

I was born in a hospital in Derry, I'm from Tyrone, you know, born 1970, so eh born just at the start of the Troubles or the war or whatever, you'd like to, call it like you, know but I was the eldest, the eldest son of me mothers second marriage her first husband died like she had two sons you know, and then eh meself then, she got married re-married and then she, she had meself and me, then me younger brother and then, eh, a week before me younger brother was born me father was killed by the British Army, like you know. But he was hit by a Saracen, and eh, like a fucking tank basically, like you know, a Saracen, you know. So that was in the 1st of May, '72 like you know. So I just grew up, basically grew up in the North like it was, normal day, like, normal day stuff to us wouldn't be normal like I mean yeah it was full, full going at that time, like in the early 70's like, when you're growing up all you see is rioting and whatever, you know rioting, cops Brits, you know what I mean guns on the streets, and guns here, there and everywhere like, so like you just you know nothing else, so it's just normal like you know what I mean, it's just normal like. You don't see what normal is, that was normal to us like. But you just grew up with this hatred of these people walking your streets, like you know what I mean, but eh, (you just seize the minute. Or see them in it?) is normal like throwing stones, bottles and then eventually, you escalate, or you, you know what I mean, you go from stones to bottles to petrol bombs to whatever else then like you know what I mean, but then a brother of mine died then when I was only nine as well like which was a brain haemorrhage he was only 20, like, me brother was like he was the oldest of the whole, so he was the father figure, like and then he was so after that I just went fucking mad, I was, there was no, nobody could tell me what to do when to do it, you know what I mean, I just hated the world after that. I basically hated the world, hated everything on it, I just closed up, I just fucking closed up, I wouldn't let nobody in or nobody in, nobody could help me like anymore. My mother had been trying, was trying for years to get me to go and see help. At 11 I was being sent to see school psychiatrists or psychologists at that time, you know, but, But my school psychologist, I used to go to her like for maybe an hour a day or something like that and I used to fold me arms and pick a spot on the wall like you know, I as if I was getting interrogated and like, I used to use this as practise, like I say, when I get older I'm going to be arrested and taken to Castlereagh or you know other all them interrogation centres this was my practise like you know what I mean leading up to whatever age I was going to be arrested at, like you know what I mean, which was, everybody growing up in the Six Counties knew that as soon as the 17th birthdays hit they were, they were getting away, they were 'going on their holidays' as they say you're going to Castlereagh, that's the end of it, like, as soon as you hit 17 if you've any Republican inclinations at all, like, you're getting taken away, you know, you know. I just grew up a very violent and angry person and it was, it suited, I mean the environment that I grew up in. Nobody actually could see how violent and angry I was 'cause everybody else was in the same frame of mind only my hate was, my hate was oozing out of me like, it was just, there was nothing else there only hate, you know I hated everything, anything, everything. God, religion, authorities, any sort of, anybody, that could tell you, or think they could tell you what to do like, I just hated them, I just, I just hated anything.

School, me school went, like I was fairly intelligent at school, it was. Teachers were an authority, you know they were authority so I just rebelled against the system and when I was 11 I got, I got put down two classes then. I went, I was in the top grammar class. In my eyes, I was going to be dead by the time I was, you know I was 21 anyway. Like you know, I was either going to be jailed or dead. I always wanted to die, you know what I mean, as a Republican, an I.R.A. man, I mean, Tricolour over my coffin that was it. I loved violence, it was just the only way I could show, it was the only way I knew how to show, I just battered people, you know.

So I started getting in, just getting my name signed in and going home again. I just basically stopped going to school. So I got expelled anyway and I got a job at 15, I was painting and decorating but the man had no work for me so by the time I turned 16 I was in the YTP, it's like a Fas scheme, you know, so I did that, and I enjoyed it and all like you know, different fellas and all. So, I moved to Dublin and all, away from home and then the drinking started and so them years from 10 or 11 to 21 that was just, I was clean mad, you know what I mean, yeah drink and the anger like you know. The anger never went away, and the hatred never went away like you know.

