**INTERVIEW M04: JOANNE PURCELL**

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Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interviewee: Joanne Purcell [pseudonym]
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Transcriber: Dr Barry Hazley

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, so that's it running, and the levels seem to be right. Okay, so I'm sitting here in the living room of Joanne Purcell who's very kindly agreed to do an oral history with me this morning. So first of all thanks very much Joanne for, for agreeing to do it. Do you want to say hello and introduce yourself for the tape?

JP: Okay, hello my name is Joanne Purcell. I live in a small market town in Cheshire, lived here for fourteen years and I've overall been in England since 1980. I'm married with three children. I'm a retired nurse, although I still work, I work for a small medical charity and I'm really delighted to be taking part in this oral history project and I hope it will help later generations to understand what it was like to come to the United Kingdom, certainly in my case in the early eighties.

BH: Okay, fantastic. Now I know you've already told me a wee bit about yourself in the first email you sent me, so could you say just a wee bit of something about why you were interested in the project?

JP: I guess I'm interested in the project because as I've got older I've been, become more interested in understanding where I've come from and where I am now, and the impact of where I am now on my sort of life history and understanding of it. My children, three children, were born in England and I think it's important for them to understand my history, although they do know a lot about it and they sort of thought it was quite amusing that I volunteered to be in the project, and one my sons said God help the person who's coming to see you mum, he'll never get away, but anyway, and I guess it's that sense of knowing yourself and when you're working full-time and you've got a busy family life you have very little time to reflect about yourself, and I think it's probably now I have more time, and there are a couple of other issues as well too which will come up during the interview, as to why you know I was very interested in the project.

BH: Okay, great. Okay, in terms of that then idea of sort of learning about where you come from, when and where were you born?

JP: Okay, I was born in 1958 in a small market town in County Armagh. There wasn't anything particular special about it, it was a town that was founded really on the linen industry and it was well known for producing it, its linens and I think it had a good market at that time. There was also some manufacturing companies largely, well, actually in the main British, and these included places like carpet factories and other, other sort of consumables, which these factories employed a lot of the population, although many did work in the traditional industries, in the shirt factories, that sort of thing. It also had a rural component, it wasn't a big town, but it had a surrounding kind of hinterland or townland as we would have called it, so there would have been a lot of people from, certainly who I went to school with, from an agricultural background as well, and of course there were professionals in the town too, teachers, nurses, doctors, that sort of thing, so all in all it was a, it was a fairly good mix of a town.

BH: Okay, was it a good place to grow up?

JP: Well, I suppose there's two, two parts to that answer. As a child I wasn't aware of it being a bad place to grow up in, but as unfortunately the Troubles evolved it became a, and it feels very much to me now, a bad place to be in because of its kind of notoriety, but certainly as a child growing up in the late fifties and early sixties I would say it was a nice enough place, you know, it had nice recreation grounds, it had a, you know, a sense of civil, you know, sort of pride, although again, that was complicated because that was probably in two parts, but it felt carefree up to a certain point, up to a very precise point in my sort of formative years.

BH: Okay, what about your parents then? What did they do?

JP: Okay, my parents were traditional working-class Northern Irish folk. My father I believe was born in Scotland, but came to Northern Ireland when his mother died, he was quite a young child then, it was a large family, his father couldn't cope, and as I think was often the case, children were sort of split up and sent to various relatives, and that's what happened to my father. My mother was from the town, although herself, her formative years had been spent again in Scotland due to her father's employment, and so mummy was, you know a, a girl of that town when she returned to the town, and neither had what you would call, what I would say was an education that went onto age sixteen, I think they both left school relatively young with no qualifications, that wasn't unusual. My father went into road construction and my mother, like many of her peers, went into working in local factories, and when they got married my mother may have given up work when they got married, which wasn't unusual, but she certainly did and became a housewife when she had her first child and subsequent children and didn't return to work for many, many years, and that again was a traditional kind of model, that the husband was the breadwinner and the mother was the, you know, stay-at-home homemaker.

BH: Yeah, so you have brothers and sisters then as well?

JP: Ah ha, I had two, I had, I have two sisters and a brother. I, in terms of the order of things I was the, the third, third child.

BH: Okay, and where did you live at then?

JP: We lived at that time close to the town in a, what I would probably say now was a 1950s very small housing development and, you know, when I look back on it now it must have seemed fantastic living in a house that had three bedrooms, a garden, front and back, and, you know, an indoor toilet, a living area and a kitchen. That might seem odd saying that today, but, you know, people did live in difficult circumstances in this particular time, they would have lived in terraced houses with maybe an outdoor toilet, so this, I think for my parents to get what was called, you know, I think they were called housing trusts in those days, which is ironic because we have housing trusts now, to get one of those, and I think they might have been the second occupant, I think the first occupant didn't stay very long, it must have been great, and it was on a small development, it was predominantly probably Protestant, we are nominally Roman Catholics, so it must have been, you know, it was nice, people coexisted and, you know, you could walk into town, you would then walk of nice public open spaces, the streets were safe, not many people had cars, there was an area that we would have played in half way up the street with our friends, so, you know, I remember those years as it being nice actually, you know, living in that, living in that sort of environment.

BH: Okay, so that was a modem postwar housing development then, yeah.

JP: Ah ha, good houses, well built, yeah.

BH: Yeah, and so you mentioned it was predominantly Protestant estate.

JP: Well, it was, yes.

BH: Yeah, and were there sectarian tensions, were there problems?

JP: We, I wasn't aware of that as a child, but as things started to develop during the, you know, the start of the Troubles I became aware at the age of eleven that things were different. Certainly before then the Twelfth of July was always a bit of a, you know, hot spot, but for us as children we actually thought it was great. We used to follow the bands, it was funny the, the roads would be re-tarmacked around where we lived and there was always this wry joke, oh they're getting it ready for the Orangemen, but we didn't feel as children separate from that until the Troubles started, and I can think of one incident in particular which made me think we are different, although we had Catholic neighbours around us we had Protestant neighbours as well. It was a tradition to have a big bonfire on this public open space near to where we lived and as Catholic children we would go to it, we would think it was great fun and all this kind of thing, and it was tradition for some of the people who were organising the bonfire to go around with trays of sweets to give to the children, and I remember distinctly this one particular night, and it really wounded me, it really hurt me, I would have been about maybe seven or eight, maybe nine, and I was there with my brother and sister, I don't think my younger sister came at the time because she was quite small, and it was a big bonfire, so, you know, and the guy that was giving out the sweets came to us and said no, and walked past us–

BH: Is that right?

JP: And I remember thinking what does that mean, are we different, and I was very crestfallen and we went home and I told mummy, and she said you're not going there again, and I said oh mummy, I love the fireworks and all that, she said you will watch the bonfire from your brother's bedroom window.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JP: Because we could see it, there was a gap in the houses, and thereafter that's what we did, and that made me feel set apart from erstwhile community and, you know, I had friends who were Protestants and the difference between them and us is they went to Sunday school, we went to mass, **[00:10:00]** but we always played together on a Sunday, there was never an issue, but there was this sense of kind of otherness.

BH: Right, okay, so–

JP: And I can remember that moment so well and so strongly.

BH: Right, and that's what I was going to ask you next actually. So in terms of playing outside of school and things like that, did you interact, did all the kids on the estate interact?

JP: We did, we did, we went to different schools obviously, I, I went to a Roman Catholic convent school, my friends went to a different school, but after school we joined together, we played together, we explored the surrounding area and again, the differences were that my friends went to Sunday school twice, went to church on a Sunday morning, Sunday school in the afternoon, and I used to wait thinking when are they going to be back, you know, and, you know, that was, that was a common thing, there was a, they were different to us, but it, it wasn't really kind of, you know, and they would put flags out, that was the other thing on the Twelfth of July, they would put out the Union Jack and that was kind of seen as what they did and what we did, and it was just it, you know.

BH: Sure, was church important, either as a devotional thing or as a social activity? Was it an important part of your life growing up?

JP: Church dominated our lives, and we didn't call it church, it was chapel and mass, it was only when I came to England they called it church and I found it quite confusing, but I realised there's Welsh chapel as well, so the, I would say we were ruled by a minor theocracy, okay, the priests, you fell out with a priest in my hometown, you were finished, so there was a lot of control. I got a good education, you know, from the nuns, no doubt about that, but your life inside and outside school was very much dominated by how you interacted with the church, with the Catholic church. So, for example, you went to school and you were taught by nuns. The choice of the name of your baby could be hinted at or, you know, by nuns, and I remember again distinctly, and tell me if I'm going into too much detail, but as a five-year-old my mother was expecting her youngest child and we were in the nun's class, she was a lovely nun, I loved this nun, she was so kind, I can see her now, and she had me on her knee and she said to my mother Mrs So-and-so, when is the baby

due, and my mother said oh whatever the date was, and she said oh, she said, that's the feast of St Joseph the Worker, so you'll be calling him Joseph or her Josephine, to which my mother replied oh no, she said, no, no, I've got my mind made up on the name, and the name would be seen as a modern name by those standards, maybe even a TV name, but the nun was scundered, as you would say back home, and mummy was adamant, so in some ways mummy was a bit of a rebel, she, whilst being a very devout Catholic, also had her own mind about things and one of the things I remember her telling me later in life, when it came to having children, was that the priest said to my mother Mrs So-and-so, you're not doing the work of the church, you only have four children, to which my mother replied Father, if you give me the money to put shoes on their feet and clothes on their back, she said, I'll have a dozen children for you. Now that was quite brave of her to do that because the priests ruled, they ruled supreme, and they ruled in different ways. If you were from a wealthy family in the town the priest would visit you frequently, they'd come to your house for tea. If you were like us, working class, they never came to us except when they wanted us to do the monthly or the weekly offertory collection envelope, where you put money in and it was handed into the church and my parents did that religiously, there was never an issue about that, but the priest would come around checking that you were signing up for that offering, as they called it, but I would be in school with friends who were from I would say fairly wealthy backgrounds, parents would be professionals, and they would say oh Father So-and-so came around last night, or Father So-and-so had dinner with us, or Father So-and-so did this, that and the other, and I would think do you know, the priests never come to our house, if they do it's once a year. So the church was very important and it defined what you were and what you did. So there was mass on Sundays, there was devotions maybe on a Sunday night, there was the, Lent and Advent were very important in the church calendar, so you went to all the events. In school the nuns ruled supreme, you know, they were, they were in the majority good women, some of them were very unhappy women, they had been put into becoming a nun because it was the done thing. If you were from a Roman Catholic family you had to have a priest, a son who would be a priest and a daughter who would be a nun, but again, the nuns ruled supreme, and I can think of a, you know, quite a comical story. We used to go, there was a, it was like a family mass or children's mass on a Sunday morning at nine o'clock, and we would get the bus from where we lived, there was a special bus laid on, so we would stand at the top of the road, a row of Catholics, mothers mainly with their children, hop on this bus and go. I think it's quite comical now thinking about it, this bus was especially commissioned for us. We'd go to mass and the nuns from the convent would be at that mass, cos it was primarily like, a family mass or a children's mass, not that any of the preaching was relevant to children, and I remember [laughs] the nuns would always say on a Monday morning, they'd pick one person out and say what was the homily, so you had to make sure you were at mass because if you weren't at mass and you didn't know the homily that was a big sin. But there was also another sin, your mother's modesty, and I remember this Monday morning and I was thinking oh gosh, trying to think what the homily is, I'll try and remember, because you were terrified you would be asked and your mind would go blank, and this nun stood up and she was the head nun, and she was really quite a formidable character, and she said, she said, and it, there was an all-girls' school, so she said girls, I have something to say to you, she said, and it is heartbreaking, and we all sat there, you know, tremulous, thinking what's this about, and she said somebody's mother yesterday made the Blessed, our Blessed Lady cry, and we were all thinking whose mother, and she said because that mother had a very

short skirt on and sat with her legs crossed during mass and she broke the heart of Our Lady, and we're all sitting there thinking was it my mummy, and she said and the girl whose mother it was knows who she is, and I want her to go home and tell her mummy she must not do that, and that was the extent of the control that they had, you know, it was quite powerful, it was frightening, so all the time you wanted to keep in with the nuns [laughs], you know, and there were nuns that you had attachments to who you really loved. I had two nuns whom I absolutely adored, and I would say probably they were the only two nuns through my whole school career, but they were good women, they were kind women, and in another life they would have made lovely mothers. So this, so you were defined very much by the church, you did everything, you had first communion, you were baptised, first communion, confirmation, you took the pledge, which was a promise that you would never drink alcohol, and you took that and you got your certificate and that was framed in the house, so everything was very much around the church, where you didn't dare fall out with the priest because the priest was very important, especially the monsignor.

BH: Sure, so did your parents then or your father in particular have any hobbies or interests outside of the church or outside of his work?

JP: No, no [pauses]. I would say my father worked very long hours, he had a difficult job, part of that was time spent away from the family earning money and that was in England, with other men who had quite a tough time over here, and you, you can ask me questions about that later on if you wish, if you've got time, and for many of the migrant men I think a lot of time was spent in Irish clubs, you know, that sense of belonging, and that invariably involved drinking and very often heavy drinking, so I think you can kind of, you know, elucidate from that that drink was a very important part of, of my, just not my father's life, but many men, not only the ones who had migrated to England, but also men who lived in the town.

BH: Well, I was going to say, I mean, and it's well known in Northern Ireland drinking was a big part of masculine culture.

JP: Oh yes.

BH: Yeah, was that something that, that you recall, like?

JP: Oh yes, I did very much, very commonly men would go to mass, they would go to the twelve o'clock mass as opposed to us going to the family mass, and they would go straight from there to the local, you know, sort of Irish kind of Roman Catholic kind of drinking club, and that would be a big part of where they did their socialisation. The town I was in, as in many cases, had a huge Gaelic Athletic Association kind of setting, and again, that was a very important part of socialising. My mother was at the other end of the spectrum, she didn't drink at all and she was very intolerant of alcohol, so she would often feel I think quite ostracised from that side of the community, and she would know people, parents whom I went to school with and she would, I would say be quite sniffy about that, she didn't like those social events, and that was very much coloured by her mother who was very anti-alcohol and I think that probably was a theme down that family line, so, you know, I think people did socialise together and I think it might have been, from what my mother told me

it was very drink **[00:20:00]** orientated, and that was among the professional people, the teachers, the doctors, you know, those sorts of people, they would, they, my mother would see them as being different to her and she would much prefer to have her, her social life would revolve around the children, around meeting other mothers and it would be, you know, like, tea and cakes and that sort of thing, it would be very much like that. But my father was a hands-on father initially when we were little, you know, the amount of time he was round, he would be more interested in jobs around the house, keeping the garden straight, tidy, all that sort of thing.

BH: Okay, in terms of that drinking and that going to, you know, the GAA club and things like that, was that mostly men or did some women take part in that as well?

