INTERVIEW M10: PATRICIA MCALEESE

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interviewee: Patricia McAleese
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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: Okay, that's it running there now. Okay, so it's Monday morning, second of December 2019, I'm here in the Irish centre in Cheetham Hill in Manchester with Patricia McAleese. Before I begin, I just want to say thanks very much for agreeing to do this and taking the time out of your day. I know you had things to do this morning and everything else, so really appreciate you taking the time out. Before we get into the actual talking about your family background and things, could you just tell me how did you find out about the project and why you were interested in taking part?

PM: Well, it was Rose really, Rose Morris, who emailed me to say that there's a study taking place and would I be interested in doing this, so I read through the email briefly and hadn't really decided and then someone else mentioned the study, I think it was Bridie from the Irish writers in Manchester, and then I thought well, when you get two prompts like that you think I'll look at it again, so I did and then I thought why not, because I think as we are a part of the forgotten history of what happened, we're really displaced people, even though it's only an hour away on a plane, we're still displaced because of circumstances at home, otherwise we would be living there, so I think in that case well, perhaps it's good that we have this research done and if I can help to be part of this I'm fine with it, yeah.

BH: Brilliant, well, I'm glad Bridie and Rose told you about it, you know, I didn't actually know if Bridie had had any word of it. So I'm going to ask a bit about your family background now, so where were your parents from?

PM: Well, my father was from Belfast, my mother was from County Tyrone, from a farming family in, near Coalisland, and so she was from there, but she came up to Belfast obviously after her parents died and the farm was left to the eldest brother, and worked around Belfast, in hotels in Bangor, cos she was probably, that was the only thing she could probably do, you know, coming from a farming background, and basically met my father there and they were married in a short time.

BH: And what did your da do?

PM: Well, he was just generally a labourer I think, but then he had a few accidents and he wasn't really in good health, so, and I was the youngest, I came at the tail end, so I don't remember really, he died when I was thirteen actually, but I don't remember him being out regularly to work from when I was small, I just remember him being round the home a lot because of his ill health and the scarcity of work too, because if you haven't got qualifications and you can't do something hard like physical hard labour, what do you do.

BH: What do you do, yeah, did he have accidents or something at work, did he?

PM: Well, he had only one kidney and he had an accident, he fell off the back of a lorry. They were transporting men to some work and he fell off it and injured himself and he was, he was what my mother termed delicate [laughs], so from then on he didn't do much in the line of hard physical work, so he stayed at home just.

BH: So what about your, was your mum the main breadwinner then, did she–?

PM: No, in those days it wasn't really, it was very unusual in, well, in Northern Ireland anyway, I don't know about over here, but women didn't go out to work. She did during the war, she helped with the ammunition factory on the Springfield Road, she was, she worked there because the grandparents helped out, right, so otherwise she probably couldn't have done that, but that was it, she was at home and she was a home person just.

BH: So was there a big family network around you then, when you were growing up. Your grandparents, did you see a lot of them?

PM: Well, because I was the youngest, by the time I can remember they were both gone, the grandparents had both gone, but we had some cousins on the road, Falls Road, but mostly we went to see our cousins in Edendork and Coalisland and we had relations in the South of Ireland because my mum's sister married a man from Dundalk, so she lived down in Drogheda. So we spent the summers either in Edendork at my uncle's house or down in near Drogheda, so really there weren't that many relations around.

BH: Not in the immediate neighbourhood, no?

PM: Oh no, just the one uncle who had two children, but mostly, sort of by that stage the youngest aunt had died as well and the eldest aunt on my dad's side had gone to America, so there weren't really that many, that much family around, there wasn't a big extended family like you'd imagine, normally in working-class areas, there really wasn't that because she came from Tyrone.

BH: Yes, right, so that's what I was going to ask next, what kind of a place was Falls to grow up in, what kind of a neighbourhood was it?

PM: It was actually a great place to grow up in, that's before the Troubles, because neighbours were wonderful, yeah, you relied on your neighbours heavily. The children played out happily with each other, of course they had their ups and downs, children will do, but generally it was a great community spirit, shops were thriving, you went to the

shops, you know, you hadn't got a big supermarket, so you went here for your bread and there for your meat and, you know, there was a general little grocery store round the corner, McAleenan's, you went for all your bits, your milk and your bits and pieces, butter and stuff, but generally it was thriving. The people were hardworking, they were working class, but generally good people, the best of people actually, this is the, I, we used to go, in fact, I'd go up to the Shankill regularly and my father had lots of friends on the Shankill he'd visit every other day, and there was no such thing when I was growing up before the Troubles as, well, you knew somebody was a Catholic and you knew somebody was a Protestant, but there wasn't the same animosity, but before, you know, except round the Twelfth of July, I've written that in my autobiography actually, around, before the Twelfth of July, the few weeks before, you'd play in the park, right, and you'd be Protestants, Catholics all together, and suddenly about a week or two before the Twelfth of July there'd be an atmosphere and you'd hear the drums being practised in the local halls and you kind of instinctively knew that things were changing up to that point, and then there was more you are this and we are that, there was a more, the bit of a cat-calling and stuff like that among kids, but then a week or two after the Twelfth it all went back normal again.

BH: Is that right?

PM: Very odd.

BH: I've heard that before actually, that around that time there's a noticeable change like, people got more aggressive.

PM: Yes, and, you know, you heard the drums being practised in the halls and the Lambeg drums and that kind of, I don't know, we, as kids, I used to compare it, when we were kids we used to go to the Saturday matinees down in the Coliseum and we'd see the Indians coming over the hill [laughs] and the drums being played and every time you heard the drums you knew there was going to be a war, warpaint and drums, and as a child you kind of compared that to the drums you heard in the hall because you knew that the Indians were coming over the hill [laughs], because the eleventh night you'd have an odd window broken where we lived, because I lived in Townsend Street, don't forget, and the top half was the Shankill, near the Shankill, and the bottom half was the Falls, so even though you had all your friends up and down and across, you know, across the barriers, the top end you didn't go near before the Twelfth of July, you stayed out of there, you know, you knew instinctively even as a child you didn't go there, and then when things had died down a week or two after the Twelfth and things kind of got back to semi-normal then you're back to the park or you went back to that chippy near the Shankill because you didn't, you weren't afraid to go up there anymore in Cargill Street [laughs].

BH: So you mentioned there chippies and the park and things like that. What were people's hobbies, you know, what did you do, you know, for fun, and what did your parents, did your parents have any hobbies?

PM: I don't know, there was, neighbours popped in and out all the time, I've written this actually, neighbours popped in and out, it was like a free house, you didn't even, you'd just hear a quick knock on the door and they'd walk in and that's the way it was, they'd just sit

down and they were made comfortable and given a cup of tea or a bit of soda bread or whatever, it was sitting round the fire, because no central heating, don't forget, so there weren't hobbies as such, but, because you were surviving, people, women hadn't got washing machines, they were washing, they were looking after the children, and men who had a job were out working, so people didn't have that much time, it was all chat, and women didn't go to pubs.

BH: Well, I was going to ask next, were pubs important, for the men anyway?

PM: Yeah, pubs were important for men, but you would never have seen a woman in a pub in Belfast. A woman who was in a pub in Belfast would have a bad name [laughs], in those days, and don't forget the swings in the park on a Sunday were all chained up.

BH: I've heard story too, yeah, yeah.

PM: They were all chained up, so you couldn't play in them, but once, once a couple of friends of mine had an idea for squeezing in one of those bars that weren't quite as narrow as the rest because of the bendy bar, and squeezed through and swung on them with a chainsaw and got into big trouble.

BH: Is that right, yeah? And this was because, what, the city council didn't allow?

PM: The city council was mostly Presbyterian and they were strict about Sunday laws, Sunday was a day of rest and you weren't allowed to swing in the park [laughs]. **[00:10:00]** People believe that [indecipherable].

BH: Yeah, and presumably that meant then that there was no pubs or anything open on a Sunday either then.

PM: Nothing, nothing opened and they closed at ten o'clock at night.

BH: Is that right? What about church then, was church important?

PM: Yeah, because we went, I went to a Catholic school on Divis Street, I ended up going back there to teach actually in St Comgall's.

BH: Is that right?

PM: Yeah, so I went to St Comgall's and it was all girls, on one side of the school, and there was a quadrangle in the middle of the school with a bit of a lawn which you never dared walk on, and the other side were the boys and the yard to play in had a central fence, it was like a metal kind of a fence, and it was round at the tops in case you fell over it or something or got stuck, but you were not allowed to go near that partition in the middle of the schoolyard because the boys were on the other side and the girls were on one side, and I had brothers on the other side, if you went over to talk you were sent–

BH: And this was like, a gender thing, like?

PM: Very much, and as somebody said to me in my creative writing, it could only happen in Ireland [laughs], it's true, so that's how we, so I went to school from the age of five, never was in a class with a boy, all through secondary school, never was in a class with a boy, all through teacher training college here, all girls.

BH: My goodness.

PM: So from the age of five to twenty-one I was never in a class with a male.

BH: And do you think that that had any effect on people?

PM: I do think it does because I don't think you had the same confidence, you know what I mean, because I know one thing, when we were in high school we were doing *Pride and Prejudice* for O-level and we had a middle-aged, balding man doing it with us, he was the teacher and everybody liked him, they all fancied him and, I mean, I thought jeez [laughs], because they weren't used to men around, and when the boys came up for debates oh my God, the excitement, you know, cos there'd be a debate with maybe St Mary's school or one of the boys' grammar schools, you know, when you get to sixth form they had interschool debating society, we all went to listen or took part, and it was great excitement when there was a male coming into the school, honest to goodness, you'd think it was somebody from outer space.

BH: [laughs] But did you enjoy school? Do you have good memories of school?

PM: That's, well, in the primary school, no, it was dreadful. The primary school was all the three R's, which is good, it drummed it into us, the three R's are important, but there was no kind of, nothing arranged, no days out, nooo days out and the height of excitement was when they put up a screen, you know it, I can't rem-, you know, a thing that would–

BH: An overhead projector?

PM: An overhead projector, sorry, and what we watched were chimps, like a PG Tips commercial or something, for tea, that was the height of our excitement watching that, because we got no films, nothing to watch, we had assemblies with a bit of music and no days out, nothing at all that I can ever remember, but then what happened was, lucky enough I was born at the right time, because my brother next to me was five years older, he was very clever, both of my brothers were very clever, but that never was really used or utilised at all, they never got taken advantage of their cleverness, because there was no high school and they had to leave school at fourteen and get a job, but with me coming along last, and five years between me and the next one, I went to secondary school, and because I could do exams I got through doing exams and came over here to do teacher training, but they wouldn't have had that opportunity, if that school had have been there five years earlier, they would have done something with it.

BH: Right, so the time you were born made all the difference?

PM: Made all the difference in that family because, I'm now, what, sixty-eight getting on for sixty-nine, so the next one to me is seventy-four, so that age group had very little if you were working class and you didn't have that eleven-plus behind you, and even if you had the eleven-plus behind, you know, unless your parents could afford the uniform, they couldn't afford the uniform and things, so you didn't have any opportunities.

BH: So they left school when they were fourteen, and what would they have done then, what would they–?

PM: Well, they worked in the local mills and things and factories just or warerooms, whatever there was there, you know, one was a postman, so that was it. My sister worked in trousers, making trousers, Clarences, I think they were over in Grosvenor Road somewhere, off one of those streets, so that was, that's all they could do.

BH: So you were lucky then, you were able to stay on and do A-levels.

PM: I was just lucky, cos the girls' secondary school was built before the boys', St Thomas's, that was the first one on the Whiterock Road, and actually Seamus Heaney taught in there.

BH: Is that right?

PM: There was a programme on there about Seamus Heaney on Saturday night, quarter to ten, did you watch it?

BH: No, I didn't, no.

PM: And she mentioned the swings and the park.

BH: Is that right?

PM: I have that in my autobiography, cos they're a couple of years older than me, they'd be that age group, but she was from Ardboe and he was from Bellaghy, and they were talking about, they were from rural backgrounds, you know, and talking about going to Belfast and meeting up, she had [indecipherable] in one house and he was in the other and they were Catholic then, you didn't live together, she would stay with her friends and he was, until you got married, generally that's how things were done then, you know, and it was good to hear somebody talking about the swings and the park and things, people don't mention that.

