

## INTERVIEW M22: ALISTAIR SCOTT

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Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley

Interviewee: Alistair Scott

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Location: Virtual

Transcriber: Naomi Wells

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

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BH: Okay, that's us off and running now. Okay, so it's about twenty-five to six on Tuesday the eighth of December 2020 and I'm here with Alistair Scott to do an interview for the Conflict, Memory and Migration project. Just before I begin Alistair, can I just say again thanks very much for agreeing to do the interview.

AS: You're welcome.

BH: And for taking time out of what's probably a busy schedule this late in the evening as we're heading towards Christmas. So, sorry Alistair, I'm going to move this laptop downstairs cos I think I can hear it cutting out a bit.

AS: Okay, I can hold on.

BH: I'll just be two minutes.

AS: No problem [extended pause].

BH: Okay, so I'm downstairs now and I'm closer to the, to the wi-fi, can you hear me okay?

AS: Yeah, good, clear, yeah.

BH: That's better, good.

AS: Now I'm getting a bit of an echo now.

BH: Are you? Right, okay, so what I will do is I'll put in, is that any better now?

AS: That's, I'll just talk, yeah, yeah, that's good.

BH: Good, great, I think that, I didn't have my earphones in there, so I think that's part of what the problem was. So I think I was just about to start there and I was saying that this is

an oral history interview and the first question I usually begin with is when and where were you born, so I'll just ask you that, when and where were you born?

AS: The thirtieth of July 1958 in Castlecaulfield in County Tyrone.

BH: Okay, and where did you grown up at?

AS: I think there for sixteen and a half years, it was Castlecaulfield and then for a year and a half after that I lived in Dungannon before moving up to Belfast to start university and really never went back home after that, so I've lived in Belfast for university and then Lisburn once I qualified and started working.

BH: Okay, and what did your parents do?

AS: Mother was a housewife and father was, initially he was, worked in a linen factory in Castlecaulfield and then after that he joined the traffic wardens and the part-time reserve police.

BH: Okay, and did you have any brothers or sisters?

AS: I've two brothers younger and two sisters older, all are still alive.

BH: Okay, and what was it like growing up in Castlecaulfield?

AS: It was a quiet village, but because that's all you knew you thought that was fine, you just played out a lot, you had lots of friends. The primary school was walking distance, it was only a small primary school, three classrooms with three teachers over the seven years, and in fact in the whole seven years I was there I don't think there was any change in any of the teachers, which was something different and, where else are we going after that, and so you just, you, we were, I was in the Boys' Brigade so that, you know, out in the evening to that, and just the only sort of entertainment was the youth club or some of the church social events that you went to now and again.

BH: And so what, was that what you would have done outside of school then?

AS: Yeah, that would have been it. I wasn't really interested in anything else, sport wasn't into me and I think we were just went to the Boys' Brigade because everybody went there and that's what you did, it wasn't something that you were invited to go to, you just went.

BH: You just went.

AS: Yeah, you were told to go [laughs].

BH: And would everybody have went to that?

AS: Yeah, I think we were all in it, yeah. I don't remember the sisters being in, the two girls being in anything. In fact, I don't think there was any sort of whatever, Girl Guides in the,

just the Boys' Brigade I think I remember, that's all that was in the village, and it was quite popular as well cos it had a good catchment, although it was only a small village there was a good catchment area around, around, so a lot of people brought in, but it was very much Protestant orientated.

BH: Was it like, a majority Protestant village?

AS: Slightly, I would say it was maybe fifty-five, but there was still a, cos we had a separate Catholic primary school, so we had both the schools, we had both the Protestant primary school and then the Catholic at the other side of the village.

BH: And would it have been like, in terms of how people played together and so on, was it fairly segregated or was there a lot of mixing?

AS: No, there wouldn't have been a lot of mixing cos most of the areas you lived in were Protestants like, we lived in a group of twenty houses and not knowing, well, the youngsters I played with would have all been Protestants, I don't know who lived in the other houses, if they didn't have children what religion they were, but the ones we played were always either Church of Ireland or Presbyterian cos that was the two churches in the town, there was no Catholic church in the village.

BH: Oh right, okay.

AS: They went to Donaghmore, which was about two miles from Castlecaulfield.

BH: Right, and were these housing areas, were they private housing areas or were they like, council executive estates or—?

AS: Yeah, council houses.

BH: Council houses, yeah, and was there one then as well for Catholic people? Was there another estate or was there just the one estate?

AS: Not that I, I think it may be, not that I know, cos there was a couple of estates, you know, like, estates like, twenty, thirty houses, nothing big, but I can't remember if, I think the cottages, the ones with the cottages in it were more Catholic orientated, but I think then a lot of the Catholics seemed to live over in Donaghmore and come across, which was only two mile for them, yeah, so I'd say yeah, it was more, it was more Protestant in any of the estates.

BH: Were your parents well off?

AS: No, as I say, mother didn't work, father when he was working in the factory he also did evening work like selling carpets or firelighters, or at Christmas he used to go round people's houses and draw their turkeys for them.

BH: Is that right?

AS: Yeah, to get, you know, a few pounds together and, well, a lot of people didn't want to do it cos then you always bought a live turkey and brought it home a few day-, or like, about a week before Christmas, and then a few days before Christmas it had to have its neck wrung and then drawn out and he would have done that and, it was, he didn't particularly like killing animals, he wasn't into that, but, you know, for the family it'd gather him some money like, I think it was about fifty pence or ten shillings they gave him, but it all added up back then.

BH: Sure, and then you were saying your mother didn't work?

AS: No, no, she was always at home, so she never worked in our young childhood, she did work once we were up, you know, I'm talking when I was in my late teens, when she moved to, when she moved on after we lost our father, but in our earlier days she never worked, just was a housewife.

BH: So that would have been your dad then I suppose supporting five children then.

AS: Five children, yes, we were also all on free school meals, that type of thing, and grants.

BH: What about, so you mentioned there earlier that church youth clubs and things would have been a focus I suppose for, you know, maybe events or playing, playtime and stuff.

AS: Yeah.

BH: Was the church in general an important influence whenever you were growing up?

AS: I suppose yeah, you could say yes, but [00:10:00] it's one of those things, it was like, automatic, you weren't told to go, you just went and it was one of those things, and you went to Sunday school every Sunday and then over to the church for the ser-, and then home for dinner and that was it, and you always cleaned your shoes on a Saturday night, because you weren't allowed to do it on a Sunday morning, to be tidy for church and that was it, you know, yeah, I can't think, it was just, it was just you did it, I think, I can't put anything more to it than that.

BH: I mean, you weren't personally like, strongly invested in religion whenever you were growing up.

AS: It was always around and we always, you know, we were always brought up to respect religion and to go to these things and respect the people in it, but I still nowadays I will, I don't go to church now, but I still would be probably in inverted commas religious, you know, I, I, I still would feel a lot of the fire and brimstone from the pulpit, you know, I've some people and, you know, I've a friend, a partner, and when we go on in, he's not, he's atheist, and when we go into churches, you know, if you're abroad, and if he swore in it it would make me petrified [laughs], you know, you've still that deep in you and you know it's wrong, you know it's not, it's a stupid feeling, but you still, you can't say that in here, you

don't do that, you know, that type of an attitude I have and he is more blasé, cos I'm always afraid of a bolt of lightning coming through the roof to me [laughs].

BH: Right [laughs], and were you Church of Ireland or were you Presbyterian?

AS: Oh definitely not Church of Ireland, I have to be Presbyterian, of course [laughs], it's the only one, that's, yeah, look, as we always said, the Church of Ireland, there was only a paper wall between them and Rome [laughs].

BH: Yes [laughs], and were both your parents then Presbyterian?

AS: Yes, yeah, yeah. Mother didn't go to church at all and my father, she always had this saying that she didn't need to go to church to talk to God. I think my mother was just lazy, she didn't want to go, have to put an effort into much, whereas my father did go, but then once he started work doing the extra work and different things to get money for us he couldn't go on a Sunday, you know, cos he was probably, you know, on the weekend patrol with the police reservists or whatever, that, so, but he always encouraged us to keep going after that anyway, when he wasn't going.

