INTERVIEW M18 + M18-SG4: LAURA AND PETE HODSON

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interviewees: Laura and Pete Hodson
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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, so that's us off now. Okay, before we begin, I just want to say thanks very much Pete and Laura for agreeing to do this today. I know you probably have plenty of other things to do and so I appreciate you taking the time to do the interview.

LH: No, that's fine.

BH: So I'm just going to begin Laura by asking you some questions about your memories of growing up in Northern Ireland. So when and where were you born?

LH: I was born in Daisy Hill in Newry.

BH: And what kind of a place was that to grow up in?

LH: Well, I actually grew up in a place called Newtownhamilton, for the first six years anyway, which I can't remember that much about, obviously. Newtownhamilton was one of the border towns that was quite heavily bombed in the Troubles. It was like a little country village, farming area, mainly, I suppose the majority would've been like, nationalist community in it, so, but I was only there until I was age six and then my parents moved up to Belfast, but we still had connections down there cos my father's brother still stayed there and his mother as well, so we were up and down quite a bit, but didn't actually physically live there.

BH: And what did your parents do?

LH: My mum was basically, background's in farming until she married my dad, up until that she was basically, worked the farm, and again, it was a farm that was right on the border, some of the fields were in the South, some were in the North, but that was sold after she married my dad. My dad trained as a mechanic, served his time in Newry, I think it was with mixture of Ulsterbus and the Great Northern Railway Ireland, and so that's sort of, what his, what he was trained as, and then when he moved to Belfast it was to take up a position with the civil service and it was like, a vehicle and driving examiner in the MoD stations that are here.

BH: Right, that sounds like quite a big move up then.

LH: Yeah, I mean, I think cos they were both from the country and they were both moving to the town, but also I think part of the reasoning behind the move was my father didn't feel so safe around Newtownhamilton because he'd been in the B-Specials.

BH: Sure, yeah.

LH: And obviously that was a bit of an issue, so that was partly, I think that was partly the reasoning, you know, talking to my mum, that they did make that move and they moved to Belfast rather than moved sort of to the likes of Craigavon, where there was test centres and stuff, they actually moved up to Belfast cos you could be a bit more anonymous.

BH: Sure, so were both your parents from kind of the Tyrone/Fermanagh area?

LH: No, south Armagh, it's the south Armagh border, borders onto Monaghan that, so it's actually County Armagh not Tyrone/Fermanagh.

BH: And were they both from that area?

LH: Yeah, both from that area. My mother was from Tullyvallen, which was just one of the I suppose the town sets of, around Newtownhamilton, and dad was from Newtownhamilton itself.

BH: Right, and were their parents of farming background or something different?

LH: My mum's family were farming background, yeah, they had a farm. Dad wasn't, I'm not, his father was a bus driver. His mother I think had served her time in some of the big houses, country houses, and it was Clones she was from, as a, I don't know what you'd call, like a housemaid type person, and I think her sort of family, they, he'd been like a, not a minister, is it a sexton I think they called them, to do with the church, so different backgrounds really, but they, I think they went to the same school that was–

BH: And did they, did you have other family members around that area after you moved?

LH: Yeah, my dad's brother, in fact he's still alive and he still lives there, and their mother, cos it was, we actually lived with her while we were in Newtownhamilton, so she stayed on in Newtownhamilton.

BH: And did they retain the farm then and continue working it?

LH: No, cos it was my mum's family that had the farm and when my mum, she was the only one that was really interested in it, she had an older brother, but he was in the police and he'd moved away a long time from the farm, but it was my mum that would've worked the farm and my father had no interest in farming, so the farm was actually sold when they, I

think shortly before they got married, so yeah, so the farm didn't, wasn't that part of our life really.

BH: Right, and do you have memories from those six years before moving to Belfast?

LH: To be honest, I don't really, I think the memories that I have is more, cos obviously we still went backwards and forwards, so probably the memories that I've got are more as I got a bit older and going back up to Newtownhamilton to visit my gran and sort of my uncle and things like that, but actually no, even when I look at pictures of where we lived and that, I can't remember that much, to be honest.

BH: And did your parents talk to you much about their prior life there as you was growing up?

LH: Sorry, say that again.

BH: Did your parents talk to you much about Newtownhamilton when you were growing up?

LH: When I got older and was able to more understand some of the reasons for them leaving and also sort of reasons why whenever we did have visits up to Newtownhamilton we sort of like, had to be quite cautious, because of dad really, you know, he wasn't, because when he'd came to Belfast obviously the B-Specials had been disbanded at that stage, he joined the police reserve, so again he had things that he had to follow. We weren't allowed to go up on a regular basis, you had to alter days that you went, and I could never understand why that was until I was older really. There was no set times to go up, you went up unannounced, you didn't tell people you were going, it was that sort of thing, you just appeared, so I remember things like that and not being able to quite understand it until I was a lot older, probably maybe fourteen, fifteen, before they would've actually said very much to me about anything, to be honest.

BH: And would people in the local area of Newtownhamilton have been aware that your dad had been in the B-Specials or that he was in the police reserve after that?

LH: They would've been aware that he was in the B-Specials because obviously it was a small community, they'd all gone to the same school [laughs], sort of like, so it was sort of like, it was friends that were on the opposite side really, so yeah, they would've been well aware. I'm not so sure, I think he did try and keep it reasonably quiet about the reserve. I don't know whether, apart from his close friends in Newtownhamilton, would've actually known, I think gen-, widely, in general, no, most of the residents wouldn't have known, it was only people that he knew, that were his friends, that he could trust.

BH: Yeah, would most of your parents' friends have been from the local Protestant community or did they have friends amongst the Catholic community as well?

LH: Both, to be fair. From what my mum said about when they were growing up, it was very much sort of like, mixed and it was only really after the Troubles started that the mistrust

between them all sort of started to occur and you probably wouldn't have had much to do, it was more divided at that stage.

BH: Yeah, is that the way they talked about it, that the advent of the Troubles changed relationships between people?

LH: Yeah, yeah, it did.

BH: So what are your recollections then growing up? Because as you say, you were **[00:10:00]** over the age of six by the time you had moved to Belfast. What part of Belfast did you move to?

LH: East Belfast, an area called Cregagh.

BH: Oh yeah.

LH: Lived in there, which again, it was, that was a completely Protestant area really, if you like.

BH: And what was it like growing up there?

LH: Yeah, it was fine, cos it was quiet, you were quite sheltered from a lot of the stuff that was going on in Belfast and other areas, where we were wasn't, even though it was quite close to the Castlereagh police station, which was I think quite notorious, there was never really much round our streets because I don't, well, there just wasn't any, it was just a residential area basically. So really, again, while I was at primary school and even secondary school, I was quite sheltered from all sorts of stuff that was going on in Belfast. Yeah, you would've went into town, but I would've went in probably with my mum and that was, you know, I wouldn't have went in on my own, so yeah, so again, cos again, at school you didn't mix, it was a Protestant community, there was never any trouble round where we were, there was a large estate which maybe around the Twelfth of July and that was the usual, with the bonfires and stuff, but again, there was never any trouble because there was nobody from the other community that lived anywhere around, so there was nobody to get upset or feel that, you know, it wasn't right what was happening, so I guess I was lucky really.

BH: Were you aware of the Troubles as something going on when you were growing up?

LH: Well, yeah, because if you went anywhere there was, there was, the army was on the street, you would usually, there would be Land Rovers going about with the army and sort of like, at the back with the rifles out, which was a bit, you know, you didn't feel that comfortable when you were driving behind them. You went into town, it was all security checks, you couldn't get into towns, you had to go through these security barriers, you had to get searched before you went into the shops, well, before you went into the shopping area and then again when you went into the shops, so it was that sort of thing, it was all, it was more like, an inconvenience, but it was normal, if you know what I mean, because I'd not known anything different, because obviously, you know, by the time I was fourteen it

was, the Troubles were well established, it was just normal life and there were areas that you just wouldn't go to, so from that point, but again, I can't say it affected me that much at that time because it was normal, it was all that I knew really, I didn't know what it was like not to have to go through all these procedures really.

BH: You mentioned there the Twelfth of July. Were your parents or yourself involved in Orange culture? Was that something they were interested in?