JP: I think there were two parts to that, and I'd never, ever really explored the GAA clubs because we were not a sporting family, that's another thing which I felt set us aside, there were several things that set us aside, and you might want to come back to that some wee point because there were significant things in our, my life and our life, our life as a family that I think set us aside. But I would say in the GAAs, I would say, and again, I might be wrong, that there were two aspects to it. There was the men socialising, particularly after foot-, after Gaelic matches, and then I would say there was the wives were taken along, maybe on a Saturday night where there would be socialising, and I, the only reason I would know about this is I would see photographs of these in the local newspaper, that was my kind of knowledge base, it wasn't based on anecdotal stuff, my mother went once [laughs] to one of these events and she was mortified because she was drinking fruit juice and somebody said to her, in a jocular way, och sure, whatever my mother's name was, you'd be better off going to such and such a place, which was the fruit shop, and get your, you know, get your, you know, get your drinks there, and my mother was mortified and vowed never to go back and she never did go back to that, any social event there. So that was my impression was that, you know, there was a sort of a, the men did a lot of drinking, maybe on a Sunday after the matches, Saturday night seemed to be the men and wives went out together, and again, I can only glean that from maybe what the odd person would say to me at school, or looking at the photographs of events in the local paper where you would see men and women sitting together and you could see, you know, photographs of alcohol.

BH: Sure, sure, so you mentioned there that there was two things that you think maybe set your family apart.

JP: Well, there were three things actually. First thing is the school I went to was in what we would have called the Catholic part of town. We lived in the Protestant part of town, so I would look to my friends longingly to go their way, but instead myself and, you know, my friends, limited number of friends, there was a few families, we would walk up the other way and it felt very lonely because there would maybe be six or seven of us straggling along. The second thing that set us apart as a family was that none of us had typical Catholic names, none of us were really, one of us might have been named after a saint, but the rest of us weren't, so our names were very different, our names were neither Catholic and they potentially could be seen as being Protestant, our name, our Christ-, sorry, our Christian names, our mai-, our, my maiden name, family name, was traditionally Catholic, but our

Christian names weren't and that to me felt significant because I was surrounded in school by Ps, Ms, Js, Is, all very Catholic names.

BH: Was that something you felt or did somebody identify that or point that out to you?

JP: No, I felt it, looking around, you know, B, D, they all, as I grew older I thought why am I not got a name like them. The other thing that set us apart was, let me see now, I'm just trying to think, I've told you about the school, oh yes, family size. Again, I had three siblings, my school friends invariably had six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and I thought this would be wonderful, and so, my friends, my, my class, my colleagues in class would be going that way, opposite way to me, and there would be loads of them, they'd all be mingling together, and I used to think how wonderful that would be to have so many brothers and sisters. But also there was a downside to that because that was a tradition, this was a tradition, and it may have happened in England as well, is that very often houses weren't big enough to accommodate so many children, so what would often happen is that the eldest child, or maybe even two of the eldest children, would go to live with the grandparents, and that was seen as a very favourable thing because very often they would get a bedroom of their own or they would share a bedroom with one sibling, whereas I would say in those families there was probably three or four sharing a bedroom. So in some ways I used to think well, I share a bedroom with two of my sisters, I didn't do until my younger sister was born, but, you know, it was a big spacious bedroom, whereas I think the children I envied were going to very small back-to-back properties, you know, and there was one family in particular, whose house I used to pass at a later stage, and I knew they were, there were probably about ten kids in that house, and I used to look at that house in amazement and think how do they fit them all in, you know, it was a kind of my fantasising about do they sleep downstairs, do they sleep in the kitchen, you know, an innocent child couldn't make sense of these big large families in small houses.

BH: Sure, yeah, did you have any wider family in the area?

JP: We did, yes, we had what I would probably call a fairly extended family, and again, different to how I live here, our families lived very, very close to us. My maternal grandmother and grandfather lived literally around the corner, again, in one of these great 1950s, you know, postwar houses, and my unmarried auntie lived there, she was the eldest of three sisters. My mother's younger sister lived next door to us, which, you know, again, when I look back on it we must have looked like a very close-knit family. She lived there, my auntie, with her husband and her one child and, you know, nowadays, and this is not meant to be judgemental, but in the area I live very often families who live next door to each other, we would maybe see that as being a bit clingy, a bit needy, and I'm wondering if people looked back and thought the so-and-sos, they've got, they've got their family nearby. It wasn't a particularly close-knit family, there were lots of tensions within the family, but we did live, and I could see my grandfather's garden from the upstairs back window and he had a gorgeous garden, and I could just about see him pottering around in the garden. The other members of the family, my mother had a brother who came to live in England many, many years before, so we had very little contact with him, perhaps by letters. My father's family were dispersed, very, know very little about my father's family because of the circumstances of his parents, his mother died at a relatively young age, so, but he did have family

connections in a town and they were his like, his step family, so, we did have contact with them, but we were, because we were quite a smallish family and again, this is very interesting, from my mother's perspective she was again one of four, she was one of a very small family, so there weren't those extended networks that you would get if you had ten brothers and sisters, and that again, you know, maybe, I can't remember feeling that way, but when I look at it now our family network, our family tree was quite, quite small really.

BH: Okay, what about politics then? Were your parents interested in politics?

JP: My parents had no interest in politics whatsoever, although they would have come from, possibly before the phrase was popular, pro-nationalist backgrounds, politics were never discussed, and I remember, quite clearly again, an incident when I was twelve, I had not been long at the grammar school and I was walking home from the centre of town to where I got the bus stop and I had my satchel, and it was my first year and I was absolutely loaded down with books because all the subjects were separate, you know, your chemistry and all the rest of it and biology, all separate, and I had these very expensive books in my, in my bag, which I had to pay for, because at that point you didn't, education, while it was free, you had pay for all your textbooks, and it was, it must have been a huge issue for my mother to be able to, my parents to be able to afford me those books, but anyway, I was coming home from school in my very distinctive school uniform, it was a summer dress, we had summer dresses and winter uniform, and I was walking through this, you know, mixed housing estate and the area I was walking through I would say was predominantly the Protestant side of the estate, and two boys shouted at me and they called me a Fenian, and I hadn't got a clue what they were taking about, and they were hurling abuse at me and I was terrified. I thought do I drop the bag with all the books in it and run like billy-o home, or do I run with the bag and it will slow me down, because I really thought my life was in danger. I mean, I was, you know, I was a very sensitive child, and I thought I'd better run for it, so I ran and I got home into the house and I was distraught, and I said mummy and they called me a name and I don't know what that means, and I remember saying to her and she said what was the name, and I said well, it began with f, and my mother was a bit horrified at this point, and I said it sounded like fee, feenon, and she said was it Fenian, and I said yes, and I thought it was venial, because venial is a word in the Irish and the Catholic liturgy, catechism, there's a venial sin and there's a mortal sin, mortal sin you die with, **[00:30:00]** the venial sin is a minor sin, and I thought they said I was a venial, how naïve I was, and mummy said no, she said was it Fenian, I said yes, that was it, and she said, and I said what is a Fenian, and she said we don't discuss things like that and the conversation was shut down, like that. But interestingly enough on the wall in the house we had a framed picture of the Kennedy family and it was, said from the white cottage to the White House and in the middle was a tricolour, so there was an element of nationalism in the house, but it was never spoken about and we did frequent trips to the Free State, to Dublin, and we'd frequently come back with things that, like a rock that was green, white and yellow, but we were never to take it out of the house, you know, it had to be consumed indoors, so there were, there were sort of kind of, you know, nuances to it, but politics were never discussed.

BH: Never discussed at all, right.

JP: No, and my mother in fact used to say the local MP, who was unionist, she said he was a good MP, he would, you know, he looked after his constituents.

BH: Okay, so you were born in 1958.

JP: Ah ha.

BH: The Troubles begin proper I suppose really sort of towards the end of 1968, 1969.

JP: Ah ha, ah ha.

BH: Do you have any memories of the emergence of the conflict?

JP: I do, I do indeed. I was in my first year at the grammar school and the eleven-plus was a big thing then, so I had passed the eleven-plus and I had gone to the grammar school, and my friend had as well, and she lived two streets away from me, and I always wanted a chopper bike, but my parents, you know, weren't in a position to buy one, but my friend had two, so she loaned me one of these chopper bikes and we were off, you know, biking around and whatnot, and I think it must have been Saturday afternoon and I'll never forget, it was Easter and it was actually snowing a bit, it must have been very cold, and I can't remember the exact year, but it would have been the end of the sixties, and it felt like, it was an absolutely huge crowd of young men walking up this, my friend's street, and we were stood outside the garden debating whether to go in or whatever, and I thought it must have been a football match because there was a football ground not a million miles away from the town, but they were, there was something aggressive about them and they had on clothes that looked, and I'm nearly sure this is right, I mean, again, I might be getting confused, but I think they had clothes on that had some degree of a uniform, and I don't know whether they had tartan clothes on or something, there was something about them, I think they had black boots and they were quite terrifying, and my friend and I ran down into the house and sort of, sort of peeped out at them, and they were aggressive and they were boorish, but they, I can't remember if they were chanting anything, but they subsequently became known as the tartan gangs, and they were primarily teenagers who would shout kind of insults, if you like, but there was a sense of foreboding about them and I felt very uncomfortable about that, and that was my very first memory. Then we had a major incident in the town, where there was I suppose you could call it ethnic cleansing, and what happened was these gangs became much more widespread and we had our windows broken and that was terrifying, it was terrible.

BH: In the housing estate where you lived, yeah.

JP: In the house, in the housing estate, yeah, all the Catholic families were singled out and had their windows broken, bricks put through the window, and my parents were a bit, you know, obviously worried about this and thought it'll settle down, it'll settle down. There were bigger things going on in Ulster, Northern Ireland at the time, but, you know, this was sort of the start of things, and we weren't given any protection particularly, we didn't feel reassured, you know, it was just kind of, you know, pick up the glass, the housing trust came out and fixed the windows, the windows were put in again, and then this particular night, it

was a Thursday night and *Top of the Pops* was on, and my brother and sister were studying for GCSE and A-levels respectively, and we had the windows put in, as we called it, and it was terrifying, it was a full-scale riot, we watched terrified through the windows and our next-door neighbours trying to move the furniture out very quickly and one of them had–

BH: These are Catholic neighbours?

JP: These are Catholic neighbours, we had Catholic neighbours, on our road there were probably, yeah, the whole, the whole wee part of our road, row were Catholics, opposite the road there were Catholic, Protestant, Catholic, Protestant, and at the top of the road there were a fair number of Catholics, but Protestants as well, and our Catholic neighbours had dropped a picture of, I don't know whether it was Our Lady or the Sacred Heart, and they were trying to retrieve it and one of these young men came up and stamped on it and put their foot right through the picture, and I remember looking at that and being absolutely horrified, and we looked out through the windows and there was a gang of these youths on the corner marauding up and down the streets, you know, shouting blasphemies, as we would have thought it, called it at the time, and on the two corners of the road the police, the RUC were there and the army was on the other side, and my mother said we're going to be okay, we're going to be okay, the army is going to save us, because the army at that time had come in and were actually welcomed, you know, people were saying oh it's great the British Army, you know, they're going to sort all this out, neither lifted a hand, neither of these two, you know, sort of agents of the state moved to do anything, and I remember being absolutely confused, terrified and latterly very disappointed that none of our Protestant neighbours came out to defend us, and I can see now why, you know, in my naivety. My best friend never came out, she stayed in her house, nobody came out to help us and it was absolutely awful, and that night we were terrified and we were able to secure some accommodation on the other side of the town through a friend of a friend. My brother, my sister and my father sat in the house because they were terrified that the house would actually be occupied, and as it happened when we were, as we called it put out, that became a phrase, put out, evicted, ethnically cleansed, the houses were immediately occupied by Protestant families, and I would say that was a very traumatic experience, if I was to describe it nowadays people would say post-traumatic stress disorder, but you just picked yourself up and got on with it, and it was a difficult time because it was A-level, it was exam time.

BH: You were doing you're A-levels at this time?

JP: I wasn't, my brother and sister were, I was only eleven, twelve, my brother and sister were, and I went into school the next day and there wasn't a word said to me like, we're sorry to hear what happened, the nuns airbrushed it.

BH: Is that right?

JP: The nuns never discussed it, and I know the reason why. The nuns were predominantly middle class, it was a Catholic grammar school with a high number of sort of lower middle-class families, it was also a boarding school, the nuns didn't want, did not want their reputation sullied.

BH: Is that right?

JP: So there was no there, there, there, there was no counselling, there was nothing, and to add, make matters worse, we again, found out where the local Catholic church was when we were moved, we were moved out of town into a brand new housing development, the houses weren't even finished, we were put into these, they didn't know what to do with us.

BH: How did that happen and how did you transfer your furniture and things?

JP: A lorry took us, everything went. My brother and sister and my father left the house eventually, you know, it was just awful, and we were as a group of families on that road, we were transplanted into a brand new housing development, they hadn't even laid the gardens, painting wasn't finished, we were just put into these houses and they were small houses, they were badly built, tiny little garden at the front, I mean, you know, but I thought it was exciting, I just thought it was, you know, this was great, you know, we're in this new place. I didn't realise at the time it was heartbreaking for my parents, but for us it was like ah, you know, I had left my friends, I was very sad about that, but the first Sunday we were there we went to mass, and again, we didn't know any of the people and as we later found out, that this housing development was actually what you would call, they had moved people form the slums of Belfast into this area, so we were cheek by jowl with people that we wouldn't really have associated with who were very strong nationalist persuasion and that was a shock.

BH: And they had been moved from Belfast?

JP: They had, slum clearance, you know, like you have in Liverpool and Manchester, so they were in, they were in this town that they knew nothing about, we were in the development we knew nothing about, and when we went to mass on the Sunday the priest stood up and said and you, you, you, you people from, we don't want any trouble from you, and my mother was absolutely wounded. It was like we were the troublemakers, you know, we had been evicted from where we'd been happy, my parents would have been living in that house twenty years in the July, and this thing all happened in June, because I think I only had a few weeks left at school, because there was a big issue of how was I going to get to school, as other children from the same school, you know, we had to work out how do we get into town, cos when we went to the school, the school we went to was on the edge of town, so we had to get a bus from the centre of the town out of the town, it was how did we get from where we were, which seemed a million miles away, to town, you know, so there was all this sort of like, working out the navigation of things and, you know, breaking it into the sort of like, detail, how do we do that, and again, you know, we managed it, but there was no support, there was no you poor things, there was nothing at all, it was just pick yourself up and get on with it, and I think back and it must have been awful for my parents and for those **[00:40:00]** young people who understood the implications. I just thought ooh, you know, summer of '69, we're in a new house and it's different, we've got a, we've got a dining room, we had a small dining room, we never had at the other house, the other house had a small living room and a kind of like, small kitchen and we used to eat in the living room, whereas we had a dining room, we had three bedrooms which were marginally bigger

than the previous bedrooms, we had a much more modern bathroom. I probably didn't realise the heartbreak all of that had caused my parents and other parents and families.

BH: Sure, yeah.

