INTERVIEW G11: BRENDAN CONNOLLY

Interviewer: Dr Jack Crangle
Interviewee: Brendan Connolly [pseudonym]
Interview date: 3rd September 2020
Location: Virtual
Transcriber: Naomi Wells

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type. The interview was recorded across two audio files that were spliced together to create a single audio file.

JC: I've hit record there. So I know you, I know you signed the consent form and everything, but just for the purpose of the recording, would you be able to just confirm that you're okay for the recording to go ahead?

BC: I am indeed, I'm happy to comment.

JC: Great, and could you also then just state your name and today's date?

BC: Brendan Connolly and it is the third of September '20.

JC: It is, okay, so shall we start off then, if you could just tell me whereabouts you were born and when?

BC: I was born in Belfast in 1965, nineteenth of January 1965.

JC: Great, and you grew up in Belfast, did you?

BC: Did, yeah, I was born, actually I'm one of the few, my mum wanted to have one of us in the house, so I come from a family of seven kids, mum and dad, seven kids, I'm the eldest boy, so two older sisters and then I'm the eldest boy and four younger brothers, and my mummy wanted to have one of us in the house, whatever reason, so the first two sisters were born in hospital and I was picked to be born in the, born in the house, so I was actually born in the room that I still sleep in whenever I go over and visit my dad cos my dad is still in the same house, mum's died now, but my dad's still in the same house.

JC: Really, wow, yeah, that's cool.

BC: But it's a bit unusual, you know, fifty, whatever I am, fifty-five years later that I, I still sleep in the same room I was born in.

JC: Yeah, so you were the only one who was, who was born in that, in the house, then, yeah?

BC: Yeah, yeah, the only one in the house, cos it was an old, old, bit of an old Irish tradition to an extent that, you know, I want one in the house and, although in fairness my, my auntie, as she still reminds me now, I was the ugliest baby she'd ever seen in her life, you know, I came out, a big massive mop, I'm a baldy now, but a big massive mop of red hair and a big red face that looked like it'd been smacked about a bit, so that's my auntie's words.

JC: Fair enough, and, and what area of Belfast was, did you go grow up in then?

BC: I was born in Suffolk Crescent which is on, I was going to say it's on the Stewartsto-, the Stewartstown Road, is what it was called, which was, if you picture the Belfast, I wouldn't necessarily know what it is, but out of the city centre there's various different roads, so it's, it's west, so if you go west along the Lower Falls Road and Falls Road then joins into Andersonstown, and then Andersonstown, so you come out of Andersonstown, you go onto Stewartstown Road and, before heading further on out, I'm on the Stewartstown Road, so it is in a, it's in a, as a lot of Belfast is, or was certainly then, it's in a mainly Catholic area, and there was a Protestant, I was going to say enclave, but there was a Protestant estate, small estate, and it was called the Suffolk estate actually, that was pretty close to the house, you know, like, two streets away, it would have started to an extent, so there was always that element of, you know, that rivalry or that underlying current that was always there as you grew up.

JC: So was there, would you say there was tension and stuff between the Catholic and Protestant communities there?

BC: Oh God, yeah, I mean, if you look, I mean, if I, I grew up around, what was it, primarily the seventies I suppose by the time I was, well, I would've been five in 1970, so, you know, my five to fifteen years were spent [indecipherable], in the seventies, a lot of that was before, if you were going out there were certain shops, I remember actually the early part, and I still have memories of it, that there was mixing, even with this wee, this wee estate next to us, I remember going out to the shop there, I would have known a couple of people, not many because they would have went to a diff-, they would've been at different schools and so on, but you were still able to walk up and go into those shops and, and so on, but anyway, I remember then, as I got into the seventies, that less and less, you just, you didn't go to those shops, and you didn't meet there, and you kept your way, and if you were actually walking past the main Stewartstown Road, to an extent it's, when you get past all of our estates and the estates below it you would eventually, the Protestant estate, you'll have passed it, on the right hand side was Catholic, the left hand side was Protestant and, yeah, quite often there was stone-throwing over either side, if you walk along you need to keep an eye out and your wits about you because there would have been, you know, people getting jumped on or, or given a kicking or whatever, on both sides, on both sides, so it was, yeah, that element of it, being so close to it I suppose, if you'd been further down in the middle of Andersonstown or the Falls then it would have been less of an issue, it only would

have been the city centre that would have been, the cross, or potential hotspots, but whenever you're closer to one it's always a bit of an issue.

JC: Yeah, so it's the issue of the two communities living so close together, sort of thing.

BC: At that point, yeah, because it was just total–

JC: Yeah.

BC: But I, I do, I do remember in, and I've still got memories of it, the army initially coming to the streets going into Belfast, so I would have been young, I would have been, that would have been 1970 I suppose after the civil rights march in '69 and, so I still remember a British Saracen, as we call a six-wheeler, so big armoured vehicle coming into the street and my mum and the other neighbours coming out with cups of tea and chairs and them sitting in the back of the, and us sitting in the back of the, the armoured vehicles and they would let you hold the gun and the army, they were getting their tea and coffee and stuff, but that was very much at the early, only at the early stage of it, because relatively quickly it was, from being heroes initially, because at that point there was, there was lots of the, the Catholic families, I know my aunt was, was in that situation, were burnt out of their homes in the, in Lower Falls as there was, yeah, the Protestants, some of the Protestant enclaves on the Shankill Road came across and, and claimed the four or five streets that were mixed or whatever and burnt all the Catholics out of them, and, and she was put out of the house, so pretty quickly it was deemed then that the British Army, initially they were there to protect, so they were, it was good news, but then after that it obviously developed into something else.

JC: Yeah, so, so those attitudes, I mean, you mentioned at first they were kind of almost seen as like saviours in a way, but that, those attitudes changed pretty quickly, then?

BC: Yeah, yeah, I think whenever, whenever they started to then, any time there was any trouble it, it appeared that they were on the side of the, I suppose the Protestants or the loyalists, however else they want to put it, the loyalists or whatever, at that point, so if there was a roadblock it was, it was put there to, you know, to protect, it was, to beat them down rather than actually beat the other way, so yeah, it became, you know, it became less of an issue, more of a, you know, enemy rather than, enemy's a strong word, more of the perceived enemy from that point of view, the difference of [indecipherable], you know, you don't get involved, you don't get involved in any of it, it's a, you know, seven kids, five boys, my mum was, my mum was pretty strict with us all, mum was the disciplinarian, she, as is the case in a lot of Irish homes, any, any discipline to be handed out was done by the mum, and my dad was the big threat, but he very rarely had to do anything and mum's attitude was, you know, and she put it in all of us, you know, none of the family have been in any, any real trouble, was, you don't have the right to judge other people or do anything to them and you certainly don't have the right or should be condoning anybody being killed, so yeah, we all just really didn't get involved in anything.

JC: And what did your parents do for a living?

