'm pretty sure it absolutely stopped, when we came to England, there was nothing, nothing.

BH: Yeah, sure, and was this, I mean, these activities associated with the church, were they voluntary or just simply something that it was a routine that you had to do, it was obligatory, you know, you had to go to church?

AG: Ah no, no. I could, you could say I don't want to go to the Brownies ever again, you know, I'm not going to Sunday school, but it was nice because it was fun and it was kind of activities and it, you know, you see, you've got children in those days, you know, they wanted to do things like that and go out places, you know. I don't know if you had it where you lived.

BH: Oh I did, yeah.

AG: Yes, yes, but we also had, we had coming round the estates these people, we called them the wee meeting.

BH: Oh yes, we had that too, yeah.

AG: Oh well, you know all about that, but it was fun, and we were only little.

BH: Yeah, yeah, and these would go round the different estates and then they would hold something in the middle of the street kind of thing?

AG: They would, yeah, yeah, and they'd give you a little, if you answered a question about the Bible, I mean, we could answer questions cos we'd go to Sunday school, and they'd give you a little bookmark and you thought my goodness that's great, you know, yeah, so.

BH: So where would your friendship groups have come from? Would those have been school or more where you lived or church or, who did you socialise with I suppose outside of—?

AG: Being young in, say, Ballysillan, it was the people that I was with there.

BH: People who lived in the street there?

AG: That lived there, lived the street there, cos it's next door, it's across the street and all of that, and I think that was probably it. Oh I, when I went to my grandmother's quite often, obviously cos she's not very far away, so I had friends in her street as well, so that would be it really, and oh sometimes I went to, I went to people's houses off the estate I remember, cos they were further down quite a bit. I'm always amazed that I would be allowed at sort of six to cross, you know, two busy roads and, you know, ten, fifteen, no more, fifteen minutes walk to somebody's house and they didn't bother, but that was a different, you know, different thing then. Going beyond, if you want to talk about when I go to Knocknagoney or Hollywood, you know, then I'm older.

BH: It changes then, does it?

AG: It does, absolutely, I mean, absolutely. I would say when I got to Hollywood, and I would reckon I was, I went, I think I went two, two years to the primary in Hollywood and that was, there was, yeah, no, Knocknagoney, that was, that was, I had to go on a bus when I was at Knocknagoney, but when I got to Hollywood, and now I'm on another council estate and I'm walking a good, long distance cos we were sort of at the far end of Hollywood, and so then I'm in an estate and there are definitely Catholics there.

BH: Oh is that right, yeah?

AG: Yes, and friends, and that's fine.

BH: So there's interaction.

AG: Interaction, when you got, that's what I'm saying, and the older I got the more that circle—

BH: Began to happen, with Catholics.

AG: It, it went wider and wider, and I don't know if you know Holywood very well because it has a reputation of being sort of stockbroker belt up there—

BH: Well, that's what I'm sort of thinking.

AG: And you're thinking I'm on the other side, I'm in the estate and it's a big, quite a big estate, and the people that I'm with, you know, they're there and I play with them and I get friendly, and the older I get, as I say, the more there is. So I have a split then when I finish primary school, and then I'm into who's gone to the secondary modern, who's gone to the technical college, who's gone to the, you know, right into Belfast, you know, St Malachy's and, you know, all of that, there are people going on buses all the way to Belfast to, you know, to the good schools.

BH: Yeah, the grammar schools.

AG: Catholic schools and that, but as it happens, and I'm friendly with them the whole time, out in the evening, I'm out with the lads and I'm out with their friends and everything and, but where we are, right next door is to, is the grammar school, Sullivan Upper, which is one of the kind of, you know, when it, there are these, there's Portora and there's, you know, all of this.

BH: Yes, I know, the son of my headmaster went to Sullivan Upper.

AG: Yes, yes, so I pass the eleven-plus and now I'm in the grammar school.

BH: Right, so you went to—

AG: Oh yes, yes, because, I don't know how it worked, because I had I passed the eleven-plus, that's how it worked, but there's some sort of, I don't know if there's bursaries or what, but anyway, from this council estate I'm going with people there who've had, they've passed the eleven-plus and we're going in there.

BH: Right, okay.

AG: When we get in there, it's just amazing that, you know, where these people live and where they, you know, the holidays they go on and, you know, all of this, the cars that drop them off.

BH: So you'd noticed a big change then in this school.

AG: Well, of course, of course, and then I, and then I'm mixing with them, we are, because it's, it was like that, and you're a friend, you know, your friend in school and you can go, you

know, to stay or, you know, go to her house and you go in and you think my goodness, I've never seen anything like this in my life and, so that's when all the different groups all came together, and I would say from, you know, in terms of wealth they're in there as well, from us over here in the council estate.

BH: Okay, so you're saying everybody's interacting.

AG: Yes, and there are Catholics there as well.

BH: Is that right, yeah? [00:30:00]

AG: Of course, of course, for sure.

BH: And is there any friction between people from different backgrounds, no?

AG: I never, I never had it, no, I never had it. Strange, isn't it, it's very strange. I ponder on that, you know, because it was a good, it was a good time, yeah, and like I say, people were coming, you know, from the, or were going to school in Belfast and coming back and we'd be down in the town in the night, you know, in the evenings, yeah, yeah, so that was great, that was great fun, and we used to go to Bangor of course, you know, and that was even better, you know, so.

BH: Yeah, so what do you do then? So that's what you were doing at school, and what did you do outside of school as you got older then, did you have a part-time job or anything like that?

AG: Well, yes, as soon as I was old enough I got a part-time job on Saturday in Littlewoods in Belfast, selling umbrellas and hats [laughs], so that was good, yeah, yeah, but now, you know, you can move on, and then I'm fifteen and my mother has itchy feet again and that's what takes us away.

BH: Right, so you stayed at Sullivan Upper until, was it fifteen?

AG: Fifteen.

BH: And then what do you do, O-levels then, is that—?

AG: Ah yes, well, no, I'm in the class to do the O-levels, but then we decide to go to England, so I come out of that and I have to go then to an English school, having been taught half the syllabus of the Northern Ireland syllabus, so.

BH: Right, so this is how you migrated then, which is part of your family.

AG: That's it, hmm, uh huh.

BH: So talk a bit about that then. What motivated your mother to move to England?

AG: [pauses] It's difficult in a way, I don't know, it's that I don't know that is difficult [laughs], yes, so it's strange, it's convoluted and, so my mother's gone as far as she can getting to Hollywood away from, you know, where she was before.

BH: Do you think she was consciously trying to get away from where she grew up?

AG: Ah I don't know, maybe, she'd take a chance, always she wanted, you know, the grass is greener.

BHL Right, sure.

AG: She was always, why don't we do this, you know, it's not, oh my goodness I have to do this, cos she's very upbeat all the time, she's interested, she wants out there and all of that.

BH: So is this social aspiration?

AG: Ah it might have been, I've no idea, I've no idea. So, I'll tell you one solid thing that came into it, my father met an RAF friend in some sort of, I want to call it a convention, but it wouldn't have been in those days, but there was something that was going on in Belfast and it was to do with television, and it was to do with colour television, maybe, I think, and he meets this ex-friend from the RAF. This man is over in this place, he's British, he's English, he's there for some reason and after that it began to, to, I think this friend said to him you want to get over into England now, you want to go there and try and get in now, this is, things were moving with televisions and all of that, and so they thought about it. He went, I can't remember exactly, he did go there, he went, he came to Manchester, he started working there, but I don't think he was very long with what this guy was promising, so he's now in Manchester, on his own, which he's used to, having gone away to London and then, you know, places down south, and now he's there and he says to my mother, you know, Manchester looks good, why don't you come here and have, come for a couple of weeks and see what you think, and so that was it.

BH: And did you go as part of this couple of weeks or did you remain in Belfast?

AG: No, I, I got the chance to go there and see it, and my sister, it's difficult as well because my brother, don't forget, you know, I'm, I'm fifteen, my brother's, you know, seven years older than me, he's been, he's been set, you know, his life, his style and everything, he has been living with my grandmother in north Belfast when we moved south of the river, so from fourteen, fifteen he stayed there because all his mates are there.