JP: So there we were transplanted to a foreign country, surrounded by people who had a different accent to us, who seemed, you know, to me I was quite a sort of, you know, sensitive child, they seemed rough, these people, you know, they had, they talked about the IRA and things like that, that were, it was, we could have been on planet, you know, another planet, it was such a cultural shock for us and there was nothing, you know, it was no assimilation programme, there was nothing, we were just transplanted, and many of the people who came with us, you know, there were doctors, there were teachers, not, yeah, I think one doctor, teachers, civil servants, you know, it, where we had lived before there was a great mixture, on our road we had a great mixture of diversity of backgrounds, you know, it was very monoethnic, but we had people up the road who worked of the post office, people who worked for the civil service, you know, it was a real nice mixture of people, and my parents were working class and we had working-class families, you know, it was a really good mix, and here we were and our, you know, people who had moved who were, you know, professionals, they got out, they moved very quickly, they picked up this is not going to work, you know, and my parents weren't socially mobile, so didn't have the funds to move and buy a house, very quickly, the families that we had lived with who were, as I say, professionals they moved, they moved to, they moved to another side of town, they moved to probably a more Catholic side of town, but a nice side of town, so there we were abandoned in what we saw was a nationalist enclave.

BH: Right, okay, and you were at grammar school at this stage, is it?

JP: I was at grammar school, so a Catholic grammar school, yeah.

BH: And were any of the children in your class on this same development or were they–?

JP: Yes, there was, there was, there was at least one, her father was a teacher, her mother was a senior nurse, and they very quickly moved, so that was a loss of a friendship, that was another loss, there was lots of, lots of losses went on, you know, and I was just so upset, I never saw my friends again for a long time and when I did they blanked me.

BH: Is that right?

JP: And that was another hurt, yeah, because again, this particular market town, like many towns in Northern Ireland, was a divided town, you had the Protestant end of town and the Catholic end of town. I'd spent eleven years in the Protestant end of town, but we mixed freely between them, it wasn't an issue. Suddenly I was transplanted to the Catholic end of town, even though it was on the outskirts of town, so our shopping behaviour changed. We shopped in the Catholic end of town, we didn't dare go to the Protestant end, we were terrified, these gangs were still around, you know, and the one time I saw my friend and my mother saw a neighbour they just blanked us, and we were very hurt and very angry, very angry about that, but now when I look back I can understand why.

BH: Sure, yeah, and did you talk about that loss and that anger with other children in school or with teachers or with your parents?

JP: No, it was never discussed. There was a sense that we maybe had brought it on ourselves, I don't know, it was never really discussed, we just seemed to get on with it. Teachers certainly never mentioned it, you didn't have things like school counsellors, the nuns never mentioned it, the priests never mentioned it, as long as you were paying your dues to the church, and my mother didn't particularly like the new church we were going to because of the mix of people.

BH: This was your new, you'd moved, moved to a new church.

JP: Moved to the new church, so we would often go back to the old church which was two bus rides, or no, one bus ride and then, yeah, a bit of a walk, not a massive walk, so her allegiances to that church carried on for quite some time. There was another church that was nearer, it was a more modern church, she wasn't mad keen on that, but that was a shorter distance, so we'd sometimes go to that as well.

BH: Okay, tell me a bit more about the new development then, because obviously you'd started your grammar school then, you were about eleven or twelve, presumably you were there up until GCSE age or whatever.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

BH: So what are your memories of that period growing up then, as an adolescent in the new development?

JP: Well, in the new development it was a, I think our mother was very keen for us not to mix. I think she saw the other people as being, you know, they were from a major city in Northern Ireland, she deemed them as being a bit rough, so she was very, very wary of us having anything to do with them, so by and large we, we continued, I continued to mix with children who were at the same school, but the new development had a big new education plan and had a comprehensive school built, a very large comprehensive school. Now comprehensive schools were relatively new in Northern Ireland, we had the two-education sector, we had the secondary modern type of school and we had the grammar school. Now we, we did the eleven-plus in our primary school and my dread was that I would be sent to the secondary school, because it, in my terms and in other people's terms it was full of very rough girls and I was terrified of these rough girls because I'd seen them. I mean, I was a very, very intense and anxious child and the thought of having to go to that school it powered me on to pass the eleven-plus, believe you me if you ever had a reason to pass the eleven-plus it was that, and my cohort was the same, we were determined we were going to go to the grammar school. So the new comprehensive was very different, it was considered to be a mixed comprehensive, so there were going to be children from both sides of the community, but I think–

BH: Oh really? Right.

JP: Yeah, but I think by and large it was mainly Catholic. This is my remember, my memory of it and I hope I've got it right. A couple of my friends defected from the grammar school to the comprehensive school because it was nearer, you could literally walk to it. The grammar school you had to get a bus to take you into town and then get another bus, and that was expensive for some families, you know, but I persevered as I did with probably about three or four other girls, and we, we went to, we carried on going to the grammar school. The boys who had been at the equivalent of the grammar school, because our school was a single-sex school, like many of them were in the sixties, those boys went on and carried on going to their schools. In the same way, they'd get a bus into town and then a bus out to their various, boys' grammar schools, and that carried on, that was just one of those things. I, I wasn't for leaving, you know, and there was also a technical college in the town which, again, was a mixed technical college, and many, many siblings went to that after, for sort of, it would have been like a college that you would have over here, it would be a bit like that, so, but I stuck at what I went to. My younger sibling went to the comprehensive, there was a break of tradition, I think the eleven-plus then became voluntary I think not long after, yeah.

BH: Okay.

JP: Yeah.

BH: So then did you stay on then to do A-levels and things like that?

JP: Yes, I did my GCSEs and did very, very well and then I started my A-levels and I had a, I don't know, an experience and it was largely to do with things that were happening at home. I decided that I wouldn't be able to stay on and finish my A-levels and go to university. I opted for a career which never, ever, ever [laughs] thought I would go into. I went in, I decided I'd become a nurse.

BH: Right, okay.

JP: And that was a terrible shock and provoked horror, my mother was horrified, the teachers at school were horrified, because nursing was seen then as being not a particularly good occupation. It was, certainly by the nuns, it was seen as a, much lesser than going to university and becoming a teacher or a civil servant or a lawyer or doctor, it was really looked down on, and my mother was not happy and I had to do some persuading, and I did investigate doing my nurse training in England and, you know, locally, and then I decided I'd go to one of the, one of the major cities in Northern Ireland and it was very difficult. The teachers in school, I was first year A-level, and the teachers in school were sent to me in the library, one by one, to try and dissuade me and this was largely I think planned by the head nun who just shook her head and said it's not for you, it's not for you, we had greater plans for you, you know, but I was very headstrong and I felt life at home was difficult. The backdrop to the Troubles as well hadn't helped. I felt it was my escape route and so I left home at the age of not quite eighteen and I made that journey, and I used to say every day in the first year of my training this is the best thing I've ever done, I was so happy, and this was someone who never had a vocation. I met girls in my training who had always wanted

to be nurses, whose mothers had been nurses, whose fathers were doctors who had a, you know, a really strong sense of vocation from when they were little. I never had, I never had, I wanted to do languages, I was a very keen on languages and history. My history teacher was, he said I just envisaged you working in what was the EEC then, **[00:50:00]** he said I just imagined you, you know, being an academic, you know, he and, he and, he was just, you know, you've got to think about this and don't leave and, you know, you can still come back, you know, this was in the June, I had got a place in the September, and they all said you can still come back, it's not an issue, you know, and I thought the lady's not for changing, I am not, I am not changing my mind, so, you know, and I was quite, quite a studious girl. The Troubles curtailed many of your activities, my parents didn't have a car, so for me studying and doing well at school and getting the requisite qualifications to get into nursing was my life and in fact, one of the teachers in school had said to my mother at a parents' night, you know, she hasn't got a broad enough interest, but you were curtailed by the Troubles, there were very places you could go to safely, we didn't have a car, you know, so, you know, like many young people I think we just focused in on doing well at school, and there was always a drive at home to do well, my parents were very pro-education.

BH: Is that right?

JP: Very supportive, and that's why mother was so disappointed I was leaving before I did my A-levels, because she had envisaged I was going to go to university like my older siblings. My parents were very, although they had relatively little education themselves, education was a way out and my mother used to frequently say that, she said you don't want to be like me, you want to be doing something with your life and your education, and she saw education, she didn't see marriage and children as a vocation, as she frequently told us.

BH: Okay, so you were a high achieving student, you had a grammar school education and you're effectively on the cusp of actually probably passing your exams and actually realising that sort of aspiration that your mother has been cultivating for all those years. So what prompted you to really change paths then?

JP: It was, it was, without going into too much detail, it was family circumstances, things were happening at home that, you know, were making home very difficult, home life was difficult. I mean, I can tell you off the record, but I'd rather not disclose that now.

BH: Sure, certainly, and was that then the principal reason for leaving Northern Ireland then at that time?

JP: I didn't leave Northern Ireland, I decided in the end to stay in Northern Ireland. I did have a place at a quite, quite a big prestigious teaching hospital, I did have a place there, but I declined. I don't know what made me change my mind, maybe sense of homesickness. I wasn't called for interview, you, they were so desperate for nurses back then I think, you know, they, they offered you the post, in England certainly, without an interview. No, I, I decided to go to one of the bigger, well, one of the two big cities and, you know, I think there was a sense of I'm getting away, but I'm not getting fully away, and that's enough for me.

BH: Yeah, so really the choice to do nursing and moving to one of the other big cities, that was really about getting out of the family home, that's what that was about.

JP: It was, yeah, I hadn't, I hadn't really got a vocation, I had never been to a careers, you know, event, I had no, I, I had no advice. I didn't have anybody in the family who was a nurse, my mother was really against it, so it was very lonely actually because again, my, the cohort of young women I was at school with were equally quite shocked, you know, there she is, she's, you know, really bright, she's a bit of a swot and she is going off to be a nurse, how bizarre. The more bizarre thing is I, you know, I had a letter from the nun in my first year with, cos I'd done extra GCSEs in my A-levels that I couldn't do when I was doing my O-levels, very often if you, you know, because of the clash of subjects, so I did two extra O-levels while I was doing my first year A-levels, as you do, and one of the O-levels was very important because it was socio-economic history, which I had to do to do my history A-level, and I also did a GCE in Irish and it was really intense because we used to spend, my friend and I who were doing it, we used to go in lunchtime for extra tuition from these two teachers, you know, so we were like, really cramming it in, and the nun sent me results of my GCSEs and then she wrote to me in my first year of nursing to say, a lovely letter, to say how sorry she was that she hadn't encouraged me, that she realised that becoming a nurse was like being a nun, that it was a true vocation, and I treasure that letter actually, it's making me feel choked now thinking about it, and I remember thinking yeah, and then I was in my first year of nursing and then suddenly when I was, I think it was the start of the new academic year for nursing, the intake was March and September, didn't I only see four girls from my school come to my nurse training school and I was absolutely shocked and I, I said to them and they said oh no, no, no, nobody's discouraged us, we just want to do this because we heard that you were, you know, enjoying it and blah de blah, and I felt a bit responsible for a haemorrhage of people not going to university or teacher training college, because that was a big thing, you went to university or Catholic teacher training college and nothing in between, and yeah, it was bizarre and these people were kind of a year below me and, you know, they've come into nursing and it was like, oh this is great, you know, I've kind of normalised it, it's okay [laughs].

BH: So what was that experience like then? Because I presume that's your first real sort of departure from the family home presumably, and you're moving to a much larger city obviously.

JP: Ah ha, oh yeah.

BH: Living on your own or living with other girls?

JP: Oh living in.

BH: What, what, what was that like?

JP: It was so exciting. I was in the nurses' home, you had to live in the nurses' home for at least the first six months, and it was a female nurses' home, so it was very much like, looking back on it was like going from the convent to another convent, except the nuns were replaced by ward sisters, yeah, and the nurses' home had two wardens who sat at a desk

and they made sure that nobody of the opposite sex got past them, so it was very, very segregated. It was safe, it felt secure, I had a bedroom to myself for the first time and I had money in my pocket, I was paid a princely sum of £96, my first salary. Your accommodation came out of your salary, your uniforms were supplied, they were laundered for you, they were returned to you, they were put in your room, you had a cleaner who came in and cleaned your room. I had beautiful views of, I was in, I was, my first placement in the nurses' home was in a, in a, outside on the edges of the city, so I had this fabulous view of beautiful parks and grounds. I could get a bus into the town centre to the city and I could shop, although again, there was a restriction, security checks, you know, there was this backdrop of, you know, the Troubles had really, you know, by the time I was eighteen they were really in full flow, but I was an independent person and, you know, I'd go home on my days off, I'd bring my mother little gifts and, you know, I would realise that I had done the right thing because things still weren't happy at home, but it was a sense of wonderment and the fact that I was so happy, I thought I'm so happy, just loved it, you know. The routine was strict, the work was arduous, you know, as a student, a very junior student, you were treated at times quite badly, but the ward sisters to me were just like the nuns, you know, there was good and bad among them, they wore, they wore a uniform with a white collar, they were dedicated to the profession, many of them were single women, many of them have devoted their lives to nursing, they were fantastic role models, they were scary, some of them were terrible, some of them were lovely, some of them were nurturing, but to me I had gone from one kind of set of restraints to another, but if felt safe, and I now know I am the sort of person who likes things to be boxed off because I feel that's my way of being safe, so yeah, it was great, I mean, it was, you know, backdrop terrible things and I saw awful things as a nurse and, you know, heard awful things, but shall I tell you a wee bit about the integration and the nursing life?

BH: Yeah, I wanted to ask about that actually, yeah.

JP: Yeah, yeah, it's very interesting. I was in a very large set, we call them a set, a hundred and six of us started in this particular September and it was 1976 and so the Troubles were really under way, and although we were all mixed, Roman Catholic, Catholic, Protestant rather, and you knew who was Protestant and who wasn't because of their name obviously, Christian name and surname was a dead giveaway, but none the matter you mixed and it was like a whole new world opening up again. When you went onto the wards you mixed, you worked with Protestant girls, you worked with, you know, it was all, you know, whatever, and the nursing force was primarily female of course then. You nursed Protestant and Catholic patients, you nursed prisoners, because some of the hospitals, you know, would have prisoners, you nursed policemen, you didn't nurse soldiers cos the soldiers were nursed in the military.

BH: They had their own.