BC: Father was a painter and decorator, and my mum was a housewife, so we grew up with, there wasn't a lot of money in the house, both of them, both my mum and dad were born down in the Lower Falls, one was a street called Sultan Street and the other was Springview Street and they were, you know, two-up-two-down, outside-loo houses, you know, as, as you, you do get in the inner city, in most of the big cities, and they actually, when they bought our house for eight hundred pounds or whatever it was in, in 1960 or something, or '61, it was, you know, a big commitment to them, but they had the same thing, they wanted to make sure that the kids were brought up out of the, you know, the centre of the town away from it, and even where we are now is still deemed to be nice, a nice area as such, so all fair play to mum and dad, but as a result of that there was very little money and my mum always still says to this point that in the early days when she was, she had her coat and the button fell off and she couldn't afford to get another button, that she had, you know, she had a big safety pin in, holding the coat closed, and she was wheeling four of us down, down the street, but dad, I'm going to say my dad wasn't around a lot, he was, but he was, he was working basically through the day and then he was doing homers at night, to make sure we had enough, you know, money to put food on the table for us all, but there was no real money forthcoming, I mean, all, all of us from our own point of view had to real-, realise that we needed, if we wanted a few pounds in our pockets when we became teenagers, we had to go and earn it, you know, so when I was thirteen and I was, I was doing a milk, delivering milk and then I was working, once, soon as I was sixteen I was washing glasses or waiter in bars and barman, before at seventeen, eighteen, **[00:10:00]** I got a job in Topman in town and then that was, that was me.

JC: And what about the neighbourhood, like, as a kid and stuff you mentioned there was sort of, there would have been some tension and stuff, was it, could you, like, play out on the street and things like that or was it too–?

BC: Oh yeah, no, no, it was, it was great that way and our, where our house was it was in, it was called Suffolk Crescent and actually it was a bit of a, it was a, it was a crescent in that there was, there wasn't a lot of traffic on it, the only traffic on our street was traffic in the street because there was an avenue where they would've went down and bypassed our crescent, so, yeah, some, some really, really good memories. I mean, there was, again part of the, how would you put it, the community aspect of the neighbour, neighbourly aspect of the whole thing, with everything that was going on there was a real understanding as such that the kids needed to get some elements of, of normality with everything that was happening, so from, at one end of it, I remember my dad at one point saying, again this would have been in the early seventies, that he and a number of the other neighbours in our street were, I'm going to say vigilantes, but that's pretty much what it was, they, they gathered at the top our estate or street which was, as I say, next to this, the, this Protestant estate, ready that if there was any, you know, incursions of, you know, either gangs or whatever else it is in this block, that they were there to, you know, repel that I suppose, as such, so that was, that was in the very early seventies whenever the, the burning was happening down then in the Lower Falls, but then there was a real, the wee residents association had put together, and we had street sports every year, which I loved, and actually got quite big, you know, so they took over one whole street and, you know, there was all the usual races, free football tournaments, games and all that sort of stuff, so from that point of view we had a, I was going to say I had a pretty happy childhood for me, you

know, we played a lot, we literally went out, a lot of it, a lot of it was judged, which is sometimes here now, you came in when the streetlights go on and that was, and a lot of you, you'd have went out in the morning and you'd have been just playing, you might've came back for lunch, you might not have, but you were just out, cos it was, in those days there was no, you'd, you'd, I had BBC One, ITV and BBC Two, they didn't start until four o'clock, and there was no breakfast TV or anything, you know, so sitting watching TV, there were no computer games and stuff, you played, you went out and you played, played outside and, and you did all of that, so, yeah, that was a, that was a, a big part of it. The whole tension aspect, I suppose, with the other estate, there was, there was one thing and I'm trying to remember the year, it would have been, it would have been the mid-seventies, and my two brothers, and obviously this wee estate next door I was talking to you about, my two younger brothers, they're two twins who are just about a year and a half younger than me so they're, they're, they were fifty-four last week funnily enough, so they would have been in their early, early teens or probably even less than that, they might have been about ten or eleven or something, and they had been playing with one of the other neighbours in this green, green area, there's, like, a green area on these two streets that almost joined or was the link between the Protestant estate and ours and basically they were, I'm not going to use the word kidnapped, but when they were telling the story it's probably grown arms and legs over the years, but yeah, there was, there was a gang of the Protestant lads who, you know, grabbed the three of them and took them into the [indecipherable], this block of flats there, took them into the bottom of the flat and the other lad was a couple of years older and he got a good, he got a good kicking, they slapped my two brothers about a bit, but they were holding them there, they weren't letting them go and everything else and eventually, eventually they were, you know, they were found, if you want to call it that and, and let go and that caused a, a big furore at the time. I remember walking down the street with all the neighbours in the street literally, there was, whatever it is, sixty, seventy, eighty people, all out, all walking up to, to confront, you know, to find these guys who'd, who'd taken these Catholic, you know, young lads and put them in the basement and stuff, and on the back of that then there was a, a big wall built, as in metal corrugated steel gates and a wall, no gates, there was one street that had a gate that could be opened, to allow for emergency access for vehicles and stuff, but in reality at the end of two, two of our streets fed into that, it was all linked, they went up at the point and these are, whatever they are now, thirty, forty feet high, big green walls, like a peace wall almost, Protestants in there, Catholics here.

JC: And they're still there, are they?

BC: Still there, still there to this day, yeah, yeah, still there to this day. I think they probably could come down, but I don't know, everybody seems happy enough with them, it's made a couple of nice wee cul-de-sacs rather than big through roads going through and stuff, they keep that part, so yeah, that was, could have, I was just going to rabbit on about my, the earlier days then.

JC: Yeah, no, no, no, that's great.

BC: The, I suppose there's different aspects of the, the younger part that you remember from a Troubles point of view, if you want to call it that. We, I, I remember, from being in

the house point of view anyway, I remember in my bedroom, and quite often there was our garden at the back, there was a wee bit of a gap in the hedges of the trees into the estate behind, and a lot times you were going up, or you'd have been sitting in the garden and next thing the army literally would have been coming through your, this hole in the hedge in your back garden, so there was foot patrols out a lot through the seventies and, and the early eighties and, yeah, literally they were able, just walking through, so walking through with guns saying I'm just cutting through. You couldn't do anything with it, just literally sitting in your garden, chatting and then this foot patrol comes through your, comes through your garden and out through the front gate, and another time there was, yeah, a couple of older guys from my point of view, must have been twenty-odds or something, literally outside my gate there was a foot patrol, an army, and there was police, used to be there was army foot patrol and then there would have been maybe a policeman with them, and they stopped these two lads right outside my gate and they, I think basically the lads were saying who are you two, stopping me, so a bit of a confrontation came on anyway and I do remember at one point literally just looking out of my bedroom window down on it, but, no they, one of the lads offered this, this army guy who was being a bit mouthy with each other a square go, he says, says you're a, you're a big man when you're standing there with a rifle round your neck, get rid of your rifle and let's see how big you are.

JC: Yeah.

BC: The, the squaddie in turn went right, feck that, so literally he took the helmet off and he was, you know, pulling the gun over his head, ready to go for a square go, and at that point this guy just, one, two, and two, big haymaker, and so the two of them, literally they fell backwards over, over the gate into our driveway and the policeman was just trying to simply [indecipherable], yeah, so then a police chief comes and then they're thrown in the back and taken away. I would have been going out when I was in my teens, sixteen, seventeen, going down to my friend's house, either down the street or, or around the corner, and numerous times I would have been stopped by the foot pat-, an army foot patrol were just coming by at the time and just seen you and said oh what's your name, where you come from, date of birth, you know, up against the wall, frisked, right, on your way, you know, you go, so, it became part of, part of life, it wasn't, it wasn't, it was just, it was our normal to an extent rather than anything else. It was the same when you were going into town because the town through the seventies was, the city centre was a target for, for bombs and stuff, so there'd be big gates, basically big metal gates with turnstiles and anybody going into the city centre had to be searched, so if you were going into the shops, literally, you were, you'd go through a, a steel cordon to go into the centre of town to go shopping, but again, it was normal, to an extent. I suppose closeness, as far as elements of Troubles go, the, at the top, very just top of our street, so literally whatever it is, a hundred and fifty yards from my house, which on the main Stewart, Stewartstown Road, just across from us there was a, a large estate called Lenadoon, a few of my classmates and friends were in there and there was a bit of rioting or trouble on that road, I can't remember, probably would have been around hunger strike time or maybe slightly later, early eighties, and there was a girl called Julie Livingstone who was just a, a schoolgirl, I'm going to say teenage schoolgirl, or not teenage, primary school, maybe eight or something like that, but she was killed just at the top of the street, she was hit in the head with an army rubber bullet and that obviously caused lots of furore and there's still the, the monument there, like, a wee, you know, a wee