BH: So you would have still had to go then, even if he wasn't going you would have to go?

AS: Yes, yeah, we would.

BH: And did you ever not go?

AS: I have a few times, especially in the summer, there was a small like, a small wood between where our houses were and the village, and I've spent a morning in there just kicking leaves about and breaking sticks and not being caught [laughs], but it was just sometimes, when it was a good summer day I didn't want to sit inside, that's about it, yeah, but I didn't do it too often cos if you did it too often somebody would notice and in that sort of a village everything got back to your house before you got back to it, if there was anything to tell.

BH: How many people would have been in the village? Was it fairly small?

AS: I'd say about [indecipherable], about three hundred.

BH: Three hundred, right, okay, right. What about things then like the Orange Order and the Twelfth of July? Were those things that your family were involved in or you were involved in?

AS: My mother's side, but they lived down in Katesbridge near Banbridge, they were very involved with that, but we weren't. My father was in the Apprentice Boys, but not actively in it, and the Twelfth of July just makes me shudder, I hate it, I think it's just, I just think it just churns up people's emotions and all and I just, I've, you know, I will say, I've been to Twelfths and, you know, and it's fun when you're with other friends and all, but the other thing behind it I just don't enjoy.

BH: Yeah, is that something, is that a change in attitude since moving away from Castlecaulfield?

AS: No, no, even when we were young we would have never gone to a Twelfth unless it was in the village itself, you know the way it moves around.

BH: Sure.

AS: Yeah, until it, we would have gone and we would have rarely, you know, you wouldn't have made an effort to go to it if it was in some of the outlying towns.

BH: Yeah, you said there that, you know, it would stir up emotions and things like that. Was there tension between Catholics and Protestants in Castlecaulfield whenever you were growing up?

AS: There would have been always something cos even, I even remember my father saying that when he was at the primary school, the older primary school which was for Protestants, it was in the Black hall when he was growing up, you know, there would have been the odd stone fight between them and the Catholics coming down from the hill.

BH: Right, what about adults, you know, would have adults have mixed, you know, would they mix in the same pubs or would they have worked together or—?

AS: Well, tell you the truth I've never been to the pub in Castlecaulfield [laughs]. We were not allowed to go, I would have, I, in fact I don't think I was in a pub until I went up to university, so, and I can't think of even, other than as a watered down like, a shandy, watered down at Christmas, that's all we had until I left home, we would have never, we'd never drink in the house, so pubs, I don't know about who would have gone into that pub.

BH: What about into Dungannon then? Would you ever have went in there for to go out or anything?

AS: No, I was so good I never went out [laughs]. I just wanted to study and get a good job and that's the way we were brought up, if you don't need to go out to these, my sisters used to go out to some dances in an Orange hall outside the village, there was a bus picked up, but it wasn't my, it wouldn't have done anything for me.

BH: Sure, see I suppose there would have been bands and things you could have joined as well, you know, and things like that, or maybe there wasn't, I don't know.

AS: No, there was, there was a couple of bands, but I had no interest in that either, yeah, I wasn't, I think, I think really when I was growing up I was quite a shy person and I preferred not to go in and be noticed rather than, you know, seek things like that, sort of thing.

BH: I take it from that then, you mentioned there you worked hard at school, did you enjoy school?

AS: Yeah, I loved school, I loved the atmosphere in school and just doing things and trying to, being right, that motivated me and gave me a good feeling if I, you know, if I could always be right that was, but I think that was, my mother hadn't a very good attitude with our education.

BH: She did or she didn't?

AS: Didn't, well, I'll tell you a story, well, this story that, if this is okay to tell you these things.

BH: Oh aye, yeah, yeah, of course, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AS: Yeah, there was another, two doors up from me was my best friend Malcolm McFarland and we both went to the same primary school and we went to the grammar school, we were the only two that qualified that year for the eleven-plus, but any report cards come home, if it said twenty per cent poor or if it said ninety-nine per cent excellent, best, you know, it, my mother was, well, what did Malcolm McFarland get, as long as I beat Malcolm McFarland it wouldn't matter what was on the form. She was very much, very much of that ilk, you know, it was as long as you're better than somebody else, you know, that she knew of, that was her, whereas my father was different, he just, you know, do your best, if you, you know, if you need any help, you know, come and ask, but do your best and I can't ask for any more. Mother, all I can hear is well, was that better than Malcolm Mc-, did you get better than Malcolm McFarland.

BH: Right [laughs].

AS: And I think that did form a lot of issues I had later on, with this chipping at the back of my mind, but I've got past that and all that, so that's that.

BH: And what was that about then? Was that just a competition between different people on the street kind of thing?

AS: I would think, yes, because my mother always thought, well, she was from farming stock, a big farm down in Banbridge, so she always had this that the McElroy's, which was her side of the family, were always better than everybody and, you know, I know sometimes I've heard, if my mother and father were having a row, she would always throw, my father always said I married beneath myself, so [laughs], so it's as well she's not about now otherwise she'd have been knifing my back out for saying things about her [laughs], so she, yeah, she was always, she always I think later on after the romance and love went out of her marriage I think she always felt she married beneath herself, but at the time she married I think she just, she was quite [00:20:00] a rebellious teenager, late teenager, and her father let her do anything she wanted, he just was, she was the apple of his eye and Ivy could do no wrong, so I think she always had that attitude and when she moved away from home and settled into her own life or her own real life, she didn't have that support there, that leave Ivy alone, she's always right, etcetera, so, but, but my father always cajoled her along and worked with her cos you had to sort of, sort of pacify her and meet her halfway with anything, otherwise it was difficult.

BH: And did your father then, did he have like, ambitions for you in terms of doing well academically or—?

AS: He would, he had to leave it, he was the eldest of his family of six I think there was, and he had to leave to work with his father in the factory because money was needed there and he left at fourteen, so he always had this ambition for us to be able to do, looking back on it he would have been ideal to go on for further education because even when I was at grammar school if I showed him some of the maths or something he could help me with it in no time. He also liked the finer things, you know, he liked classical music, things like that, which he'd never had, he had never been or was never, had anything live, it was always radio or record player and I think he missed out such a lot, but he, I think he started to live what he wanted through us because we, you know, all five of us, you know, we've all, even before he died he could see that we were moving on, on a better life than what he had and what he wanted for us.

BH: Yes, and he wasn't, sounds like he wasn't interested in politics then, the Orange Order or unionism or anything like that.

AS: No, no, he was easy-going man, he just wanted everybody to be happy together, I think that was his, even as a reserve policeman, a lot, you know, Catholics would, used to approach him as well cos he was that type of a guy, you know, he just, whether you're Protestant or Catholic didn't matter, it was the person that mattered, I think that was his outlook on life.

BH: You mentioned there that you went to grammar school, so did that mean you had to do eleven-plus or something like that?

AS: Yeah, well, back then you did the eleven-plus and I think there was eight of, eight pupils that year we did it and there was only two of us passed, myself and Malcolm McFarland.

BH: [laughs] Right.

AS: Oh if Malcolm had've passed and I hadn't my mother would've been in an early grave [laughs].

BH: [laughs] Right, and was this, did you go with Dungannon Royal or something like that?

AS: That's right, yes, yeah.

BH: Right, okay.

AS: So we had to bus it in each day, it was a four-mile bus journey.

BH: Right, okay, so that would have been a fairly big change then I suppose to the small country village school then.



AS: It was, it was a big, cos the grammar school there was a boarding school as well, so you, you know, you maybe had four hundred pupils there in total with the boarding side and the boarders came from all over the world to it, so, but the first year was, well, I can't think of any time in any of the years that I was there that I didn't like it or anybody took to me or, you know, bullied me or anything, there was nothing like that, I was just quiet there. As in one report, oh it was when my, when I was going up to, you had to put in a sort of, I'm trying to think, the headmaster had to write something about you for your universities you'd applied and we were allowed to read it and on his he said Alistair is quiet and he has a few good friends rather than lots of acquaintances, so that was me, I had a few, about three or four guys I used to chum about with and that was about it, I knew lots of people, but not to chum about with or, you know, go to their mother's house for tea, a cup of tea someday or play out during the summertime.