LH: No, not particularly. We were, me, I do, you know, remember going to the Twelfth of July parades in Belfast with my mum and dad and it was, you know, it was okay. You sat on the side of the pavement, you watched the bands going past, but we would've never stayed to watch them coming back the other way because that's usually when the trouble would've started. My dad wasn't, I think his father was probably an Orangeman, cos I know there was a sash at my gran's house, but my dad was never involved in the Orange Order and my mum certainly wasn't, they wouldn't have, no.

BH: Why do you think he joined the police reserve? Was that because of political views or was that more about an income?

LH: I think it was probably a bit of both, to be honest, and I think it was because he enjoyed the B-Specials and he enjoyed that sort of thing, but he, I think he probably felt he was too old to join the police full-time because he'd already, you know, got his career and that and this was just he felt that it was his way of maybe doing something useful.

BH: So I take it from that his way of thinking about the Troubles would've been from a unionist perspective.

LH: Yeah, I mean, it would've been, yeah, but, I mean, having said that, I don't think I ever really heard my parents being completely offhand about the other community if you know what I mean, not to the point where it was like, don't talk to them, don't, you know, when you hear some people in Belfast, from the sort of like, the areas where there was lots of trouble, I think again, because we were in an area where there wasn't, I can't remember them ever being sort of like, very staunchly anti-nationalists, I mean, I don't know, it's difficult to explain really, and again, because of the school that I went to as well, because it was a Protestant school, it was never anything that was really, it wasn't mentioned because it was a Protestant area, there was never any of the trouble that you would've seen on the TV, where there was like, schoolkids getting name-called on their way past cos they went past their opposite communities on their way to school and things like that, so again, I never really witnessed anything of that, like that.

BH: Right, yeah, but sometimes the images that are circulated of east Belfast in particular are kind of housing executive estates, painted kerbstones, dominated by loyalist paramilitaries, but I take it from what you're saying your residential area was different from that.

LH: It was different, we had, yeah, because those, the clash points would've been down towards the Short Strand in east Belfast, where on one side of the road was a Protestant

community and on the other side of the road was nationalist community, but, and we had one large estate, Clonduff, who would've had all their flags out and would've had their pavements painted, but again, that was probably, what, ten-minute walk from where we actually were. Round our streets there was never a pavements, yes, some people had flags out, but the pavements were never painted or anything like that and there was no flags on flagpoles and things, there was just, some individual houses would've put flags out.

BH: Yeah, during that time then, you know, you mentioned that you would've had sort of periodic visits back to Newtownhamilton. What are your memories of that?

LH: When I was little they were nice memories because obviously I was going up to see my gran and you got spoilt, you went down the town, everybody, sort of like, with my mum and one of her friends, and one of my dad's friends had the sweet, local sweetshop, so we'd go there and you'd get your free sweeties and things like that and your ice cream, so it was nice from that point of view. But when I got a bit older and started to understand and see, mainly my mum, the stress in her, whenever we were going up, she was always worried that something would happen. My dad probably was, but wouldn't, didn't show it cos he was very laidback, and I think when I got clo-, when I passed my own, my driving test and was able to drive myself I sometimes would've went to Newtownhamilton on my own as well, and that was okay because it, nobody would've bothered with me, it was my dad they would've been interested in and, but the journeys up there sometimes was quite, I mean, cos obviously with him being in the reserve, cos the other thing, around Newtownhamilton quite often there was, there was lots of roadblocks and road checks because of where it was, but quite often some of those roadblocks wouldn't actually be the army or the police, it would be the IRA. So that was one of the things, really, we tried not to go up at night, so that dad could get a good, you know, good idea of who it was up ahead, because again, with being in the police he had his police ID on and he also had a weapon, and generally if he was one hundred per cent sure it was the army or the police he would show his ID and then we wouldn't get searched, but there were occasions when he wasn't so sure and he wouldn't, so that was a bit stressful. I think I only witnessed it once where **[00:20:00]** he didn't show his pass because he thought it wasn't a legitimate checkpoint, so yeah, so that wasn't very nice, so the older I got, the sort of like, the more the memories weren't so pleasant because I was able to understand and I knew why my mum looked so stressed and so worried, and the other thing, my dad would've went up sometimes on his own and it, this was against the advice of the police and things cos he was in the Masonic and he was part of the Masonic Hall up at Newtownhamilton, they had one, and of course their meetings were on a regular basis, so, but what he tended to do for that, he went up with a couple of other men and he would've never used his car, he would've, they would've used their cars because again, that was something, the registration number and your car was well known, he changed his car quite often because of that, so yeah, so there's lots of things that when you think back, at the time it's just normal, but when you think back, you think gosh, you know [laughs], it must've been very stressful for them.

BH: Was it stressful for you?

LH: It was when I sort of started to understand and I used to be sitting up on the Tuesday evening with my mum, waiting till he came in, because they weren't home till late at night,

and it was like, cos obviously there was no mobile phones, nothing like that, so there was no way you'd know that there was a problem until somebody turned up at your door really, so yeah, I couldn't sleep either, and as I got older as well the nights that he went out on duty with the police reserve, I wouldn't have settled until he was back in the house, so yeah, but as I say, that, my parents managed to cover most of that up until I was, probably till I left, I was leaving school really, it was like, up until that I didn't really twig what the stress was like.

BH: What did you think, when you talked about, for example, those roadblocks and things which weren't the state, they were Provisional IRA, I wonder what did you think they were doing, as in, why were these guys, you know, shooting and killing members of your family potentially?

LH: They were just looking for any, to the best of my, I mean, my thinking was, well, it was just if they could root out a few policemen or a few UDR soldiers or off-duty people then that was good. The other thing that I think, from what I understood, was they were perhaps looking for people of their own that had maybe given information to the wrong people, so it was more their way of controlling their community and frightening people really.

BH: You said there it wasn't until really much later, when you were coming up to leaving school that you, that your perception began to change. Why do you think it began to change?

LH: Because, oh I probably wasn't able to do a lot of the things that I'd maybe want to do like, you know, as you sort of got older. When I left school I worked in Belfast in an estate agents and it was only then I started to sort of like, mix with people that perhaps weren't from my community, and if you wanted to go out or do anything you had to sort of watch where you were going, so it started impacting my life at that point, and again, having to be careful as well with people that I didn't actually know, when they ask, you know, about your father or anything like that, I mean, I would never have told anybody what his part-time job was, I would've always just said what his full-time job was, that was something that was never talked to any of my friends about really.

BH: How did you find school? Did you enjoy school?

LH: Yeah, I liked school, funnily enough, it was alright, I enjoyed the time at school.

BH: Did you have any ambitions for yourself whenever you went to school like, did you have career plans?

LH: Yeah, I always wanted to go into nursing, that was what my plan was from the start really, and at that point you could get into nursing, you couldn't start, I think you were, you had to be eighteen and you only needed five GCSEs to start the nursing course, so I opted to leave after my GCSEs cos I had enough, and work in an estate agents for a year until I was eighteen, until I could start my nurse training, so I'd always had that plan.

BH: And so what was that like then, first of all that year working at the estate agents and then went into your nursing training?

LH: Yeah, working in the estate agents was more of an eye-opener as to actually how much the Troubles were affecting Belfast, because it was in Belfast and a lot of the time there was bomb scares, sometimes there was, the actual bombs would go off, a lot of the time it was just bomb scares, but it still meant the same, you had to vacate your offices, you had to go to a safe place, you had to be moved away. If you had your car, if I had the car in town, sometimes you'd have to go home and leave the car in town because you couldn't get back to where the car was parked, so you had to get home by other means and get, retrieve your car at a later date, so, and also because I was in town more often then, I was in it every day, it was like, going into the shops, getting searched, it was like, all the time, whereas before it had just been occasionally and usually with my mum, and also you could see the damage that it was doing to some of the nice buildings around you and things like that as well, so yeah, it was–

BH: And you still were, you felt like doing nursing then, after that year you continued on into the nursing profession?

LH: Yeah, yeah, I had my place in the nursing. I probably knew that I was starting from about six months before I actually started and was offered a place, so yeah.

BH: And what was that like?

LH: That was okay and again, that was even more so mixing with because where I trained, I trained up at Purdysburn Hospital, well, it was Purdysburn at the time, I actually done my mental health, so I was in with a very mixed group of people, people even from the South of Ireland that came up to do the training, people from Monaghan, people from sort of like, Derry, so it was like, a big, a large mix of people, which was completely new to me really, and I would say that I probably felt a little uncomfortable at the start until I got to know people, and then once you got to know people you sort of forgot that they were from a different religion than you and it was fine, and you'd go out with them and it would be fine and, you know, it was okay and you just kept off the subject of the Troubles really, because that wasn't what we were there for.