BH: Is that right?

AG: Yes, so he was in, he also passed the eleven-plus, but seven years earlier, he couldn't, he was supposed to go to, or perhaps not, he had the eleven-plus and the school was the Belfast Academy and by rights he should have gone there, but he was not, he didn't go. He went, they opened a new school in Ballysillan and they had a stream, a grammar stream, he didn't get that opportunity that I had, but never mind, so he, he's apprenticed to what used

to be the GPO as a telephone engineer, believe it or not, so now he's an engineer, he's twenty-two, twenty-three, he's got a lovely girlfriend, he's not going to go to England.

BH: He's staying in Belfast.

AG: He's staying in Belfast and that's what happened, he never came. So myself and my younger sister, yes, who is eight, we go, you know, you see all of Manchester and oh this looks pretty good, lovely shops, you know, very nice, that kind of thing.

BH: I mean, how did you feel about that move? Because obviously, you know, you're coming up to you O-levels and it sounds like you've quite a close sort of network of friends in different places.

AG: Yes, yes, very much so.

BH: That's quite a big transition, so what did you think about this when you were told you were moving?

AG: I thought about it very, very clearly and thought about it a lot, and I thought that I would go, and maybe that's something that was just in me like it's in my mother and, you know, and my father as well because he'd travelled such a lot and, you know, that kind of thing, and so I thought why not, why not, I've never been frightened of making friends and so that was alright, and we didn't, we came, he had, oh yeah, he'd been in like, a boarding house and the woman who owned it said to him oh I've got this house, do you want to, this is not for us this is for him, do you want to live in that house there, you know, and keep an eye on it for you, you know, I'll let you, you know, go in there, and he was living there in Miles Platting, two up, two down, and we came here to that from Holywood, you know.

BH: So was it a lower grade of housing.

AG: Oh God, yeah, yeah, and we didn't stay there, we didn't, we stayed there for the two weeks we came, and my father then found us a flat in Moston, which was quite nice, it was alright, so that was alright, we went there, and then I had to go to school, my sister had to go to school.

BH: Yeah, did you have to, cos you were fifteen, did you transfer into another school then in Manchester to finish off your studies?

AG: Yes, yes, so I would be obliged to, I would have to stay in school till sixteen cos that's, you know, school leaving age. We were in Moston then and in Moston there was North Manchester Grammar School for Girls. A year before that the comprehensive system came in, but in fact, I was in a grammar school and the school down the road was still in the secondary modern.

BH: Sure, what year was this by the way when you moved?

AG: It was, I came, we came September, October '67.

BH: '67, okay.

AG: I'm about, in January I'm going to be sixteen. [00:40:00] So then I'm in this, you know, grammar school.

BH: Sure, and meeting new people obviously.

AG: Yes, yes. The thing was, and, and, you know, you look back and people, people are so kind, and I was like, given like, two or three girls to look after me, they were there, and they said oh, you know, this is Audrey and this is Cath and this is Stephanie or something like that, you know, and so I've got these three people and they're very, very interested, you know, because why do I speak like that, where have you come from [laughs].

BH: How did they react to your accent and things like that, how did they take that?

AG: Yeah, they were curious and they were, you know, I mean, the accent is, is nice, isn't it, you know, so they were very, they were very friendly, they looked after me. I think, on reflection, there was an English teacher who was second-generation Irish.

BH: Right, okay.

AG: Julie Lynch, never forgot her, and I, she may have done this or it may have been the form tutor, but once I was in her class she was absolutely, she was just willing me and willing me to succeed.

BH: Is that right?

AG: Ah wonderful, and not just for me, but I felt that because in the academic, very academic grammar school of Sullivan, you know, it was all, you know, get it done, get it done, get it done, you know, you have to succeed, and that came across to me and I always had that from Sullivan, but this was a gentler thing and she was delighted to have me in her class. I can't, you know, it's just how it happened, and within like, two or three days I'm with Audrey and Cath and that and they're taking me out at night, you know, so now, and I'm going on a bus to where she lived and Aud-, Audrey, you know, she brought me into her house, her family, she took me to the youth club, you know, and these girls were just wonderful, wonderful and the school, I loved the, I liked the school.

BH: Was it an all-girls' school by the way?

AG: It was an all-girls' school, which Sullivan wasn't. I'd have liked a few lads there, to be honest [laughs], but, you know, the, I went to the youth club and all that kind of thing, so yeah.

BH: Sure, so that was 1967, you're doing your GCSEs presumably at the end of that year.

AG: Yes, yes.

BH: The following year, October 1968, is really the beginning of the Troubles, it's the civil rights movement and these images of that begin to circulate within the British media and so on. Do you have any memory of that at that stage?

AG: Oh God yeah, absolutely, absolutely, I remember it before, I mean, you know [pauses], I don't know [pauses], there was a sense of things, and I'm fifteen, and then I was sent, you know, and there's talk, we talk, you know, we, those Catholic friends, we're caught talking about things.

BH: Oh so there is conversation about things?

AG: Oh there's conversation about this, of course, yes, you know, but it's very early on, I don't know when the civil rights were, but it was, would be prior the walks, you know, yeah, by September '67, somebody said to my father, I don't know who it was, no, about my father, in hindsight, they said your, your father took you out of there, now I don't know if that's true, but that was said.

BH: Right, okay. Who said that?

AG: My father, no, sorry, a relative said about my father. He never said that and he never said anything about it, but he was, he was, he's quite political, he's, you know, he's interested in politics, and his politics would be of the English type, he would, he would kind of wind up, you know, the family about the Ulster unionists and all that, you know, make jokes about them, you know.

BH: Yeah, and what about your mother's side then? Cos she's obviously from Belfast, what would her politics be?

AG: She wasn't particularly, she wouldn't be particularly political, no, no, not at all, but he, he was that kind of person, you know, he'd be saying where's the Labour Party, is what he would be saying, and I do know he did say that, you know.

BH: Would he have been a Labour voter?

AG: I would think so, I would think so, yeah, yeah, so.

BH: And what did your friends, you said your friends would've been talking about this even back when you were living in Holywood, what were the conversations about?

AG: It's hard to remember cos it was quite, it was quite vague, you know, maybe it was more socialist, being young people, you know, the 'Ban the Bomb', I had my badge and I had this and, you know, and it was about, it was more socialist, and it was, it wasn't until after the civil rights marches and so on, I'll come back in a minute to that, and so on, it wasn't till then that I began to see the division. I didn't see the division because we, they were in Holywood and we were there and it was fine and the division, but I just remembered something. I remember we were in Holywood in the evening and there was a big thing going

on and it was the Reverend Ian Paisley who was coming to Hollywood, and he marched and we went to look, all of us, we went, we wanted to look at this man, and, you know, kind of, and the Presbyterian thing and all of that, you know, because now we're beginning to think, as I say, more socialist than division, and we went, and we went and looked at him, and he marched up the high street in Hollywood, and you think, and the size of the man, very, very strange, you know.

BH: Yeah, well, I mean, that's the other thing I should've asked you about. I mean, how important was Orange culture in Belfast when you were growing up? Was that something that you were involved in, Twelfth of July, that kind of thing?

AG: Not involved in actively, no, no, because my father would, pffft, what's that, you know, he wouldn't, he wouldn't take to anything like that, even though he's a Scotsman, but he's not a Glasgow, he's not a Glasgow, he's from way, way high up.

BH: Fraserburgh, you were saying.

AG: Fraserburgh, so anyway, yes, now, what we would do as a family, when I was very small, say, Ballysillan, say, my father always had a car, people didn't have, a lot of people didn't have cars, but he always, always had a car, and we would, the eleventh night for the bonfires, he would, we'd get in the car and he would drive us all around and we'd go down the Shankill and all of these places, you know, and you would see these amazing, I mean, they're ridiculous now, aren't they [laughs], but, you know, to me as a small child I would see this and it was a spectacle, that was it, it was a spectacle, and then on Twelfth of July we'd get in the car again and we would go always to the King's Hall, you know, big King's Hall.

BH: Ah yeah, I've been there.