JP: The military and had the military wing in one of, in one of the hospitals where I lived, so it was just, you just got on with it and no one ever said to you you treat them the same as everybody else, you just inherently knew it was the right thing to do, you had a moral kind of background about it and an ethical background, but nobody came to you and said you must not show preference, you just did it, you just got on with it, you know, we had

orthopaedic ward, my first ward we had people who were kneecapped, you know, terrible injuries, young men with life-changing injuries, but you just got on with it. The difference came at the end of the day when you went back to the nurses' home where you mingled on the corridors, it was a bit like in boarding school, you know, you congregated in each other's rooms and you chatted, but if you were going out socially that's where it finished, you know. The Protestant girls went, you know, to wherever they went when they went home on their days off, and the Catholic girls who went home on their days off would have done the same. There was very few places in the city where you could go to, and I had one very interesting experience with a couple **[01:00:00]** of girls, we, they were Protestant girls, three of us were Catholic, three of us were Protestant and we got on really well, we were all at different stages of our training, but we had great craic together, you know, and one of the girls said I'll tell you what, she said, she said there's a great dance going on, it's a disco up Stormont way. Now at that time I was really politically naïve and hadn't clicked what Stormont was and she said oh it's near the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald, and I thought ooh that sounds great, good enough for me. So we went and we, one of the girls drove and we got up to this place and it was oh it's a bit odd this, there's a lot of security going into this disco, and we were in this disco and I've got, still got a photograph of us having a great time dancing around, and I kept being asked to dance, and the young fellas that were there they all had very short hair [laughs], and I was thinking this is really odd, and it transpired it was an RUC disco run by the RUC. We had come in unwittingly and I was terrified, I said oh my God, we've got to get out of here, if anybody finds out, if anybody finds out what we were doing, and, you know, I was just naïve, I must have been about nineteen at the time, and I was so cross with my friends, you know, I said what were you, and they said oh you'd be safe, you know, they went, and I said it's not that, I said if anybody found out, if anybody found out back home, if anybody found out, you know, and that made me realise that we were segregated, you know, it was really quite sad in a way, you know. I mean, I carried on being friendly with the girls and we'd go on our days off, we'd go for coffee, we'd go into quite a famous restaurant in town, which sadly had been blown up a few years later and one of the girls I had gone to school with, who was a boarder, her sisters were very, very badly injured and, you know, so it was kind of, you know, it was alright to do certain things together, go shopping, go to a restaurant, but it wasn't alright to go to kind of like, discos and nightclubs, it was mainly discos they had in those days.

BH: If people had have found out, as you say, you know, back, back home or whatever, what would have happened?

JP: Well, I think it would have caused problems for my family, for my parents. I mean, one thing I didn't mention was that the town was almost like a garrison town. We had a big factory that was closed down just before the Troubles really kicked off and the town became a place where we had a huge army camp and when the army first came in they were accepted and welcomed actually, well, actively welcomed, that soon changed as you are probably aware if you've read the history, and it changed that in Northern Ireland and the army became seen as bad as the RUC, especially after Bloody Sunday and all that stuff, and we would be walking, you know, down the street and mummy would say avert your eyes, don't look, young soldiers would be patrolling up and down and they would have their guns and they'd say good morning ma'am, you know, they were very polite, and I first thought it was very flattering because they seemed really polite, you know, and that all

changed, and my mother would say just look the other way, don't give them any eye contact. Now when I look back these were young men probably the same age as my sons, you know, catapulted into a small town where they probably couldn't understand, you know, the population, you know, because the town had a very strong accent, and, you know, we were like this, looking the other way, but there were a number of Catholic girls who did marry these soldiers and they were run out of town.

BH: Is that right?

JP: And we did have girls who were tarred and feathered in the town centre.

BH: Really?

JP: I don't know if you've heard of tarring?

BH: Oh yes, I have, yeah.

JP: Ah ha, and girls were tarred and feathered, and my mother used to say don't give them any eye contact because we don't know who's watching. I think it was terrible, it was like the collabor-, you know, you would be seen as collaborating if you even spoke to them, and of course we had the terrible thing that happened to Jean McConville, you know, that poor woman, you know, because she helped a soldier and she was seen purportedly as a, as an informer and, you know, I think hearing the stories about people who were brutalised by their local communities, and it was mainly nationalists, my mother was keen to protect us, particular as girls, you know, it was just look the other way. So the worry was that things would get back to the house, to home that you've been, you know, and they were called mixed marriages, so a mixed marriage was like, terrible, not because inherently you were selling out, and I'll explain a little bit about that because I had personal experience of that, is that you, your, your, your life was threatened, you were a risk, you were potentially going to bring your family into disrepute, but also put your life and their life at mortal risk.

BH: Sure, right, okay, so this is while you're working. How long did you continue in the teacher training, the nurse training for?

JP: Three years, you did your nurse training and then you qualified as what was called in the old-fashioned ways, days, the state registered nurse, and that was your pride, that was just what you aspired to, and then you became a staff nurse, and I was a young staff nurse in this particular teaching hospital and I, you know, did very well, I got to work on the ward I really wanted to, I loved it, and then something happened that, and I had, in those days you always, pretty much always after a year's nursing did your midwifery training, that was kind of like, you know, the dual qualification, it was just you did your midwifery training and you either did that in one of the big two cities or you came across the water or you went to Scotland to a very prestigious hospital there, either in Edinburgh or Glasgow, and that was the route, and most people then, and you could do your midwifery actually in the city I was in as well or another city, but then you tended, if you went across the water you came back, it was always a temporary thing.

BH: Oh right, okay.

JP: You came back, yeah. So I was kind of thinking oh I think I'm going to do that at some point, but I'm not really sure, you know, I'm not going to, I don't know how it's going to work out, and I was kind of, you know, will probably do it over here, and then something happened to me that really crystallised for me that I can't stay in this place anymore, and it was, I was working and not been long qualified and it was the Twelfth of July and all the buses stopped Twelfth of July, so you had to work out how you were going to get into work and I was on a late, which was a one till nine shift, so I thought right, I'm going to have to set out really early, and I remember it was a blistering hot day, and to travel between the two hospitals you had to wear a grey uniform coat that buttoned up the neck, cos in those days wearing your uniform out of work was absolutely a no-no, nowadays they don't care, but in those days, it was seen as unprofessional and also putting patients at risk of infection. I mean, the, nowadays, oh don't start me, the way they dress outside of the, well, how they dress as nurses anyway is another, another thing, so you had to go to work buttoned up to the top in your full uniform, black tights, black shoes, and it was a boiling hot day and I was absolutely sweating, and I was going down this particular road, a big arterial road, and it was thronged with Orangemen marching, problem was they were marching the opposite way to the way I was walking. So I was trying to get into the city, they were coming out of the city, could I get through them, not one of them would stand back. I clearly looked like a nurse the way I was dressed, you know, you wouldn't walk around in a grey gaberdine, these grey gaberdines were the uniform of the nurses and most people knew cos it was a local hospital, and I had to push my way through that crowd and they were so bad-mannered, you know, and I was jostled, and it was awful, I was the only woman pushing through these groups.

BH: On your own?

JP: On my own, pushing through, there were a number of, there were women supporters, but they were on the periphery, they were like, on the pavements, and I was trying to get though these, and I thought this is terrible, I'm not, just, you know, and anyway, I got into work and I thought that's it, I'm not staying here, I've had enough of this, I'm sick of this. I was also, I also had a boyfriend who was a Protestant.

BH: Ah I was going to ask what did you do outside of your work.

JP: Yeah, yeah, he was Protestant, I met him through the hospital, he was a staff member at the hospital, and he was a lovely lad and we got on really well and, you know, first serious boyfriend, my mother met him, my mother thought he was lovely, but she was very worried and she said to me he's a lovely lad she said and, you know, if you were to get married I couldn't wish for a nicer son-in-law, but she said life will be difficult for you and your children, and she was really worried, and my father liked him too and he got on well, he was a really nice lad, but things were difficult and his aunt was very upset, he was from a very matriarchal background, and his aunt said if you, if you marry that girl I will have nothing more to do with you.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JP: And sadly his mother was of the opposite conviction, she, she was saying oh forget it, you know, just, just go ahead, you know, go ahead, but I thought no, I, this is it, I, you know, I, I can't live here, I can't be myself, so I decided to come to one of the major teaching hospitals on the mainland to train as a midwife. Prior to that I had, I had explored joining the Queen Alexandra's Nursing Corps to do my midwifery training. I was dissuaded by that of a family member because they said, you know, that's just like being in the army, but I was so naïve I just thought the training looked fantastic, and actually I had worked with a QA midwife when I was doing my nurse training, we had to spend a period of time in obstetrics in a very small maternity unit, and she was English and she was married to a soldier and she was an amazing role, role model and she trained in the QAs, and she was just so good and she was so much better than the local midwives, I thought I want to be like her, she was my role model, so I decided I was going to join the QAs, and this member of my family was absolutely horrified [laughs], they said don't you know what you're doing, you're signing up to the British Army, and I hadn't thought of it that way. So all of those things, I was so naïve, you know, I was like, twenty-one, so naïve, I decided I would come to England and I would train over here, and I got accepted without an interview, and my friend, who wasn't sure what to do, she came with me, and there was a few of, girls from sets before me who were already here, so there was a little cohort of us **[01:10:00]** from this particular hospital.

BH: Okay, so your main motivation for deciding to go over to England then was–

JP: Get away, I had had enough, the Troubles were at their peak, I was just sick of it, I was just sick and tired and, you know, would, you know, we would have horrible things happen in the hospital. I remember being in a surgical ward and I was probably in my second, no, I was in my third year, I had done my finals, and I remember hearing a bang and it was, I think it was on a late shift, and I could hear all this running and I thought ooh somebody is, the cardiac arrest because, you know, you knew when somebody had arrested, usually the whole, you know, crash team would run and ward staff, and I thought somebody has had a cardiac arrest. It later transpired that a policeman had been shot dead in his bed and I just thought, and at the time also a major member, a female member of Sinn Féin, I think it was Sinn Féin or Provisional IRA, had been shot dead in her hospital bed in another hospital, and people had got in and shot her and, you know, I was quite stunned by that, and a friend, someone who I valued as a friend, had decided to come to mass with me because she had never been inside a Catholic church, nor I a Protestant church, and we were walking along when this had happened, and this friend, who I was very fond of and, as I say, she was a Protestant from a very Protestant family, and she said to me well, she deserved it, this woman who was shot dead, and I remember thinking that's a terrible thing to say, and that wasn't to say I was nationalist, I was nothing, nothing at all, in fact, I was the antipathy of it, and I remember thinking at the time I don't know whether I can be friends with you, I was quite shocked, and here she was coming into a Catholic church, you know, and she subsequently married a Catholic, this girl, you know, which, you know, I've lost contact with her over the years, but, you know, I, I, you know, like, and I said to you before about the family, religion not being an issue and nationalism wasn't an issue, there was also in that particular area where my parents had the sense of intimidation, and I'll tell you quickly, it's just come to mind. I was home one day, I had got two days off and I had come home, and I was probably quite newly qualified, and this particular night, it was a Friday night, there was a knock on the door and there was a young man stood outside, fairly young, and he was

selling the official newspaper of I think it must have been Sinn Féin or something, and he said, and I said to him I'm not buying that, and he said well, your mummy does, she buys it every week, and I said well, I'm not my mummy, I am not buying that and I, you know, he scooted off. So mummy had been out and she came in and she said you didn't buy it, I said no, mum, I'm not buying that rubbish, she said we'll get our windows put in, and it hit me then, actually my mother was living under siege of a, you know, and I just thought I'm not, I'm not, I'm not putting up with this, I can't be doing with this, so I upped sticks and left.

BH: Sure, what about the boyfriend at this stage then?

JP: We'd split up.

BH: You'd split up.

JP: We split up, it was on his part not mine, I was very heartbroken, you know, but I thought this is it, I've had enough now, so I had a few reasons to get away and I was just sick of all the disruption and, you know, you couldn't go into town if there was a bomb scare or you'd be somewhere and there'd be a bomb scare or, you know, the buses would be disrupted, the whole pattern of life was disjointed and, you know, you were stopped and searched and och, you know, and I had grown up with it, you know, and I just thought I don't want it anymore, I just want to get away.

BH: So you knew you were going to go over to England. How did you decide upon a particular location?

JP: Well, this particular location was easy to get back to [laughs], and I was encouraged by a member of the family, they said, you know, it's got a good reputation, and I applied and I didn't have to go for an interview, they were so desperate for pupil midwives that myself and my friend got accepted.

BH: And your friend went with you as well.

JP: Yeah, and she was a Protestant.

BH: And was she doing midwifery as well?

JP: Ah ha, we were doing midwi-, we went into together, yeah, yeah.

BH: And then, did you say there was other girls that were there before you–?

JP: Yes, they were.

BH: Or came after you?

JP: No, the couple of girls there before us, I'm not sure if one came, one or two, one or two did come after us actually, yeah, they did, yeah, people who were six months or a year behind us, but yeah. Can I stop to go to the loo?

BH: Sure, of course you can.

JP: Do you need to go to the loo?

BH: No, not at all.

JP: You okay?

BH: Yeah, you go on ahead, yeah.

JP: Right, we will have some tea and cakes at some point.

BH: Sure, yeah, yeah.

JP: When would you like to stop?

BH: I can pause it now.

JP: You can pause it now. Shall I put the kettle on, yeah?

BH: Of course I can, yeah, yeah.

JP: Because your tea's gone cold.

BH: Yeah, sure.

JP: Do you want tea or a coffee?

BH: Tea again please would be great.

JP: Am I talking too much?

BH: No, no, this is brilliant, this is great [laughs; interview paused].

BH: Okay, that's it off again. So yeah, as I was just saying there, we had been talking about you moving to do your midwifery course in England and you went over with a Protestant friend, but there were also other nurses there ahead of you, and I think you said there were some also followed you over there. So I was just, I wanted to know a bit more about that and how yous all interacted and corresponded with each other.

JP: I suppose you could say we were a little community within another community, cos there were a considerable number of Southern Irish nurses there training to be midwives, but certainly the girls that were there that were from my original training hospital I knew, if not, not terribly well. One girl I did know quite well because she had been a staff nurse with me in my first job back in the, back in Northern Ireland, and then it was nice to see the girls coming behind us, they were younger than us invariably, and to see them coming through

and, you know, supporting them really with what I think is quite a diff-, difficult transition, it was for me because I was dreadfully, dreadfully homesick, I really was homesick, and I mean homesick for the city I had trained in because it was a nice city, it was a provincial city, whereas I felt Liverpool was a very depressing place. It was Thatcher era, the place was in absolute decline, the unemployment was dreadful, poverty was terrible and the whole infrastructure of the city had collapsed, and all I saw was this very poor area, very poor city and people I couldn't understand, couldn't understand their accents, they couldn't understand me, I may as well have been in Timbuktu, everything felt strange, the uniform was different, the uniform was terrible actually, my friend and I were aghast at what they gave us to wear, we thought some of the nurses that we were working with were very informal with the patients, they, you know, didn't address the patients as Mrs or Miss, they were all on first-name terms, that's not the way we were trained and it was quite a shock to the system for this casual way of interacting with the women we were looking after. Eventually we did acclimatise to it, but initially it felt we were in a completely foreign country and our lecturers, our midwifery lecturers weren't particularly nice women, they were older generation and they considered modern midwifery not to be the art of midwifery, but the art of being a handmaiden to the obstetrician, so they were very negative about our training, which didn't help, and we were plunged in into very detailed anatomy and physiology to an extent that, you know, we had not really done in Northern Ireland, so it was a huge change for us.

BH: Okay, when you first went over where did you stay?