BH: Sure, yeah, yeah, that's good a story, it illustrates well just actually how restrictive it could be.

PM: How restrictive everything was and, you know, in the Twelfth fortnight, that's what I've written too, in the Twelfth fortnight people had to get out because if you stayed there you were just hemmed in, you couldn't get out, practically to get your shopping or anything in, you know what I mean, factories were closed, everything closed at the same time in the Twelfth fortnight, so you didn't have like, we can go in August, we can go in September, no, it was the Twelfth fortnight for most companies, most factories, mills, everything closed up,

so if you couldn't afford a holiday you were stuck in Belfast during that Twelfth fortnight with the Orange marches, and kids would go and look at marches anyway because it didn't really, it was just a novelty, they didn't think of the politics behind the Orange marches, they just enjoyed the drums and the music or whatever, but we were lucky, I was very lucky because my mother, as I said, came from a farming background and she had three brothers, two of them weren't married and had places of their own, I mean, they were like, big, dundering in houses cos they were bachelors and they didn't look after them after properly, but one had a wee shop at the bottom and that was like nirvana to us, so, a sweetie shop, so anyway, we'd go down from, the school closed for the whole eight weeks and we'd land on my poor uncle [laughs].

BH: So you were, for the whole summer holidays you would go to Tyrone then, and stay on the farm.

PM: We'd stay, well, he had a bit of a farm at the back, but he leased things out, we looked after his shop, so he had like, you know, the double-fronted houses, stone and the middle path up to the door and he had a flagged floor, but that side was the wee shop, I can still smell the oil and the flour and the rice and rows and rows of these sweets in the top, you know, we were kids, we loved that, and then on the left side was the living room with the open fire and a big like, dresser and cats that lived in the drawers, five cats, you opened the door and you'd get spat at and scratched, you know, and you'd think my God, cos he was, he didn't care what was happening, he was very easy-going, I mean, half the countryside owed him money, I don't even think he ever got it back because [laughs] my mother would go down over the summer and say what's this, here, see, that money's been owed, ah for God's sake, should've, I know, but they're on the bus at weekend, away into the town to get the big shop, but they run in here whenever they're stuck and think they can get it for nothing, you know, that's what happened. He was a very kindly man, so we spent the summer with him and rambled around those rooms at the top of the house and rambled around the fields, around the surrounding fields, cos my uncle lived over the road, the two were on the one title, you know, so the one over the road had a tin roof and it was just like, added on to this house, and he moved in there with his wife and he had the six children, he's the only one that produced anything, the other two were bachelors, and the other uncle was the eldest, he got the family home down the lane. So the one with the family, this one down here, uncle Joe, he had the original family home, and the other one up here had the second house his father bought, you know, the shop, just opposite the chapel in Edendork, St Malachy's, and then the other uncle lived literally over the road, so we, my cousins from Dundalk, or Drogheda, would come up on the train and we'd meet them where the train stopped and changed, and we'd end up on the bus to Dungannon and then, and then we'd get, or the train to Dungannon, and then we'd get a bus from Dungannon out to the uncles, and they would stay in the uncle's across the road, only two of them and my aunt, and we'd stay at my uncle's this side of the road, and we'd all play all summer.

BH: Yeah, and those were good memories, like?

PM: Great memories, they were lovely memories. We'd go to the carnival in the town, you know, they'd fill up your pockets with pennies or whatever, my uncle, you know, he had this old tin box on the window ledge full of loose coins, change, you know, and [laughs] he'd say

are you going to the carn-, right, and throw it in your pockets, you know, and away you'd go to the carnival, so it was lovely, yeah, we'd do all sorts, like getting in the cart on the back of the horse, out to the fields and helping out, getting the potatoes and walking [indecipherable], cos that was for us a novelty, coming out of Belfast.

BH: I was going to say, it's quite different from Belfast.

PM: And then of course we were getting away from all the stuff going on in Belfast, you know, over the fortnight, so it was lovely.

BH: What about politics then like, were your parents interested in politics?

PM: Yeah, but you never heard, cos my father, his father fought in **[00:20:00]** the First World War, so he was quite pro-British, he was from Cavan, so my grandfather on my father's side was from Cavan, but because he came back after the First World War and there was a [laughs] war of independence he had to move north.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

PM: Because he was living in Cavan, he came north because obviously he had been fighting in what they considered a British war.

BH: Sure, that's very interesting.

PM: So he was one of the ones that Redmond called to go out to war, but he had been in the army before, he'd been in India, in Allahabad, so I don't know if he, cos he had a family then, I don't know if he actually was at the Front or anything, but he came back, he was okay, and I don't know, my daughter was looking up all those things in the museum or in the papers and things, so he's down there, Felix Reilly, and I don't know, he was in the Royal Irish Fusiliers, that's all I know. But apparently before I was born, see, I was the youngest, I missed everything, because there's a photograph of him, you know, with the uniform on, but one of the aunts came from America and took it back to America, you see, so I didn't see any of those things when I was growing up, so yeah, so basically he came north and met my aunt, or my grandmother, sorry, in Belfast and they got married then. She was, she was McKeown, but her people came from County Derry as well, so they all came into Belfast, so they were from County Derry from the Loup.

BH: Oh I know the Loup.

PM: Do you know the Loup?

BH: Yeah, yeah.

PM: O'Neill, you know, a lot of O'Neills in the Loup, aren't there, so she was, her gran-, her mother like, my great grandmother was Kitty O'Neill who came up to Belfast and then she met somebody and had her children, so, and then my grandfather came from Cavan, my

mother was from Tyrone, so, you know what I mean, there wasn't really a big history in Belfast, it was mostly all coming in from the country area.

BH: Sure, so that grandad then, that was pro-British, did he retain his connections with his people in Cavan and things after that or did he–?

PM: I think he probably did, yeah, but then I don't know much about that history. I've asked my mother before she had dementia, used to ask her all the questions, which was why I was writing everything down, and my daughter did that DNA test, you know, she says one day, you know, in your mouth, DNA test, and my, well, he's now my ex after forty years, we've now split, we did his too and the next thing, and mine came back a hundred per cent Irish, which, apparently a hundred per cent is very rare.

BH: Yes, I'd say it is, yeah.

PM: But he came back eighty-seven per cent, so she was pursuing the eighty-seven per cent [laughs] and found out it was from the border of Germany and France, we're trying to figure out where that came from, you know, so she was, I didn't carry on with that, I just left her to it, but he was, his people are from, well, the McAleeses are from Portglenone, you know, and Cullybackey, up that way, and his father came from there to work in Shorts and his mother was from Fermanagh, so really we were from, out of four parents, three of them are from farming backgrounds.

BH: Yes, yeah, I suppose that's a relatively common thing, people moving out of the country into the city, especially at that period anyway, you know, with the farming's starting to go down a bit maybe at that stage as well.

PM: Yeah, and they're trying to just survive I suppose, this is what happens, so yeah, so we were lucky going to the country every summer to get away from everything, great memories, you know, all the things you do in the country, and then go back to the city to school again. But the high school, I went to St Louise, it was only open a couple of years when I went in 1962, so I was lucky it was there because I did quite well there, and other than that I would have been just like everybody else, in the local factories or mills or whatever there was there.

BH: At school did you have like, did your parents want you to do, did they want you to have a career, did they, was that part of their thinking or–?

PM: No, to be quite honest it was the teacher. I had left school and was working at sixteen in an estate agent's and I didn't like it, and I went up to a past pupils' meeting in the September and the nun grabbed hold of me, Sister Genevieve, and I thought here I go, in trouble again, could hear my name getting called again, and I thought what's this, and she said you did well in your exams, you're coming back to school, and it wasn't, do you want to, it wasn't, what do you think, and I didn't like the job anyway, I thought, you know, I wasn't really ready for the world of work, I thought I'll come back. But, you know, she was fierce, I mean, they were fierce, but looking back it was for your own good, they had your best intentions at heart and if they saw anybody with any kind of potential they wanted you to

use your potential, they didn't want girls getting married and having babies just because that was the done thing to do.

BH: Is that right?

PM: They were the first feminists from my point of view, they were the ones that told you, you have something, you go get, you go become whatever, don't be getting any tuppence ha'penny job, every assembly was, don't be getting any tuppence ha'penny job, go for something that has more long-term benefits or a pension, even at that age it was drummed into you, even filled in your forms for you, for college and everything, they were determined that these working-class girls were going to do something different, and so even though they were fierce and their methods were questionable, they had good intentions behind it.

BH: Sure, yeah, were they strict about the girls' faith as well?

PM: Yeah, we had, in our assemblies were, they basically talked about people like, you know, Little Flower, how she sat doing little things everyday, and because it was French order of nuns, the Sisters of Charity, we got a lot about St Vincent de Paul, Catherine Labouré, all those saints that were from Paris because that's where their order originated, in Paris, and so we had a lot about their lives and the things they did every day that made a difference to the world, so that was kind of drummed into you, they were very good values actually, I know we were bored in assembly and that, but you think, look back on it now and you think well, they were trying to instil good values in us of being better people, and on top of that they had a Marillac Association and in that, it wouldn't be right today cos, you know, it would be politically incorrect or there'd be sort of safeguards in place and health and safety and stuff, but those days we were encouraged to get an old person to visit, an old person that said they wanted a visit from schoolgirls, and we would go round once a week and keep a person on their own company and chat to them for an hour and get a cup of tea or bring an apple pie to them or something like this and, you know, looking back on that, that was like, pioneering work because now there's so many lonely people that see nobody all week and they're getting these scam phone calls and being taken in, and they go to the supermarket and the only person they might talk to during the winter is somebody on the till, and so we did that then, at fifteen, sixteen, and then when we left school somebody else would take our place and go to that same old person until they died or what, and then they were allocated somebody else.

BH: So was it kind of like a social work, almost?

PM: It was like, almost like a social work, you know, what you did, and we didn't consider it that. We'd have a meeting Monday after school, discuss the old person, did you visit, what happened, it was all listened to, everybody was listened to, where you went, your old person was missus so and so from this street, and how did you go on, how long were you visiting and how is she, is she alright, or he alright or whatever, and I suppose that would be, I don't know how they would work with that nowadays, you couldn't, it would be under some other heading of social care or something, wouldn't it, you wouldn't be allowed.

BH: You wouldn't be allowed to do it, no. What about Irishness then?

PM: Well, we had–

BH: Was that promoted at school or at home or where would it have been?

PM: Well, my mother was very republican, from Coalisland, so our Irishness and our sense of identity was very strong with her, my father was less so. In school we weren't supposed to get Irish history, it was all British history.

BH: Is that right?

PM: Mmm, but they did teach Irish history, which was kept undercover kind of.

BH: Is that right, yeah? So that wasn't part of the syllabus?

PM: So if you had an inspector coming in you wouldn't be doing Irish history, you would be doing British history.

BH: Right, yeah, so that implies then that the nuns were keen to teach Irish history.

PM: Oh they were very, cos well, the, well, those were mostly from the Republic of Ireland those nuns, you know what I mean, there was only three basically, that was Sister Genevieve, Sister Rita and Sister Mary, and they're all from the Republic of Ireland anyway, but we grew up Northern Irish Catholics, which are a bit different from theirs, but they would instil stories about, you know, being, sort of Irish independence, you know, maybe, but it wasn't drummed into you and they weren't, we weren't brainwashed, it was just there, you know what I mean, it was just there, you just knew.

BH: What about things like language and–

PM: Well, we had Irish.

BH: Like, the GAA and things like this?

PM: Well, yeah, because we had the GAA and the Casement Park and we had Irish language, you could choose Irish or Spanish or French or two languages out of that in your curriculum, so you could do Irish in school if you wanted to.

BH: Oh is that right, yes, you could do that?

PM: Yeah, you could do that and that was accepted, you could do Irish O-level, but yeah, some did and some carried on and some did Irish language classes privately, maybe somewhere else, but we, I didn't pursue it at all, you know.

BH: Did your mum not promote that then? Would she not have seen that as important?

PM: Not really, no, and Irish dancing, we did Irish dancing and things, you know, like that, and the boys played Gaelic football, you know, at St Agnes's up round there, but that would be the height of it really.

BH: Sure, yeah, so you said your mum was more republican than your father, why was that?