BH: That's quite a complex thing, you know, you're socialising with these people, you know, perhaps even for the first time in your life from a different community, and the city itself is visibly affected by this ongoing conflict, but the way it's managed between people is not really to discuss politics, not to talk about it at all. Did that seem strange, did it feel strange?

LH: Didn't feel strange because to be quite honest by that stage I just wanted to get on and get on with my training, get on with my life and try not to let the Troubles impact me, you know. Obviously there were still some restrictions cos there were, if you went out in the evening anywhere it was, you sort of, you were aware that you were putting yourself at risk really because you were going in pubs, you were going in, you know, places that potentially, you know, there could be some trouble in or there could be an explosion outside it, and a lot of these places were all fenced off, they'd got like, big high wires around them, so that

people couldn't lob things over into them and, so it was a bit, but at the same time, I'd reached that point where I thought I just need to do things really, I can't, you can't live in a bubble and you've got to be part of what's going on around you, so yeah, so it wasn't easy, but it got easier as time went on, **[00:30:00]** and actually one of my best friends was a Catholic girl and we would've went on holidays together and stuff like that, but it still took me, even though I knew her quite well, she was from Omagh, it, she wouldn't have been back at the hou-, where, my family home till I'd probably known her about two or three years, so there was obviously still that bit of mistrust. I could trust her, but I didn't know about her wider family or anything like that and certainly she, I eventually told her what my dad done, but it took a long time.

BH: Yeah.

LH: So yeah.

BH: So where was your first nursing job then? When did you start your first contract?

LH: I started my nurse training, it was 1979 at Purdysburn, and I worked between Purdysburn, Newtownards Hospital actually, cos it was a proper hospital at that stage, the Ulster Hospital and some little, some bits in the City Hospital.

BH: And what was that like? Was nursing, did it turn out to be the career that you wanted?

LH: Yes and no, I mean, I opted to do my mental health to start off with, so, but part of that you still have to do some general nursing and again, because of the hospitals that I would've done my placements in there wasn't a lot of, cos it was mainly the Royal in Belfast that would've got anything to do with the Troubles and that, that was the one most of the people with the bad injuries would've went to, so again, it, I didn't really see much of that. I sort of like, got more involved in the mental health side of things, about how things were affecting people, people that had maybe got, you know, injured, and so it was more the mental health side of stuff I got involved with rather than the physical side of what was going on.

BH: And did you enjoy it?

LH: Yeah, I did, yeah, I enjoyed it.

BH: And did you plan then to stay in Belfast then and work as a nurse? Was that the plan going forward?

LH: Yes and no, I mean, I always had it in the back of my mind that I would quite like to get away from Northern Ireland for a bit and sort of use my nursing to do that, sort of like, left with a view to doing my general maybe in Manchester rather than doing it in Northern Ireland. I mean, part, the, one of the main reasons that I probably did go in the end was because of, I wanted just a little bit more freedom, I didn't want to have to think about was it safe to do this or I didn't have to think about, well, you know, about the Troubles, didn't, I just wanted away from it for a bit and the nursing was a good way of achieving that.

BH: So it sounds like in terms of what motivated you to leave Northern Ireland was that actually this was becoming a bit of a burden, living and socialising in Belfast, is that right?

LH: It is, yeah, I mean, I just wanted a change, I wanted to see what else there was that, I sort of like, was realising that this really wasn't normal [laughs], that there was more, you could actually go in a pub and relax, you didn't have to go and sit and watch the door, so yeah, that was, and the other part of the reason was, which is I could've done it at home, I wanted just that bit more independence, I was ready to move away from home and I just wasn't so sure that there was any other part of Northern Ireland that I wanted to go and live in.

BH: Were you still living with your parents at that stage?

LH: Yeah, mostly. I'd moved out periodically, whenever I had different placements at different hospitals, but generally, because we were so close to Purdysburn, there was no reason for me not to live at home really, and I had a car, so.

BH: And what year then did you move over?

LH: 1984.

BH: '84, and why did you select Manchester in particular?

LH: I didn't really, it was just the job that I applied for, I didn't, I hadn't a clue cos I'd no idea, I'd never really been to England. Our family holidays used to generally be in Scotland, probably the Lake District was as far down as I'd ever been, so yeah, no, it was just the job really, that I applied for and got, so that was it really.

BH: So you weren't really thinking about the destination then? You didn't, for example, think I'd like to go to Glasgow or Scotland or anything like that?

LH: No, I just wanted to be somewhere that I could get home easy enough, I could get to the ferry, and whether that was like, four hours up into Scotland or four hours down into England I wasn't really too bothered. I never looked at the site of England or London or, I wouldn't have went past further down than Manchester, but that was purely just for ease of getting, you know, getting, you know, getting the ferry at Stranraer really.

BH: Sure, so proximity was an issue then, you wanted to be able to get back quickly if you wanted to?

LH: Yeah, yeah.

BH: Yeah, did you make the move with any other people from work, for example, or did you go on your own?

LH: I went on my own. I was closely followed by a couple of other people that I trained with. One of them left because they were in a mixed relationship and were basically told to leave, and I'm not sure about the other one, you'll have to ask, I think you're interviewing him anyway [laughs], Jeffery.

BH: Oh yes.

LH: He came about a year after me, again to Manchester, but yeah, we trained together.

BH: And so what were your first impressions then whenever you moved over to Manchester? Did you think it was a good move or a bad move?

LH: It was a difficult move, it was harder than I thought it was going to be, more, I don't know whether that was because I was away from home for the first time or because I'd got to find my way to where I was staying, in an area that I didn't know and I wasn't used to motorways, I wasn't used to that amount of traffic, so it was a bit scary, but once I got there and got to the nurses' home that I was staying in and met a few people it was okay. It didn't take me that long to settle in, that was probably more to do with the people that I met initially, who were really friendly, yeah.

BH: So your first encounters then with, presumably these were English people.

LH: Yeah, mostly, although the ward that I was working on, the charge nurse on the ward was actually Irish, was from Northern Ireland, but had left years and years and years ago, so that probably helped a bit really, but yeah, no, generally I would say most people were fine, yeah.

BH: And was it easy to make friends?

LH: It was easy to make friends I think because of the nature of the job really and the people that I was working with, and also cos I lived in the nurses' home for a while.

BH: Of course, yeah.

LH: So that's quite a social place, and the hospital that I worked at in those days, they all had like, their own social centre, you know, social centres where you could go after work for a drink and things like that, in the grounds of the hospital and stuff, so yeah, it was very easy to make friends.

BH: Did you feel homesick?

LH: Yeah, I did feel homesick, but I can't say I missed Belfast, I missed my family, but I didn't miss Belfast cos it was great being able to go into Manchester and walk in shops, walk around, not being searched, not, you know, not waiting for the alarm to go off for you to get out because there was a bomb scare or whatever, you know, so that was quite nice, so I enjoyed that.

BH: So that sense of freedom that you hoped for, you found that whenever you came to Manchester.

LH: Mmm, yeah.

BH: Yeah, what did you do in terms of socialising with other people then? Was it going out to pubs and things? Was it going to church?

LH: It was mainly sort of like, pubs, cinema. The group of people that I did eventually sort of become quite good friends with, we, when we moved out of the nurses' home into a house and stuff it was like, you know, shared meals and it was just, **[00:40:00]** it was just that sort of thing really. Church, although I'd been brought up in church here, England was very different, people didn't seem to go to church, so I never really bothered.

BH: Right [laughs], so did the church going taper off then whenever you came to England?

LH: It did a little bit, yeah, much to my parents' distaste. It resurfaced when I come back for holidays, though [laughs].

BH: Right [laughs], what about English people and English society then? You said, I think your phrase was mostly it was good–

LH: Yeah.

BH: Were there occasions when it wasn't good?

LH: Yeah, but it was, again, it was with people that didn't know me necessarily, it was if, I'm just trying to think of some occasions, it was like, one occasion when I was out with some of my friends and obviously your accent sticks out, you know, and I think I'd gone up to get, you know, the drinks and somebody at the bar had sort of like, made, was making some like, derogatory comments, they wanted to sort of talk about, didn't want to talk about, they were just basically saying that the people over there should learn to live with each other and that, you know, it was a load of nonsense and that it shouldn't be part of the United Kingdom anyway, trying to goad you really into discussion and I clearly didn't want to do that, so there was some people you'd meet like that and there was, I think that only ever got said to me once, that you really need to go back home, we don't want people like you over here, and that was only once that was said. Apart from that it was okay.

