INTERVIEW G18: CHRIS PATON

Interviewer: Dr Jack Crangle
Interviewee: Chris Paton
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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: So Chris, can I just get your verbal consent, in addition to the signed consent form, that you're okay for this recording to go ahead?

CP: Yes, you have my consent.

JC: Great, thank you very much. Do you want to start then just by telling me your name and today's date?

CP: Yeah, my name is Chris Paton, Christopher Mark Paton, and the date is, is it the fourth, the fourth of December, there you go.

JC: That's right.

CP: 2020.

JC: Okay, so when and where were you born, then?

CP: I was born on the sixth of October 1970 at the Moyle Hospital in Larne in County Antrim.

JC: In Larne, right, and I believe you, you didn't stay very long in Northern Ireland after you were born there.

CP: No, my, my parents were from Carrickfergus, so shortly after I was born, my father was posted, he was in the Royal Navy, so he was posted to Helensburgh in Scotland, so literally within a few days of being born we were straight on the boat over to Helensburgh and I was there for the next four years. My bro-, my other brother and sister were then born in Scotland and then we moved down to Plymouth when he was posted down there, so we, we ended up out there for another four years, so it wasn't 1979 that I got back to Northern Ireland again.

JC: Right. So your brother and sister were both younger than you, then?

CP: I have, yeah, I have a brother and sister born in, in Helensburgh and then a younger brother born in Plymouth as well.

JC: Right, okay.

CP: So we, we are the British family, we, you know, we, we are literally, you know, all things to everyone, you know.

JC: Yeah, so you lived in, in Helensburgh till you were about four.

CP: Yeah, it would have been the first four years.

JC: Yeah, obviously you don't, won't have many memories of those yourself, but did, did your mum and dad ever talk to you about, about what the west of Scotland was like at that time?

CP: No, only in the sense that my dad has told me stories about when he was in the navy, and, you know, he, he ended up as a petty officer, he worked on submarines, so he, he was there and he would tell me about, you know, occasional things that would happen in terms of his work, like, you know, they would do drills in case of IRA incursions on bases and things like that, so he would tell me about, you know, they'd have to go out and do these drills and a few stories to do with that, but in, not, in Scotland there was very little specifically that he would tell us about and I don't remember a lot from living in Scotland. It's not really until we get down to Plymouth that I sort of have my earliest memories, I've got one or two from Scotland, but not a lot. I know, we lived in the, what was known as the Nelson estate in Helensburgh, which was attached to the, the Faslane base, and they, they were naval quarters, like, you know, but my father was based at home there, so, you know, I kind of remember him being around and, and stuff like that, but I've lots of photographs, but they're mainly photographs of me, my mother and my brother and my sister, there's, I don't think I've got any photographs of my father actually in Helensburgh cos he was always at work, you know, and down at the base.

JC: Was your mum working when you were in Helensburgh, or was she a housewife?

CP: She did work for a time, in, in fact I took her back to Helen-, she passed away seven years ago, but about ten years ago I, I took her back to Helensburgh for a visit and we went to a place where she used to work as a kind of servant, and apparently when I was a baby I used to be left in a pr-, a wee pram by the radiator and she'd go off and do her thing, so I was toasty as a bun for the first year of my life, you know, but I think after that she tended to be working from, I think she tended to be at home quite a lot. I remember in Plymouth she had a few jobs, she worked in a casino and she worked at a chip shop and a few other bits and bobs, like, you know, so.

JC: So you, would you have had chance to go to school in Helensburgh, or was that all in Plymouth?

CP: Not, not in Helensburgh, no, my first school was in Plymouth, yeah.

JC: Okay, yeah, so you moved down to Plymouth when you would have been about, about, yeah, four years old, you said, and that was, that was to do with your dad's work, yeah?

CP: Yeah, he was posted to Plymouth, yeah.

JC: Do you know how your family, the family felt about sort of moving around quite often, was it just sort of comes with the territory, or was it a bit of an upheaval?

CP: I, I, I think we just took it as what it was, you know. I mean, when, when my parents moved to, to Plymouth they were together for four years, but they actually ended up at the end of that four-year period, by 1978, '79, they separated, so there were obviously pressures on the marriage from the naval lifestyle, you know, and obviously my father going out to sea at times as well, like, you know, so there's a bit of that going on, so it, it ended up within that period that I, I knew there were a bit more sort of tensions and stuff within the sort of the household at that time and obviously I was getting a bit older, so I could, I could see what was going on and it ended up that towards the end of that period my parents did separate, and my mother and my, my youngest brother and sister went back to Northern Ireland first, and then we hung around for about six months in Plymouth, I suppose, I'm, I'm guessing it was for my father to sell the house, and then we ended up going back to Carrickfergus as well about six months later, but then we ended up raised by my father and the two youngest were raised by my mother in the same town, so it, it all got a bit messy [laughs].

JC: And then, so, just sort of thinking back to when you moved from Scotland down to Plymouth, do you have any memories of that journey at all, or were you too young?

CP: Not of the journey. I think my earliest memory probably within Plymouth would have been my first day at the school actually, my, my first, my first actual memory. I remember the, there's stories that my parents told about when we arrived in Plymouth, so we had a next door neighbour, two neighbours called Ferne and Audrey, and I know the story was that the day we arrived with a big removal van and all our stuff that they, the neighbours came out and said oh I see, have you got a maid, and they nearly panicked cos they thought oh my God, they've got, they've got maids around here, like, you know, but apparently maid was Plymouth for a daughter, so there were, there were a few wee sort of like phrases like that, that they sort of commented on when they moved there, but my first memory was probably going to school at the age of five, you know, and I, and I remember my grandmother came over from Northern Ireland and stayed with us for a few months, so she was there on my first day at school as well, I remember that.

JC: Right, okay, so you went to school, would it have been quite local to where you were living?

CP: Yeah, no, I used to walk every morning, it was, you know, a five-minute walk away from, from where we lived.

JC: Right, okay, and what are your memories of school in Plymouth, did you get on okay?

CP: Yeah, no, I loved it, it was, I was there for three years, so I had a teacher, Miss Kennell in my first year, then I had Miss Kennedy in my second year and then we had a teacher called, four years actually I was at school, sorry, we had a Miss Thompson in the third year and then I had a Mrs Bowden in J1. I, I have to be honest, I, cos I live in Scotland now and that was, obviously most of my schooling was in Northern Ireland. I actually can't remember what the English system is, so I don't know why we went into J1 in my fourth year, so I don't know if it was a pre-school and then, I, I don't quite know how that works, but that, that's how it worked. We'd, we'd three years in the kind of lower part of the school and then went into J1 and it was during J1 that, that my parents separated and that's when we knew that I'd be going back to Northern Ireland, so I remember the last day of school was quite, quite an emotional thing, you know, cos the teachers didn't want me to go and I, I didn't want to really leave, you know.

JC: I'm wondering what your accent would have been like at primary school, if you've got Northern Irish parents, grew, spent the first four years of your life in Scotland, and then moved to Plymouth, like.

CP: That would have been a bit west country, innit [laughs]?

JC: Yeah, yeah [laughs].

CP: Yeah, no, it would have been, in fact, I know when I moved back to Northern Ireland, I went into P5 in Carrickfergus at the Model Primary School and everybody was convinced I was English, and I was adamantly trying to tell them, no, I'm not English, you know, I am from Northern Ireland, but they weren't having it, and then they started calling me Paddy and I thought this is ridiculous, cos I've just moved into a whole country of Paddies, why are you calling me Paddy when you all think I'm English, so it was very confusing [laughs], when we moved back, but that's, that, that was kind of the weird thing, yeah, so, but there were, there were other things as well. I remember when we, when I first started school in Carrickfergus and the year below me had spent the year learning how to do joined writing, you know, and I picked it up in two weeks, so they weren't impressed with that [laughs], so.

JC: Yeah, no, and you mention, obviously your, you said there was maybe a bit of strain in the family when you were in, in Plymouth. Do you know how your family got on in England sort of more broadly in a sense of, cos I'm thinking this would have been around the time when the Troubles was sort of reaching its peak, was there ever any sort of discrimination or hostility towards your family for, just by virtue of being Irish or Northern Irish?

CP: Not that I recall. Again, the other thing I do remember is, obviously my dad was in the navy and, and my brother ended up in the navy as well, and there seems to be this weird thing that people from Northern Ireland when they join the navy, they end up being called Paddy, so that was my dad's nickname, he was Paddy, you know, Paddy Paton and my brother was the same when he ended up in the navy, Paddy Paton, so that, that's kind of the only kind of in your face thing that, to me, reminded us that we were Irish, Northern Irish, living in England. By all other measures at that point, I had no knowledge of the

Troubles at that point, when I was living as a kid, I literally had no idea anything beyond what was going on beyond Laira Green, where we lived in Plymouth, you know, that kind of, when, when we moved back to Northern Ireland, oh there was one time that I travelled back to Northern Ireland, when we were living in Plymouth, I went to see my mother's sister, we went and stayed with her for a, a wee bit and I remember that my mother had agreed this, I think my father was at sea and my mother had agreed this and I, I actually can't remember how I got back, it might have been with an aunt of mine, another aunt of mine who'd stayed with us for a bit, but I remember that my father, from what I understand **[00:10:00]** quite angrily, was really not impressed with this when he heard about this, so he ended up coming over to fetch me back from Carrick when, when that happened. I don't know the story around that, but I remember there was a lot of unhappiness on his part about me having gone back to Northern Ireland, that might have been because he was in the navy at that point, I don't know, you know, if he was concerned from a security point of view but, but beyond that, it wasn't really until we'd left Plymouth and got back to Northern Ireland that suddenly there was a sudden sea change as to who I thought I was and what the world was and all the rest of it, so I think to summarise with, with Plymouth, I was just another wee boy living in Plymouth, I didn't feel any different to anybody else, I don't, I wasn't treated any different to anybody else, I was doing well in school, I, I had no worldly view of Ireland, Northern Ireland, I knew nothing about it.

JC: So your parents wouldn't have talked to you about it at all or anything?

CP: No, but then you see, I was only a wee boy at that point.

JC: Yeah, sure, yeah.

CP: And I think at that point as well, my, I think it's, it was more, there were, there was things, like, you know, I had a grandmother who came over and stayed with us for a year, and I had, her daughter and granddaughter came and stayed as well, so they stayed in our house for a bit, so I obviously knew they were different and they were, because they were from Carrickfergus, you know, and they were as mad as a box of frogs, like, you know, so they, they were very different in terms of the rest of the people I knew in the area, but that's probably the only kind of intrusion from Northern at that point, was just literally the appearance of family for a bit and staying with us, but by all measures in, in that, I was kind of cocooned in a bubble almost, you know, so I, I didn't know that we were different until I left and then from living in Northern Ireland realised that we'd been kind of ripped away from where I'd been born and things were very different when I moved back cos I wasn't really sure what the hell was going on when, when I arrived back, you know.

JC: And was, was church of religion a part of your family's life at all?

CP: In the, in sense of, yeah, it was to a degree, not, not so much my mother and father, but there, there was that thing of, you know, go to church, so there was a church at the bottom of our road in Plymouth that was called the Zion Methodist church and the Zion Methodist church, they had a Boys' Brigade group there, so, but they'd only just started that Boys' Brigade group up and it was, let me get this right now, I think we were eleventh Plymouth company and there was a second Plymouth company that was established. In eleventh

Plymouth I think there were, like, three or four people that were in it, cos there was a General or a Captain Scobie who'd, who started it up from scratch, so there was a handful of us from Laira Green and we used to meet up once a week with another company called second Plymouth, and so I remember things like, as a wee boy, doing things like the annual Boys' Brigade display on Plymouth Hoe, so I did, we, I did that and we used to go to a Sunday school as well as part of that Zion Methodist church, so I remember doing that each week and when, when I left, I was actually given a New Testament that, and I've still got it, that was signed by the other people in the Sunday school class that we were in, so I think religion was important in the sense of, that was the thing you did from Northern Ireland, you know, good Protestants, you went to a Protestant school, or you went to a Protestant church and all the rest of it. It's just at that point I didn't know it was a Protestant church, I didn't know that's what happened back home, I just thought that's what everyone did, you know, so again, I think it's one of those things, cos I ended up in the BB when I was in Northern Ireland, when we went back, I joined the BB again, and at the point suddenly realised now there's only certain people went to the BB, and it's weird because I'm now in Scotland and I'm actually married to a woman from the Republic of Ireland, from Kilkenny, and, and she's Catholic and my boys have been christened as Catholic, but they're in the BB over here cos for a long time when they started the BB in, in Ayrshire, I, I wasn't sure whether they could join the BB in Ayrshire, like, you know, until somebody said yeah, we'll take anybody, you know, nobody goes to church anymore, we're desperate, so, so, so, and in terms of, they're a complete mix here, so the, the hang-ups we had about all that kind of stuff back home certainly didn't exist when I was a wee boy, and so that to, to a lot of extent don't really exist now that I'm back again with my kids, but there is, there's a wee bit of that on the west coast of Scotland, but there wasn't when I was in, in Plymouth. In Plymouth we were just wee boys, went to church and did as you're told, you know, anything just to give my mother a break on a Sunday morning probably, you know [laughs].

JC: And so you did BB, did, in Plymouth, did you? Was there anything else that you enjoyed doing outside of school, like, just, hobbies or extra-curricular stuff?

CP: I don't think there was, I just remember going out and playing a lot out in the streets, you know. I remember things like Halloween, we had a big thing, I remember Guy Fawkes night was a big thing, and it was a big thing because when we moved back to Northern Ireland we didn't celebrate Guy Fawkes night, you know, bonfire night was a different thing entirely back in Northern Ireland, so that was confusing when I first went back, why did we not do the fifth November and all that, so, yeah, so, but I remember there was a bonfire night and we used to go and do that, there used to be sports day every year, you know, all the traditional school stuff you'd do. There was a big, there was a place called Plympton that was near Plymouth where we used to go down, there was a field at the bottom and that's where the school sports day was, so I remember all that kind of stuff happening too, but yeah. Apart from that I had a brother who was a year younger than me, so we'd knock seven shades of hell out of each other every day and go out and play and, you know, all the things that kids do, and I had friends on the same street that we lived in as well, so there was a lot of mucking about with them as well and, you know, shooting each other with bows and arrows and things.

JC: So it sounds like in Plymouth you had a sort of fairly normal south of England upbringing in a sense and then, yeah, tell me about, tell me about moving back to Northern Ireland, then, in, in the late, would it have been the late seventies?