BH: Yeah, so would these other boys that you knew would they have stayed in Dungannon or were they, where would they have been from?

AS: They were more, yeah, Moygashel, around about the area, still the same area, although two of them were Castlecaulfield based as well, but older than me, a couple of years older than me, yeah.

BH: And so what would you have done then outs-, at that stage outside of school then? I suppose you'd just be coming back on the bus to Castlecaulfield each evening.

AS: That's right, yeah, you'd get home about, you'd get home about half four, you did your bit of homework and that was really it.

BH: And then did you, did you kind of have a sense of what you wanted to do whenever you went to the Royal?

AS: No, not at all, it was only in my later, I just wanted to get good qualifications, I didn't even think I wanted to go to university, but we always had to, we were all, all of us have had Saturday jobs. I started working in a men's outfitter and then I, I did that for about four years and then the shoe shop and I always liked retail, but I was always interested in medicine and that's where then I sort of, I don't know how it come, but I thought I'll, I want to do pharmacy cos it gives me the retail side, in retail pharmacy the retail side that I enjoy and also it involves you with medicine and health of people and helping people, which, which sort of suited me on both sides, and that was why then I chose pharmacy, to go ahead and do pharmacy, although the last two years at the Royal I worked in the hospital, I worked in the hospital in south Tyrone, but I worked as a domestic, but I enjoyed the hospital and was able to talk to some of the doctors. At then pharmacy was very much away back in the back room, but, so I never really had much chance for the pharmacist then because it was completely different thirty odd years ago, but you got, you know, and because I had this interest there was a couple of doctors and they were very good, they brought me in to, in fact I stood in on three operations to see that part and, you know, supported you well that way.

BH: So did you, were able to get, you were working in that job while you were still at school?

AS: No, in the summer holidays.

BH: Summer holidays, right.

AS: In the summer holidays, yeah.

BH: Yeah, yeah, and what kind of a place then was Dungannon? That would have been nineteen, late seventies?

AS: Seventies, yeah, seven-, yeah, I left, I went up to university in '76, I went up to Belfast in '76, so like, early sev-, what, '74, '75. Dungannon was, I don't know, other than going in for an hour to shop or going to the chip shop and come home and that, I never did anything, oh go to the pictures, that was it, but I think if I'd have went, if I went to the pictures twice in a year was the height of it.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

AS: Yeah, well, I think not for go, it was moneywise was the main reason, you, it was a treat then.

BH: Yes.

AS: Yeah, so you got some money, but that was it, that was it, so, and also to get into Dungannon was an effort, you, cos there was only daytime buses, there was no evening buses, so you had to go in the daytime.

BH: Yeah, obviously Dungannon's fairly famous as the place where kind of the civil rights movement was kind of born in the earlier part of the sixties, and that was all about, you know, discrimination and housing allocation and things like that.

AS: Yeah.

BH: Was Dungannon a place that you noticed where there were significant, you know, political or sectarian tensions?

AS: At that age no, not at all. I knew there was troubles and there was trouble in it, but either I was oblivious to it or just didn't think about it, and things like that weren't really talked of at home or anything cos, because my father wasn't that into that sort of thing, to taking sides or all, it was just trying to just, you know, steer down the middle and get the best for his family, so that's the way, anything, it was only until sort of a year or two before my father died that when we had a couple of people in the village who had been killed by the other side that I become more aware of things weren't as what the way I thought things were, were just easy and you just got on with life and there was nothing to hassle you.

**[00:30:00]**

BH: So there had been people killed in Castlecaulfield?

AS: In Castlecaulfield and also around about it there was, you know, there was soldiers blown up in culvert mines and stuff like that.

BH: What did you think about that? I mean, were you, did you know what that was about?

AS: Yeah, I knew what it was about, but it, strange looking about, it was one of those things, it happened, it's awful, but you just had to get on with life, cos I remember, you know, the back field, our house run into a back field and the big helicopters from the army used to drop down there and the first or second time you're excited and then after that oh it's a helicopter and it was just part of life, if you know what I mean, it just, there was nothing, I can see, I can see that even nowadays when you see these catastrophes in places like India and all and people just get up and they go on and it's just, you just do it, you have to, you can't get too bogged down in it and I had no interest to getting involved in the political sides of that.

BH: Yeah, were you aware of kind of the political debate, did you know what it was about, about the Union and partition and that kind of thing?

AS: Yes, yeah. I think, although I said earlier we were down the middle, I think both sets of grandparents made you appreciate that you were part of the United Kingdom, because they were there before partition and I think they had to, you know, strive for a lot and to make the Six Counties, you know, or to, they were very aware of that and what they wanted, they didn't, they wanted to be part of the Union and therefore we must want it and we did because that was like, born into it, that was my heritage.

BH: Sure, whenever your dad then joined the RUC reserve, would you have been aware that that was a dangerous occupation to be in?

AS: Yeah, because he did talk to us and it meant, you know, when we were going anywhere like, checking around the car, checking under the car, the car was garaged as well, you had to check around the garage in case there was anything and always be aware. I remember the first thing when he did join we got a chain on the front door, I don't know what that was going to do, but, so you put the chain on before you opened the door to anybody and just things like that, you were aware of it and he made you aware, but not, not in a horrific way that, you know, you must sit in the corner and not do anything ever and hide, it was just be very careful, understand what the possibilities are.

BH: And would you have been anxious about that when you were growing up or was it something you didn't really, you didn't really think about?

AS: No, you just did, again, it's strange looking back, and you just did it because you, just for safety and, but you didn't actually, you weren't, you know, if I went up, even when I was going up, say, we'd kept something in the garage and I had to go up and get it I wasn't afraid to, you know, go up to the garage in case there was a wire across part of the door, you just looked around, if there wasn't you opened it and that was it, and we, my grandmother and father they lived, well, it was a bit, a good five-minute walk from us up a dark lane and my

only fear coming, because the lane wasn't that well lit, we would go over there and then we'd come home, my only fear coming down that, that, it wasn't that somebody would shoot me or kill me, it was just somebody would jump out at me, and I used to run from her front door to the bottom of the lane to where the lights were before I would stop, you know, but it wasn't as if I was afraid oh I'm going to get shot here, it was just somebody jumping out at you and scaring you, that was the main thing.

BH: Yeah, so then what did you do after you finished the Royal school then?

AS: Well, before, before that, before I left, the year I was doing my A-levels, just this week my father was murdered, so that, that caused me a lot of distress.

BH: Sure [pauses]. Take your time.

AS: [weeps] Oh God, after forty odd years and it still [pauses], you block it away until, and then with my A-levels coming up I didn't do as well as I should have, so I'd gone for my second choice, which was food science, and would, I had got enough provis-, at that time [pauses; weeps], at that time food science was, pharmacy was the same as medicine, so I didn't get the grades for that, but unbeknown to me my sister had written to the faculty head and told them the situation, and the teachers and the headmaster had said I should have got enough, so they interviewed me and allowed me to do my first year in general medicine stroke pharmacy and if I passed all the exams I could, I could be let into the further three years to qualify in pharmacy, so that, that happened there, the first year was, because I was away from home as well, a difficult situation, but I think at the back of my mind my father was there saying, you know, this is what I want for you, and so progressed on that.

BH: Was your sister older than you, yes?