BH: Was this in the context of being out socialising or did it happen on the wards and things like that?

LH: No, it was when you were out and it was more, I think, I mean, I suppose looking at it, people in England couldn't maybe see any reason why people were fighting to stay, keep Northern Ireland part of the UK really, it was more that, and seeing it as their people were over there, putting themselves at danger for no reason, that sort of, it, and, I mean, I [sighs], I would say that I probably didn't really get into much discussions over those sort of things, cos as far as I was concerned that unless you sort of lived in it and understood it, then there

was no point in really trying to explain it to anybody because they weren't going to understand anyway.

BH: That's a really complex kind of position to be in, cos it sounds like what you're encountering is not so much anti-Irishness, which is what some people associate with the effects of the Troubles in Britain, but actually the idea that Northern Ireland isn't British and the fact that, you know, British interests shouldn't be expended for what many people regard as not really a British place.

LH: Yeah, because a lot of people, if they asked you, they never sort of referred to you if they met you that you were from Northern Ireland, they would say oh you're from Ireland, and I would sort of say oh actually Northern Ireland, cos there is a difference, and quite a lot of people for whatever reason just see Ireland as Ireland, they don't see sort of like, the difference and I guess that's quite difficult for people sometimes, I don't know, but, I mean, the other thing about Manchester there was quite an Irish community there and that's possibly, you know, but it wasn't the community that I was brought up in, it was more a Catholic community, which I'd find, cos I'd one friend that decided to take me to an Irish club that he'd been going to frequently cos he was onto Irish music, and I went with him only to discover it was like a, in the backstreets of Rusholme somewhere, I can't even, it was in Rusholme, in the backstreets somewhere, and it was an Irish club and yes, they were playing Irish sort of like, music that you would associate more with the South, but they were also, had buckets where they were doing collections for the victims of the soldiers, so that was really uncomfortable, but I think that was the perception that a lot of people had, that that was, anybody that was over in England that was from Ireland, this is sort of, they were part of that setup really, so I got myself out of there very quick and I didn't put anything in the bucket and I never went back [laughs], so.

BH: So this is the situation where on the one hand you're being identified as Irish by many English people and told that because of that, you know, Northern Ireland isn't part of Britain, but at the same time the existing Irish community in a city like Manchester is very much pro-republican.

LH: Yeah.

BH: So you can't identify with that.

LH: No.

BH: So that's, the space that you're in it's quite difficult to navigate.

LH: Hmm, mm, yeah, you just gauged it as you went along really, and as I say, I felt comfortable with the group of people that I was with or that were my friends, and to be fair I didn't know what their religion was, half of them, you know, and it wasn't important to me, but I did draw the line at, at being in that place [laughs]. I was actually quite surprised, I didn't realise, I was a bit naïve really, that places like that would actually exist. I couldn't believe that in the middle of Manchester there was this sort of like, group of people who were basically supporting the, you know, what was going on, I was quite surprised really.

BH: How did you feel when English people refused to sort of to recognise your British heritage?

LH: I don't know whether actually anybody ever did. It was more like, once you actually said to somebody well, actually it's Northern Ireland, it is part of the UK, they would, didn't, it was okay, there was no argument, it was more I think in general people just not knowing the difference, does that sound daft, not, because it was something, they seen what was on the telly and it was like, Ireland, you know, Northern Ireland, I don't know, it was all, don't quite know how to explain that really.

BH: Did your sort of sense of identity change? Once you moved to England did you think of yourself, for example, as Irish, as British or as something different?

LH: No, I always seen myself still, and that was why people if said oh you're from Ireland, I would always said no, Northern Ireland actually, I've got a British passport [laughs], that, you know, I would say my identity didn't change in the time that I was there, no, and probably because I still had strong links back at Northern Ireland really, I would've been home quite a lot of the time, you know, on holidays, I would even gone home some weekends and stuff like that, at the start, so no, I would say my, I would've still identified myself as being from Northern Ireland and British.

BH: Did you have other Northern Irish friends in Manchester, distinct from obviously the, you know, the Southern Irish community in Manchester?

LH: Only the people that I've mentioned, Jeffrey, and we would've went out quite a bit. There wasn't anybody else really, there was, and Seamus, the one that I said that went, more or less, cos they had to go, wouldn't have seen him as much though, cos he wasn't as near to where I was living, so no, I would say the majority of people that I met in Manchester were not, they were English, they were from England. The people from Northern Ireland that I would've been friendly with were people that had moved, well, like Jeffrey, had moved, with me. There was one girl from Dublin, but no.

BH: Did you ever encounter the impression, which is slightly different from I suppose the idea that, you know, the Irish should just learn to get along with each other, but that Ulster Protestants in particular **[00:50:00]** were kind of bigoted, illiberal and narrow-minded? Did you ever hear anybody say anything like that?

LH: Yeah, I mean, people's opinion was, as far as people were concerned they couldn't understand why people couldn't just learn to live together, that was the big thing really, they couldn't quite understand what people were arguing over, that, yeah, I mean, that is something that people would've said. I'm trying to, I mean, how do you explain that, you don't, and I must admit, you know, sort of the longer that I was away, I nearly started to think that myself [laughs].

BH: Is that right?

LH: And even now, I just think, well, do you know, why can't just one side let the other side live, you know, put up with their parade and then we put up with their parade, what's the issue, you know, give and take.

BH: That's really interesting, and do you think that that, you know, the, you know, the gravitation towards that way of thinking about it, was that because it was difficult to offer a different kind of explanation when you're confronted with these questions from people?

LH: Well, no, I think, as I say, that's really just something that, in this last few years is my way of thinking, not necessarily when I moved over, it's more like, now, that's, you know, now that I'm sort of back, and although it's very a different place that I've come back to, there's still tensions there, there's still unresolved stuff there, and I just think oh God, you know, just move on [laughs], you know, why–

BH: When did you move back?

LH: Just last year, yeah.

BH: Oh right, so quite recently then?

LH: Yeah, yeah.

BH: Did you feel settled in England?

LH: I always wanted to move back, my plan was never to stay away that long, but I met Pete's dad [laughs] and he wasn't for moving to Northern Ireland for I suppose, not just the fact that he wouldn't have felt maybe comfortable, but workwise he was quite happy with what he was doing, but we did actually move from Manchester to the Isle of Man in 2008. So we've moved from the Isle of Man back to Northern Ireland, not straight from England, back.

BH: And what was the idea there? That's kind of halfway between.

LH: [laughs] I was determined to get him here one way or another [laughs]. No, it's just way life goes, really, lost my, he, he got made redundant and wasn't happy with the new job that he got, so was a bit unsettled, and both of us really enjoy sort of like, being near the sea, and I had lost both my parents by that stage and we thought well, shall we just move, and we thought about Isle of Man or Northern Ireland or Scotland, and Isle of Man won really, mainly because Graham felt that he could settle there better at that point, and again, although things were very different in Northern Ireland, I didn't feel that comfortable moving back at that stage, (a) cos my parents had just died, but also because of the age Peter and Emma were. I was a bit worried with their English accents how they'd fit into school here and also because I'd brought them up not really being anti-Catholic or anti-whatev-, anything, sort of like, quite neutral, that I wanted that to continue, cos I didn't want them to end up being bitter in any way or, I wanted them to, you know, not have to listen to the stuff that I had to listen to as a kid basically, and even though the Good Friday Agreement, what was that, '98, we, I still had friends here whose kids were the same age as

Emma and Peter, who were very much still in that mindset, that Catholics versus Protestants, and I just didn't want them to be part of that, so that was why the Isle of Man won really.

BH: I was going to actually ask you about the peace process and whether you had kind of followed that, the, you know, the development of that, in England. It sounds like from what you've just said that you weren't wholly convinced that it had transformed Northern Irish society, is that right?

LH: I followed it to a degree. I've never been, had a great interest in politics to be fair, but I always thought there'd been episodes before where there had been like, peace deals and truces and that hadn't really worked out, so yeah, I probably was a bit sceptical, it took me quite a while to realise that, yeah, things had changed for the better, but there's still that undercurrent really. I never thought that things, oh I didn't come back because I thought things would revert back to the way they were years ago, because I don't think that would happen, but it was just the undercurrents really, and the, yeah, and as I say, just.

