INTERVIEW M09: JOE LENNON

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interviewee: Joe Lennon
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Transcriber: Naomi Wells

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type.

BH: Right, that's it recording now, so I'm just going to move that closer to you because needs to hear your voice. Okay, so I'm in the Leeds Irish Health and Homes. This is my third interview today. It's now coming up to three thirty p.m. and I'm with, do you prefer to be called Joe or Joseph?

JL: Joe.

BH: Mr Joe Lennon. So before we begin, I just want to say thanks very much for agreeing to do this.

JL: It's a pleasure.

BH: We appreciate it and the fact that you've travelled twenty miles–

JL: That's okay.

BH: To actually come here is great. Before we get into the actual, the oral history questions, I just want to basically get you to introduce yourself for the tape and just say why you're interested in taking part in the project.

JL: Okay, my name's Joe Lennon, I'm sixty-two and I'm a retired psychologist through health reasons. So research, I'm interested in any positive research or fascinating research and I thought this was, and also the fact that I came over to England in 1980 and, from, when the Troubles were at their peak really, and so this is quite interesting and I think will be as much beneficial to me as I think other people, and I hope that it is beneficial to other people because I think it's important that people truly understand, cos I think unless you've been there, I don't think people truly understand, and I think Brexit also, the whole issue about the border, which is always being put out as how they cross the border and the economics of it, and it isn't, it's about the people, and it dares bring back what we've been through, that's worrying, so anything that can be of value to anyone in the future, for whatever reason, to understand better, that's why I've chosen to do it.

BH: Okay, cheers, so you mentioned there that you came over to England in 1980, is that right?

JL: That's right, yeah.

BH: Where did you grow up at in Northern Ireland?

JL: I grew up in Castlewellan in County Down, which is south Down, near the Mournes, born in 1957 and had one of the loveliest childhoods that one could ever imagine, you know, it's a small town, beautiful countryside, lots to do, it's just get out and go and various sports, enjoyed school, and that was always my memories of that, and family and relatives and friends. It was a beautiful place to grow up and there was never any thought of trouble or anything, you'd just sort of a feeling it was more to do with this religious thing, you know. I was brought up Roman Catholic, it was a little nationalist town mainly, as it would be described now, then it probably wasn't, it was I think something like ninety-eight per cent Catholic, so there were never any issues. People didn't resent people because they were Protestant, it was just like, you were curious, you know, you know, why didn't they go to mass every Sunday and take holy communion, there's only one truly apostolic church, that sort of thing was put into your head, you know, so yeah, so, so that was it and I wouldn't, you know, I can't add much, I had a great group of friends, it was just lovely.

BH: What did your parents do?

JL: Right, my father was a retailer and had a grocery shop. He, Castlewellan comes under parish of Kilmegan, which is the sort of ancient name of the parish, and there's a place a few miles away which is Aughlisnafin, and both my mother and father lived, were born about a mile apart.

BH: Is that right?

JL: Yeah, so that was it, interestingly he's told me a story, they've both passed now, and they lived to quite, very ripe old age, but he told me that he wasn't very far away from heading to New York.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JL: Yeah, and I forget what it was that changed his mind at the last minute, and then of course then he married my mother, but the families all knew each other.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JL: Yeah, so it was, they didn't venture very far and he worked his way up as an apprentice through retail, and my mother was training as a nurse and went over to Scotland to train in nursing, as did her sisters, so they both came from relatively big families.

BH: Were these farming families?

JL: They were farming families, yeah, and then basically by the time I was born he'd a grocer's shop on the main street in Castlewellan, which was basically quite a busy little market town, population of about, at that time probably about two thousand, it's probably about three and a half thousand, thirteen pubs [laughs]. My father never drank in his life.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JL: Well, they had this, the thing was being a pioneer, which you abstain, and a lot of men and women would do that, choose that in that faith and–

BH: Were they strictly religious?

JL: Yes, they were deeply religious to the point of, you know, even from here, the first thing my mother would say, did you go to mass today, if it was a Sunday morning phone call, you know, that sort of thing, and then that caused you to lie which made it even worse [laughs], and so I was brought up, I was altar boy, all sorts of things, brought up through it, and it was great. Then 1968 was when I was leaving primary school and then moved on to a boarding school in Belfast.

BH: Right, so you went to primary school then literally right up until the year the Troubles really begin to start.

JL: Exactly, exactly.

BH: So then you went to a boarding school, which is a relatively unusual thing presumably for a boy from Castlewellan or not, like.

JL: My other brothers had done that.

BH: Had done this, right, okay.

JL: Yeah, and so they had all taken, because they're running a shop and a grocer's shop and like, for example, my father delivered, you know, it's relatively a modern thing, was for people of my age, shops delivering now to your home, supermarkets, it's a relatively new thing, and he was doing it in the 1960s, people would phone up, they would take their orders and each day he would do a sort of a locality around Castlewellan, and they would go, he would go out, deliver the groceries and they would get whatever, you know, so it was quite a busy life and like, Saturday nights they were open till ten o'clock at night, that was the standard.

BH: Is that right?

JL: Yeah, because people would come in–

BH: Was there a bar in the shop as well?

JL: No, no, no, no, no, no way, he wouldn't have coped with a bar, no, he would never've allowed that, yeah, so most of, well, all of us were sent in turn to this boarding college, St Malachy's, it's deemed the oldest college I think in the North of Ireland.

BH: And was that unusual, cos I'm, you know, were there other high schools around, you know, the town?

JL: Yes, yes, but I think my mother was one of these people that thought well, it was big in Ireland anyway, if you can get through, you know, academia's the way out, education's the way out, because of course growing up as a child I wasn't sure whether I'd ever be able to allowed to vote, there was that point of it. I couldn't have joined the civil service, things like that, it never dawned on me so much, but basically there was a form of apartheid in this state, in a way. But I think the shock for me was I wasn't the right person to be going to boar-, child to be going to a boarding school.

BH: Why was that?

JL: I was a homeboy, you know, I loved home, I loved my friends, I was, you know, I don't think any of my other brothers liked it particularly, and it was, that was it, I just, from day one I wanted to get home and I deliberately didn't work because I thought well, if I fail, cos I did very well to get the scholarship with the eleven-plus and stuff, and it was like two years of hell because St Malachy's College had a, it was the bottom of the Antrim Road, so it was surrounded by housing that was broadly a Protestant estate, certain housing. It had the Crumlin Road prison, **[00:10:00]** it had a convent, which was the hospital, and then it had an army base, and what was left were the streets of the estate, so going from that, the Troubles flared up then and things like bottles used to be thrown over the wall because they knew it was a Catholic college, in the hope, I just, what on earth is this, you know, it was, it was quite a shock.

BH: Well, I was going to say, I mean, growing up in a small rural town effectively, virtually a hundred per cent Catholic, and you've moved at the age of eleven presumably–

JL: Yes, yes, yes.

BH: To boarding school, situated at, beside of Crumlin jail, that must've been–

JL: I mean, we used the Falls Road baths and the reason the baths were used, because it was the Falls Road, it was just nice in this area, but you had to cross the bottom of the Shankill Road to get there, with your uniform on, and it wasn't like you went as a group or a class, you had to go to this learning to swim things, and we'd be chased by lads with knives, because they'd see the uniform, and we were told not to, don't, you know, wear your uniform with pride, well, I mean, we were chased by a group of boys with knives [laughs], you know, we were eleven, twelve years old. You didn't get home at weekends, you got home at Christmas and at Easter and summer. I think there was once they let us home for Halloween I think, but you didn't get that and, you know, with being a distance away and with my parents having, my, my father was very involved in the GAA, at that time it was the GAA, Gaelic Athletic Association, which it still is, and he used to like, go round with, to

various events and he had loudspeakers, he was very interested in electronic equipment and all that sort of thing and messing about with televisions and stuff, so he would go, and a very big Gaelic man, he was very much into that, he actually played for County Down when he was younger and he was very much into that, he was a fluent Irish speaker and so he was very much into the whole Irish culture, and so Sundays were when all the GAA was on, so it was hard to get, my mother sometimes would get a bus down on Saturdays and that, so it was, you know, the lads that were there were good, but it just I hated it, I hated every minute of it, and then there was a dodgy priest as well. It's something I won't go into in depth, but that wasn't nice, it wasn't seriously, it, it was like, sexual abuse, but it wasn't serious, but it was very demeaning and very, so that was all happening and yet you couldn't have told anyone, this is a priest.

BH: Right, you couldn't say this to your parents?

JL: Oh this is a priest, oh good Lord no, you know, priests and doctors could never do such a thing, that sort of attitude, you know, so I couldn't do it and also even if I did I knew it would devastate them, and there were other boys as well, so it wasn't, they wouldn't say anything either, cos also part of it was, it's under this guise of taking you down to his room for sex education, so that was happening as well, so you had the Troubles, you had all of that.

BH: You had that as well, yeah.

JL: So 1970 they realised I shouldn't be there anymore and I went to the grammar school in Downpatrick, but it was too late really to catch up academically.

BH: Okay, how did they realise at that stage that it wasn't the right place for you?