AS: Yeah, both sisters are older, so she, that sister, my eldest sister is [pauses], I never knew [indecipherable], she was more of a mother to me than my mother, or more of a mother to us than my mother, my mother had [pauses], she got depression, things like that, so she needed a lot of cajoling along and then, and my sister gave me, I remember my first day at primary school, my eldest sister she took me, it wasn't my mother, and then, you know, she would have sorted out anything and even when I bought my first house, she'd have been the first one I would tell, but her first, I mean, you know, have you got enough money, are you going to be short, have you got this, have you looked at that, she always sort of would've thrown up the things that you need to look at rather than just walking blindfolded, I can have this house because I'm earning a certain wage and, so yeah, she's very important then and still is very important even after all these years, as I say, she was, in fact when I qualified and we got graduation a neighbour asked my mother what I'd graduated and she said, what, you know, he went to Queen's, I'm not really sure, you know, she was that, if it didn't involve mother it didn't exist sort of thing. Oh God, you're getting all the dirt spilt [laughs], so yeah, and then I went up to university, the first year I stayed in a lady's house that had, you know, had, she was a spinster and she let out her rooms, so I did that for the first year, then after that I'd met somebody and we moved in together, so as after that we had a house that we lived in for the rest of my university life.

BH: And that, I mean, that's, that's a big move for anybody to move from the family home in Castlecaulfield to Belfast, but obviously to move in the aftermath of your father's death would have been, would have been difficult I guess, like.

AS: Yeah, it was, the only, the plus thing again was I had a cousin who was also starting uni-, a different university, but he was two streets from me and we got on very well, so that was a big plus, so I wasn't totally alone, and then when I started the pharmacy, in fact from the second lecture I think I met somebody, a guy, and he was from Enniskillen and we clicked straight away. He lived nearby and in fact we were that close I was his groomsman at his wedding and last year I was over at his daughter's wedding, you know, and it was just one of those things, and in fact there was about ten years we never even spoke with any, cos I went to New Zealand for a year and then when I come back, you know, I didn't pick up all my things, but after a while, you know, after ten years we were, I'd just email him one time or rang him and we just, as if we never had that missing part in between. His life had changed a lot too and it's fine, you know, we're, we talk now, but you're talking maybe if it's twice a year it'll be the height of it, but that's enough, if you know what I, if you understand.

BH: Yes, [00:40:00] so you're saying that you formed a close friendship very early on whenever you moved to Belfast.

AS: Yes, yeah.

BH: And that was a help, was it?

AS: It was, it was that, and then later on in sort of the Easter term I formed a relationship with another guy who was working and we were together about six years, so that was a big help.

BH: You were together as partners, like?

AS: Yes, yeah, yeah.

BH: Right, so, I mean, that's quite a big event as well in terms of-

AS: Especially coming from a small village in Castlecaulfield, to even think that anybody was gay, ever [laughs].

BH: Well, well, that, but also I suppose I'm thinking of the time period, which is kind of 1970s in Belfast, you know.

AS: It was very difficult and even, we used to go down a couple, I met him in a place in Belfast, Crow's Nest it was called, just behind the cathedral, which was sort of the gay pub and it was difficult, you know, going in, you sort of were walking up and down streets and then trying to furtively just go down this, into the pub, but it wasn't good and before I met him, twice, before I met him that time I actually had been to the doctor and had one lot, well, quite a bit of counselling to try and change me.

BH: Really? Right, okay.

AS: Yes, and it didn't really work, so then I had some medication to try and change me, but that didn't, well, it did, it's not that it didn't work, I just, it was too stressful and, which was strange in those days, the, the psychologist they sent me to, now looking back on it he was a minister, he was, you know, and I just think nowadays to think of sending somebody to get help and support and it's a minister who was trying to change you.

BH: Sure, yeah.

AS: So, as I say, I, oh he had all strange things he wanted me to do like, when I was thinking about particular men not to think and go s-, it was weird, and then when I had the tablets that changed me a lot, it, because it was a tablet than reduced your male hormone levels, so you stopped shaving and you stopped having any feelings at all and, and when they started, when I weaned off it the feelings were still there, so you just thought this isn't going to, but it was the way there because, you know, back in the seventies this was a disease, it was something, it wasn't, and because of that I wanted to change cos I didn't want to be abnormal, that's the way I felt, it was abnormal, I shouldn't have been feeling like this, but I think, even back then, I think if my father had still been alive I would have been able to and he would have accepted, he was that type of a person. My mother would have screamed the house down, in fact my mother she knew I was gay, but we never discussed, I didn't ever, I never come out to my mother, you just didn't, it wasn't just something, you know, she knew because I had partners and things like that, but you never come, but yeah, at that time it was difficult and you wanted just the easy way, so I thought psychology might help, these tablets might help and therefore everything's, cos I've had girlfriends as well and that was easier, but you always had this in the back of your head, it was easier because you could go out to things, you know, everything was normal, everything was acceptable.

BH: Sure, when did you become aware of this? Was this before university or was it after, when you went to Belfast?

AS: Oh no, it was, that I had feelings for guys, for men, oh God, as a twelve-year-old, I'm sure.

BH: Oh really? Right, okay.

AS: Yeah, in fact at, and this, I am really opening up, but that Malcolm McFarland we used to have some fun together [laughs].

BH: Is that right? [laughs]

AS: Yes, you know, we used to go over the fields and I remember there was this cowshed and we used to have fun in there [laughs].

BH: Is that right?

AS: Yeah.

BH: What if somebody had have found out around Castlecaulfield? That wouldn't have went down well I guess, like.

AS: Oh no, and that's why we went there and then once everything, once we were moving home it was never spoke about, nothing, it wasn't even thought about until you were in that situation again, it was just too, it was too drastic to even think about, you wouldn't even have thought, you know, what have we done, we just, it was blocked totally out of your mind.

BH: Right, well, when you went to Belfast then and you started going to the Crow's Nest and so on, and then you said you tried some of these, you know, treatments and so on, but at that-

AS: I was, no, that was slightly different, in that I met up with this guy and we were together four years and it was after that, we split up and I took that very rough and I said I don't want to go through all this again because you had nobody to talk to, you know, you couldn't tell anybody oh I've split up with my boyfriend or something like that, although the people had meant something to you, and I went through a very bad patch at that time, I used to be quite a big guy, I was about fourteen stone and I went down to nine and a half stone and I just couldn't hack it at all, in fact the GP wanted me to go into Downpatrick, I was still working at the time as a pharmacist and I could do that okay, but once I left the protection of my work and what I was doing and focused I used to just, I lived in the country at that time and I used to just walk the streets, you know, just walking up and down lanes, and I had a dog at the time and that's the only thing that saved me, and I went down to that, so then, you know, it was a doctor suggested, you know, what else can we do, so he was okay, but then he put me to this psychologist and that's where he had suggested about you'd be happier without being gay and, and that's where all that psychology and then the medication came in, but that-

BH: And that whole time then did your, you know, did your, any of your sisters or brothers or, you know, your mum, did they know you'd had a four-year relationship with that guy?

AS: My mother would have, yeah, had some inkling, yeah, well, that there was somebody, a male that I was very close to, put it like that, that's what she'd have known, not, yeah.

BH: And what about your sisters then and other people you would have known from back home?

AS: Yeah, well, that friend of mine that I was, that I'd been to his wedding and his daughter's wedding, he knew cos we would have socialised with them, and although he was from Enniskillen and, you know, quite, cos we were mates and friends before he knew that it was okay, you know, well, we never really talked about it just, Pe-, my partner at that time was Peter, Peter was there and it was just accepted and, you know, it's like anything, it's when you start thinking beyond the person and people think when you're gay, people don't think of the two people, they think of what they get up to in bed and that's the issue people have rather than it's just two people and that's as far as it needs to go, so they were fine for that,

and another couple that I was friendly with through the dog club they were fine, you know, fine, I don't know whether fine with it is the word, but they just accepted it.

BH: Accepted it, yeah.

AS: Yeah, yeah.

BH: I take it from that then that there was no such thing as like, a, like a nascent gay scene in Belfast at that time, there was nothing like that.