CP: Yeah, would have been ’79, seventy-, ’79, ’80, ’81, ’82, yeah, so ’79, in the summer of ’79 we’d have moved over and my mother had already moved over with my youngest brother and sister as I said a few moments ago, so we moved over and we were picked up by my father’s sister from Belfast and she, she sadly passed away about ten years ago, but she picked us from the ferry and I remember the ferry journey going over and then we went to her very posh house on the Antrim Road in Belfast and it was, like, we didn’t, we didn’t do posh, you know [laughs], so I remember, you know, there was a story about when we arrived, and I think my aunt had made us a meal with steak and chips and my brother said to me what’s that, and I said behave yourself, its meat in a lump, you know, and, and what I meant was we ate, or we always ate mince when we lived in Plymouth, we’d never had steaks, you know, so, so this was the first time we’d ever had meat in a lump, so, yeah [laughs], so there’s things like that, and then what happened was that my father’s mother had died the year before, so he had inherited her small house in Carrick and the, the initial big shock was that when we moved into that house there were only two bedrooms, so myself and my brother had to share one room and my father had the other and there was one tap in the house, there was no hot water, there was an outside toilet, you know, privy outside, a mangle, you know, for doing the, the clothes and all that, so we went back to the nineteenth century and that was for two years, living, living in there, and at that point that’s when I started going to school in Plymouth, at the Model, and that’s when things to do with sort of the Troubles began to sort of impinge, in terms of becoming aware of things, so I remember one time going home from the school and saying to my dad, dad, dad, dad, there’s a Catholic in the class, you know, and I was only nine years old or whatever and he goes that’s great, son, what does that mean, I don’t know, you know, and, and it sort of, there was obviously somebody in the class at school had said look, he’s a Catholic, he’s a, you know, or to someone, and, and I didn’t know what it meant, but apparently it was a big thing, you know, so I wanted to join the club and apparently we weren’t allowed to join the club, because we turned out to be Protestants, so, but all of that was a complete, I would say kind of culture shock. It didn’t kind of, well, I mean, culture shock, but I don’t mean in a sense of that I was losing sleep over it or anything like that, it was just a, it, suddenly the world was different when I went back, and, and suddenly people were labelled with things and I didn’t quite get it, and I remember one night there was, there was the, we got, the door was knocked and the police were outside, it was the RUC, as it was back then, and we had to, we were told to go to the back of the house and it turned out that in the front of our house, there was the, the library in Carrickfergus, there was the car park across the road from it and there was a car had been abandoned or had been hijacked and left there, so it ended up that they, they called the bomb squad out with one of the wee robots, you know, and, and so, and I do briefly remember seeing that through the window, looking through the window and seeing all the blue lights and all the rest of it, and then we were all told get to the back of the house, get to the back, you know, because if it is a bomb and it goes off and all the rest of it, so that was kind of the first time that anything kind of Troubles-related really hit, you know, in terms of understanding things were just a wee bit different to, to what had happened when I, when I was living in Plymouth.

JC: It sounds like a lot of this you kind of worked out for yourself in a way. Did anyone ever, like, sit you down and say, you know, this is how things are in Northern Ireland, this is the way that you're meant to behave or see things, or was it just kind of a learning process?

CP: I think, well, I mean, it, the whole, it was, the whole thing's a learning process, but I think what I had were certain factors. I mean, my mother's family were quite loyalist, you know, but not, not in the way, my, my mother wasn't that bothered with it, my mother was quite religious, but she wasn't loyalist, and cos my dad was in the navy, he wasn't particularly loyalist or anything like that. I mean, he was British in the sense that he worked for the British armed forces and all that, you know, but his **[00:20:00]** mother was very loyalist, you know, but she passed away, but she was a real Orange Lil, like, but she was from Glasgow and, and had moved to Scotland, but then she passed away, as I say, the year before, but my father I think was determined that we wouldn't be raised to be on one side or the other, so he left the navy in '78 and when he went back, because he was a single parent, he got involved with a group called Gingerbread, which is a single parents' charity, and I remember there were lot, there was lots of talk about things, like, to, to qualify for funding you had to have, in, in your group you had to have sixty per cent of the, the group had to be Protestant and forty had to be Catholic, the sixty-forty scheme, to qualify for funding, so the, you know, when they, and he did genuinely try to introduce people to these groups and it wasn't always easy because, you know, events would happen and then Carrickfergus tended to be a very Protestant town, so there was quite a small Catholic sort of contingent, but he would try to form partnerships with groups in Belfast from some of the Catholic areas and try and get people to meet up and things like that, so he was, he was quite determined that we wouldn't go down that route, and then I think that kind of rubbed off on me to an extent, in the sense of just, you know, I, I think there was, there was an element of me that thought I don't quite get this, and, and I'm quite stubborn, I don't like people telling me you're this and you're that and, you know, and you think well, actually why am I this and why am I that, you know, so I'd be sitting there trying to work things out for myself, but that kind of element from my father, I think, of, you know, just questioning things and that thing, that question that I mentioned about, you know, coming home from school, daddy, daddy, daddy, there's a Catholic in my class and my dad saying to me, well, so what, and that, that did resonate with me and it's, like, okay, yeah, no, you're right, what, so what, I think that kind of burrowed its way in a wee bit, so I was constantly asking questions. I remember there was one part, where, where we lived, we lived on an estate called Castlemara in Carrickfergus and I, I didn't know what mara meant, you know, and I got really interested in this and then it turned out mara was from Gaelic, you know, Irish Gaelic for the sea and there was a, a road round the corner from us called Straid Walk and again, I was asking, you know, what's straid, so I did a bit of looking and, you know, and I realised that straid came from *sráide* which means street in Irish as well, so it was all around us, you know, but we weren't aware that it was all around us, it was just the st-, the names of streets and it was only when I started looking at it and started questioning things and then I realised that actually there was a lot sort of around us that had been kind of almost, I wouldn't, culturally supressed, you know, there were a lot of things maybe a hundred years ago that people took for granted which, when the Troubles kicked in the whole thing pulverized, and then suddenly, you know, nobody would identify with Irish or, or, or with any kind of, sort of Protestant inclusion within that, you know, in the past, so, but yeah, I, I think the school I went to, the Model, tended to be kind of very middle class, very

Protestant. We went to, initially we went to Second Joymount church which was next to the, the house that my dad inherited and that was a Presbyterian church, and then we moved after two years to another house up in Castlemara, and then we ended up going to a different church, which was First Presbyterian church, and that, that was very different to the church I'd been to in, in Plymouth, and I remember that, I remember that when people went to the church on a Sunday it was almost like they came along to be seen to be going to the church, so they were all in their Sunday best and they were all with their Bibles and they were all evil as hell, like [laughs], you know, but on a Sunday they, they made damn sure that they, that, you know, that everyone knew they were at church, whereas my mother, she was different. She, because she had the two youngest in the family, they went to a different church, they went to the church of the Nazarene and that's kind of happy-clappy, you know, everybody's praising Jesus [laughs], and sort of standing up and stuff, so occasionally we'd go up there and, and go to her church services and stuff, and she ran a group called the Caravanners, a youth group, so they, they tried to do stuff, but I, I know my two parents weren't involved in the whole kind of, the, the sectarian thing if you like, but I know members of the extended family certainly were, particularly on my mother's side, you know. There was a few bad eggs on that side of the family and we just tried to keep out of it, you know, we, we, you know, we knew occasionally there were people in the family that were in trouble and got up to things and we just didn't want to know, so we kind of kept ourselves away from the rest of my mother's family, even when we were there, which is a bit sad, but.

JC: And how did that work out, you sort of living in, in a different house to your, was it your sister and your mother lived, lived in a different house?

CP: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Yeah, was that challenging at all, were they nearby?

CP: Yeah, they, well, the, the estate that we lived in in Castlemara was maybe about a mile from the centre of the town and in the first few years that we were there my mother lived in the town, so she lived above shops and things like that with the two youngest, and I remember it was quite a messy separation with my mum and dad, so I remember that we, there was, there were periods when we were told you're not allowed to go and see your mum, and I would go and visit her anyway. We, we'd meet up in secret and stuff, like, you know, I remember there's a place called Legg Park that used to be next to the school I went to, and I remember one day, you know, walking two miles to get to Legg Park and I'd just missed her, or I, I think I was late, I think I was doing a paper round or something like that, and by the time I got down there they'd already left and I just walked straight up to her house and we ended up having a picnic in her front room, you know, and I never told my father about that until years later, like, but, so there was a bit of that going on, but it was, it was more to do with the internal dynamics of their kind of failed marriage as to, to what that was all about, you know, rather than anything else that was going on.

JC: Yeah, it's intere-, it's a, it's a strange situation in a sense. Did you have a lot of extended family nearby as well, that you would have seen?

CP: Only, well, on, on my, my father's side I had an aunt that picked us up in Belfast, but she was the posh aunt, you know, so she was the lady captain of the local golf club in Carrickfergus, but she lived in Fort William in Belfast and, and she was very much about who you were seen with, and, and my father, who'd just left the navy was a single parent, and, you know, we, we were maybe not quite in the same class really, although she loved me the best, like, you know, I mean, years later when I went to university, she put me up for the summer and I had to work as a security guard in Belfast to, to raise a bit of money, so we always got on well, but she wasn't very, particularly close to my, to my dad, so we saw her from time to time and we occasionally saw my cousin that would come down. On my mother's side, that was very different because my grandmother lived on the same estate as us, but because my dad didn't get on with my mum, I mean, she was literally two minutes up the road, I mean, I, for the first few years we were there, we, we barely saw her I think. I remember there was one year that my dad, they'd obviously thawed their relationship a wee bit and it was New Year's Eve and my dad sent me up to my gran's and said take this lump of coal up, and I thought oh my God, my poor granny's run out of coal, and, and what it was was his, my dad's mum was Scottish, and it was a Scottish tradition, you'd take your lump of coal first footing, you know, going over the door. Well, I actually took a carrier bag and put a few bits of coal in, taking it up to her, thinking my dad had heard she'd run out of coal so, you know, take it up, so there were, there were things like that, but it got to the point after a few years, things mellowed down a wee bit, so I would have bumped into my cousins and my aunts and stuff on the, on the street and stuff, but we weren't particularly close, as I say, cos they were kind of more involved in the kind of the, the, the loyalist side of things and that, I, by that point I, I kind of knew what was going on there and I wasn't interested in, in, you know, flying all these bloody wee flags and all this kind of nonsense that, you know. I had an uncle who used to put a UVF flag and a UDA flag up on the same day, thinking he'd be all things to everyone, and he'd up-, he'd upset everybody, you know [laughs], because he was flying the, the different flags, you know, so there were things like that that happened, but we, we, we kind of, we, they were around and we knew they were there and, yeah, and so on, but we weren't particularly close. I was probably closer to my dad's sister in Belfast than I was to my mum's family on the same estate that we lived in, you know.

JC: Can you tell me a bit more how you got on with your peers and, especially at school and stuff in Carrick? I mean [phone rings]–

CP: Can I just answer this, sorry, just in case?

JC: Yeah, yeah, go for it, go ahead, yeah.

CP: Let me just mute this for second.

JC: Not a problem. **[00:28:04]** [The two interview audio files were spliced together here].

CP: Asked was a bit about peers, what was it you were–?

JC: Yeah, well, I suppose I'm interested, I mean, you mentioned a bit earlier about them sort of saying you had an English accent and stuff. I, I suppose I'm just wondering how easily you were able to fit in after moving back at what's quite a, I guess, quite a formative age.

CP: I think, yeah, I mean, I think the first year I was there, I, I think I was probably treated the way that anybody who comes in to a new school halfway through, you know, was treated. The, the big thing was when I did arrive I did have an English accent, that went very quickly, but the lasting impression I remember, I know when I finished, I went to Carrick grammar school after that, and, and even until the age of eighteen I had close friends who were convinced I was English and at that point I was telling them no, by Christ, I'm not English [laughs], you know, it never bothered me when I lived in England that I wasn't, but by the time I got to eighteen, by Christ, I'm not English, you know, but they were still convinced, so that obviously had an impression on them that I'd come in, but probably, they probably had more of an impression on them than, than it had on me, cos I just naturally picked up the accent very quickly and, and went on. I, I know that I remember a lot about when we lived in Plymouth, which my other brothers and sister don't, and that, that's a huge thing. It particularly happened when my mother died seven years ago, I remember talking to my brother and he just, he couldn't remember anything, so I'd written down a lot of her memories and I let him have a look at that, so that, that always remained a part of me, I think, as, as I was growing up, but no, I think, I think we were kind of fine, there were, there were a couple of minor, minor wee things just that, you know, I would pronounce words in certain ways and, you know, and people laughing at you and stuff and, you know, but it did disappear very quickly. I kind of assimilated quite quickly as well, with them, trying to say, I think I ended up just becoming another one of the, the people in that class, albeit one that was tagged as being English even though I wasn't, you know, and, and plus the fact they called me Paddy for the first three years, and that only stopped when I went to Carrick grammar school because there was another guy in our class whose surname was Patterson, so he'd already been called Paddy as well, so Paddy Paton gave way to Paddy Patterson and I ended up just being, you know, Chris Paton again, so thankfully I think that kind of went cos I'm not sure I would have been happy with that [laughs].

JC: And so you talked about not, knowing there was a Catholic in your class, but not really knowing why that was significant. Over time did you become more exposed to maybe some of the more prejudiced attitudes towards Catholics, and, and how did you feel about those and respond to those?

CP: Yeah, no, definitely. I mean, obviously once you're over there you're then exposed to an entirely new tool kit of traditions and things, so, for example, on, when we moved to Castlemara, bonfire night, on the eleventh night, well, the eleventh night bonfire was literally twenty metres to the left of our house and we, we had a neighbour who was Roman Catholic and who was a very good friend of ours and, and involved in the same single parents' charity that, that I mentioned that my dad was running, and we used to be in and out of the, our houses all the time, but on bonfire night I know that they used to get a lot of grief, people pinging their windows and, and throwing stones and, and causing a lot of grief, and, and I remember, and we used to have stupid things that would happen as well. You'd have, you know, the fire brigade would turn up when there was a big fire, but they would never put the fire out, they would be hosing down the walls beside the fire, you know, if

they put the fire out they'd have been shot [laughs], you know, but they were trying to protect the property, so they hosed the buildings down, so there was all these weird things. You're thinking why are you not putting the fire out, oh because that's not what they're here to do, but they're firemen, oh that's not what they do on bonfire night, you know, so we had a bit of that, and I remember things like the Orange marches and stuff like that which I, I didn't go to a lot, but I remember the first couple of years we were there, we went to a, a couple of the Orange marches. I seem to remember we went to one in Belfast and I remember the significant thing about that year was they had a tribe of Native Americans who were over marching on Royal Avenue, I think it was on Royal Avenue in Belfast, and they had their feather head-dresses and Orange sashes on and I, I couldn't get my head round this, cos, you know, and, and yeah, so that, that was weird, and I remember going to a couple of the feeder parades in Carrickfergus in years after that or, or local events, but after that I lost all interest and we used to get asked, my dad would say oh there's a parade on at the weekend, do you want to go and I, no, you know, I never got the attraction of it, I never understood what it was all about, I couldn't tune into, I don't, all this weird kind of deference, I don't know, it was a weird thing. When, when I ended up, when I went back to England in 2000 and, when was it, no, 1991 I went to do a degree in Bristol and for the three years that I did my degree, it was a media degree, but it was based on anthropology, I spent those three years making programmes about Northern Ireland as student projects, so I made one about, there's a statue in Carrickfergus, for example, of King Billy, you know, the, on the Battle of the Boyne and all this kind of nonsense, Carrickfergus is famous because that's where he stopped off the boat to march his way down to the Boyne, so in 1990 it was the centenary, or the third centenary of him landing, so the council had built this wee statue of King William of Orange. What they didn't have was the money to build a proper full-sized statue, so they did a wee tiny one and they did all the usual spin, saying oh no, it's not because we couldn't afford it, it's cos we wanted to show the, the true image of King William, but actually he looked like a womble, this tiny wee, you know, so the town absolutely rejected it, so I remember making this documentary saying, well, why did the town reject it, and the reason I, I, I probably made that programme was because I'd been asking the same questions just before leaving Northern Ireland. What, what is this all about, like, you know, so I got very into the whole, the, into the whole kind of anthropology side of that degree, and I'm trying to work out what all this kind of nonsense was about, so, but yeah, I, I think, I, I kind of became aware of the whole Orangeism thing and I think I must have unconsciously probably rejected that within about three or four years of having arrived and thinking, I'm really not that bothered with it, you know, and I don't really know why that was. I don't, I don't think it's because I took sympathy with the other side or anything like that, it just never clicked with me, I just didn't get it, you know, and possibly, that's possibly to do with the fact that my father actually wasn't involved in it as well, and so he'd be saying och just, you know, it's not that big a deal, you know, but you were always aware of the whole Catholic-Protestant thing because, particularly when it came to things like the Gingerbread holidays and the outings and stuff that we used to do, that was the single parents, by the nature to get their funding they they did have Catholic groups and, and we'd mix up and you'd be told they're, they're from the Catholic branch up in Belfast and they're, you know, and so there was a bit of that going on, but it was never done maliciously, it was just done as in, they've got this whole thing in Northern Ireland, them 'uns and us 'uns, you know, and you can, nobody ever seems to define themselves as to who they are, it's just who they aren't, is who they define themselves as, and, and there was a wee bit of that,

was, yeah, we're from Carrickfergus and this is our group and, and they're from the other place and they're not from our group, and, and the word Catholic would be in there as part of the description of that, and then you'd also have, the other big thing that I remember as well was literally every night on the news, watching the, the Troubles on the news, that, that's one thing I do remember as a kid was literally, day in, day out, there was never a good news story on, on the news cos the things that were going on were the Troubles, so that was something else that I, I think, again, I just kind of mentally switched off from it, thinking no, I can't be bothered with this, you know.