plinth thing to her, but we were, again, that's what I'm saying, we were, probably all my early years were pretty protected. There wasn't a lot of mixing with Protestants, just the way that it worked, I went, I went to school, I went to a school called La Salle boys' school in the middle of west Belfast, it was a, it was a Chri-, a Christian Brothers school, it wasn't a grammar school, so I, I failed my eleven-plus, but I only, I must have only just failed it because when I went into that school I was in the top stream, and it was one of those schools were there were seven classes, **[00:20:00]** top two will do the exams, the next three might do something, but not a lot, like, City and Guilds we used to call it, and then the bottom two were the remedial guys who, you know, really weren't examy and you, you know, school life was great, did various different mixes and trips, played on the football team, it was quite often actually if you were, elements of mixing would have been if you were playing in football matches against Protestant schools.

JC: Oh really, yeah?

BC: Oh yeah, yeah, if you were playing in tournaments and sports and so on you're, you'll, you'll have mixed against other schools and a few of those, generally they were alright just there, there was one or two over the years that, you know, a few wee altercations appeared, but yeah, it's, I suppose growing up, but it's helped me, not helped me, it's part of my life now even when, you know, recently I, I've been on quite a lot of photoshoots in the work I'm in now, and I've been in Cape Town for a lot of years and when I was there with a photographer last year, the year before, it was, he was saying how do you know these things, basically it was, you know, we were walking back to the hotel and you, you learned to have your wits about you, if that makes sense. Growing up in Belfast a lot of it was like that, you know, you were always extremely worried, conscious of who's in front of you, who's behind you, who's to the left, who's to the right, and they, yeah, so you just always know, like, they're closing up a little bit too quickly for my liking, speed up, and if they're still closing, you change direction and you wait and see, so just different things like that, and even now it's still part of the instincts because that happened in Cape Town where I'd seen somebody way back and said he's, he's closing very, very quick, there's something not right and nothing came of it, but literally this guy was, he was, he was begging, but you just have to watch out what you're doing, so it's just different instincts I suppose that develop with you, so in that school I remember coming out of it in, actually it would have been primary school, so that would have been in the early seventies again and there was a place called Silver City, as it was called, it was basically an army fort, so they took over two playing fields and built a big corrugated fort with lookout posts and I remember coming out of school and, primary school, and the big ones come out of the high school that I actually ended up going to, would have been basically standing throwing the stones at this fort, all it would have been doing was making a bit of noise and annoying the guys inside, but it was still socially disordered to an extent, so I remember, I remember being there and it was like getting trophies if you got a wee bit of camouflage off this, camouflage that hung over the corner of these forts and you went to school next day with it [indecipherable], but there were snatch, snatch squads as they called them, snatchies, where basically they came flying out, you know, three or four jeeps out of the station to break up the, the ones that were doing the stone-throwing, and, and come down, picking the big ones out to an extent, grabbing them, and throwing them in the back of the jeeps and speeding off, but yeah, so I suppose you remember those things as, as you go on. But in school a good, you know, good,

tight group of pals, some of my best pals now are still, my two best friends are still ones from school, they both live in, still living in Belfast, but, I'd rather be in Glasgow, but they're still, you know, they're still my best of friends, and yeah, I suppose from a school point of view it was all, it was, it was pretty good. At one point I thought about being a priest.

JC: Really?

BC: Was a bit unusual, I, I've always been one of these people that questions things and I, and I always wanted to, again, maybe the way mummy brought me up, I was always wanted to help people, if that makes sense, [indecipherable] helping people and I got something out of it, and I thought maybe one of the, one of the options was to, to become a priest, that's one way to do it and I thought it about at my sixteenth, seventeenth, early seventeenth, so I thought, do you know I could, I could really do this sort of thing, but in, in the end the, the lure of girls was a bit stronger than the lure of God from that point of view.

JC: Yeah, I don't blame you.

BC: Although, although it changed to an, well, not, not changed to an extent, it, it meant I still ended up going into something that was about helping people to an extent, more than anything else, so I did a lot of voluntary work when I was about, I was probably about sixteen, fifteen, you know, whether it was in the local leisure centre with groups or in youth clubs, did a lot of voluntary stuff and I actually did a chunk of voluntary stuff with the adults, special needs, it was called handicapped then, but special needs, and then the youth club twice, well, I say youth club, they'd a club cos they were, most of them were adults, on a Monday night and a Friday night and yeah, I volunteered with that. I went with the driver, picked up all the different members and then I went to the club and did things, you know, so I, I was comfortable, you know, wiping grown men's bums if they couldn't do it themselves, I didn't mind all of that at all, but again that, again that opened up an element of, cos that, that was all mixed, that was, you know, Protestant, Catholics, everyone else, so large parts of what I did at that point were, were linked to that, and then I suppose from a school point of view, an academic point of view I did, did my O-levels, got seven of those, did my A-levels, got three of those, and ended up going to uni even though my teacher at the time in school said to my mum the year before Brendan's not university material, he's not going to get his A-Levels, so that was it a I'll show you thing, so I did that and I ended up going to do a BA honours degree in youth and community work, at University of Ulster, Jordanstown and, and yeah, so still doing, I was still doing chunks of voluntary stuff at that point, working in youth clubs and, but this is my way of looking to see, you know, yeah, I suppose it's my calling, I was really good at that sort of thing, you know, stand up, entertain and get kids involved and things, so we did loads of different things through, through the course and then I was working part-time in Topman in the city centre through this [indecipherable].

JC: Yeah, no, I was just going to say it sounds like you were working from quite an early age.

BC: Well, no, I was working as in part-time jobs.

JC: Yeah, part-time, yeah, sure.

BC: Part, part-time I was doing, but that was just to get money whilst I was still at school, and yeah, they called me the oldest Saturday boy in town in, in, in Topman because I was, I was part-time right through uni, literally, uni in, in Ireland in Belfast was, you started at eighteen and you finished at, it was four years, and you were coming out at the end of twenty-one going twenty-two.

JC: And you were still living at home then, were you?

BC: Living at home, I lived at, I lived at home, lived at home until I got married, bit unusual, but yeah, I lived at home until I got married, but yeah, so I did, I did the honours degree at Jordanstown, which was great, and that mixed, that was, you know, everything, I was doing a lot of stuff, I was doing cross-community stuff and everything else, and the Troubles had, were easing off cos this would have been about '85 probably, and did Camp America, went off to the States and did Camp America for three months which was, which was brilliant, [indecipherable], and then after uni first full-time job, if you want to call it that, was the youth leader in charge at St Joseph's youth club in Crumlin, which is about thirteen miles outside Belfast and it was great, you know, I was, enjoyed it. I was there, in fairness I was there probably less than a year, but because the, at that point the, I'd, I'd just left Topman, but I'd been working with Topman right the way through in the Arcadia Group, and they came back and they said to me listen, we're actually running a graduate management course, and there was this store manager then, the area manager of it, said listen, he says Brendan, you'd be, you'd be great at this, why don't you, why don't you do it, you know, so I was happy doing what I was doing, but I thought, well, it's another string to my bow, let me just decide what way I want to do, and everything else, and I decided, I said, well, okay, listen, I'll give it a, I'll give it a try, I was able to play hardball for a wee bit of extra money at the time, I said listen, I says I'll, I'll be swayed either way, so they gave me the extra money and says yeah, go and do it, so yeah, so I ended up going and doing, leaving the youth club, got one of my other classmates the job, then left that and went to do this graduate management course in, which was retail, and yeah, did alright with that one. I think actually within a few months they put me on, I did young manager of the year competition things, finished second in that, for Northern Ireland, and then ended up going, then started area manager, they said listen, we want you to come off the course and just manage the store which was in Newtownards, which was again, that's where Dawn's from, and the, the organis-, the HR department wouldn't let it happen, they says no way, he has to finish his, the course itself , but then they came to the arrange where I could run the store and get released to go for the other bits of the course and stuff.