BH: I think I'll bring in Pete now, cos I think this is the right time to do it. I suppose just straight off Pete, listening to what your, the stories your mum's told there, what's your impressions?

PH: Well, I'd heard most of it before, haven't I, I've heard a sort of the briefer version of what you've just heard, it's been already narrated to me in the past, what, certainly if I was in her shoes, I would've done the same journey I think and moved from Northern Ireland to England because of the restrictions on your social life and mobility, so I definitely sympathise with her in that respect, I'd have done the same in her shoes.

BH: When and where were you born?

PH: I was born in Stockport in 1993.

BH: And where did you go to school then?

PH: That was in Hazel Grove, which is on the sort of the south-eastern periphery of Greater Manchester. We lived there from '93 till 2007, when we moved to the Isle of Man, so I went to primary school in Hazel Grove and also three years of secondary school in Hazel Grove.

BH: And then you finished secondary school then on the Isle of Man, is that right?

PH: Yeah, so I did my last of my GCSE years in the Isle of Man and sixth form as well, and I moved to Belfast, 2011, for Queen's.

BH: And was that undergraduate degree at Queen's?

PH: It was, yeah, yeah.

BH: Yeah, growing up, first of all I suppose in Stockport and then Isle of Man, were you aware of Laura's background?

PH: Yeah, as we would've gone to Belfast I suppose every–

LH: School holiday.

PH: Every seven to eight weeks because my grandparents were in quite ill health towards the last, well, last sort of four or five years, so we would've gone across to sort of give a bit of respite to my granny or vice versa, every seven to eight weeks, so we would've jumped in the car, got on the M6 to Stranraer and across on the ferry to Belfast, yeah, every seven to eight weeks, so it was basically my second, my second home when I was growing up, Belfast. We stayed in of course my grandparents' house in east Belfast and I've got quite fond memories of knocking about on the streets with some kids in the neighbourhood and it was my sort of summer playground really, and going to day trips to Bangor and Portrush and Donaghadee, that sort of thing, so yeah, fond memories really, growing up.

BH: So was that connection then to Northern Ireland and those trips back, were they important in shaping who, how you thought of yourself as growing up?

PH: I reckon it was, yeah, definitely, it was definitely unusual because I was never in Manchester on school holidays, so I was only ever seen in school, if that makes sense, so when, you know, half-term or summer holidays came around, it was like, oh Pete's off now for two or three weeks or even longer, so yeah, and I remember, I can't remember this, but my mum told me this a few weeks ago, but when I was in like, **[01:00:00]** P1, P2 there was sort of Northern Irish colloquialisms slip into my speech, I'd say wee and things like that, so I don't remember that, but it must've had an impact on me somehow, and even now I tend to speak to my mum [laughs] in a Northern Irish accent, as opposed to what I'm doing now, which is another strange, a strange trait I suppose that I'm not always conscious of, but it just slips into it sometimes.

BH: That's really interesting, sounds like in different situations or contexts you can kind of move between different kind of idioms.

PH: Yeah, yeah, particularly under the influence of alcohol [laughs], it can get even more pronounced, and of course my partner's from, well, Irish, she's Donegal and I tend to communicate [laughs] in an accent as well, it's a strange affliction really, so yeah, strong memories of Northern Ireland, I always really enjoyed coming across here. I used to go to the summer schemes too in east Belfast for a couple of years.

BH: Leisure centres?

PH: Yeah, yeah, so it was based at the Robinson Centre in, it was named after Peter Robinson, wasn't it, in east Belfast, yeah, I remember going to Dundonald and ice-skating and being traumatised by that. I got a bit of teasing from other kids about the accent, nothing too serious, but I was always I suppose othered, for want of a better word.

BH: That's really interesting, so east Belfast, presumably quite Protestant summer schemes and things like that.

PH: Yeah, almost exclusively, and we'd go to church, wouldn't we, now and again as well, I was dragged to, was it Orangefield we used to go to or Cregagh?

LH: Yeah, Orangefield, Cregagh.

PH: Presbyterian church, so, and even in Hazel Grove we went to church quite frequently, it was the Methodist church, until I reached the age of sort of eleven, twelve, thirteen, was it, and just made my own choice not to go anymore.

BH: Yeah, and you mentioned there that some people would pick up on your accent. What kind of things would they pick up on or what would they say?

PH: Just sort of like, mimicking me really, I suppose they'd, I can't remember exact phrases now, but it was certainly just imitation because I've not lived in Manchester now for, what was it, thirteen years, but I've retained the accent, pretty much even now, despite living in Belfast all these years now as well, so it was mainly imitation from what I recall. I do remember one incident, my mum, you chatted to about sort of prejudice and any incidents of, you know, sort of yeah, prejudice. We were playing in the back garden once in Hazel Grove and our back garden backed onto another house on Beech Avenue, and we weren't too friendly with them, were we, he was called Lloyd, and there was a bit of aggro one day in the back garden between, it was quite, it was turf wars basically [laughs] between the kids, and basically Lloyd's father got involved and started screaming at us through the hedge, so you came down to see what was going off.

LH: Mmm, forgotten about that.

PH: And his dad picked up on my mum's accent and started calling you a Paddy and saying go back to where you came from.

LH: Forgot about that one.

PH: Yeah, I remember that quite strongly, it was just that it's the first realisation that I thought, that I really was aware that you were perhaps a bit different [laughs], you know, because I've never heard anyone speak to you like that before and I was quite, I remember being quite shocked by it, yeah, that sticks in my mind, that one.

BH: That's interesting because he used the phrase Paddy, which is obviously, historically really refers I suppose to the Irish Catholic community in Britain, but of course your origins are within the Protestant community in Northern Ireland. How did you negotiate that Pete, did you think of your background as Irish or did you distinguish it?

PH: I had no real conception of it really until I became older and perhaps even when I moved to Belfast in 2011. I was never all that into politics until I suppose I was confronted by it in Belfast and I suppose forced to make a decision really. I mean, my main political education I

suppose was watching my grandad's VHS tapes that were in the drawer in Meyrick Park. He used to tape all these Channel 4 documentaries about the Troubles and, you know, sort of like, police stuff, RUC stuff and, well, and Western films that he was quite fond of as well, so I used to sit and watch these old VHS tapes on Northern Irish history, aged sort of like, nine, ten, eleven, which was quite a strange thing to do [laughs], most people are watching *Postman Pat*, I was watching Troubles documentaries. I suppose that's had a bearing on my current job and career trajectory, so yeah, it was only until I moved to Northern Ireland full-time when I was eighteen that I suppose became more conscious of the sectarian divide, because in east Belfast, where my grandparents were, it was a bubble, wasn't it really.

LH: Mmm hmm.

PH: And even on days out we tended to gravitate towards, I don't want to say Protestant towns, but the seaside resorts that we went to tended to be Portrush, Bangor, Newcastle rather than, I don't know, like, Donegal.

LH: Mmm, although Newcastle's a–

PH: Yeah, I suppose Newcastle's pretty mixed, isn't it.

LH: Mmm.

PH: So yeah.

BH: Whenever you made the decision to do your undergraduate degree you could've obviously selected a university in England. You could've went presumably even back to Manchester or somewhere else.

PH: I know, yeah.

BH: So you must've particularly wanted to go to Belfast then.

PH: Well, the strange thing was I was all set to go to university in England. I'd accepted a place at the University of Chester and I had surpassed what I needed to get into Chester by quite a margin, so I applied through UCAS Adjustments to go somewhere else, and I'd saw a Facebook post that Queen's had a few spare places for history undergraduates that year, so I thought well, I'll throw my hat into the ring and see how far I get, so I applied to Queen's very late August of 2011 to try and get a place there for the September and a week later I did. So we'd even seen the accommodation in Chester and we'd visited a couple of times to get myself orientated, and then that was just all blown apart, wasn't it, and I went to Queen's, really on a gamble, it was never preordained or planned, I just thought I'd try and get into a slightly more reputable university, I don't want to sound too snobby about it, and obviously they're offering an Irish history course or a few modules that I was of course into, so yeah, it was very last minute, it was never planned and then, September 2011, I washed up in Belfast and I've been here ever since.

BH: That's really interesting, so you're saying it was about reputability, you got better grades than you expected and selected to go somewhere else.

PH: Yeah, yeah, basically.