AG: Ah yeah, and we would find a space packed all up that road and it was, it was, same, it's a spectacle and, you know, when you're seven years old and you're, they're beating big drums and throwing the, throwing the staff, you know, so that's my acquaintance with the Orange Order, you know, but otherwise no, that was it really, we didn't really bother, no, well, we didn't bother at all, didn't mean anything to us.

BH: So whenever then you moved to England, and it's around 1968 and all this was becoming more visible—

AG: I know, I know, yes, absolutely.

BH: What did you think of it and also the people that you, you know, began to make friends with in England? Were they observing this as well? Did they have a reaction to that?

AG: I think so, yes, yeah, I mean, you find in your life there are times when you have to explain things and there are times when you really don't, you know, it's there, it's on the TV, **[00:50:00]** but yes, people, over the years people ask, don't they, that's part of it, and they're curious, and you try and give as good a, you know, an honest, what's going on, you

know, but often at the end of it when you look at their faces they think really, you know, why, why, why would you do, why would they do that, and I would just say, you know, I don't know, why would they, you know, so—

BH: You found it difficult to explain.

AG: I could, the facts are there, you know, that's okay, but, and I just, and it was dreadfully, dreadfully, you know, when, when, we were away from it, but the streets were our streets, and you'd look in, you know, and you'd see places in Belfast, and we would, we, we in the house would watch it all and say oh look, it's, oh look what's happened to that and, you know, and be desperate and desperate, terrible.

BH: And how did you feel about that when you were watching that from England, like?

AG: Very sad, very sad, you know, and difficult. I don't know if you want to ask me anything more about that, but to put it a little further, we went back.

BH: You went back?

AG: We went back and back, we didn't, when, maybe a year or so, we would go over because the family's there.

BH: I was going to ask you, your brother's still there, so—

AG: He's still there, yeah, yeah, you know, and he's in telephone exchanges [laughs], you know, which is susceptible and have been, you know, and he's a young guy, he's out in the bars and all of that, you know, so that's a worry for my parents.

BH: Yeah, and were you aware of this as well, even though you were sixteen, was this something you're conscious of?

AG: Oh yeah, yeah [pauses], all that, you know, my knowledge of sort of, you know, from when, from perhaps just before I left school in Holywood, you know, then I'm here, I'm, I'm watching all of that and I'm smart enough to know what's going on, and the family talk about it and it's so, so sad, but, you know, the family are still back home and then we go and visit them.

BH: What are your memories of that, return visits then, after you moved?

AG: It's funny, it's, you just wonder when you look back. I was talk-, I talked to my sister because I was going to do this and she's, obviously she's eight years younger, and we could remember, she could remember, she brought it up, that at one point, and it can't have been more than, she must have been ten, eleven, if that, so I would've been old enough, I might've been sixteen maybe, sixteen maybe, and I can remember, and she does, that my father took me in the car to the Liverpool boat and put, sent us on the Liverpool boat and her and I were on that boat, no berths because, you know, that was, that was more money, and there's all these big sort of lounges as they called them and these seats, and we're

there, and the crossing is horrendous, so she remembers that, and she said to me do you remember when we pulled out the life jackets so we could lie our heads on something soft, and I said yes, and she said and do you remember all those people being sick, and so that was one event that she remembered as a child, you know, but then otherwise I would come back because I had a very good, well, two good friends, one of them a Catholic and I'm still friends with her now, I still see her.

BH: So you retained your friendships with these people.

AG: Oh gosh yes, yes, there was a big gap at one point when all the kids came, you know what I mean [laughs], but then, you know, I've been back to see her and all of that, so probably that first summer when I'm sixteen, certainly I went, and I would go for the summer and I'd stay in her house.

BH: Is that right?

AG: Yes, and we had, you know, we were out there like everybody else, we're going in and of course we're going in the bars, aren't we, and we're going here and there in Belfast.

BH: Is this the seventies, the eighties?

AG: So this would've been, no, cos I came in '67, so '68 maybe, then '67, '67, '68, I would be coming back, not always to Donna, and to stay with her, I think maybe I might've stayed twice, certainly twice, maybe three times, but then of course I've got other friends and I'm out with them and I stay with my aunt when I go over, so I was there, in fact, in fact, the day, the day the British Army came through, off the boat, up, in there, I was in Belfast that night.

BH: Is that right?

AG: Yes, yes, so we, I was there.

BH: So that was intense rioting, mid-August '69.

AG: Yes, yes, I, you know, I don't know where we were, I don't see that, except them coming in, I don't remember anything else but that, yeah, but I was definitely there then, and then other times, you know, you'd have been out, you'd be in a bar and, you know, and people talk and, yeah.

BH: And did Belfast appear differently when you were back? Did you observe like, a massive transformation, like?

AG: Oh yes, well, the fabric is still the same, well, it's maybe not because of the few other things, but the, I want to say the geography's the same, the buildings are the same, if they haven't been spoiled, and so it's all, it's all familiar, it's my city and that's it, but then you've got other things, haven't you, because, you know, later on you've got the gates and you've

got, you know, there police, there's the police and there's and then there's soldiers, you see that if you're just going shopping, like that, you know.

BH: What about relationships with people? Cos you said you went back and you stayed with a Catholic friend. Did, once this began to happen, did this alter those relationships in any way?

AG: No, it didn't, they didn't because of that, actually she, I should also say that she came and lived with us.

BH: Oh right, in Manchester, right, okay.

AG: Yes [laughs], she was a brilliant shorthand typist and she walked straight into Piccadilly and into a job, so, you know, so that kept on, and then she, I think she went to London and I lost touch with her because she was very, oh I don't know what would you call it [pauses], what do you call the people in the streets with the yellow tops, religion, that religion, what is it, the guru, there was a guru and they went to live, do you know what I mean, in the seventies, you know, they ring their bells, they're not Buddhists, but they're—

BH: Oh Hare Krishna?

AG: Yes, sorry, I forgot, we got there in the end [laughs], so she, you know, so there we are.

BH: She became involved with Hare Krishna?

AG: Yeah, well, I don't know where, they were in some place that they went to worship and all of that, and that was another friend of mine from Holywood and they got married in the end, so we kind of lost touch for many, many years and then it was restored, you know, we were friends and I went to see her and that kind of thing, yeah, shouldn't have said perhaps her name, so, anyway.

BH: What about your family members then? So in addition to your brother obviously you had your mum's sisters and things there as well. Were they were impacted in any way by this churning up of things?

AG: Yes, mm hmm, well, of course because they were, you know, they were trying to work, they were working, they were, you know, and they were, they did go out in the evenings, you know, people knew what was safe and what wasn't or nearly safe, you know, as that and, I mean, [01:00:00] they talk about, you know, they can't get home from their work, you know, that was always it, you know, it's all shut off, we can't get home, there's no buses, there's nothing, we have to, they have to walk all the way up, you know, to the Oldpark Road or, you know, that kind of thing, so, but then again my brother has been in and around incidents when he was out and that was, that was terrible, yeah, and [pauses] it's, I, I met my husband when I was very young, seventeen, so, and he lives, he was from Newton Heath in Manchester.

BH: Oh really, so just a couple of years after you moved, right, right.

AG: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and so there comes a time, oh I'll take you to see my family [laughs], and he was very brave about it, so I brought him over and we came by plane and we got, where my aunt we were going to stay with, she lived actually in a very strange part of the city, in that there's the Ardoyne, the very top of the Ardoyne, and there's the Ballysillan, right, and she is living on a road opposite a big Catholic girls' school, but she's not in Ardoyne, she's in where Ballysillan is, in nice private housing, but that's where she is, and we come off the airport bus at the top, on the Ligoniel Road and we walk down and as we get near her house there's something going on at this Catholic girls' school and they've evacuated it or something, it was always happening, and it's right across the road from her, opposite, and the, the, was it, no, it wasn't, it was army, army were there, and as we came down and we turned into my aunt's drive two soldiers were lying on the floor with their guns ready at the side of her house, in front of her garage, and that's how he saw Northern Ireland [laughs].

BH: And what was his perception of this, like?

