

INTERVIEW M06: MARY JEFFERS

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley

Interviewee: Mary Jeffers [pseudonym]

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Transcriber: Naomi Wells

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

BH: Okay, that's it running now, so I'll keep that near you because you're the one that needs to be heard. So I'm here in Leeds with Deirdre [Quill] and with Mary Jeffers. It's the twenty-fifth of November 2019 and we're just about to start our interview for the Conflict, Memory and Migration study. Before I begin, can I just say to both of you thanks very much for agreeing to do this, and thanks Deirdre for organising this and helping it along.

DQ: My pleasure.

BH: So I'm just going to begin my asking a few questions about your family background and about growing up in Northern Ireland, so when and where were you born?

MJ: I was in Belfast in the Royal Victoria Hospital. I don't know what time I was born. I was born on the twenty-eighth of the ninth 1951. My mother died after she had my twin sister and I was took away from my parents. I stayed in hospital for a couple of months because I had poliomyelitis. They thought I wasn't going to survive for a couple of days and now look at me, I've survived [laughs].

DQ: And some.

MJ: Not really.

BH: And what did you dad do?

MJ: My father was a soldier and my mother was a soldier's, she worked in the army base.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: She was a nurse for helping the soldiers.

BH: Okay, and what army base was that, where was that?

MJ: I can't remember.

BH: Can't remember, okay, what about your brothers and sisters then? You mentioned you had a twin.

MJ: I have a sister called Joan who's ten years older than me. I haven't seen her since I was a baby and we don't contact each other. My twin sister died. I know I had a twin sister because my uncle Johnny told me. I was brought up with my uncle, my mummy's brother, and his wife and his twelve kids.

BH: Twelve kids, right, and what part of Belfast was that?

MJ: Whitewell Road.

BH: Whitewell Road, and did you stay there all your life or was that—?

MJ: I stayed there till I was ten, and my father came for me when I'd just turned ten, and he took me to Sugarfield Street, his home. He only had one bedroom in the house. The toilets were outside and we had to wash ourselves in the tin baths.

BH: And who else was in that house then with your da?

MJ: Myself.

BH: Just yourself, yeah, and what was it like growing up in Belfast at that time?

MJ: Oh it was terrible because I heard bombing, I heard bin lids and I always had to sleep in the wardrobe. I was scared being in the house on my own.

BH: Okay.

MJ: My father worked at night time and when he'd come back from work I got myself to school. It was Mount Vernon school. It was just for girls and when I went up to a higher school I didn't know the name of it.

BH: Did you like school?

MJ: I loved school, but I had to leave school when I was fifteen. My father put, my father put me in Muckamore Abbey. I took epileptic fits and now I don't. I left Muckamore Abbey when I was twenty-one.

BH: So you were there seven years?

MJ: Yeah, nearly my childhood. But the staff there, some were nice and some weren't nice, and I seen a lot, girls, when they played up it was terrible. The staff put their arms right up their back, and even their legs, to carry them in the side ward.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: Yes, one of those jackets, you know, crossover.

DQ: Oh yeah, strait-jackets.

MJ: Strait-jackets.

BH: Yeah, so what did you do then when you were twenty-one?

MJ: I was put into different places, and then I started living with my auntie again when she was nearly in her eighties, and I was in different homes.

BH: Okay, so you were still moving around different homes after you came out of Muckamore?

MJ: Yes.

BH: Yeah, and what was your father doing at this stage then?

MJ: I don't know. My sister had him. He couldn't walk and when he couldn't walk he lost his temper with my sister a lot, and then my sister, when he'd lose his temper with my sister, my sister takes it out on me, and I haven't bothered with her.

BH: For a long time?

MJ: Mmm, till 1980, till she rang and said my father died. I put the flags out that day. I didn't want to be near my father because he abused me when I was a child, he, will I say it?

DQ: Only if you want to, Mary.

MJ: He raped me when I was, from ten years old till I was sixteen.

BH: Right.

MJ: And I ran away from him, and he thinks I should have been in Muckamore, just running away from my own father. I didn't know he was going to do it, and I went up to my auntie's and her husband did the same with me.

BH: Right.

MJ: But my cousins didn't. She had thirteen fellas and six girls. One of the fellas, one of my cousins, Bobby, went to the some other hospital and he went mental. When he hears bombing, bin lids or anything he's underneath the table. I remember them days badly.

BH: Okay. You mentioned that your father was a soldier.