JC: Yeah, that's really interesting, and, and I definitely know what you mean about there sort of being this perception of two sides in Northern Ireland, like, them and us, and I'm wondering did you feel like you, you were part of either of those two sides, or were you sort of–?

CP: No, no, that's the point, that's–

JC: Outside of those, yeah, yeah.

CP: Yeah, yeah, and, and people'd tell me I was, I was part of one and, you know, I mean, when I was in BB, in the Boys' Brigade in Plymouth, I was in the BB, when I was in the BB in Carrickfergus I was in the BB in a Protestant church, but, you know, as far as I was concerned in Plymouth I'd just been in the BB in a church, you know, and it was things like that. There'd be people constantly telling you, you know, and you'd have all these things at school, like, you know, you know, how do you tell a Catholic, cos their eyebrows meet in the middle, you know, all these kind of ridiculous kind of things that kids got up to, you know, playing tig and, and, you know, touching somebody, oh don't touch them cos they're Cath-, you know, but they weren't Catholic, it was just, it was an insult, you know, nobody knew what the word meant, so you used the word Catholic, you know, so I, I, there was a bit of that going on, but yeah, I think it was, it, it was, ah yeah, it was just all a bit weird, I just, I couldn't find anything in common. I think one of the things when I did my anthropology, sorry, media course was, one of the things I came across is this description of a thing called ethnic ascription, and it's the idea that when you're young, when you're born, you're programmed by your culture, but I wasn't programmed by that culture when I lived in Britain, but when I went back I, I was kind of, I was against, not against, as in proactively against, I wasn't part of what everyone else had been indoctrinated into and, and it felt it, I did feel like an outsider to some extent and, you know, when I would say to people I can't be bothered going out to the bonfire and I can't be bothered to, going to the Orange march down the road, well, why not, because I can't be bothered, you know, there's nothing else to it, but people were always trying to ascribe motive to that and you think, well, it's not, it's just, I don't get what you're interested, like, you know, I've got a fire in the living room, I could put a coal on that and watch telly at the same time, you know, so it was, it was things like that I would, I would find just weird, and difficult to get into and I could never really tune into it, and one of the weird things now is I now live in a part of Scotland where they've got the kind of the Orange culture here, in parts of, you know, and I'm just looking at it, thinking my God, you guys don't even know what it's all about and you've got it over here, like, you know, and it's not to the same extent, but it's just, it's, you know, it's weird. We moved about a year ago and the place we've moved to is just up the road from a wee village

and **[00:38:04]** for the first time I think in about twenty years I heard a flute band on, on the Twelfth of July, and it was just, it was such a shock because I just thought, I've not heard this in years, like, you know, so that's been a bit of a, of a hit recently, just having to step slightly back into it a wee bit, you know.

JC: Yeah, sure, and what about the Troubles itself, were you ever or your family ever personally affected by any, any violence or incidents or anything like that?

CP: Not my immediate family. There, there are members of my extended family who were involved in things and I had a, even recently a couple of years ago a, a second cousin, there's a relative was, was shot and killed during a loyalist feud back home, not somebody I ever met or knew, but it was somebody who was involved on that side of things. The things I tend to remember were things like, I did a paper round as a wee boy at the railway station in Carrickfergus and there was a pub just down called the Railway Tavern and things like, one day turning up to go and get my newspapers and not being allowed in cos it'd all been taped off, and somebody had been shot inside the, the Railway Tavern, a loyalist of some sort, so there were wee things like that would come in, and more I think towards when I went, I was in university for two years in Belfast after I went to Carrick grammar and I think for the two years I was there that's when things really began to make themselves known, and there were lots of bomb alerts and things like that, you know, and prior to that you'd heard about bombs going off on the telly and stuff, but the, the nearest you ever came to it was going on a weekly visit up to the comic shop in Belfast and there'd be a bomb damage sale next door because something had gone off the night before, you know, so everybody was waiting for these bomb damage sales, but at that point I hadn't quite twigged that you got a bomb, a bomb damage sale after a bomb had gone off [laughs], you know, so I'm just looking for the bargains, you know, so there, there was, there was some things like that in Carrick and I remember you'd have things like, and the local newspaper, the *Carrick Advertiser*, and it was just full of these wee bigots every week, they were either ranting about nonsense, I remember the whole 'Ulster Says No' thing, I think it was '86, and I remember Carrick town hall had a big banner saying 'Carrickfergus Says No', and the paper said, I remember seeing in the papers quite a lot of, not stuff to do with that, I think it was the Anglo-Irish Agreement and then there was, there were things like elections and I remember that you, you'd hear wee stories. I mean, there was one guy I heard of, who my father knew, who apparently in an early time had been a loyalist and he'd accidentally blown up the British Legion, you know, and you'd hear these wee stories and you'd think, just what planet are you from, like, you cannot, you know, your own world doesn't even make sense to yous, like, you know, so aye, but there was a lot of that and there was a lot of these religious pastors shouting at you and stuff in the papers every week, but I, I mentioned that incident with the bomb alert when we lived in, in Joymount in Carrickfergus, when we were first got back, and having to go back to the back of the house, that was something I remember in the back of my mind, and I remember going back to Carrickfergus Library about ten years ago and I went through all the back issues of the *Carrick Advertiser* and I actually found a photograph of the car after it had been sorted by the, the wee robot, you know, cos the, there was a bomb in the car. The way they sort it is they blow up the bomb, you know, in a controlled explosion, so I remember and, and just confirming to myself, no, I do definitely remember that because there's the photographs from the morning after, so that was definitely a real memory [indecipherable], apart from that, no,

the only other thing, there was, there was a friend of my mother's who was a councillor, and he ended up being the, the leader of the Alliance Party, that was Seán Neeson, and I remember he was Catholic and, and he was a good lad cos he was a historian in Carrick and he got my, he helped to get my mother her house when she moved over, and apparently they'd been in school together, or, or he was in school with somebody in my family, so there were wee things like that. You knew there were occasionally people around that you'd think oh there's Seán, you know, and the thing you knew about him was that he was a Catholic, you know, it didn't mean anything, it was just a label, but that, that's what he was, but I remember interviewing him years later when I did that wee thing about the statue, cos he was the mayor at that point, and he, I think he'd been the first ever Catholic mayor of Carrickfergus, and so he wasn't invited to the annual pageant re-enacting King Billy landing in, in Carrick. They'd usually get wee boat to bring a, a re-enactor to, you know, as King Billy, shaking hands with babies and then walking off into Belfast, well, every year they invited the mayor to do that, and he was the, the first time there had ever been a Catholic mayor and they didn't invite him and, and he thought it was hilarious, you know, and I thought it was hilarious, but, so I remember talking to him about that, years later, but, apart from that, no, it was more the extended family, there were things we knew were going on, but we just kept our distance from it, you know.

JC: And what about, I'm also thinking, sort of after having come over from England, things like, just the presence of the army on the streets and stuff, I mean, was that a big shock for you, or was that difficult to adjust to?

CP: That, that, that was actually, yeah, that was more so as a, as a young teenager I think, you know, when I was about thirteen, fourteen, I would get the train up to, to Belfast to just, I was into comics and things like that and there used to be this comic shop called Talisman, so I'd go up there and just visit once a week, and I remember seeing them driving around quite a lot as, as I, when I was younger than that, in Carrick, but in Belfast I remember, you know, you'd be walking down the street on Royal Avenue and they'd be aiming their weapons at you, you know, just, just practising, like, you know, and then I remember one year when I was a student in Belfast I, not meaning to be bolshy, but I just walked up to the them and said do you mind just not pointing that at me, it's very intimidating, like, you know, but when I was a lot younger, the, the only big thing I remember was just that they were there, I'd never seen the British Army before, I seem to remember, and the other big difference obviously was the police, cos their uniforms were all green, and the RUC, and that was different, so the police looked different in England, but I remember that was a big, big difference as well, and the other thing as well was noticing, I remember all, there was the police station on Carrick and that was surrounded with barbed wire and stuff and I'd often say to my dad why, why have they got barbed wire and stuff around it, and it's, you know, obviously cos they were a target, like, you know, so there are, were things like that that I do remember, sort of just not quite clocking when we first moved over. I mean, you eventually, you, you get told what the answers are and then, and you just assimilate it and move on, but there was that initial kind of double take with a lot of things like that when I first moved over, but you had to accept it and just grow up with it, like everyone else did, you know.

JC: So secondary school, you went to, was it Carrick grammar you said?

CP: Carrickfergus Grammar School.

JC: Right, yeah, okay, and how was that transition, was that, was that fairly smooth?

CP: That, that was fine, you know, you did your eleven-plus exam, you know, and if you were stupid enough to pass it, you got sent up to the grammar school, you know [laughs], so I passed it and went up. It was, the only, the big issue there was I think because we came from a single-parent family, and my father was out of work for a good ten years, he did a lot of voluntary work, but he was out of work. There was a class divide, because most of the people at the grammar school tended to be from the hoi polloi and, you know, very middle-class comfortable backgrounds, from the, kind of the suburbs of Carrick, whereas we, we were the riffraff, you know, with our second-hand clothes, going in there, having the cheek to actually pass all the exams [indecipherable], you know, and so there was a lot of that. I did quite well academically, but I think, that, that's one thing where, my brother and I were a year apart and we both went there and we did kind of have a very different experience actually, because he was more of a Jack the lad, whereas I was thinking no, I just need to get my exams to get this sorted and move on, so I tended to knuckle down and concentrate with the studies, and he tended to knuckle down and try and get along, along with the people on the estate, you know, and things like that, so we were, we were kind of quite different in, in how we had experiences at the school, and he was very sporty and I wasn't, so we, you know, but also at the same time we'd do things like history and stuff, and I remember there were things in history that we'd learned about in Carrick grammar, which I remember doing when I was at school in England, and it, it was only when I left Northern Ireland years later I realised it's cos we weren't actually being taught Irish history, we were just doing more British history, with kings and queens and things like that, we did all that and the dinosaurs, we did a lot of dinosaurs and things [laughs], but there was nothing particularly unique, and that that's one of things I remember when I left Northern Ireland thinking I actually don't understand what it's all about, and then I twigged when I worked in te-, I worked for the BBC for a long time and I was, I was getting involved with that, then I really twigged that the reason for that was because actually I wasn't taught it, so I started reading it all for myself, from both sides, remember, you know, there w-, reading books by David Trimble from the leader of the unionists, and, and books by Gerry Adams on the other side and just trying to get a sense of what the hell it was all about, you know, and I remember when we, when I went back to, to England, cos I, cos after I went to university in Bristol I stayed in, in Bristol for another three years and worked for the BBC there, and that, that was the second time I'd moved to England and at that time I was a lot more clued up about the fact I was Northern Irish, and this was only in the immediate aftermath of the ceasefire, and I remember when I was at university getting really quite annoyed by people pointing their finger at me and saying I know what we need to do to sort Northern Ireland, and you go, well, the people of Northern Ireland don't bloody know what they need to do to sort out Northern Ireland, so just shut up, you know, and, and I remember that, that kind of manifested itself in a slightly different way when I ended up working for the BBC, because the first time that I got a job I was working for a really nice guy called Peter Symes and he ran a series called Picture This and it was for first-time directors and you'd pitch ideas and you'd get a half-hour slot to try it, you know, so I, I pitched an idea about Carrickfergus, there used to be a place in Carrickfergus called Lovers Lane, and what I was interested in

was this Lovers Lane was that, it used to be a key throughway in the town and over years each side of the lane was being developed, so one side became a golf course, then they put a housing estate on the other side, and then the ultimate injury, just before I left Carrickfergus, was they closed off the end of the road and built a dual carriageway right next to it, so I thought there was something quite interesting about this part of the history of, of this wee town in Northern Ireland just slowly being cut off and separated from the modern **[00:48:04]** world, and I thought, there's, there's something in that, you know, so I was trying to think about what ways I could maybe try and explore what that might mean and, you know, but the thing that, when I pitched this as an idea to Peter, he said that's a great thing, I'll give you three days' funding to go over and explore and see what stories you can find and how you can maybe try and make a poetic kind of thing out of this, and then when I went back I said I've found all this wonderful stuff, he says great, but to make it into a programme you need to make it on a commentary on the Troubles and see if you can tie it in with that. I went what [laughs], I said what are you, what are you talking about, like, you know, there was nothing to do with Troubles, you know, but that, that, and that's when I realised that they were actually quite programmed in England to understanding what they thought Northern Ireland was about, so it had to be about the Troubles, it couldn't be about this little road which, you know, with this wonderful place in Ireland with all these wonderful wee stories, and I ended up actually not doing that programme. I said I'm sorry, but you're forcing me to try and make this about something which isn't what I was interested in, you know, and he said that's fine, you know, it's, it's just from our point of view I don't think it's going to work, because that's what the audience here expects, and then there was another time when I was at the BBC in Bristol, when I worked on a series called War Walks and, with a wonderful historian, military historian, Richard Holmes, did these kind of half-hour walks over battlefields and I worked on the second series and one of the programmes that we did was the Battle of the Boyne, so we had to go to Ireland and go down to Dundalk and, you know, go to the Boyne valley and all this kind of stuff and we made this great wee programme, Richard strutting his stuff, you know, trying to avoid being shot by Jacobites and all this kind of stuff, and then at the end of it, I remember in the edit, the director had put in this final sequence where he'd interviewed some guy from Dundalk, from a his-, no, sorry from, from Drogheda, sorry, I beg your pardon, Drogheda, and the interview was this kind of two-minute commentary on how we all need to learn to love one another and, and if only we could just come together, and I'm watching this going this is really patronising bullshit, you know, and I remember saying this to the, the director in the edit, he says oh no, no, and I realise this was his Jerry Springer moment, you know, he, he really wanted to just have a coda at the end of this film about something that took place three hundred years, but in the way that when they did a programme about, say, Dunkirk there was no two-minute thing at the end about how we should all get on with the Germans now, you know, and it was just, it was this weird thing, that he wanted it to be his signature piece about Ireland, and I'm watching it going you're, you're preaching absolute nonsense to me because you don't understand it, I'm still trying to understand it, so I'm actually quite offended by the fact you're putting this, but he actually put that in, in the programme and it went out, so we, we had this great twenty-five minutes about the history of the Boyne and then we had the Jerry Springer moment at the end of it and I'm sure a lot of people, you know, were highly entertained [laughs].