PM: Well, she came from a very republican background, you know, in Coalisland, you should know the **[00:30:00]** first civil rights march was in Coalisland, so she was very aware of British misrule in Ireland and she was a very clever woman, well read and she read books and knew, and read the paper thoroughly everyday, never missed anything going on and had very strong opinions, whereas my father didn't have the same strong opinions cos he wasn't brought up in that atmosphere at all, because don't forget his father was in the British Army, had to come up to the North and then, and then he got two pensions cos he fought in the war, so [laughs], that's what happened, he got two pensions.

BH: Right, yeah, two pensions, right.

PM: So my mother would say oh they're pro-British that lot, you know, but she was very republican, I'm afraid, yeah, and then when she lived on the Falls Road in the, through all those Troubles and saw what was happening with the British Army, you know, what things happened there, it made, strengthened her point of view if anything else, she was more strongly pro rep-, pro having a Republic of Ireland, you know, so yeah, she saw all the hunger strikers' coffins go up past her window, up to the graveyard, the nine hunger strikers, so you can imagine what they lived through, cos she was born in 1911, so she was a baby during the First World War, she lived through the Second World War and then she lived through the Troubles.

BH: Sure, that's some life [laughs]. What about civil rights then? You mentioned Coalisland there and the fact that actually it grew up around that area really, was your–?

PM: It started there with Austin Currie who actually, who, his aunt married my uncle.

BH: Is that right?

PM: That uncle we went to, the one with the children, his wife was a Currie and she was Austin Currie's aunt.

BH: Is that right?

PM: Yeah, so, but we weren't aware of that much, but–

BH: Was your mum aware of it?

PM: Yeah, she would have known all that, yeah, yeah, she was aware of it all. But we were aware of civil rights cos we knew right away we were second-class citizens, you knew it when you went for a job and they asked you what school you went to, what you were, they didn't have to ask you anything else, you could all, you, they knew indirectly wh-, you know,

what you were, and they had the control, for fifty years they were in control from nineteen, cos Brookeborough was in control from 1943 to 1963, and Brookeborough said as the prime minister that he wouldn't, it was a Protestant government for a Protestant people, and he wouldn't even employ a Catholic gardener to cut the grass round Stormont, and that's an actual quote.

BH: Yes, no, I've seen the quote, I know the one you mean.

PM: So that was the atmosphere you grew up in, and my grandfather worked for a while in the shipyard, but he was told by a friend, cos he has a Southern accent, he was told by somebody don't come in tomorrow, and something was going on, I don't know whether that was the time those men were thrown into the water and that, I don't know if that coincided with that, but he didn't go back then, you know, cos his accent gave him away anyway, so that's, yeah, there was discrimination, the Catholics were they were only a third of the population, but if you look at the statistics they didn't fare well in jobs that went up the scale, they were low level, unskilled in the docks, they didn't even train them up, you know, in the shipyard, they just were labour, general labour, and so things were for the boys generally, and we felt that, yeah, we knew that from a young age, you knew that.

BH: Well, that was my question. Were you aware of that, of being a second-class citizen–

PM: Yeah, yeah.

BH Or was that something that came later?

PM: Oh you're aware of it, because we played out, we played out in Campbell's Row and there was a glass factory there, I can't remember the name of it, and the men who went to that glass factory, even though that was on, nearly on the Falls, were all from the Shankill, they all walked down from the Shankill with their lunchboxes, tin lunchboxes under their arm with elastic bands, all walked down to that factory, and you as a child could stand there and see well, why does nobody around here work in that glass factory, why are they all coming down from the Shankill, all the way down into that place there, and you just thought well, that it doesn't add up, even as a child you knew there was something that didn't add up.

BH: Mmm, yeah, so whenever you went, when you were at school then or when you went back to school, did you have an idea in your head that you couldn't maybe find a job in Northern Ireland, or did you plan to stay in Northern Ireland?

PM: Well, I knew because I had done my, I had gone back to school and I had done what we would call their College of Preceptor exams as well as O-levels and that wasn't really acceptable exams, so I had to do O-levels then again, some O-levels and then an A-level in a year, so really I knew I didn't have the proper qualifications to get into St Mary's because there you needed two good A-levels and the right background, cos sometimes when you were interviewed in those areas, I did an interview and I was sitting beside Dana actually, Rosemary Brown, in that interview, the nuns themselves discriminated because they knew the families would get certain preferential treatment.

BH: This was a class, a class–

PM: It was a class thing too.

BH: Right, okay.

PM: Not just from being a Catholic, but you had a class thing as well, unless you were exceptional of course, but I could give you an example. There was a girl called Fidelma Harkin who came from a grammar school into our secondary school because her father was Brian Harkin who was a trade union, he was well known, or was it Brendan Harkin, anyway, and she didn't get the right A-level results, but she got in because the nuns would've pushed her cos her father was well known, you know, that kind of thing happened, it happens everywhere so, you know. So I knew I'd have to probably have to take the boat to do something, and then when you take the boat and you go to England and you're trained you're regarded as second-class teachers cos you didn't get the right A-levels [laughs], even though you could've been a very good teacher in the classroom, and I'm not bragging, but I know I was, that would be, but I did get a job in Belfast, only because I went to that primary school, probably.

BH: Yeah, so tell me a bit about that process then, sort of the events leading up to going to England to do teacher training. What happened around that time?

PM: Well, I think, when you put it, what they say is you could go to this Mary Ward in Nottingham, there's Sedgley Park in Manchester, all the good, you know, the female teacher training colleges that somebody else had gone to before and, you know, would bring back news to the nuns at home, ah this is good, that's good, and then you'd be encouraged to go to those, and there was another one in, not Mary Ward, Sedgley Park, there was a third one, I can't remember, I think it was down in London, anyway, so there was about three or four that we were encouraged to apply to, so I applied to Sedgley Park in Manchester and then I got word, you know, that I got in, so they helped you with the application form and everything, but I remember it was a girlfriend, yeah, there was a girl near me and she was going to the same college, so the both of us went over on the boat instead of going over on the plane, her father worked in the merchant navy and encouraged her to go by boat. Anyway, we ended up being one of the first to arrive at this hall of residence early in the morning, cos we'd gone on the boat all night, and the rest hadn't come in yet, so we picked the best room [laughs], but then they painted it and we got shoved out, but anyway, so that was fun, and we met a lot of girls from different walks of life, you know, and it was good because it was an education in itself, you know, we'd just come out of Belfast, this had just happened, then the Falls Road, Bombay Street was burned down, and once my friend and I, Isobel, went to see a rally in Casement Park and it was all these young new civil rights, you know, like Ivan Cooper and there was a Michael somebody, I can't remember his second name, what was his second, it's gone, and they were all speakers for, you know, you Catholics, this is what's happening to Catholics and making us more aware, we already kind of knew, but they were making us more aware of how we were discriminated against and what areas, and there was this rally, so Isobel and I decided, my friend, we'd go home early, cos every time there was a rally there was a riot or somebody throwing stones at the police

station, so we had said we'll nip out early because we don't want to get caught up in anything. So we walked out down the main Andersonstown Road, before we got to Andersonstown barracks, and we thought we were way ahead of the game, that they were all behind in the field, and we looked behind and we were at the head of a riot, they were all behind us, it was like something out of a comedy, so we were oh my God, they're behind us, cos we were at the front like, leading this riot, so we can ran, thinking get out of the way, and they went charge [laughs], that was the signal to charge [laughs], it was like Laurel and Hardy, so they were like, behind us running thinking we were at the head, and we thought divert to the side, you know, get out of the way, so we went up to somebody's back garden and sat on two upturned buckets, they'd left the house for the day, they had more sense than we had, and we sat on these two upturned buckets and we could not get out of there for hours and hours, we were there for [laughs], until it was nearly dark, then we could get out of there and go back down home. Honest to God, we were always inseparable, we always got caught up unwittingly in things, you know [laughs].

BH: Yeah, so was this, this happened before you went over to Manchester?

PM: I left, I left, before I left to go to Manchester, this was all was happening, between the rioting, getting caught up in this and Bombay Street, there the night before, but next day the house wasn't there, all these things were happening all round you, you know what I mean, and even though I lived closer to the Falls Road, you'd look up and there'd be a march going down and stopping at the last Protestant house, and the people on the Catholic side with hurley bats like, hurley sticks like, this was the threat, you know, if you come any further past Leonard's house you've had it, you know, and then they'd go back [laughs] because it was like, oh my God, the Indians coming over the hill, **[00:40:00]** that's what it was like [laughs].

BH: What did you think about this? Because obviously this is a fairly, set of changes happening in Belfast at that time, you know–

PM: Yeah, it was terrible bec–

BH: And you were doing your, finishing you're A-levels or whatever, like.

PM: Yeah, because up on, at the top end of Townsend Street there was like, a Coaches Street which was fairly Catholic, but round the corner was Brown Square, which was very Protestant, every single, that's another memory, I shouldn't, every Twelfth of July from when I was small they always had a bonfire up there, but we were kids, we didn't know, we had bonfires, fun, we'd go up, you know, but if they found out you were Cath-, the attitude changed if they knew you were Catholic on that bonfire, so you didn't stay there for long, you got off site, because Brown Square was there and there was a street coming up across here and this was Coaches Street, all Catholic and that was Protestant, literally, and that was the Shankill and that was the Falls, so these people were all put out during the beginning of the Troubles, they had, they were all displaced, they all had to move out and get some place to live too. Nightmare.

BH: Nightmare, but at this stage you'd already decided that you were going to Manchester.

PM: Well, I was going over to Manchester, but I was only going over to Manchester for three years in my opinion, I was coming back.

BH: You were coming back to teach.

PM: To teach, in Belfast, and you didn't think any further than that.

BH: Yeah, but just to go back about that there, you said, you know, the nuns helped you fill out the forms.

PM: Everything.

BH: Yeah, and also I think you said that there'd have been other girls who'd went ahead of you, just before, and they brought information back.

PM: Back like, there was Maura McGlone, for example, she went to Sedgley, so when we went there in the first year she was a second year, she would tell us where to go, what to do, you know, so she'd feed information back to the nuns and say this is a great college over here and they'd say Sedgley Park, right, so then she would fill us in when we got there.

BH: Right, so there was good connections then between these colleges and–

PM: There was good connections, and Mary Ward and what was the one, oh God, what was the one in, there's another name, down in London, cos I met somebody recently who went there, funny enough, yeah, there was mostly those because if you didn't get into St Mary's, cos there was only St Mary's and St Joseph's, don't forget, you'd have to have, there was nothing else, there was no, Derry, well, there was just, the one in Derry had just opened up literally, what's it called now, the one?

BH: Oh St Columb's, is it?

PM: No, no, it's the university, is it Magee or something?

BH: Oh Magee College, yeah.

PM: Magee, that had just literally opened up, it was like a mucky field, and just opening up with mucky fields all round it, you know what I mean, that was just there, so there was nothing else, so if you didn't get three As or whatever, you didn't get the exact A-levels you had to go to England, cos there's more choice now, there's Jordanstown, there's all sorts, but there wasn't that then.

BH: Yeah, and you said you travelled over with another girl from your school.

PM: Yeah, Kate McMullen, so the two of us went on the boat together, cos her father said and be careful and lock your doors, honest to God, cos he was in the merchant navy and we were scared stiff, he had us petrified, so we locked the doors and literally there was

bunkbeds and she was in the top and I was in the bottom, we ended up in the top bunk together, I mean, the door locked like, seriously.

BH: What did they think was going to happen or what was the–?

PM: He had us petrified there were these men were after young girls on these boats, we're just coming out of Belfast after being at an all-girls' Catholic school, we hadn't a clue what he was talking about even, so we were like, two of us in the same bunk and the door locked like, isn't that pathetic [laughs], laugh about it now, I don't know what he thought was going to happen, and she was tiny and I was tall and skinny and she was tiny, and she had a suitcase the size of her, so getting her to pull the suitcase around and some man offered at one point and then he left it down, he said love, what have you got in there, a dead body [laughs], getting that on the bus and finding our way to this place we'd never been to before, and Mrs Scott had met us at the door, a skinny, very sullen looking woman, and she had this very London accent, she said she was from Kensington, but we didn't believe her, but she smoked incessantly, and every time she, she'd this cigarette and the ash was like this, would fall off all round her, you know, every now and again, and she couldn't pronounce the Irish names right, like, Ann McGrath was Ann McGraaath, you know, this kind of thing, and we'd laugh at this, and they were very mischievous to her actually once, once they tied a rope outside her door to the one opposite and she couldn't get out.