'95 me daughter was born, Nadine, she was born in Holles Street in Dublin and that was, em the start of me trying to change my life like, you know. Love is something that I never knew in my life. I didn't know how to love, I didn't, I didn't know what love was, She opened, like she was the sledgehammer that broke down the Berlin wall of hate for me, like you know what I mean, she's, and she still to this day like, me and her have a bond that'll, that most parents don't even have. She's got more sense than me, hah, you know, but she keeps me, she keeps me on the straight and narrow so she does like. If it wasn't for her I don't think I'd be alive today to be honest. I don't think I'd be alive. And I, I, I cut the umbilical cord and all, and I remember saying to me "you're free" you know I remember saying to meself your free like, it was brilliant, like. I was the first person to hold her, like.

Nah, Her mother's a lovely woman, like, and mean and her got on great, now, like, you know. Been on my own for years and drank, just drank myself into oblivion, as they say, Then I met another girl and we had, we had a boy, he's only two and a half now. I see him most days, like, I'll see him later on, like, Sectarianism, like, where I come from, it's a 100, it would be a 100 per cent Nationalist, if you know what I mean.

You come down here, and like I was coming down here, and you met people and they were Protestants, you find out like, ah well he's a Protestant, like. Where I came from you wouldn't ever have met a Protestant like, you know what I mean. And then you start to realise, that they are just ordinary people the same as ourselves like, you know what I mean, but now, I take people as I get them, you know. It's, it's neither creed nor colour, like that makes me, you know make my mind up about people. It's who they are, or what they are, it's who they are, but it's not, I don't prejudge them now because if they are a Protestant or, ah, you know, I don't like him 'cause he's Protestant. I don't like him cause he done, or I don't like him cause I don't like him, it's not because he's a Protestant like or whatever like you know.

All that peace now up in the North now, like I don't know, it's nice to see it for the next generation, like, you know what I mean. The hatred, the hatred was always there, where we come from it was a Republican area, like, you know. But the fact of the matter my Da was killed by them as well made it personal, it was personal, so, I was going out on me own personal Vendetta, to me it was a personal war. I was taking more, more things on me shoulders, you know, my mother was trying to get me help here and there and everywhere for my anger like you know. I didn't want it for a start so you can't, you cant give somebody something that you don't want it was hatred and anger that kept me alive you know, it was hatred and anger that kept me going all them days. I had a nervous breakdown ended up in a mental hospital, drink, so I ended up, I ended up in three altogether, I went to psychotherapy and all that there and like, I started understanding it, that the reason I was the way I was was because of this happening, this was what happened to me in my life. It was because of the developments in me life which made me that way, like, you know what I mean? Well, I've tried, I don't know, there's somebody definitely, there's definitely somebody looking out for me, there's definitely somebody looking out for me, me Da, me brother, me Granny, whoever, I don't know, whoever but there's somebody, somebody definitely looking out for me because ah, it's a few years back, I don't know I can't remember, remember what year it was, like I was drinking heavy, I remember drinking heavy. Nadine was living up the North I know that, she was only a wee baby, she was two or three, three, three or four maybe. But my head was gone, I was, I remember sitting with a bottle of vodka, on my own in the flat and me mate used to stay with me from South Derry, he had his own key and all, I hadn't seen him for about six weeks, an ah, drinking a bottle of vodka and

got all my tablets put them out on the table, took a tablet, slug of vodka, tablet, slug of vodka, table slug of vodka drank the rest of the vodka, remember getting up walking out on the balcony, put me two feet up over the balcony and just shoved myself off and two arms came around me chest like that and pulled me back over the balcony and it was Jon-Joe. I hadn't seen him in six weeks and he must have been coming through that front door as I was getting off the sofa to kill myself, like, and, eh, if he'd have stopped for a piss in the toilet on the way in I was dead. He just got to me, as I, I didn't hesitate, I didn't, I just sat on the edge of the balcony and I just leaned forward and as I leaned forward his hands come over me. I remember waking up the next morning, and all, and there was just photographs of Nadine all around me. They put them, they'd placed them all around me, so if eh, as soon as I woke up all I was seeing was Nadine, you know what I mean, I don't know who's idea was it, because it was like somebody had my head in a vice for them couple of years just squeezing and squeezing and squeezing like.