BH: But I suppose you probably could've went to, the same grades to get into Manchester Uni or Sheffield or something like that.

PH: True, yeah, yeah.

BH: I was wondering why in particular you turned to Belfast?

PH: It was strange because I've not really got any real affinity towards Manchester. The move to the Isle of Man was initially quite traumatic, but I ended up loving it and I still do love the Isle of Man, and I was devastated when [laughs] you two left to be really honest.

LH: [laughs] We probably came too close to him, to be honest, that's it, didn't want us on the same side of the Irish Sea.

PH: On my doorstep now, aren't you, literally [laughs], so yeah, I didn't have any real urge to go back to Manchester, apart from to see relatives, and I certainly didn't want to go there to live full-time for university.

BH: That's something that I haven't really asked about, the other side of your family, which is based back in England in the Manchester area. Is your, your father's from Manchester, is that right?

PH: Yeah, he was born in Ashton-under-Lyne **[01:10:00]** in Manchester, Tameside and, yeah, and my granny is from Lincolnshire originally and my grandfather, who's been, passed away about fifteen, sixteen years ago now, was, yeah, Mancunian, he was brought up in the area and they met in the late forties and set up home in a place called Droylsden in the I suppose 1960, thereabouts, and my gran still lives there to this day, in the same house.

BH: I'm wondering, both Pete and Laura, how that side of your family apprehended and perceived your kind of Northern Irish origins or background?

LH: I think Graham, that's Pete's dad's parents, probably were a bit apprehensive, not with me, but they certainly didn't like Graham coming to visit Northern Ireland with me, almost made him get his, not allowed to get his hair cut before he went in case somebody would think he was in a, you know, a soldier and that sort of thing, and because he's quite tall, so yeah, also, because my family had a sort of like, church background, and so did I really, I wanted to get married in Belfast, and I wanted to get married in the church that my parents went to and that I went to. Graham was happy enough with that. I'm not so sure his parents were too thrilled at having to come to Northern Ireland, as was his family, yeah, his cousin, a few people declined because of where the wedding was, including some of Graham's family, his cousin and her family wouldn't come because they didn't want to put themselves at risk, so yeah, but I mean, I found, I think Graham himself felt a bit uncomfortable the first few

times, but I think when he realised that he wasn't, you know, I wasn't going to take him anywhere where anybody would start quizzing and questioning him he was okay and actually quite enjoyed his holidays here, I think anyway, looking at him, he's across the room, he's nodding his head [laughs].

BH: Did your family members have, on the English side, any political views about Northern Ireland?

LH: Gosh, you know, that's something I never really would've asked them, I don't know. Did your mum and dad have any political views on Northern Ireland, Graham? What was their opinion?

GH: Political views, I suppose they were Protestants and I suppose they, yeah [inaudible]. I guess they viewed the Catholics were more of the troublemakers.

LH: Yeah, yeah, no, he's just saying, I mean, I never really had any discussions like that with them–

GH: Generally.

LH: But Graham was just saying generally, because they were sort of like–

GH: Not particularly religious.

LH: Yeah, they weren't particularly religious, but they were Protestants he said, so if anything they would've seen the Catholic side of things as being the troublemakers.

GH: And it was always the IRA–

LH: It was always the IRA that–

GH: Never really the UVF, was it?

LH: Yeah, even though from my point of view one side was as bad as the other for what they done.

GH: Aye, they were.

LH: They wouldn't have viewed it that way, maybe.

GH: Probably didn't even know the UVF, did they?

LH: Yeah, they wouldn't have even known who the UVF was, it was more, cos it was always the IRA that they would've heard of on the news, so yeah, I don't know if that answers that.

BH: It does, yeah, yeah. Pete, when you were growing up and when you were in particular going back and spending holiday time in east Belfast, were you aware of the conflict and the fact that it had sides and so on?

PH: Yeah, well, we always had a Northern Irish car, didn't we, so there was, well, you always alleged that there was enhanced port security checks for certain registration plates and I think you're probably right because we did get searched an awful lot going across on the ferry, not just to Belfast, but to the Isle of Man too on holidays, but, it's popped out of my head what I was going to say then. What was the question again, Barry? Sorry, I've forgot the question now.

BH: Basically, yeah, were you just aware of the conflict and the fact that it had sides?

PH: Yeah, yeah. We'd always get a phone call, didn't we, when we got off the boat from my granny saying if it was safe to come up the Woodstock Road, which was the interface where the Short Strand is.

LH: Or if we have to go round the long way.

PH: Or if we've got to go the long way, yeah, so we'd always get a phone call about the, I suppose the conflict in that sense, but I was never too aware about differences because I think I wasn't ever in contact with any Catholics or nationalists until I came to Queen's nearly ten years ago. You were in a very much a cultural and social bubble in east Belfast, or our part of east Belfast anyway.

BH: Were you aware of implicit assumptions about who was right and wrong?

PH: I suppose so. I think I'd have perhaps absorbed a lot of what my English grandparents thought about the conflict and tend to think that the other side were the troublemakers and, but it was never very vivid, I never thought about it too much like, well, it didn't have a huge bearing on what I was doing or who I was speaking to.

BH: What about that experience then of going to study, of all subjects at Queen's, history? Being in seminar groups and tutorials with people who presumably come from republican backgrounds and you're there obviously with an English accent, but also parentage with origins in the Protestant community of east Belfast. What was that like, that experience?

PH: It was sometimes a bit uncomfortable because you did come across, cos I was never that politicised about the constitutional question and I'm still not particularly politicised about it, I'm pretty ambivalent really about what happens, going forwards, it's not my fight really, but I did get triggered by some of the things that were said in tutorial groups by I suppose more Sinn Féin-orientated students who made you feel sometimes that it was your fault, and you'd get these glances across the room sometimes [laughs] when they were saying something to sort of like, make you feel like you should have some guilt in this. I encountered that a couple of times. So perhaps in Irish history modules I was a bit less vocal in seminar groups than other ones, and I certainly never really raised the fact that my family were, well, half my family was from a Protestant area of east Belfast, and that wasn't

because of shame or stigma, it was just because it was nobody's business really. So I remember telling someone in first year, because we somehow got on the conversation of the B-Specials, and I mentioned that my granda was in the B-Specials and he seemed quite enthralled with that and he's now a DUP MLA [laughs], yeah, Jonny Buckley, so, but apart from that it never really came up that much in conversation, you were defined by your Englishness and how you sounded like, and no matter how I, I suppose conveyed my background it was never really registered, and of course you had the added dimension too of the Isle of Man, which is, you know, a very distinct national culture in itself, it's not British or Irish, so I tended to say I was from there cos it was–

BH: Ah.

PH: It's where I came from, it's where my parents lived, rather than Manchester or Belfast.

BH: That's quite an interesting kind of way to identify yourself, it's kind of a neutral space.

PH: Yeah, yeah, in a sense it was, it gave me a get out of jail free card sometimes too in terms of political debates, so yeah, but that, and I suppose I'd still, not define myself, but I feel more affinity to the Isle of Man than anywhere else that I've lived in the past twenty-seven years [laughs]. Dad's got his thumbs up here, yeah, yeah, it's, I do feel quite a deep attachment to the place.

BH: I'm just wondering as well there, listening to Laura talk about, you know, the anxieties and stresses, you know, associated with, you know, being the daughter of someone **[01:20:00]** who's involved first in the B-Specials and then the army reserve, and the family home is in a border area and difficulties with that, actually growing up, and I think you said that you'd heard some stories before. Around Queen's University, was there recognition of that, that experience?

PH: What, of the border issues?

BH: The border issues and I suppose the fact that this was kind of a difficult experience lived by particular Protestant communities.

PH: Yeah, and it, I suppose it mainly came through reading as opposed to conversation, so I'd read stuff about border Protestants, you know, in the 1920s that were kind of left behind in the Free State, and I suppose I'd put my own family experiences into that debate really, yeah, so yeah, yeah, I can't really answer that really.

BH: Yeah, did you situate your own kind of background within that kind of experience? It sounds like maybe you did a bit.

PH: I suppose I did, but I never went, yeah, there's that whole bloody ethnic cleansing debate, which I never bought into, it's far too toxic and political, that. So obviously there was push-pull factors there, but I think it was as much economics as it was politics because, you know, it's a very rural area and there's not much you can do if you're not a farmer, from what I understand, but yeah, of course my grandparents are buried down there, so I've not

been for a couple of years now, but we did go down quite frequently at one stage, to Newtownhamilton. I remember my granny's funeral in particular cos a lot of people popped out of the woodwork that I'd never met before and I realised that how big your extended family and friend network is, because it was packed, wasn't it?