AG: Well, it's just, he's stunned, he can't take it all in, he can't really, you know, but my aunt, you know, she's wonderful, she, she took us all the places we should see, as they say, you know, we went everywhere, and we went to Hollywood and we went to Newcastle and all over she took us, you know, so, because she so wanted him, you know, to like the place, and she, the pride in the city and the country is fantastic, you know, and they're very, very proud of where they live, always, and so that was a baptism of fire, and then later of course and, you know, I have two sons, we would bring the kids, you know, but it was tailing off then. My son was born in '82, you know, so it was, it was still going on, yes, yes, when we brought him over, he was, he was nine months old and again, brought it to the same aunt and everything and there's [laughs], you know, all this around us, that she's kind of hemmed in, you know, yeah.

BH: How did you meet your husband in Manchester?

AG: It's very funny really. I met him with my friend Audrey, who took care of me, who took me to the club, the youth club, and I think he was in the youth club, but afterwards, outside, I was with Audrey and other friends and he was there and it was a bus stop and that's where I met him, so, so that, we must have gone back to the youth club the next time and I, so I don't really remember, but I definitely know that's what happened, yeah, so there we are.

BH: And was he your first boyfriend in Manchester?

AG: Yes, yes.

BH: Yeah, and then you stayed with him then, after that?

AG: Yeah, pretty much, pretty much, on and off a couple of times, but pretty much, yeah.

BH: So as really you were sort of developing your courtship again and this stuff's going on in Northern Ireland—

AG: It is, all the time.

BH: What does his mother think about this and his father and so on, like? Do they have any understanding of this?

AG: No, no. I don't think, they would see it on the TV, but they didn't relate to it and they didn't, they weren't, I wouldn't say they weren't interested in it, because now they've got this, you know, Irish girl in their midst and, you know, she's talking and talking and all of that, you know, and they're very quiet people, you know, so that, I think they kind of went like this a bit, you know, but, you know, they were lovely people and very kind, you know, they just, they had nothing to say about where I'd come from, not at all, not at all.

BH: Well, that's what I was going to ask next, I mean, how do you think Northern Ireland was perceived more generally in England in those years? What were people's attitudes towards what was happening?

AG: [pauses] It's, I don't know, I think they would, they just couldn't understand, you know, of course they couldn't, and they would be dreadfully upset, you know, with bombings and all of that and especially when it comes over here, you know, when it's in your back garden, your backyard, so that's and that there is, it [pauses], it seems strange doesn't it, I think that it's only across the water and all of that is happening and like, people do ask, yeah, I've said that already, you know, people do ask you and I think people must be very, very angry with what they saw, and when it's over here it's even worse.

BH: Did you feel uneasy? Did it make, did you find it difficult to try and articulate that?

AG: I, as I said before, I mean, if people are asking me about something I try to explain, and it's when a big thing happens, for example, and my sister reminded me of this as well, she said, this is later on, I don't know the year, my mother when she came to England she got work then in an aircraft factory, which is very strange, because she worked in an aircraft factory during the war, so it was strange that she came here and did that, but, so there was an incident at Chorlton Street bus station where the young soldiers were being transported to a camp in Yorkshire and on the way, on the journey, on the motorway the coach blew up, and that morning when she went into the aircraft factory there were people, whether it was one person or more people, but were absolutely in her face about it, and she was very upset, but she said she stood up, they were in the canteen, she stood up and she told them exactly, you know, her situation and that she is not in any way, you know, she doesn't support these people and all of that, can they not see that there are people who, you know, and that was the, that was I think the only one thing that she ever did because it was so absolutely right at her, first thing in the morning, and she stood up and she gave them a bit of a lesson in what it's really like, so, and there are times when you when you need to say, you know, I'm not of that persuasion.

BH: Yeah, sure.

AG: And so there, you know, you do your best, you do your best and you never ever forget those people, you know, going back strengthens it when you go back each time, that these people are trying to get on with their day and their lives and their children and it could happen to anybody, [01:10:00] you know, there was one incident that really I thought, the one that I think probably got to me the most, and there was, and I cannot remember when it was, it was around the time I was getting married, and there was a bomb in the Abercorn, Abercorn restaurant, and the victims of that, two of them, that I want, would speak about, that was awful, was a girl and her sister and they'd been out to buy the girl's wedding dress, terrible, and I'm sitting there and I'm, you know, I'm about to buy a wedding dress or, you know, I'm in that period of whatever, and that, that I would never forget that, you know, but they're very, very dreadful and, I mean, those girls lived, they were mutilated and that girl got married, you know, and I saw, I remember it on the TV when she got married, you know, so dreadful, dreadful that, yeah.

BH: Yeah, do you have any strong memories of events in England?

AG: In what way?

BH: Just any particular, I suppose really I'm thinking of republican bombs in England itself, do you recall those bombs going off or people's reactions to them?

AG: I mean, of course I remember them, you know, you remember, I remember the Birmingham ones, you know, the Hyde Park and all of that, yeah, I [pauses], you just don't, you just don't know what to say sometimes, no [extended pause], I don't know.

BH: Do you think people in England, did they distinguish between, you know, British and Irish, Catholic and Protestant or did they simply view it as an Irish issue? For example, would they have classified you as Irish or as British?

AG: It's not like, doesn't work like that, I don't think. I will say that this city brings in people and takes, takes them in and they accept them, and I will say that, with one tiny exception, I have never ever had anybody say to me something negative in fifty years, that's, you know, I honestly, honestly, I had one tiny thing with a teenager in my class who thought he was a wee bit clever, well, he wasn't when I, you know, told him, that is the only thing and that was just a boy who didn't understand, so that was resolved quite easily, but I have never had anything said to me at all, and you maybe have heard lots of people that said that awful things happen to them and they did, they did, but I don't know why I had a course around that, and the reason I know about that, and you might want to ask me about my links with the Irish community, because, you know, I, I, I love those people, the, the, the writers and that, you know, they were brilliant, they're brilliant, brilliant, and I feel awful that they have had that, and I have no explanation for that.

BH: Yeah, well, that's kind of what I wanted to ask you about next. So when you moved over here you mentioned the teacher who was really kind to you, who you thought was maybe second-generation Irish.

AG: She was, yes.

BH: Did you have any other interactions with Irish people over here, either Irish from the South or from Northern Ireland?

AG: This is the complete and utter difference. No is the answer to that, absolutely no, and then you must ask why.

BH: Well, yes, yeah.

AG: When you are or were brought up in the Protestant faith, which I am not in any way now, you, we came on the Liverpool boat into Exchange station, which, which used to be here.

BH: I have a picture of it, it's no longer there, yeah.

AG: Right, Exchange station, and got off there, you have nowhere to go in terms of anybody who will know you or who will talk to you or anything, you as a Protestant family are absolutely on your own, because of course, it's wonderful that the network of the Catholic people coming, and they can go straight to mass and meet people, and people who will help them, you know, and they'll get jobs quite often because of that, they go to the clubs, the Irish clubs and they go to the Manchester Irish centre, the heritage centre. We have nobody at all, and it's strange because coming in at that time, you know, '67, there were very few Northern Irish accents, there might have been some more Irish ones, I don't know, but, you know, certainly, we, if we heard, as a family, if we were out or something or you were in a shop or whatever, and you would hear a Belfast accent and you'd think oh my God, but you're not going to go and talk to them, maybe, you know, I don't know, it's very odd, and I didn't realise that till years later, that we were completely and utterly on our own, there was nobody, so, but we went to school, my mother went to work, my father went to work and you build slowly don't you, you know.

BH: Well, that's what I was going to ask. Who were your parents' like, friendship groups? Were they, did they have other people that they made friends with or went out with?

AG: Yes, my mother always made friends with the neighbours, you know, be friendly, go in and out of their houses, not so much here as you would've done at home, but when she got there and when she went to work, that was another thing, you know, and I think that was mostly it, neighbours and, you know, people in the workplace, yeah.

BH: So what about yourself then? I mean, I know already that you became involved and were one of the founding members of the Manchester Irish Writers.

AG: Ah ha, ah ha, yeah.

BH: Can you say a bit about how you sort of gravitated towards that and when that happened?