JL: Well, a lad who went to the same boarding school with my brother had become a priest and he was placed there, would you believe they had a dean of discipline and all that dean was, dean would do was hand out discipline, and the dean that was previously was the one that was taking boys down to his rooms and things, so this new dean said it's not working for him, so he was a friend of my brother and therefore his mother was a friend of my parents, and he said he's better out of here, it's not working for him, he's not, and he saw that, you know. I mean, I've some interesting memories, there's no doubt about that, and I've still friends who went there. Unfortunately, that's another thing now when we think about it, I look at the, the *Collegian* was their annual magazine, you know, you've all the photographs of all the students, and I think out of that student of twenty-eight, I think there's ten dead and I think eight died as direct cause, out of one class, direct cause of the Troubles, which is quite sad.

BH: Is that right?

JL: Because it wasn't a complete boarding school, there were very few boarders, it was mainly day, but yeah.

BH: Yeah, I was going to ask you, what was the interactions like between the people who just came in during the day, like? Did you know, did you make friends with those kids, like?

JL: The ones in your class you would, you know, they were good lads, they were good, you know, you'd get a bit of stick about being a culchie, that sort of thing, you know. Boarders were seen almost like, as second rate, even though like, obviously we must have had some money if we were staying at a boarding school, you know, we were seen as, and you used to have to pay, you'd pay the money to go down, get you something from the shops, we weren't even allowed down to the shops, we weren't, you know, and so, no, look, that was okay, but you were sort of quickly picking up what was really going on out there, that Belfast wasn't a good place, things were going wrong, just from what they were saying, you know.

BH: And would they have been, themselves, drawn from like, the Falls Road area or would they have come from–?

JL: Falls Road, Andersonstown.

BH: Or south Belfast or–?

JL: They'd probably come from all over because it had a quite a reputation, the college, you know, it sounds snobbery, but it really isn't, it was, like–

BH: A top-class school, yeah.

JL: A sort of high, top-class grammar school and was always renowned for that, you know. Unfortunately they educated Eamonn Holmes and, but fortunately Martin O'Neill, the senior, and then I forget there's a Hol-, what do they call the Hollywood actor, Northern Irish, anyway, so there were various people came out of it, had become famous, but that's not anything to do with like, that side of it.

BH: So this was really I suppose then your first encounter with I suppose like, overt sectarianism then, when you moved to there, or had you encountered similar kinds of things back in Castlewellan?

JL: Not really, not, not, because, as I say, I'd left before it really started, but then when I came back to Castlewellan it was a different ball game because, and I think this is often underestimated, cos people think of the Troubles in life and the Troubles as, you know, Belfast, Derry, maybe Newry to an extent, Newry had a, but a lot of the rural towns, particularly nationalist towns, were under pressure and were dangerous places to be, and difficult, and in some ways, in some ways more, because you're easilier targeted and picked out, it was easier to, you know, and it was also easier for the military or police to pick on you. One is the police knew who you were, they knew everything about you, it's easier to sort of hide in the population of a city or whatever, whether it's the Falls Road, Andersonstown, Short Strand, whatever, but here it was very much and there was, you know, after, because when I then moved to grammar school in Downpatrick, which was ten miles from home, I travelled on the bus everyday, it then became, I remember we walked out when internment was announced and I actually came a photograph of, which I've got here, I'll show you afterwards, of soldiers and police lining the street with shields and batons and whatever, and that was an illegal march in Castlewellan against internment, but

it was deemed illegal, and the photographs of them, and I was standing there to the left of that, and that photograph was very, very powerful. It's been put in a book that's a recording of the parish of Kilmegan, which I mentioned at the start, about the whole history of that area, so there's some brilliant stuff and it's in the post now, I can't wait to get it tomorrow. So there was me then coming back, in a way protected in the college, cos you weren't, you weren't, you know, to suddenly, I remember the Twelfth of July parade, which was being held in the town.

BH: In Castlewellan?

JL: Yeah, which is ludicrous, ninety eight per cent Cath- and there there were these sort of thirty, forty bands marching through the town, and as young teenage lads we were being harassed by, **[00:20:00]** you know, the police, the RUC, and them saying, you know, ah so you must be little young Fenians then, are you not joining in, and you felt that, you felt that bullying, we're thirteen, you know, and fourteen, and that sort of thing.

BH: And was that new at that stage, you know, that kind of hostility, was that something that–?

JL: The hostility, there was never ev-, I never felt that, and certainly my father, cos my father was involved with Sinn Féin, he was an out-and-out republican because of, you know, he never was a violent man, involved that way, so it was very much that political side of it, and he would have killed any of us if we spoke out against someone for their religion or, you know, for him it was purely, the British are in our country and they shouldn't be here, and this should be part of Ireland, that was his attitude, I totally respect that, I think people can have that attitude, people say no, I'm British, I want to be, that's their attitude, but this sort of thing was no, they were, you know, the problem was that each Orange Order in different towns would host, you know, like different countries host the World Cup or the Olympics, they would go round–

BH: A different town every year.

JL: So yeah, maybe five or six towns in County Down and this was one, but to have it there was a, was a provocation. What was interesting was that there was a pub, none of the pu-, all the pubs closed because they didn't want them, they didn't, you know, not even so much for bias, they didn't want trouble, but one, it was like a pop-up pub, opened for the day, and it was called the Last–

BH: Pop-up pub.

JL: Yeah, it was called the Last Chance Saloon, that's what they called it, and they opened it up for the day and it made an absolute killing. What they didn't know was that the owner was, the family were very republican and indeed their son, who unfortunately was shot dead as a leader of the IRA, was, you know, and they were paying all this money and it was quite ironic really, it was quite, you know, so there were lots of funny issues, there was one pub, maybe, in the town you wouldn't go into it because it was, it was certainly loyalist, it wasn't just, whereas other pubs would have been mixed, Protestant, Catholic, course mainly

Catholic cos of the population, but there was obviously a pub that was, people thought things were happening and working out because there were assassinations and–

BH: Well, you mentioned there about that photograph, and that was a photograph of a march against internment.

JL: Yeah.

BH: Was it in 1971 or something like that?

JL: Yes.

BH: So you would have been quite young at that stage, you would have been, you're a teenager anyway.

JL: Oh yes.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

JL: I remember we mar-, we left, left the school to go and join a march in Downpatrick on the morning it was announced, turned out we were the only class to get up and went out for it, the rest of them all stayed behind [laughs].

BH: Is that right?

JL: So yeah, but they wouldn't have punished us I think because it was, you know, it was something that was horrendous at that time.

BH: Sure, I'm just wondering like, as you were sort of getting older did you become more politically conscious or had you always had some understanding of politics before that?

JL: [pauses] Not really before that. All I thought was, you know, yep, united Ireland's the only answer, that's it and, you know, the Protestants have got it wrong, we got it right, that's all I thought, I was not, and it, that wasn't sort of shoved down my throat, but it was always around cos you know, you grow up, whatever, you're influenced by your parents, my, my–

BH: And that's what everybody else thought as well presumably, like.

JL: Yes, oh in that area, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, absolutely, but then of course as the Troubles grew that emphasis grew, I mean, it was quite interesting cos I [pauses] was sort of moving on a bit, that sort of developed and things that, and it's, there's another thing about being in England. People will say, you know, openly say it to you, oh the IRA are scum and, I, these are people I know and respect and I don't want to say yeah, but I was told to get off the street you dirty bastard, you know, by your soldiers, in uniform, and if someone, it was interesting, I was sitting on a bench, and probably about sixteen at this time and somebody's approaching, and they came and they said move along Paddy, that was the

word, and so I got up off one bench and moved to the next bench. It was slightly provocative but, you know, it was my town, I was actually born on that street, I wasn't born in hospital, I was born on that street, and then he, you know, I thought I told you to move on, I says I did, I moved from there to here, and he said what I meant of, meant was you're dirtying the street, you Paddy bastard, get off it, and that was deliberate, and I saw them shout at young girls, ten, what they would do to them sexually and everything, it was disgusting, it was filthy, and it was deliberate, you know, and that hurt, and at that time I suppose, if I'd been asked did I want to sign up I possibly might have, but deep down I was, I always was and always have been like, a pacifist, you know, I, I always struggled with the idea of guns. I can actually understand why they're armed resistance and I, I can understand that.

BH: Did you know other people who did become involved?

JL: Oh yes, yes, yeah, everybody knew bar the police [laughs]. It was like, to try and sum up how that happened was, people used to get their poitín, right, now poitín's illegal moonshine, and at that time, the milk, there was a milkman, not being a gender issue, there was a milkman and he would deliver what we call mineral, which is like, lemonade, as well as milk, but he was also the delivery person for the poitín, so poitín was brought by the milkman and they could never find out how people were getting this illegal moonshine, it was all done, you know, and it was that sort of same thing, of course we knew who they were, they were all dressed in black [laughs], a bit like yourself, black shirt, black trousers, and they would all be there and you'd go, you know, that's them, that's it and, you know, looking back, and bombs used to go off on a, for a while on a Tuesday night, cos that's the night they met in the pub, so they would blow up something. Now nobody was ever killed in this sense, they would just blow up, because they, the ludicrous thing was they would blow up a building and say well, right, it's going to be brought back on insurance, they would warn, people'd be out, whatever, I mean, it was dangerous stuff, I don't condone it now, and we'd be standing up the street and watch a bomb go off down the street and the whiff was quite horrendous, and you knew it was Tuesday evening, approximately eight o'clock, and then it would to, you know, to confuse the police and the forces they would move it to a Thursday, and you'd know where they'd be, and you didn't know the specific person who did it, and I remember having a suspect bomb thrown at me by a friend who thought it was very funny. They'd seen this box with wires sticking out of it and he thought here, catch this, and what I didn't know was he'd actually looked in it and realised it wasn't a bomb, and here was this wired thing going, and threw it at us, and we're going, you know, and that was a strange norm, but, you know, as you're growing up, if a car came up slowly behind you, it's a bit like, I do understand the fear that women may have if some, you know, and that was weird, I had that feeling, cos there'd be cars coming slowly up because there were people assassinated around where I was.