AS: Well, it was very underground, you know, that's what, you know, I feel sometimes the younger people now they've, they sometimes think they're having it hard, but the only place you could meet anybody was either in a public toilet or this Crow's Nest and that was it, everything was underground and furtive and it made everything feel seedy and dirty and that, so you had to try and live with that as well as being gay, you had to think well, I'm going to these places and, you know, they're not places you really want to go to meet people, but it's the only place you had, and then one time there was a place up in Belfast which was, people used to go there and sort of walk about to pick up people, and at this time I just wanted to meet somebody, I just wanted to, and I went up there and I got mugged there and that just, this just was, just awful, it just added to everything, cos at that time I just wanted somebody to, I still think it, I don't know whether it's a throwback with my father as well, I just wanted some male company, just somebody to hold me, somebody that was stronger than my mother because my mother wasn't strong at all, and I went up there, there was a place, you know, somebody had, somebody had said oh you could go there, it's quite nice, you know, it's nice and you can meet some nice people and [00:50:00] all I heard was this crowd of people running through the place and they caught up with me and mugged me and that really [pauses], it changed things for me a lot, you know.

BH: Yeah, changed in what way, like?

AS: You just, you, that's, that was another factor in wanting to change, I didn't want to be gay, I don't want this, I don't, I can't deal with all this all the time, and so I suppose it was from both sides. I went to the doctor, I need help with this and that was the only help you got in those days, was psychology to make you change or, and medication to make you not want to do what you didn't particularly want to do.

BH: Sure, I'm conscious as well when you're telling me this, kind of the backdrop to this is also that the Troubles going on in Belfast.

AS: Yeah.

BH: Did that impinge upon your life in any way at that time or was that a completely separate thing for you?

AS: No, it was there, and I've seen times I've been down the road and it was just cordoned off and you just stood back and there was a whole, a place blown up and or something and you just, again, it was, people nowadays must think there's something wrong with you,



you'd be watching, oh it's got blown up and no, nobody's hurt, that's fine, you just went on about your business, it was just as it was, if you know what, understand, and it was the same later on when I worked in places that got blown up, you know, I worked in a pharmacy in Lisburn and we got out, oh no, it was that night, somebody had left an incendiary, it was burned to the ground, three days later we were working out of a Portakabin and you just, you just did.

BH: Yeah, it sounds like for you in a way the more fearful thing or the thing which was more dangerous was trying to meet people, that—

AS: I think so, the Troubles were, you could, you could avoid, you, well, you knew where not to go, you knew how to keep yourself safe, that was, but it was, the other thing that's more personal to you was the more difficult thing.

BH: Sure, well, after then you attempted those treatments and you said, you know, you eventually realised that, you know, the, you know, this isn't going to work basically, what did you do then?

AS: Well, it wasn't going to work, but I had a female relationship for a couple of years and, as I say, it wasn't complete for me, if you know what I mean, so I just let that go and then we, I met another guy and we started a relationship and then that's when I was [pauses], he was a married guy, which was difficult as well, so it was very, but it worked well, you know, because, as I say, for two years, but again, he wasn't difficult, you know, he was Catholic, which was difficult as well, so there was no way he would have left his wife of the time and he was quite strong that way that, you know, yes, we could be together, but he wouldn't leave his wife and I knew that and I needed more than that, so then that went by the way and about a year later I met somebody else who was gay and had been gay and was quite, and totally different to what my upbringing was, he was a grandmaster or a past master in the Orange Order, he, he used to go to every disco in the land and very flamboyant and oh God, when I look back it was just not, not somebody I would have picked for me, but it happened and it worked well, we were together for sixteen years and—

BH: Really? Right.

AS: Yeah, yeah, so.

BH: You see, because the perception that would often, you would often have I suppose of, in particular of maybe Protestant unionist culture and definitely Orange culture, is that it would be, you know, misogynistic, homophobic and so on.

AS: Oh very much, he had to keep it quiet on his side, but then after a few years he just, I am what I am and that's what he said, but there was a lot of fallouts with people in the lodge and him, you know, but I didn't get involved with that because the lodge didn't appeal to me at all. He used to do his own thing and, you know, his meetings and Twelfth of Julys and everything, but my side was more the dog end, I was, I used to train dogs, go to dog clubs and that, that was more my outlet, and then he come over, when I moved to England in '91 he come over with me.

BH: Ah right, so you, after university then you pretty much stayed in Northern Ireland then?

AS: Yeah, I did, yeah, I did. I worked for Ernest Baird for a while, I don't know if you would know the politician, he was a politician and he had pharmacies, and then I left him and I went to Connors as second pharmacist and then worked my way up there to become their area manager, they had about eighteen stores in Northern Ireland, who after I left had been bought up by Boots, but then I moved over to England and I always wanted to change my job because I got as far on as I could with the group I was in and there was nothing else available in Northern Ireland, they're all small independents, and I'd applied for a few jobs over in England and had, in those days pharmacists in England were so short that you could have got a job anywhere, you could have went over on the boat on the Sunday night and had a job on Monday morning, and the big thing that made it easy to actually do the move was Jeffrey lived in Manchester, my brother lived in Manchester, and he was moving down to London for two years, so his house was available, so it meant that I had a job, there was accommodation there, it was easy. So I moved over, or we moved over, and after about six months living in his house I decided to buy cos I just thought this is where I want to be, there's so much more going on, I don't even mean in the village, in the gay village in Manchester or anything, I just meant everything. You could go places without having to get on a plane to go to them because, you know, at home if you wanted anywhere outside Ireland it was either a boat or a plane, so you go down and see something in Birmingham or Stafford or down to London on a train with no bother. I love, I've always liked theatres, and the theatre was so accessible there, so it was just a different lifestyle altogether.

BH: So was the main motivation then for moving in 1991, was that about work then?

AS: Yeah, cos I needed some, if I've been doing something too long and I'm too, I know how it works, I get bored and I need always something to be striving for, I'm always that one, I need something to motivate me all the time, to keep me going, and that was the main reason, as I say, I done, I can't do anything here. In fact, before accepting the job over there I'd applied to the prison service as a governor, cos I wanted something to push me and all, and I'd got through all the interviews, but the last interview though, face to face, they weren't happy to give me a job at that level because of my father's death, how he was murdered. I think they must have thought I was going to go in and get all the Catholics and gas them all or something like that [laughs], you know the way they had those thoughts in those days, but I, it was the job I wanted and I think, you know, I was quite good at managing people because, you know, some of the, you know, there was fifteen shops, I was over the pharmacists there and their dispensary staff, so I knew, I know that the prison officer is a different kettle of fish, but I think, you know, with training and support I could've done a good, but that wasn't to be, they just, that was, and they told me frankly that that was the reason, they don't think it would've been the job for me with the past, so then I thought well, I need to do something, I can't spend the next thirty years of my life in Northern Ireland just pottering about, that would put me in the funny farm, so yeah, I come over, '91, worked for a group of pharmacies for a couple of years and then an independent, he had two pharmacies, I managed one of his for, until 2001 and then again I needed to do something, so I, I was with my partner that come across from Northern Ireland, I got a job in New Zealand, we'd been to New Zealand a few times on holidays and it's like a busman's

holiday, if you go any country and there's a pharmacy [01:00:00] you go in and see how they do things and that, so I'd been there and this guy had said well, we're short of pharmacists here, if at any time you want just let me know and he would do the paperwork and so worked in, I went out there for a year and I probably would have stayed longer, but at that time the money wasn't great there, you know, I was, had to up my hours to forty-five hour week and I really couldn't save anything, cos everything was so expensive out there when you were being paid in their currency, and also there was cracks in the relationship as well that, so I stayed there for a year, then come back and started doing locums initially for a couple of years, I come back in 2002.

BH: Came back to Manchester, was this?

AS: Manchester, yes, yeah, because the house I had bought after I left my brother's house I just locked it up and had it all set up with the estate agent that if I decided a hundred per cent to stay out there they would have sold it for me, but I knew after about six months there with, with the long hours I didn't want to work that length of hours and not have any extra money coming in, my partner didn't work and there was cracks in the relationship, and I didn't fancy being out there and I felt if we split up out there it would, although New Zealand is very open to gays, trans, everything like that, I felt it's a small country again, it felt to me it's like being back in Northern Ireland again, if I was on my own again, so I thought there's more options in Manchester, so I headed back, or we headed back again, and a year after that we split up.