AG: Yes, it's very straightforward really. I, when I was thirty-five, thirty-six, when I was thirty-six I thought I'd like to do a bit of writing and I had a short story published by, they're here, still here in, the publisher Common World, Common Word publishers in Manchester, and they wanted people's views about their life in the city of Manchester, and I realised that I had a unique, quite a unique, to take to them, you know, as a short story, and they, and it was published.

BH: I'd like to read that.

AG: And I, it was my first day in Manchester, from the moment that I woke up in that house and came into Manchester and whatever, it's semi-biographical, so, and it was published, and then I got quite friendly with the Common Word people and I had another couple of things, that, the other anthologies that they had, and Common Word were very good because they wanted to bring in the people on the outside, so there were lots of people coming in, all, you know, so, you know, sort of African people and all of this, and they realised they didn't have anybody coming in from the Irish community, who did they know who was Irish, only me, so they rang me up and said we've got money from, money from the Allied bank or something like that to do some workshops, will you do some workshops, and of course I, at that time I was, I was teaching then and I said yeah, course I will, yeah, I will, and [01:20:00] we did the six weeks workshops, one week, and the writing was amazing, I just loved it, and then they said it's been so successful we've got another six weeks for you, try and get some more people in, and that's what happened, the end of that, I had met a very, very special lady, Rose Morris, who was at the Irish heritage centre and was a very prominent person there and still is, and she asked me if I would help her to set up a writers' group, and she was a writer herself, and we had this sort of, these people might come from the workshops, and she said please, I said I don't think so, she said please will you not come and do it, it would be great.

BH: You were reluctant to do it at the start?

AG: I, I wasn't, I wasn't really sure if I would do it. I mean, I was very busy and everything as well, you know.

BH: Was it the Irish centre that put you off the idea?

AG: Yeah, it was, the unknown, the strangeness, for sure, but Rose, I remember her saying, I was like this, well, maybe I will, I'm not sure, she said look, she said we've loads and loads of Mayo people in here, she said, but we have to get a Protestant in one at a time, and that's what she said, and I thought really, you want, so will I come in and will it be alright and what will people say, because, I mean, I look the same, you know, but there's things that I don't know and there's things I will say and, you know, and all of that, so when she said [laughs], oh go on then, I'll do it, so that was the start of it and so it's twenty-six years or something going now, I can't remember, so, well, it's, no, 1994, 1994 it was, I remember.

BH: Yeah, and how did that feel then, going to do your first workshop or your first sort of meeting with the other people?

AG: Well, I just took it as, you know, doing a session and whatever like I had at the other ones and that was fine, and I knew some of them from the other place, from Common Word, and we just started out and we wrote and we wrote and we had anthologies and we had performances all the while, all the time, it was very, very, very good and the writing was superb, it was great, and people came in who were really good, really, you know, published and all of that, and we went on with that for, I stayed for twenty years and then I sort of said I was, because then I was retired and I wanted to write novels, so I needed to sort of, you know, I was still friendly with them but, you know, and it was, it was strange.

BH: Yeah, yeah, I was going to ask you, I mean, it's an Irish writers' group so you would expect a theme to be Irish identity. Did taking part in that and being so involved in it, did it have any impact upon your sense of yourself?

AG: Yes, yes, because, I mean, I, we'll maybe come to this later, Irish, Northern Irish, come to England, you're Irish, you know, whatever, it's, we have this kind of strange mix, especially, I felt it, but [pauses] I loved it because I learned such a lot about their lives, you know, and about where they came from and such really interesting things that they wrote about, and the thing is, this is a funny, this is a funny thing, I was thinking about this the other day when you sent me a message, and I thought, you know what, Irish poetry was in Sullivan, not, not the Catholic, but the Protestant [laughs], so we had, we had Louis MacNeice, we had Yeats, you know, we didn't have, you know—

BH: Sean O'Casey.

AG: Exactly, but I got that from Julie Lynch, she took us to all, all the theatres, the Contact theatre when it was amazing, you know, *Shadow of a Gunman*, she took me there, you know, and so I had this, I had this. I also, didn't say before that my father was a kind of folk singer, he sang all the Scottish folk songs, he, he, I mean, he'd go in a bar and play and have a few whiskies, that was it, that's what he did, and he sang all the Irish songs, north, south, he sang them all, you know, so he was very liberal, so I was, had these songs coming up, you know, 'The Rising of the Moon' he'd be singing in the, you know, kitchen and all of that, so I did have some sensitivity I think to that, and when I was sitting the other day and I thought, you know, Sullivan that was that as well, they wanted it because it's good poetry, wonderful poetry, and then of course Seamus Heaney came along, you know, didn't he, and that was just phenomenal and, you know, I taught Seamus Heaney all the time, I always did, even if it was a year seven, you know, up to the ones who were going to do it for their, for their GCSEs, because he's always been on the syllabus.

BH: Sure, so you were teaching him prior to 1994, before you joined the writers' group?

AG: Yes, oh yes, yes, we did, so I did have something of that.

BH: Yeah, so what do you think the works that the writers' groups did then, was it a reawakening, was it a transformation or a confirmation of something?

AG: For me or for everybody?

BH: For you.

AG: For me, it was, I would never have been without it, it was wonderful and it did bring me into the Southern Irish as well, although there were several Northern Irish people, but we never had another Protestant come in.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

AG: I can't remember, Rose might remember, but I don't, you know, what I did was I brought in people from like, we did this, just before Liam's big event with Martin Lynch, we had a big event as well, we got our lottery and all of that, and I brought in the head of drama from the school where I worked, and I brought in a friend, how do I know her, don't know, a friend who's a director, I think that was through another Irish woman that I met at the centre, so, we got, I got people in like that, you know, to try and just lift it all up, yeah.

BH: Sure, yeah, and did you feel accepted in that environment?

AG: Yes, oh yes, yeah, I was, I definitely feel, felt accepted with all the poetry that we were doing and that, and it was just lovely, yeah, and to have the anthologies was very good, yeah.

BH: What about your career then? So you went to grammar school over here, you did your GCSEs presumably and then what happened next, did you go to university, did you, what happened?

AG: What I did as soon as I left in July, with my exams, June and my exams, I went back to Belfast [laughs].

BH: Back to Belfast, right.

AG: Yes, I went back Belfast for another summer, in fact, I stayed until October and they thought I'd left entirely, at the school in Manchester, and in the end I decided to come home, it was quite a big decision.

BH: Decided to come back to Manchester in October, right.

AG: Yes, yeah, cos I was there all summer and, you know.

BH: And you were half thinking that you might stay in Belfast, yeah?

AG: I, I, I wasn't going to stay, I thought I might like it, but I didn't, it, somewhere in here said no, don't. So I had that long, long summer after that, that was good, that was good, yeah, it's just with friends and all of that, you know, [01:30:00] it was good, so [pauses], lost my train of thought there.

BH: And you came back to Manchester.

AG: I came back to Manchester and in October I just walked in the gate, door and said can I do my A-levels [laughs], they said yes.

BH: Right, so you went back to the same school then.

AG: Back to the same school, and the great thing was they didn't have any records, registers for me, so every time it was PE I went to the library and the woman didn't know I existed for two years [laughs], so I just did that and it was good fun, anyway, so.

BH: What did you study at A-level?

AG: English lit-, no, there was only English literature, there was no English language at all at that time, English literature and geography, and then they gave me, I was supposed to have had three, and they gave me something like advanced maths [laughs] or something, or maybe modern maths, it was something sort of maths, and I think I lasted about a month, I couldn't do it, I can't do maths, so I had only two subjects and lots of, and another lot of frees, so it was very lackadaisical actually, so I stayed and I did my A-levels, and now and, and [pauses] now I'm thinking, well, I'm not really, no, everybody's thinking, thinking about university, I'd never been to university, don't know anything about it, don't know what these forms are they're doing, you know, I don't know anything about it. We haven't got money, we sti-, we've never had money in the family, you know, occasionally, yes, yes, occasionally there was ooh something happened and we got some money, but we didn't have a lot of money, and I wanted money, I wanted to work, so then I'm very slow again when I have my A-levels and I don't know what I want to do, and my mother says to me, at this point of course, you know, my brother's a GP, no, not GPO any more, it's a, he's British Telecom now of course, so she says why don't you apply to British Telecom, no, I'm not doing it, I don't want to do that, I don't know what I want to do, so I get then again to the, into October, cos I've had another summer, I can't remember if I went back again, I probably did, actually I did, yes, I did, and then, alright then, I'll write a letter to British Telecom, and I come now into Manchester, two days, I've applied for this thing called an executive officer, sounds brilliant, you know, and they pay really good money, so I get a job in Manchester and I work there then for twelve years.