BH: And this was loyalist assassinations.

JL: Yes, yeah, yeah. I mean, there were one or two soldiers killed about a mile down the road from a landmine, and I think there was one killed in the town itself, but there were certainly, and there was that lad from the IRA that was shot, who I knew, I actually knew quite well, and of course the big issue was, and this was what people were saying, it was

like, you know, terrorist shot dead by the, and he was actually running along from his house, running away, and they said he'd a gun and people knew he didn't have a gun and things like that, so the truth was happening, but you had what everyone's saying in the media was something totally different, that was really hurtful because, you know, and I think then as I sort of got to sixteen, seventeen, I wanted to help change things, and we'd formed a youth club, I mean, though at sixteen or seventeen it was quite young to form a youth club–

BH: It was, I was going to say, I mean, yeah.

JL: But the kids needed something, they needed normality, they needed, cos they were being harassed on the streets, they were being, you know, and I remember it was the eve of St Patrick's Day, and this time I'd probably reached about eighteen at this time, as the youth leader, and they had walked in, foot patrol, and had walked around, this was a St Patrick's eve disco, you know, most of the kids were twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, and they just went, you, out, you, out, and they dragged the older lads out, and then they placed them up against the wall outside, the youth club, at the side, **[00:30:00]** and I came down and I said you're okay boys, they can't do anything to you, they've, you know, they've no legitimacy whatsoever to do anything, so don't be afraid, you know, there weren't any of the lads crying or anything, but I was just making sure they knew I was there. Next minute I was slammed, my head against the wall with a brick in my face, and it was this abuse, don't you dare, and interestingly an officer suddenly appeared and said get down now, leave these lads alone, it was like, suddenly it was, they'd got out of control and away from their officers, so there was also this hang on a minute, you know, this lack of discipline. That sort of thing was happening, and then you'd maybe have foot patrol and suddenly there's a sniper and you're, you know, where's that coming from, and there'd be shooting backwards and forwards, so you had all of that happening on a very regular basis and, you know, you were having friends who'd suddenly disappear for two or three days and they'd been interrogated for weeks and–

BH: So is this frightening, this, or was this something which was just exciting at that age, or was it–?

JL: No, it wasn't, the bomb things were a bit exciting, but this idea of like, you know, the day after the incident was St Patrick's Day, and I'd gone to mass and I was coming out from mass with a mate. We'd crossed the road and the square and this soldier put us up against the wall, and I realised this was the soldier who'd held a brick to my face, and he came to me and he said listen, he said I'm going to get you down an alleyway and I'm going to put a bullet in the back of your head and they'll blame the loyalists, he said I'm watching for you, and that was really scary, and that was like, here's a man, you know, it's a legitimate army, you know, and he's telling me, and they were the Duke of Lancaster, called themselves the Dukes, they thought it was quite funny and they'd graffiti all over the place, 'Dukes Rule' and all that, you know, it's like, this is, that's the stuff I didn't like and that's, and the problem I was having was I was trying to stop myself ever, you know, being involved in an armed struggle or whatever, cos I thought that youth work was the way through, and yet I'm saying this and I'm feeling this, and interestingly six weeks later I was driving through Newry heading down to Dublin, and I pulled up to this junction and there was that same soldier, with the Parachute Regiment hat on him, and he looked and he put his thumb up at

me, I managed to give him the fingers, so we'd realised, so he had actually been planted in, and that suddenly was–

BH: Ah right, yeah, yeah.

JL: Like, what's going on here, there's more to, you know, this isn't just a soldier force coming in trying to keep the peace or doing, this is nastier and this isn't nice, this isn't, and I'm saying this as being unbiased, this is what I witnessed, you know. I'd seen other bastards that were involved in the IRA, you know, I knew they were bastards and I thought ach, they're just doing it for, you know, but what, and then shortly after I think that incident, because it was sort of coming, getting worse and worse and worse, you know.

BH: Mm hmm. You were still at school, at the youth club, you were still at school, in your GCSE years.

JL: Well, I was, yeah, sixteen, seventeen I was dossing about school, pretending to be at school and stuff and, you know, I was a bright enough lad, but it wasn't really, it was waiting the time to have to get a job or whatever, you know, so at this time, yes, I probably–

BH: GCSEs?

JL: No, I would've just left, yeah, I ended up with maths and English O-levels, that was it. I actually did, I passed maths three times, just to redo it for something to do [laughs], I learned how to play, how to gamble, was really good, and I passed English language once and failed it the second time [laughs], it was just, we were, it was a group of lads and we just thought yeah, it's fair enough, it's like time out, you know, people take time out, we were taking time out after the Gs, so, we were probably signing on then and doing a bit of drinking up the park and the Forest Park, cos there was a massive Forest Park, but–

BH: I mean, was this not unusual in your particular context, in that, you know, your parents had sent you to St Malachy's, a high achieving school, and then you went to the grammar school, and it sounded like your mum would've had probably ideas of you becoming, I don't know, a doctor or something like that?

JL: No, I think they knew when I'd left the boarding school, cos I told you, if you remember, I deliberately crashed, I thought I'm not doing this, I'm not–

BH: So they had accepted that at this stage that you weren't–

JL: They had sort of accepted this as let's see what's going to happen and, you know, and we'll see, what will be will be, sort of thing, they knew I was bright enough, they knew, and I think they believed that at least I cared about things, that was, and that was a value to them, you know, you know, I had another brother and he was, you know, training in catering and stuff like that, cos, you know, he, like me, decided he wouldn't–

BH: He didn't want to do it either?

JL: He didn't want to do all the whatever, but then the three previous brothers, and then shortly after the incident we were, I was I think about eighteen, nineteen then, and we'd been out drinking and we went up to, there's four large squares, Castlewellan, it was actually designed by a French designer for the lord of the manor and stuff, so it's quite a pretty town, and we went up to go and get some Chinese, slightly tipsy and stuff as you would be on a Saturday night, and a lad came running over, I'm not going to mention his name, his name would be in the papers or whatever, but he came running over and he said have you seen my brother, and we said yeah, we've just been talking to him, he's literally, and they live a mile just out the road, it's a easy way out, and he said he's just gone, literally five minutes, he said oh I'll try and catch him, and the next morning he was found in a ditch and, and I'll be ruthless here and tell the truth, he was, according to his family, he'd cigarette burns all over his body and he'd been castrated–

BH: You're joking me.

JL: And shot in the back of the head, and that, and that to me was like, oh my God, that really brought that very closeness of what had happened to him, and the people knew who it was, cos remember we also knew who the, you know, I said, ah yeah, I knew who was in the IRA and who was whatever, the whole town did, you know, but also you knew who was involved in the UVF or those.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JL: The thing was they were also involved in the Uls-, they were in the Ulster Defence Regiment, which of course was a British Army regiment, by local, set up by a local, you know, so, and they weren't being charged, they weren't being charged, and people knew.

BH: So this, this was a frightening, a–

JL: That was a horrendous feeling, you know, it was, and there was that sort of like, awful tragedy as how, cos it was a personal experience, it was like, you know, phew. Shortly after that then one of my brothers took his own life and I attribute that to, he'd suffered chronic mental health, health problems for a while, but that was living and working in Belfast, he was too gentle for it all, and it was all, and I attribute that, and that's something that people do not see, in the Troubles, the amount of people that end up taking their own lives cos they can't cope with everything that's going on around them, and I remember he was, you know, I talked about us as young lads being chased with knives, he had been beaten up, just, you know, by, you know, people, so, the, yeah, there was all of that, and I think I remember sitting with a mate and I said I'm, I'm going to go, I'm going to. I had a brother that's studying over here and his mate was studying over here. I had a bit of money, I'd worked in Belfast for two years in the, in the benefits office.

BH: So this was after you finished your GCSEs?

JL: Yes, yes, and you were allowed to work in the civil service then, you were allowed, and that was an experience, cos you'd some very strange people coming in to the benefits office [laughs]. It's like, depending on who they were, if they'd lost their giro they got it straight

away if, you know [laughs], cos you wouldn't, they'd, I know where you live, and it was like, you know, alright, there you are [laughs], it's not my money, it's the government's, but do you see what I mean, and there was the story I mentioned to you before about it being an incident centre for people who would phone in, particularly the IRA would phone in with a bomb warning, give a code word, and I heard the guy talking about tips on horses, this guy phoning up, ah there'll be a bomb in such and such, there was that whole side of it, it was all ludicrous, it was all–

BH: Yeah, it sounds surreal, like.