MJ: He was.

BH: Was that unusual at that time? Was he based in Northern Ireland or was he overseas?

MJ: He was based, he was overseas and then he was, he came over, Ireland, he didn't know he had another daughter, and when he seen me he turned his back on me. I don't know why, he just turned his back on me.

BH: So who were the most important people in your life when you were growing up then?

MJ: My auntie and uncle because I lived with them when I was a baby. I thought that was my real mother and real father and I thought good, I have brothers and sisters to look after me, and they did look after me. I was like a princess, wearing wee frilly dresses and socks and hats.

BH: Yeah, did you have any interests or hobbies outside of school? What did you do for fun?

MJ: Well, I was, I didn't do anything, I just came home and done my homework. [00:10:00] If it was a good day I went to Bellevue Zoo or walk up to Antrim Road with my auntie or my uncle, but they couldn't leave me on my own because they think if I was, if I was an epileptic, if I took a fit with like, them, they have a whole lot to talk about, but thank goodness God was on my side, I never took no fits or anything, but when they took me away from my auntie and uncle, I broke my heart.

BH: Yeah, you mentioned there God. Was church important when you were growing up?

MJ: Yes. My auntie and my uncle took all of us to church and we weren't allowed to look around church, we weren't even allowed to talk in church or fiddle with our hands or anything. We went to Sunday school, Sunday school, I wanted to be, when I was growing up I wanted to be a Sunday school teacher or a nurse, but it didn't happen. There was a next-door neighbour looked after us when my auntie and uncle went shopping, and my cousin Bobby had me upside down in the window, second floor [laughs], I had to laugh at that, and then he dropped me when he heard an aeroplane.

BH: He dropped you?

MJ: He dropped me on my back, and I don't know what happened because I was in hospital, but that's when Bobby went to hospital, mental hospital.

BH: And how long did he stay there for?

MJ: He stayed there all-

BH: All his life?

MJ: Mm hmm.

BH: Right, what about your father then? Whenever he was away overseas did you stay with your auntie and uncle then?

MJ: Yes, but he made sure he didn't pay. In them days you paid for my keeping. My auntie and uncle paid for it, my father didn't, he thought it was free, but my mother, not my mother, my auntie Liz says to him why don't you pay my mum and dad, she's your daughter, pay for her keep, he never done it. I don't know how they coped with twelve plus me. He was a, my uncle Johnny was a coalman. He worked so many hours in the day, even at night, and when my cousins, when the fellas grew up they got a job and they helped feed us and all that.

BH: Yeah, thirteen is a big number like, it's a lot of people.

MJ: It was. In them days there was always a big family. Next door to us had twelve and the other side of us had sixteen. We all went to school and we all knew each other.

BH: Right, and were these redbrick terraced houses?

MJ: Yeah.

BH: Two up, two downs?

MJ: Yeah.

BH: So where did everybody go in there? Where did everybody stay?

MJ: Well, the girls stayed in one bedroom, in one big, big bed, and the fellas did the same in the other bedroom. My auntie and uncle slept downstairs on the couch, if they could. It wasn't those bed settees in those days.

BH: Yeah, and would they have rented this house or would they own it outright?

MJ: They owned it.

BH: Owned it, yeah, and what about your auntie? Did she work as well or was she at home?

MJ: My auntie worked very hard, she had two jobs. She had a disabled daughter, couldn't walk, couldn't read, well, she was blind, and she couldn't even move her arms, and her husband, my auntie's cousin's husband worked and when he worked for so much, the wife worked the next couple of hours. They were helping each other out to look after the daughter who was disabled.

BH: Mm hmm. So it sounds like they had a lot on their hands.

MJ: They had.

BH: What about Belfast more generally then? What kind of place was Belfast to grow up in back then?

MJ: Very bad.

BH: Very bad, in what sense?

MJ: You couldn't put your foot out of your front door. You'd get stones threw at you or petrol bombs threw in the door or in your letterbox or through your window.

BH: Right, and when do you begin to remember that stuff beginning to happen?

MJ: I remember it when I was eight.

BH: When you were eight, right, so this was even before the beginning of the Troubles really, even in the fifties and early sixties, you remember?

MJ: Yes, I remember all that, and I seen people queuing up with cardboard, Brits, get out of Ireland.

DQ: Oh like, placards.

MJ: Yes.

BH: Placards, yeah. What about things like Orange parades and marches and things like that? Do you ever remember any of that kind of—?