BH: Right, okay.

AG: And that was great, you know, I had the money and my husband did, we had, he had money, holidays abroad, all of that and everything was going very nicely, and then we decided that we'd start a family, so, and we have a, then I decide that I will leave work and I will look after the child, Adam, so then, then in that time, and then I have another son, Dan, and in that, before Adam was born, I registered at the Open University, so while he was growing up I was doing a degree, and that's when I, you know, that's it really.

BH: And what was your degree, what was it?

AG: At the Open University you choose lots of things and they get combined as arts, but mine were all about literature and the history of, you know, of the literature and all of that, so it was kind of almost history-literature, so that was it, and then, so, so now, where are we

up to, so we're up to now, Dan's born and then that's when I start to write a bit, and then I'm still at home and, oh he's two, and I see an advert for the BBC, and it's very good cos it's only for mornings and it's only for the particular show that is being broadcast from here, so I went for that and got the job and it was Eamonn Holmes and it was called *Open Air*, and every morning I would go down, you know, and do three, no, it was about four and a half hours, come back, pick up the kid, the other one's at school, and so I do that, and I did that for three series and then they move it to Pebble Mill in Birmingham, so I can't, so what do I do, I'm going to be an English teacher [laughs].

BH: I was just wondering, cos you mentioned the classroom before, so where does teaching come into it?

AG: [laughs] So I'm forty, so I'm forty, and I go and train here, Man Metropolitan.

BH: Oh right, yeah.

AG: Yeah, yeah, and so then I'm teaching in high school.

BH: Teaching English, which school did you teach at?

AG: I taught in Ramsbottom, Woodhey High School, yes, it's a big school, well, it's twelve hundred now, yeah, kids, so I was there, and then I was an assist-, I was head of English and I was assistant head, and during the ten years of the last of my teaching I decided that I would, I really ought to write a novel, and so every summer holiday for six weeks I wrote a novel and ten years later I had it, and by that time I'm deciding whether or not I'm going to retire, sent it to Blackstaff, the publishers, and they took it and it absolutely soared. They didn't know what they had because they were all about, but yes, it was Irish because, well, I'll say something more about that later, it was Irish, it was Northern Irish in World War Two, but they didn't realise it was commercial women's fiction, they never mentioned that, they didn't think, they just said oh yeah, this is really nice, you know, and then and then all of a sudden they put it up on Amazon as an e-book and, you know, paperback and there it goes.

BH: And all of your fictional writing has an Irish aspect to it?

AG: Yes, yes, even here, even here, yeah, there's two Manchester books and the third one I'm doing now, but they do, the one, *The Girl in the Pink Raincoat* is all about, you know, whether you're Irish or you're not Irish or you're, you know, you know, there's that kind of thing about it, yeah, yeah, so then I decided that I would retire and did the three books with Blackstaff, and then where do I go, well, a friend, I mean, a really lovely, lovely writer from Armagh, who is quite elderly, I met her at a joint book signing and the next thing she wrote to her London agent and said you need to read these books, how lucky is that, and this, she is the specialist, the main family saga, romance, you know, all Victorian, Edwardian, World War Two, that kind of thing, and so I went to see her and she said yeah, what are you writing now, she wasn't interested in the Irish books, she said what you going to do now, I said I'm going to do Manchester and her eyes lit up, she said there's no Manchester, there aren't any, you know, maybe thirty years ago, you know, Maisie Mosco and the Jewish, yes,

so that was that, and she said I know exactly who wants this book and that was Head of Zeus, so there we go, yeah, I was very, very lucky.

BH: Can you tell me a wee bit about your children? Cos you've mentioned there your two sons. When were they born?

AG: Adam was born in '82 and Dan was born in '87, so I had a bit of a gap there, yeah.

BH: You stayed at home during that time? **[01:40:00]**

AG: During that time, yes, except for the BBC bit, but the funny thing, when I started my PGCE was the same day Dan went to, to primary school, first time [laughs].

BH: So you were both starting a new educational enterprise.

AG: [laughs] Yes, yes, that's right, so that was quite good. I asked them, I asked my boys, I told them I was doing this, and we never had a conversation like that.

BH: Right, so that's what I was going to ask you next you see.

AG: So, and separately, one arrived and then two days later the other one arrived to see us and it was, what's, what about this here, but then they kind of said, then Adam said I think it's really nice that I've got something else, cos he appears to be an Englishman, doesn't he, you know, he's thirty-seven years old, he's an Englishman to anybody, but he said I know that I've got the Northern Ireland with me and I've got memories from when we went over, and the food, you know, the food he talks about and that kind of thing, so, and then he remembered again, he said, he said there's something else, well, he said we always had the Northern Ireland football shirts for the [laughs], for, certainly for the World and the Euros and that, they've had those shirts and they wanted them, and we, we, I didn't say—

BH: They actually wanted these?

AG: They wanted to be it, you know, and then he said, and of course he said, you know, to be honest, he said I know, you know, there's the English team he said, but I always like the Northern Ireland team, you know, so he's really that, and he said as well, he said they're very sporty, and he's, he's, Rory McIlroy, he's really pleased because of course he comes from Holywood, doesn't he [laughs].

BH: He does, that's right, yeah.

AG: So, you, he'll say I'll always look, he watches golf as well, he'll say, you know, I always look at, for him first, that was, that was that, and of course he's had his fill of Van Morrison because that's always been, we've always had that, well, I've always had that in the house, Van Morrison, yeah, so and that, now, Dan went to uni at Newcastle.

BH: Upon Tyne?

AG: Yes, yeah, so he went to Newcastle and when we took him there the first day and got his stuff, you know, all in the place and he was all settled, there wasn't many people around, anyway, we left him and when we got home he rang and he said you'll never believe it, he said there's a whole gang of guys from Northern Ireland and he'd said to them, you know, cos he was in the, he was there and he said oh well, my mother comes from Northern Ireland and from then on they call him the wee man [laughs] cos that was the Larne rugby team, nearly, virtually, you know, so from these big, big rugby players and he's quite slight, you know, so they called him wee man, so he said I got it all, all the time, you know, that kind of thing, so there we are.

BH: So did you—?

AG: And he said the same as Adam, right away, well, he said it's nice to be something else as well, yeah, so they both had that kind of same thing, yeah, yeah.

BH: So did you take them back then to Belfast when they were growing up for holidays and things like that?

AG: We did for a while and then it all went, kind of thing, you know, so they haven't been there, they've, they've had family come ov-, because my family came over as well.

BH: Oh the rest of your family, yeah? Oh goodness.

AG: Sorry, we're going back and forwards [laughs].

BH: Yeah, yeah, sure, yeah.

AG: Yes, so we see, we see them coming back more often, yeah, not my grandmother, she's older of course.

BH: She stayed there did she or what?

AG: They, they, they'd come over for holidays.

BH: Over here for holidays?

AG: Yes, they would come over for holidays, they didn't come, just to stay, well, you know, a week, two weeks that's all and then they'd go back again, my brother comes very occasionally and we go over there to see him, so the boys, I wouldn't say more than ten, no, no, not ten, maybe ten, yeah, maybe ten and six they were, it's a long time since they've been there, yeah, yeah, it was a long time and I, we just, the family themself-, it was busier, we were going on holiday and they were, you know, doing a lot of things and it's, as I say, they did come over a bit, but yeah, yeah.

BH: I suppose at that stage as well going abroad for holidays was becoming much more, much more possible I suppose for people as well.

AG: Yes, yes, now, but what they have done, my sister lives in the States, they've been over there, that's, I think that's what came, as they were in their teens they would quite often go over to, well, my sister lived in New York for thirty years and she's just now moved to Washington, so they would go over and stay there the summer, on Long Beach, you know, it's just wonderful for them.