BH: Right, I'm just wondering because, you know, you moved over there to Manchester in 1991, had it never occurred to you before that to move, you know, to, you know, Manchester, London or somewhere like that?

AS: Not, not a thing, I was content and happy cos I was enjoying my pharmacy, I was working through the ranks in the job I was in, had the friends, had the dogs, I competed in dog shows and obedience and agility and it was all good. It was just that, you know, I got to the top of what, you know, in the dog world, you know, I was competing in the top competition in everything, so there was nothing more to do there, I was a level one trainer in that, I'd got the pharmacy superintend-, assistant to the superintendent, and the guy above me he was only five years older than me, so he wasn't going to opt out, and he had family, so he wasn't going to go and do a change of career at that stage, so that was, that was that.

BH: And were you able to live an openly gay lifestyle at that stage with your partner from the Orange Order?

AS: In, in the dogs, I never mixed my work life with my home life, never. In fact, it's not even a thing I do now and everybody knows I'm gay, it's just, I always feel it just can put you in compromise if you have to deal with somebody, so I've never really had any need for anybody, I've enough friends now that are not connected with my work to not need, you know, it's like, we get on well, everybody gets on well at work, you know, I'll, I can chat to them, things like that, but I don't socialise with them.

BH: Yeah, so what then was it like when you moved over to Manchester? Was it a good move like, were you glad you had did it?

AS: It was, it gave me more, I had to sort of push myself again, in every way, both work, you know, there's new things to do, there was new things to explore and people to meet, you know, just different people, it was easier to meet and, people were, that were gay, but most of the people that were gay that we met were in relationships. The village, I rarely went, it didn't appeal to me at all, it was just too over the top for me, although my partner, he would have loved it cos he was different, you know, and, as I say, that was, you know, Manchester did and I still, you know, I would find, you know, if somebody said, you know, home is always Northern Ireland, but if I said I'd be at home it'd be Manchester, you know.

BH: Manchester, yeah.

AS: Yeah, when I'm over, you know, there or, you know, or if I'm on holiday, you know, it's always home is Manchester.

BH: And these friends that, the friendship network that you've built up in Manchester, would these have all been English people or were they from Northern Ireland or Ireland?

AS: A lot of them, well, some of them are from Ireland, but a lot of them are, and unless you're into it in a big way, it's the dog fraternity.

BH: Dog fraternity, right.

AS: Yeah, I have, you know, three years ago we went to spend time with friends in Melbourne that I've met through the dogs, you know, I've had one of her breed that she sent, a bitch to Finland, and I've friends in Finland that we got a puppy from that and all that, so yeah, I've been, friends, just seem to be a lot through the dog thing, and a lot of friends, and the gay friends that we have, I think there's only one couple we have that aren't involved with dogs, the other gay friends are through, all through dogs, who either—

BH: Dogs as well, right.

AS: Yeah, who either bought puppies off us or we know through the show scene.

BH: And was your partner, was he involved with the dogs too or—?

AS: He was, but more on my coat-tails, if you know what I mean.

BH: Right, okay.

AS: Cos once we split up he just didn't bother with the dogs again, he was happy with his make-up and his, he had a partner before we split up, you know, the drag, drag, drag and all that sort of thing, and I definitely don't look good in tights.

BH: [laughs] And did, I'm just thinking, I mean, you know, Manchester in 1991 like, there were some bombs and things in Manchester, you know, I'm thinking here about, about the IRA and stuff like that.

AS: Yeah.

BH: And with your partner having that kind of background in the Orange Order and so on, how did you adapt to life in England from that perspective?

AS: Well, he only went home for the Twelfth of July, we went home at other times to see family, but the only time he always went home was for Twelfth of July. He didn't join any, there are, you know, in Southport and different there's Orange lodges here, but he didn't join any of those, he was happy enough with, that was enough for him then as well, for what he was doing that, and as for the bother in like, the time of the bomb down at the Arndale, no, we never really got any, nobody gave us any hassle about that, there was nobody about, and the only thing when it happened, you know, it's typical small mind, Irish people is, you know, they were all ringing, I was alright, you know, they thought that, you know, I lived in the Arndale, it was sort of two streets round, everybody saying is he near, it's like one time, as I say, we were on our way to Australia and the plane was, we were changing the planes in Bangkok and there was a bomb in Bangkok and people were emailing us, Facebooking us, where are you, are you alright, thinking, you know, but it was always the ones from Northern Ireland think that, oh this plane it just landed beside that, and it was the same from there, the number of people that rang and left messages if they couldn't get through, you know, will you ring us, where are you, because I think they thought well, if, but I suppose it's the same, people sometimes, you know, if there's a big bomb in Belfast people used to, you know, English people would have rung you and gone, you know, are you alright, are you safe there [laughs], but yeah, that, you know, there was no problem with that or with any, I've never had any bother with anybody with me being, with them being English and me being Northern Ireland accent cos my accent's still quite pronounced and people will comment on it, but not, you know, what are you doing in this country and all that.

BH: Well, yeah, that's kind of what I was getting at, I was wondering, you know, did you encounter any hostility or anything like that?

AS: Other than one time in a, or a couple of times in work when we've refused somebody a sale because we think they're addict to it or something like that, bloody Irishmen coming over and telling me I can't have what I want and that, and that's, but nothing, nothing untoward.

BH: Yeah, what about I suppose the, just Irishness like, people from, you know, a Protestant unionist [01:10:00] background, were people alert to that or would they have just assumed, would they have just seen you as Irish I suppose?

AS: Yeah, you mean over here?

BH: Over here, yeah.

AS: Yeah, yeah, everybody just think you're Irish. I'd say Northern Ireland, yeah, cos I remember one time getting stopped, cos I had Northern Ireland plates on the car, one car I had here, and they stopped, the police stopped me and, you know, I was going to work one morning and they stopped me, where are you going, all this and, you know, looked at the front, oh you've Irish plates, I says no, I've Northern Ireland plates on my car, and he said oh right, and then he was fine, he said right, go on, but it is very much it's Irish, you know, everything, and it's from my upbringing, I'm very much, you know, Northern Ireland or Ulster, that's, that's what I am.

BH: Yeah, and you don't think, I mean, were people in Manchester, English people, were they interested in the Troubles? Did they, you know, did they enquire about it?

AS: No, not, not really, you know, the odd comment, you know, you know, when they heard something bad, oh I take it everybody's okay at home are they, you know, just normal things that you'd say, but they wouldn't, they wouldn't, I don't think anybody was close enough to sort of, to ask you lots of things about it, they just accepted that, you know, who were you were and that was it, and maybe sometimes with one of close friends they would, you know, you'd talk about what happened when, a bit like what we're doing now, they would say God, what was it like when you were up at university, but it was more close friends like that, not some of your acquaintances or work colleagues.

BH: So would these close friends, would they have known about your father?

AS: Unless they're very close, unless I've known a long time, the ones you mean in England?

BH: The ones in England, yeah.

AS: Yes, I've never, you know, he just, he died and that was it, there was only, I just felt it would stir up too much and I couldn't, I didn't know how I would react if they wanted me to explain what happened. The friend from Enn-, who lives, who's always been in Enniskillen that I was, mentioned earlier on about being at his wedding and his, he always knew, you know, from early on because we just seemed to click well enough on that, and he had lost his parents anyway in a car crash when he was young because he had, he went to some school down in Dublin through some, some society his parents were in, so it was sort of a similar type loss with that.

BH: Sure, yeah, when you'd moved over to England at this stage, I suppose even when you went to New Zealand and then came back, did you continue to follow the politics of Northern Ireland, for example, the peace process and so on?

AS: Yeah, I would have looked at it on the BBC and stuff like that, but not, I'm not, I've very much the attitude if I'm, can't do anything about it, you know, I just, well, there's other people, it's like lots of things, like Brexit, everything there, I can't do anything about it, maybe I don't want to do anything about it, so I haven't got the motivation to do it because it just, I find it, it's not, I just want the easier life, I just want things to be, I don't want to get

that, go into any conflict, so yeah, I'll keep up to date with what's going on and I'll get feedbacks from home and all, but I don't get involved.