LH: Mmm, well, yeah, because, I mean, they had a lifetime in Newtownhamilton, so it was, you know, they're quite big into their funerals [laughs].

PH: Yeah.

BH: Laura, what did you think whenever Pete decided that he would go and study history at Queen's?

LH: I was quite pleased really. I just seen it as another reason for having to come to Belfast on wee trips [laughs] because by that stage my parents weren't here, so we perhaps weren't coming over just as frequently, yeah, so I was quite happy, and also obviously by that stage things were an awful lot better here. It was quite weird really cos a few years ago I stayed in Belfast for like, a few weeks in one of the flats that Pete was in whenever his flatmates were away during the summer, and some of the places that, my friend came down and stayed as well, and it was quite funny listening to Pete and one of his mates talking about some of the places that they went into and it was the same places that me and Clare would've went into at the same age they were, apart from our experiences were much different from what Peter's was, because obviously they were open, there was no security, whereas when we were going in these places there was a lot of security and they were like, dark, dingy, all sort of like, boarded up, so that nothing could be thrown through windows and stuff, and it was like, completely different, you know, what Peter was experiencing to what I had, which was quite nice to hear.

BH: So this was evidence that some changes at least did happen.

LH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, well, yeah, and there's no army in the streets, there was like, no security in the shops really, yeah, you might've seen the odd security, but just generally what you'd see in the UK like, a security officer wandering around looking for pickpockets and shoplifters rather than people looking in your bag for bombs, so yeah.

BH: It's interesting you mentioned there that, you know, Pete, when he moved to Belfast after your own parents had passed away. A lot of people who migrate to a different country, they often say that, you know, they lose contact once family members pass away or they move, a sense that there's no reason kind of go back for trips and things like that, but I suppose Pete moving there has, at least at that stage, created, he created a reason to go back.

LH: Yeah, I mean, we, I still had family here and we still would've come for the odd holiday, but certainly after my parents passed, we maybe would've–

PH: Once a year.

LH: Been once year.

PH: Yeah.

LH: Rather than sort of like, the three or four times a year we would've been over, yeah.

PH: Yeah, it was nice coming to Queen's though and having this unexpected support network, cos I'd have gone to my, you know, family members' houses for Sunday lunch and even early on sort of like, couple of shopping trips to get me settled in, so it was nice having that backup if ever I needed it, which I didn't, you know, ever call upon, but it was nice knowing it was there.

LH: No, which was, that was, from my point of view I was quite happy too because if there was any pieces to be picked up there was somebody there to pick them up for me [laughs], but it didn't happen [laughs].

BH: And I suppose that would've been quite unusual for other, you know, English or Scottish students who were going to Queen's, they wouldn't have had that family background necessarily.

PH: Yeah, I remember, cos of course, you know, Elms Village would empty on a Friday night and there'd just be two or three people left in my building that was, you know, eleven people on each floor. It was just the English people essentially and a few Scottish people as well and a few hardcore Northern Irish people that refused to go home and get the washing done [laughs], so yeah, that was, they used to be quite jealous, the fact that I was going off on my Sunday afternoon jaunt to get a big feed of chicken and roast potatoes, but yeah, certainly the ones that I gelled with in the flats were the English ones, but that was more out of accident rather than design because the rest of the housemates were only around perhaps three or four nights a week because of their proclivity to go back home at every opportunity to get washing done and bringing back Tupperware full of lasagne to see them through for the week, things like that, so yeah. My closest friend, who I'm still mates with and still lives in Belfast, is from the south of England and his father served here in the eighties in the Paratroop Regiment, and I remember Alex's twenty-first birthday, and his dad came across to Belfast for the first time since about '86, '87 and him being shocked at how normal it felt compared to his last encounter when he was, you know, uniformed and carrying a rifle, so that was, yeah, that was quite interesting.

BH: That must've been an interesting experience for him, his son going to university there.

PH: Yeah, I remember Alex, cos he used to do politics at Queen's, would never have revealed that to anyone, that his dad was, you know, a serving British soldier, that was always keep on the downlow.

BH: Yeah, what about your own kind of political ideas about Northern Ireland? I mean, you said as you were growing up you, it wasn't something consciously really reflected upon too much.

PH: Yeah.

BH: The experience of moving there to go to university, did it make you think more about kind of the region?

PH: It did, but to the extent that I would hold nationalism and unionism in equal contempt.

BH: Right [laughs].

PH: Yeah, I would fall more into a Labour tradition and there was never really any outlet for that in Northern Ireland, that I could see anyway, that was, that would kind of align with my more, my viewpoints, but certainly I still am quite repulsed by the level of debate in Northern Ireland between the two main political parties and the, I suppose the hangers-on, the SDLP and the UUP as well. It's certainly made me deeply sceptical about nationalism in its broader forms and the impact that it has when it's put into more devious hands like, you know, Nigel Farage and Trump and people like that, so yeah, I'd have very little truck with either side of the political debate, so I, well, having said that, full of contradictions now, I did vote SDLP in the south Belfast election in December 2019.

BH: Is it Hanna?

PH: Claire Hanna, yeah, because **[01:30:00]** she was the best of a bad bunch and I wanted the DUP out of my constituency basically.

BH: Yeah.

PH: So I've only cast a ballot once in a Westminster election and that was for the SDLP.

BH: What do you think about that, Laura?

LH: I completely–

BH: Have your political views changed or remained the same?

LH: I would say they've overall probably remained the same, but I would be along the same lines as Peter really, completely agreed with his, when he said who he'd voted for in the elections, I would've done the same myself. I think both sides are equally horrible, the things that they've done to their own communities and each other's communities, and I think sort of like, when I was growing up and listening to my parents and that I would've been along the lines of, well, there must never be a united Ireland, but I think now I'm at a stage in my life where I'm just thinking, do you know, whatever happens, happens, and if there is a united Ireland, is it going to be any better or any worse anyway, I don't know what I would say. To me, getting decent healthcare and a decent sort of like, life is more important than where the border is, and if I said that to some of my friends they'd probably have a fit really, because they're still very much, you know, it's two separate communities still, whereas I think cos I've been away from it, I'm now much more, you know, whatever happens, if it's for the better for people that live here in general, so be it. I'm not, yeah.

BH: So that does kind of sound like a change in the context, in the longer context of your family history of, obviously with family members who served in the RUC and so on, presumably saw themselves as acting to preserve the Northern Irish state.

LH: Well, yeah, and then that, you know, it does cause a bit of conflict in my head really, but you know, yeah, I think, I, I just think the here and now and the future's more important than the past and that's just the way that I think now, and I wouldn't like to see it happen, I would quite like still Northern Ireland to be Northern Ireland, but if it did happen I would go with it, I wouldn't raise any major objections to be quite honest.

PH: And sure I'm a Irish citizen now anyway, aren't I?

LH: I know, he's gone and got himself an Irish passport [laughs].

PH: Yeah, that's, that's one big perk of being the child of a Irish migrant is that you can apply for an Irish passport, so [laughs], I got one about three weeks back, didn't I?

LH: Yeah, yeah.

PH: Cos my last one was up and I just thought, you know, given the trouble down the road with Brexit and possible travel restrictions and, you know, additional costs, thought I'll just get myself an Irish passport and be done with it all, so, no.

BH: Well, that was actually going to be my next question.

PH: Oh sorry about that [laughs].

BH: No, Brexit, what impact has that had upon both your thinking?

LH: I think probably that's part of the reason why I'm thinking that if Ireland was one big island it might actually be better for the people on it, long term, because I must admit I don't think I would've voted the way, you know, for to leave the EU. I think it is going to have implications, so I think that is part of my thinking why it's sort of like, making me easier with the thought, well, if there's a united Ireland, there's a united Ireland, yeah.

BH: What about you Pete?

PH: Yeah, well, I look around me and see all these peace dividend funds, you know, you get on the train and it's stamped with, you know, this train was built with part European funds and, you know, across town you see all these investments going on that have come courtesy of the EU and I can't quite fathom why people would want to leave that when the region or the province as a whole have got so much tangible benefit from European institutions, so I definitely think it'll have a negative effect in the long run and I was pretty repulsed by what the DUP were playing at in 2016 as well, you know, sort of going with the crass populism rather than any economic sense really and, you know, I'm quite in touch with people in east Belfast because, you know, my PhD was on the shipyards, and the Lower Newtownards

community feel, you know, quite betrayed by what's happened there in the last two or three years really, so yeah, I don't think it's going to benefit Northern Ireland in any economic sense. It'll probably inflict more harm than good.