JC: Oh okay.

BC: So yeah, so that was me basically moved into my retail career at that point, and of course I'm still, I'm still in, in it, retail, one way or the other, different guises over, over the time, but yeah, so manager of Topman, and then went to manager of Principles for Men in the Castlecourt, I suppose around about that time it did have another couple of counters, actually, from a Troubles point of view, again I don't know if the Troubles part of it is relevant to you.

JC: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

BC: The, one of my earlier, one of my earlier, **[00:30:00]** what age would I have been, I'm, I'm going to say sixteen to seventeen, I could probably actually work out the exact year of it, but it doesn't really matter to an extent, so I was lying in bed one morning and a Saturday morning it was, nine o'clock, and it sounded literally like, you know, a shutter, not, not an electric shutter, you know the shutter on the shops where you go and you grab it and it goes crrrrrrrrrrr [makes a noise] as you're pulling it down, it sounded just like that, and I went what the hell, that was, it was really loud, you know, and it can't be a shutter, there's no shutters about here, where did that come from, and basically it turned out that one of my two best pals that I spoke about, his house was up the top of my, my street, there was a, there was a shop on the Stewartstown Road, there was a couple of shops which were our main shops and then across the road a wee bit of grass and then there was a row of houses to an extent, and my best pal lived in the second house, four Doon Road, he lived in the second house, and yeah, basically they, you know, they got a, a knock on the, the door at two in the morning, three in the morning, man with balaclava on, they said we're commandeering your house, we've got, we're out, we're, we're on active service, we've got an operation going down, go get your kids out of their room, out of their beds and go into that back room, so mum and dad got them two out of their beds and my sister and they went into the back room and, you see they'd literally just taken possession of the, so it was the IRA, of the M60 machine guns from Libya or wherever else they got them from, so this was the first time they'd actually, these M60s were used in any operation and basically just across from his house there was the shops and there was a library, Suffolk Library next to it, and they had broke the window at the side, set the alarm off, so basically faked a break in, alarm was going off, so at that point the police just didn't respond automatically to alarms or anything, you know, they waited and waited until the next morning, so they had been, basically been sitting, waiting on the police arriving from whenever it was, four o'clock or something, so five hours of sitting and waiting and, yeah, basically that's what that noise was, it was the M60 machine gun and two, two police jeeps arrived and that was it, of the, of the M60, so there was two, two killed that day and the two policeman killed and there was a policewoman who was shot and badly injured, but she managed to return fire, and even when I go back home now and visit my, my pal's mum and dad, they still live in the house, there's bullet holes around the door, and there's, in the library there's still bigger bullet holes where the M60 rounds hit the library and you can still see the chunks out of the wall where, where the they hit, so there's elements of that where you see things.

JC: What, what was the perception of, like, the IRA and, and the republican paramilitaries in your area growing up, cos I mean, you kind of mentioned the British Army being seen as the enemy or the perceived enemy in a way, was–?

BC: Yeah, och no, it, it was the opposite, the IRA were deemed to be on, on your side. I mean, I remember Newsbeat, Radio One Newsbeat coming into our school and the headmaster picked out, three of us out to speak to, sensible ones as he thought, but he ended up getting quite a, a mix between the three, of the, of the three guys, one of the, I won't give his name, but Kevin in the class, he said oh no, I totally support what the IRA are doing, freedom, you know, [indecipherable], my angle was I, I agree with their objective of a united Ireland, but I disagree with how they're going about it, nobody's got the right to take human life, was my angle, and, and the other lad was very much, no, no, I disagree with it

all, you know, and he got a lot of grief for saying that, for disagreeing, I got, I got grief as well for saying I disagree with how they're going about it, you know, at school the next day, it's all part of it, but what was the question again, Jack?

JC: Just, just how, how the IRA were perceived I guess in your community, yeah.

BC: Yeah, so they were, they were deemed as being, I'm not going to say the protectors, but in a lot of areas they were. If you remember, growing up in the likes of west Belfast, you were actually statistically, not even west Belfast, but in Belfast in general, through the seventies and eighties, statistically you were safer walking through the streets of Belfast than any other major city in Europe, there was, there was no, or very little, I'll call it normal crime, hardly any stabbings, very little, you know, lots of the other things that go on in all, all these other places just weren't in place because it was being policed by, I suppose, two police forces, there was the police force themselves and then there's the paramilitaries within these communities, so there was no real drugs to speak of, although there was, like, a, I think they were called the INLA, they were deemed as, were more gangsters, re-, republican angle, you know, so a wee bit of drugs maybe going on there, but within the IRA there was no drugs, if you were caught dealing drugs you were, you were dealt with, or doing anything antisocial, you were dealt with, and I suppose by best example of that would have been a guy called Gerard Devlin, Gangster Devlin he was called, couple of years above me in school, he went to my school, and he was, initially he was, antisocial stuff, you know, breaking into people's houses and finding who it is or holding up a van, a van, delivery van or something and getting, so he got the, there was a hierarchy of punishments, if you want to call it that, when dealing with the IRA, so firstly he got, he got a big beating, stop doing what you're doing, and then he, then he got a good tanking, couple of broken bones and stuff, and then continued to do it and he was then kneecapped, so shot twice in the back of both kneecaps, and that made him a bit unsteady on his knees and he continued to go and he just said frig you, I'm doing it, you know, and he got what they called the full house which was ankles, knees and elbows, shot in each of those, it took him another few years to recover from that, walking with two sticks as a, as a guy in his twenties, you know, and he was given a final warning, and he broke into an old woman's house and robbed the house and that was it, bottom of Ladybrook, which again isn't too far from the house, used to get the bus, basically they came up behind him and, and shot him, shot him dead, so whilst it's all very brutal and everything else about it there was, there was an element of, the stuff that they're doing is to stop all the antisocial stuff affecting our, you know, our neighbourhood, our, our area as such, so yeah, there was that element of it, but yeah, just to be clear, I worked in the bar and they used to collect, hold the green cross, which was the, it was the fund to provide help to the families of those that were in prison, the active service members as they were called, in prison, and they used to collect every, every Friday or Saturday night in the pub that I worked in, used to come round everybody, put your money into the, the jars [indecipherable], so I suppose there was an element of us against them, everybody's in here doing it, but there was also a wider picture which has to be the case of, you know, it couldn't keep going the way it was going.

JC: And did your mum and dad talk about sort of politics and the Troubles and things like that much when you were growing up?