MJ: Oh I remember that, you'd get bottles threw at you, they don't get care, parading, they just terrified.

BH: And were you ever caught up in any of these things yourself?

MJ: Once. I didn't know, I was watching a parade and the bottle just hit me there.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: [laughs] I fell, I have to laugh now, I fell, I didn't know what was, happened, and the police were on with the army to try and get the people to stop fighting, but they nearly killed everybody. I was, another thing, I was up at Falls Road with my friend who was getting married. I stood outside, let her try the dress on, and of course Mary had a smoke and me, hadn't had a cigarette in my life, and I seen half a dozen people running down, and I didn't want to ask what's wrong or anything, and one grabbed me by my arm and pulled me and says run, run, run, UDA's are coming behind you, and I says who, and I fell and two men got me up and put a knife against my throat and told me get out of 'effin' Ireland.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: Mmm, next day, I didn't say yes or no, I packed my case and I came over to England.

BH: So this was when you moved over to Leeds then in 2000.

MJ: Yes, yeah.

BH: So talk a bit about that then. After that incident you were scared for your life.

MJ: I was. I wouldn't go back to Ireland again. If I could, I wouldn't.

BH: Yeah, you were there for a long time.

MJ: I was.

BH: Born in 1951 and then you came over here in 2000.

MJ: Yeah.

BH: So you spent most of your life in Belfast.

MJ: Yes.

BH: What was Belfast like then, after that, as the Troubles became more prominent?

MJ: You mean when the Troubles got worse?

BH: Yeah, the seventies.

MJ: I didn't know what to do. I was scared for my life and I was scared for my family, and I was thinking if I talk to a soldier or a fella or anything they'd have been shot. It doesn't matter, pardon me saying this, doesn't matter if [00:20:00] it was my own religion, but they would have been shot. I wasn't even allowed out at night time or you'd be tarred and feathered. You weren't even allowed to say good morning to the army, you couldn't even say hello to the police, you couldn't even talk. Them days there was eyes watching twenty-four-seven.

BH: Who would've been watching?

MJ: UDA, IRA and a couple of other ones.

BH: And what would've happened if you had've been caught talking to the army or talking to the police?

MJ: They would take me, they would've took me and tarred and feathered me, and I didn't want that.

BH: And did you, did that happen to other people?

MJ: Yes. I've seen it happen. My friend, old school friend, only said hello to a constable and the next day I never seen her. I asked her mother what happened and she says oh she's dead, they killed her, and that's why they were moving away from Ireland.

BH: So they moved as well, these people.

MJ: Yeah.

BH: Did they leave Ireland or did they move somewhere else in—?

MJ: No, they left Ireland and went to Australia.

BH: Right.

MJ: People were moving away, boats were packed, planes were packed, and they had no room for anybody else. They'd have to wait for the next day and the next day and the next day. You seen the airport or the dock full with people. You thought they were refugees.

BH: During that period then, did you, were you working or anything like that?

MJ: No, I couldn't work because I had poliomyelitis down the right side. In them days we were hidden away, nobody wanted to know you or anything, but in the 1980s they wanted to know you. There was no more houses to hide, no more hospitals to hide in, no more places where they can put you. They were all knocked down, thank goodness they were because it was terrible. I was in a place in Portru-, in Bangor and it was for disabled people. You thought that it was nice, it wasn't. There was a like, a school in it too, like a boarding school, and I had a life like hell in it. They knew where you're from and they still said where you were from, and they'd bring it back up again, they wouldn't let you forget about where you were living.

BH: Why were these places so bad, the places that you stayed in?

MJ: I just didn't like them. One matron says oh you go to Girl Guides, yes, we went to Girl Guides, we were counted like sheep, on the bus, off the bus. I ran away a couple of times there, but I don't know how I done it.

BH: And did you get captured again? Did you have to come back?

MJ: Mmm, got captured half a dozen times.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: But then I said to myself no more running because I know they would get me right away, and they did.

BH: And what was like, the daily routines? What did you do during the day?

MJ: Go to school, boarding school. First in the morning you had to feed the animals. You had to be up at five o'clock in the morning, get the pig stuff ready, the sheep stuff ready, the cows, milk a cow. I didn't know how to milk a cow, but they learned me how to milk a cow.

BH: They taught you how to do that?

MJ: Yeah. Get the eggs from the hens. If the hen won't let you get the egg you have to fight with the hen, but the hens always wins.