BH: Yes, nice place, a nice place to be able to go.

AG: But they're a bit upset now because she's gone to Washington, yeah, it's not the same.

BH: Not the same kind of place.

AG: No, it's not at all really, so that's what happened I think, and then we were going away as well.

BH: Okay, so skipping towards the last sort of few sets of questions [pauses]. Do, when the whole Troubles thing ended effectively or at least the peace process, were you conscious of that, was it something that you followed?

AG: Oh gosh absolutely, no, I've had, I followed everything, I'm quite, not in a active way, but I'm quite political, you know, I always, always, the news goes on first, Radio 4, on the news, *Newsnight*, we're all, so I always follow, you know, everything like that.

BH: So throughout these years then, when you were living here—

AG: Oh yes.

BH: You constantly, you would've watched what was happening in Northern Ireland.

AG: Absolutely, every night, every, yeah, yeah, you know, every morning, get up, you know, when I'm making the tea, the *Today* programme, you know [laughs], so.

BH: And do you think your political views changed over the course of your time over here?

AG: I [pauses], I thought, you know, going to the Agreement, but I thought it was just astonishing and wonderful and that people were actually, you know, Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness, for God's sake, I just, I thought it was wonderful that they did that and that they could do it, and Mo Mowlam is just, was just amazing, and how that came together with such good will and, you know, and the strength to push it through, fantastic, fantastic, yeah, so no, I did see it, yeah, yeah, and you could see when there were times when it was, you know, that hadn't arrived, '94, was it, yeah, was it '94, no, it wasn't '94, sorry, that was, it's later than that.

BH: There was a ceasefire in '94.

AG: Yeah, that was it, was it, when those were coming in that was wonderful, you know, that was, yes, yeah, and for the family, you know, even, actually I didn't tell you this, my

sister when she was about seventeen she went back to Belfast and she stayed there and worked there, in a solicitor's office in Rosemary Street.

BH: Right, who did she stay with when she went?

AG: She stayed with the other aunt, Peggy, who married the soldier. He was, he was a Northern Ireland man.

BH: Oh he wasn't a British soldier, he was a—

AG: He, no, he, yes, he was, he was born and bred in Northern Ireland and joined in the late fifties, you know, so he was, he was back then, they came back and, so, but, so she actually went there and stayed and that was at the height of it. She was telling me about where she was, in her, the office where she was with people, it was like, it was a dome, a glass dome, and they sent, she said I don't understand why, but there was a bomb outside that they were going to set off, the, the, detonate it, the soldiers, and they sent one soldier to each person to stand with them, to be with them, they wouldn't take them outside, and she said I've got my own soldier next to me, how strange, and that was the day when she had to walk all the way [01:50:00] from the middle of Belfast to Glengormley, she said it was hours and she had to walk cos there was no, there was no anything, but when I look back on that, how on earth did she go, why did, why did mammy let her go to Belfast as a seventeen year old, we've been, you see what, it's strange how we've gone back and forward, it's very odd, and when I go back to Belfast, you know, as soon as I get there, as soon as I walk out from the plane, the air is different, you know, you go into the town and it's all, it's there, it's, it's my city, but this is my city cos I've been here fifty years [laughs], you know, but it's, I know it all, I know all the streets, I know everywhere, isn't that strange, it's very strange, but, so I've been going back much more frequently now.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

AG: Yes, also, you know, to do with the books and that kind of thing, and coming more, staying more with my brother and his family and cousins, you know, so this is much more recent, this might be since, probably, I would say mostly when I retired, so that's seven years, been back much more frequently.

BH: And what motivated that, apart from obviously the books, was there anything in particular you think that—?

AG: I think we've just got a, you know, as a family, myself and my husband, we've had much more time, you know, to do things and to go and it's no distance, and we say, we say it's only thirty, forty pounds, you know, to go, why don't we go, you know, and, yeah, so that's been nice, yeah, to spend more time with them.

BH: All those years when you were over here and following the political developments in the news, did anybody else in your family take an interest in it or was it or was it just yourself?

AG: Oh no, no, I mean, my husband would be watching it, he's a bit like me, I mean, he's actually in front of the Parliament channel as we speak.

BH: Is that right?

AG: Yes, I'm afraid [laughs], and has been.

BH: You're both quite interested in politics then.

AG: Oh well, I think so, yeah, yeah, yeah, I would say more than the average, so he of course, and he understands, he understands it, and of course he's spoken to the, my other, you know, the relatives and they went to, and they're always very keen, what do you think about this, you know, they ask him a lot of questions, you know.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

AG: Oh yes, how are we perceived, very much so, but then he's one step closer to them than the average person, you know, but people do, are often quite curious, you know.

BH: Yeah, what about all those sort of political groups in Britain itself during those years? Cos there were activist groups and things like Troops Out, even the Irish community had groups, the Irish community in Britain representation group or whatever you call it, who were all very much kind of actively campaigning around the issue of the Troubles. Did you, were you conscious of those people?

AG: In the background, you know, I didn't give them much thought, you know, you can protest and you can say whatever you want cos that's the country we live in and why shouldn't they, and if it's peaceful, you know, people say troops out, well, they did come out, you know, and everybody was happy with that, weren't they, you know, I think people have a right, honestly, and you look around the world, I mean, look at Hong Kong now, you know, and that's not looking good and it's going on and on, and it's such a shame because that was a lovely place and they were very prosperous and, I mean, they still are, but it's confusing for them, isn't it, they haven't got what they want, and that's about rights, but, I mean, that's fair enough, absolutely fair enough, get out and protest if you want to, somebody'll come along, you know, and they will say something different, but I'm not, I wouldn't be one, I'm not in any way active, I'm just, I'm just interested.

BH: Interested. Have your political views on Northern Ireland changed over the course of your time in England?

AG: I don't know, I'll just tell you, this is strange, my third book was edited by a man called Michael Faulkner and I didn't realise that that was the son of Brian Faulkner, and I was writing about Brookeborough and what he did and how it went, I'm talking during the war and the Americans and all of that, and at one point he said to me, cos we, you know, he sends messages back, you know, can we put in something more about this, I don't understand this, anyway, and he comes back to me, you might be interested to know that my mother was Brookborough's private secretary, I'm going bloody hell, do you know, like

that, so, and that was a bit of a, what I was, I was going to say was, you know, things were very, very wrong and I didn't know that when I was there. I didn't know there wasn't one man, one vote and gerrymandering, I didn't know that at all, and it was a while before it all came out and I realised what it was, you know.

BH: How did you find out about that? I mean, when did you become conscious of that?

AG: I mean, I would've known with the civil rights, I would, you know, and it's yeah, yeah, I did know then, I did know then.

BH: I mean, do you think moving to England itself and living here, did that change your perspective? I suppose it's hard to say.

AG: You're getting feedback from your family at times, you know, but they kept their heads down, they weren't, you know, that was it, they got on with the work, with their work and that was it because, I don't know, I'd say one other strange thing I didn't tell you at the beginning, that there's something about else about the family, our family, and that is that my grandparents, my grandparents, yes, no, great-grandparents, my great-grandparents, both of them, no, on my mother, no, both of them, yeah, my great-grandparents were actually Englishmen, they were English and each of them pu-, married an Irish woman for, to, for some strange reason, so there had been in the family this kind of, that there was an English thing there and that came out I think quite often, they often talked about the English grandfathers and that was, you know, it seemed to be woven into the fabric, there were things that were shown that belonged to the English grandfather, you know, that kind of thing, so, kind of-

BH: As a source of pride, like?

AG: I think maybe, and maybe it's just what my boys said, there's something that was different in that family, you know, so that was a strange, that's strange, but I've taken you off the, off the, yes, yeah.

BH: No, no, so I suppose the thing, the obvious thing to ask about next then, peace process, what about the Brexit situation, is that something you've been following, something you've been interested in?

AG: [laughs] Absolutely, on the TV all the time. We were, we were a house divided [laughs], shall we say, but it's nothing, you know, it will happen, you know, and it's interesting, and do you know what, I would say I'm interested in it for the drama.