JL: It was all crazy, and some of the things like, I told you some of the tragedies there that happened in Castlewellan. I remember one night we were being put up against the wall and there was, you know, young squaddies and you could see they were shaking, you know, we had nothing, we were, you know, young lads, eighteen, nineteen, whatever, so we were all up against the wall. What's your name, you know, what's your name, and then it would be, came to me **[00:40:00]** and said, you know, what are you doing, well, this was my time out I was just telling you about, you know, I was just dossing about, quite happily picking up dole money, you know, it was British money as far as I was concerned [laughs], I was like, you know, and enjoying life for a while, and I said oh I'm between jobs, as you say, and he says oh you mean you're a lazy Fenian bastard, that was all what he said, and I said no, I'm between jobs, he says well, you could get a job in the army, why don't you get a job in the army, and I said cos I've got O-levels, I'm too intelligent, and it didn't go down very well, but the bloke next to me was even funnier, and he said what's your name, and he told him his name and he says where do you live, and he just went, see that road there, he says as you go along that road, the further you go, the harder they are, I live in the last house, and you can see this young soldier, you know, it's like [laughs], he's trembling at the thought, you know, the harder they get, which means tougher they get, I live in the last house, so there was that sort of comeback and it was almost, you almost felt sorry, they, here were young lads, you know, on about, what were they doing here, you know, it's reflected my outlook on war ever since, you know, and sending young men and women to fight battles you've no need to be in, you know, that sort of thing, so in that sense it helped me in future to think about things, you know, but–

BH: But you said after that year out you moved in to Belfast then, to work in the civil service, yeah?

JL: Yeah, yeah.

BH: So was that something that you had planned to do or what–?

JL: It was all I had.

BH: Or was it just about getting a job?

JL: It was, they were throwing jobs at Catholics then for, because, you know, something needed doing, cos the Troubles had been going so long, well, hang on a minute, so that

would have been about what, 1976, whatever, and that, I hated the travelling and I sort of hated the job, but it was quite–

BH: You travelled in every day?

JL: Yeah, yeah, every day, yeah, there was, I mean, they talk, a scheme, this is car sharing, everybody car shared, you know, and you gave money to the driver and whatever and that was, and we had only one, two tapes, Glen Campbell and Bob Dylan, we had that for two years, that stuff, so, and you were with your mates, that was hilarious, I mean, it was really good, and what was interesting was, where I learned was, people were, of both faiths, I mean, that was, there was an odd person who may be Jewish or whatever, but it wasn't, there wasn't much outside of the Protestant, Catholic, but, and when they were working together we were all together, then you go out into different communities, it's like, so it, I sort of thought give people work, give them education, they'll be alright, they'll be alright, they don't need all this, you know, so it filled me and that's when I decided then, after my brother had taken his life and I decided I'll come over and, for a holiday time and for a couple of weeks, came over, had a great time, I could say whoever I, be whoever I wanted, I could fly whatever flag I wanted and nobody would care, they, it really didn't matter, and I had experienced that when I used to come over to watch Manchester United, I just suddenly, this country's wonderful, it's like, you know, and people would ask oh you're from Ireland, it was like, quite friendly, it was quite, instead of having to be wary about where you were and where you were going and what you were doing, and then, that was just before Christmas in '79, then 1980 I said right, I'll give it a go for a couple of years, and I was only over here a short time, got a job on a media project, trying to, at that time like, local radio was basically news, weather, celebrities, that was it, there was no link with community, as you know, now it's all about the show, community activities, you know, *Children in Need*'s even an example of like, how that's on a massive basis, so, so I ended up working because of my background, and I think that was quite easy for me because if you're doing youth work in the middle of the Troubles, you know, back in the North of Ireland, they want you to be in there because they think, oh right, you know, this is some-, it was almost like, a, certainly in social work and, and youth and community work or community development work, Irish people were quite popular to get in because they must've seen a lot and done a lot, you know.

BH: In terms, just going back there to whenever you moved over in 1980, what would have been the main motivations? What were the factors that kind of, you know, provoked you to decide right, I'm going to go?

JL: I was sick of what I was seeing. I was sick of this narrow-mindedness. I was sick of seeing what was happening and I felt crushed, I felt, and I needed something bigger and brighter and, you know, I had seen hatred on both sides, but I also, I felt like I was being compressed in and wasn't able to let go, get out and whatever, I wasn't able to do that, and I needed to try something, and I remember sitting in the local pub, I mean, the thing is they were all local pubs, I mean, I remember it was one night, the landlord said I'm away to a dance in Dundalk which, with, the owner, so he said there's the keys, lock up when you're going, this was like, about midnight, and we sat there, we paid for every drink, and we sat there one night, and one of the boys says you're always talking about going, you'll never go, and it was

like, a few months later I decided to go. Now the owner came back about three hours later and says it's no good, and we had enough drink to daylight, it was like, you know, that was the way of it, you know, it was great, so they're wonderful memories, I mean, I could, I've stories coming out of my ears about what went on in the pubs. There was one other incident actually where I was, which actually led to it in a big way, because of the work I was doing, the youth work, and trying to do that, we'd got training and all that sort of stuff, it was deemed as a big thing over there, and there was a young lad that these local hoods basically were picking on and I went over to them and I said, you know, you do that again, you leave him alone, cos he was a lovely lad and because he was dating, he was from another town, cos he was dating one of the local girls they were like, trying to be, and I said leave him alone, and then I think two nights later, there's a brick came through the pub window, we were sitting in the pub, and we went out, saw these lads, it was them, running up the street, and me and three other mates ran after them, mainly to identify them, we weren't actually violent type, we weren't, but we went up around the corner and it was a dark entry and they were waiting for us, they ambushed us and I was beaten unconscious, kicked under a car, and they were claiming to be in the IRA and everything, and see I knew who was, they weren't, and a couple of nights later I was on crutches, face badly beaten, I'd been in hospital, and I went up to see one of the friends who was with me who I knew was in [laughs], he was in the IRA [laughs], and was talking to him in the house, we heard these bangs outside and came out of the house, looked up the street, and guys in balaclavas jumping in a car and shooting at, police had turned up and it was like, a bit of a gun battle going on, then they disappeared, and I found out that these thugs that had jumped myself and the other lad, they'd jumped out of a car, ran up to them, aimed the guns at their faces, shot over their heads and says you do that again and it won't be above your heads, so it was sort of illegal justice and part of me, and I don't, didn't agreed with that type of thing, but part of me agreed with that, if you see what I mean.

BH: Yeah.

JL: You know, and it was happening all the time in Belfast, we hadn't seen, and it was sort of strange cos these boys suddenly gave me a lot of respect [laughs], I had nothing to do with it, it's like, people going oh it's him, look or whatever [laughs], think they thought I was a godfather or some-, it wasn't, it was more to do I think with they were shouting the name, we are, and that was bad publicity, and, as I say, one of the lads was with us was, and it sort of went to there, so that sort of thing was going on. Another time I was banged against the head, I got my head split open for doing youth work, one of the friends of these guys later on, and they'd used him, he was an idiot, so I was getting personal injuries out of doing youth work.

BH: Doing youth work, yeah.

JL: So all of that was just like, you get that from that soldier and you'd get that, and you're just watching it, and it was horrendous to see good people being smothered, and I just felt no, I need to leave this and, yeah, so I came over here and came back and I could be whoever I wanted to be, that's what I felt, and then, as I said, I got a fascinating job, you know, working with local radio, and interestingly, I think I may have mentioned it at the start, that because of my accent they wanted me to do voiceovers, you know, **[00:50:00]** I

mean, Leeds at that time, this area was very colloquial, you know, yes there were people who had come from other countries, that what I would say were parts of the colonies that had come back, you know, so around Leeds there would be a lot of people that would've come from the West Indies or India, Pakistan or whatever, you got that, but really it's still quite colloquial and the people, the white population here didn't seem to move much, it's like, you know, so anybody that was on radio had a what they call the BBC accent, they all sounded the same, sort of middle-class, posh BBC accents, and I ended up working with this bloke who was quite keen, we got young bands together and then they would come in and talk about politics and meet the politicians and actually have a go at the politicians, you know. A nuclear alarm went off, for example, in, by accident in Wakefield, so the young Wakefield people would come in, they'd have a local band playing in the studio and they would fire, why were we thinking, we've, you know, three minutes to live and all that sort of stuff and, you know, we didn't even know there was one, you know, this sort of thing, so it was quite interesting and I think that came from me, coming from what I'd been to really think this is where, the answer's with, with young people, which I believe is what should be happening in the country now, you know, that sort of attitude, so–

BH: I mean, you said there a minute ago, you came over here and you felt free all of a sudden, in the sense of you no longer had to worry about any of these incidents or any of this intimidation or these threats to yourself when you came to England.

JL: Yes.

BH: So was that liberating then, to not have to negotiate that on a daily basis?

JL: It was, I mean, I remember, it would have been January and March, sitting in a pub not far from here, in Leeds, and over the table we had an Irish tricolour on St Patrick's Day, and people were queuing up to join us and come around, you know, were saying right, we're all Irish for the day and English people they were loving it. It was almost, it was a different thing, and yet the Troubles were still going on, but it was quite strange cos the Troubles didn't seem to affect people here in their attitudes, that was a strange thing, I was surprised by it, I thought they'd all, it wasn't, you know, and also because, you know, people say oh you're from Ireland, what part of Ireland are you from, so there wasn't that really, that–

BH: Is this, cos it's quite a strange thing which on the one hand you're growing up in Castlewellan and there's a British soldier who's, you know, physically intimidating you, and then you go to England and everybody's alright. That's a strange kind of thing, isn't it, like?