BC: Not really, there was no, we weren't, we weren't a republican household, we were very much a neutral household and that's the way my mum brought us up, we were exposed to all the other stuff and I've, I mean, I, I mean, I'm absolutely the opposite of it, I wouldn't have been doing what I was doing as far as youth work and everything else, I, you know, bear no grudge or ill to anybody at all and that's why, that's why I was doing all the cross-community stuff and everything else. I was, same as you, you know, a lot of this is down to the, you know, the socio-economic group that you're in, where, where you're living and so on, it's not so much the fact of, well, why are those Catholic or Protestant neighbours up in that lovely wealthy estate up on the Malone Road getting on absolutely fine yet you're down here and, you know, poverty-stricken in Lower Falls or Shankill and yous are hating each other, it's more to do with the, the social aspects of it rather than actually the religious aspects of it, and I used to have a big theory that actually most of the war in this world was, was caused by religion, I think I would have argued you black and blue for a number of years that every single war is, you know, it's down, it's because of religion or a variation of religion before I realised the fact it's nothing to do with religion, religion's the, you know, the, the cloak that they cover different parts of it. It's to do with what we stand on, it's to do, this is my turf, this is my land, I own this and if you want to take it it's because you're a Catholic or a Protestant that you want to take it, that's why I'm fighting you, no, it's not, it's because somebody wants to take it, that's why the, it's the, it's the, it's the Shiites and the Sunnis in Iraq, you know, they're both Muslims, but they hate each other, because they want to take their turf, so yeah, you learn that after a certain stage.

JC: And was, was the church, I mean, presumably if you wanted to become a priest at one point, was the church then a big part of your life growing up?

BC: It was, I was an altar boy when I was, when I was younger, I started serving on the altar when I was probably still in primary school for a few years. I still go to church, but I went through a wee phase, again when I was a bit older, bit older than when I was thinking about being a priest, I would have been a student, so I would've been about **[00:40:00]** twenty or something like that, where I wasn't getting what I wanted out of the, the Catholic church at that point, so I went, I went to every, I went to Evangelical, I went to, you know, a Baptist, I went to a strict Protestant, I went to different things to try and find where, you know, which, which one of these things is talking to me, and there's aspects of all of them, the different parts of the lot, you know, I love the music and the singing and the, the revelry of the Baptist and the Evangelical, but I struggle with their teaching of Catholics or anybody who supports the church that's built on the, the City of Seven Hills, or any, the Roman Catholic church, you're all going to hell and you have to be saved and stuff, so to an extent I came back to or stayed with the Catholic church because fundamentally their teaching is, or I was taking from it that, you know, everybody's got a right to worship what they want, you might not agree with it, but it's their right to do it and I, so yes, from that point of view I've stayed, I've stayed [indecipherable], but it's more, in my mind it's more about being good to people and being righteous more than anything else, but yeah, it was, it was, yeah, it was, you know, it was still, it was still a very important part of my life, you know, the parents, my parents were, weren't overly holy, my dad went a lot, my wife's mother and father were pretty holy and still pretty are, and they, you know, they still make sure they're at mass every week and all the rest of it, but for my kids now it's, it's their choice, they, they, they

will go until they're eighteen and when they're eighteen they can decide what they want to do, but yeah.

JC: And you talked, you talked a bit about sort of what you did when you left school and going to uni and stuff. How easy was it, sort of with everything going on, to sort of maintain a normal social life in sort of in inverted commas, like?

BC: I think it, it did get easier, I mean, I came out of uni in '85, so I suppose elements of the seventies and the early eighties were starting to calm down somewhat, some things were still going on, but, like, if we went into town in our late teens and so on, we had our town names, depending where, where, what bar you were in and so on, our real names, so my, my two best pals were, my, I'm, I'm Brendan and then there was Eamonn and Marty, so pretty Catholicy names, you know, that's, and that's what a lot of it was, you determine people, you, automatically you suss people out by their name, sussing out the school and then you were just either a bit wary or you, you're, yeah, you're just conscious, you needed to make sure you were okay with them first, cos people would have been, you know, literally they would have been trying to suss you out for whatever reason, so I became Stephen and the other one was John, so we had neutral names whenever you were, you were in town, at that point, but again because I'd worked in Topman in the city centre and there was various different, you know, religions and people from different parts that all worked in the city centre I was, I was exposed to an awful lot more of it, so it was much less of an issue, really was much less of an issue as we went to the mid-eighties and late eighties. I mean, when it comes to the whole element of, did the Troubles force me away from, from Belfast, not really, not really, I mean, I suppose, I mean, to put it into context to an extent, I, I, I met my now wife when we were seventeen, so I was working, so met her at mass funny enough, I stood at the back of the chapel and she was there and, she's nice, she's nice, so anyway we, we, you know, started out when we were seventeen, couple of wee fallouts in between when I did Camp America [indecipherable], but then we got married when we were twenty-six and when we got married we, we moved out, cos that [indecipherable], I would rather raise my kids away from all [indecipherable], them and us for, for whatever reason, and my, my pal did the same, but funnily enough he didn't like, he was too far away from what he knew, he ended up moving back, but we moved out to a, a suburb called Carryduff on the south, south-west side of, of Belfast and most of them, actually, most of, apart from my two twin brothers, who're still in Belfast, most of the family have moved out to an extent, two out to the count-, three of them out to the country, four of them actually, a bit more out to the country, because, you know, I suppose growing up it was a case of, you know, we want to make sure our kids have got the best chance, opportunity and area to, to be growing up.

JC: How did, how did Carryduff compare to where you were, to west Belfast, then?

BC: It, it was, you know, bit quieter, bit mi-, yeah, it was, it was suburbia, more so than, than where, where we grew up, but yeah, yeah, there was nothing. I mean, where, where the house was and where Sal's mum lived, they're still nice areas, they're still absolutely, they're still, you know, they're not, you know, inner city or anything, so from that point of view we were relatively lucky, in, in growing up, but yeah, Carryduff was always, it was always a part of town that I liked and, and was happy to get away from the road, as it was called, away

from the road, so we moved up there, and I mean, we, we were about two years in the first house then moved up to a bigger house, in Carryduff still, I suppose my, careerwise I'd moved on a bit. I was then a, I became a, I'd moved, assistant general manager at Macro before becoming the area manager with another, another business, so yeah, and then first two kids were born, had two born in, in Belfast in '94 and '96 and yeah, life, life was, was grand, I was enjoying it, worked in, at that point I was with Macro on the west side of, of, or Dunmurry, which was a mixed area actually, and then obviously the peace accord was signed what, '95 wasn't it, so it was all for good, I would, by that point I would, I was working with a company called Jeanster as the area manager when I left Macro and then I got a call and then, when was it, well, it would've been about '98 maybe, from a, actually no, I was with that business, but were, potentially there was a bigger job coming up with, with a guy who I met in, in Belfast, he was the manager of Debenhams, and both our stores, I was manager of Principles for Men, both our stores were firebombed on the same night, so that's why we met each other, you know, we were standing there at three in the morning with, looking for incendiary devices or sprinklers going off, so that was the other time I came fairly close to an instance of, I suppose the, the Troubles, and that would have been, it would have been about 1990 and I, I was on my lunchbreak from Principles for Men, went into the wee bakery in what was called Chapel Lane, just outside the Castlecourt shopping centre and I was ordering my roll, my roll and sandwich, or soup and sandwich, and just heard this crack, crack, or whatever it was, I went that did not sound, bit unusual, I look, my friend was with me getting lunch too, we looked at each other and says that didn't sound right and you looked outside at the glass and just seen people running, oh something's gone down, so literally you came out and I turned and just, it's, it was a narrow street, so, like, space for one car, two wee small [indecipherable], and your eyes adjust, and I could see people, like, wandering the doorways or running down side, side streets as such, and then you arrived, you see them running from this area up here and then the only thing I could see up in this distance about, I think it was about fifty yards away or something, where the bomb with two feet, literally just sitting up like that, and it was a policeman who'd been shot dead, and so it was a bomb on his two feet, there was, two of them were shot, one of them was, one of them was okay, but someone was dead, and in your eyes adjust, because everybody's ducking and moving except for this one guy that's running toward you, and I'm looking [indecipherable], but actually looking to say right, what's his hands doing, what's he doing, so he had a blue cagoule on and the hand was inside the cagoule part and all I could see was a bit of a white glove, like a snooker referee's glove, that's what came in my mind, inside it, and he just said, you know, he says that's the shooter, jeepers, what are we going to do, I said, well, if that hand comes out you're hitting the ground, but he literally, twenty yards before us he turned left into an alleyway and we just went, like, so we ran down and jumped over a wall and away, I mean, so those are the instances, among all of it where I was probably close enough to, you know, touching distance, as such, of, of the Troubles, as they say.