JP: Stayed in the nurses' home, which very conveniently was opposite one of the main cathedrals in the city, so that was my bolt-hole and for us Irish girls and Northern Irish girls we would go over there to mass, whatever, you know, shift we were on, we would always fit in going to mass and that was nice, that was, that was a good feeling. We also had the cultural Irish centre next door which, you know, we would go to occasionally, it was a bit rowdy for us, but again, that became part of our, I don't know, it was just, it was just like a safety net really, didn't, I didn't socialise a lot in the town because the shops and clubs and things like that were in decline, places would be often boarded up, so in a way it was a wee bit like Belfast in some ways, but without the Troubles, but it was seen to be a dangerous city to be in at night on your own, you know, even with a group of girls, you know, there were lots of muggings because the place was, you know, it was, it was terrible, it was a very deprived place and it was very sad to see such a fine city in such a state of decline, and again, this was largely during the sort of Conservative administration, and there was lots of problems with city politics, the city had lots of difficult politics going on as well too.

BH: Okay, so who were your main friendship groups at this time then, when you, when you first arrived?

JP: Well, the Southern Irish girls, there were quite a few of them in our set, were the main friendships groups. There were some English girls as well, they tended to live at home, so they didn't have that sense of being in the nurses' home and that integration, so the Irish girls were very good and very supportive of me because they knew I was desperately homesick, and to that extent one of them who, you know, we saw last year when we were back in Southern Ireland, she fixed me up with my husband, and that was in an attempt to

stop me being homesick, but he was English, so I don't know where that came from. I had one other boyfriend while I was there, but sadly he was in the middle of a spiritual crisis, he had been training to be a priest actually, he was having a year off, and, you know, it wasn't, I don't think it was a good idea for him to, you know, embark on a relationship, so we sort of went our separate ways, but yeah, it was, you know, it was, it was good fun, but once I got settled, a bit more settled then, it was tough, tough training, it was hard training, very condensed into one year. **[01:20:00]**

BH: How did you find the Southern Irish girls? Did you have many, did you have much experience of interacting with Southern Irish people prior to this or was this a relatively new thing?

JP: This was relatively new. The Southern Irish girls were lovely, they were very friendly, they were very [pauses], they loved having a good time and that was more important I think than [laughs] studying. I on the other hand was very deeply intense, and my friend and I were always studying together and things like that and obviously, you know, quizzing each up other and revising sort of thing and in fact, we got, we got accused of, accused of cheating, my friend and I. We had a little exam and a question was related to the area we had worked in in our previous hospital, which was cardiology, which is heart, you know, like a heart ward, and there was a question related to a particular thing in that and we both gave the same answer and in front of all the other students the lecturer accused us of cheating because no one else in the room knew the answer to the question, and we kind of intimated it was due to our superior training, which didn't make us very popular. But we interacted well with the Irish girls and they were always up for a bit of craic, they were very, but they felt quite different to us, not just to my friend who was Protestant and from a different sort of community to me, I felt they were different to me and that's when my sense of kind of Northern Irishness started to come up, because in this particular hospital and the city we were known as the Irish girls, because there was a huge number of Irish girls came to the city to do their midwifery, in fact, I would say most of the pupil nurse, pupil midwives in training were Irish.

BH: Is that right?

JP: Either Northern Irish or Southern Irish, we were quite an important workforce, and I used to baulk a bit when people would say, I would say well, I'm actually Northern Irish, and that then, as I've realised later on, probably made people think was I actually a Protestant, because this identification of being from Northern Ireland is often seen as that, and although I hold an Irish passport I still see myself as being Northern Irish not Southern Irish, and I had to go to explain, because people would say stupid things like, which really irritated me, did you have to pay for your training then in Ireland, because in Southern Ireland to train to be a nurse I think is quite expensive, I think it was, I don't know whether they still charge, and I said no, because I trained in Northern Ireland and they go oh, and I say Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, so this ignorance used to really wind me up, that they saw us as one homogenous group, you know, and in some ways some of the things the Irish girls would say and do was as foreign to me as what some of the English girls would do. So while there were areas of commonality there were also areas of distinction where I didn't feel they were the same as me, nor I am sure they didn't feel the same as me

either, you know, because it is different, Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland are two different countries, you know, to me. But the one thing I forgot to mention, the backdrop to all of this was the Toxteth riots, 1980, '81. I was working on labour ward, I think I was still a pupil midwife, I hadn't quite qualified, and the Toxteth riots started, which were, you know, the lead up from what I talked to you before, like deprivation and poverty, it was like a race riot really, and our hospital was on the border of that area and we had a lot of women, terrified women, come in that night in labour because getting through, you know, all the incidents was awful, I shudder now when I think about it, and we had gates that led into the hospital and those were actually locked, so it was a very difficult time, and that particular area of Liverpool, that particular area of that city, oh have I mentioned Liverpool, I have mentioned Liverpool, have I mentioned Liverpool?

BH: Yeah, you have, yeah.

JP: [laughs] That part of Liverpool was so desolate in the days and weeks and months after the riots, you know, it was just awful, the damage that was done, people were dispirited, it was, it was very hopeless and I remember joking to my friend saying do you know, we came away from Northern Ireland to get away from this, you know, I can't believe, and although it was a different context, entirely different, and it just felt as if we'd gone from one city of despair to another one, and the Liverpool you see today couldn't be more different to the Liverpool of then, you know, it's such a vibrant place now, and I know there are still terrible pockets of deprivation, but Liverpool, you know, it was a, it was a sad place to be, and people might dispute and say oh no, no, it was this, that and the other, but from my perspective of being new to the city, you know, it did seem a very sad place, and I'll give you an example, if you went into the town centre at night, which we rarely did, if you went to the cinema you'd come out, the pubs in the town centre near Lime Street closed at ten.

BH: Is that right?

JP: Yeah, absolutely, closed at ten, you know, and when I go past Lime Street now there is one pub and my husband will say do you remember we went there and we were chucked out, we had only, we'd not even finished the drinks, everybody had to go dead on ten, that was the extent of the sense of danger in the city.

BH: Really? Right.

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it was, it was, it was, you know, really sad cos it, you know, industry, the decline of major industries, they, they, you know, were still big employers, but you had people, you know, living on the edge of the city with very little in the way of resources and income, so yeah, so we saw a lot of inner city deprivation, certainly when we on the community aspect of our midwifery, where we looked after women in their own homes, you know, I saw women who couldn't afford to put a lightbulb in, so when you went in to see them after they'd had their baby they, you know, the rooms would be in semi-darkness and you wouldn't believe that, that was, you know, in the, you know, beginning of the 1980s, you know, there was a lot of deprivation, a lot of poverty.

BH: Okay, did you have any English friends at this time when you moved over?

JP: I started to make friends with a couple of girls, mainly people you met on your placements on the wards. I'm scotching around in my head now to try and think actually, and I'd be perfectly honest with you, although we mixed with them and we were friendly with them, and we did go out with them for drinks and things, those relationships beyond our leaving the hospital was, weren't sustained. I think there's only one person I've met since then and she, her husband was friendly with my husband, they worked at the same hospital, and I met her probably three or four years ago when my husband randomly got in touch with her husband, but in terms of friendship groups the ones I'm really in contact with is my friend who came with me and two and possibly three of the Irish, the Southern Irish girls, there's three of them, and two of them I certainly see, I certainly see, one of them I saw quite a lot of last year, so yeah, yeah, they, they would be the probably the only really sustained relationships, I hope I'm not leaving anybody out, and my friend from Northern Ireland, but I'm frantically thinking, I don't think so.

BH: The friend from Northern Ireland that came over with you, a Protestant, when you went to mass and you went to the Irish cultural centre, would she go, attend any of these things herself or–?

JP: No, I don't think she came to mass with me, she might have come to the Irish cultural centre maybe once or twice, but I don't ever, never really saw it being an issue, we'd go shopping together cos, you know, we used to, cos we lived in a small flat, so we used to do our shopping together and we were, you know, we were close and we often did placements together, yeah, yeah.

BH: Yeah, okay, you mentioned there as well that when you first arrived you were homesick. What in particular were you homesick for?

JP: Well, it seemed like a bigger city, also, you know, I'd had a position of, you know, having some, not authority, that's the wrong word, I was a staff nurse, I was running a ward, I went from that to being a pupil midwife who knew absolutely nothing about the area of midwifery and had to learn very quickly, but I also found some of the qualified staff not very friendly, not very helpful, not very nurturing probably is the right word, and I just think that sense of, I don't know what it was, I really missed my old job and I missed the city I had been in because I loved the backdrop to the city, I loved the views. When I looked out of where I lived it was just tower blocks, there was no greenery, there was no open spaces, it didn't feel like that anyway, you know, there may have been open spaces, there was one open space we used to go to, we used to walk around it, but it was a small Victorian square surrounded by large three- or four-storey Victorian houses, which had fallen into disrepair, because again in that area there was a lot of boarded-up properties and houses, so I never felt there was a scenic view, you know, I couldn't look out and say oh there's that hill over there, there was, there was none of that, and of course, the language [laughs], couldn't understand what they were saying, it was really hard, I used to have to, they couldn't understand me either. I'll give you an example of that. The word pain, you know, we say a pain, this is, this is going to sound a bit funny, well, and this happened to one of the girls from Fermanagh, she even said pee-ain, she said it even harder than I did, so they would say

pain, yeah, so I remember saying to a woman do you want something for pain, and she thought I meant do you want something to pee in.

BH: Yeah [laughs], yeah.

JP: And I said par-, and she said I don't need, she said to me in her, you know, way, oh she said, oh I don't need to, I don't need to pee, I don't need a bedpan, and I thought I didn't ask her that, and it only clicked with me, and again, you know, you had to change a little bit, you had to adapt to be understood, it was very important to working in the field of midwifery that your, could communicate with your, the woman you were looking after, so you had to learn fast to tone it down a wee bit, and the exact same thing happened to this girl. She came in and I was qualified at the time and she was from North-, from Northern Ireland and she had a strong accent and she said, made exactly the same mistake, she said to the woman do you need something for pee-ain, and the woman **[01:30:00]** sort of looked at her really blankly, and I said I think she, you know, means pain, that's how they say it, you know, but yeah, yeah, the accent I think, and the ways of being were quite different, there was a lot of informality with the patients that I hadn't been used to.

BH: Yeah, did you, what did your parents say about you moving over?

JP: I think they weren't, I mean, I think initially, I think my father was more worried because of his experiences, yeah. I think my mother was okay about it. I think she felt it was escaping the Troubles and maybe it wasn't a bad thing in itself, you know. I think there was always the expectation I'd come back home cos most people did go back home after it, but, you know, they were, my parents were, you know, they were very good people, they were not anti-English, although my father didn't have a good experience working with, my mother had, you know, English colleagues, you know, where she worked when she went back to work, you know, she never was oh they're, you know, there was never that sense cos again, we were not a political family, you know, we didn't have this entrenched view that people had about the English as being like some sort of homogenous group of people, we weren't like that at all.

BH: Sure, at that time you went over, obviously it's early eighties, the hunger strikes just happened at that time. Did you have any sense of the Troubles in England? For example, how did the other Irish girls from the South, did they talk about the Troubles or anything like that?

JP: It's interesting, I don't recall them ever talking about the Troubles. I know certainly my experiences prior to that, and going to a college in Southern Ireland, as I had to do, we had to do, we had to go to a speaking, an Irish-speaking province, it was called the Gaeltacht, and that was, that was sort of like, seen as, you know, it was kind of the thing you did, and I know when I was there and we got chatting to Southern Irish children, because we were all like, eleven- and twelve-year-olds, they talked about the black North, and my friends from Southern Ireland never called it that, but you always felt there was a little bit of we don't want that coming down South kind of thing, not particularly from them, but generally, you know, they wouldn't really discuss it. Of course I was aware of the Troubles cos I was going back home a lot, you know, on the, on the boat [laughs], not on EasyJet, it hadn't, hadn't

been invented, so I was very aware of the Troubles, but I didn't, I didn't spend time thinking about it in the sense of, you know, I just, I'd see it on TV and just think oh here we go again, you know, it's, it's just awful and I don't want to be part of that.

BH: Sure, sure.

JP: You know, just.

BH: Well, that kind of answers my next question then. Was the Troubles something that you kind of followed on the news and stuff when you came to England?

JP: I wouldn't say I sought it out, it happened to be there, it was always on, yeah, and of course, you know, when I met my husband, before we got married, he would come across with me and, you know, we'd both be subject to I felt a lot of scrutiny, so going home was not a good experience and it was a great reminder of I don't want to live here anymore.

BH: Well, this is because you're with your husband who's English.

JP: Yeah, he was my boyfriend at the time and we went to a pub one particular night and we went in the bar, and it probably would have been a slightly nationalist pub, to be honest with you, but we had driven to it, we had gone out of town, and it was sort of in a rural area, and he went to the bar and he ordered whatever and could have heard a pin drop, he felt very unsafe, because it was always a supposition if you had a, if you were a Northern, a girl from this particular town, or any town I would say in Northern Ireland, and you had a boyfriend, husband who was English it, I think people assumed he was a soldier, and my sister's husband is English and they got married in the town we're from. I got married in Liverpool, not by choice, but because my husband's family members felt it would have been too unsafe for them if we'd have got married in Northern Ireland.

BH: Is that right? Okay.

JP: [whispers inaudibly].

BH: Yeah.

JP: Yeah, so, and again, I think it was hard for my mother, my mother I think was a bit worried at times that people would think those two girls have got soldiers for husbands, because people were so narrow-minded, you know, they'd hear an English accent, you know, and it's funny when we used to go home to the town, which was a small town, it's now kind of exploded into a big town, I would see people in the street that I would, you know, know and had gone to school with and, you know, my husband would say you know everybody, and I'd say yeah, because it's a small town, but he would be very uncomfortable about speaking.

BH: Sure, sure.

JP: And it's only now that we go over he will actually take the lead and go into a pub and order cos he feels so comfortable now, and you go into streets of Belfast or Derry you hear people speaking, you know, with English accents, but back then it was, you know, I was reminded of the Troubles when I'd go over, because of the stopping by the police, even when our children were little, you know, we'd always be dragged out of the car as soon as they'd hear my husband speaking, you know, it was just, and, and it became worse as the children, the children were small, you know. There was one incident we went and the eldest was about three or four and he was driving us mad, so we said we'll take him to the park in the town [whispers inaudibly], and a gorgeous park, lovely play area, we got there and the swings were tied up because, I don't know whether you're aware that used to happen, because of the council being predominantly unionist and you weren't allowed to have a good time on a Sunday, and he stood there, my son clinging onto this [laughs], clinging onto this swing and it was all locked up with a big, you know, like a big padlock, and I said to my husband this is terrible, this is awful, and then we did think at one time about coming back.

BH: Really?

JP: When we were married, and we'd been married a few years and I think we'd had the eldest son, and my husband applied for a job and got a call for an interview.

BH: Back in Northern Ireland?