BH: Sure, what about other Irish people that you would've met then in England? So Manchester, for example, has a big Irish community, or at least it used to have anyway.

AS: Yeah, it had, we've friends, we've had twenty-five years now, a couple, her husband's dead now, but she, her parents were from Ballyclare and she's Catholic and she's a very staunch Catholic, cos he, when his funeral, it's only the second Catholic funeral I've been to, and he had a full requiem mass and I thought it was going to go on forever and ever [laughs], it, you know, you thought when it was coming to an end it started another page and I, phew, but that's what she wanted and it went on for I think nearly two hours or it felt like that, whereas, you know, at home half an hour and, you know, you don't want to, you don't want to sort of detain people too more, too long at the graveside, you want them to get them a cup of tea and a sandwich, so yeah, she was, they're fine and, but we don't talk, we don't talk politics, I think that's one thing we just, you know, I don't think we could, it would, I don't think it would aim to gain anything from it, we just know who we are on each side, she wouldn't be one bang-, banging the drum for a united Ireland, she just, you know, they let them get on with what they have to do, what they need to do over there.

BH: Sure, and would that be the same with other Irish people you would encounter, you just don't, you just don't, you stay off politics?

AS: Yeah, that's it, unless drink has been taken and then that's the worst thing ever [laughs], cos then you get a loose, you get a loose tongue and then that would go nowhere. I had a friend, he's died as well, and I remember one time, he was a very staunch Catholic as well, and oh it nearly come to blows one night after we'd had too much, many whiskies and we're never going to go down that route again [laughs].

BH: [laughs] Right, and how did that happen?

AS: Well, we just had been drinking and then and he had said something about, he had asked me had I an Irish passport, a green Irish passport, and when you're drunk like that you say what the hell do you mean, and then, and then he says oh yous are all the same, yous are like Paisley, and I said I'm nothing like that Paisley man [laughs], and then he started to, you know, you come over here and you get jobs, and we started then arguing and then swear words went on and the next morning it was just God, what were we up at.

BH: [laughs] So yous were able to make up after that again?

AS: Oh God yes, it was just so stupid, cos we were good mates, it was just the drink that took everything out of, cos we would never have done that, you know, even with the drink we would sometimes banter something and that's [indecipherable], but this got into seriousness, if you know what I mean.

BH: Yes.

AS: It went down and it was the drink and it was definitely drink and I think God no, and he says we'll avoid that in future, I says yes, we will.

BH: Yeah [laughs], right, and I take it this guy wouldn't have known about like, your father and things like that?

AS: No, no, and I never told him, although I was very close to him he was, he was a lovely man, he was lovely and very compassionate and very giving and all, you know, he was always kind, very kind. His partner was a different kettle of fish, he was Catholic and he was typical Catholic as my grandmother would say, he was always out to get what he could grab for [laughs], that's what my grandmother says, they're only out for what they can get [laughs], so, but, but Steve, who was the one I got on best with, you know, he, I was very close to him, it meant a lot when he died, you know, to me, I felt very lonely, even though I had my own partner, it was just he was one of those close friends that, you know, you could just be with and not talk about anything, just be happy there.

BH: Yeah, and where was he from, what part of—?

AS: He's over in Stockport.

BH: Stockport, but he was from somewhere in Northern Ireland as well, is that right?

AS: No, probably well back, but no, but his family were very, his mother was a staunch Catholic and so was he, well, he wasn't, he didn't go to church all the time, but, you know, he followed, he was a good Catholic, put it like that, he was a good Catholic.

BH: Yeah, so during these times then did you return back to Northern Ireland? Once you had moved over to Manchester, did you come back for holidays and so on?

AS: Other than holi-, when my mother was alive I would have been back at least four times a year, but since she's died it's only once a year and that's only, every November we get together for a family meal and I always go over for that, but this year it was cancelled because of—

BH: Covid, yeah.

AS: There's no, yeah, so, but yeah, that's the only thing, sister, my sister's been over, my elder sister that I mentioned to you earlier, she's been over a couple of times with her husband, but I've no pull now for Northern Ireland at all to, other than to meet up with family and then after a day of that I just want to come home, if you know what I mean.

BH: Yeah, so, I mean, that sounds like quite a big, in terms of your life it's quite a big change because, you know, you, after finishing university you did stay in Northern Ireland for a quite a long time and it was your home and then you moved, but now you wouldn't consider going back at all.



AS: Not at all. In fact, I've, I'm very proactive and my funeral is planned and everything like that, so even my ashes are going up to Scotland to be scattered, they're not going home.

BH: Why up into Scotland in particular? [01:20:00]

AS: I spent, well, about ten, I've friends up there and they had a croft and they used to let me have it every Christmas, until they sold it, for about ten years, and I used to take the dogs up, we used to go up every Christmas, and there was along, a forest we went to along the Moray Firth and I've run the dogs there, we used to go out early morning, cos we stayed in the croft, but we ate all our meals with our friends, so we'd nothing to do, just, so we did walks and walks and I just feel that that's where I want to be. I can feel the dogs will be there with me and I'll be there and, and that's just where I feel I want to be. I've no, my brother asked me the other week well, do you not want some of your ashes brought back to the family grave, and I told him that is the last place I ever want to be, I don't even like going there, in Castlecaulfield, it is nothing but pain for me and I certainly don't want to spend my afterlife there either.

BH: Right, so it seems, it's taken you quite a while over the course of your life to come to that perception.

AS: Yeah.

BH: Did moving to England trigger that perception more?

AS: Yes, it, it released me, you know, it felt that there was, my life was more than just what was in Northern Ireland. I, I feel people are very insular there now and, but I'm saying that there, I find people in Manchester, I work with people and, you know, I says oh have you been to such and such a do, no, and they've hardly been out of the, you know, if it's Chadderton or Failsworth, they've hardly been out of there, you know, you get the same everywhere, but for me I felt it's too insular for me there to go back, it wouldn't give me any satisfaction, I'd feel choked if I went back to live there again, although my brother he just loves it.

BH: Yeah, and when you say choked and when you say pain, is that because of the memory of what happened to your father or is that more to do with your sexual identity?

AS: Not, not even sexual, but choked would be, choked, I would've nothing to do, you know, where can you go to the theatre, where can you go to this when you, not, I don't think my sexual identity is any issue now, I think I'm well past that now, I'm totally out, you know, I've no qualms, you know, you know, if somebody said oh what's, you go into somebody and they say oh does your wife work in pharmacy, no, it's not, it's my partner, but he's been a primary schoolteacher, you know, I've no qualms and that, whereas years ago I would have said oh, oh yes, my wife, no, she, and I would have stuttered over everything, in panic. The pain is, that pain I suggested is only when I go up to that graveyard, when I go inside the gates of that I just, it is just, it just, it's horrific for me, I just can't deal with it, I just hate it, cos the last time I was there, I've been up, my mother was buried about six years ago, or her ashes were laid there, I've been then and I've been once, I went again once after that just to

see the grave and it does nothing for me, it just, it just causes me pain, but outside that, Northern Ireland's fine, but I just find it choked and it, God, you know, it's like being without air, you know, what do you do when you sort of, when you've nothing else to do, you just sort of sit and read a book or—

BH: So it sounds like moving to England then has been a release from some of that then.

AS: It has, it has, it's, and it's made me a lot freer than what I would have ever been, I think I would have probably churned along and just did what sort of everybody needed you to do and that sort of thing.

BH: So do you ever think you wish you had have went sooner, you know, 1980s or seventies or—?

AS: No, I don't think I would've been ready for it then. I think I wouldn't have been strong enough then, and I think the, probably the time there it gave me confidence to build myself up with being able to get, you know, the way I've done in the different things in the dog world, in the pharmacies, I was able to do it, my father knew I was able to do it, but I didn't know it, you know, I wasn't, was never, I'm still not a hundred per cent confident, but I'm a lot more confident than I ever was in Northern Ireland in the early days, and those things that I worked through and pursued gave me more confidence to make the move, and then England sort of made it that yes, you'd done the right thing.