JC: Yeah, it's interesting, I've, I've always heard the phrase used, a place apart, to describe how English people think of Northern Ireland, that it's just something that they don't really understand, just a place over there that they don't really get.

CP: I, I have to be honest with you, I think that's an English thing, not just about Northern Ireland, I think it's an English thing about Scotland and I think it's an English thing about parts of England. I think the north of England is as much a mystery to people in London, or, or, or is caricaturised in the same way to an extent, like, you know. The one thing about, that was great about living in Bristol for six years was, I don't think anybody really understood Bristol, so they got away with murder, you know [laughs], they, you know, you know, Bristol is a great place to go to, in the same way as Yorkshire, like, you know, I think they're good places to go to, cos they're, they're a bit harder to try and really stereotype all those places I think, you know, but anyway that, that's my take on it, having been there, you know.

JC: So you were at Carrickfergus grammar, getting on okay, like, academically-wise and stuff, and presumably that was mainly a Protestant school as well?

CP: Yeah, ninety-nine per cent, you know, and I remember there, there would have been maybe one or two people there who were Roman Catholic and who were exceptional, I can't actually remember anyone who was. I do remember one guy who was a Jehovah's Witness and I had great craic with him, you know, cos he was always late, no, I was always late for school, so if you, if you were late you never walked into the assembly, and because he was a Jehovah's Witness he had to stand outside the assembly, you know, so I got to talking to this guy every day, like, you know, so I remember that, but I don't remember anybody, I think there was one girl actually, I think, came from a school that closed when I was in lower sixth who may have been, and at that point you just kind of, yeah, whatever, you know, it was more when you were a kid, cos it was a label to try and distance people, you would be pointing at people going they're this and they're that, even if they weren't. By the time you got to seventeen and eighteen, it, we weren't that bothered, you know, in our school at least, but the thing about Carrickfergus is Carrickfergus wasn't in an area that was, like, an interface area, cos it was almost an exclusively Protestant town, so there was nobody to pick fights with. There was, there was one small area in Carrick which was the kind of the Catholic part of the town, but they had their own school, we had our school, and by and large people did get on fine within the town, but it wasn't like in Belfast where literally every other street, they've got different colours on the road, you know, Carrick wasn't like that, at least back then it wasn't. I remember one of the things that I got really disgusted with actually, just towards the end of my time in Carrick, probably towards the, the final years when I was at the grammar and when I was at university was that I, I think they must have moved a lot of loyalists down from Belfast into our estate, because overnight suddenly all these bloody gable wall paintings went up and all the red, white and blue painting on the kerbstones and that's something we never had as a kid, you know, even though they had the bonfires on the estate we didn't actually have any of this kind of cultural symbolism in our face and suddenly it appeared overnight, and so there'd obviously been a few people been relocated I think from Belfast and, and put into one of the satellite towns, and so suddenly it became, you know, one of these kind of loyalist areas which it never had been, and, and having left Castlemara years ago, I mean, thirty-odd years ago

now, when you watch the news now, any time there's trouble in Carrick you automatically think it's going to be Castlemara, in the way that it never was when I was there, so that was a really sad thing, but from my point of view I was kind of lucky that happened just as I was at the end of my time there, and then obviously I moved to Britain and then, you know, and then I've, I've been over here now what, since '91, so it's been a while now, so yeah.

JC: And at that stage when you were sort of becoming a teenager, young adult and stuff, you'd obviously been in Northern Ireland a while, so you were, had a much better understanding of what everything was about. Were you starting to form your own political consciousness and ideas about Northern Ireland and about, and just more generally?

CP: In a younger, in the younger time, not initially, I remember, the key thing I remember actually from a political point of view, the first thing actually wasn't a Northern Irish thing at all. I remember watching Maggie Thatcher losing her election and we had a small black and white TV and I think I seem to remember that having just moved over from, from England, thinking that's the, that's our prime minister, you know, and, and she's just been beaten and what, and this, oh no, sorry, she won, Callaghan had been defeated, that was it, yeah, so I remember thinking oh no, Callaghan had been lost and I knew he was the prime minister, so that, that was kind of the first kind of political thing. Then after that it was really weird because, cos there, there was no Stormont or anything like that back then, you know, they kept trying to get these kind of assemblies and stuff up, but it was really more of this kind of dreary local politics and all these councillors nodding and dressing up in their bloody robes and stuff and, and all the nonsense you read in the local papers, so from that side of things, I, I wasn't particularly interested. I think when I first started to really twig there was something going on was in the lead up to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1986, and that's when I saw the big banner going up on, you know, I mentioned earlier on about the town hall 'Carrickfergus Says No', and it was, like, no to what, you know, and, and so then you'd, you'd start trying to find out what was going on, and I think from that point onwards I started really beginning to question things, but the point was, you, you couldn't really ask people in Carrickfergus or in your community, you know, what was wrong with them 'uns and why, why are we right with us 'uns and all the rest of it, because if you said the wrong thing, you know, people would be threatening you left, right and centre. It was a pretty nasty place actually, I mean, in, in some respects. I remember there was, there was a lot of all these kind of local paramilitary sort of punishment beatings and stuff, and I remember people I knew getting kneecapped and stuff, not many that I remember, I can remember one in particular, one guy who got kneecapped on a playing field near, nearby, but the, the initial thing was really around the Anglo-Irish Agreement and at that point I, I wasn't very British and I wasn't very Irish. The one thing I do remember actually was, I think I must have been about maybe si-, let me think about this now, sixteen, or was it eighteen, but I remember thinking that I'm really fed up being told about all this nonsense, not nonsense, I, I didn't understand what the problem with the South was, and so I decided one day that the only way I'm going to sort this is to go there [laughs], so I got on the train in Carrick, got to Belfast and got the train to Dublin and I remember getting off at the train station in Dublin, I think it was Connolly station, absolutely terrified, and, and I'd, I'd no rational reason to be terrified, it was just, it wasn't somewhere I'd ever been before, it was the place that people had told me was where the bogeymen lived and I was curious to find out, and I remember walking around, and I was up and down O'Connell Street, and, and suddenly all the big

differences, you know, all the bilingual street signs and stuff and seeing stuff written in Irish and stuff, and at that point I, I really thought Christ, you know, I don't kind of get it yet, but I, you know, nobody's having a go at me [laughs], you know, nobody was there to eat me alive cos I got off a boat, off the train from, from Belfast, so that, that was the first time, I remember that one time being absolutely terrified just walking onto O'Connell Street and that went within half an hour. I loved the place, I thought it's a really nice wee place, you know, and I started going down to Dublin maybe, you know, twice a year just to, **[00:58:04]** to go around visiting museums and stuff cos I was, I was interested in history and stuff, so I started picking up a few bits and bobs from that, but I didn't really start looking into Irish history until I actually moved over to Britain, and when I went to Bristol it was in 1991 and I think after about a year or so, I thought, I, I started to think okay, I'm actually quite interested in the Irish language, so I thought okay, I'm a Protestant, nobody's going to talk to me, but there was a Bristol Irish society, so I went to the Bristol Irish society and I said to them do you mind if I tag in, I'm just interested to see what this is about and they were great, they, they welcomed me in and I went along and I was there for about a year or so, trying to learn the basics of Irish Gaelic, and then there was one night, somebody who was from Dublin actually who, who'd been learning Irish Gaelic, I think she had contacted me and said there's been an incident with the society and I wasn't there one week and she said no, there, there's been a really serious incident and apparently a couple of loyalists had been over from Belfast and had attacked somebody who ran the Bristol Irish society. Now, at that point, I thought, I can't go back, you know, because I'm a Protestant, it'll be in their face, even though I didn't really believe in it, I wasn't very religious, I thought it, just me as a symbol walking in there as this kind of Protestant, I can't do that, you know, so I stopped doing that and I ended up meeting this friend of mine who was from Dublin and we'd just go to the pubs for a few months and just carried on doing our sort of studies together within this pub, but I was, I was so embarrassed about what had happened and, and so mortified because I, these people were the salt of the earth, like, they were just trying to, you know, preserve their heritage and stuff and then, bizarrely, that only lasted for about a year or so because thinking I need to do this on my own now, I ended up going into a shop and tried to buy a CD of some music in Irish and I saw a CD with some really bad Irish in it and I thought I don't quite understand this, but I, you know, I'll listen to this and it turned out to be that it wasn't Irish Gaelic at all, it was Scottish Gaelic [laughs]. I started listening to this Runrig, this CD from Runrig, and, and from that point onwards I actually started looking into Scottish Gaelic and then went down the Scottish Gaelic route, because it was a lot easier to understand. It was a kind of Gaelic that Protestants spoke in Scotland, there was no baggage with it, and then I joined a Scottish Gaelic group in Bristol and that was an easier way into it at that point, but I, I do remember that time that this guy had been attacked and thinking absolutely, just being absolutely mortified and embarrassed, that I couldn't show my face cos I felt that I would be their next problem, not because I'd done any-, I wasn't involved in it or anything like that, I just thought that the symbol of what I was and what I represented would be too much, and I, I maybe should have tested that and said look, you know, got in touch with them, but I just remember at the time being so embarrassed about it, so yeah, that, that was quite a shocking thing that happened when I moved over, but yeah, sorry I've lost where we've started with that question [laughs].

JC: No, no, worries, me too actually. I suppose I'm wondering, when, when you were sort of, like, a young adult, like, maybe before you even left Northern Ireland, obviously you

weren't, like, a staunch loyalist or anything like that, but I'm wondering if sort of in, in the broadest possible sense, whether you would have been a unionist in the sense that you thought Northern Ireland should be part of the UK, or even by default if those, I guess those were the sorts of people who you were surrounded by.

CP: I think, now I'm, I'm trying to remember if this is actually the case, I think I may have voted once before I left Northern Ireland, but I'm almost certain that I voted Alliance and the reason I voted Alliance was, I was not impressed with the unionists and I was not impressed with Sinn Féin, I didn't really understand the SDLP, you know, there's, yeah, I didn't know who were, but Alliance cos I knew Seán Neeson, who'd been this councillor and stuff like that, and I thought the Alliance seemed like good guys, and they were kind of more middle of the, the road, so I, and I'm fairly sure I voted once in, in Northern Ireland and it would have been for Alliance, so I never thought of myself as a unionist, never thought of myself as a nationalist. I do think of myself as a nationalist now, but in a Scottish context, because of the politics that's going on now, but I was never a nationalist in an Irish sense, so I, I think the Alliance to me was a kind of comfortable down the middle sort of type way, and actually when I went to Bristol I think I kind of maintained that a wee bit, cos I'm fairly sure I voted Lib Dem in an election as well, cos again I didn't like this, I don't like this idea of polarised things, so when somebody's Labour and somebody's saying they're a Tory and, you know, you know, if you vote one then you're against the other, and I always look for the middle ground, so I think I voted Lib Dem at that point, but that didn't really change until I came up to Scotland and then obviously the constitutional politics here is very different, but, which is why I ended up being sort of much more involved with the SNP and stuff like that, but back then, no, I, I knew I wasn't a unionist, I knew we were in the Union, and I didn't know whether that was a good or a bad thing, but I, I just remember the, the outrage with the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1986, and, and me personally not being that impressed with it, you know, everything for that year was 'Ulster Says No' and Carrick, 'Carrickfergus Says No' and, and all this, and I didn't know what we were saying yes to or no to or anything like that, I wasn't politically aware enough at that point, so I'll, I'll put it another way. I was never seduced by unionism and I never had the opportunity to be seduced by nationalism because Carrick was a Protestant town, so they just didn't lure me in in the way that they did some within the town and I never really quite twigged why that was. I think it's just cos I never felt a part of it from the outset when I arrived, cos I think, I think I did feel different, or maybe I wasn't quite sure what I was, but very, a very Northern Irish thing, I kn-, or I didn't know what I was, but I knew what I wasn't [laughs], and that's what I wasn't, you know [laughs], you know, I came back from, from Plymouth and that wasn't what I was, that's, you know, I didn't know what I was, but it wasn't one of them, you know.

JC: And so leaving secondary school, then, you went to university in Belfast at first, did you say?

CP: Yeah, I did. I did two years in Belfast and then three years in Bristol, so two years–

JC: Was that at Queen's?

CP: No, no, I got, I got a place at Queen's, but I turned it down. I ended up going to, to the art college actually in Belfast.

JC: Oh right, right.

CP: So I did an HND in design and communication.

JC: And how, what was Belfast like at that time, this would have been early eighties?

CP: This would have been–

JC: Oh sorry, early ni-, early nineties.

CP: Yeah, 1989 to 1991, I, I did the, the HND. Bel-, what was Belfast like, I commuted in from Carrick, so I didn't live in Belfast, so Belfast's only nine miles from Carrick, so it was a twenty-minute train journey in and out and I had a couple of pals from Carrick who were on the same course as me, so we ended up going in and out, so there, there were some things that I remember, I mean, and, and I'd al-, I had been visiting Belfast quite regularly as a kid cos, as I said, I was interested in comics and stuff, so I used to go up to this Talisman shop up in Smithfield Market. I'd never really gone beyond the centre though, I'd only ever been in Royal Avenue, I'd never been out sort of towards Stranmillis and Queen's and stuff like that. What did I think, I think that's probably the, the time when I first really began to experience the full-on kind of thing with the Troubles and, and it was just towards the end of the Troubles, it was just before, what year was the ceasefire, was that nineties, was that–?

JC: [pauses] Got me [laughs].

CP: It's you on the spot now, right, okay.