JL: It sort of shocked me. I think because I knew, you know, I believe I was quite bright and I was quite, and I was always keen to see broader than what, you know, I mean, I mentioned earlier we took the piss out of these young squaddies cos we could take the piss out of them, you know, these were young lads, nothing left maybe in their lives, not all of them but, you know, it's a bit, but they were, and this was a way out of their life, you know, and we were able to destroy that by, you know, at home people tend to be quite sharp, quite fast, quite articulate, quite, you know, so I'd seen this wasn't the norm, whereas when I'd been over as a boy to Old Trafford–

BH: Yeah, ah of course, cos you'd been here before to watch the football matches, right?

JL: Yeah, and suddenly, you know, it was, it might've been influenced by we were sitting in a café once after a game, and we were leaving and there was a note from one of the waitresses saying here's my phone number, ring me up and I thought, and it was obviously the accent, for me it couldn't have been about the looks that [laughs], but there was something to do with that, so, but no, but in general I felt at ease, and I think also I think because people heard the accent they weren't, and hence that's probably why it worked on the radio, and then I end up doing, you know, a show in the afternoon along with this other guy, and it was specifically about my accent, it was like, and my laidback attitude, you know. Some days if I couldn't make it I would ring in and say I'm not coming in today, I'm sick, and he would say what are you sick of, what is it, I'm sick of you, I'm sick of the radio station, I'm just sick, I can't be bothered and it was that, and people hadn't, you know, so it was a play on the Irishness almost that was quite interesting. Never stupid, shrewd, but liked to play the game, you know, as if, you know, that sort of thing, and to interrupt the programme when he's on live as if, you know, I've got to tune this piano and then we'd stick on some brilliant pianist and you'd hear all this brill-, people believed I could play the piano brilliantly, so it was like, playing on that, so it was quite nice because it wasn't laughing at me being Irish, it was like, hang on [laughs], there's more to these people than you think, which was quite interesting. But I think things started to change, I mean, at that time you would cope with the Irish jokes, that was fairly standard, things, the Falklands war came along, things started to change, but even before the Falklands war, I mean, one, possibly the most prejudice was from people, Irish people who were from south of the border.

BH: Well, I was going to ask you like, whenever you moved over, first of all who did you, did you come over with anybody else from Belfast or Castlewellan?

JL: Well, no, I, my brother had been over, he was at a, well, it was a polytechnic here, it's now a university, so he was here, and another mate from Castlewellan was at the uni here.

BH: Ah right, okay.

JL: So I had come over, stayed with them for a couple of weeks, went back at Christmas and then I took them back to the university and we got a house between us, so basically there was this little Castlewellan conclave in Leeds.

BH: Well, that's what I was going to ask, why in particular did you go to Leeds?

JL: Yes, sorry.

BH: So it was because you knew people already there, yeah?

JL: I've got another brother living here, who had been working here, so it was an easy way without thinking this is too big a risk, you know, and that sort of thing and, yeah, and it was like a trial run.

BH: And did, would they, whenever they were living over here, was it mostly other Irish or Northern Irish people they were with or did they have friends from Leeds and things like that?

JL: Oh no, no, no, no, it was, because they were at university they would be, well, yes, there was a close sort of Irish, and interestingly from Portadown, which is quite a loyalist area.

BH: Sure, yeah, yeah.

JL: And it was, but everyone was Irish, that was something I couldn't understand, hang on, what, you mean you're Irish, it was, you know, and I was, I thought at that time if you take everybody from the North of Ireland out, take them away for a few months, plant them in different parts, and then send them back it would be over tomorrow, because from the outside looking in we all knew, even though we were mixed rel-, but no there was a wider and, you know, they had local friends, we met local lads from the pub and whatever, we were quite amenable and I think they enjoyed it, you know, it was a bit different to them, that having someone like that. The worst part was supporting Manchester United in Leeds, Leeds supporters detest Manchester United, you know, that was a joke like, but what was hard was hearing people talk about what was going over there that I knew wasn't true, you know, it's like, you know, our poor boys are out there and they're against this scum and this whatever and, yeah, there are scum, but they're not all poor, wee boys, you know, and it was that sort of thing and that's, I found I didn't want to speak up about because the odd time I did it almost caused a fight. So you had to be careful what to say, you know, and then, you know, we wouldn't go to the Irish centre, we went a couple of times because people'd come up to you and say oh you're from the black North, and the black North, black was related to strong Protestantism, and that's all they would say, so you're identified in Ireland as the black North, and they thought we were going to cause trouble–

BH: Yeah, because the–

JL: When effectively it was mainly them that caused any fights, we wouldn't do anything.

BH: I was interested to know about that because the last thing that I studied was, you know, postwar Southern migration to England which, especially around Leeds I suppose, was mostly Mayo, west of Ireland.

JL: Oh yes, Mayo's massive here, yeah.

BH: And these guys, a lot of them builders and things and so on, construction workers, and they established that whole network of pubs and Irish centres and clubs.

JL: That's right.

BH: And I was wondering whether, could people from the North who came over at that time, sixties, seventies, eighties, could they go to those clubs and use them or did they kind of feel apart from them?

JL: Where we are now, this was the area of the pubs, of Irish pubs, they were all around here, because it focused in from Harehills and around Chapeltown and what was quite interesting, I felt much more at ease with people who were from, maybe they descended or were first- or second-generation Caribbean or Asian, didn't see as many Asian people, and there was also a mu-, **[01:00:00]** almost a mutual respect, you know, and so that was much easier cos, you know, we're literally across the road from the West Indian centre and, you know, I got married just about five hundred yards from here, so, and people go, oh you're living in Chapeltown, you know, a mainly black area, one of the best places I've ever lived in my life, felt at home and so that was easy, but the Irish pubs weren't quite so bad once you were in because they were owned by or run by an Irish landlord would be, but they'd watch you more to start with.

BH: Is that because of your accent?

JL: Yes, yes, and then, I think if I put it in perspective, it's a bit like, you hear people say we were in a pub and suddenly Travellers came in or whatever, which tends to be that sort of Romany Irish accent type thing, and there's going to be trouble, that's the way it was for us.

BH: Is that right?

JL: That sort of feeling, that they thought, and we actually I suppose felt we would go out of our way to make sure that they knew that fairly quickly, and suddenly they realised we were, and actually we were a group of, you know, I can't say the word, you know, everybody, certainly everybody from round where I came from would all be nice, we weren't nice, but we enjoyed ourselves, got, never got in trouble. But when I was in Castlewellan the group I was always with never ever got into trouble, we were mad, we were insane, we'd do stupid things, but never ever get into fights or trouble, so that was the way I came through all of that, and I think that was the case for a lot of people over there because they were watching trouble around them and, you know, I'm talking about the people who used to wear the all black who you knew were there, these came across as decent people. I never saw them fighting, never saw, you know, a fight would happen, be a fight, a fight, you know, just a fight, you know, that's alright.

BH: I'm wondering as well about, you know, the conservatism of maybe some of those older, Southern Irish communities, sort of church-based, socially conservative in general. Were they kind of, you know, suspicious of, you know, radical republicanism and things like that? Was that something that maybe they, that they, they didn't want that here kind of thing, like, or–?

JL: Yes, that might've been that and that certainly did come from the older guys, you know. Younger guys that came over couldn't give a, you know, they wanted, I mean, at that age as well we were all out for a good time, we were all out for that. I think, now I mentioned the Falklands and I remember one incident, and it was an awful incident in the sense there was nobody hurt, but in my memory, and we'd gone to a bar in the centre of Leeds, and we were sitting, two Leeds fellas and three of us were Irish, and we were sitting talking, and this guy was in the bar himself and we were, and actually I was with a brother, and he knew, cos he worked in the catering, he knew the owner or certainly the landlord of this, it was like a

wine bar rather than, and there was nobody else in apart from, and we were having laughs and chats and whatever, and somebody mentioned about, you know, one of the English lads, about back, you know, in Northern Ireland whatever, and I think one of them had been over to Castlewellan that sort of thing, and we were chatting, talking, and this guy sitting at the bar said I've just come back from the Falklands, I served out in the Falklands, I don't want to be sitting here with this Irish, IRA scum, and the landlord asked us to leave.

BH: Is that right?

JL: Mm hmm, five of us, him, just because of the accents, and he had been out there, now that made me really angry cos I thought, you know, he was painting a picture, I've been out there, I've been a hero. It is sad again that he had to be out there in the navy, but I also saw what his comrades had been doing, you know, his colleagues or whatever you call them had been doing, so, you know, that made me really–

BH: At the time did you protest to the barman, did you say, did you–?

JL: Yeah, and he said no, no, no, you've got to leave, you've got to leave, you know, and we said well, actually I think I said something I think that might've been provocative, maybe deliberately provocative, cos we hadn't been drinking, I mean, we weren't mad, we weren't, and I just said I feel sorry for you that you're deciding to ask us to leave and leaving him here when he said those things about us, yeah, no, we didn't have a go at him at all, and there was that feeling of if that's the way you feel that's, which is the way I now feel about anyone who's racist and openly racist, particularly in today's politics, I feel sorry, these people have missed out on life or they're stupid, but it's not really stupid, I think they've just been conditioned. I was conditioned, in a sense, you know, we all are.

