

M17: IRIS STEVENS INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Iris Stevens [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interview summarisers: Dr Fearghus Roulston and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded across two audio files that were spliced together to create a single audio file.

M17: Iris Stevens	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:54:46	Duration: 01:54:46	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in 1962 in Bangor, Co. Down, the youngest of three siblings. The family moved to Strabane in 1966 and from there to Portrush in 1968, where her father, who came from Derry, managed a department store. States that she had ‘a pretty idyllic childhood’ prior to the outbreak of conflict in 1969. Reflects on the reasons behind her family’s two moves, her father’s strong work ethic and her ‘very comfortable’ upbringing in Portrush, where she enjoyed primary school, as she did grammar school in Coleraine.			
10:00–11:11	Remembers being aware of the Troubles as a teenager and recalls her reaction to ‘three big bombs’ exploding in Portrush in 1976: ‘it was horrifying and we sort of thought oh it’s come to us now’. The two interview audio files were spliced together here.			
11:12–21:11	After her A-levels in 1980 she decided to study library and information studies at Manchester Polytechnic, having failed to get a place at QUB. Reflects that she ‘was quite naïve about what I was coming to and I think I was probably quite self-centred’. States that the Troubles did not consciously influence her decision to leave NI. Recalls how her being ‘conditioned’ to expect security checks on entering shops in NI stayed with her in Manchester. Mentions a relative who was a Maze prison officer and that her father was somewhat affected by the Troubles as a manager and keyholder at stores in Dungannon, Portadown and Armagh.			
21:12–31:11	Recalls the frequency of bomb scares at school and during trips to Belfast, and becoming blasé about them. States that she did not become a political person until her thirties. Recalls her early impressions of Manchester as a very busy, rather decrepit and socially lively city. While she missed ‘the sound of the sea’, she was rarely homesick, made friends easily and ‘loved being a student’ there.			
31:12–41:11	Describes some difficulties with accents, both in terms of her own ability to understand others and to be understood by them. Recalls being told by a lecturer who marked her down that ‘you’re never going to make anything of yourself speaking like that’, and on another occasion being called a ‘Paddy’ and realising that ‘people do think of me a bit differently here’. Explains that while she regarded herself as British when she first came to England and still holds a British passport, she now thinks of herself ‘more as Northern Irish actually than British’, adding: ‘I wouldn’t refer to myself as Irish, although I will always cheer for Ireland in the rugby’. Discusses meeting other people from NI in England and how religious and cultural differences and commonalities play out in that context.			
41:12–51:11	Recalls seeing student fundraisers for the Maze hunger strikers on campus in 1981 and says that she could understand their position without supporting it. Discusses English people’s indifference towards and ignorance of NI during the Troubles. Explains that after her first degree she did a postgraduate degree in tourism management, in the final year of which she applied to join the police and was accepted by the Cheshire force, but chose not to take up the place.			

51:12–01:01:11	Explains that she got a librarian post in Stockport and settled there, encouraged by the fact that her two brothers were also living in England by then. Moved to London in the mid-1980s to be with her future husband. Worked as a librarian in Richmond and for the Inner London Education Authority before returning to the north west in 1989-90. She enjoyed living in London and has no memories of the Troubles having an impact on her life there. Mentions an incident in a shop in Wilmslow where she 'was made to feel uncomfortable because of my accent'.
01:01:12–01:11:11	She got married in Bushmills, Co. Antrim in 1990. The marriage ended in 2009 and she now lives in Macclesfield with her current partner. Recalls becoming more aware of political issues when working for the Inner London Education Authority, which she describes as 'a pretty left-wing organisation', and becoming a <i>Guardian</i> reader. Recalls her parents' visiting England to see her, her brothers and their children, and taking her own daughter back to NI when she was young. Says she tried to inculcate a sense of Northern Irishness in her daughter, whom she describes as a pacifist, as she herself is.
01:11:12–01:21:11	States that she 'never got involved in sort of what in my head is [...] the expat side of things' in Manchester. Explains that she considered returning to live in NI, especially when her parents got older, but her family and career ties in England won out. Although she has no regrets, as her parents' only daughter she feels 'judged from afar' for not having done so. States that she still keeps abreast of news and current affairs in NI, 'and just how mad it all still is there in lots of ways'. Recalls celebrating the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and stresses the need to be mindful of 'how bad it was' in order to protect the progress and gains made since then.
01:21:12–01:31:11	Reflects on her daughter's attitude towards her NI heritage and the effects of migration on her own life course. Credits England with making her a more open-minded person than she might otherwise have been had she stayed in the 'narrow society' of her birth. Sees benefits and downsides in the community 'tightness' that typifies NI, and recalls an occasion when news of her social exploits in Manchester reached her mother in Portrush within hours. Explains that her national identity is 'a bit complicated', in that she is 'nominally British', but is alienated by flag-waving displays of patriotic nationalism.
01:31:12–01:41:11	Contrasts her complex sense of nationality with that of Mary, her best friend in Manchester, who is from the 'very nationalist town' of Rosslea in Co. Fermanagh. Whereas Mary is 'absolutely definitely Irish', Iris explains that she is 'not just British, I'm British stroke Northern Irish, it's very complicated'. Mentions again the commonalities that unite NI people abroad, irrespective of their religious backgrounds. Reveals that she is now an atheist and expresses strong support for integrated education in NI. States that 'Home's two places', but suspects that 'Northern Ireland as home will cease to be when my father's not there anymore'.
01:41:12–01:51:11	Reveals that she sometimes feels guilty about not having been as affected by the Troubles as other people, but then remembers seeing the effects of a bomb as a child. Cites her 'disdain for religion' as one legacy of growing up in NI, adding that 'religion was used as an excuse for a lot of ill-doing on both sides'. Mentions the common perception that because she grew up during the Troubles she was 'living in a war zone, but I didn't [...] feel we did particularly'. Explains that her partner 'absolutely loves' visiting NI with her, having previously avoided it because of his job in the air force.
01:51:12–01:54:46	Brief discussion about the possibility of one of Iris's friends being interviewed for the project. Interview ends with Iris asking the interviewer about his NI origins.