JC: Yeah, it was '95, I, or six–

CP: Was it '95, so yeah, oh so we must have been still been full on in the Troubles at that point then, yeah, actually no, you're right because I was in Bris-, I was in Bristol when, when the ceasefire happened, that's right, so, so yeah, so we were still at that point in, in the middle of the Troubles, and things were getting pretty nasty at that point, and so I do remember lots of bomb alerts and a lot of, you know, having to evacuate stores, going into CastleCourt and, any shop you went into you had to have your bag searched, used to have this weird thing that if you got on a bus and there were barriers by Royal Avenue, if you, if you, you know, when you approached the barrier, somebody would come on and would look under the seats for firebombs [laughs], but you're just sitting there waiting for them to finish their search and they'd get off and you'd drive into the centre of town, so all of that was a bit weird, and I remember the, the time when it, when it really hit was the summer before I moved over to Bristol, cos I did a two-year HND, and I applied to do a degree in Bristol, but because it was a brand new degree, if, if it had been an established degree I could have gone onto the second year, it was a brand new degree, so there was no second year to go into, so if I wanted to do this course, I had to do the first year, and because I did the first year I didn't get any funding, cos you only got four years of funding for university, so it meant that I had to work my backside off over the summer to, to try and save some money to go to Bristol and I did that by working as a security guard for a company called

Mensecurity and that's when I really got exposed to a lot of, some serious shit in that, in that summer. There, there was one night when the, I was working at a place called Allied Maples near Lisburn and I, I was covering people when they went on holiday, you know, so I'd be there five days and then three days here and two days there, and they drove me up to Allied Maples and it was one of these things, the IR-, IRA used to do this thing where they would phone through a bomb alert, but they wouldn't phone through one bomb alert, they'd phone through forty bomb alerts, and there was only two bomb squads, so they all have to be checked one at a time, so the amount of disruption that used to, to cause, there was one night I couldn't actually get back from this Allied Maples and I had to stay the night at somebody's house on the Shankhill, the manager, his mother lived on the Shankhill, and I remember being just as terrified of that as, as I was of, you know, going to Dublin, thinking Christ, I'm on the Shankhill Road, what's that all about, like, you know. In fact, that day, when they cu-, one of the bomb alerts was actually at Allied Maples, there was a roundabout just outside it, and so we had to evacuate people from the store and I remember the manager saying to me we have to get people out through the back of this building, and we'd a pair of wire snips and we had to cut the wire fence to get them onto the, the, there was a road down below and we had to wait there until the bomb squad came and checked out this thing, and there were other things like having to do fingertip **[01:08:04]** searches of the sofas and stuff every night to check for devices, and you got ten pound a week danger money, you know. If you found one of these things you'd have lost your bloody arm, like, you know, but I needed the money cos I was saving up to go to uni, so there was weird things like that that I remember, and there was one night as well in Belfast, there was another night I was at the GAP, which is by CastleCourt, and I think the shop across from us, there was, there was a firebomb went off one night inside, you know, a wee tiny device went off in one of the clothes, so that had to be sorted, but we didn't deal with that, that was the, the mall that dealt, you know, CastleCourt that dealt with that, so there was a lot of things like that. The final thing that really freaked me out was, I, just before I moved over to Bristol, the, the York Gate complex is an old kind of mill and they were doing that up and the Co-op had a, had taken part of that and I was working as a security guard one night and there was a guy, there were a few things on that, but I remember there was one guy came up and he wouldn't sign in and I said I'm sorry, I can't let you in unless you sign in and he face-to-face basically, you know, threatened me and said you, you will let me in. I said I'm not letting you in, I was a bolshy little bastard, like, you know, I said I'm not letting you in, but I knew fine rightly I was in trouble for doing this, but the manager sacked him, but that was literally the week before I left, so I, I was glad to have got out of there, but there was one night where the people who were signing in and out, there was one guy signed, went to the door and he walked down the road and the IRA went past and shot him through the neck and it was because it was an English construction company called Farrans that, that was, that was contracted to do the job and they were just targeting soft targets, so this guy got shot. I didn't actually see that, but I heard about it the following day and I thought, well, enough's enough and I quit the following day and I actually went over to Bristol a week earlier than I was supposed to do, cos I thought I just need to get out of here, you know, so that kind of freaked me out, and I didn't actually go back, let me get this right, I think I went back a couple of times in the first year, to my mum's for the, for the holidays, and then I didn't go back to Northern Ireland for I think about six years, you know, I was just, I was just too freaked out about it all, and, and of course at that point I'm then back to Bristol with all the baggage of what the Troubles was all about, in, in the land of infidels who

had no idea what it was about, but they all knew the answer to it, you know, so I had all this kind of crap to deal with for a few years, and also things, like, I remember, cos we were just down the road from Birmingham and I didn't know anything about the Birmingham baggage, you know, with the, with the, what had happened there, but there were people from Birmingham I remember in Bristol, just wouldn't come near me, you know, because, you know, we were all the same as far as they were concerned, but, you know, so there were things like that that kicked off, but yeah, it was, it was, it, Belfast, the last two years in Belfast really was kind of an eye-opener and that last summer in particular was the, when, the point when I thought, I just, this is not me and I, and I want out of here.

JC: So that was, that was part of your motivation for leaving Northern Ireland, the, the situation?

CP: No, I'd already decided to leave, but the reason I decided to go to Bristol was cos that's where the course was that I wanted to do and that, that was the only reason. I mean, the intention was to do the course and then come back, but that summer I thought Christ, no, hang on a minute, this is proper, proper bloody nasty, and I was at the age at that point, I was in, you know, I think I must have been about twenty at that point, when I was an adult and I thought this is just bullshit, I just don't get any of this, like, you know, and so I ended up going over, did this degree in Bristol and then got a job in Bristol and I've been in Britain ever since. I think the weird thing now is, for the last fifteen years, I left the BBC in 2006, and I now work as a genealogist, I do family history for people, and having gone through that journey of doing my own family history, where half of it is Scottish and half of it is Northern Irish, I've, I've completely reappraised things again and, and I have a very, I have a very, very comfortable now relationship with my Northern Irish identity in the same way I have a very comfortable relationship with my Scottish identity, but I had to really work through that one document at a time trying to work out where I fitted in and where I came from, not where somebody was telling me I should come from and, you know, and all this kind of crap, you know, that we had to deal with when I was younger, and I, I think it's only as I was going through that, the more I got really annoyed, realising how much crap we really were put through, when we were raised in that way, and some of it subconsciously I think, people just, you know, that's who they thought they were, but it, it, I think it was imposed on me in a way that I didn't really understand until I realised it had been imposed on me, because I, I came to terms with who I am through my own research, through looking at my identity and stuff, not through having been raised with it from birth and then I think that's something that I really, I, I am now comfortable with, you know, so I, I mean, I was actually, this morning I was on a meeting with people from the, the National Archive in Belfast, the PRONI, and I regularly go over and do stuff, so I'm, I'm quite involved now, but there was a period of about six years I wouldn't go back to Northern Ireland. I just, I just could not deal with it and, and that was kind of a really massive psychological thing, like, you know, and I, and I equally couldn't deal with it in Bristol, people telling me oh we know the answer to this, that and the other and I think that's probably part of the reason why I ended up leaving and going up to Scotland.

JC: How did, how did your mum and dad feel about you leaving Northern Ireland, do you know?

CP: I, I d-, well, at the time I left I had fallen out with my father a wee bit, so we didn't talk for a few years. My mother, I think, I think there was part of her that kind of was happy that I was out of it and part of her just being a mother, you know, being worried and stuff, like. She ended up moving over to England herself though, a few years later, she moved to Wolverhampton and then up to Manchester, which I think I mentioned to you before, so she, she kind of got out of it as well, and in fact, my father did too, my father ended up going to Bristol weirdly enough at the time when I wasn't talking to him, so I, you know, I'd occasionally bump into him on the train and stuff, and he ended up, in 1999 there was a train crash, the Ladbroke Grove train crash, he was the guard on the train.

JC: Really? Wow.

CP: Yeah, so he, he had a massive, massive experience on the back of that and that's when we started talking again and he ended up going out to Crete for fifteen years in the aftermath of that, so he's actually not, he's now only actually just moved over to Scotland again, he now lives just up the road from me, and in fact is now self-isolating with Covid [laughs], cos his carer's just turned out to be positive, you know, so that, that's kind of all come a bit full circle again, but at the time I think my father would have got out cos he did it, you know, with the navy, and I think my mother was probably worried, but I think, my, my sister moved to Wolverhampton and did a degree as well, and I think she moved over because my sister was there and I think once they'd moved over, same with anybody from Northern Ireland, when they leave Northern Ireland and come over to Britain, Northern Ireland is never the same when you go back, because you realised how bloody weird the place is in some respects, you know, compared to how the rest of the, the, of the UK and in fact, the, the known world and civilisation is. There are so many things about Northern Ireland that are wonderful and there are so many things you just want to slap people around the head and say, get over yourselves, but I think that, that's one of those things, it's, it's very hard to go back to Northern Ireland once you've been over here because (a) when you go back, you go back with a different understanding of the place that you're going back to, but also people look at you differently when you go back cos you had the audacity to leave, and it's almost like you're above yourself, you know, who are you, you're above your own station and all the rest of it, coming back to lecture us, and you think we're not going back to lecture you, I'm just going home, you know, so there's always that. There was a wee bit of that has happened in the past with members of the family, but the members of my family I tend to get on with are the ones who've actually left, you know, so I've got, I've got family in Australia who I've seen probably more times than the family back in Carrick. I've got family down in England that, you know, I'm regularly in touch with on Facebook and stuff, so there's, it, it's one of those things, the ones that are still there and who are still trapped in this kind of bubble of nonsense on the loyalist side, I've kept my distance from that because I'm just not interested, you know, and I think, you know, it's the same, you occasionally meet up, my mother's funeral was probably the last time I saw them seven years ago and I wasn't that bothered, even at the funeral I didn't sit with them, you know, I sat on another table just thinking I don't really have a lot in common with you, you know, anymore, so aye, yeah.

JC: And how did you get on in Bristol, what was that experience like?

CP: How did I get on in Bristol, well, well, I was there, there was two phases. I was three years there at university and then three years working for the BBC, so the first three years, the first year was, was again, I was a little bit different to the rest of the students cos everyone else was getting funded fully and I wasn't, so I actually had to work full-time, so I got a job at an Asda superstore in Bristol, had a great craic there, you know, I mean, the amount of fun we had there was unbelievable. We used to work on a deli counter and you had to pull these wee tickets out and because of my accent, you'd be calling out the numbers for people to come and get their cheese, you know, eighty-one, eighty-two, you'd shout out eighty-eight and somebody'd say are you calling me an idiot, no, it's my number, I'll do it in English, eighty-eight, you know [laughs], so you'd have a bit of banter with it, you know, and, and, you know, I got nominated for a thing called an ABCD award twice when I was at the Asda store and that's above and beyond the call of duty, and I got nominated cos I was insulting people at the counter, but with an Ulster accent and I was doing it for a laugh and, and it was just good craic, you know, so we had a lot of good fun with that, and the Bristolians I always found were quite closed people until you got to know them, and then they were just as funny as people from Northern Ireland, like, you know, so that, that was good craic. At university, the course, a lot, I think I mentioned earlier on, a lot of the coursework I did I decided to tackle Northern Ireland through the projects that I did, so I did the one about King Billy with the statue, I did another one about the discrimination against the Irish language, and I went back to Belfast and interviewed people saying, you know, what, why have you politicised it, and, and trying to interview somebody from the loyalist side to say why are you so against, but nobody would talk to me on that front. There's a part of that, I, I have these kind of wee rites of passage from, from my sort of media career, and one of the things was that during that **[01:18:04]** documentary I made about the, the Irish language, I wanted to get somebody from Sinn Féin to talk to me about, you know, this nonsense about every bullet you learn is a, what was it, every word you learn is a bullet in the armed struggle, that's what the, that was the phrase they said about Irish, and they radically politicised it, in a way that Scottish Gaelic isn't, so I, I ended up, well, I wanted to meet somebody and I got a journalist in Bristol to act as a go-between through the National Union of Journalists, and he set up an interview with me, with somebody at Connolly House in Belfast, which is the, well, I don't know if it is now, but back then it was the headquarters of Sinn Féin on the Andersonstown Road, and the day that we'd arrange to have this interview was the day after a loyalist had murdered a top floor of this bloody building, so of course I'm thinking, well, I'm, I'm still going for this meeting, you know, and my mum's going are you really sure you want to do this, like, you know, you are a Protestant going up the Falls Road, and I'm going I know, but it's all been arranged, you know, through the, they had my credentials if you like, I'd been vouched for by a proper journalist in, in the NUJ and all the rest of it, so I ended up going up and I did an interview with a guy called Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, who ended up becoming the mayor of Belfast, you know, and I've a lot of time for Máirtín, I thought he did a good job when he was the mayor, but at the time I, I, you know, I did my best to try and ask him some probing questions, at the same time realising this is Sinn Féin and they've a very, you know, interesting relationship with other groups, so I was kind of reining it in a little bit, but I was still asking him questions, you know, why is it that are you doing this and why is, you know, and I got a great interview out of it and put it in this documentary and then on, on the back of that I actually got an award in the university, just an internal bursary thing called the John [indecipherable] award, but they gave that to me cos they, they appreciated the efforts I'd gone to to try and just tackle something that

my community wasn't supposed to tackle and I, I just, you know, I just wanted to get answers to it, so that, that focus on Northern Irish topics was something that I used the course to try and answer questions for myself with, and the course gave me this kind of backdrop and reason to tackle these things, and because the people who ran the course were also from an anthropological background, it, it was the anthropology department that the media course had come out with, that's, you know, their whole discipline is trying to understand, you know, how humanity works and all this kind of stuff, so I, I got a lot out of that course and that actually then affected my relationship as well with Northern Ireland. I realised actually that my most comfortable relationship with Northern Ireland was by being impartial, or trying to be impartial and this kind of journalist, so I, I really embraced this whole kind of journalistic sort of side of things, so I ended up doing this career in the BBC, so the first three years I was at the BBC in Bristol, I worked for what was called TV features, which was the, the documentary unit and, you know, I, we, we had a lot of fun, you know, just, I worked on series like *999* where you were re-enacting emergencies that had taken place with the emergency services. I ended up in the bloody title sequence cos the actor didn't turn up, so I had to put the outfit on and then, you know, for three years I'm running in silhouette [laughs], towards this helicopter, and yeah, that, that was fun. I, I think one of the things I did get though from the BBC when I was there is I realised what an awfully, awfully, awfully Oxbridge place it was, and, and I think I was able to use that because I, I couldn't be categorised by all these double-barrelled names, you know, and that's why they kept hiring me to do these things cos they'd just, you know, I was just a bit different to the rest of them, so I kept bringing things to the projects I worked on that I think, that, that was appreciated. I remember when we did the documentary on the Boyne, though, for War Walks, we di-, we actually did some filming in Carrickfergus, partly to tell the story of King Billy landing and making his way down, and, and there was things, there were, there were some experiences there, I just remember, like, we had a lunchtime during the, the filming break and the, the crew said, well, where shall we go to eat and I said, well, there's a restaurant over there and there's a restaurant over there and they said, well, we're going to go to this restaurant over there, and I says fine, I'll see you in an hour. There's not a hope in hell of me going in there, because it's funded by the UVF, you know, and I thought I'm not paying money towards, you know, these nutters, so there were things like that that happened. It was the same time actually that, that filming trip was also when Tony Blair won the election, cos I remember sharing the plane with Richard Holmes and he was mortified, you know [laughs], he was, he was a proper Tory boy, like, he was a lovely man, but he was a real Tory boy, like, you know, so, there were, yeah, there were things like that, but at the same time there was funny things, like, we had to [laughs], the, the director really wanted to make this his signature piece on Ireland, you know, somewhere he'd never been to before, so he wanted to have a scene in there talking about the lasting effects of the Boyne, with how the, the Orange Order still marches every year and all this kind of stuff, so I was asked to get a, a band and a banner to film for, for this documentary, and the only band I could get was a pipe band. There was, it was a Scottish pipe band that was based somewhere, I can't remember, I'm not really s-, it might have been Carrick, but we filmed somewhere down at the Mournes and we needed to get a banner and I remember going to the Orange Order in Carrickfergus, saying can I borrow your banner for a night, no problem Chris, there you go son, you know [laughs], so me driving down the road with a banner, you know, and me and another guy walking with a banner and just a close up shot of the banner itself moving, you know, it wasn't an Orangeman carrying it, it was me, you know, and, and

in the same documentary we had to do this thing where, there was only one re-enactment group in the whole of Ireland that could play both the Jacobites and the Williamites and they were in Sligo, and so we got, we got this Sligo history group, I think it was Sligo living history group or something they were called, and they had a fort and they had a cannon and they had muskets and all the rest of it. The one thing they didn't have was gunpowder, so I had to arrange for a small supply of gunpowder, with an RUC escort, over the border from the North into Sligo, so they could fire these bloody muskets, and the reason for that was that the gunpowder rules in the Republic were even stricter than they were in the North, cos of the Civil War, so there was all these weird things and I'm thinking, I'm from Northern Ireland and I'm driving through Northern Ireland with a tub of gunpowder, with an RUC escort, into a country where there's no Troubles whatsoever, but they've made it illegal, how the hell have we got gunpowder in our place, you know, so, yeah, it was just, you know, and the really stereotypical way of saying that if you're in England was oh that's just Irish, you know, but I never said that, because I knew that was a real stereotypical thing, but that's how it would have been described, that's just a really Irish thing, like, you know, of course the only place you're going to get gunpowder is in Northern Ireland, and of course the only people who are going to help you to get it to the place you need to get it to are the RUC, in an escort over the border, so there was nonsense like that, that just I found hilarious that, you know, that kind of manifested itself afterwards, but yeah, the course itself that I did was a real strong point in terms of personal development because it allowed me to focus my skills in terms of beginning to analyse and assess things and understand things, and then I've, I've carried that on ever since, even with the genealogy I do now, you know, and the family history and stuff like that. I know how to ask questions now, how to get the answers from them.