BH: [laughs] Yeah, it wins, yeah.

MJ: But funny, I got the pig to feed the swills and every time I'd give them the bucket, I wasn't supposed to, supposed to put the food in the dish, the big container. I give them the bucket [laughs]. I couldn't do anything else. I was stuck in mud and shit and all that.

BH: So this is, you had to do this every morning then before school?

MJ: Mmm.

BH: And then what was school like?

MJ: Well, school was alright. You wouldn't lift your head up from the table. If you needed to go to bathroom they just says hold on another minute, it's near time closing, you had to wait for all that, but they made sure they made you do your homework and all that. Schoolwork was really bad, and then you went to bed five o'clock in the afternoon.

BH: Five o'clock?

MJ: Cos you have to get up at five the next day.

BH: Yeah, so was there any games or anything like that outside?

MJ: No. They trained you to work like, be a farmer's helper or a waitress and all that.

BH: At the the time did you have any aspirations for yourself in terms of, you know, did you want, you said you wanted to become a nurse?

MJ: I wanted to come to, I wanted to be a nurse because everybody was, some of my friends were sick, I looked after them best I could, and one nurse says to me you could be a nurse one of these days, and I says you are joking, you're not even allowed to scratch your head in here [indecipherable] or your nose.

BH: So you didn't pursue nursing then?

MJ: No.

BH: No. Is that something you'd have liked to have done even now?

MJ: I would've loved to do that or be Salvation Army helper, but I'm too old for everything now.

DQ: Go away on, Mary.

MJ: Hell, I'm 67, no 60, I forget what age I am [laughs].

BH: So were you familiar with any other parts of Belfast when you were living there or was it just the one main area?

MJ: No. Shankill Road, Falls, Antrim Road, Ballycastle, Coleraine and Portstewart.

BH: Portstewart as well, yeah?

MJ: Mmm.

BH: And in Belfast itself like, were you able to go out and socialise? Were you able to go out to pubs or anything like that?

MJ: No. In them days you were scared to go out at night time.

BH: And this was because of—

MJ: Of the Troubles.

BH: The Troubles, yeah.

MJ: If any girl was out from seven till ten that's when the trouble starts. The people drives the cars up and down, shouting at the police, the army and everything else.

BH: So did you have to stay indoors then at night time?

MJ: Had to stay indoors all, say, twenty-four hours seven.

BH: Is that right? And what would you have done then?

MJ: Well, we were lucky we had games, we could watch TV or do puzzle books or do nothing, jigsaw puzzles, anything you have to do, set the table for dinner.

BH: And did you, when you, watching the TV and things like that, could you follow the Troubles on TV as well?

MJ: Yeah.

BH: Was that not unusual—

MJ: It was unusual.

BH: Watching the Troubles on TV when it's also outside your house?

MJ: We could even hear it outside, we didn't have to listen to the TV, even when we had, if we heard, seen people running up and down we had to turn our lights out, TV light, was only a firelight, [00:30:00] fire was lit up, we had to put slack on the fire to cool it down in case anybody comes down the chimney.

BH: And for a lot of this time were you scared by this.

MJ: Yes. I was frightened because I found, I didn't know I had a bad heart at that time, and I, they just sent me into hospital, I only found out when I had an angina problem when I was in England and I fell a lot, I didn't know why I was falling a lot, I thought it was my big feet that I'm falling over, it wasn't, but not what it was. We couldn't see a doctor twenty-four-seven, and our doctor was on the Shankill Road and we had to go there, and I didn't want to go to the Shankill or the Falls.

BH: Yeah, cos you were frightened to—

MJ: You know, that's where all the devolution was and they knew you were, I don't how they knew but they knew, you weren't the right.

BH: You weren't in the right place?

MJ: Mmm.

BH: So does that mean then people avoided going to see the doctors and things like that?

MJ: Yeah, and they were scared of their doctor coming to see them, and ambulance drivers got it too. I was rushed in with appendicitis and the ambulance came for me and it was, bricks threw at it, a whole lot of things threw at it, and the police was in the ambulance with me, covering me in case I got damaged. I remember that, was awful sad about a couple of police officers. I take sorry about the army and the police over there. I seen a whole lot, I seen a lot dying, doesn't matter if they were kids or not, they still, they still die.

BH: Did you have any friends or anybody that you were close to who was involved in either the paramilitaries or the police or the RUC?