BH: I mean, it sounds like the English attitudes to the Troubles over here, they're complicated, like. On the one hand they can join in a St Patrick's Day parade or they can be completely oblivious, what you were saying when you arrived, you expected you were almost, you know, waiting for something, but there wasn't.

JL: Yes.

BH: But then there's other contexts or occasions when what you just described there, where actually you bring up the issue of, you know, British soldiers and their attitudes can change. It sounds like it's not straightforward, you know.

JL: No, it isn't straightforward, it is very complicated and, I mean, some people would say, I remember an incident where I met this, he was a sort of a guru counsellor, he did these courses and, you know, in depth sort of Rogerian counselling, you know, and I remember someone saying to me, you know, if you've got hairs in your belly button and it's not bothering you why don't you just leave it there, and they would want to know, no, we need to get those hairs out whether they're bothering you or not, that sort of person, and I met him and I was working, doing community work for Barnardo's at this stage, we've sort of moved on, but I'll come back, it's just this incident, and he came up to me and he said well, we were introduced and it was like, and where are you from, and I said Ireland, he said near

Belfast, I said yeah, I'm so sorry, and I looked at him and says why, everything that's going on there, I said I loved most of it and I'd go back tomorrow, but God don't feel sorry for me, but he felt, and I thought, and that was a key moment, it was like, what, you're just, how dare you, that was almost worse than what the soldier said, how dare you say you're sorry for me, I don't need that, you know, and so there are those attitudes. So, as I said, this time then I'd done the radio work and I'd met sort of lots of famous people, all sorts, it was all a bit sort of pretentious then, and we had achieved what we did in the project and whatever, and I ended up working in a homeless day centre for homeless people and that was quite fascinating. It was a, it wasn't a dry centre, so they were allowed to come in with drink and the ideas we would try, we could get them to basically a rehab unit here and then moving-on house, and that was with a shelter here, where it's interesting that the man in charge of the building we're in worked with me, alongside, we were colleagues, his wife worked there and my wife worked there, so we all–

BH: You all met then.

JL: [laughs] Yeah, we all met, it's lovely, and we're still the best of friends, that's nineteen, oh we're going 1983, and I had a serious injury in 1984, I seriously injured my back and I've never recovered from that.

BH: What was, how did that happen?

JL: There was a, it was quite interesting because I enjoyed that work, partly also because unfortunately a high percentage of them were Irish or Scottish.

BH: Yeah, you mean majority of homeless?

JL: So the majority were of the, yes, the homeless, were, particularly the two main sort of Celtic countries, nations, and I think, for me part of that relates to this depth of feeling for your home, and I mean your country, and that depth and depth of feeling when you're away, and there's a different style of living over here, it's you get on with your life, yes, you've friends, you whatever, but it's, you know, we would almost like, talk about nothing at any time and about everything at any time and do whatever, and the culture here, not wrongly, is different.

BH: Yeah, it is, of course, yeah.

JL: It's like, you know, when we have time, when we have space we talk, and it has to be done in such a way, and I think a lot of that damage to a lot of people, **[01:10:00]** also maybe even the type of work they were in and, you know, let's be fair, Scotland and Ireland are more drinking nations than maybe England, England have a different route, and I remember it was like, the one noticeable thing was that in Ireland people would quite happily drink whiskey and beer at the same time, the same in Scotland I noticed, whereas in England people would go out, this is the night we go out and this is, you know, it's not even necessarily the drink, it was more of like, a sudden binge type if you're going out the weekend sort of, so the culture was quite different I think, that cultural difference, people would feel maybe isolated or lonely, and, as you said, you know, there's a lot of sort of

labouring manual labour jobs going, and people came over, and I know, and I still have a friend works in London, his wife and family are still at home, and he goes home every six or seven weeks, cos that's where the money is, and he's like, in the building trade, you know. So there were a lot in there, but that's probably where my growing up and my background helped make it easier, because I could relate to them, even the Scottish guys, you know, there was this, you know, and, you know, I think the thing at homeless is they tend to give, you know, you'd have, you know, Halifax Harry and Huddersfield Pete and, you know, Dublin Danny and all that sort of things, they would always add, you know, and I think they called me Irish Joe, that was, you know, cos I was one of the Irish members of staff, and the guy that runs here his parents are Irish, so he could, you know, there was that, I'm not saying we were better, but there was that affiliation and understanding.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

JL: So what happened was this guy had basically been physically violent with his partner, they were both drug users and abused alcohol, and she had black eyes and whatever, and she was a bit of a wild character, he was a quiet character, but it was obvious he had, and she was being, trying to sort a place of safety for her, a shelter where she could go and be safe. Now we had a sort of a, it was a minibus with long side seats rather than a minibus, was, because we would have to take someone in if they were very drunk and sit them down to take them onto the detox unit, whatever, and this was an alternative to police picking up, and we were taking her and it was, interestingly I was with who is now my wife, who was working there, and she'd been looking after this girl, and I was just watching him, he was pouncing up and down, and we got her into the minibus and he, outside the building, again it's not far from here, and he decided he was going to kill himself by smashing his fist through a car window, I'm going to cut my wrists, I'm going to cut my wrists. So I stepped out, we had personal alarm systems cos it's a quite dangerous place to work, you know, and almost that was part of the adrenaline, it was like, you asked earlier well, you know, was there any sort of form of adrenaline or excitement or whatever, this had an excitement because you were doing good, it had that excitement, that danger, but you were actually doing good, you know what I mean, and he had tried to do this, he couldn't smash the windows, so I just took him to restrain his, his arms, and other people running around, looking, cos they were looking, this was out the front, and we managed to get him inside the door of the building and he decided he was going to split his head open with a, so he banged his head on the wall, and all I did was catch the base of my back on a little bit of metal staircase, and I'm now, well, that was [pauses] April the twelfth 1986.

BH: Is that right?

JL: And four years ago I was using a wheelchair, it just deteriorated, went downhill and I've a back full of metal now, and it was interesting was he didn't mean it, you know, I was able to put the little sort of sticky stitches on and send him off to hospital, but what hurt was then I would go, and Helen'd become my girlfriend at the time, and I would go and wait for her outside the building cos I wasn't allowed in the building, I'd received a letter, I wasn't allowed inside the building cos I was an insurance risk, cos I had spent six weeks in hospital, therefore if anything happened to me in there, and there I could see this guy coming and going as he pleased, and after that it made me think about people need to be looked after in

work and whatever. I then went on, did a professional qualification in youth and community work at Bradford and Ilkley, and I'd moved on into Barnardo's. It was strange because the fact that I was Irish also, there were young care leavers who were sixteen to eighteen, they were all fascinated about, and it would be quite interesting, some of them would start to get a bit difficult, one of them'd say do you know he's from Belfast, you know, don't, and it would actually [laughs] quieten them down, so I'd never say no, no, no, no, no. But that influence was always there for me and, you know, I'd come across, I was luckier than a lot of people, you know, I think a lot of people came over here and found it maybe tougher, but I remember hearing about the last killing I think in, I think it was the last killing, or certainly close to, before Good Friday Agreement, was in Castlewellan and it was a boy basically aged sixteen, and he was, so I was over here, and he was picked up, exactly the same as happened to that friend of mine, the same happened, tortured and they end up throwing him in a slurry hole and, it's, I know the people who did that and they're actually identified in a recent documentary on the Loughinisland shootings in *No Stone Unturned*, which is something very, if anyone wants to understand what it's like, the way I've described things, watch *No Stone Unturned*, I don't know whether it's on Prime Video or Netflix, and it's a genuine documentary about how dirty things were, and that made me cry when I heard about that, I didn't know that lad, sixteen, and they picked him up, just to prove a point, you know. When the Good Friday Agreement was signed that day I broke down and cried, and it was one of the most cherished days of my life, and that's still, I still get very emotional, I still get very, very emotional about, when I hear things being lied about over there or, and, I mean, the other day it was like, I'd walk in, everyone going ach would you look, here comes the leprechaun, I'd just go oh God is that the best you can say, you know, and that sort of thing, but those, you know, it's, you know, I very much believe in equality and, you know, people are saying oh it's political correctness gone mad, without political correctness this'd be a very dangerous world, yeah, sometimes things are just taken, but then that's our perspective, I don't know if they're taken too far cos I'm not one person, you know, I am me, you are you, that's the way I try and think now. But I think sometimes it makes me get angry when I see people on the news and know that this is not true because I've lived through it, you know, and when I had signed up with that job, when I came over here I was a member of the NUJ, and I remember a journalist saying we were banned from doing anything, getting over here, that's why people were, that's why they weren't bothered that I was Irish, I didn't know, I thought they would hate me, but the only time it was bad news when there were any bombings over here, interesting, when there were bombings over here it didn't seem to make any difference, in the sense of how people saw us, it was them, it wasn't you, it wasn't, you know, and it, you know, it was, the most thing you'd probably get is people say I love your accent, that was when I decide to slow it down enough of course, you know.