JC: It's interesting you, you talked about stereotypes there. Do you think when you moved to Bristol, either in uni or in the BBC, with your accent, did people affix stereotypes to you?

CP: Yeah, very definitely. I, I remember one example when I worked on a documentary. It was, *Country Life* magazine was celebrating its hundredth anniversary, and I don't know if you know *Country Life*, but *Country Life*'s this magazine that the posh people buy their big houses from, and, and the front cover's usually got a picture of the house and it's that size on a big thing and, and the image is a blue sky and the big lawn and people are buying the idea, you know, so it was a hundred years, so we did a documentary for BBC 2 following *Country Life* and I remember the director telling me that she hired me deliberately because the people she wanted to interview were going to be these posh boys and girls and she wanted somebody that they would just be curious about, so I turned up with my Ulster accent being this little, you know, sort of working-class trying to be middle-class person who wouldn't stop asking questions, and, and she knew, and she was actually right, there's a thing actually about, Billy Connolly talks about this thing, about how the middle classes are, are the people who are always problems, the working classes and the posh people get on brilliantly and there's always the middle class trying to stop being one thing and trying to be the other thing that are the people with the identity crisis, and that kind of worked in that documentary cos I came from this kind of Protestant Ulster working-class background, dealing with these toffs. I mean, we were offered a horse, offered a house, you know, where Diana's brother was at, and all these kind of places we got to, and I just got on with them all really well, like, you know, so the, that, but I remember that was one instance where I was

deliberately told yes, you have been hired because that's your background and I need that to, to penetrate this world, you know [laughs], of people who just, you know, they would say no to other posh people, well, you walk in and you're, they'd just never met anything like it, and it works, you know, we, we all got on and we delivered for that programme. I remember at university though, just that thing I said earlier on about constantly being told, you know, people trying to tell you what the solution to the Northern Irish Troubles was, and, and me just getting really wound up about it, there were a couple of people in my class who were from Northern Ireland, in my year. One of them was actually from just down the road, and, and her cousin was in my class at school, so we kind of got to know each other before we moved over to, to Bristol. The only problem that I had with her was she was quite a holy Joe, you know, she, you know, so she was always trying to get me into the churches for the wrong reasons, you know, and I just wasn't interested, you know, and then there was somebody else who was just a bit of a tripper [laughs], from Belfast, who was just there for the party, so we got on quite well too. In fact, there was four, there was another one, there was a guy called Gordy as well, he was from County Down, so there was, there was a small core of us from Northern Ireland that occasionally we could just talk to each other with our own, with our own accents and, and just, you know, not have to explain things slowly for people. We used to joke in, in Bristol that people always say you talk really quickly, and we used to tell them it's cos we could process thought faster, you know, you know, I remember there was one girl in Bristol and every question was, like, well, you know, you know, my brain would be seizing up, you know, trying to listen to this, **[01:28:04]** so, so there was, there was things like that that we had to deal with.

JC: You men-, you mentioned the people from Birmingham as well, with that history. Was, was that a thing of people, like, thinking that you might be a terrorist or an IRA sympathiser or anything like that?

CP: No, I don't think it was that. I, I think, I, I can't speak for the people of Birmingham and I can't speak for what happened and all the rest of it, but I think it became almost, like, not, I wouldn't say erased memory, but it was part of the fabric was, this atrocity had been carried out and that atrocity is associated with the Northern Ireland Troubles, so when you hear the accent you remember the atrocity, and I think it was something to do with that, but it, it wasn't a big thing, it didn't last long, it was just that, it was just that, it was an initial barrier, and it was one of those things where I think when people got to know you, actually, it, it became irrelevant, but it, I remember that being a conscious barrier that a couple of people I knew, that I came across with, that that was something that, and I didn't even know about the Birmingham Six and all this kind of stuff at that point, it was only when I came up against this that I thought what's going on and somebody told me oh no, they had this thing up in Birmingham, like, you know, so that, that was something, but it was, it was a minor thing I think really, but it, I do remember that as being an initial thing that I had to just leap over, you know.

JC: And, and you also joined the Bristol Irish society. I mean, did you, did you see yourself as Irish at that point, or were you still identifying as Northern Irish or British?

CP: Well, see that's the thing. I, I never identified as British, so that's the, the kind of weird thing, and I never identified as Irish. I think it was part of my exploration, trying to work out

what the hell it was I was, and yeah, it was. I, I remember when I was a lot younger, I remember things, like, you know, when we moved to Carrick and we moved up to Castlemara two years after we arrived and our neighbour who was a Catholic, I remember saying to her one day that I thought, you know, I remember seeing all the flags of the UK and saying, now just as a child, saying oh that's fascinating, but that's because I was, I ended up becoming interested in art and graphic design and that's why I went to uni-, you know, to the art college and stuff, but ear-, the earlier kind of manifestations of that was thinking I'm interested in seeing flags, they're really fascinating, so she bought me a Rubik's cube when Charles and Diana got married and there were two, you know, there were six sides to it and two of the sides were pictures of bloody Diana, pictures of Charles. I couldn't give a shit about them, and I was looking at all the flags, you know [laughs], and all that kind of stuff, just being fascinated by it all, but then, and so of course they, they used to say oh Chris, isn't it lovely, he's into Diana and Charles and the royal wedding, I couldn't care less about the royal wedding, I was just interested in this Rubik's cube, you know, but I remember down the line being really uninterested in the royals and it's part of the reason why I couldn't be bothered going to the Orange marches and all this kind of stuff. I just, there's, there's nothing about it that floated my boat, and, and I think as I, as I was in Carrick and I'd said to you, you know, occasionally I'd see street signs and stuff and I just got curious as to why we had Gaelic all around us, but we didn't realise it was Gaelic around us, and so that was part of my exploration of that, was thinking, I am actually interested to know a wee bit more about what the Irish language is, and so when I got in touch with the Bristol Irish society I said, you know, I remember going in apologetically on the first day saying look, I am from Northern Ireland, I am a Protestant, and I just, I'm just interested to know what the hell it's all about and they could not have been nicer, you know, and they were brilliant and, and that, that's why, as I said to you, the following year I was absolutely mortified when this bloody thing happened and I was so embarrassed about it I couldn't go back to it, but it was part of me trying to work out where I fitted in, but in the same way that on the aftermath of that, I then started looking at Scottish Gaelic, which I didn't even know existed when I lived in Northern Ireland, I didn't realise Scots spoke Gaelic and I didn't realise they were all Protestants and again I found that fascinating, it was another way for me to, to tune in in a different way, and so yeah, and, and ultimately actually went down the Scottish Gaelic route, and so I can speak a bit of Scottish Gaelic. In fact, one, one of the reasons I did that was when I did this project as a student on the Irish language, there's a place in Belfast called the Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, the Cultúrlann's a big cultural centre and there was a guy there called Gerridge and I interviewed him and he was the one actually said to me about Scottish Gaelic, I remember, that's right, he talked about Scottish Gaelic and how he thought it would be a way for Protestants from Northern Ireland to try and tune in, and he was actually right, but that, he must have been an influence on that as well, around about that same time, cos that, that was something that did, the penny did drop with that. What's interesting now is when you're on Twitter, the kind of the Scottish Gaelic or the Irish Gaelic, or Gaelic, kind of worlds now talk to each other on Twitter and stuff and it's wonderful seeing things in Belfast now, like, there's a woman called Linda Ervine who's from the, the Protestant, almost loyalist community in Belfast and she's running Irish language classes and she's a real inspiration, so she, no, and I, I keep buying mugs from her group just to support her and, and they've loads of Protestants there now beginning to, to study Irish and things, but because I moved to Scotland I went down the Scottish Gaelic route and because of my family history I also understood that some of my ancestors did speak in Scottish Gaelic, so

that was a much more of a reason for me to tune into that as well, down the line, but that was part of a curiosity of, of trying to figure it all out, and then enjoying it and, and thinking yeah, and then when you look into the history of it and you realise actually the Protestants in Northern Ireland practically saved the Irish language at one point, they were going round collecting all the songs and Presbyterian ministers, I mean, the Cultúrlann in Belfast is actually named after Robert McAdam, who was a Protestant, along with Cardinal Ó Fiaich, the two of them's what it's named after, the Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, but it's ha-, you know, the people I can talk to about that are not in Northern Ireland, it's weird [laughs], you try and tell them there's this hidden history, I think it's beginning to change now in Northern Ireland, that people are beginning to realise, I think my take on being a Protestant in Northern Ireland is I'm very much more in the United Irishman kind of side of things, the, you know, the pre-1800, Remember Orr, Presbyterians who, who had a very different take on things back then, and so I'm much more interested in my Ulster Scots heritage from that point of view. I remember from the family history point of view I gave a talk in a place called Largs a few years ago, about doing Irish family history, and some guy came up to me and said that he was a member of an Ulster Scots heritage group that he was setting up in what's known as the Three Towns, Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston, would I like to come along, he really enjoyed my talk, and he said, but the key thing, just so you're aware, it's a non-sectarian thing and I thought okay, let's see your leaflet and he handed me a leaflet. I said listen mate, if it's the, if you're a non-sectarian group can you tell me why you've printed it on orange paper, you know, he gave me a leaflet printed on orange paper. I said I want nothing to do with you, you know, so I, I ended up, I've been exploring a lot of that recently, becoming much more comfortable in my Ulster Protestant background, but looking at it without this contamination, as I see it, of the Orange Order.

JC: Yeah, without the baggage of sort of loyalism I guess as well, yeah.

CP: Yeah, cos Ulster Scottishness existed two hundred years, long before the Orange Order, you know, so I'm beginning to look at things from that point of view, but I'm, I'm able to do that to an extent because I am in Scotland, and so I have a distance where I'm not having to justify myself talking to people back home, when you say, I'm interested in this, why would you be interested in that for, you know, all this kind, I don't have those conversations over here, you know, so it's easier to do that now, I think, but it's only now that I'm actually comfortable enough to be able to start tackling that side of my kind of identity and becoming quite proud of it actually. I, I'm very proud of my Ulster Scottish credentials, but today I ha-, I have an Irish passport, I have a British passport. One of the things about doing my family history is I, I've really used it as an opportunity to try to define where I fit into things rather than, you know, being collared by one side or the other, so I'm, I'm just as comfortable with the two of them, probably much more comfortable with, with my Irish passport in the aftermath of Brexit, you know, I'm really beginning to reject the whole British thing now, and because of my Scottish nationalist interest as well I'm looking forward to the day when I can replace the British passport with a Scottish one, you know, but that's a story for another time maybe, you know.

JC: So did you move up to Scotland straight after Bristol, or was there anywhere else in between?

CP: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, okay.

CP: I moved up in, in ’97.

JC: And what brought you to Scotland, was it Glasgow you moved to?

CP: Initially it was, yeah. I lived in Glasgow for four, four years and then moved out to Ayrshire. I’ve been in Ayrshire ever since, but the reason I moved up was, I, I was really getting fed up with this kind of, I mean, it did and I was saying about I’d had a good time at the BBC, but even at the BBC I was still having this kind of nonsense about, you know, we know what the solution to this is and we need to have our Jerry Springer moments at the end of programmes and this kind of stuff, and I remember, in fact, there was another instance of that, just, just thinking about it. I worked on a series called *999*, which was these kind of re-enactments of major rescues that had taken place with the emergency services, and I joined in series five, and, and I said can I see what’s happened before, and I realised they hadn’t done a single story on Northern Ireland and I remember speaking to the editor saying, look you’re, you’re the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, it’s broadcast in Northern Ireland as well, do you mind if I look for some stories in, in Northern Ireland and then I think at that point she sa-, well, the editor’s, yeah, okay, you know, go and have a look and I came back with about four or five stories. The one she chose was the story of the horse that had fallen down a manhole backwards in Belfast, and I said to her why did you choose that and she said oh it sounded dead Irish and I thought fuck me, here we go, right, you know, but I d-, I think the real reason she went for it is because it had been recorded, so you don’t have to re-enact that, you’ve got, you know, somebody had recorded it all, so you had the footage, so you could do a very short piece, but I remember that time she said oh it sounded dead Irish and I, or it sounded very Irish, and I thought that’s actually racist, you know, that is act-, at that point I was beginning to twig, these kind of things are properly racist, like, you know, and, and I think that was part of the reason why I eventually decided I wanted to leave. The other reason was, I was actually, I’d done three years in Bristol and I was told if you want to get anywhere in your career you need to do time in London and I thought hell’s going to freeze before I go to London. As far as I was concerned London was a hit and run route, I was never going to live in London, you know, it was a day trip, **[01:38:04]** you know, as far as I was concerned. I’d been to London a few times whilst working in Bristol, didn’t really like it, not for any political sense, I just didn’t like the energy and the bustle, you know, the, the bustle of it, it’s, it’s too much. I, I like hills and water and things like that around me, so, and because I was also more interested in the Scottish side of things at that point, with my Scottish Gaelic interest and things like that, I thought maybe I could, I could do a bit with that, so I moved up to Scotland in ’97, the other big reason being it was close enough to Northern Ireland without being in Northern Ireland for me to be able to just hop over on a ferry to see my mum if I needed to do that at any point too, so it was convenient, it was, it was closer to Northern Ireland, but not quite there, but also allowed me to explore a bit more about my Scottish identity and, and things like that, and actually to have another career within the media within the BBC in Scotland. It turns out you didn’t have to go to London, you know.

JC: So you, did you stay with the BBC?

CP: I, I initially worked in the BBC for three months on a, on a Scottish Gaelic series actually. I was working as a researcher on a series called *Eòrpa*, and then I went to Scottish television for three years and then went back to the BBC for six years in, in Glasgow, so I, I worked in Glasgow for I think nine years within the, the media, and that included the BBC, yeah, for six years, but, and, and actually strangely enough on network programmes, but the conversations we had on network programming from Glasgow were very different to the conversations we had network programming from Bristol, so it wa-, it wasn't a bunch of double-barrelled names, it was people who actually understand about Northern Ireland and understood about the context.

JC: Yeah, I was going to ask that, like, do you think people in Scotland have a, maybe a better or a more nuanced understanding of the Northern Ireland situation than English people do?