BH: Yeah. I think I have asked all my questions, but the final kind of question that I always ask is, is there anything that I haven't asked about which you think's important or that we should talk about?

AS: Just give me a résumé again of what you're trying to obtain for this, I had read it, but just to see if there's anything.

BH: Well, it's a very broad based thing, really what we're interested in was people's experiences of migrating to England during the time of the Troubles, and kind of the two big sort of aspects of that I suppose were the ways in which the Troubles affected people when they were living in Northern Ireland and if that affected their decision to move over or it affected how they moved over.

AS: Ah right, right.

BH: And then the other side of it was when you're living in England, how, how was the Troubles really portrayed within English society and did that have an impact on people, those were the kind of things, but that's very broad, you know, it could have been anything.

AS: Yeah, no, yeah, I think it's covered, and I think I've been very fortunate in England in that I didn't have really any backlash off it, so that made it, probably if I did I would have said I probably might have moved back, but no, I, it's been, England's been okay, it's been good.

BH: Sure, I mean, one of the things that's came up, sometimes when I have [distracted by whispering voice near AS's microphone], sometimes when I've interviewed Protestant people from Northern Ireland, it's not so much a backlash that they talk about, but sometimes they're disappointed or frustrated that actually they find English people don't really care for Northern Ireland and actually would be quite glad to see it kind of chopped off [laughs], and actually support unification.

AS: Right.

BH: For some Protestant people I suppose, who maybe have a strong sense of British identity or Orange identity, they're quite upset by that, but then of course some people just aren't concerned with that at all, you know.

AS: A lot of, a lot of the friends I have, because I think it's, they just don't, they just take me as a person, they don't, I don't think they want to go any deeper whether, well, what about Northern Ireland, I think people have their own lives and just, well, it doesn't involve them and if it involves me I have to deal with it, but, and I, you know, I would be the, one of those ones, I never want to see the partition of Northern Ireland from the Union because I just feel I have too much there, my, my, sort of my history is from, from there, you know, from the, my grandmother who I knew, even my great-grandmother I knew, and to let that all go, but I don't, I don't think you'll see me standing on the Shankill with a big banner any day soon if it happens, if it happens it has to happen, but for me I wouldn't want it to happen, I like being British, I think being British has for the four countries has a lot to offer and I can't see a benefit for the South of Ireland to take on another two million people and work and pay for that when their situation isn't, because I, I have friends in the South of Ireland and things aren't as rosy there as they make out, you know, things are tight there, unemployment, etcetera, so I don't see it, any benefit, and I really don't understand why these hardcore people still want it to happen.

BH: Do you think people in England have any interest in Northern Ireland remaining as part of the United Kingdom?

AS: I think at the minute, the way with, between Scotland wanting to go as well I think a lot of the, probably not a lot, some of the English that I would be, would want it to go because I think it's just a sponge mopping up the excess money that's here, I feel that, and that's people saying it that have no connection at all, [01:30:00] they just think it's a sponge, both Scotland and Northern Ireland, and they'd be better rid of them, but overall I don't think it's a benefit to the Union. I think Wales will always be attached to England because that's the Welsh for you [laughs].

BH: [laughs] And does that bother you whenever you hear that kind of attitude from English people?

AS: Yes, but I wouldn't, it bothers me, it makes me sad that that's what they feel, but unless they were close friends to me I wouldn't, I would never take them on, you know, it's, if that's what they want to, you know, I wouldn't go out and preach well, we need this and that, but if it was a close friend I would say well, can you not understand from my side and

what it is and try and educate them that way, but if it was just an acquaintance or somebody, you know, I'll say well, if that's what you want that's what you want.

BH: Yeah, you don't think, since moving to England has your sense of your Irish identity, has that strengthened or weakened or is that not changed at all?

AS: Now when you say, when you say that, that's where I would pull you on my Northern Irish.

BH: Northern Irish identity, yeah.

AS: My Northern Irish identity, no, I would say it's similar to what it's been.

BH: Similar to what it's been.

AS: Yeah.

BH: Cos sometimes you get people from Protestant backgrounds who come over with the idea of being British and then after a period move strongly in the direction of becoming Irish.

AS: Right.

BH: I've seen that happen as well, but that doesn't apply to you.

AS: No, not, not in this country, but say if we're ever on holiday, and we've been to Australia or New Zealand, and oh you're Irish, and you just say yes, cos that's the easiest way, but in this country, no, I'm Northern Ireland cos they know, they should know the difference, they live within, within a thirty minutes' flight of it, so they should know and they should be educated, but somebody in Australia or in America, well, America you just tell them yes and they're so happy if you are Irish cos they want to buy you a drink.

BH: [laughs] Right, yeah, yeah.

AS: But no, sorry, just to say, my Northern Ireland would be the same as what I left it with and I'm happy at that level.

BH: Yeah, I suppose maybe that has something to do with the fact as well that I guess you left when you were a bit older, as in you didn't come over when you were kind of eighteen, it was, you were already, you'd spent many years living in Northern Ireland—

AS: That's right, yeah.

BH: Before that, yeah.

AS: Yeah.

BH: Yeah, yeah. Okay, listen Alistair, unless you've got some other topics that you want to cover I think I've covered everything.

AS: No, that seems to be, that's been, it's quite therapeutic for me as well I think, it's been quite good [laughs].

BH: Well, that's great.

AS: It, it, it, it stirred up things that you think you've dealt, you, and then you dealt with again and again, but, you know, no, that was, no, I'm quite motivated now after being allowed to talk about all those things.

BH: Well, I'm really glad that you got something out of it because—

AS: Well, I hope you, I hope it's been beneficial to you and your project as well.

BH: It definitely has, it definitely has, but it's always good to hear when the other person has got something too because I don't think always everybody does, you know, so I'm, I'm glad you enjoyed it.

AS: That's grand, yeah, good.

BH: Okay, listen Alistair, thanks very much again for giving up your time and just to, one last thing to say, if you want to follow what we're doing with the rest of the project or anything like that, don't hesitate to drop me an email any time, and as well as that we've got a website, there's not much on it yet, but eventually there will be stuff going onto it and again, if you type in the, you know, the title of the project that'll come up automatically, you know, and you can search around the website, but yeah, other than that just—

AS: Barry, just before you go, what is the length of time of this project? When do you hope to call it to an end like, how long have you set out?

BH: The data collection, the interviews and so on, it's a three-year project and I think it started 2019, so I think it's 2022 is the official end date when the funding runs out, but then after that there'll be, you see, I suppose the publication of articles and books and things, it'll be another two or three years after that really, so you're talking maybe, what is it now, 2020, 2024 I would say, hopefully by that stage we'll have most of the things we want to do done by then I would have thought like, you know.

AS: So it's not something I'll read next, in June next year?

BH: Not in June next year, but, you know, there will be articles, you know, there'll be academic articles will be, you know, potentially, aye, maybe not June, but maybe September, maybe there'll be something out, you know, and if you want to read about that I can let you know, you know.

AS: That would be good, yeah, that's, that'd be interesting.

BH: I definitely, I mean, there would be at least I would say five academic articles and they'll go into, you know, an academic jour-, academic journals and then there'll be a book. Now the book'll be a long time away, but the articles will be out over the next two years I would say.

AS: Right.

BH: You know, so yeah, I, I can email those to you whenever they're out, you know, if you–

AS: Yeah, if you keep that that will be super, yeah, that'd be good.

BH: And any time just, you know, drop me an email as well, if you're wondering what's going on or what we're doing, just email me any time, you know.

AS: Okay, and I'll send this, once I get sorted I'll send this consent form back to you as well.

BH: Brilliant, that'd be fantastic Alistair.

AS: Okay.

BH: That'd be great. Okay Alistair, enjoy the rest of your evening.

AS: And you too Barry, and thanks, thanks for calling.

BH: Not at all now, thanks now.

AS: Take care, bye bye.

BH: Bye bye, now, bye bye.

INTERVIEW ENDS