BH: I think a lot of people are.

AG: I'm stepping back here and I'm just, pffft, you know, just do it or whatever you want, you know, but the drama of it is amazing, you know, I mean, you go back to the peace agreement being signed and all those people in rooms and how they got it done, you know, and going back and forward and all of that, and that was, that was drama, that was really high drama, but the stakes there were so high, you know, and I watched that, and this one,

we watch this one, as I say, on the Parliament channel, is just, but I go in and out all the time and my husband's there all the time, you know.

BH: But what do you think about [02:00:00] the Northern Irish sort of aspect of this, the DUP?

AG: Yes, it's so interesting, isn't it, because the fact that they, they could end up, you know, with so much wealth and, you know, things going on, couldn't they, they could, because they've got this, you know, they've got the thing where they've got it double almost, haven't they, you know, they're saying they'll be better off, that's why the Scots are so angry, the Scots would love to have prosperity and, you know, they can't get it, so that's very strange because they're going to be worse off, the Scots, aren't they. I haven't talked to my Scottish relatives about that [laughs].

BH: [laughs] Unfortunate Scottish relatives.

AG: But yeah, so that was, that's strange really.

BH: What if it led Irish unity in the future?

AG: That's interesting, of course, it's there somewhere, isn't it, it's there somewhere, you know, years ago, we in the North, and I think whether it was Catholic or Protestant, I wouldn't like to say, but in the North we were the powerhouse, we had the money, relatively speaking, you know, the industry and all of that, you know, the shipyard and everything, and we were all like that and it was always said, you know, they'll never combine because we won't, you know, we won't go in as Irish, as Protestants, because it will drain our resources, you know, as a sort of Germany thing as well, you know, you come together, don't you, and that was always thought that it would never happen, but now, these, these young generation they can see that, you know, I don't know the state of the South now after all that, you know, the terrible things and people losing—

BH: It's better than the North anyway, I think.

AG: It is, isn't it, so I don't know, that's the way it will go, it will be for prosperity and the young people will take prosperity, and if they have a good life, and why shouldn't they, and why shouldn't they, you know, but there are always, I'm afraid there will always be a core and they will, you know, want, there will be no surrender.

BH: Yeah, there will always be people who won't accept that.

AG: But the people on the outside, you know, they get on with their lives and for their children's sake they do what they do and that's it, and so who knows, I could see that, maybe not, well, maybe in my lifetime, I don't know, and [pauses] it'll happen. My father used to take us over the border in his car and he would show us all the places there, do you see that.

BH: Going on holidays, like, yeah?

AG: On holiday. We've got a twenty pound note here, we won't come back till it's spent, that's what he used to say and he took us all over Southern Ireland.

BH: Is that right?

AG: Yeah, yeah, places I've never been again, hmm.

BH: I suppose to him, being from Scotland as well, this was, you know, a different place.

AG: It was, it was, I mean, he wanted to see, you know, the, the, where's the Battle of the Boyne, he went to see it, he took us to some, I don't know, some sort of fort, fort.

BH: Is it Drogheda?

AG: Yes, I don't know, you know, I can't remember now, you know, and it's in Drogheda, yes, it would have been, with us as well, and he was very interested in the history of it, yeah, so that's it.

BH: Okay, last few questions then. So looking back over your life, what do you think has been the most important thing as regards growing up in Northern Ireland and moving to England?

AG: What's the most important thing?

BH: What's been the most important thing to you?

AG: [pauses] I have two places that are mine. I have two families, an English family and an Irish family, I might say, you know, when my mother was born she was Irish, you know, you mustn't forget that, so I have [alarm goes off], I have these two wonderful cities and, what can I say, I've been given so many opportunities and whether I would've had that in Northern Ireland, maybe I would because I was in Sullivan [alarm stops], and who would I have been then, but I do not regret it for one moment, not for a moment, and I did say that the twenty years with the Irish writers has been an absolute delight, you know, for friendship and, I don't know, just the opportunities and I've always taken them, and people might say nah, don't do that, but I did, particularly in my career, to say no, I'm going to do this and that's what you've got to do, and similarly, you know, I waited an awful, awful long time to write a novel, but, you know, I, I persevered and I did it, and at the start of it I, even though I was a, you know, an English literature teacher, a language teacher, I couldn't get it at first because it's so big, you know, I could write short stories and poetry and all of that, but, and I could've given up and I didn't, and so I'm glad for that, and I'm glad for my sons because they love it here, you know [pauses], I think that's about it really, they settled here, this is their place, they are Mancunians.

BH: And how would you see your identity now, at this time?

AG: Oh gosh [pauses]. You can't be English. I could be a wee bit Scots, but not really. It's a bit like you can be, you can be all these things because you can in a way be Irish because your family were Irish, you know, I've a great-grandmother from Clones, a McCracken, you know, that's it, so there's the Irish, so sometimes I might say oh I'm Irish, I go away quite a lot, you know, meet people and whatever, but the Northern Ireland is a strength as well and a strength of that is, is family and what they've achieved and what they've done, you know, writing about World War Two, you know, I didn't talk about what they did in World War Two because, you know, they were, they were singers, they were members of ENSA, the whole four, the, the, my mother and her sisters entertained the troops in the barracks and the base, the RAF bases, they were out in the, in the Blitz and all through the war, raising morale in the Grosvenor Hall in Belfast and John Dossers and all these dancehalls, they did all of that, and I know all about that now because I did all my research and I know what they did and I know what they left behind, and to have that, you know, they were Protestant women and they went out there and they did all this, and the hardships of it, you know, is how I feel about my family and, you know, you sort of, I, I, I wanted to say what they were like, who they were.

BH: Right, so it sounds like you're really talking about a distinctive Northern Irish identity.

AG: Yes.

BH: As a distinctive thing.

AG: Yes, yes, but a geographical one possibly, you know, in terms of the Irish mainland, yeah.

BH: Yeah, so where, given what you've been involved with writing about, that place and its people, where is home to you now?

AG: It's very hard to say that, isn't it [pauses], yeah. This is where I am, this is, this is my home, yeah, because I've been here so long, you know, and I'm, but, yes, I would still claim Belfast is as well [laughs].

BH: Is that right?

AG: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think so, I think so, it's a dual thing.

BH: Yeah.

AG: Yeah.

BH: You don't just have one home, you can have more than one.

AG: No, it's like one of these Venn diagrams and, you know, you've got, you've got them all overlapping, you've got the English, you've got the Northern Irish and you've got the [02:10:00] Irish, Southern Irish, but I can't ever be English, I can live here, you know, that's straightforward, isn't it, that's how I see it.

BH: Yeah, sure, so a very final thing to ask. Is there anything I haven't asked, about which I should have asked about, that's important and I've missed it out?

AG: [laughs] I don't think so, no, I don't think so, and I didn't even look at this here, but no, there's, there's nothing there, that's everything, yeah, all of that, yes, yeah, all of that [extended pause], yes. I would just say that I looked at Liam's book, you know, and Moyra Donaldson, and I looked at that last night again because I remembered and I thought it was just so sad. She had a poem in there called 'Exile', do you remember that, and she didn't, she stayed, she didn't go, but her, I think it was her grandfather that came over to Northern Ireland and she was saying that he'd made his life there, but in her growing up during the Troubles, that almost spoiled her childhood, I took it like that, and she lived through the Troubles. I did not really, I got glimpses. I left and came here and so Belfast is crystallised for me, it is what it was, that's why I know the streets and the people and all of that, and so I feel so sorry that she didn't have that, and her growing up was difficult because of the Troubles, and she, she's only one person, she's only one person, but I, absolutely, you know, I was taken immediately out of there and given all of this, and Belfast is still Belfast for me in 1967, you know, and it's just such a sad thing. Okay, I'm quite emotional now [voice breaking].

BH: Listen Ann, thanks very much for doing this today, and for coming down and coming all the way from Bury. I really appreciate you taking the time out to do it and that was fantastic, so thanks very much.

AG: You're very, very welcome Barry [laughs]. It was great craic, wasn't it.

BH: It was great. I'll just make sure I'm not doing anything wrong here.

INTERVIEW ENDS