JP: In Northern Ireland, yeah, in, in one of the counties, one of the coastal counties, and there was a big incident, I think some British soldiers were killed, and my husband withdrew his application.

BH: Is that right?

JP: Mm hmm, because there'd been a lull, it had gone a bit quiet for a while. But to go back to your original question, I didn't follow it religiously, I was aware of it in the background and I just thought, and then we, I'd go home and I'd think I can't be doing with this checking, this checkpoint checking and checking your bag and all the restrictions, you know, I just can't be doing with it.

BH: Yeah, and would you have liked to have got married in Northern Ireland?

JP: Yes, I would have done for my parents' sake because it was a church I was baptised in, you know, and my mother had been baptised there. It was a lot of hassle for my parents and my family, I had quite, you know, a few nieces and nephews and yes, you know, I look back on it now and I'm probably, probably a wee bit resentful actually, you know, that we had to do that, but, you know, I just didn't want to have any conflict, and my family, they never said to me they were annoyed about it, but they came and they came willingly, you know, at quite considerable expense actually, you know, flights and all that sort of, they weren't cheap like nowadays, EasyJet you can book, so it was a bit annoying, you know.

BH: Well, that sort of, that suggests then that your husband's family in general must have had particular perceptions about Northern Ireland.

JP: Oh they did, they did, oh they had, they had perceptions and I can't say they were always based on accurate facts. They never, they never discussed it with me, they never expressed any interest about any impact, they probably wouldn't know, they probably wouldn't know to this day that we had, you know, experienced, you know, being clean-, moved out of our family, out of our family home.

BH: Really, really?

JP: I have, I have to say to you I don't think I would have discussed that with many people cos there was a sense of shame.

BH: Mmm, okay.

JP: And that was to do with I think the fact that nobody cared about us, you know, nobody, you know, we weren't important and I, you know, and when that priest spoke to us at mass like that it made me think he must think we're really low, you know, we're really kind of not important to think about it, so I never, I've never really discussed it with many people, you know, I can't, if people ask me what's your experience of the Troubles, which they rarely do, I will tell them, you know, I could be really bitter and twisted, my parents could have been, but we didn't, we weren't those sorts of people. I do know people who were put out like us who became very embittered and twisted, they may well have got involved in other activities, I don't know, but we certainly didn't and some of the families who actually were put out, I forgot to mention this, the majority of us ended up where we did, some of the families chose to go to very, very pro-nationalist areas in the town.

BH: Is that right?

JP: Yeah, yeah, probably because they had family links there more than anything, but yeah, no, there's not many people, in fact, I don't even know if my friend was aware of it until we had some discussion about it, but it was never, you know, it was like, kind of one of those things you just kept, I don't know, maybe it marked you out as being working class, you know, there could be an element of that, because I felt during the Troubles, the Troubles largely didn't really affect the middle classes. I, I, I felt that they were, I know that that sounds awful because there were lots of people who died who were, you know, middle class or whatever, you know, I don't want to make it into a class issue, but I do think people from working-class environments probably suffered the most in terms of dislocation, you know, and having to move, that's probably what I mean, not in terms of injuries, because you know, it was across the board really.

BH: I think, I think there's good evidence for that, you know.

JP: Is there, yeah.

BH: I think it's fairly well established, yeah.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

BH: That point about your in-laws' perceptions, did they ever talk about it or is it just something that–? **[01:40:00]**

JP: Well, one of them did and they were very politically aware people.

BH: Oh right.

JP: They were very, well [pauses], kind of liberal leaning, very educated in terms of politics, very astute.

BH: Right, okay.

JP: But where they fell down was sometimes you'd get a bit of armchair politician stuff coming out like, you haven't lived, I, I would, wouldn't say it to them, but I'd say it to my husband, you know, they haven't lived there, they don't know the reality, you know, and I don't think they meant any harm, I think they were just looking at something that was a long way away, and when I look at footage now I think do you know what, this looks terrible, it looks awful, you know, when you see it, and I think I was walking through those streets, it just looks, and my children are quite horrified to think that I grew up and worked in that environment, but at the time, and your parents will probably tell you, you just normalised it, you just got on with things day to day, humdrum life, that was it, and, you know, there were girls at school and one girl was killed in an explosion, another girl lost an eye, you know, we had quite a few people in the school who sadly, you know, you just thought how sad and you just got on with it, and one of the very well-known female politicians, she wasn't a politician, she was a very well-known person within the nationalist kind of arena of things, I went to school with, she was murdered, you know, during the Troubles and that was quite a shock to me cos I'd sat beside her in school kind of thing, you know, so, you know, there were times when it touched you more, and I was an adult then, so it touched you more cos she had children and I thought how dreadful for the whole family, so there were times when it touched you more than another times really. Don't think, I don't think I ever became heartless or hardened, you just have developed this thing of God not again, and you just kind of get on with things, you know.

BH: Sure, those perceptions that your in-laws had, did you ever encounter negative or otherwise perceptions more generally within English society?

JP: Yeah, you'd sometimes hear people saying oh let them get on with it or why don't we pull out, and oh it's always been the history of those Paddies, you know, you'd get derogatory terms and things, and people saying oh they deserve each other, you know, unhelpful things, but I suppose people saw the fact that their soldiers were there and they were being, you know, murdered and things like that and, you know, people, I think people would say things like oh you're Irish, oh my granny was born in Dublin and I think so [laughs], you know, so there was a lot, there was a lot, I felt there was a lot of ignorance actually, to be honest with you, and a bit, the bit about me having to pay for my nurse training, when I tried to explain Northern Ireland, the Six Counties are part of the United

Kingdom, I was shocked at how many people didn't know that, they just saw you as one lump, you know.

BH: Sure, was that ignorance helpful in a way, in that, I mean, one of your motivations for leaving Belfast was that you actually wanted to create some distance from that? Did the ignorance help you to kind of to, to not have to think about it?

JP: It did in a way, but I think I was kind of ambivalent about it. I wanted people to know where I was from and the right place I was from, but I didn't want to be there, so at sometimes it did help, but of course your accent is a dead giveaway, so people will always say to you oh where are you from, are you from Dublin or wherever, and I would say no, and then you'd tell them about the little town you'd be from, and then sometimes they'd proceed to tell you that they knew somebody who was stationed there during the, during the Second World War, so that would open up the dialogue and the whole thing would change. If there's, if there's a connection between you and the person who's talking to you, that you discover accidentally, the whole thing changes, and then you feel as if you've entered, you feel as if you've [briefly interrupted by someone at the door], you feel, you feel as if you've entered a whole different relationship, and I had this happen to me recently. I met someone in a professional capacity and she said to me where are you from, and I thought oh here we go and I said to her, and she went my father was brought up there, and her father's since died and she's lived in this country all, she spent a little bit of time there, her father was a soldier, and she's mostly lived here, and we got chatting and it was just a whole different connection, you know, cos she remembered things and I said yeah, you know, and she was quite a bit younger than me, so, you know, the dynamic changes once people understand where you're from and maybe have a connection of some sort, but most people just look at it as Ireland, you know, and they'll come back with silly things, you know [laughs], silly statements.

BH: Did you want to be understood when you'd moved to England?

JP: In what way understood?

BH: In that sense of did you want people to know where you came from and know who you were?

JP: Yeah, I did actually, I wanted them to recognise the validity of the place I came from, that it wasn't just part of a, of a, it wasn't just a problem and it wasn't just, you know, part of, you know, an island that was ruled from Dublin, you know. I know that in itself and I know, certainly I think now because I emphasise that more now cos I feel more confident about doing it, is that people do look at me a bit as if to say so you'd be on the unionist side kind of thing or, you know, people who are well versed in it, people who are, you know, are politically aware, but yeah, I suppose I did in a way because I didn't want to be, I mean, the Southern Irish girls they had different, totally different education to me you see, you know, they went to national schools, they did the Leaving Cert, you know, we did A-levels, you know, it was all very, very different, so whilst we were all from the same island we were actually very different, and in some ways, we, I was more similar to the English girls because I did A-levels, they did A-levels, you know, they had grammar schools, we had grammar

schools, so there was a bit, it was a bit, what's the word I'm trying to think about, there were sort of like, conflicts, you know, in a way, you felt as if you were a bit of that and a bit of that, you know.

BH: Yes, so that's quite a complicated position in the sense of on the one hand you perhaps want to move away from this place because it's all restrictions and all its problems, and then you do get away, but at the same time you want people to understand that you're actually from this place.

JP: Yes, and you, part of you wants to go back.

BH: Part of you wants to go back, yeah.

JP: So it's quite, emotionally it's quite a, I'm trying to think of the word [pauses], it's, oh there's a word, there's a word in my head and I can't think of what it is, that you've got this conflict and you've got almost two different thought processes running parallel with each other, and the word escapes me [laughs], I can't think of what the word is, it's very often used in counselling terms, I can't remember what it is [laughs], but yeah, so there's this and it's quite hard to sort of to bring those two things together, but it's, in some ways it's, it's different now, it's totally different now for me.

BH: How, that, how, when did that difference happen or how did that come about?

JP: I think as I got older I got more confident of who I am and where I've come from, resolution of the Troubles as we know has helped enormously, people being able to travel freely there and be confident that they're not going to get injured, but I would still say in a place like this place, this village I, town I live in, being Northern Irish is not without its difficulties because this is a quintessentially English town.

BH: Oh right, okay.

JP: Yeah, very, very few migrants here of any type, and, you know, I have come across people who have been from Ireland, north and south, who actually don't want to engage about where they've come from. An example of this was when I was at a wedding at one point and the, some of the major guests were from Northern Ireland and again, you know, you shouldn't say this, but you, you knew kind of by the name where they were from, and I tried to sort of engage with them and I was snubbed. Now I don't know whether that's because they knew who I was or because they just genuinely weren't friendly, you know, or they [pauses], see there are some people who don't want to know, be known that they're Northern Irish.

BH: Is that right?

JP: I know that sounds terrible like, they're almost ashamed of it or something, I don't know, and I think some, some people when they come from Southern Ireland or Northern Ireland they come over and they become more English than the English themselves, you know what I mean, it's like, they want to drop that bit of the identity, because back in the day people

from Ireland were seen as Paddies or Micks, you know, the people who came to Ireland of my father's generation were generally unskilled labourers, not all. Subsequent generations have come now, like myself, as a trained professional. Your generation have come now, highly skilled, highly educated, you know, taking top jobs, going in and having a totally different role, so you've, it's the immigrant's tale, isn't it, you start off here and you move up, and I think some people who've moved up don't want to know where they came from, I don't know, I just, I've just had a couple of experiences of that. But to go back to me feeling more comfortable about where I've come from, I think it's also because Ireland became very popular, cool to be Irish, I don't know how that phenomenon happened, was there some event went on, I don't know, but there was a period.

BH: Oh there's definitely an Irish cool kind of aesthetics.

JP: Yes, isn't there, yes, there is.

BH: Yeah, yeah, there definitely is.

JP: But there wasn't back in the day, it was like, you know, you know, no blacks, no dogs, no Irish kind of thing, and you crept into the Irish centre because you didn't know, you know, and even when I worked in north Manchester, which had a big Irish immigrant population, even then it wasn't kind of like, it wasn't cool to be Irish, you know, kind of thing, now it seems to be, and I think what has actually **[01:50:00]** not helped it, but really brought it to the head, is my, one of my children went to university where there was a huge cohort of Northern and Southern Irish people, and they're his best friends and I would say my son [laughs] could be potentially more Irish than me. All my sons have got Irish passports, I don't know why, it just seemed the right thing to do at the time for them, but that particular child's, young person's, son's, my son's friends they've been to the house, I know them quite well and there's a sense of homeliness about it when they come to see me, I haven't seen them for a while though, more so than my other two sons' friends who are English, and I'm not being preferential.

BH: No, sure, yeah.

JP: And one of the boys when he came I got chatting to him, cos the usual story is where are you from, where are you from, you know, and he told me where he was from and he said I'm from Belfast, but my mother is from [pauses] a place, and I said well, that's where I am from, and it turned out to be his mother was at the same school as me.

BH: You're joking?

JP: Yeah, so, you know, it just goes to show how small the world is, and we made an instant kind of connection, and my son is still friendly with these young people and, you know, we, you know, they'll say how's, how's Joanne to him and all that sort of thing, you know, so I, I, it's funny, you know, because my son will use phrases like, both of them will, it's grand, now, that to me is a Southern Irish phrase, I would never say grand, would you say grand?

BH: I've actually started saying it more, but again, I've probably picked it up off, I work with people from the South of Ireland and things like that.

JP: Yeah, they say grand.

BH: Yeah.

JP: Yeah, we, I mean, we would say och that's great or whatever, or no worries or no problems or whatever, whereas two of them and this, the younger one doesn't have Irish friends particularly, although he is working with someone who is from Belfast, and he says grand a lot, but you see my three sons have got very traditional Irish names, so whether it's been a bit of a [laughs] pull I don't know, and the eldest boy has got, you know, some Irish connections, but the majority of his friends I think would be English or American or whatever, you know, maybe it's because he's in London, I don't know, but yeah, so how did we get onto that then?

BH: We were just talking in general about I suppose identity.

JP: Yes, yeah.

BH: Well, in terms of your, of your, the parenting of your sons then, was it important, did you, did you try actively to instil some understanding of Irish identity in them?

JP: Oh yes, yes, I did, I mean, it was always very, you know, I had explained things to them and they will tell me things now, they say mum, remember you, remember you telling us that, and they're quite interested in Irish history and very interested in the key things that have happened, and sadly they do take some interest in the Troubles and I think they're just starting to understand now how, how awful it was, you know. I mean, I, none of my family thank God suffered in terms of, you know, terrible things had happened to people, but they understand now that the trauma that I must have gone through when we were forcibly evicted from our homes, and they're quite shocked at that now because I didn't discuss that with them when they were little cos I didn't think it was appropriate, but, you know, they love soda bread, they love wheaten bread, you know, you know, they like the things that are kind of, you know, that we would have had at home, that sort of thing, and we always have this joke, I used, in this country I could not get buttermilk when I first came and it drove me and my friend mad because we wanted to make our own bread because we were homesick, and this is in the eighties and of course nobody was sophisticated enough to have buttermilk in Sainsbury's or whatever, could not get buttermilk anywhere. Anyway, I started, Marks and Spencer's started to sell soda bread, cos you couldn't get soda bread anywhere, so they started to sell it, which was great, and the boys would love it and they'd have it and I remember them asking me could they have jam on it, and I made up this awful fib, I said no, I said you can't have jam on it because the high kings of Ulster forbade it, and they believed that for years, and you see I'm great for telling stories, and they said do you remember you told us, I said but I was trying to save your teeth, and I said and anyway, you would never have jam on soda bread at home, and they said but this is home, and that's a common thing, I would say I'm going home and they'd go your, your home's here mum, and I'd say well, yeah, but it's home home kind of thing, even though there's nobody really living

there now, you know, you know, in that sense, so yeah, I used to tell them little stories, you know, and they knew about, they knew about, a little bit about, you know, things, but, you know, I didn't, you know, make them sit down and read history books, but, you know, they knew, they knew, they knew as much as they needed to know, and they have been very interested since, and they would go over and see my brother, quite fond of my brother.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

JP: Yes and, you know, so yeah, and they are interested in all things Irish, which is why I ended up here because my son got the poster off somebody somehow.