BH: What you were saying there about that sense of equality, I mean, you made a career over here, really, in social work, well, not social work–

JL: Yes, social work, youth work, yeah.

BH: Community work, youth work, I mean, did that originate out of the work that you had done back in Castlewellan? Is that how you fell into it?

JL: That was the, yes, that was the grounding–

BH: That was the grounding.

JL: You know, and I had basic training over there, and I realised that was where I wanted to be because, you know, like, the young lads been hanged up out, or lined up, I mean, they're all grandparents now, I think, but lined up against the wall and, you know, I had taken that brick in the face, but at least I knew they were safe. Now I didn't want that brick in the face and I don't want that again, **[01:20:00]** and I, you know, no one deserves that. The way I see it is that that was something that opened my eyes to something, and then the incident about me threatened to be shot in the back of the head, I don't know if that ever would have happened, but what it makes me think is they go, oh this boy was murdered by, you know, and I think when I saw that documentary *No Stone Unturned*, I know some of the people, I know that pub, it was, you know, I knew the owners of that pub and whatever, and to see what happened, and watching World Cup and being gunned down, and then the people were still walking around and they, they'd been named, and the, you know, all of that was going on locally in my town, those were the cover-ups, you know, and that was very much about living in a smaller local area, you knew the cover-ups, you knew who was going whatever, you know, whereas it's much worse living in, you know, borderline areas in Belfast and whatever, it was much worse, but they would come in, assassinate and go out. But the thing for me was that it's given me an insight into how wars are carried out and what's really going on, and I struggle with Help for Heroes, I struggle with that because hang on a minute, you know, so, and I see it in the news everyday, I see all of that all the time and, you know, it's coming up, I don't want young people being taken. The thing is they're being sent out to die because some politician decides they want oil or they want power or they want, but this is better and they're just, and that's still happening, and it's unfortunately happening now, but I don't like all this glory stuff there, you know, cos I saw another side of it and in a sense it was very dirty, it was very, so.

BH: So, I mean, is that a legacy of your experience of the early Troubles then, that it's in some way shaped your career choices over here–

JL: Oh yes.

BH: And the things that you've done? Yeah, yeah.

JL: I mean, I mean, that just, you know, the youth work was partly great fun, you know, we enjoyed, we were a group of mates, cos it's a small town, they did it and whatever, there's another group of lads they would do the Scouts, you know, it was, you know, that was sort of, but I think it was everything around it, it was about, you know, social justice, and I go over and I love it, I know there's still problems, I tell you what though, what was interesting, when I first came over here I was more afraid of going out here on a Saturday night or Friday night in Leeds than I was of going out in Belfast, and people couldn't understand that, cos I knew I was safe in Belfast, you're not going to get beaten up in the street or whatever, but here you would, you know, because there were certain, you know, women over there, I'm not saying it didn't happen, were less likely to get raped because you'd want the police to catch you, you know, again, that was that under-, I didn't believe in this kangaroo justice,

but sometimes you just thought well, at least sometimes it's per-, it wasn't protecting the right people, but, you know , so yeah, and over here there was as many killings going on here, if not more, but it wasn't, you know.

BH: Reported in the same way?

JL: Yeah.

BH: Whenever you were, had moved over here then, and you were settling, did you continue to go back to Northern Ireland?

JL: Oh a lot because [pauses] I loved the place, I still love it, I was back in July, but then as my parents got older we'd go back quite a lot, three or four times a year, because my father died about ten years ago and he lived till the age of ninety-nine and a half, and they were all joking that's because he didn't want the Queen's telegram, but–

BH: What did your parents say about you moving over at that time?

JL: They knew I was up to a lot of things over there, not illegal, not but, but, you know, we were drinking, I'd go missing for two or three days and I'd end up on the other end of County Cork or something to do or whatever, so I was, and that sort of worried them because of the Troubles, there's an interesting point, what parents don't know, you know, if it's happening over here it's like, God, you know, he's gone up to the Lakes for a while, he's got, no, we haven't heard from him, you know, and things like that, and I'd be out, going, and that was a fear, and that wasn't like, you know, here maybe you've more fear of your daughter if she doesn't come home, that sort of thing, this was, and I didn't realise that that was upsetting for them, so I think they were probably, knew, ah well, he's away, he's alright, he's better out of it.

BH: So they actually thought, they weren't saying no, don't go, don't go, it wasn't a bad thing, like?

JL: Well, well, they knew, there was a brother already over here and another one studying here, so it wasn't, you know, and then I would go back and see them and it was great and, you know, it was, that was always nice and that was always good. I did, right, I nearly left the biggest thing out of my life. When I was over here one of my very, very best friend, and it was sort of weird because as you were saying, it's, no, I suppose it ties in with what we're saying, I would go over and the problem you'd go over is, you'd go over, I'll go in for a drink and then somebody'd come in, you know, ah Joe, you're back, here take a pint, and then somebody else, hi Joe, and then it ends up with, you know, a session, it would be, and I remember the mate who had actually ended up in the bar, late, threw me the keys and whatever, and he said, you know, he said, he had said to me no, you should go away, I'd come down, he, we live fairly close to, as a matter of fact I lived just at the back of his house, but you had to split roads to go down, ours was a cul de sac, and we were both quite drunk and he just threw his arms around me, he says Joe, you're better where you are and always remember I love you, and that was it, and a few weeks after that he lay down in the middle of the road and let a car run over him. People had said because he kept being brought, what

they call, they were lifted, lifted meant they were taken by police or army, and he kept being lifted and taken. He did die just before Christmas, cos his father died naturally quite a few years before, at Christmas, so Christmas was a rough time for him and he did suffer from bouts of depression, but that night he said, you know, I love you, he put, threw arms around me whatever and it was like, whatever. Now when that happened that broke me in a big way. I'd lost a brother and I again, it's directly linked into, and I went over and I was just absolutely distraught, more than when I'd lost my brother, probably because I knew my brother had been ill for a long time and almost it was, I'd watched my parents suffer through that and almost, you know, it ended his pain, it ended, but for my other friend it wasn't like that, and [pauses] when I had, not long after that, I'd been with this girl and she decided to split up with me, it was nothing, you know, and I went out and cut my wrists and I ended up six weeks in a mental institution.

BH: Over here, is it?

JL: Over here, yeah. I never told my parents cos it would have destroyed them, my brothers knew, and that was just all those bits, and a psychiatrist, actually I thought he described it very well, he was saying, you know, if I sat here and put my foot on that chair and you started hanging different weights over it, you know, it doesn't matter what weight at the end, one of them will snap your leg, and that's the same about stresses and little stresses, and that's what happened eventually. The split with this girlfriend just snapped all of that. So what I've learnt, so I nearly left that out and that was a big one, but that in a sense made me learn and give me more understanding of how people can really be and really feel before they break and they snap, you know, and it can happen to anyone, it doesn't matter what, so it gives me an insight and, as I say, when I'd injured myself, I had, I think since 1986 I've had twenty-four, twenty-five various surgeries, you know, I've metal in my back, I've gone through all of that, I've gone through hell, I've worked, after I had to retire from work, as I say, I'd worked for Barnardo's which is a wonderful organisation, compared to the other organisations that treated me [indecipherable]. So I retired through ill health, but then went on, did a degree in psychology, cos this is me going back to, I dossed about when was younger deliberately, can I actually do it, got that degree, I was in my late fifties, no, I don't know, late forties, and then went on to Hull to try and do a masters in occupational psychology. I didn't want to go into clinical or anything like that, it's really for young people anyway, but because I'd, no, I'd done all that, I'd done, you know, child protection, worked with young people who were suffering, and then, **[01:30:00]** interesting I'd seen young people suffer here and through years of abuse, and it was like, the same psychological damage as other young people where I'd come from, somewhere, it was just a different form and, you know, so perhaps then I'd also a better understanding of that, and then I went on, I couldn't finish the masters, and it's quite interesting, I struggled to get people to do research [coughs], cos I was researching into the physical and psychological facts of being on call [coughs], sorry I'm struggling there now.

BH: Take a drink.

JL: Yeah, I'll take it out of this [pauses for drink], because I used to be on call with Barnardo's and we literally had a house just here somewhere, just down, and they were given to young people and they shared a house, you can imagine what they're like, they'd left care, they'd

do whatever, but they couldn't budget, they couldn't, so I was on call out, it was almost I'd prefer to have been called out than not called out because you're waiting for it, so the whole thing about like, that you'd wasted a whole weekend and you felt, you know, whereas you're called out at three in the morning, I remember being called out to a shooting, it's funny enough [laughs], at three in the morning someone tried, cos these young girls refused to do what these blokes were wanting them to do and they put a pot shot through the window, and I'm saying, you know, what am I doing at this hour of the night, but I had a buzz, that was almost taking me back to, the other wasn't, the other was like, destructive, this wasn't, this was I was trying to do something, yeah, so then I couldn't quite finish the, so I was doing that research and it's a struggle to get people, particularly this type of thing, it was more a qualitative than quantitative and, but, they give me, I passed all the exams and everything and also, so I had a professional certificate, that's all, I know I could do it, that's not the issue, and then I had major surgery that got me from mainly being in a wheelchair to within three weeks being able to walk five miles, so that was a massive change, and I'd been on massive doses of morphine as well, so all of that, you know. I can be fiery, it's quite, I think you get away with it, one as a sixty-two-year-old man and the other is being Irish with red hair, it's just like, they say oh he's just a fiery old Irishman, I say aye that's right, you know, you sort of think, I can, quite calm in many situations, but when I let go I, you know, you'll know I let go, that sort of thing, you know.