CP: They, they do to an extent because the west of Scotland has a lot of the same issues to do with sectarianism, you know, Glasgow had that, not to the same extent, but it certainly had it. I mean, when I lived in Glasgow I remember there was a Celtic fan, I can't remember whether he was killed or whether he was assaulted, I think he was killed, in, in the Gorbals, and we lived in the part of the Gorbals called the New Gorbals, you know, that had just been redeveloped, so I remember that being a big thing, thinking Christ, that's the first time I've seen that in a few years, you know, cos I never actually experienced any of that in Bristol, somebody being attacked cos they were, you know, apart from the Bristol Irish society thing that I mentioned, so that, that was quite a shock, and, and the reason we ended up moving out of, of Glasgow was when we had, our first son was born, and I thought I don't want him growing up in this kind of sectarian sort of soup, so we moved into a part of Ayrshire which was quite posh and very middle class, without realising at the time actually that the other bit of Ayrshire further down was about as, as Orange as it came [laughs], but we, we lived in the bit where all the retirees moved to and stuff, so yeah, and the kids had a great upbringing where they didn't really have any of this, you know, so.

JC: Was that a, a problem for you at all, like, moving to Glasgow, like, because you'd kind of moved away from Northern Ireland to get away from all of that and now, I mean, you mentioned seeing the Orange parades again for the first time and being, like, bloody hell, what's happening here, was that, was the–?

CP: The Oran-, the Orange parade I mentioned earlier on was actually here, where I live now.

JC: Oh was that, yeah, right, right.

CP: Yeah, that, that was last year, it was just down the road in a village called Dreghorn that I heard them. No, I think when I moved to Glasgow, I moved to Glasgow very much knowing that I was going to be working in the television industry and, and things like that. The, the sectarianism that exists in Glasgow, although it's there, with the whole Rangers-Celtic thing, that's kind of how it manifests itself in Scotland, is through the football, so the trouble's

always to do with the football, you know, and, and things have moved on, but to be, well, things have moved on obviously now because Scotland's now looking at the possibility of going independent, it's manifested itself a wee bit in, in, on that side of things, so after the 2014 referendum when the Yes side lost that, that night in Glasgow in George Square some loyalists from Belfast came over and did a number on a few Yes voters and I remember watching that and thinking oh my God, here we go, that's the positive side of the Union, like, you know, so, but at the time I was living there in Glasgow it wasn't that big a deal, we lived in the city centre or close to it, and so Glasgow's a brilliant city, I don't know if you've ever been, if you haven't, go, Glasgow is just full of energy.

JC: Yeah, my dad's from near Glasgow and I, well, I was mean-, actually meant to be based there for this project, but Covid intervened, so [laughs].

CP: [laughs] Which university were you going to be based at–?

JC: Well, I was, actually, no, it was Manchester, with the University of Manchester, but because the, my job is, for, to interview people from Northern Ireland in Glasgow, it made sense for me to based in Glasgow, but then I don't really know anyone in Glasgow, so when the whole Covid thing happened I came back to Belfast where I'd, I'd previously lived and my partner is and stuff and yeah, everything's done remotely now, so I'm back here.

CP: So are you in Belfast now or Manchester?

JC: I, I'm in Belfast.

CP: Oh you're in Belfast, sorry, oh right, okay. I thought you were in Manchester, right okay, yeah, yeah.

JC: No, no, weirdly enough, although I'm with Manchester uni, I don't actually go to Manchester at all, weirdly enough, but, yeah, no, I, I do know Glasgow pretty well.

CP: Well, I mean, the, the point is then, when I moved there, Glasgow is a happening city, in fact, Glasgow to me is the same as Manchester. Manchester's the bit of England I like [laughs], there's a lot of culture, there's a lot of, of good craic there, good humour, and all the rest of it, and as I think I said to you before, my mother lived there, her final years she spent there as well, she was based over in Clayton, so yeah, so, so Glasgow from that side of things, the whole Northern Irish thing didn't really kick in, there was, I just remember that one time with that Celtic fan being assaulted and that that was an issue, and beyond that, it was, it was really, it's only more in recent years that the whole Orange thing, the Orange thing here's almost died, but there's still a few adherents to it, let's put it that way, in the area and I think it's, it's not quite having a resurgence, but I think there's been a th-, it's been slightly buoyed up in the aftermath of the, the Yes, sorry, the independence referendum. My big fear at the moment is it looks like Scotland is now going to go independent cos the polls are now consistently showing we want it and the minute we go for it I think we'll get it, and I think there's then going to be a reaction to that where I think things are going to get a bit nasty for a bit, but that's, I, this is a weird thing, in some ways having this conversation with you is, it's a conversation I can't have with people here. I've

tried telling people my fears about that within the SNP over here when I was a member, I'm not in the, in the SNP anymore, but I, I was saying to them, you know, it's never going to be this just straightforward walk through, rosy and the following day we're independent and we're all drinking tea and biscuits and going on holidays down south and they're all coming up here. I think it's going to get quite nasty and people are saying you're only saying that cos you're Northern Irish and I'm going but that's kind of why I'm saying it, cos I've, cos I've seen it, I've seen constitutional mess, you know, in the past, so I, I have concerns about that in the future, but I think, you know, I don't doubt it's going happen, but, and it's not going to happen in the way it happened when Ireland left the UK, as in the Republic, you know, there's, there's not going to be any Easter Risings or anything like that, you know, that kind of stuff, but it's not going to be straightforward, there's going to be some issues to work through I think, you know.

JC: You're, you're still pro-independence though, are you?

CP: I'm still pro-independence, but I've, but I've, I actually stood as a candidate a couple of years ago for the SNP for a council election, but I have actually now left the SNP a few months ago, but I'm still very much, yeah, pro-independence, you know, but pro-independence in the sense of I think it'll be a good thing for everyone, you know.

JC: Yeah, when did you, when did you start to become involved in the independence movement?

CP: Well, within the movement, it was actually because, the, the year 2014, they had a two-year campaign and I, I'd always kind of voted SNP since I lived here, mainly as a way to get away from voting for Labour and the Tories cos I thought they were a disaster, you know, and then when 2014 happened, it wasn't actually the Scottish independence campaign itself that initially got me involved in it, it was the, the European election where Nigel Farage and UKIP swept the board in England and suddenly all their MEPs and I thought oh my God, Brexit's a really serious possibility and then the Scottish independence thing, I, I kind of got involved on that side of things, but my initial involvement was to do with Europe. I, I wanted my Scottish identity if you like and my European identity to be preserved and I never thought in a month of Sundays that Brexit was, was going to happen, but I saw the threat of it at that point and then I got involved on the Yes side and then really went for it, because I personally believe Scotland's future is going to be better served, and I think the Covid pandemic actually has shown that when we do things our own way, we, we tend to get better results, in the same way that I think actually down in England, I think, you know, Andy Burnham in Manchester, I think he's had a few interesting experiences, you know, in, in terms of trying to deal with things differently, so yeah, I think that's when it really kicked off was in 2014, but I, I had been very sympathetic to the arguments in the years leading up to it, you know, and, and so that's why it ended up being quite easy, but the, but the trigger was the European thing, with, with the, the European parliament-, parliamentary elections, and also I remember Alex Salmond getting up and doing a debate one night with Alistair Darling and made an absolute dog's dinner of it the first one and I thought Christ, if you want something done you have to go and do it yourself [laughs], so I turned up at the Yes group in Largs that day and said right, what leaflets are we putting out and then I kind of got really stuck in big time at that point, you know.

JC: And then, kind of linked into that, how would you feel about the prospect of a united Ireland?

CP: I, I think the, the prospect of a united Ireland, I think, I think would be a good thing. I also think it's inevitable, but I don't think it's going to be, it's, it's a hard one to explain, I, I think a united Ireland in some ways I think would have to be a federal system, I think you'd have to preserve something in the North that dealt exclusively with the North, certainly in **[01:48:04]** the, in the initial years if it ever happened. I think the big issue actually, I, I actually think the big, I think the country at the minute that has the biggest identity crisis, and I don't mean this as an insult, is actually England, I think that's why Brexit's happened. I think there's a massive identity crisis happening down south with the loss of the empire and all this kind of stuff, and then I think England is trying to find its role in the world and is lashing out at everyone, which is why Brexit's happened. I think Scotland knows where it wants to go, I think Northern Ireland, I think there's a massive change is slowly beginning to happen. I'm not the only Protestant in Northern Ireland now with an Irish passport, I know a lot of friends and stuff who've done the same thing and I, I wouldn't be personally upset at a united Ireland happening, I, I see it as kind of inevitable. In some ways I kind of think the big issue with a united Ireland is actually going to be to convince the Republic as much as the North, you know. I think a lot of people in the South have been very happily being the South for a long time and they don't want these boyos from the North coming in and causing trouble, you know, and I kind of get that, you know, that was the, that was the real tragedy with Brexit was Brexit's, sorry, the European parliament, the European Union solved everything for everybody, there was a united Ireland within the EU, it was one economic zone, there was no border, there was a United Kingdom, so the loyalists got their way, you know. Unfortunately Brexit's come in and thrown a torpedo into that now and, and that's when it's just going to kick off again, so I, I suspect down the line, once the current generation of people who went through the Troubles and stuff pass on, as inevitably they will, I think the, the current generation that are emerging in Northern Ireland are going to see things in a bit of a different way, but I, you know, I think the biggest recruiting agent to all of that is actually what's going on in England with Brexit. I, I really do, I think they're, they're going to cause it, and I mean more the politicians more than the people of England, I mean, the, the people only vote for what's put before them, but I think there's a real dearth of leadership in Westminster at the moment and I think that's what's going to drive everything, including Scotland and, and Ireland, you know. I think there's just as equally a prospect of Scot-, of Northern Ireland becoming its own thing, separate, you know [laughs], like, you know, there could be an interim thing there where Northern Ireland decided to do its own thing.

JC: That would be interesting.

CP: Yeah, you know, it's just weird. If Scotland went independent you'd have a United Kingdom of Little Britain and a tiny bit of Ireland, it just doesn't sound quite as good as, you know, the British Empire [laughs], so I think Northern Ireland is inevitably going to, something's going to happen, but I think there's a job to be done within the Republic of Ireland trying to convince people. One thing I do think is really good though is that I do think the whole Catholic-Protestant thing is disappearing fast.

JC: Yeah, I was, I was going to ask you your perspective on how you think Northern Ireland has changed since you left?

CP: I think people are tired of it all, I really do, and I think some of the interesting things as well, is it's a bit like Scotland. In Scotland you've got the Western Isles and on the Isle of Lewis, which is the most Calvinist island, you know, until recently you didn't even have ferries going over to, to Lewis on a Sunday, cos that was the Lord's day and all this kind of stuff, Northern Ireland's a wee bit like that, you know, but over time it is just all slowly being whittled away, all these kind of thou shalt nots, and I, and I think that's beginning to happen in, in Northern Ireland. The fact you've now got legalised gay marriage in Northern Ireland, that finally happened, one of my sisters, I have a half-sister in Northern Ireland as well who's a lot younger than me, but she's gay and was an activist in Northern Ireland and, and her generation did not grow up in the Troubles and they didn't have all this kind of nonsensical Jurassic King James Bible nonsense that, you know, that people had to deal with, and, and as much as the South is changing, I think people in the North have seen the South beginning to change faster on some of these issues than they've seen in the North, and have been inspired by it. I think that's partly, probably the reason why there is now equality with things like gay marriage in, in the North, it's cos they've seen it happen in the South and the South used to be the most Catholic country in the world since Italy, you know, I mean, so if, if it's happening down there, I think the big thing is actually is, is this, you know, it's people having phones and Twitter, they don't need to listen to these dreary people that dress in grey every Sunday now, they, they go on Twitter and just find out things for themselves and it's really democratised access to, to knowledge and, and it's put a lot of these saints and, and people back in their boxes and, you know, people don't care about it anymore, my, my wife's a Catholic and she's from the South.

JC: Yeah, I was going to say, yeah, your wife's from Kilkenny, did you say?

CP: Yeah, she, she's from Kilkenny, you know, and so she, I shout no surrender at her and she throws holy water on me, watches me burn for a bit and then we get on with life, you know, it's, it's not an issue, it's really not an issue, you know, the, the big issue is me trying to convince her that, you know, God obviously comes from Northern Ireland and not from the South, so [laughs].

JC: How did you and your wife meet?

CP: In Bristol, at the Asda store that I worked at, yeah.

JC: Oh she was working in Asda as well, yeah?

CP: Yeah, I was actually working at the BBC and then the job I was supposed to do at the BBC fell through, something happened, so I was suddenly out of work for a wee bit, so I went back to the Asda store that I'd worked at as a student, just to get some money in, and I, I previously knew her sister and brother, but she'd been travelling around the world and then when I went back, it was only for two weeks, but that's when I met her there and we got on like a house on fire, so that's, that's when it all kicked off from there.

JC: And what was her, as a, a Southern Irish person, what was her perspective on Northern Ireland, did she, did she get it, or–?

CP: I don't think she was that bothered about it, I don't think her family were that bothered about it and a lot of them had lived in Bristol for a bit, so a few of them had moved over. I think what was a really, really interesting thing was when I went over to her place, her home in, in County Kilkenny, and initially I was the big Orangeman from the North, even though I wasn't an Orangeman from the North, you know, but the, there's a joke that one of her nieces, one of her, one of her uncles, or sorry, one of her nieces, the father said to her one morning go in and wake Chris up, you know, say go on you big Orangeman, you know, and she came in and she was only a wee girl and the joke was that she came in and she saw me lying there with my arms outstretched and, you know, a sheet over me, white as the day I was born, so she called me the big white man from the North, so for, for years afterwards I was the big white man from the North and, and so, so, but after a while I think because I was learning Scottish Gaelic and my wife's mother speaks Irish I, I knew more Irish than some of them knew, so I was having conversations with her mother and when they realised I wasn't this stereotypical, what they'd seen on the telly, Northern Irish person, I think that's when barriers began to break down. I'm still different, you know, to other people within the family, I'm still a Northern Irishman, but I think their definition of it now's changed. A lot of them have now actually been on holiday in the North, ever since the ceasefire and the Troubles have stopped and all that kind of stuff, so I think nowadays they, they think I'm probably more Irish than some of them are, but I'm also more Scottish than some Scottish people they know, like, you know, so I'm probably a bit of a conundrum to them, but they, they've kind of accepted me and they're, I'm very much part of their family now and, you know, as they are with mine, but I just remember that initial thing was, there was always that, you know, oh my God, there's a Northern Irishman in the house, how did that happen, you know, and I remember taking my mother down to meet my future mother-in-law as well and she was terrified. I don't think she'd ever been to the South, you know, so, but then they, they just accepted her and, you know, and, and at our wedding my aunt came down from Belfast, my aunt was the only member of my family, apart from my mother and father who came to my wedding, which was in County Kilkenny, the rest of them wouldn't come down, because it's in the South, what are you going there for, like, you know, and I got married in a Catholic church, just for the craic, you know, because I knew it would annoy everybody, so I got married in a Catholic church, and my, my aunt came down and my aunt was called Sheila and she passed away a few years ago, but even when I go back now, they keep talking about auntie Sheila cos they just threw their arms around her when she turned up, like, you know, auntie Sheila made a big impression all over Belfast, you know, so [laughs], so that, that was good craic, aye.

JC: Yeah, that's interesting, and what, what about your kids, do you think they have a sense of their Irishness, have you tried to instil that?

CP: They have a sense of their Irishness, but I think they get it more from their mother's side.

JC: Right, okay.