JC: Yeah, the ones that stick in your mind.

BC: Yes, no, they do, and then, so back to whenever we moved, so we were happily living in suburbia, the Troubles at this point had calmed down dramatically, '95, that's a good sign, so it was quiet, but from my point of view it was more about career again, I, I was at area manager level, I was running a number of stores and there weren't too many jobs in

Northern Ireland that were going to give me the opportunity to continue on with the career path that I was on, **[00:50:00]** so I took this job anyway and it, it initially involved, it wasn't involving moving because I was still responsible for, it was going to be Northern Ireland and Scotland and a bit of north of England, so I could still do that from, from where I was, but then it, it changed somewhat and they asked me to go into their head office and head up a marketing department that hadn't been set up yet, so I didn't know if I was going to do it, want to do it, but they, they were flying me back and forwards, they put me up in a flat in the middle of Glasgow city centre and they were flying me back and forward Friday and Mondays, which was fine for a short of period of time, you know, I brought Sally and the kids with me, well, do you like it or not, cos then they said listen, here's the job, do you want to take it, then you have to move over. Initially I wasn't going to move over cos Sally's a real homebird, as a lot of people are in, in Ireland, certainly in the North where, you know, I'm, I don't want to move, I'm happy here, I'm happy here, and probably the only place I would have moved to would have been probably Scotland, just from the point of view of, you know, literally proximity, very close, I know it's, you can be just as close if you're down south, but proximity and the people, the people are very, very similar, similar, you know, outlook on life, similar attitude, similar sense of humour and all the rest of it, so it was going to be one of the easier places to, to move to. I was happy with flying back and forward, and I'd always been associated with Scotland with the different areas that I was in through work, you were always, Northern Ireland and Scotland were always latched together for the vast majority of things, so it felt like the natural link, being able to move, move across, so Sally and the two kids came over for a bit and see if they liked it or not and ultimately we said right, listen, we're going to do this and look for a house, found a new build house, she likes new builds, still in the house now funnily enough cos she really likes it, and yeah, we moved over in April '99, we bought the house and moved the family over in June 1999, and, and then had two, two more kiddies, over here. I've got four, so Euan was born in '90, not '90, '02, and Rio was born in '04, but two kids born in Scotland, two born in, in Ireland.

JC: And what area, what area of Glasgow did you move to?

BC: It's just on the edge of Newton Mearns on the Southside of Glasgow, so whenever I was moving over the company I was with at the time, there was another senior guy in there, actually both from the chief exec and this other senior guy [indecipherable] going over [indecipherable] and they basically said right, these are the three areas you want to move to Milngavie, Bearsden, Newton Mearns, they're the, the nice parts of, of Glasgow, so I went and looked at properties round, all these things and found us one on the edge of Newton Mearns, so good schools, really good schools, I mean, the schools that the kids went to are number three, top three in, in Scotland for, you know, for public schools, if you know what I mean, so yeah, really, really good from that point of view, and still, still there now, still in the, still in the same house.

JC: Yeah, and how did people react to you and your wife as, like, people with Northern Irish accents? Did they ever ask you sort of questions about what Northern Ireland was like or, or did you get a sense of that they knew much about the Troubles or about Northern Ireland, cos you, you mentioned the kind of similarities between people in Glasgow and Belfast?

BC: [long extended pause] [**00:54:12]** [The two interview audio files were spliced together here].

BC: I think I just said a, a sense of, what was it about, was it about the accent?

JC: Yeah, yeah, just how people–

BC: Well, no, I don't, not really, not really, I mean, more I got the, I suppose more I got the whole, oh can you just please keep talking, I love that accent, you know, it's great. I suppose if I was that way inclined I think, if you were down in the bars and pubs twenty years ago when I was younger and fitter, you would have been absolutely fine cos they just loved the accent, so I never got a lot of, oh tell us about the Troubles sort of thing, it comes out now and again in different conversations, you know, from, but usually only if you're in a, you know, you're drinking with people you don't necessarily know and it's, it's, it's a long chat, but I suppose it gets less and less cos I'm over here over twenty years now, but yeah, you still get the odd, I mean, some of the stories that I've told you I have to regale every now, as, as people say go on, did you ever see any of the Troubles, well, couple of times.

JC: And what about the whole, obviously Glasgow has the sort of Catholic-Protestant thing as well, did you ever sort of experience or come across any of that?

BC: I suppose when I was talking about the time whenever I was, I was put up in the flat in, in the centre of Glasgow and was flying back and forward, this would have been 1999, '98, and I do remember, I think it was the first where I actually says I'm going to, I'm going to stay through this weekend and come back on, like, Thursday, and do a four-day back home, so I said I'm just going to, I'm going to, love, you stay, but I'm just going to stay in, in Glasgow this weekend, I'm going to visit some stores and stuff, and then I remember lying in bed on the Saturday morning and going what the hell is that, and, you know, whatever, it was eight o'clock on a Saturday morning, that sounds familiar, and literally got up, opened the window and there's the Orange band walking up High Street in the middle of Glasgow, and I went frigging hell, so there are, they are a very, very strong links obviously, but again a lot of it is down to the, I was going to say the social mix, when you see some of the ones who are, you know, bitter and holding on to a lot of things, you know, not all the time, but invariably they'll have the tattoos, they'll have the, the anger, the built-in anger, the built-in upbringing that they've got, they've, you know, I hate them bead rattlers, I hate them Orangemen, you know, it's just, yeah, it's, that's unfortunately, it, it is, it is still there, that was surprising to hear, and I wasn't expecting to hear an Orange band, and not far from my house in Thornliebank Road, it's where the, you know, when it comes to the marching season there will be, the road'll close off sometimes, so there's some parts you couldn't escape, as they say, but I loved coming over here, in our wee street when the kids, first two were really young, and it was still, like, a brand new estate, houses still being built and so on. In fact, my eldest son Nathan, who's twenty-six now, and he's still pals, there's five of them who all grew up on the street together, or on the development, and they're still the best of pals now, they're all going golfing this weekend, and it's a real mixture, you know, two of them are, three of them are diehard Rangers fans, the other two are, actually no, two are Rangers, one Kilmarnock and one St Mirren and one Celtic, you know, it just, they're out there playing in a, whereas back home in Belfast you wouldn't have went out in a Celtic