MJ: I had, my next door neighbour's daughter Julie, she was going to be a policewoman and she came to see me, her and I were the same age, and she was nineteen, and she says Mary I've joined the police, and I says are you mad, she says no, my daddy's a police officer, my mummy's a police officer, my uncles and aunties are all police officers. Next day later she was found dead, at her doorstep. I found her, I can't, I just, it was sad for me. I had to go in and see her in the coffin. You wouldn't think she was dead. You would think she was going

to sit up and say hello Mary or hello mum and dad. That was a mighty shock. I just don't want to see anybody else hurt like that.

BH: During this time then this sounds like it's a pretty terrible place to live, you know, did you ever think of moving away like all the other people who were?

MJ: Well, I was nineteen and I wanted to make more friends, and if I made more friends I would've got myself killed. I kept myself to myself and I went in to my friends, see their parents, our parents, and I went to see Jim's mother and father too, he was a policeman too. But my, the neighbours what we had were really nice, they didn't care what you were, Irish, Jew, Hindu or Africa, pardon me saying that.

BH: That's alright.

MJ: They didn't know if you, they didn't care if you were a Jew, Protestant, Catholic, monk or anything, they made you just like ourselves.

BH: And these were the neighbours that were on, living on the same street as you.

MJ: Yeah.

BH: Yeah, so did you know them quite well then, did you?

MJ: Yes, we all, we all went into each other's house, we didn't even have to lock our doors till the Troubles started. We had to lock our doors, lock our windows, lock our pets in.

BH: So when the Troubles started then, people saw less of each other.

MJ: Yeah.

BH: And when that happened who would your main friends be, you know, who would you—?

MJ: Still the neighbours.

BH: Still the neighbours.

MJ: Because I had, we had no ph-, telephone in them days. If my father was delayed coming back, not my father, my uncle was late coming back home he rang the neighbour, the neighbour came into the house and told him George'll be late coming home. We always were scared if uncle George died on the way home, same as with Annie, auntie Annie, she was scared if she didn't get home. She was ducking in and out of places to get to her family, doesn't care if it's up the road or down the road, she tried and they did get to their family.

BH: So you're always worrying, not just about yourself, but you're worrying about other people getting hurt as well.

MJ: Yeah.

BH: And that's all the time?

MJ: All the time, even when you're asleep, you, you don't think about yourself, you think about other people. I don't know what other people would think for me saying that, but I really mean it, I just think about other people. I don't think about myself. I think about Vicky, even the staff here and the ones who I'm living with, I think about them.

BH: What about things like meeting boys when you were growing up? Were you able to—?

MJ: We weren't allowed.

BH: You weren't allowed to?

MJ: We weren't allowed [laughs], that's one thing, you weren't allowed. Your auntie's there behind you or your uncle's behind you, get into that house.

BH: Right, so you can't, no courting?

MJ: No.

BH: No, none of that.

MJ: If you had to court you had to court in front of them.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: In the house, and if you wanted to have a kiss with him, they'd stand between you.

BH: Is that right? [laughs] It doesn't sound too good.

MJ: No, there was no courting time there. They would tell you when you can kiss and when you can get married and all that.

BH: What about things like holidays and stuff then?

MJ: Oh yeah.

BH: Did you ever go places like that?

MJ: We went to Portrush once, stayed for two weeks, loved it, and I thought I was in a world of my own, went to Barry's and all the amusements. They lost me one day [laughs]. I didn't care [laughs], I enjoyed myself.

BH: And was that like, a Sunday school trip or was that a—?

MJ: No, it was a holiday.

BH: Just a holiday, yeah, and who took you there?

MJ: My auntie and uncle with their twelve kids, plus me, and we got a hotel, whole rooms for ourselves, whole corridor.

BH: Whole rooms to yourselves?

MJ: Mmm, it was great, but when we had to come back we had to share the beds [laughs], it wasn't the same. I remember them days.

BH: Yeah, how did you get to Portrush from Belfast?

MJ: We had to get the bus, Ulster, no, I didn't know if it was Ulsterbus or any, [00:40:00] we got a bus.

BH: What about other trips then? Was there every anything with connected the youth clubs or Sunday school or anything like that?

MJ: Sunday school trip was good. I remember one time in Sunday school, this fella liked me. I didn't know him, he was a stranger, and he gave me a peck on the cheek and I slapped him, and he says why did you do that, I says I don't like anyone pecking me on the cheek, and he gave me a kiss on the lips.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: Mmm, I apologised to him, but then, I didn't know what a peck was, I didn't know what a kiss was, and if a girl was menstruating we couldn't tell—

DQ: Yeah.