Ah, her birth was definitely the turning point in my life I didn't stop drinking but it was the time I tried to stop drinking, you know, just drinking to forget everything that ever happened in my life probably but when Nadine was born in '95 it was, it was the turning point, it was something that I could say I loved, it was the, the only, the only thing I could say I loved was me daughter. I've, I've sort of turned the corner now a bit, hopefully anyway, hopefully I've turned the corner, you know, I just want to, I just want to see my kids grow up and be happy and that's the simple as life as I want, now yeah, because, as they say it took its toll you can't be angry for ever, because it eats and eats and eats at you.

I give, I give me kids a hug, kiss them tell them I love them, every time I see them I tell them I love them, every time I'm talking with them that's the last words I tell them, is I love them. I can listen to people now where before I wouldn't, like, you know, I will actually sit down and listen to people, all right, there's times that I won't though. If I was to do it all again I would. Well it's not that, I wanted to do it in the first place. At that time I wanted to be a soldier, that was, that was the only thing on my mind, was, was to be a soldier, like. If, if the Republican movement at that time, had a, had a suicide squad I would have been on it, you know, 'cause to me to die, die, you know, die a martyr, was, was, to me that was up here, like, you know what I mean, that was how fanatic, fanatical I was, like you know. I used to go to bed, I used to sleep with a Tricolour over my bed, you know.

Music, I love me music now. The only music I listened to when I was a kid was Republican music and rebel music and but now I love all types of music now in some ways I'd just tunnel vision for one thing and one thing only but now, me, me mind like is definitely open to different things, like, you know what I mean. But, em, I started writing my whole life down, you know reading it back and I've loads of lovely poems written about, you know, my kids and all, like you know but, ah, it'll come again, you know, once I get settled in to this new place now. Ha, ha, it's been a life, put it like that, it's been a life, but ah, nah, it's getting better, you know what I mean. Two lovely children, which, that's, that's my life, you know what I mean. And they are my life, you know, now.

I couldn't have kept going the way I was going, nah, I just want to be there for them, I just want to be there for them at all times, I mightn't be there everyday, all day, but I'm there for them when they need me, like, you know. I just want to be a, I am a good father to them, you know. And I'm still, I'm one of the best fathers and I know that, like, you know what I mean. There's very little fathers has a bond with their daughter with the way I have, cause me and her are like best friends. I just have to start living me, you know what I mean, I just have to start living. I can't, I'm just trying to draw a line under that episode of my life and step onto a new one and just, it's just me and the kids now and my girlfriend, like you know, she's brilliant, like you know what I mean, she's, you know we get on great like.

Commissioned by Breaking Ground, the Ballymun Regeneration Ltd per cent for art programme.
The project focusing on people living in Ballymun, a small village on the outskirts of Dublin city.
Five people with different lives and experiences tell their stories.

Their interesting and fascinating life stories cover a wide range of issues, including alcoholism, sexual and physical abuse, homelessness and self-harm, but perhaps most importantly, the interviews demonstrated each individuals capacity to love and to survive hardship. Each interview could be listened to in private on Audiophones which were available in the exhibition space.

A photograph of the person interviewed or an image suggested by what they said in their interview was specially made for the project by Cecily Brennan.

With special thanks to all of the interviewees for being so generous with their time and sharing of their experiences and to Pat Rosney at Irish Diving Contractors, Hugh Mc Elveen at exhibitastudios.ie Ray Yeates at Axis Ballymun, Louise Neiland, Geoffrey Perrin, Aisling Prior, Patricia Scanlon, Martin Murphy at Murphy's Prams and Nursery store, and Philip Whyte at EFJ Laser.

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