BH: [laughs] Is that right?

PM: They hated her, and she'd say Ann McGraaath I know that's you, open that door, you know, and Ann was sitting giggling somewhere in the corner, you know, and Cathy McAllister, that's you, oh God, poor woman, I don't know how she felt about these Irish girls coming over in, you know, there was this sort of–

BH: I was going to ask you, were there other Northern Irish and Irish people there at this time?

PM: Oh there was loads, there was loads, that's the thing, there were loads, and in the hall of residence there was loads of Irish girls, loads of English as well, and we all got on fine, you know, and in the second year went out into flats, you kind of formed your friends in the first year, then you decide who you wanted to go in the flat with in the second year, and the flat we were in was like something out of Rachman rents, tell you what, it was like *Bleak House*, and after that then you'd go maybe somewhere else, different flats and you'd just, I don't know, it kind of evolved organically who you, flat sharing with Rita, I get on better with her, so we went into a flat over here and somebody got on better with somebody over there, they went somewhere else, but you all kept in contact, you were all popping into each other's places, you know.

BH: So these people formed your friendship group when you were over in Manchester.

PM: Yeah, but a lot of them went home like, the Newry girls went back home, well, one of them married an Englishman, she didn't, but most of them went back home, they found work, I don't know how they found work round Newry and round the rural areas, but they

seemed to find something, but, what was, where I went, where did I go first, I went to Openshaw and then I went to St Pius X, and then I met my husband, I was two years younger so I was going up one day, one St Patrick's night up to Middleton, there was an Irish pub up there, and I was in a flat with a Polish girl, Christina, and we ended up in the pub called the Britannia, it was an Irish night, but all the guys were from Hopwood and they're all playing Irish music and having a great time, and I met my husband there that night and we were together forty years, forty-odd years, but we've just split up three years ago [laughs], he'd a drink problem.

BH: So you met your husband at like, an Irish night out.

PM: Yeah.

BH: On St Patrick's Day.

PM: Yeah, up in Middleton where the boys' college was, La Salle.

BH: Right, so was he teacher training as well then?

PM: He was teacher training as well, yeah.

BH: Right [laughs], and where was he from?

PM: Belfast, east Belfast, he's McAleese, he was brother of Martin, so then, there was no, no sign of Mary being president then, you know what I mean, we just knew her as a girl from the university and she was doing, working in a solicitors at that time and she hated it, she'd done her law degree, she was a clever girl, and so that was that. So we ended up going home to get married and stayed in Glengormley for about, till the two children were born, as I said before, we went to the Bahama Islands for seven, seven, eight years.

BH: My goodness. That time when you came over, '68, '69–

PM: '69.

BH: Were you aware of the way things were developing back in Belfast at the time or were you just focused on your work?

PM: No, you were very aware of it because don't forget as a student you were home Christmas, Easter, summer, and you were home and you got caught up in everything even then, you know those times. I stayed at my mother's house, my mother used to walk out to the shop opposite and hear the gunfire, cos they'd be shooting from the flats over here on the Shankill and vice versa, snipers were all over the place, and the army I suppose too, and so the shop owner used to look out the window and see my mother lying on her mouth and nose on the road and say oh there's shooting outside, Mrs Reilly's on her mouth and nose again [laughs], she used to go back and forth to the shop in the middle of this hail of gunfire, cos people lived with it everyday. It's hard to say how immune you got, my kids were brought home when we lived in the Bahamas and they still talk about how they were

standing next to a soldier with a big gun and thought nothing of it, you know, you'd hear, and you'd see, you'd know where the explosions, you'd tell by the sound how big the explosion was, how much gelignite in and what direction, you got so used to the direction of the bomb, and was it a big one or a light one, cos you knew by the sound and the impact, you know, cos I remember overhearing a couple of kids one day and saying is that a bomb, the other one says no, it's only, no, the other one says is that thunder, and the other one said no, it's only a bomb [laughs], so that was what it was like, for kids even, you know, at that stage.

BH: And when you've moved over first did you want to move to Manchester?

PM: When I came, when I taught in Manchester, I moved back home, to get back home, as I said, I worked in St Comgall's and then we went to the Bahamas because where we lived in Glengormley it was what they called a mixed area, so there was tit for tat shootings every night, and one night it was a Catholic, the next night was a Protestant, and so it got to the point when you were literally, had to go upstairs, if somebody knocked at your door you had to go upstairs, look out the window to see who it was before you opened the door. That's all you heard on the radio everyday, next one killed, next one killed, so you didn't know if you'd be next, so he decided then we're going to the Bahamas and I thought this is going to be fun, thinking in a couple of years over there, back home it'll be all over.

BH: Mm hmm, and it didn't.

PM: No, it wasn't all over, we ended up in Manchester again and, yeah.

BH: So even though you were living in a mixed area, a relatively good part of Belfast at that time, you still thought no, we can't stay here.

PM: No, because it was all the tit-for-tat shootings, and it was Catholics in Protestant areas and vice versa and so, and car bombs, when you got up in the morning you, **[00:50:00]** at the beginning when I was still working, before I had the children, we had to look under the car for a car bomb before you got in the car, so you were checking on the ground, under the car for wires and things, suspicious, before you got in the car, because every day somebody was blown up in their car.

BH: Yeah, yeah, what about your parents and your brothers and sisters then? Did they stay in Belfast at that time?

PM: One went for a while to Leeds and came back and, let me think now, no, they stayed around. One ended up in the South of Ireland because her, his wife's family had a pub in Blackrock outside Dundalk, not the Blackrock in Dublin, and he got a job in there and there was like, bedrooms upstairs, so he could stay up there with, him and his wife and the children, so he went down South then, but my eldest brother was postman, he stayed in Belfast, the middle one, Dermot, he stayed in Belfast for, till he was in his thirties and then he met an English girl in Belfast, but they ended up in Canada, so he went to Vancouver. So there was me in England, brother down south and one in Canada, so the eldest two were the only two that remained permanently in Belfast.

BH: Yeah, did you worry about them whenever you moved away again to the Bahamas?

PM: Oh yeah, cos, yeah, every time you heard something happening you were, you know, checking at home, you know, what was going on, are they alright, always worried about your family back home, but when I lived on the island there was a phone alright in the living area, but there was an operator in Governor's Harbour to get you off the island, to get you connected, and you'd literally be sitting on the phone for days to get the operator, you'd literally fall asleep on the phone getting the operator to get you home, it was a nightmare actually, but nowadays I'm sure it's a lot, that was the eighties, I'm sure it's all completely different now, you've got, you know, technology has grown in leaps and bounds and they're all *au fait* with Facebook, cos they're now on my Facebook page all the Bahamians I taught and all the ones I taught with, so I can, you know, they're there like everybody else now, they're on the internet too and everything else that comes with it, but then we had like, no TV, you couldn't get reception.

BH: Yeah, how come the Bahamas, you know, it's a fairly unusual destination to go to, you know?

PM: I know, because my husband was one of those good-time guys who thought oh my God, we're going to go to the Bahamas and have a ball, cos he liked partying, he was a party animal, right, and I was with the children, so I went out there in the April or May with two babies, one not quite one and one not quite three, and he had been out there six weeks before me, and he went out basically to see what was what, and they had no internet then, so you'd go to the library and look up what the Bahama Islands consisted of, cos I was totally ignorant about the archipelago and what was what, but I studied up and said to him on the phone if you can get Long Island or Eleuthera, cos they seem to be the more developed islands, cos even though Andros was a huge big island it was very backward, you know, you were sent out there if you did something wrong with the government, if they didn't like you they'd send you the Andros [laughs], with a can of Raid spray for the mosquitoes, so, and funny enough he was going to go to Long Island at first, and I said yeah on the phone, he phoned my mum's, yeah, but he was in Nassau, there was better reception then, yeah, Long Island looks good, or Eleuthera, and next thing he went to Eleuthera because the guy who was in the school in Eleuthera left without any notice, fell out with the head, so he was sent prompt into that school, so then we got a house, a government house, we didn't pay rent in the Out Islands, that was a perk, and I was in the little house near the high school with the two babies and then, that was April, May, but by this, his wife had left with him, so there was nobody in the primary school, so I hadn't intended to go into the primary school, I was thinking to stay at home with the babies, didn't intend working, but then this job came up and he got organised and said this lady's going to look after the kids, and this job in the primary school, so I went along with that and was there for seven years.

BH: Seven years, wow.

PM: Nearly eight years, I didn't think I was going to be there for even two or three.

BH: Right, and was your husband teaching, was that what his job was?

PM: He was in the high school, he was up on the hill, he taught technology, woodwork, metalwork up there, but I was in the primary school.

BH: Sure, and what about your children then? Did they go to school in the Bahamas then?

PM: Well, yeah, they did, they went to the Catholic school, which is a little mission school, and of course you have to pay there, but we worked to, the government employed us, because we were employed by the government we had to work in state schools, the Catholic school would be considered private, but it was really a small mission school that was funded by small amounts from the pupils, so my kids went there to support the nuns, the Canadian nuns, and they loved it, they had a great time.

BH: Yeah, and did your kids I suppose, cos that's when they're very young, so I suppose their first real sort of formative experiences is in the Bahamas, it's not so much Northern Ireland at all, like. Did they have any sense of themselves as Northern Irish or–?

PM: I think they did, but when they were in the Bahamas my second daughter, Kate, thought she was a Bahamian, didn't want to leave the Bahamas, she says I'm a Bahamian, and when she heard the national anthem she was at the national anthem singing it, you know, like a Bahamian [laughs], they had to put their hand like this, like the Americans do, and the eldest girl, well, they knew cos we went back to granny's, my mum's, at holiday time, summer holidays were so hot there and humid, we got out and went to Belfast, so they were there every summer in my mum's and they knew Belfast, they knew their granny, they didn't identify with Northern Irish really, but we ended up in England, so now they identified as parents who are Northern Irish.

BH: Yes, so how did you end up coming back then from the Bahamas after the seven years?

PM: After seven years I was expecting my fourth child and we went over one summer, we'd saved my salary for seven years, and looked for a house, found one, so that was in the summer, she was, I stayed behind and had her in the December and he went back, and I had the two youngest with me cos the two youngest didn't go to school, but he had the two eldest in the, well, going to primary school, and looking after them while I took some maternity leave, and then we went back and finished that year, and then went back into the house, which was empty by then, in Manchester.

BH: In Manchester, right.

PM: Up in Prestwich, not far from here.

BH: Right, and why not back to Belfast then?

PM: Well, cos he didn't want to go back to the Troubles, he'd come from east Belfast and he'd seen the house getting, you know, his family were put out, and he didn't want to go back. I wanted to go back anyway, cos women were close to their families, aren't they, but I

think looking back on it he got his way, if I could do it again, at my age now, I would have insisted on going back, but then I just went along with it, cos he wanted to stay in the Bahamas he said, and we knew long term, you know, unless you got residency or whatever, unless you got, what's the other one, permanent residency and citizenship, and that was unlikely for expats, so really you couldn't stay as long as you wanted, we knew somebody who did, but for me it wasn't an option because the eldest girl was coming up to ten by this stage when we left, nearly three when we got there, we stayed seven years, so she was coming up to the end of primary school, so I knew there was no junior high school, you stayed in primary school until you were fourteen and then you went to the senior high school, very like the American system, and there was nowhere to send her to except the boarding school and I wasn't going to send her to boarding school, I didn't really like that option, so I decided that's when we're going back to the system here, get her into the system here to get her through, and she became a lawyer and she did really well in Manchester, she came out with a first.

BH: Right, so it was a good decision then.

PM: So the primary school didn't seem to, even though it was on a little tiny island and it wasn't exactly what you'd have here, didn't seem to–

BH: Affect her.

PM: Yeah.

BH: Yeah, did you miss home whenever you were away?

PM: Always, always, because we are different, slightly different culturally and different values really, so I always did miss, but Manchester's been good to me, I can't complain about Manchester really.