BH: Sure, yeah, did you take them back to Northern Ireland during the years of the Troubles?

JP: Oh absolutely, frequently, very frequently. So the eldest one particularly remembers the army checkpoints, he remembers being searched going into shops and things. He has quite good memories of things actually, you know, I mean, not good, clear memories of things, the middle one maybe not so much, and by the time the last one came along things were starting calm down a bit, but yeah, yeah.

BH: And just thinking about, you know, taking them back to your parents' home and things like that, what was that like? Because presumably, you know, they were going to primary school here and they have an English accent and things like that.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

BH: Was that ever commented upon or–?

JP: Never an issue because, you know, they didn't play out and I think mum, my mum was kind of quite careful about that, but certainly for my parents were concerned they just loved them as little grandchildren and, you know, they were, the boys were brought up as Roman Catholic and went to Catholic schools and all that sort of thing, so, you know, and although my husband is English he is Roman Catholic, my parents were very fond of him, you know, when they were alive, so, you know, all in all it was never an issue, never an issue at all, you know, it was fine and, you know, I think they would sometimes not understand what granny was saying, you know, and she was a real joker with them and she was quite irreverent as well, so they, they liked that she, in contrast of the other granny who was very formal, yeah, very English.

BH: How did you meet your husband? Because, as you said, most of your sort of friendship group when you were first working in the hospital was Irish girls, so how did you meet an Englishman?

JP: Right, well, what happened was he was living in a block of accommodation across the way from me and the Irish, the Southern Irish girls were in that block and they got chatting to him, and I went up one night and they introduced me to him and I think that was, you know, the subtle way of them trying to make me feel less homesick, I don't know why,

because he wasn't Irish or anything, but they introduced me to him and, you know, it sort of went on from there really. So one of the girls, we saw her last year and we said it's all your fault, you know [laughs], thirty-odd years later, you know, but yeah, and there was a lot of nurses in, the nurses and the non-nursing staff lived together in these blocks of accommodation, so, near the big teaching hospital where he worked, so, you know, they knew him from going to the pub with him, I didn't particularly go to pubs then, so, you know, they were, they were more friendly with him than I was, and then there was a party I went to and it just sort of evolved from there. I could actually see his flat from where I lived, I could actually look across the way, yeah.

BH: Right, one of the stories that whenever I did interviews with Southern migrants who came over in the postwar period, forties, fifties and sixties, was about falling away from the church, as in they moved to the big city, lost their religion and became heathens. Did migrating to England sort of dissolve your faith or was it–?

JP: Not at all.

BH: No, not at all.

JP: Not at all, cos I was living virtually on the doorstep of one of the big cathedrals and it was just two minutes' walk across, so mass was very important, observing religious feast days was very important. Liverpool is a very Catholic city, it was very, I mean, they always say Liverpool, it's the second capital of Ireland, don't they, so it felt very, that bit of it felt very at home.

BH: Yeah.

JP: No, it wasn't, we in fact got married in that cathedral.

BH: Right, okay, actually in Liverpool, yeah?

JP: In, yes, in the cathedral, yeah.

BH: Okay, right.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

BH: You mentioned there a while back about that you'd worked in other hospitals, Leicester, I think you mentioned.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

BH: Manchester as well?

JP: Yes, yeah.

BH: So you, did you, you must have moved out of Liverpool at some point, did you?

JP: Yeah, I did, yeah, I mean, it was, I worked as in capacity as district nurses and middle nurses in the, I didn't actually work in the hospital, I did a little bit in Leicester, but not for very long, yes, we moved around quite a lot and my husband changed jobs, so I went to work in Manchester and I went there as, to train as a district nurse, and that was again a big shock to me [laughs], never lived in such a big city and I wasn't used to, I was quite naïve really in a way because I'd really lived in kind of monoethnic places, apart from Liverpool which had a significant Afro-Caribbean community, I'd never lived in an area where there was such a, such a mix of various ethnicities, and particularly north Manchester, which was so, but again, I had an Irish community as well, but that was a different generation to me, that Irish community were people who'd come in the forties and fifties, older people, so yeah, that was Manchester, and I also worked in Leicester, and that's again, didn't work in the city, I worked in the rural villages, and that was quite challenging for me because I felt very dislocated and very out of it, and again, you know, we had trouble finding a village or a town that had a Catholic primary school, cos we were adamant that the children should go to Catholic primary school, so we did find one and in that school there was, in that **[02:00:00]** village, town there was I think one person who was from Ireland, they were Southern Ireland, so that was a, predominantly again, very monoethnic, very monocultural place to live, and because I worked in the, in the rural areas it was again quintessentially English, you know, very nice little villages, and again, I felt kind of very out of it because of my accent, you know, which, you know, probably that was my perception more than, no one ever said to me oh you can't come here because, there was never any of that, but you just feel, you just feel apart, set aside, you just feel different, I don't know how to explain it.

BH: Okay, when you first came over you used some of the Irish community networks and things like that, you went to the Irish cultural centre for dancing, dances and things.

JP: Yes, yes, yeah.

BH: Once you got married and you had children, did you still sort of visit those places or these things, no?

JP: No, that all changed, the only time I went to them was when I was district nursing in Manchester and we would have Christmas dos and events and that would be held in the cultural centre, but other than that I didn't seek out, I didn't seek out places and, you know, from time to time I used to think, you know, I'm, I'm going English [laughs] like, that was a kind of a, that was like a sort of a terrible thing to do, you were going native in a way, and I had to occasionally pull myself, pull myself together and, you know, you know, sort of, you know, get my history books out again and sort of, you know, little things like that. I'd say little things in Irish to the boys, you know, and they laugh now cos they've said to their friends, they say things to their friends in Irish and their friends will say we never learnt it that way, and I'd say yeah, but that was Donegal Irish, they probably learnt west of Ireland Irish, it was, it was slightly different.

BH: It's different, yeah.

JP: The dialects, yeah, so no, and I think my, my, my, my thing of keeping my identity going probably is I hope I didn't lose my accent, although it has modified, and when I go home it goes much stronger and, you know, I had, we had our Irish passports, I encouraged my husband to get one and he left it too late, so he hasn't got one and poor him, he is out of the EU, and, you know, the boys have, I didn't plan for them to have Irish sounding names, but I do have three names that actually are very Irish, it's particularly when they're, you know, in their reduced form, whatever that, I can't remember the word is, but yeah, the, I didn't feel I needed to go to those things, but equally so they weren't available, they just, I would have had, I'd have had to go to a big city, it's like me trying to learn Irish, you know, I was trying to explore that for the last few years and I've never been able to find anywhere, you know, where I could do it, and one thing I have started doing, a bit of a funny thing really, is I listen to Radio Ulster.

BH: So do I, yeah.

JP: Oh do you? [laughs]

BH: Yeah [laughs].

JP: We do listen to Radio Ulster and I am impressed particularly in the phone-in shows, about the articulation and understanding of British politics.

BH: Yeah, it's much better than actually–

JP: The other way around.

BH: The British stat-, British stations, like.

JP: Yes, yeah.

BH: Yeah [laughs].

JP: The people that ring in, I'm, you know, they're so on the ball, I say to my husband God, they are so articulate and so knowledgeable, so that, I feel that's my link back and we have, we, you know, we go back and forth, and we went touring last year. My husband would love to live in Northern Ireland.

BH: Really? Right, even after the experiences early on?

JP: He would, he would really love to live in Northern Ireland and we did look into it, but there's two things. The boys would have to fly over there to see me and if they ever had grandchildren I wouldn't want the dislocation that my mother had, and the other thing is the Brexit thing, because it could–

BH: Of course.

JP: Because it could affect the peace as we know it.

BH: It could.

JP: You know, and you get involved, you buy a property and before you know it the bottom's fallen out of the market and you, I don't want to put my children at risk if they came over and things went, you know, with the Troubles maybe stirring up again, so there is that, the immigrant's longing, we're always looking back and, you know, I've just finished reading a book called, I think it's called *Ghost Light* and it's by Joseph O'Connor, don't know if you've heard of Joseph O'Connor.

BH: I have, yeah.

JP: Yeah, he's Sinéad O'Connor's brother and he's a very fine writer and he's written a book and it, it really lovely book if you ever, and she's an, she's an immigrant to England, I don't know if you know the story, the back story. She was married, she was, had a relationship with Synge, you know, Yeats and Synge and all that crowd, and she's ended up in England and she's looking back very wistfully, and I found it a very moving book and I thought the immigrant's tale is always the same, you know, there's always that looking back for something that may not be there, you know, and that's why sometimes I say to my husband I know, I know, but maybe we're looking at it through rose-coloured glasses, cos we love the County Down coast and, you know, we've gone touring around Southern Ireland, and we'd go there, but the health service is in a mess.

BH: Oh it's terrible there.

JP: You know, you can't risk, you know, you have to have insurance and, you know, various things, so, but yeah, yeah, so, so there are things, wonderful things, I mean, I've got books here, I've got Seamus Heaney's poetry, I've been to Seamus hom-, Seamus Heaney's HomePlace, you know, we love all things Irish, you know, we watch what's it, Simon Reeve on TV, he did the thing, it wasn't that well done, I think his analysis of Irish politics was a bit, you know, whatever, you know, sometimes I'll try and find RTÉ TV [laughs], various things, you know, and things that were of my growing up period as well, some of the country and western music you see would have been very important to my mother. So when I listen to Philomena Begley I think mummy would have loved that, you know, that sort of thing, you know, all those little links, and I do think about my parents a lot more now when I hear something on Radio Ulster, you know, it just brings it up and if somebody had said to me fifteen, twenty years ago you'll be listening to Radio Ulster I'd have said oh no way.

BH: Is that right?

JP: I must admit I have got an ear, if I hear, oh yeah, yesterday we were in Manchester and we went to a café and we were having lunch, it was a vegetarian place, really, really nice place near the university, and the lad that came to serve us he said one word and I said are you from Northern Ireland, and he said yes, he's from Belfast and he's a medical student, he's only been there six weeks, and my husband said how did you rec-, I said he just said something and then I went into mother mode. I said I hope he is alright and my husband

said he's not your son, I said I know, but he's, you know, he's only young and I wonder if his mummy's, you know, missing him and all of this sort of stuff.

BH: Yeah, sure, yeah.

JP: But I'm, if I hear an accent I straight away, and people generally, you know, are okay, but you get one or two who are a little bit like, oh I don't want to, you know, I don't want to go there, and I think fine, yeah.

BH: Yeah, you said whenever you were growing up your parents were more or less apolitical and you yourself were politically naïve effectively, at least whenever you were living in Belfast. Have you become in any way more politically conscious over the years?

JP: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, I have, very much, both for British politics and for Northern Irish politics.

BH: Okay, and how did that happen or what prompted that?

JP: I suppose my husband's quite a political animal, in as much as he's, you know, very analytical and I suppose we're quite liberal thinking, we read the liberal newspapers, you know, we like to keep ourselves, you know, up to date with what's going on. I think probably I was very politically naïve about British politics when I first came here, you know, Thatcher was seen as a new departure, she was a woman, you know, there was all this kind of stuff, and of course, you know, as time has gone on I've seen the different political parties come and go, so I think largely due to reading kind of liberal newspapers, being open-minded, and also my husband, we have big political dialogues with the children as well, they're very, very politically aware, they've, you know, they've had a, you know, more from my husband than from me probably, although probably I've done more education on them towards Northern Irish politics, but yeah, they are, they are, they are very in tune with what's going on in the world of politics, which is good.

BH: Okay, so you mentioned there that when you moved over here you started reading liberal newspapers and things like that.

JP: Yes, yes.

BH: The Irish community or at least some parts of the Irish community over here had, you know, dedicated sort of political activist groups which were talking about Northern Ireland.

JP: Yes.

BH: Troops Out would be one.

JP: Yes.

BH: There were a few other ones as well. Were you ever involved in any of those?

JP: No.

BH: Or did you ever go to any of the meetings or anything like that?

JP: No, no, no involvement whatsoever in Northern Ireland politics, no, absolutely not, and I didn't even like, you know, some people would go and find Irish newspapers like the *Sunday Press* and things like that, never sought those out at all, no.

BH: Yeah, and why was that, was that, you know, some people I guess do seek those things out, was it just not on your radar?

JP: Wasn't on my radar, I wasn't interested in getting involved with any of that. I was too busy, I was married, bringing up, bringing up a family, working full-time and it just wouldn't have been, it just wouldn't have been the thing for me, you know, no, no interest at all, ever, I've never been a member of political party, I've never wanted to, no.

BH: No, okay. **[02:10:00]** I think I'm getting towards the end of the questions. I just asked [pauses], so you've talked about the peace process and actually that was something which did change things a wee bit.

JP: Yeah, it did, I mean, I have to say this now, I was saying to my husband was I asleep when the peace process happened, process happened or was I having a baby or something, cos there's a lot of it just goes over my head. Since listening to Radio Ulster, I have to say Radio Ulster has been a big factor in educating me about the micropolitics in Northern Ireland and, you know, the, Stormont being suspended and about all the different sort of, you know, factions within the unionists sort of thing, and that's, that's been really, really helpful for me, and I would say that's probably educated me more than, say, reading the *Guardian*, which is like, the paper we would read. But I would say in terms of the peace process, I sometimes have to stop myself and think when they're talking did I miss that, what was that about, you know, and my husband will say yeah, that such-and-such thing happened, and I say well, I've forgotten about that whatever, but I would say it's made a huge difference to us as a family, feeling about going over and certain for my husband, cos he's probably a bit more Irish than I am, although he has got Irish relatives, back in the day, and in fact, his maternal grandmother had the same maiden name as me, so we do [laughs] think what happened there, he would go back, but I, I'm not sure, probably from the children's point of view, but also I'm just worried about the impact of the Brexit sort of set-up, what's going to happen there, but it has made a difference in people's, you know, when I'm talking to people I feel as if I'm doing the Northern Irish tourist board thing when they say oh you're from Ireland, oh I say no, I'm from Northern Ireland, oh well, we've been to the South and then oh we love Ireland, we've been, and I say have you been to Giant's Causeway, no, have you been to the *Titanic*, no, have you been to the, you know, the County Down, have you been to Giant's Causeway, no, have you been to the lakes, no, I said well, you need to go, you need to go, and I tell them all that. So I feel confident now doing that in a way I would never, ever have recommended people to go to Northern Ireland, so from that point of view I think that's good. But some of the stuff doesn't change, and you're never going to maybe change, there's always going to be that undertone of, you know, political, you know, nationalism versus unionism, that kind of thing really.

BH: Yeah, you mentioned there I think earlier on that something that happened recently which had kind of changed your identity or had been important.