top or a Rangers top depending where you were, but here they were all out just playing, Celtic, Rangers, Kilmarnock, it was just boys with their football strips, which was the, one of the real positive things about coming over to here, and seeing that, but I'm still now, I still wouldn't encourage my, my kids, whether it's in my head or not, to be putting on a Celtic top if they're going into, into town, or, or anywhere really. I says if you want to play football with your pals then fine, that's okay, but if you're going somewhere else, no, it's, you know, I don't want you wearing that, and it's a club, I coach a lot of football, I've been coaching underage football for just about all the time we've been over here, and, you know, our club, St Cadoc's youth club it is, but it's an, it's an interdenominational club because you can be anything you want, they never really wear, you know, no Celtic or Rangers tops at training or matches or anything else, you know, just to keep all that out of it, all that nonsense, keep it neutral as you can. What I did do, when I came over here, which I hadn't mentioned yet was, I, there's almost a sense that maybe ties to what, what you're, you're working on, Jack, is that I felt a lot more Irish when I came over here, when I came away from Ireland. I, my daughter, my wife was a very good Irish dancer and did Irish dancing for years and my, my sister-in-law, Sally's sister, is a world champion, she was really, really good, and so Chloe, she, my daughter did, my mum, or my mum, my wife didn't want my daughter to do Irish dancing cos she probably knew what it was like, but I said oh she has to do Irish dancing, she's good at it, she'll love it, something for yous to do together, so she started doing Irish dancing, so she was tiddly, you know, four or five, whatever it was, and sure, we weren't over here long, literally we'd just moved over, so less than a year of moving over here, and we went to a feis, an Irish dancing competition, bearing in mind she could barely dance, but it was all part of the, the fun and there was, so I was at, sitting in the, in the, the audience watching this and then one of the judges, I recognised one of the judges, like, three judges for it, and he went to me, he says Brendan how are you doing, so it was a guy called Sean Fleming who I played Gaelic, I played Gaelic football and soccer when I was back in Belfast, and I played Gaelic with Sean for Rossa through, through my twenties. He said oh Brendan, how are you doing, and I said ah not bad, I've moved over here Sean now, oh great, are you keeping well, and so we were just having a good wee chat before he went onto his next competition and then Chloe's teacher, afterwards Chloe's teacher went and said he was, it was a guy, he says oh Brendan who was, how do you know Sean, I said oh I played Gaelic football with him when I was back in Belfast, he said oh do you play Gaelic football, and he says oh listen we've got teams over here, I said och do you, I hadn't played it for a couple of years at this point, oh that's, good on him, and next thing literally, he went, he was called away, ten minutes later this other, a wee tap on the shoulder and this, this man was there saying oh Brendan is it, how are you doing, I'm Tommy, I hear you play Gaelic football, oh yeah, no, I did back home, he says do you fancy playing, I says, well, I haven't played for a couple of years, he says oh come along to training anyway, we'll see how you get on, see if you enjoy yourself. At that point I was still settling in I suppose, still looking to build, you know, your network of friends and all the rest of it, and I said listen och I'll come along to training and see, he says brilliant, I'll be back in a wee minute. Again half an hour later these other two guys came over with transfer forms and everything, so literally I was signing these forms to transfer me from a club in Belfast over to this club in Glasgow, I would say within an hour of meeting them I'd been transferred to them, so I ended up playing, the team, team called Tír Conaill Harps in Glasgow and I played for, I played with them for, I don't know, ten years over here. I was getting too old at that point and, and considering retiring and that, but we won the championship in Scotland, which they hadn't won before, and I

was in that team, but on the whole, there was a much more of a sense of, of Irishness when you're away, you know, you listen to a bit more Irish music cos it's home, you listen to a bit more of this cos it's home, and so maybe it's similar in a way in, in America, you emigrate over there, you become, you want to hang on to a little element of what is home and quite often the, the, the music that, the culture, the Irish dancing, all those other things, all, all, all contribute to you, that sense of where you are, that's probably waned in fairness, that's probable waned a bit, although I find my daughter's, more than the boys, my daughter has absolutely grabbed it with two hands and she will be listening to lots of different Irish music and all the rest of it, more so than the boys, so, and even if I ask, when I ask my, the kids, I say, or people say to the kids oh what are you, Irish or Scottish, I tell them all, I says you're Irish, but you live in Scotland, so the two big ones are okay with that, cos they were born in Ireland, they understand it, two younger ones would say dad, I'm born in Scotland, surely I'm Scottish, we're in Scotland, lived is Scotland, we're Scottish. I says no, you're an Irishman who was born in Scotland and lives in Scotland, there's a difference, so whether, it's up to them, they'll develop their own sense of, but they're not, they're not into the Irishisms as much as my elder two who were born over in Ireland.

JC: But that was important to you to kind of instil that in them, their sense of Irishness?

BC: Yes, yes, and it still is, I mean, my daughter, their passports were all due up, if you want to call it that. I've always held, held a UK passport, but I know I can have an Irish passport, and fundamentally you want to, it to keep you, this is where the whole principle thing is all, oh if you were really principled about it you'd make sure you had an Irish passport, I was thinking, hang on, that costs me twenty quid more, you know, why would you want to do that, I'm happy, I'm happy with my UK one, although I might change that when it, when it comes up. My daughter as soon as her last, her kiddy passport ran out, she had an Irish passport, so she's got an Irish passport now and the other ones are given a third choice, cos they can have, they can have one, they can have both, it's up to themselves, just have to pay for both if they want both, but I think they're going to get Irish passports too. Now, whether that's the whole, now linked into the whole Brexit situation, she says, well, hang on, if you get that then we're covered for this, that and the other, I said aye, but you won't be covered for that, so you need to remember, so yeah, I suppose the whole, that element of Irishness is still, it's still there and I do still want it to be [indecipherable], as far as I'm concerned kiddies, yous, yous are all Irish, I'm Irish and–

JC: Did you meet a lot of other Irish people through things like GAA and stuff like that?

BC: Oh yeah, oh aye God, loads of links, **[01:04:12]** and the Irish are first generation, because yes, the ones who've emigrated over, but also they, a lot of them are first generation, you know, they're, big Donegal contingent, cos a big part of Glasgow, and greater Glasgow and west of Scotland has a strong Donegal contingent, and yeah, and the, and the young lads now here running the, the GAA club are very much keen first generation rather than, you know, migrants who actually moved over and have done it, they set it up and were involved in it, but now the youngs, the next young level coming through are all first generation and probably feeling extremely Irish too.

JC: Yeah, that's interesting, and do you, do you still visit Northern Ireland a lot, or have you visited a lot since you moved?

BC: Yeah, well, we used to, because my work, I had stores over there, and so on it was eas-, I was able to get over there four times a year and would usually take Sally and the kids with me in the earlier days, bit less now cos I don't, I'm not on the road as much, but usually, I'd look to get over at least twice a year, and Sally would go over three or four and she'll take, whether the kids are going, she would take all of them. Now it's just the two younger ones, but we always go over at Christmas, and we usually get over at a time for, in the middle of the, in the summer holidays, Sally would maybe go at Easter as well, depending what's happening.

JC: And what do your kids make of Northern Ireland?

BC: Och it's home, it's, I was going to say it's home, it's not home to them, but they still, the two older ones still see it as that, oh they, they love it when they go over, but I suppose it's more an element, it's more the people, people say to me do you miss, do you miss Ireland, I says, well, I don't necessarily miss the physical place because where I am is very similar, physically. You miss the people, you miss the people, you miss your family, you miss, most of those other elements of it, but you do, you develop your own network of friends and confidants, and it's still not home and actually the whole lockdown and the, the advent of Zoom and everything else, probably, I've probably seen more of my immediate family through lockdown than I had seen them ever before, cos we were doing our weekly, this is our weekly, you know, that sort of thing, so you were seeing loads and loads of people, and the family are quite close back there, they will have, you know, at least once a month my full family will be together for, either in a group, birthdays, usually have two or three birthdays together and say right, all the August birthdays we're going to such-and-such's house, or they're going to such-and-such's house, so yeah, there's always that, that, that mix of it.