BH: Yeah, when you moved to the Bahamas and then even when you moved to Manchester, was Manchester a compromise?

PM: Yeah, well, for me, I thought it was a compromise, but really and truly it wasn't, he was [laughs] pulling the wool over my eyes, so yeah, he didn't want to go back, he had a terrible abhorrence of what was going on, he'd say we're not bringing the kids up in that, but for me it was a tie at home, it was home, wasn't it, so anyway, we ended up here, but we're back and forward all the time, you know, but my mother wanted me back there permanent, but then getting jobs wasn't easy, you know, so you ended up coming back and forward all the time, and they ended up, the eldest girl ended up now in Essex, she's the head of legal in a bank, second one is with me up north here, she's the only one that stayed north, son went to Australia and is, a year after did his degree, law degree, he's a human rights lawyer in Sydney, my youngest went to King's in London, she's now in Surrey, she's a dentist, so they've all spread out because really this was not their really their roots in Manchester, you know what I mean, so basically when your roots are not in Manchester you don't have that same loyalty or, you know, your granny's not here, your aunties are not here, so they move

with their husbands, or my son, in his case his wife was from Sydney, and that's what happens, your children become displaced too. **[01:00:00]**

BH: Sure, yeah, well, what about when you were in the Bahamas and then whenever you moved back to Manchester, did you continue to watch what was going on in Northern Ireland, did you follow the news?

PM: Oh yeah, every night, oh we had, always Northern Ireland news on, I still have it on, 863 Virgin, I have Northern Ireland news on every night, I watch it every night, I see what's going on, I always keep in touch with what's going on and I have still my friends in Northern Ireland too who I phone regularly and tell me what's going on too, so I've always kept abreast of everything. In fact, if my daughter, who's here, and her children decided to move down south, I would go back, even at this stage.

BH: Yeah, presumably when you were in the Bahamas nobody who was a native of that, of those islands had really much sense of what Northern Ireland was or anything about it.

PM: No idea, the English had no idea, no concept of Northern Ireland, they said what you all doing over there, this terrible disgusting stuff, and you'd say well, there's terrorists, you know, and you'd say well, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, not that I'm saying I'd agree with the violence of the IRA, I don't agree with it at all, but having said that, they hadn't an inkling of the fundamental injustices the civil rights movement were trying to highlight and if those genuine grievances in my opinion had've been dealt with you'd never have had the aftermath of what happened, but they, I mean, but they would never have allowed it, the Ulster unionists were never going to give an inch in my opinion, so that was unfortunate. So they had no idea of the history of Northern Ireland and the Irish, they have no, in fact, even now people, my friends' friends and my daughters' friends would go to France for a holiday or go to Portugal, go to Spain, there's very few go back to Ireland, go that way, and there's loads of people over here who have never even been to Ireland, so unless you've got some Irish roots, grandparents, aunts, uncles or relations over there, a lot of people don't go.

BH: Yeah, so when you were in Bahamas was it mostly, was there an expat community there?

PM: Yeah, there was an expat community.

BH: And were they English people or what?

PM: They were English and expats and we became friendly, as well as the Bahamians, we were friendly with the Bahamians too, but there was an expat community, it was partying, you know, and he loved that my husband, absolutely loved the cheap rum and stuff, you know, so anyway, well, we had a friend called Lou who married a Bahamian girl, he brought out a wife with him, an English wife and then she went back, they divorced, and he met somebody on the islands, a lot of that happened too, a lot of marriages breaking up on the island because you're out of your comfort zone, you haven't got the same family security round you and things happen, you know, so, but we survived, I don't know how, seven

years, cos he was a big drinker and anyway, long story short, so it eventually killed us forty years later, you know, left, had enough [laughs].

BH: Sure, those English people and the other expats on the Bahamas, did you talk to them about Northern Ireland, did they ask about it?

PM: Yeah, aye, they did ask about it and I would tell them stories about young men walking up the road doing nobody any harm and being spread-eagled against the wall and left there for ages, and thrown in the back of vans all the time, you know, the way they were treated really, and they'd say the British Army can't do things like that, it was all about the British Army being perfect, and I'd say there's no army perfect, you get a young, cos I taught in Salford that last, one of those years, and most of those boys were joining the army from Salford, working-class boys, and they were joining the army and they were really kids, had no hope of proper employment in the area, and I knew what kind of boys at that age were attracted to the army, so, you know, you could see really what was in it, although I'm not blaming them for coming over to Northern Ireland, they were thrown in the deep end, didn't know what the history was, didn't know the divisions, and they were used too.

BH: Yeah, so that's an interesting perception, that English people in general found it difficult to accept that the British Army would do anything wrong.

PM: Yes, still do here, still do, I think so, and you remember that time that there was a photograph taken of some, British soldiers in, was it Afghanistan, and they had humiliated the men by making them naked and taking pictures and really humil-, and somebody took photographs and had them developed in Boots, and somebody in Boots found them and then went to the papers and the television and that with like, that was, and my son-in-law at that time, British Army wouldn't do things like that, and I said that's somebody just taking a picture and because it's gone to Boots and somebody in Boots developed it and saw that, well, how many people don't take pictures when this is happening, I'm trying to say that this is just one incident of what's shown, what happens because somebody took the picture, but what if they don't take the pictures, what exactly is going on behind that, how bad is it behind that, so you're under an illusion of what armies do, and then recently wasn't there a case last week about the British Army in, shooting, what was it, civilians, there was something recently on last week, I've–

BH: It was Afghanistan–

PM: Was it Afghanistan?

BH: Or Iraq, yeah, there was more stuff.

PM: It's coming out, yeah, you see, armies get together, I don't know any army in any country is, you know.

BH: Yeah, and was that difficult then, in terms of, you know, interacting with English people or making friends with them, to the extent that they have no awareness of Northern Ireland, and was that something that you could get past or was it something that you kind

of, made you think, you know, these people don't understand where I'm coming from, therefore I–?

PM: Yeah, well, I just, I always had an opinion and always voiced it and told the story of Bombay Street, and that my son-in-law was shocked, the one from Norfolk, he was completely shocked at that. I said the police held those people back from their homes while they burned them down, now that was the start, I'm not saying there weren't Protestant streets burnt too, but that was the start, and I said, that's what happened. He was completely horrified at that, had no, no conception, they have no idea even yet, my sons-in-law, of what happened in Northern Ireland and what you grew up with, no idea.

BH: Norfolk's quite a particular kind of place as well.

PM: Isn't it, my daughter makes a joke about that, she'll say in the Norfolk hospitals they have NFN at the bottom of the bed on the, what do you call it, the little board, and I said what does that mean, she says normal for Norfolk [laughs], she [laughs], so I said why, she says they're all inbred, I just pass no remarks. He's a lecturer in law actually.

BH: Oh is that right, yeah?

PM: Yeah, so he had a very, very narrow view of Northern Ireland and a very narrow view of the army there, they could be perfect and couldn't do anything wrong at all, well, you know, so I think–

BH: Did you ever encounter, I mean, I suppose when you came back from the Bahamas it would have been what, almost 1990, 1988?

PM: '88.

BH: 1988, what was it like living in England at that time, I suppose in terms of the Troubles, was there any discernible effect of the Troubles upon life here in England?

PM: Well, with the Manchester bombing, I remember that. I was in the bathroom and my daughter was coming into the bathroom too and she said oh my God, what's that, and I said that's a bomb, mum, you're not in Belfast, I said that's a bomb and I'll tell you where it is, I said, it's down near that Boddington place, you know, next to where the MEN Arena is now, I said it's down near there, and she was what, I says that's exactly where it is. I knew by the sound and it wasn't too far off, it was the Arndale, but you could tell the sound of it, it was a bomb, cos I was so used to hearing bombs. But I didn't agree with that, that's terrible bringing a bomb over to innocent civilians or anywhere else, but lucky enough nobody was killed, thank goodness.

BH: Did you ever encounter any, so you talked about encountering basically people who were indifferent to the Troubles or had no understanding of it, did you ever encounter hostility?

PM: Yes, definitely, you know, there was hostility if you were Irish, there was hostility in the eighties and that when they brought the bombing campaign over to England. You'd find if you're Irish oh you're a bomber automatically, you know, and I don't think there was an understanding of English people that there were a lot of Irish people that came over to get away from the Troubles, you know, they weren't part of what, well, they didn't want to be involved in the conflict and they came away because they didn't want their children growing up in that conflict, but that wasn't understood very much either, not really. But we had a lot of friends who were Northern Irish because there was a little nucleus left behind here, you know, of the people that he knew at college who'd taught and stayed in Manchester who were from Belfast or Lurgan or Newcastle or wherever, and we had those as friends too, so we had that little nucleus of friends here who were Northern Irish as well, and the friend, Kate, I still, you know, I was in touch with her, the one I came over with, so–

BH: She was still in Manchester?

PM: She was, she married a guy from London of Irish extraction, but his people were Southern Irish, so we had our little nucleus of friends here who were Northern Irish too, as well.

BH: So was that your main kind of like, friendship group when you moved back to Manchester?

PM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it was, but now I've friends who are from all different backgrounds, you know.

BH: So that's interesting, so that was a wee group of Northern Irish people.

PM: When we come back to here he went to the Parkside pub and we'd meet on the Wednesday night for the quiz, we'd all go to the quiz on a Wednesday night and meet up with their wives, you know, and they were Northern Irish as well, so there was about ten, twelve of those.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

PM: Yeah.

BH: Now were those people involved with the wider Irish community in Manchester or were they distinctive within that?

PM: [pauses] **[01:10:00]** I don't think so, no, I think they kept to the teachers who were Northern Irish, that was their little group.

BH: That was their little group.

PM: Mmm.

BH: What I'm interested in is, I mean, I've heard some people say this, that irrespective of whether you were Catholic or Protestant from Northern Ireland, sometimes you weren't automatically received well by what I would classify I suppose as the Southern Irish community over here, sometimes that there were, there were problems were there as well. Did you ever encounter anything like that?

PM: No, I can't really say I did, but they look upon, well, I came over here, but I think you're kind of looked upon as not really Irish [laughs].

BH: Is that right, yeah?

PM: You know what I mean, not as Irish as they are kind of, but, and they wouldn't understand what's going on, and a lot of them just didn't, weren't interested either.

BH: Yeah.

PM: That stuff's going on up north, you know.

BH: Well, that's what I was going to ask, I mean, what did people from the South who'd sort of settled here think about the Troubles, you know, what was their–?

PM: I think they had short memories because it wasn't that long ago before you had the Easter Rising and the 1922, you know, all that stuff going on in the Republic of Ireland, but it was like they were coming over for economic reasons and they adjusted, I would say in a different way from us, I mean, as I said, we Northern Irish stuck together, we were all Northern Irish teachers. I didn't really know anybody from the South, just a few, but not well, maybe you'd meet somebody in school teaching, somebody from the South, but you knew they were Irish and they were friendly and you were all together, but you wouldn't really necessarily socialise in the same places because the Southern Irish had their own places for socialising, St Brendan's and there was places in Fallowfield and Chorlton, but I didn't necessarily go to those places, although friends of mine who were from the South, like the O'Briens, their children were at school with my children, we were friendly with them, they were from like, Donegal, Cavan, we were all friendly, the kids were all friendly at school, and they went Irish dancing and one of mine went Irish dancing and you'd see each other at the Irish dancing feises and festivals, you know, and you had neighbours who you were friendly with, but they didn't really understand Northern Ireland, the same way as you would be if you were from there.

BH: Okay, well, what about meeting other people from Northern Ireland over here, not just the group that you already know? Did you ever encounter other Protestants or Catholics over here?

PM: Yeah, we did, we had, we met Bob Jackson, he was a Catholic from Derry, he taught music in one of the schools, and there was a few Southern Irish who were, parents were Southern Irish, Charlie McGee, people like that you got to know, and you went over on holiday to Ireland, you'd met up, maybe in the South of Ireland, Roscommon or somewhere, and have a drink and a laugh, and my brother don't forget was down south as well, so we

did, yeah, we did, we were friendly with them, but they still really hadn't an idea, they were very down on what was going on up north and they really hadn't a clue of the sides, different sides of the argument, neither did they have on television, all you ever saw were unionists saying we want to be a part of Britain and Catholics saying we want to be united Ireland, but there was a heck of a lot of grey areas in the middle bit that nobody understood–

BH: Sure, nobody talked about.