JP: What was that then? [pauses] Oh was it to do with my [pauses], well, one was my son has quite a few friends who are Southern Irish and it's made me sort of, you know, reawaken things. I can't remember what the other thing was, I can't remember what the other thing was, now what did we say [pauses], I'll have to pass on that sorry.

BH: That's alright, yeah, it's maybe something that we've already covered anyway.

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think we might have done, yeah, yeah.

BH: Okay, so I'm just going to ask the last few final questions.

JP: [whispers] Do you need me to close the door?

BH: I can close it, it's fine.

JP: Yeah, yeah.

BH: It's alright, the tape will probably pick it up [closes door], cos it's probably very sensitive this thing. So first of all, are you glad you left Northern Ireland?

JP: Yes, because I wouldn't have met my husband and it wouldn't have had, I've had a very full professional life and personal life which might have been different in Northern Ireland, but at the time I felt I'd done the wrong thing when I came over and there have been periods when I have felt that way.

BH: Is that right?

JP: Yes, yes, intense sort of periods of feeling, and I still do to a certain extent, an outsider.

BH: Yeah, okay, and were you ever during those periods like, strongly tempted to move back?

JP: Certainly in the first year I was, definitely, and towards the end of it I did go home briefly for a little while, and then my husband, he was sort of my boyfriend then, we were corresponding by letters and what not and I decided well, I'll go back, we, I came back, it was only a very short period of time, I wasn't even working actually during that time, but I came back and then we decided to get married. But yeah, I have felt periodically and sometimes I feel now I just, I can't explain it, particularly when I listen to Radio Ulster I get this nostalgic thing coming over me and when, you know, some of the people on the radio are reading out requests for places where I've been to, not just my home town, but other places, I think I've been there and that, that sounds nice, and I've been there and that sounds nice, and yeah, I remember that little village or I remember that little place, but I know in reality I could go there and still feel like an outsider because I've been away for so

long, and maybe my accent has changed or my mannerisms have changed or, I don't know, it's just a sense of not feeling totally belonging anywhere, which I think is very typical of the, you know, the immigrant song [laughs] or tale, you know.

BH: Yeah, I think that is, it's pretty common. Since moving to England do you think you've changed in any way?

JP: Well, of course, yes, you mature, you get the, you know, you sort of, you sometimes try to take on the English ways to be accepted, which I fight against now, you know, when you go into a room and yours is the only Northern Irish accent it is quite difficult, even at my age, I'm sixty-one, even at my age, you know, and you'll say things sometimes that people don't understand, I mean, there used to be always this joke about having a bit of craic, but of course the word craic has been completely adulterated, you know, because we know it as fun, you know, and spelled, even spelled differently, you know. But there are times when I still feel well, I, I do most of the time, I, you know, I feel, not with my husband or with my children, not at all, but with other people, people I know quite well too, you know, there's this sense of you're not quite in there, and I think you do try to assimilate, I think we all have to, you know, we moderate the way we speak. I speak much more slowly than when I first came over. What I find irritating is when people say to me say that again, not pardon or whatever, say, say it again, you know, and I find that quite rude and I think, you know, there's another way to say it. Is it my accent or am I speaking too quickly, I don't know, but yeah, it's, you do change, but I would like to think I've not changed that much, and when I go home my accent slips into whatever. My friend, my oldest friend from school, from when we were about six, she will say to me you've not changed one bit, you know, and now whether she's saying that because she's nostalgic I don't know, you'd have to probably ask my husband if I've changed, he'll probably say no [laughs].

BH: Do you think your values have changed in any way?

JP: No. If anything, they've become stronger, a sense of justice is very important to me, a sense of fairness. I don't always see that, you wouldn't see that it in any community if you think you're going to run away to where you came from and see that, you know, I think it's foolish, but no, I'd say my values are, apart from having a crisis of my faith and I'm no longer a practising Catholic.

BH: Oh really? Right.

JP: I, I would say my values are the same, I would think, and, you know, that was quite a big thing and quite a big, you know, shock to the family, to the children, to the boys who were all brought up as Roman Catholics, and my husband is Roman Catholic as well, but I've moved on from that.

BH: Okay, right, what are those values, where do they come from?

JP: I think fairness, hard-working, industriousness, trying to see the good in people, trying to be caring. They came from my parents really, you know, my mother always tried to see the good in people, she always tried to be caring. I think it's just, you know, inherent and for all

my complaints about, you know, the nuns and the priests I suppose there must have been something that came from the faith as well, you know, but yeah, I think, I think those are the values, you know, and I'd like to think, you know, despite many negative encounters in my life, which most people have, I'd like to think I'm still, you know, very much the person I was when I came over, although maybe the edges rounded off a wee bit or whatever, but yeah, yeah. These are very profound questions, you know.

BH: Yeah, they are.

JP: I hadn't prepared for these ones [laughs].

BH: [laughs] You can't prepare for these. Well, you've kind of already have answered this, do you still think about Northern Ireland now?

JP: Every day.

BH: Every day.

JP: Every day, there's not a day goes past when I don't think about it and sometimes I get quite tearful about it, I'm just feeling myself choking up a bit now [pauses; weeps]. Although [voice breaking] I've lived here a long time I wouldn't say I fully regard it as home, I mean, it's a very complex kind of mental accommodation that you make sort of, you have this arrangement with yourself, this is where you live, this is where your children were born, this is where you function on a day-to-day basis, and although I spent far less time living here, all my formative years really have been in England, I've lived here longer than I've lived in Northern Ireland. But there's that sense of kind of [pauses] belonging to that other place, cos I think your formative years really are more so when you're little. I mean, you know, when, when we go home and I, I've stopped doing it now because it was driving my husband mad, I always wanted to drive around where we used to live and **[02:20:00]** I'd get really quite choked at seeing the place and realising how small the street was, and I did actually knock on the door and speak to the person that lived there, and I, she told me about the neighbours, you know, who they were, and she told me about them, and I thought my dear mother would be heartbroken to know that the house had changed to much and, you know, whatever, it's a totally different type of person that lives there, you know, and I've kind of got that out of my system in a way, but, you know, we go to the big, the big park, which is lovely, and we go to another place, historic place, which is lovely, which we were never able to go to because it was always closed up. But, you know, I think of the, the big park in particular, I spent summers there as a child, that was our playground, you know, where my mother would give us jam sandwiches and you'd go off for the day and that kind of thing, and I haven't got any of that here, and when I first came here, particularly when I was having my first child, I thought there's nothing, there's nothing here that marks out what I was like, and because we've moved around a lot as well, that's always been a big problem, for me particularly. We've moved around a lot and the children were little, nobody knew my history, and even though, you know, you have a baby and somebody else has a baby, they didn't, one particular time they didn't know me when I was pregnant, so they, they, they didn't express interest in the baby in a way like people say oh you've had the baby, oh lovely, they would just say oh you've got a baby, and, you know, like, sometimes

I'm jealous of people who say oh my mum's popped down today or, you know, I'm popping down to my mum's or the children are going to stop at my mum's. We never had any of that, we never had any really parental support with childcare, so it was all down to us, my husband and I, to sort of juggle it between us. So there's those little things that make you feel a bit homesick, and yet I don't know whether my mother would have helped out [laughs], you know, it's always, it's always the ifs and buts, and because I've got a neighbour who's from Northern Ireland the first time I met him I felt really choked cos he's from the town next to me and, so, you know, and when I go to see my friend tomorrow, because we're going home tomorrow, we're going back to Northern Ireland tomorrow, she and I will reminisce and, you know, my husband is very good, he just sort of like, blocks it all off, and we will sit for hours talking about things and we, and I just think sometimes why aren't we talking about the present, we do a bit, but it seems to be all about, and I think it's comfort that you get from whatever, you know, and just hearing people talking the same as you, you know, like, you've got a Northern Ireland accent which immediately makes me feel homesick, but the same time not, you know, so when my son's friends come, and even though a couple of them are from Southern Ireland, I feel as if they understand the kind of things, you know, like, Irish mummies do like to fuss all over you and fill you up with cake and stuff, you know, cos that's just what my mother did, you know, although my china is not as good as my mother's, but, you know, she always got the china out when somebody came, the best cups and saucers, whereas [laughs] when I went to my husband's mother's house she gave me a cup of tea in a Pyrex cup, put it down like that, and you could have skated on it, and I remember thinking is this what you do in England [laughs].

BH: Yeah [laughs].

JP: It sounds a bit anti-English, but that to me is the, you know, the kind of summation of the English welcome, and my husband said don't be like that, not all the Irish are friendly, I said that's another thing is a stereotype, people will say oh the Irish are lovely, I'd say yes, they're lovely, but just not to each other, you know, the Northern Irish, you know, so, and that's the one thing I have found very irritating is this stereotyping of the Irish person. He's happy, he is a good fun, gets drunk, doesn't care about things, you know, and I, I hate that stereotype, and you get that a lot, you know, you get quite a lot of English people thinking that's what you should be like and trying to mould you into that, you know, into that sort of like, little box and if you don't fit that then there's, you know, you're not really right, so, you know, I have to, you have to kind of fight about that, fight against that as well.

BH: So you mentioned there, it's just one of your sentences, you said oh I'm going home next week or said I'm going back there next week.

JP: Yeah, I'm going home tomorrow, yeah.

BH: So the last question is really, where is home now and what does home mean now?

JP: Well, I've got two types of homes. I've been thinking about this quite a bit recently actually, because I think since starting to listen to Radio Ulster [laughs] it's sort of concentrated my mind. I've got two types of homes. I've got my physical home and my emotional home, which is here, and this is the reality, this is my reality, and I've got my

home, my other home is in my head, yeah, so it's kind of buried in the emotional bit of me that, you know, sometimes gives me a bit of a lift and then sometimes makes me feel a bit sad. But the here and now home is physically here in England, in this small town with my husband, with my three children, who don't live anywhere near us now, and then my other home is back there, and I haven't got a home back there because my mother's died and my father's dead, there's no family home in the town, my sister lives in the town, but, you know, it's not in the family home, so there is no home in that sense, but there is a home in my head, does that make sense?

BH: That does, yeah, it does.

JP: Yeah, yeah, it's a bit weird.

BH: Okay, so I've asked all the questions that I'm going to ask. Is there anything that I should have asked about which I didn't ask about and you think is important?

JP: Let me think now [pauses]. I think we've covered [pauses], I think we've covered pretty much everything [pauses]. No, I can't think of anything, I think we've covered everything, pretty much.

BH: It sounds like we have anyway, yeah. I think you, you've told all the most important things that have been important. Just maybe one other question that I haven't written down there which maybe I should have asked is, has the Troubles been an important thing in your life? Has it, has it had, had a, you know, a lasting impact on your understanding of yourself?

JP: Yes, because, very much so, even though I've tried at times to put them to the back of my mind, my experience as a child being forced to move from, you know, a family home in a community that we felt we were very much a part of to a community where we didn't feel any part of, that had a huge impact on me, massive impact and made me feel very isolated because of the lack of support at school, it made us feel very unhappy as a family, and that has stayed with me. So when I see people in much worse circumstances, you know, in the Middle East having to flee their homes and all that sort of thing, and I know it's much worse for them because they're fleeing of their lives, I feel that must be awful for them and I feel, you know, empathic towards them. I also feel at times a bit bitter about what happened to us. I'm not going through life thinking how terrible the fact that the authority figures, the police and the soldiers, didn't do anything, they just left us, you know, and that, and that, that was very hurtful and quite confusing. I think I, people say things to me like oh God, you're a tough one, aren't you, and all this, you know, various things that happened in life, and I say well, I'm a child of the Troubles and that's what I see myself as, a child of the Troubles, and I, because of that I have developed certain resiliences which I think stood me in good stead, maybe caused one or two problems, but I'm fairly, and I think my husband would agree with this, a fairly undauntable person. I have my weak moments where I, you know, feel quite vulnerable, but I will challenge authority, I will challenge authority quite a lot cos I want things to be fair for people and for myself. I think it's made me I suppose become more aware of the impact of world conflict as well and, you know, how the resolution of it, and that I will always look on Northern Ireland, despite the great work that's gone on, the Troubles, it is still a fractured society, you know, and maybe in myself, maybe

there's an element of that, maybe I'm slightly fractured as well in my view of things, but it's very subconscious like, you know, when somebody tells, you know, when you ask somebody what their name is, you know straight away, you know, where they're from and you think to yourself I shouldn't be thinking, be thinking like that, you know.

BH: Yeah, you're immediately thinking like, a double thing straight away, you're, yeah.

JP: Yeah, you are, right and, and, you know, and like, with some people you just can't discuss politics, you just know it's not like, and kind of it's the same over here, I mean, Brexit is causing a lot of problems and, you know, you have to be really careful, you have to think are they a pro-Brexit or are they a pro-Jeremy Corbyn or a pro-Boris or whatever, and I think, you know, that reminds me of the way Northern Ireland is and it would be hateful if that came in here and became a theme in people's lives, pre, oh yeah, she stood up for Brexit, oh he didn't, you know, that could become part of the history of England, of United Kingdom, I, I feel like saying to people you don't want to go the way of Northern Ireland, you don't want a divided community, but it could be the legacy, I don't know, I don't know. But I would say overall the Troubles has I, I can't say there'd be many people who would have come though it unscathed, and the people who I know who've died or been injured in bombs or, or things like that is, the one thing you haven't asked me about actually, it just come to mind, is the impact of the Manchester bombing and the Warrington bombings, yeah, no, I never experienced any anti-Irish sentiment over that, at all, not at all. Birmingham bombs I wasn't here, but I think there was a huge Irish anti-sentiment, I think people were very angry, but interestingly enough I never felt anything, and Warrington and Manchester would have **[02:30:00]** sizable Irish communities.

BH: Yes, certainly.

JP: Yeah, yeah, so I would say absolutely not, never felt anything, and we were living [pauses], were we living in [pauses], I can't remember where we are living, we were living in the north west anyway, so it was never an issue of that. The one thing I do, and this is my last thing, the one thing I do hate, and I mentioned stereotypical, they'll say things like oh the small, dark, Irish woman, which is me, and I'd say I am small, I've got dark hair, but I'm a Northern Irish woman, and for some people that would almost be tantamount to saying you were a unionist, but I don't feel I've got to qualify that, I don't want to qualify that, but I still feel very strongly Northern Irish, which probably sets me apart from some of the stuff that you hear on Radio Ulster about united Ireland, cos I don't want to be a part of that.

BH: Okay, okay, I think that's a good place to leave it. I'll say it again, thanks very much Joanne for agreeing to do this here, that was absolutely fantastic.

JP: You're welcome.

BH: And I really appreciate you taking, I don't know how many, two hours out of your day today to do that, and for the cake and the tea as well [laughs].

JP: [laughs] You're taking some of that with you [laughs].

BH: Seriously, thanks very much for, for doing that.

JP: You're welcome, no problem, it's going to help other people, it's going to be fine, yeah.

BH: Cheers. I'll just stop it and make sure I don't delete it whenever I'm doing it. That would be terrible.

INTERVIEW ENDS