BH: You mentioned there, maybe a couple of minutes back, said you'd got an Irish passport.

PH: Yeah, yeah.

BH: And you said I suppose that's one of the benefits of being an Irish migrant, or the son of an Irish migrant, that you have access to that. Does that imply that you see yourself as Irish?

PH: See, I was, funny, I was confronted with this actually for the first time this week. I had to put in a box my passport-issuing country and it felt strange not to be putting the UK down. So I definitely got the passport as a reaction to potential travel disruption going forwards rather than any affinity towards Irish nationality. I certainly don't feel Irish, but nor do I feel particularly British, if that [laughs], if that makes sense, as well. I think when you've led such a nomadic existence growing up [laughs] you don't have any fixed sense of who you are really because, you know, I've grown up in I suppose three very strong national cultures, you know, British, Irish and Manx, Isle of Man, so my sense of who I am in the national sense is a bit blurred, to say the least.

BH: Mmm, and presumably made all the more difficult by the rise of English nationalism.

PH: Yeah, yeah, I do get quite annoyed when, you know, the St George's flag is used for UKIP and far right rallies and nothing else and I'd, you know, when you look how sort of progressive Scottish nationalism is, for instance, or is certainly depicted in the media, and you look at how it's depicted over the border in England, I feel a bit sad that these flags and emblems and traditions have been used for such nefarious purposes.

BH: Yeah, do you continue to follow politics in Westminster?

PH: Yeah, I'm a bit of a political geek really, I do follow it quite a lot, I watch PMQs most weeks and I spent a lot of time in north-east England during my PhD studies, looking at ex-mining villages in the area, and I suppose that more than anything shaped my political outlook, which'd be more left leaning than certainly my parents. I, you know, I would vote Labour here, if I could do, in Northern Ireland, put it that way.

BH: Yeah, on the constitutional debate then and new border debate in Northern Ireland, obviously a large section of the Labour Party have long been for unification. Would you identify with that or would you distinguish yourself within Labour politics in a different way?

PH: I think I'd segment it because no matter what Labour thinks or has enshrined as party policy, it's down to a referendum in this island to decide the constitutional future of the country, so I tend to tune out of what they say and think about Northern Ireland if I don't particularly agree with it, because I know deep down it's not going to be Labour that decides, it'll be, you know, ordinary people casting ballots.

BH: Yeah, I think I'm down to my kind of last few set of questions now, so I'll just put a few ideas out there and we'll see where we go. Laura, are you glad you left Northern Ireland?

LH: Yeah, I mean, I have to say yes to that because I wouldn't have the life that I've **[01:40:00]** got now and I wouldn't have this person sat next to me, maybe. I was sad that I moved away from my parents and I feel that they probably missed out a little bit on, you know, on my life, but overall, no, it was the right decision for me, and just going back to that, when you were saying about some of the reasons that I went and the stresses, I mean, one of the major things which because of what dad's pol-, in the police and that and the nursing, I mean, I always had my own car, I was never allowed to drive his car for obvious reasons, but it was also, it was all a hassle in the mornings if you had an early shift, he'd have to get up as well and move his, check his car, move his car, cos he always insisted on mine being in the garage and stuff, so it was, that was sort of like, part of it as well, that, you know, when I was saying about the sort of like, the stresses that came along as I got older and made things a bit more real when you had to sort of do things like check underneath your car before you got into it and stuff, so yeah. Sorry, just, that was just going back a bit.

BH: Yeah, no, do you think that a move then to England changed you?

LH: I don't necessarily think that it did, I'm still sort of who I was when I left. Och, yeah, well, I suppose my views and that changed a little bit, but I don't really know how to answer that one to be fair. I don't know what I would've been or what would've happened had I not gone basically, would my views have, would I have still arrived at the same thoughts I've got now or would they have been completely different, would I have become indoctrinated in what was going on and be more sort of like, politically minded, I don't know, is the answer to that one.

BH: What about you Pete then? Do you think the Troubles has had an impact on your life?

PH: I suppose some of it has trickled down through stories and bits and bobs that I've heard growing up, but I was always very much left to make my own mind up. I was never shoehorned into one political belief system versus the other. I suppose it's evidenced by how I approached Queen's when I first started there ten years ago. I didn't feel like I was particularly swayed by one argument or ideology than the other, so yeah, I'd, although I'm pleased to have had the experience of I suppose this mixed marriage between an [laughs] Englishman and a Northern Irish woman, to have, to have had these two experiences, cos it's quite a small Venn diagram, isn't it, to have a Northern Irish parent and a English parent, so, and to have spent so much time there, growing up too, I really enjoyed, there was always a lot of excitement, for me anyway, getting in the car, going up to Stranraer, so yeah, it's shaped me, but I think it's shaped me in positive ways.

BH: You said there a mixed parentage. Would you regard yourself as a mixed product then?

PH: No, it was more tongue-in-cheek [laughs], yeah, I've not, that's the first time I've ever used that [laughs], used that description. No, it was, it, I mean, it was slightly unusual, but I didn't think of it as abnormal and I certainly don't feel like I'm, yeah, particularly distinct in that respect, I don't think.

BH: Laura and Pete, both of yous, do you think that you see Northern Ireland in the same way now or do your perceptions diverge?

PH: Good question. Well, I certainly feel that whenever I get depressed about politics and you chat to people, you know, in Tesco's or in the bakery or whatever, you realise that how nice this place is to live and you can divorce the politics from the people, can't you, I think.

LH: I think you can, yeah, I would agree with that, as I say, the politics are very different from who's immediately around you and the things that you do, yeah.

BH: So final question. Doing this oral history interview and doing it together, which is, I hadn't really anticipated this, I'm kind of wondering what it's like for both of yous to do it together, talking about this. What were your expectations and have they turned out the same way?

PH: I think for me it's added a bit more colour to some of the stories that I've heard. I've heard things in a bit more detail than I had previously and I understand a bit more about how mum was feeling about the transition to Manchester, and it's also strange for me, being an oral historian, being the one that's being asked the questions rather than vice versa, so in that sense it's a bid odd, but I've enjoyed it anyway, I've learnt a couple of new things there and, yeah.

LH: No, no, it's been okay. Yeah, yeah, it was good.

BH: And what about you Laura?

LH: I don't really know what I was expecting to be fair.

PH: You were a bit anxious, weren't you, I think, at the start.

LH: I just thought maybe my memory wouldn't be so good, but you seemed to ask the right things, that, yeah, and there's interest in listening to what Peter's views are, although I must admit most of them I sort of like, already know anyway, maybe just not in the same detail.

BH: Okay.

LH: We're not going to argue, fall out over it anyway, I don't think.

PH: No, not yet [laughs].

BH: Sometimes people do, you know.

LH: Yeah.

BH: And can have very, very different views, you know.

LH: Yeah.

BH: Okay, so that's all the questions I've got. The final thing I always say at the end of an interview is, is there anything else you want to add, is there anything I haven't asked about, but you think's important?

LH: Not that I can think of.

PH: No, nothing springs to mind, no, you've done a good job Barry.

BH: Great [laughs]. It was also slightly nerve-racking for me, knowing that the other person that I was interviewing was an oral historian [laughs], I was kind of aware that they'll be watching what I'm doing kind of thing.

PH: Ah you did a cracking job mate, don't worry about it [laughs], I really enjoyed it.

BH: Okay, listen, Pete and Laura, thanks very much again for agreeing to do this and thanks as well for putting me in contact with Jeff, who I think I've pencilled in for an interview, I need to check my diary, but I'm pretty sure I have and, yeah, if you want to hear more about what's going on with the project you can drop me an email any time and also we have a website, although there's not much up there yet, but things will go up there eventually and, yeah, if you want to keep in touch and find out what we're doing feel free to do that.

PH: Thanks Barry, yeah, appreciate it.

LH: Yeah, that's fine, yeah.

BH: Okay [laughs], alright, thanks a lot.

LH: Alright, okay, take care, thanks.

PH: Take care now.

BH: See you again.

PH: Bye.

LH: Bye now, bye.

INTERVIEW ENDS