PM: That's all they heard.

BH: Yeah, sure [pauses]. So that, you would have come back from the Bahamas then in 1988, yeah, and did you immediately start working in schools again when you were here?

PM: Not for the first year cos I had a baby at six months old when I first came back, the youngest was only six months old, so when she was about eighteen months or so I thought of doing bits of supply and then eventually I got a job part-time over the road in a Jewish school [laughs].

BH: In a Jewish school, right.

PM: An orthodox Jewish school because there was a girl there who I knew, not well, not well, just her sons say hello and, you know, terms, and she was in there part-time, well, she was part-time first then full-time because her marriage broke up and she'd three small children, and it was like, near her, so it was because she was trying to work round being a single mum, you know, and she said why don't you come over to our place and get part-time, and I'm saying I only want part-time, it's hard to get, cos I had four children, she said I'll see if I can get you into our place, get you an application form, there's a job coming up, so that's how I ended up getting into the orthodox Jewish school. It was funny, it was a culture shock.

BH: Yeah, see my next question was going to be, I kind of know the answer, you know, did your children go to the same school that you taught in or they went different places?

PM: No, no, they went to Catholic schools and I taught in an orthodox Jewish school, cos it was part-time and literally down the public footpath and over the road, I could work around family you see, before I ended up in Christ the King in Newton Heath, Catholic school, got a job out there.

BH: Were your children interested in your Irish or Northern Irish background? Was it something that they kind of questioned you about or–?

PM: They didn't question because they were over on holidays for, you know, summer, Easter, Christmas holidays, so they would sort of know what was going on from what their experiences were, they didn't question so much, but then I ended up taking my mother back in the last four years with dementia before she died, that was funny, and then on top of that, something else I was going to mention there, oh yeah, in 1999 I went back to Northern

Ireland. I just took a notion, the two eldest ones were at university and I thought if I'm ever going to get back [clears throat], I think I need a glass of water.

BH: A glass of water, sure, yeah, yeah. I'll get, I'll get it for you.

PM: Thanks [pauses]. Is that machine working?

BH: It is, there's not a huge amount of water left in it.

PM: There'll be enough, will there?

BH: If there isn't I'll go out, go and get one somewhere else [sound of water dispenser, followed by extended pause]. Here you go.

PM: Thanks. So yeah, so when the two eldest ones were at university, one in Manchester and one in Liverpool, and the third, the boy, was like, going into fourth year for his O-levels, and I thought I'm going to have to go now, if I'm ever going to go, took a notion, I'm going back now, so we rented out the house here in Manchester, in Prestwich, ended up in Coalisland, cos I didn't want them back in Belfast–

BH: Coalisland?

PM: Because the English accents.

BH: Sure, yeah.

PM: I thought I'll go to a small place, so, cos you couldn't go to west Belfast with English accents.

BH: No, for sure not.

PM: So I ended up back in Coalisland [laughs], think I'm going round in circles. In 1999 I went out, I went over first, for the first year, while he stayed here to see how things were going, and I got the two youngest with me and I put them into local schools. He went to St Patrick's Academy and she went to the high school and then got into the grammar school.

BH: Of course, St Patrick's in Dungannon.

PM: Yeah, and he went in there and it was like, all boys and all girls, but I thought if I'm going to make this, I've got to get, I got to, just one last ditched attempt to get back home, I've always wanted to go back home, I thought well, the two at university might come over and they might like it and might stay, that didn't happen, because they'd come over and go what the hell are you doing in Coalisland, you know, so I thought well–

BH: That is a bit of a change from Manchester.

PM: Yeah, from Manchester, but I thought because I knew the area, knew the schools, I didn't want to take them into west Belfast to get hammered, you know.

BH: Sure, and how did they find that experience, going to school in–?

PM: Well, he was okay with it, he did well because he was born in August, and you know how the cut off date in Northern Ireland's end of June.

BH: Yes.

PM: So he ended up in the year behind, so he had done fourth year, we went back to do fourth year, because the reason behind that for me was he hadn't grown, there was something wrong with his pituitary gland, he hadn't hit adolescence, puberty, and even though he was in fourth year he was very sm-, he was the same height as me, in fourth year, and I thought cos he was born in August he had missed out, he was born in August prematurely.

BH: Sure, yeah.

PM: See what I mean.

BH: Yeah, I do, yeah.

PM: So I thought he'd go back a year, it'll help him cos he hadn't grown, and so he went into St Patrick's Academy into fourth year again, I thought that would be a head start for him not having to do O-levels in one year, so he went in, cos it's all different, O-levels are different, and he did well, and the youngest, Meghan, went into her first year in St Joseph's, Coalisland and then she went into St Joseph's Grammar School by the Christmas, she got in there, anyway, to cut a long story short, that was, he came over after the first year and we were like, four years in Coalisland and [pauses], the two, what happened, the boy decided then he was going to Manchester University. I couldn't believe it, applying for Manchester University, I said I brought you all the way, no, I'm not stopping here [laughs].

BH: Is that right?

PM: He went with his uniform, St Patrick's, passed back over road to where it becomes New Mills, he hadn't a clue of the demarcation lines and went into a little shop to get something to get on the bus, you know, what kids do in the morning, and he felt the antagonism he said, and couldn't get over, and I said that's New Mills, well, what's different, why is it different, he just didn't like the, you know, the Catholic-Protestant thing, and then being English he was teased as well for his accent, so he wasn't, he liked it okay academically in the school.

BH: I was going to ask that, yeah, a school like St Pat's, he's probably, maybe the only kid there–

PM: With an English accent.

BH: With an English accent, yeah.

PM: So he had a lot, he had stuff going on there, you know, with some boys, but because he was a nephew of the President of Ireland [laughs], he was alright.

BH: That helped him a bit, yeah.

PM: That helped him, but if that hadn't have happened he might not have survived, he would've been bullied, but he handled it alright, and the youngest one didn't like the school at all, she hated all girls and she didn't want, she felt bullied.

BH: Where did she go? What was her school?

PM: St Joseph's in Donaghmore.

BH: Donaghmore, **[01:20:00]** I know that one as well, yeah.

PM: You know that one?

BH: I do, yeah.

PM: And she didn't like the school at all, she didn't, she used to say that was a rubbish school, I don't know why, so anyway, we went to my daughter, my eldest girl was getting married by this stage, in 2003, so we came over for her wedding and all her friends were here, and because he'd applied for Manchester, to go to Manchester University, and she said to me, she says they're all away to Manchester now and I'm the only one here, I want to go back, and I thought oh God, so, she did fourth year and then came back over here and did her last year in St Monica's, fifth year, did alright, went up to Holy Cross and into dentistry and that was it, they'd all come back.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

PM: That was my effort.

BH: So you had moved to Coalisland and then your son went to Manchester University–

PM: He applied for Manchester University.

BH: And then your daughter done fourth year and went back over here to do her GCSEs.

PM: Yeah, and fifth year.

BH: And where did you, did you stay in Coalisland or did you come back here as well?

PM: No, what we did was we had the house out on rent–

BH: Of course, right.

PM: Lucky enough, and we rented a place over there, cos I was hedging my bets, I thought I'm not buying, see how it pans out, lucky enough, but that was my effort, and my mum was on her own at this stage, so I took her down, she's from the Coalisland don't forget, and took her around all her old fr-, she was old, eighties, all her old friends and cousins and relatives, and she was reliving her youth, I would take her round all the wee country roads in the car and she would say oh it was so-and-so, oh that happened over there, this happened here, so it was like a gift to her and a gift to me too, and, yeah, so basically they didn't stay, so I had to come back too, lucky enough that was a rented house, we got back into our rented house, back into our own house and that was lucky, so we phoned the headmaster of St Monica's to see if she could go back in for her last year and he said I'm sorry, are you living in the same address, yeah, same address, same locality, in the catchment area, so she went back, caught up with all her old friends from primary school anyway, the last year, they went to Holy Cross, cemented all those friendships, cos she still has those cemented friendships here, but she's still in touch with a girl she was at school with in Northern Ireland too.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

PM: So that was a big move.

BH: That was a big move indeed, and what motivated that, you know, at that stage?

PM: Just me at that stage thinking this is now or never, it's now or never, cos they're at university, he's going to go into that year to do O-levels and she's finishing primary school, it was like, the right time educationally in their place in school, to make the move, but they didn't, they wouldn't stay there, they weren't going to stay anyway, so that was my effort, my last ditched effort to get back.

BH: Yeah, you mentioned there about accents and you said, you know, you went to Coalisland because you couldn't go into west Belfast with English accents.

PM: Kids, yeah.

BH: What was it like during those years before that when you were coming back for holidays and things like that, and your kids obviously would have had English accents and things, did anybody comment on that, whenever you used to go back?

PM: Oh yeah, they had a problem where their granny lived, they were getting bullied a bit, yeah, because my son was a great footballer, he was at Manchester United school of excellence, you know, yeah, and that was his street cred, that saved him because then they would pitch themselves against his skills.

BH: Right, so that was like, yeah–

PM: There was a wee, but when he went to Dungannon, and we were in Dungannon, he went to the Swifts playing football.

BH: Dungannon Swifts, yes.

PM: Yeah, and there was a problem there, wee bit of a problem there with his accent, but by this stage his accent then had modified in the year or two, wee bit Northern Irish anyway. In fact, he's in Australia now and his accent is still a mixture of Northern Irish English, and he plays Aussie Rules, he's six foot five now, that's the kid that didn't grow, six foot four or five.

BH: He must have grown very fast then.

PM: He grew overnight practically, yeah, and my youngest one, Meghan, she played Gaelic football, girls team, in Dungannon.

BH: Is that right?

PM: But in a way it did them good because they got a little bit of their own culture then, those three or four years, you know, they really remember those three or four years, they didn't like Coalisland at all, but having said that, it gave them a little taster, you know, so that was good from my point of view, it's a little taster of Northern Irish history, culture, Gaelic football, he played Gaelic football, she played Gaelic football, and they're involved in all sorts of activities in the areas, and then we went to the GAA club at night, that's only down the road, one block away for a social life, you know, so basically, yeah.

BH: So that was important to you then, that–

PM: To give them that bit of something, yeah.

BH: Yeah, that they had some sense of that.

PM: Yeah, that was a bit of something, cos the eldest two were in the Bahamas and came back and were in Northern Ireland for holidays and that, but the youngest two would have more of a connection with Northern Ireland than the eldest two because of that three or four years, and they kept their friendships in Manchester, cos one or two of them from school came to Manchester University, so they stayed in my house overnight, had nights staying over with me and then, but that all drifted away when they went back home, you know, they'd go back home, you might see them on Facebook, but they're leading different lives now, and all my kids are basically married and the youngest one has a daughter and my son in Australia has a new baby, a couple of months old, and they'll hardly come back now, and the one down in Essex has two children, she's head of legal down there, and the one, there's only one up here, so really that has basically impacted, this whole not sort of settled at all has impacted on the next generation because they've all moved away.

BH: Right, so you think that affected you, had to leave Belfast effectively–

PM: Yes.

BH: And move away has had like, a knock-on displacement effect?

PM: It has had a complete knock-on and displacement effect on the next generation because they did not belong to Manchester, they had no, well, they like, when they were year old kids they went to school and everything, made friends, but they had no deep-seated loyalty or affiliation with Manchester and so they moved, and my daughter Maura, the eldest one, would not be back in Manchester, I don't think Meghan would ever really, she comes up and sees her friends and goes to weddings, she's, they're all doing weddings now, you know, and the next generation of children are coming along and they are on Facebook or whatever, you know, social media, they contact each other. But my youngest's husband's from Surrey and she lives round the corner from his mum and dad, because his roots are there, and he, they've taken over his parents' dental practice down there, so that's going to be them, and the eldest girl's going to be there because her husband's from Norfolk, his family have more to do with the grandchildren down there cos it's only an hour away from where they live, whereas I'm four or five hours away. They've all scattered.

BH: Sure, yeah, well, what about your husband then? Did he try to instil some interest in sort of Northern Irish or Irish background?