BH: What about, cos you mentioned meeting your wife or at least she was your girlfriend back then whenever you were, 1984, 1985. You got married then, presumably at some point.

JL: Yeah, I've–

BH: Is that right or–?

JL: Yes.

BH: Or is it a different, different person?

JL: Oh no, no, no, no, it's still, it's still the same, it, it, it, we dated the night of the incident when I hurt my back, yeah, and it was hard because she had a boyfriend, I didn't, but we went out that night and my chat-up line to stay [laughs] behind was do you fancy listening to a bit of Irish music [laughs], and that was the thing, and then the flat we had, we used to have friends playing Irish music in a local pub, and again, we know all these people, they were second-generation, they were all English, but Irish descent, and I remember in that flat one night there was a lad, there was, he was the only English lad, there was four of us, we had separate rooms, it was called a cluster flat, and he came in one Sunday night and he says will you turn the bloody music down, and he looked and there's a little live band in the [indecipherable], I said you turn it down, so he gave up and joined us, you know, and that was lovely, that side of it all was great, so she just didn't do it, we, you know, we, you know, I'd, I'd seen her and thought this is great, so we got married then about, that was 1990, so 1986, four years, and she was there everyday I was in hospital for six weeks when I first went in, and I thought what are you doing, what are you doing coming here to see me, and it was obviously, you know, yeah, and–

BH: Is she of Irish background herself, is she?

JL: Yeah, she, I think she has three grandparents Irish and one Welsh.

BH: Okay.

JL: It was interesting seeing the, how her and my father interacted.

BH: Well, this is what I was going to ask because it's, even though her grandparents have Irish backgrounds, she's brought up in England presumably, like.

JL: Oh yeah, yeah.

BH: Yeah, so I'm just wondering what her perception of–?

JL: Oh she–

BH: The Northern Irish background is?

JL: Yeah, she deliberately also wound me up about being Irish, often, you know, and would do that cos she knew it was, but, well, my father, so there were five sons that married, cos one had died, one married a Spanish girl, another an American girl and three English girls. He treated every last one as if they were his own, cos it was never down to people, it was never, but she, her and him were born on the same date, obviously not the same year, same, you know, in December, so he had a little affection for her, and she would wind up and say so what are you going to do about these soldiers then, sure they're doing no harm, and he would go now, now, now, now, now, you know, and that was a lovely thing, and I think perhaps the other daughters-in-law wouldn't do that because, you know, so she would take that and whether that's, her father was Irish, her father was, you know, and so whether or not that was, and her surname was, I'm not going to mention her, but her surname was a very, very sort of important Irish surname, especially in the North, couldn't have been, you can't get more important, you know, I'll tell you after the tape's over.

BH: Right, okay.

JL: And she had great fun laughing, he had great fun, her winding him up and, you know, like, this here, and he sort of thought the world of her, but she, there was a couple of points that she made, when I first brought her over, when we were going out, cos there was an issue there about us living together, that was a big issue.

BH: This is a religious issue more than a–

JL: Yes, and of course when we were at home we never had the same room, that wasn't, you know, but my father sent us a note and he said I don't agree with what you're doing, but I love the both of you and I wish you the best and whatever's best for you is good for enough for me, and I thought that was a massive thing to do and, yeah, so, so she, one thing

that sort of, there were two funny things that she pointed out. One was when we went over the first time she came out and met my friends, it was a Christmas Eve night and it was in the bar, there was a bar, it had been our local, in fact, I had worked in this bar, so I had worked in bars through, you know, my time, I loved that again, but, and it was a Christmas Eve night, you can imagine in a pub [knock on door], and she'd met all of my mates and they're all totally accepting of her, there wasn't an issue, it was never an issue, you know [interview interrupted; person enters room to say closing time is approaching].

BH: No worries, no problem.

JL: We're just coming to the end, but, so, this will end it quite well, and it was, I said to her well, what do you think of that last night, and she said it was like being on the stage and in the middle of a farce with all the actors, players [laughs], but instead of sitting in the audience I was on the stage with everybody, she said it was brilliant. But one other thing she noticed was she found it really strange that there you had this, all these, you know, walking up the main street and the different shop fronts, and there were only one group of people that stood out, and that was these people wearing green camouflage [laughs], bright pink, white paint, and she said how ludicrous was that, you know, and she thought it was really stupid, she thought that was funny, and that sort of in a way summed the whole thing up for me, about, you know, this is ludicrous, you're walking around with all this, and possibly why it never ended because you can't deal with, you know, the shop you're walking past, maybe the boy behind the counter's one of your enemies, you know, so that summed it up, so looking behind it's all en-, en-, I think it's enriched, and other people over here might find it tougher, whatever, I didn't as such, they were moments, but I didn't as such.

BH: Because we're out of time I'm just going to ask like, one or two just last, final, general questions.

JL: That's alright.

BH: Well, there's loads of other things I would like to ask you, but I think we're going to have to probably, probably leg it I think soon, like.

JL: If there is, I mean, I'm happy to go back over if you do have to come over and do Karen, I don't, you know, I can't guarantee it, but if you want to just leave it that's fine, that's alright.

BH: I wouldn't want to force you to drive twenty miles again, you know, I think you've went out of your way already.

JL: My wife works in Leeds, so it's not, yeah.

BH: Well, I'll just ask, I'll end with this one question. What does home mean to you now **[01:40:00]** or where is home?

JL: Home's Castlewellan.

BH: Still Castlewellan, yeah.

JL: Yeah, it doesn't mean I would go to live there, probably live close to it, but it's almost too close to everything that was, and also my generation don't all live there, some do, you know, they've moved around, but it is still home and, as I say, I'm waiting for this book to arrive tomorrow on home, the history of home, you know, and I've contributed some of the stories to it and, you know.

BH: Do you think moving over here has changed you?

JL: [pauses] Yes, I mean, I've a lot of frustrations with living here and sometimes the depth of people, how people are, there's less depth and I struggle with that, so I can get frustrated like that. As I've got older I've gone back to actually looking at and quite openly talking about how things might've been wrong over there and whatever, I don't have to avoid it. As a person, probably much more open-minded about things, I would say, and I love the richness of different cultures, I absolutely love that. I didn't get that in Castlewellan and probably over there when I was younger I used the n-word, which I would never dream of using, cos again it's ignorance, so it's changed me and broadened me in many ways as a person, yeah, and, yeah.

BH: Would you still say that, you know, growing up during the Troubles in Castlewellan, did that have a lasting impact upon you?

JL: Oh completely, completely, and I, I, when I hear of tragedies and things I cry, I mean, what's happening in Palestine, and I see it's not on the news, that hurts me deeply, so it's that lasting effect that, you know, and other places, not just Palestine, and, you know, the other night Jeremy Corbyn mentioned something about climate change and people suffering in other parts of the world, and they all went uuugh, I just went oh no, you know, so it makes me worry about humanity in some ways and stresses me a bit and I shouldn't really, you know, I, yes, I can help and do whatever, and I've spoken at a rally about, you know, about the whole thing about the Brexit and whatever, and how it would be, I've done that, so I'm probably more politically active than I was when I was over there.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JL: Yeah, yeah.

BH: A different type of politics presumably now or a–

JL: Well, in a way it's the same because it is about rights and about, you know, things like that. It's just more, broader, a broader, you know, I was still quite openly, I mean, I use Facebook too, to get messages out as well as other things, funny things and whatever.

BH: I mean, that's something that I didn't ask you about and I should've asked you about if we had more time, were you involved in political activism over here, Troops Out, things like that, or any of those groups?

JL: No, no, no. I went on a march once, someone came over, one of the marshals came over, cos I think sometimes people play at being sort of these sort of little urban terrorists, movements, they've got a, you know, they need it, we had it and didn't necessarily take it, but it's almost people need, I need to be fighting for something, I mean, and they came over and asked for ID and I said I'm not giving you my ID, and they said to my mate can, he was from Dundalk, we were studying, and said can you identify him, and he said yeah, that's him, and that was like [laughs], and there were these two young English people didn't have a clue like, they were looking probably for MI5 and they did want us to be MI5 or CID or something or whatever it was, so no, we walked in that, not really, but I, you know, yeah, I've been on marches on Brexit in London, gone to London and, you know, because for me it's about Europe now.

BH: Yeah, it definitely looks that way.

JL: That's what it's about, it's all about Europe, and that's what changed Ireland as much as anything is Europe, you know, so, so that's the way.

BH: Listen, I'm going to draw to a close.

JL: Yeah, we have to, we're going to be kicked out [laughs].

BH: Cos I'm conscious, conscious of Deirdre out there, you know. I'll just say again thanks very much for doing this.

JL: You're very welcome Barry.

BH: And, you know, I'm really grateful you coming over here and giving your time to this, like, so cheers.

JL: That's alright, you're very welcome, seriously, you're very welcome.

BH: I think we got a fair bit there, even though we were cut short [laughs].

JL: Yeah, didn't even go into my accidents and how I should be dead all these years now, but there we go.

INTERVIEW ENDS