JC: I suppose, I mean, I've got a, I've just got a few more questions here and one of them is, I guess, like, the extent to which you think Northern Ireland has changed since you left, if you've noticed it changing at all?

BC: I'm going to say I'm probably not back enough, but it's just be-, it's become an awful lot more developed, any time I go back, I don't go into town an awful lot, but even just speaking to my friends, everybody else that's still there, there is a serious degree of normality about it now compared to what it used to be, you know, more and more it doesn't really matter where you go, where you walk to. I would now be relatively comfortable walking up the Falls Road, or the Shankill Road, whereas before I would've been shitting a brick the whole way up it, as they say, but, so that element of normality I think is a, a big part of it, I suppose anybody over there would tell you probably something similar. I think it's more like a normal city now where there's places you don't go, not because it's Protestant or Catholic, it's just because you don't go there, and that's the same in any city you go into in, in, in the world, so yeah, anybody that's going over there, and I speak to lots of people over here, they love it, you know, Scottish people who've never been before go over for, you know, a trip or whatever else it is and they come back raving about

the whole thing, so from that point of view it's the part that was always missed. I always grew up, I always grew up, or feeling, even when I was older that we loved getting visitors, people coming over from England or wherever else it is because we want to show them this is, this is our home, you know, this is where we are, we used to love that, and we always made people on the back of it feel unbelievably welcome whenever anybody came over, not just visitors to my house, but business, work, anybody, you know, we're always glad to see people and glad to see visitors.

JC: Yeah, no, that's interesting, and there's certainly a lot more visitors now, and I find it interesting the way that, like, some of the things that have happened during the Troubles have almost become like a tourist attraction these days.

BC: Well, they are, my brother, the two twins alone, I mean, one of them's a, he's a bit of a musician, but he, he does the tour guides, so he's on the bus with his guitar and he'll sing songs and he does the whole tour round the, round the bus, yeah. My colleague sitting out here now, he'd never been to Belfast before, massive Rangers supporter, it's a girl, massive Rangers supporter along with her husband, and they went over and she was showing me last week the pictures of, up the Shankill Road, stand in front of all the murals, cos all the murals are a big tourist attraction, and on both sides, you know, where she would, most of them are on the Shankill Road side, but a couple on the other side, and yeah, these are the things that, you know, the peace wall for a while, what's there, they are now tourist attractions, you know, remember this, remember when it used to be like this, so.

JC: Yeah, how does that feel, cos I mean, obviously that, that was your childhood, that was your upbringing?

BC: Ah I don't mind that at all, I'm happy, as long as nobody's shooting each other that's, I'm, I'm more than happy with that, but if people are happy, and if people want to have these things, and actually one part of it is it's, it's maybe, I'm going to say it's a celebration of the cultures, on both sides, if they've both got all their murals and all the rest of it, it's, it's an element of not forgetting the history, and the recent history, so if people are seeing that, as long as they're not pulling it out again and using it as a, as a big stick to beat somebody else over the head, so yeah, it's an element of, of, of both cultures and, listen, all the people involved have a, have a claim to the land and the turf, whether you want to go back eight hundred years or you want to go back two hundred years, or you want to go back twenty years, people will, will claim what they think is rightfully theirs, but then, no, I think it's, I think all the Troubles are, I want to say celebrate them, to celebrate the culture, and acknowledge the fact that there was a, a struggle for whatever, what it turned out to be, twenty-five years, twenty-six years of the Troubles, but also I think quite often, I like to put it into perspective for people that there was, through the twenty-six years of our Troubles, I'll call it, I think it's about three thousand people died, just over three and a half thousand, and some of those things that are happening now in, whether it's Syria, or wherever else it is, there's a three a half thousand people die a day, every day for a week, you know, to put it into context with things, and I often say to people, yes, there were troubles, but they may pale slightly in, in significance for the, the pain and troubles that other people are when there's, when their whole village is being bombed to pieces.

JC: So do you think Northern Ireland then was maybe, I don't know, mischaracterised a bit by the media, like, it was presented as worse than it actually was?

BC: Yes, yeah, absolutely, cos I also remember, again when I was working as a store manager in the town ce-, in the, and the area managers come over from England, we milked it, you know, we were saying, well, what's happening over there, I seen on the news there was a, there was bomb in Belfast city centre, said oh yeah, but I mean, that could have been five streets away and to us that was, like, the whole, do a controlled explosion, it's done, half an hour later it's back to normal, but you milked it, you know, you said oh yeah, no it's very, very quiet on the back of it is this, so the Troubles were always, for the people that were here, a lot, a lot less, it affected you a lot less in your normal day-to-day life than what you would have seen with everything else that was going on, even whenever the store was firebombed and all the rest of it, it was, you know, that made the headline news in the, you know, the company newsletter saying oh, and I remember getting an article done on me and all in the, in the company, company calls, oh, you know, good job Brendan Connolly, store was bombed, had it opened forty-eight hours later, ready to trade, oh go on here and that sort of thing, which was just, that just wasn't the way it was to an extent, but yes there was, it was always perceived to be probably worse over here than what it actually was, or, one other angle is actually that maybe it was as bad as they thought, but it was normal to us, and we just dealt with it and all the rest, so it's two, just two, two different ways of looking at it, from being, you know, really bad to actually, you know, actually, no, we're looking at it the wrong way, they're looking at it the right way, or is it the other way round.

JC: That's really interesting actually, and I noticed earlier you still refer to Northern Ireland as home, so that's, that's still where you would describe as, as home as well as, as well as Glasgow?

BC: Yeah, yeah, ultimately I suppose home is where your, as you get into it more, home is where your kids are, I would think. Now if the kids all grow up, and in the new world it's more up and away, you know, you could have your kids in different parts of the world, would we ever go back, I don't know, it depends on where the kids are, literally, if all our kids ended up going off and finding jobs in different parts of the world, it might actually open that up to go back and be close to the family, but we're here twenty years now, twenty years is a long time and a lot of, you know, we've formed a lot of really good friendships in that, in that time, so a lot of those people around would be there, but **[01:14:12]** Sally the wife's more inclined, you know, my dad's eighty-three, Sal's parents are just about eighty now as well, so how long they're going to be around for, she might have moved back if the parents were still alive, but if they aren't, God, is there, is there a massive benefit to, in moving back, don't know, just don't know, so we've actually, we've never actually said, you know, right, listen, once the kids are up we're moving back, but I also wouldn't rule it out.

JC: Sure, and do you think, do you think you've changed or your perspective on Northern Ireland has changed as, as a result of leaving?

BC: Probably not, I mean, in, in reality life is, life dictates how you develop as an individual, what path life puts you down, you know, so if it directs you down a route where you're, I

don't know, you lose a job and you end up doing something totally different from what you were doing before, that's life, just adapt to it and, and make the best of it. I always look at the point of view of as long as I can do the best by my kids and make sure they're all, if I get them all up to eighteen or twenty-one or whatever the marker is these days and get them through, get them started on their, on their work life or whatever else it is then I've done, I've done my job at that point. Yes, I'll be around whenever our grandkids come along or whatever else it is, but, you know, I'll have done, I'll have done the biggest part of it and I can happily then, maybe happily take a job that doesn't pay as much, but it's a hell of a lot less pressure and everything else that goes with it.

JC: Sure, well, listen, I think that's kind of the end of the, the questions that I, I've got written down. I just wanted to ask if there's anything else you wanted to add, or anything we haven't covered that you think's important, at all?

BC: I think you probably covered it all, I've rambled on enough, Jack.

JC: Ah no, well, no worries. Well, it's been really interesting and I'll end the recording there.

INTERVIEW ENDS