PM: Yeah, yeah, because we went to visit his relatives. He comes from a very, very large extended family and we'd go round all his aunts and uncles in the summertime, and because Charlie, the father-in-law, he lived with Mary and Martin in Rostrevor, we'd see him in Rostrevor and his people were all, he was the eldest of eleven, so there's a hell of a big extended family, you go to family dos over here, in Ireland, there was like, fifty cousins, yes, they were all in touch with all, well, not close to them or anything, but meet up at wakes and weddings and things, so he would make sure they were all aware of their Northern Irish background, yeah.

BH: Yeah, so whenever you moved back then after those four years in Coalisland, what did you feel about that, like?

PM: Oh just like, I felt oh my God, I just didn't make it, just felt as if it was never going to happen now, cos you had to go along with your kids, no point in me being over there and them over here, cos they hadn't finished school, they hadn't finished university, you know, so you really had to come over for them. Having said that, they've scattered since.

BH: Mmm, since then again.

PM: So, in a way, I came over to Manchester to try to keep everything together in the north of England and failed at that too, cos they've all scattered except for one [laughs].

BH: So would that make you think now about going back to Coalisland?

PM: I actually would again, I would actually because I think well, they can take a plane in an hour, I've got to go four or five hours down, I've got to go down on the twenty-first of December because my youngest is going to Australia to my son for Christmas, right, and so

I'll be going down on the train to see them before Christmas and coming back up to be here with my daughter and her boys here for Christmas Day, and now that my husband and I are split he's with a woman now down in the other end of, he's down in Hazel Grove with a woman, within weeks [laughs], so that was fun.

BH: Whenever you first went back, was it 1999, yeah, so that's one year after the Good Friday Agreement really, do you have any memories of that?

PM: Oh I thought there was a whole sea-change in Northern Ireland. I felt there was a real sense of positivity like, peace had broken out, that great sense of, you know, people thinking oh my God, this'll be the new, Good Friday Agreement and it's all going to be perfect from now on in and everybody, there was a great atmosphere, I have to say it was wonderful in Northern Ireland to be over there for those four years and feel the difference, that made all the difference, and to think it might be put into jeopardy cos of Brexit, that would be awful.

BH: Yeah, did your children have any sense of the politics of Northern Ireland? Did they understand the politics or was it just something they kind of went we don't really get this, like?

PM: Yeah, I think they knew because of us, because of our experiences. My husband's family were put out, as I say, and I experienced all these things too, so they knew all those stories, they grew up with all those stories, but I think it'll be when they're older it'll impact, cos it impacts when you hit middle age, you wait for it, you suddenly realise there's less time ahead than there was behind you and it becomes so important then, your roots, because really the second generation of parents who are Northern Irish they actually feel displaced too because they feel that Northern Irish identity and that Irish identity living in England, so they don't quite feel completely English either, you know, so that's another thing impacts upon as well, yeah. **[01:30:00]**

BH: So they have those stories at least. It'll maybe just take a while for them to put them into some kind of place.

PM: It'll impact when their children are older I think, and that's why I wrote my autobiography because I want my grandkids to see it, thinking well, at least they'll know what I came from and they'll have an idea, because when I started asking questions to my mother, after my father was dead actually, but, I should've [indecipherable], but I was only young when he died, so you're only asking questions in your middle age because you're frightened, well, if she gets dementia she won't remember all this, so I asked questions from her and got a lot of stories about her in-laws too, my dad's side and her family, so I was lucky. So I'm putting this on paper cos I thought with my autobiography I might just put it into a book and pass it round to them, because even if they never read it it's there if they want to look into seeing what my life was like, what it was like for my generation growing up as opposed to theirs, cos it's changed over there too from when I was young and at least they have a little insight into what we came through to come over here.

BH: Yeah, something I should have asked you about and I haven't. When you moved over, first of all to the Bahamas and then, I suppose, back to England, was church still important to you?

PM: Yeah, I have to say I'm very much a person who would go to church and bring the children to church every Sunday, we hardly missed, we really didn't, and basically trying to give them a good foundation. I know when they get to eighteen everybody questions their faith, but the way I look at it was I give them the foundation and if they reject it that's fine, if they question everything that's great, but whatever they want to do they do it now, but I've done my bit. None of them go to church at all now, none of the four.

BH: Is that right? Cos a lot of people say, even people from the South, when they came over to England they not necessarily lost their faith, but that they stopped going to church as much and things like that, and that over time it kind of slipped, but I suppose that's, is that something that you recognise over here?

PM: Well, I think, I went to my local church, it was a nice little church, the Servites, and it was a lovely atmosphere in there and the children were welcomed in, you know, and they had little catechisms, so I encouraged that, and I was a teacher in a Catholic school as well, taught religion, you know, so that was important, and I felt that was giving them a good foundation with good values and good principles and therefore I took them every Sunday and I felt that was very important for the children to be given that example. Now, since that none of them have any, my son in Australia doesn't believe in anything, you know, but doesn't matter, they'll come round to it maybe eventually, they'll come round to realise there's more to what you see now, there's more to life than just going to work every day and bringing up a family, there's got to be another dimension to your life, because it's, now at the moment, it's important to me too now at my age because we, the church I belong to now, only three years, I've moved to Rawtenstall from here, when we split up we sold the house and went our separate ways, cos I was running out of the house with a suitcase, he was drinking and volatile and threatening, so I thought what am I doing at my age doing this, I'm going to get my own place, he probably went on Tinder [laughs], met somebody else, anyway, that's another story. So I'm in Rawtenstall in a little stone bungalow and the local church is a strong little parish community, so I got involved in volunteering, you have, you know, like, your luncheon club once a month for the older to take them into that luncheon club and charge them like, four pounds, five pounds for a two-course meal. I volunteer with a lady from Belfast from, she's from the Protestant community in Belfast [laughs], but we got friendly because she actually helps, she has formulated a group for sufferers of dementia, although you can't say that, it's not politically correct, you have to say those who live with dementia and their carers, so we organise activities for them and help out and volunteer on a Friday morning or sometimes Tuesday afternoon, so I've been doing that up there. So I've got involved like, just, with Carol who married a Dubliner, funnily enough, he was in the King's Showband, in the South, that's how she met him, bit older than me and so she's in Rawtenstall, there's anoth-, somebody whose people are from Tipperary, she's from Rawtenstall, and another girl from Belfast who went to that other college down south near, where was it near, that place near where Meghan was in Twickenham [pauses], oh God, where the, Walpoles had a place there, it's a very famous area [pauses], near Twickenham.

BH: Strawberry Hill?

PM: Strawberry Hill, yeah, but there's, was a college round there.

BH: Yeah, is it–?

PM: Is it Fenham or Fenton or something, or something like this, at some point, years ago, there was a co-, but she went there, so I've got another group of women who are friendly and do volunteering, who are involved in the parish and I've got myself involved up there.

BH: Right, so it sounds like you're involved–

PM: The church, church is important then, isn't it.

BH: And so these different groups and things are connected, they connect back to the church in some way.

PM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BH: Right, okay, and have these groups become more important sort of as you've got older or were they always an important part of–?

PM: Yeah, well, it was always quite important, but they've become important now because I'm on my own, more important now cos I live alone, and on top of that I do creative writing, I like writing.

BH: Yes, I know, yeah.

PM: I do writing here, I do writing in another creative writing group, I'm in a computer class, I'm in a choir, I do other things like that, so yeah, so you get–

BH: Sounds like you're fairly busy.

PM: I am fairly busy, yeah, I don't need a man [laughs], so I'm fairly busy with the church and the social club there and the dementia group and the creative writing and the choir and what else [pauses], other, yeah, other things too, you know, so I get out in there.

BH: What about politics over here, in England then? Like, I know, for example, during the Troubles there were political groups active over here, Troops Out, things like that. Were you interested in any of those?

PM: No, I was too busy rearing four kids, no, I didn't get involved in anything, was too busy rearing the family and going to work every day, I hadn't time. But I definitely feel as if I might join the Labour Party now actually because I feel strongly about the National Health Service and I think that will be piecemealed out bit by bit, I reckon, to America, I reckon that's going that way, things are already being done by stealth, think that's already there and I think we need to fight to keep that, and I do think that since the austerity programme

brought in by Osborne and those has affected people, there's more homeless, there's more people sleeping on the streets and all the services have been cut, I feel strongly about that and where we, we still have a deficit and we still owe countries millions and we still are in the red, so what did it gain really, at the end of the day.

BH: Yeah, when you and your husband were living over here like, did you take an interest in like, British politics?

PM: Oh yeah.

BH: Would you have voted and things like that?

PM: Oh I always vote, I always, always vote, I have never once never voted, do you know what I mean, always, always, always, cos it's, I feel strongly about having a vote and, you know, using it to voice your political opinions and there's nothing wrong with that and, yeah, still would, actually I'm thinking of joining the Labour Party as well, it might do something because I think at the moment with the way the climate change and everything's going, somebody needs, I was listening to that interview with David Attenborough on Channel 4 news, Jon Snow, did you watch it?

BH: Yeah, I've seen, I've seen clips of it, yeah.

PM: He said it's, it's irreversible, that's scary, he said it's irreversible, all you can do is try to stem the flow, you can't reverse it, so therefore I thought what are we doing talking about Brexit and stuff like this, this is madness, we should be out there doing something about the planet, to save it.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

PM: Crazy.

BH: Yeah [pauses]. I'll just, so I think I've asked most of my specific questions now, so I'll ask, so a few general questions that I just ask at the end of the interview, just kind of summing up questions, so I'll ask a few of those. So do you think the Troubles has had an impact on your life?

PM: Oh God yes, definitely. If the Troubles hadn't have happened I would still be in Belfast, still living five or six miles outside Belfast and being quite happy to stay there, never wanting to leave. I never wanted to leave really, ever, and I've always thought I'd go back, even at this age if I had a chance to go back I think I probably would.

BH: Right, okay, well, that kind of answers my next question which is, are you glad you left Northern Ireland?

PM: No, no, don't think so. I mean, they've been good to me in Manchester, don't get me wrong, the people have been fabulous and everything else, but it's not home really.

BH: See, that was going to be one of my other questions, where is home now?

PM: Oh yeah, home's always been Northern Ireland, always will be. I mean, I'm only in Rawtenstall three years and I like it, I've a lovely little bungalow, I've fixed it up, spent money on and done up and I love the wee house, and I love when I look out the window, it's got a view, you know, and I see the motorway and I look on the right and I've got a mountain which is like Belfast, because you've got your Divis Mountain and you can look at Belfast and you can see the hills, so yeah, it's like home from home, you know, the valley, but having said that, my connection there now is with the grandkids, you know, and I think that since I've had grandchildren up there that's, that has settled me more than anything.

BH: That's interesting.

PM: Because that's a big tie to wherever you are now, you're heading towards the last number of years of your life and you think well, what's important now, and it's your grandkids, so really and truly maybe it's too late to go back, you know.

BH: So that implies a tension then, on the one hand still a strong **[01:40:00]** sort of identification with Northern Ireland and maybe even a desire to be there–

PM: Yeah.

BH: But grandchildren are somewhere else, like.

PM: Are the draw, yeah, the draw, their the draw, they are, you know, definitely something you'd stay for, because my daughter wasn't well either, so she needs the support too with the kids, you know, so that would be the big hold here now.

BH: Well, what, do you think moving or migrating out of Northern Ireland has changed you?

PM: Yeah, it has actually, I suppose it's broadened me out like, because people over here are from a variety of backgrounds, where we're more narrow and insular in Northern Ireland, we are more narrow and insular, but here you've got people who come from maybe Maltese backgrounds or a bit of Italian or a bit of French, whatever it is, and it's more, there's more variety and more people are more broad-minded, I think anyway, and they have a variety of opinions, you don't necessarily agree with, but it's lovely to be in touch with people who are not rigid in their beliefs and their political views. I think that's an education in itself.

BH: Right, so is that something that's happened since you've moved over here? Have your own sort of, has your own sense of identity and your own political views, have they softened or become more flexible?

PM: They've softened and become more flexible, definitely, definitely, yeah, and you can see things more objectively when you watch the news now, you can see things a bit more objectively, you're not necessarily on one side or the other, you can see, you know, she's

got a point or he's got a point, so you're more objective and not as prejudiced as you would be living there.

BH: Right, what about the English people then? What do you think of them now?