CP: I don't think they, I don't think they're quite, they know I'm from the North and they know their mum's from the South and I think they both, they, they both twig that we're both Irish, but we're different types of Irish, they get that. They both feel very Scottish, they'll follow, you know, the, the football and the rugby, they'll follow Scotland, but they'll wear an Ireland top. I don't think I'll ever see them wearing a Northern Ireland top, and it's not because I've said anything discriminatory about it, I don't think they quite understand Northern Ireland yet, and, and so that's something that certainly has manifested itself. All their cousins on their mother's side they talk to are based in the Republic or in England and a couple, oh sorry, one in Australia as well, the, the cousins on, on my side, I've only got one brother who's got a child and, and they've lived in the Middle East for most of their life, and at the minute she's now back in Portsmouth, so they get on with her, but on my cousins and that kind of extended thing the only ones they've ever really met and got on with are the ones who emigrated to Australia, so again, they're a bit different, but the ones in Northern Ireland, they, they don't know them at all.

JC: Would you have taken them to Northern Ireland much?

CP: Oh no, I've taken them to Northern Ireland, yeah, no, we, we've been to Carrickfergus a few times, to the castle and things like that, so they, they, no, they had great craic in the castle and stuff like that, but it's always been, like, a, a stop off on the way back when we're getting the ferry, you know, we'll just pop into Carrick. It's usually cos I want to see Carrick, just to see how it's changed and stuff, like, you know, so we'll stop, and, and to tell them the world's best food ever is a pastie bap, which, you know, my God, I, I go to Belfast, I try to go three or four times a year to go to the Public Record Office in Belfast, and I have yet to find somewhere in the city centre now that does a pastie bap before six o'clock, before I have to get the ferry, there's nobody, no one sells it, whereas my mother was in the chippy in Carrick, she used to make pastie baps and in fact, when I was in Bristol she used to send over pastie baps wrapped up in tin **[01:58:04]** foil, that was my emergency food supply, you know, proper food from Northern Ireland, like, you know, so, yeah, so occasionally I try to go to Carrick just to get a pastie bap while the shops are open, cos nobody sells them in Belfast anymore by the sounds of it [laughs], you know, I think people are too busy eating posh food now, but, as opposed to proper food.

JC: Is Carrick the same place as it was when you grew up, or there have been changes?

CP: No, no.

JC: What's, what's different about it?

CP: The big change now is Carrickfergus is now a middle-class suburb of Belfast.

JC: Right.

CP: And, and in fact, even from a local government point of view there's no longer a council in Carrickfergus, it's now part of the wider, I don't know, I don't know what it is, but it's, it's, like, East Antrim.

JC: East Antrim I think it is, yeah.

CP: Yeah, it's, whatever, so there used to be Carrickfergus Borough Council, it was very much Carrickfergus, Whitehead and Greenisland, that was it, you know, now it's just part of something else and it's now a commuter area to Belfast. As I said to you earlier on, when I left as a teenager, that's when some of the loyalist yobos were moving into the estate that, that I, I grew up in and even then it was beginning to change, but when I go back home now, there are some people I was at school with who are still there. I've, I've not really stayed in touch with anybody, I tend to just make unannounced visits to Carrick now and just, you know, try and take from it what I still remember, you know, and occasionally we, we bump into somebody, that kind of thing, but it has changed quite dramatically, not, not least of which because the town centre of Carrickfergus is now dead. All the little shops that used to be the main blood of the high street and West Street are, are, half of them are closed, or at least they were the last time I was over there, not cos of Covid, but because the, the, you know, the supermarkets have all moved in and they've just sucked the life out of the centre of the town, and it's quite tragic, but it's not just something that happens in Carrick, that's happened all over the UK, you know, and probably parts of Ireland as well, it's just a sad inevitabil-, inevitability, so one of the things I have done is I've actually written an account of the first eighteen years of my life to pass onto my kids, knowing full well that the Carrickfergus that I grew up in doesn't exist anymore, you know, and I needed to preserve it while I still remembered it and, and it was quite interesting, cos when my brother, who's a year younger than me, he can't remember anything about us growing up in Britain, so I, I think it was about a year after my mother died and he hadn't really been in touch with her quite a lot, I sent him a copy of this thing I'd written and the tears were flooding out of his eyes, cos there was stuff that I was, you know, mentioning to him that he just couldn't remember and, and it really unlocked a lot for him as well, like, you know, including when we were in Carrick, you know, stuff that was going on there, but he was at school in, in Plymouth as well–

JC: Just doesn't remember it.

CP: For a couple of years, but he just doesn't remember any of it, you know, so.

JC: So I've just got a couple more, like, sort of summarising questions that I try and ask everyone. Feel free to, to not answer them if they're too difficult, but I suppose the first one is, you've obviously lived in quite a few places, you've grown up in different places, Carrickfergus, Plymouth, lived in Glasgow, lived in Bristol, are any of those places, or is one of those places the place that you would define as home, or are lots of them home in different ways?

CP: Home is Carrickfergus, home is always Carrickfergus. Any time I talk about going home, to me, it is going back to Carrick. I don't often go back, but I will never use that word for anywhere else, which is a weird thing. One, one of the weird things is recently, because of the whole Covid thing, cos I'm a genealogist I do a lot of talks, I, I'm now doing those talks online, as I'm doing with you now through Zoom, and I suddenly started giving talks to the North of Ireland Family History Society, for example, so I've done talks to Larne group and

other groups. I've never done that in the past, you know, so it's now nice to be able to do that, to be able to talk to my people back home, but in terms of living in Scotland, my wife and I are always convinced we'll move back to Glasgow at some point, we, we love Glasgow, Glasgow is just the beating heart of Scotland, you know, and Bristol's one of these places that we couldn't wait to get out of, but we enjoy going back to, so Bristol's kind of one of these places that at some point it's nice to go back now knowing there's no pressures there on us, we can just do our thing when we go down, and the same in Manchester, you know, we, we used to go down quite a lot cos my mother was there or my wife's brother was there, but we kind of fell in love with Manchester, but then those two reasons left because he's move back to Ireland now and, and my mother's passed away, but Manchester's somewhere I think we'll probably go back to, and occasionally, when we get the chance once the, the lockdown eases and, and things like that, so there's a lot of places that I'm quite fond of going back to and there's places I won't go near. I won't go near London if I can help it, I, I hate the place, you know, I just have no time for London whatsoever. Birmingham I'm not a great fan of, just cos I always find it very cold and concrete, I think it's the Bullring [laughs], I think I just, I just kind of, you know, you're going to tell me you're from Birmingham now or something, you know, but, you know.

JC: I'll tell you I'm from London.

CP: You're from London, right, there you go then, right, okay.

JC: Although I can, I can see why, why people don't like it.

CP: My commiserations, yeah [laughs], which part of London?

JC: North London, Tottenham.

CP: Oh right, okay, yeah, yeah, okay. I've, I've got a cousin who lives near the Dartford tunnel.

JC: Right, yeah.

CP: Our side, like, you know, so he's, he's my English cousin [laughs].

JC: I, I did, I did leave when I was eighteen and I haven't gone back to live permanently, so.

CP: Yeah, I think, I think what it is is I, it's that thing that I, I like to have a nine-to-five routine and London's not nine-to-five, London is constantly buzzing, you know. I mean, I'm talking about the centre of London now, you know.

JC: I like that to an extent, but it does get a bit overwhelming at times.

CP: Yeah, it was too much for me. When I worked at the BBC in Bristol you occasionally have to go down to London filming and stuff like that and it was just too much, it was great to go down for a day or two, but I, I couldn't hack it more than that, you know, and so to be told that you, if you wanted to make it in the career you'd have to relocate to London, that just

wasn't happening, you know, and that, that's one of the reasons I moved to Scotland, I thought, nah, let's try something else, you know, but yeah, no, the answer to your question is home is always Northern Ireland, even if it's taken me a long time to find a way round to becoming comfortable with that again, which I am now. I'm very, very proud of being Northern Irish now in a way that I wasn't in the past. In the past I was almost embarrassed to be Northern Irish when I went to Bristol to university and stuff like that, there was a, there was a lot of people identifying you as being something that they had a problem with, even though you knew that you weren't part of that problem because you had that same problem when you went back to Northern Ireland and came across it as a child for the first time and didn't grow up with it, so I, I was very alienated from that identity for a long time, but I'm now very proud of that identity, but that identity as defined in my terms, that's my, my Ulster Scottishness as a opposed to any kind of Orange nonsense and also equally my Scottish background. I've, I've got a lot of Highland ancestry and stuff as well from Scotland on my father's side, so I'm, I'm very comfortable with all of that and I'm very comfortable in defining myself in those terms and that's why I say I don't, I still don't like these terms British and Irish. I, I'm an Ulster Scot who draws on a lot of things, you know, within my, with my, my particular background, so I'm comfortable now in, in that identity in a way that I really wasn't before, you know, and, and very happy to be there now.

JC: That's interesting.

CP: Whether the Troubles had carried on, that probably may not have been the case, you know, I may have avoided it, you know.

JC: We, we kind of like to, this is probably our limitation, like, our limited parameters, but when we're sort of filling out the details of each interviewee we like to sort of put down national identity and I'm wondering if, if you were pinned down and you had to say, you know, what, what's your national identity, what's your nationality, what would you say, would it, would it be Northern Irish?

CP: I'm probably closer to saying Northern Irish than Irish or British. I'm still not comfortable with Northern Irish as a term though as well cos I, in some ways Northern Ireland is a bit of an anachronism of history, you know. Next year is the hundredth anniversary of Northern Ireland, you know, and I don't think we've ever come to terms as a country as to where exactly we fit in with things, you know, I think there's a lot of people in Northern Ireland think they're more British than the British, you know, and you think, you, there's a lot of aspects of British society that really aren't things to aspire to, there's a lot of things in Northern Irish society that I wish a lot of people in Britain would aspire to, but at the same time we also have a lot of baggage cos we screwed up big time, but then a lot of the reasons we screwed up big time were because of factors that were imposed on us from, you know, it's such a, it's a real vicious circle that, that's worked its way around. My, my, I always say to folk that I have a British passport and an Irish passport, and my, my polite answer is I'm equally happy with both, but I am a dual citizen, but rather than using Northern Irish I prefer the term Ulster Scot, I really prefer that term Ulster Scot and, and particularly in the way that I define Ulster Scot, not in a, in a political sense, not in this kind of DUP issuing press releases in Lallans and all that kind of bullshit, you know, it's more the, the cultural background, I know where my lot came from, you know. Some of them came from the

plantations, some of them came from Scotland itself, in more recent times, so I, I, I think ethnically in a sense I'm probably more Scottish, which includes my Ulster Scottishness. I do also have some Irishness in there, I do have some Catholic Irish ancestry from down Dublin, that sort of way, but I define myself as the sum of various things as opposed to having one label and I refuse to have anyone give me a label, so if you've got a list of boxes, just put me in the other box [laughs]. I'll write a short essay for you [indecipherable].

JC: Yeah, yeah.

CP: But you do get that, you get these boxes on censuses saying, are you white British, white Irish, you think, well, you know, I, I don't think I'm any of those, you know.

JC: It's a lot more complicated than that.

CP: It's a lot more compli-, identity's a real basket case to get to grips with and it's part of the problem with some, I think part of the problem with trying to understand your Irish history and your Irish ancestry for a lot of people like me is the Troubles got in the way, and the Troubles polarised everybody, massively, you know, and wha-, and it's, it's only now we're getting into a position where we're coming out of that kind of **[02:08:04]** polarisation, or, or are able to start coming out of that polarisation. One, one of the things that's happening at the moment in, in Ireland, North and South, is this thing called the Decade of Centenaries where they're commemorating the events from 1912 up to the end of the Civil War and it meant different things to different people, North and South, and in the South I think they're, they're a lot more comfortable with being able to talk about things that happened a hundred years ago in the way that in the North I still don't think we are, so in the South, for example, they've got a website you can go on and you can trace your, your grandfather who was in the IRA, you know, the military archives because the Irish Army today traces its ancestry back to those republican groups that started off the Easter Rising and stuff. What you don't have in the North is an equivalent where you can go to a website and look up your UVF ancestry from 1916, you know [laughs], or your UD, your UDA ancestry or whatever it was back then, you know, there's still a bit of a, of a, of a need to get to that kind of comfort level to start talking about that, which ironically I think next year's anniversary of Northern Ireland might begin to say, you know, people might think okay, it has been a hundred years now, maybe it's now the time we can start getting comfortable with some of the stuff that even we got up to in the past, like, you know, that's maybe a topic for another [laughs]–

JC: Yeah, sure.

CP: Another forum, you know.

JC: I suppose, final question, do you think, could you ever see yourself or your family moving back to Ireland, either North or South, at any stage?

CP: We've actually had this conversation a few times and that's, that's an ongoing dialogue is all I would say on that. I think the two of us would actually be quite happy just spending the rest of our days in Ireland, or sorry, in Scotland. I think the issue has come up where I've

said for, I've been convinced I'll be dead when I'm seventy, you know, I just have this feeling I'll be dead when I'm seventy, and the way this Covid thing's going at the minute I'll probably dead in two weeks, you know [laughs], the way things are going, but the issue that we talked about is what happens if I pass away and my wife's still around in Scotland, and I've been saying to her I think she should probably go back to Ireland where the, her family, her extended family would be around her to help her out then, but then that depends on what happens with our kids in the future and where they settle and what happens with them, so there could be kind of, you know, a pull of factors in different areas down the line for both of us on that front. We've talked about in the past whether we would go back to Ireland, where would we live if it was the two of us and we've never been able to agree on that, not because we're against living North or South, it's we've been, both been concerned about what the impact would be on the other if we settled in our bit, so if I went back to the North, which would suit me to the ground because I could go to PRONI every day and do research and stuff like that, I'd be concerned about my wife, being from the South, living in, certainly, I would never move to Carrickfergus, that would never happen, you know, because I just, although the town itself may have moved on, my perception of how people would have treated people from the South is from thirty years ago when I lived there, and it would not have been a place for my wife to live thirty years ago, now that may have changed, you know. Belfast we've talked about, I think that you probably could get by by living in Belfast, I think Belfast has changed dramatically actually in the last thirty years, as long as you keep out of the way of the yobos, you know, I think there are parts of Belfast where you could probably have a life and similarly in the South. I think for a long time I was very uncomfortable visiting parts of Kilkenny and it's only because I was seen as being the outsider. I think that's changed now as well, I think when I go to Kilkenny nobody gives a shit about my Ulster accent anymore, you know, I, I think things have moved on both North and South quite a lot, so the conversation I think we, we had twenty years ago saying would we move back to Ireland and we never could, cos we were both terrified of what would happen to the other in the territory we moved into, I don't think those issues would quite raise themselves now if we moved back. I think the problem now, not the problem, I think the happy thing for us now is that we, we just are so happy here living in Scotland that, you know, if, if we're both going to see our days out together I think we'd quite happily do it in Scotland, it's just if I was to be run over by a bus tomorrow, would my wife spend the next thirty years living in Scotland on her own, well, that's it, that's why we've had the conversations, what would happen down the line, and she would probably go down to her own, you know, and maybe the other way round, no, I think if it was the other way round, I think if my wife got run over by a bus tomorrow I would spend the rest of my life in Scotland quite happily, I wouldn't move back to Ireland, so.

JC: Well, let's hope nobody gets run over by a bus, then.

CP: There aren't any buses running, there's a big Covid pandemic [laughs].

JC: Well, there you go, yeah.

CP: And we're all self-isolating [laughs].

JC: Yeah, no going outside anyway.

CP: Yeah.

JC: Alright, well, I think that's, that's everything I wanted to ask. Is, is there anything else that you wanted to add, or that we haven't covered?

CP: No, it's just, just what's the end result of this, then, so how do you see this, you've obviously a lot of people you're speaking to, so what's the end goal?

JC: Sure, yeah, I'll just end the recording then.

INTERVIEW ENDS