MJ: We couldn't tell the men.

DQ: Yeah.

BH: Right.

MJ: We couldn't, we had to say oh sis come here, have you any so-and-so, and they'd be asking why, I've just took my, now these days the men knows everything, but them days you had to keep it secret, if you like it or not.

BH: And who would you have told then? Could you tell your auntie?

MJ: I told my auntie and she told me the facts of life, I didn't know what facts of life was. In them days they got you in school and the fellas look in the window and see what's happened and the teacher'd come [whispers; indecipherable], and next minute there was another fella and the teacher didn't see him, and he seen all what happened, and he's

saying oh I know how to have sex with a girl now [laughs], and I looked at him and I said you're not having one off me anyway [laughs]. In them days you couldn't say too much about your body or your mind because they would think you were going cuckoo.

BH: Mm hmm, and when did then you begin to be able to talk about things like that?

MJ: In the 1980s.

BH: 1980s, and why did that happen?

MJ: Well, the doctors [laughs], I didn't know the fem-, male doctors knew about sex [laughs] till they said to me, he says did you have any sex with the, and I said what's that, and he says a man sticks his mm mm into a woman's mm mm, I said like the birds and bees [laughs], that's all I could say. Well, then he says mm mm mm mm, and I says well, I know what you mean, no, but I, now thank God I know, but affairs with fellas, I wouldn't have any. I always say I'm waiting for the right one [laughs], well, I don't because my father and my uncle abused me that much I couldn't have any children and I wouldn't want to have a child, I don't want them disabled or blind or anything.

BH: Okay, so did you ever, you never got married or anything?

MJ: No. I was getting engaged, but I couldn't agree with him. I couldn't agree with him and he, he, he was alright with me, but I wanted to stay in a different bedroom as him. I can't sleep in the same bed like, I can't sleep with anybody.

BH: And this was back in Belfast when you were engaged?

MJ: No, England.

BH: England, right, okay.

MJ: Got engaged in Morley, and met his sister, his uncles, his brother, a couple of other family.

BH: Okay, talk a wee bit more about moving over to England then, cos you told a story about being held up by knife and then deciding to go, move to England. So can you say a bit more about that? What motivated you to finally leave Belfast?

MJ: I thought my time was up in Belfast. I just wanted to start a new life again, but I didn't know I was going to stay in England or move somewhere else, but I like England.

BH: Had you been to England before at any stage?

MJ: No, well, I have an English auntie.

BH: Right.

MJ: And I asked her about England and she says oh England's nearly the same as Ireland, but different, and when she said that I made up my mind.

BH: So is this, were you corresponding with her by speaking to her on the phone or—?

MJ: No, we were face to face.

BH: Face to face.

MJ: But, and she had a disabled boy called Barry. He had three fingers on one hand and three fingers on the other, and now I, before I moved over, he was a bus driver and he's doing very well, he's a pensioner now.

BH: And what age were you whenever you decided to move over?

MJ: I was in my fifties when I was moving over.

BH: And did anyone else move with you or did you go on your own?

MJ: No, myself. First time being on the boat myself, I thought oh good, I'm leaving Belfast behind, I don't want to think of it, I want to know about England. When I came over here English people are really, really nice. Pardon me saying this, see Irish people, they're two-faced, pardon me saying that, they're two-faced, they're nice to your face and when you leave the building they give you hell. Pardon me saying that on that.

BH: That's alright, you can say whatever you want.

MJ: I wasn't going to say anymore than that [laughs].

BH: [laughs] Did anybody help you when you were moving over?

MJ: No. I went over, I had to get a boat, I had to go to the boat station and asked how much a boat was and I bought my ticket that day. At five o'clock the next day, got on, in a taxi because a bus was going at six o'clock in the morning. Got the bus, I was there for half six, the boat leaves at seven o'clock and we, they helped me with my luggage, and even the day when I was leaving I had a big queue. There was more than me leaving that day, there was a big crowd and the porters are, I call them porters, the men from the ship helped me with my luggage and everything and asked me what part of Ireland was I from, why am I going over to England, and I told them to start a new life, and they said oh that's alright. I did that and I haven't put my foot back in Ireland again. Everybody was really, really good helping. Got over to England, I don't know what part, where the boat came like, stopped at, and I got off, and the busman says to me are you Miss Jeffers, I says yes I am, I have to help you down with your luggage, I says oh thank goodness. I had two backpacks, a case, another overnight case, I couldn't carry it all myself and I did what I had to do, but I had helpers on the other side too, and if I didn't have those helpers I'd be still trying to find out where am I going to go and all that.