PM: Well, you get an odd one, you know, when I was first teaching over here, who would mention Northern Ireland and you Irish are all just martyrs and things like this, but there weren't that many, there was twice as many who'd say ah ignore her, you know, so, or him or whatever, you know, so really there were, altogether I'd have no complaints actually about the English, especially the northerners now, and people complain about Londoners, say the northerners are friendly and they are friendly and it is a home from home, but when I go down south and I am struggling with a case on the escalator in London I've always had somebody say do you want a hand, so, and on the tubes, okay people don't speak, they read their books or their Kindles, they don't speak, at first I thought that was very odd, I couldn't get over that, you know, compared to home where everybody says hello no matter who, tell you their life story in ten minutes, but I've got used to that just the way it is, I just accept it, people just talk to people that talk back to you. I've had, I have been lucky, because [laughs] once I lost my ticket and had to come through and I was rushing to get the train back to Manchester, I said I've lost my ticket, he says it's a thirty-pound fine, I says oh I've got to rush through to get the train to Manchester or I'll miss, he says away you go, he let me off, so [laughs], so I've been fortunate with who I've met along the way, you know, people have been good and helped you with your bags in London and chatted to you, so, and if I've been stuck and I've been lost. Once I was getting on my way to my daughter who was brought in to have her baby, the last one, and I got to London, didn't know this area of London that was west, Queen Charlotte hospital, and I thought oh my God, where am I here, and the first person I stopped is, can you tell me am I near Prince Charlotte or Princess Charlotte hospital, cos I had it on my wee app, you know, I think I'm getting lost here and she says I've no idea, but she says I'll get you a taxi [laughs], she says my mother and father are from Larne [laughs], she was Canadian, but we went, they went to Canada, and she started chatting about Larne and her mother and father, she was going to buy, get me taxi, I said no, I wouldn't let her, I got my own taxi. Isn't that lovely, aren't people good really, and I'm completely lost, because she was being induced the next day, and I thought if she was into labour, cos she had labour pains, I thought oh my God, I better get out, while she's in labour, but anyway, I got there and she hadn't had the baby, so it was a nightmare, oh but that woman, I can still her remember her coming down the, she told me her first name and everything, but that was it, just somebody walking along the road in London, so how about that.

BH: There you go, yeah. I think I've asked most of my questions, so the last one I usually ask is, is there anything I should have asked about which I haven't, which is important?

PM: [extended pause] I'm trying to think now [pauses]. I think, I suppose, pre-Troubles, how Catholics felt, maybe, when the Twelfth of July came, but I've already gone over that, haven't I?

BH: You've said a bit about it, but if you want to say more about it that'd be helpful.

PM: I think that there was a sense of fear, there was a fear in the atmosphere about the Twelfth of July and the town being closed off and the marching and the sense of second class and the sense of never being good enough or never being able to get out of the ruts of being poor, and I think that was, that was in, brought, brought down to you by things, conversations at home, my father saying we should go to Canada, we go to Australia, we're never going to get anywhere in this place, we're Catholics blah, blah, blah, that sense of second-class citizen, that sense of never going to get out of this poverty, and that sense of you were doomed almost, that you never had a chance, it was like being black in Mississippi really, that kind of a feeling.

BH: Yeah, that sounds very much like the way the civil rights thought about this. It sounds very much like the, you know, the language of the civil rights movement in the sixties.

PM: Yeah.

BH: And you went to these rallies and things like that?

PM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that was what we, cos we knew we were second class, you just knew, but then they were putting it into this reason, that reason, that's happening in jobs, this is a percentage, so statistics were facts, housing, Austin Currie brought it home when there was a young engaged couple who were given a council house when they weren't even finished being built because they were engaged, whereas a Catholic family in a field, in a caravan, that hadn't got a house, were passed over, and he went into Caledon and squatted in the house just to highlight this difference, and that was all coming out, you know, one man, one vote, and the English were saying what do you mean one man, one vote, they hadn't heard that before, that we didn't have necessary, no real democracy in voting [indecipherable], no real democracy in Northern Ireland because of gerrymandering, and because in Derry, where there was a majority of Catholics living, there was little representation for them, even though they were in the majority, because the lines were so demarcated to make sure there'd be a little Protestant majority in every little constituency, all of that, I think nobody really realised over here, none of that was evident, and Brookeborough saying about no Catholic, Protestant government for a Protestant people, nobody over here knew that, they hardly employed a Catholic, nobody over here knew about the shipyard, the two main areas of employment, shipyard and Shorts. My father-in-law worked in Shorts with a Union Jack on his machine like, you are here and that's why you're here, and keep your head down, so he had to keep his head down all those years and say nothing, and he'd go home and take it out on everybody at home, like bad temper, but because he had to bring in a wage and support his family he had to heel, he was croppies lie down, it was croppies lie down and that machine had a Union Jack on his, and over here people didn't realise that because over here, even though you're English and that was your flag, you didn't have to have that on your machine over here, nobody bothered, the only time we saw a Union Jack was on the side of somebody's trainers, you know what I mean, you didn't see them, and even if I see a Union Jack or an English flag here, it doesn't affect, I think this is England, they can put their flags up in every single house and every single town, that's their flag, but when it's used as a weapon over you, as a weapon, as like, really that's what it was used as, you feel very resentful of that, but you had no choice because there was no way out of that situation then. So civil rights were trying to highlight something and that's in that wee story I've

written and that, I read that out, cos it was fifty years exactly from 1969 and I thought this is an Irish centre and there's not a mention of it, so I'm going to read it out, what happened in the fifteenth of August 1969, just a small piece.

BH: It sounds like the civil rights movement was an important thing then, for you anyway, whenever you were sort of reaching adulthood like, it was something that had an impact on you.

PM: Yeah, definitely had an impact, and it's sad to see the way it went, you know, after thirteen were shot dead in Derry, that was it, scatters, you know, that was awful, people were fighting to go out then and march, but it was like a holiday atmosphere in Derry when you think about it, they were all eating their roast beef dinner before they went out to march, do you know what I mean, it was like a carnival atmosphere, until that happened.

BH: I mean, did you ever think, cos I remember speaking to another woman actually who, she still lives in Newcastle, and she was saying she must have been sort of coming to the age of about seventeen or eighteen around that time as well, and she went over to Kent to do an English degree or something like that, but then she came back after that because she wanted to be involved, if you understand what I mean like, actually involved in the civil rights movement, and she was worried that she was going to miss out on something, you know.

PM: Yeah.

BH: I wonder did you ever feel that like, whenever you went to go to Manchester?

PM: Yeah, I did feel that, but I, coming to Manchester I did feel that I was missing out on a lot and we needed to be all in there doing something, doing our bit, I really did feel that, but then when I went back to Northern Ireland I did EAL, I did Irish, English as a second language, and the Portuguese kids and there were East Timorians and there were **[01:50:00]** Chinese and there were–

BH: Was this in the nineteen ninety, 1999?

PM: '99 to 2000 and whatever, they were all, influx, big, I was going round schools, peripatetic job going round schools, so in a way, and Bernadette Devlin was at one of the classes, learning Portuguese, that I went to, so I was doing something for them then, that was a new generation of kids coming in from other areas to get a better life too.

BH: Yeah, well, that's another part of it actually, the influx of people since really the Good Friday Agreement, which hasn't always went down well with a lot of people who are living there obviously.

PM: But the thing was they had to go to England and they were getting discriminated against in England, it was their turn now, not to discriminate against them, so that's what I did, that kind of work, and I wrote a poem called 'Walls' about the walls in Northern Ireland

and I wrote a poem about that too, I must send it to you actually, not because I want anything published like that, but just thought it's relevant.

BH: Oh it's definitely relevant, definitely, yes.

PM: It's relevant, so and that wee story too, I didn't re-, but I'll have to polish up my autobiography and see if I can get it published, do something with it, because I'm up to the point now with my husband, who's fond of drink, I didn't want to put in anything about him because I didn't want to put anything negative about him in for the grandkids, you know what I mean, I was trying to leave everything out [laughs] of that bit, but, so I'm up to the point where I'm back, I'm coming back from the Bahamas into Manchester.

BH: Right, you've some way to go yet then, a few more chapters.

PM: [laughs] I don't want to go, I only want to go up to a certain point cos after that they see their mothers can tell, follow on from there, you know, their, I'm just doing the bit where they were born and they get the next bit from their parents.

BH: Yeah, yeah, okay–

PM: Is that me?

BH: I, well, I've nothing left to ask, but again if there's anything else that you think's important.

PM: No, I'm alright, yeah, that's it now I think, I've said everything, if I think of anything I'll let you know.

BH: Do indeed, and your autobiography as well, if that ever gets to the, you know, the final stages that would be, it would be good to hear about that, you know, definitely.

PM: Growing up and what it was like skipping on the street and all the wee rhymes and things we learned, and I wrote a poem about going to the Thursday novena after school, we had to go to the Thursday novena in the Clonard and I wrote a poem about that, so I like writing poems and wee stories and things because I enjoy doing it.

BH: Yeah, no, I think it's a good thing for people to write, you know, diaries or memoirs or autobiographies, they're really good for historians in particular, you know, you love to find people's autobiographies and things cos they're really good historical sources, you know.

PM: And it's what they grew up, when they might, you know, the, their, what their experiences were, and somebody else in the next two rows of houses or street might have a different experience.

BH: Completely, yes.

PM: But that's your own personal story.

BH: It's your story and it's your interpretation of your experiences as well, so everybody's interpretation of the–

PM: Different, of the same events, even in the same family even.

BH: Exactly, yes.

PM: Could be different.

BH: Yeah, no, I've interviewed people who've literally, like a brother and a sister who, you know, have had exactly the same set of things, but completely different take on the whole thing.

PM: Yeah, it's, it's amazing that, isn't it, you know, it's amazing. So what part, whereabouts are you from?

BH: Cookstown, so that's why, that, that, that's why I know–

PM: Coalisland.

BH: St Patrick's and all that, aye, cos we used to go to a place called the Clubland which is–

PM: I used to send, my two used to go to that one with the accident, where the two kids were killed.

BH: Yeah, oh the Greenvale, yeah, that's right.

PM: Greenvale, my two used to go there.

BH: Yeah, I was there this Christmas before that, I was in that place, the Christmas before, yeah.

PM: Were you, oh my God, that was tragic.

BH: Yeah, it was, it's–

PM: And that was one of the Curries, wasn't it?

BH: It was, yeah, I think, aye, they're bringing a lawsuit against the man who owns the thing.

PM: Cos the police didn't come out either, did they, in time or anything?

BH: Apparently they were out in time, but they didn't do, kind of stood about and didn't actually do anything like, so that's what the story is, so, but it's–

PM: Terrible what happened.

BH: Terrible, yeah.

PM: I love Cookstown, the big, big, wide road, big, big, wide street, and you can park up and go in the shop and throw things in the boot and go over here and throw things in the boot and go back, I love that, you know.

BH: Yeah, Cookstown's alright, you know, but it's like–

PM: You wouldn't go back to live there would you?

BH: Again, I probably would go back, but it's, what on earth would you do, you know, like, there's no, there's just, there's nothing like, I–

PM: There's nothing to do, no jobs.

BH: Nearly everybody I know has moved away somewhere like, to get a job, like, but the other thing that's done Cookstown in is two supermarkets have destroyed the–

PM: The whole little businesses.

BH: Aye, all the wee shops, you know, and that's, that was noticeable again, you know, over the last kind of seven or eight years, it's changed like, the whole–

PM: The whole thing, the whole place as well, it's sad, isn't it?

BH: It is, yeah.

PM: Oh it's terrible, and then of course they're doing the same here, with the high streets here are looking deserted, all charity shops, so that's going to have to change as well.

BH: It's the same thing, it's the same idea, you bring in these big supermarkets and there's no business for anybody else, and then everything shuts up and then nobody goes in, even into the town to do anything, so it's–

PM: So that town becomes deserted.

BH: Aye, town becomes deserted.

PM: Well, Rawtenstall now they've got the little cobbled streets, people use those streets and go up and down, there's a whole pile of charity shops too, but there's a vegetable shop and there's like, Greggs, you know, but I think it's all the chains that are like, taking over now, and then wee individual shops are all getting lost and left behind.

BH: The chains and then, I'm just going to stop this here now.

INTERVIEW ENDS