

G11: BRENDAN CONNOLLY INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Brendan Connolly [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Jack Crangle
Interview summarisers: Dr Hilary White and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded across two audio files that were spliced together to create a single audio file.

G11: Brendan Connolly	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:16:09	Duration: 01:16:09	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in Belfast in 1965 into a Catholic family of seven children. Grew up in an interface area where Catholic-Protestant tensions and clashes were endemic. Remembers the arrival of British troops on the streets in 1969-70. Explains that they initially seemed like 'heroes', but soon took on a darker hue in the eyes of many Catholics. His father was a painter and decorator and his mother a housewife, so 'there wasn't a lot of money in the house'. Says that from the age of thirteen he worked to make some pocket money.			
10:00–19:59	Says that he has some 'really good memories' of growing up and enjoyed the 'community aspect' of his neighbourhood, where the adults tried to give children an element of normality. Reveals how in the early 1970s his father helped form a vigilante group that would guard against 'incursions' from gangs. Recalls how his twin brothers were once held in a basement and roughed up by some Protestant youths. After that, a wall was erected between the two estates, which still exists. Describes how during the Troubles the army routinely cut through people's back gardens on their foot patrols and carried out regular searches. States that his early years were 'pretty protected' and 'there wasn't a lot of mixing with Protestants'. Attended a Christian Brothers school in west Belfast.			
20:00–29:59	Notes that growing up in Belfast meant that 'you learned to have your wits about you', which has served him well in later life. Says that he enjoyed school and recalls doing voluntary work with a youth club and special needs groups, which were 'all mixed'. Pursued a degree in youth and community work at the University of Ulster, despite his teachers saying he wasn't 'university material'. Enjoyed his studies, during which he did a lot of cross-community work during the 1980s. Had a full-time job in a youth club after university, but was then offered a place on a graduate management course through Topman, where he had worked part-time during his degree. This led to him becoming a store manager in Newtownards, and he still works in retail management today.			
30:00–39:59	Recounts an incident where the IRA commandeered a friend's home in order to ambush RUC members. States that the IRA were perceived in his community as being 'on your side'. Brendan himself agreed with their political objectives, but not their methods, and 'got grief' from his peers for criticising them. Discusses how little 'normal' crime there was in Belfast at the time because it was being policed by 'two police forces', one of which was the paramilitaries. Explains that his was a very 'neutral' household where politics were seldom discussed. States that religion was a big part of his early life – he was an altar boy from a young age – and says he still goes to church now.			
40:00–49:59	Explains how he went through a period of exploring other faiths, but ultimately returned to Catholicism because it teaches that 'everybody's got a right to worship what they want'. Says that his parents were not 'overly holy', but did attend weekly mass. Recalls socialising with friends during his teenage years,			

	<p>which often involved using assumed names in certain settings for their personal safety. States that the Troubles did not force him to leave NI. Met his now-wife at seventeen and married her at twenty-six, after which they moved to the suburb of Carryduff to raise their two children, who were born in the mid-1990s. Tells of incidents where he was within 'touching distance [...] of the Troubles', including experiencing firebombs at work and witnessing fatal shootings.</p>
50:00–54:12	<p>Traces the development of his retail management career and how it led to him moving to Glasgow in 1999 with his wife and family, where they purchased a house and had two more children in the early 2000s. The two interview audio files were spliced together here.</p>
54:13–01:04:12	<p>Comments on how his NI accent was more of a help than a hindrance to him in Glasgow. Noticed 'strong links' between the sectarian cultures of NI and the west of Scotland. Recalls hearing an Orange band for the first time in Glasgow, which took him by surprise. Discusses the Old Firm rivalry and how he would not encourage his children to wear their Celtic colours in public. Reveals that he coaches underage football now with an 'inter-denominational club' and also plays Gaelic football. Discusses having 'much more of a sense of Irishness when you're away' and listening to Irish music more often. Explains to his children that they are Irish, but live in Scotland, including his two younger Scottish-born sons.</p>
01:04:13–01:16:09	<p>Speaks of meeting lots of Irish people through the GAA and notes the presence of a 'big Donegal contingent' in the west of Scotland. Still goes back to NI every year and says his two eldest children regard it as home when they go over. Thinks that Belfast is much more developed now and he no longer has to be wary in certain areas. Doesn't mind that the Troubles are now part of the tourism industry. Suggests that the conflict was to some extent portrayed as being worse than it actually was, compared to the death tolls of some contemporary wars, although he concedes he may simply have normalised the experience. Thinks of home as where his children are, but would not rule out moving back to NI. Ends by saying that he doesn't think emigration has necessarily changed his perspective on NI, but rather that 'life dictates how you develop as an individual' and that you 'just adapt to it and make the best of it'.</p>