BH: Who were those people that met you at the other side?

MJ: Stephen, my partner Stephen, Paul [00:50:00] and his wife, and if I didn't have them I would've, I wouldn't know where to go.

BH: So where did you go first then? What was the first place you went to?

MJ: First place, we got into the bus station and Stephen helped me off the bus with my luggage and we went to a cafeteria in the bus station to get something to eat and then we got a taxi, got up to his house, his flat.

BH: And where was this, was this Liverpool or what?

MJ: No, this, the bus came into Yorkshire.

BH: Into Yorkshire?

MJ: In, yeah, the bus station. I didn't know where the bus station was or what size of it was till I got there. My eyes opened up wide.

BH: And what did you think of the place whenever you were arriving into it?

MJ: Too big [laughs].

BH: Too big? [laughs]

MJ: Too big [laughs], too far, but now I understand why, even some, the Irish people came, some on the same bus as me and we spoke to each other, talked to each other, and one was sat beside me, he says you're on your own, I says yes, I am, is there anybody meeting you, I says thank you there is, I says a friend, I call Stephen my friend, he, he's, I said Stephen and his friends, but I didn't want to say their names, second names.

BH: Is that right? Cos you were worried?

MJ: I was worried in case there was anybody in the bus would throw anything or, I had a look around, twenty times I was looking around and Stephen says to me why you looking around, you're not in Belfast now, I says Stephen it doesn't matter, I'm looking on both sides and since I moved over I still am looking over my shoulders.

BH: Even now?

MJ: Not now. It had to be taught, taught into me. Now I look around a lot, and I haven't.

BH: What about then the people you left behind in Belfast? Whenever you decided to leave was there anybody said, you know, where are you going to go or—?

MJ: No. My auntie was very ill. My uncle died first and after that my auntie went downhill, and her daughters and sons grew up and they got married, and I was the only one that wasn't married.

BH: Is that right?

MJ: And I says to auntie Lesley I'm going over to England, oh why, I said there's nothing here for me, but there won't be anything there for you, I says I'll try and do something. I went over the next day. A month later my auntie died and broke heart, heartbroke, I went over to her funeral and everybody was at it, and I says if uncle Johnny was here now he would enjoy the people, but, is that your stomach?

DQ: That is my stomach, yeah [laughs].

BH: It doesn't matter, doesn't matter.

MJ: But my uncle Johnny was there now, seeing everybody, the neighbours were out and they even pulled the curtains down, some neighbours don't pull the curtains down, in them days they had to cover up the paintings, cover the TV and everything.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

MJ: Did you not know that?

BH: No, I didn't, no, so this is to conceal, conceal what's hanging on the walls and things like that.

MJ: Yeah.

DQ: Yeah, part of the mourning.

MJ: Mmm, and they always have a mourning twenty-four-seven, through the next day, and then we'd know what day it was [laughs], but my auntie put in her will, don't mourn at me, just smile at me, I'm still here, and that's still in my head, and every time I go to bed she's at my bedside, sitting at my bed. I still think of her.

DQ: Isn't that lovely?

MJ: I don't know if she's made room for me or my uncle Johnny made room.

DQ: Oh she will, she'll be making room for you alright.

MJ: My uncle Johnny's with me all the time. I can feel him.

DQ: Mmm, Mary, I'm going to have to go. Do you have many more questions Barry?

BH: I have some more questions, but it's entirely up to you now what you want to do.

MJ: I want to go.

BH: What did you say?

DQ: Do you want to finish now?

MJ: Finish now.

DQ: You'll finish now.

BH: No problem, of course.

DQ: Yeah.

BH: Listen, at that then, can I just say again thanks very much for doing this.

MJ: Thank you very much helping me.

BH: It's been really enjoyable and I hope you get some value out of it.

MJ: Oh I have, and thank you very much again asking me to speak.

DQ: There you go.

BH: Okay, cheers, thank you now.

DQ: Mary, I'm going to phone you a taxi.

MJ: Oh good, I'll get the money out.

DQ: No, no, this will be on us.

INTERVIEW ENDS