

Interviewer: You told me when we were with the big group that you actually had quite a clear memory of seeing soldiers for the first time in Crocus Street. You reckoned you were 12 at the time...

2: Yeah I was 12. I think they came along on the streets on I think it was the 14th of August or something like that – '69. ~~XXINAUDIBLEXX~~ I lived in Crocus Street, two streets away from it and I remember there were barricades up at the time, because I believe a few weeks before it when Bay* Street burn down and I remember people saying the soldiers were coming onto the streets. I and my brother and a few other wee lads with whom we played football went up to the top of the street and we saw these soldiers walking up. You hear the... I think you called it whippets at the time and there were maybe a hundred or so just marching up the street and the Major or whoever it was calling out all the orders. That was scary.

Interviewer: You found it a frightening experience?

2: Yes I thought it was frightening, yeah; because the Major or whoever it was, was calling out the orders and the soldiers were turning around and actually facing you. I'd never even seen things like this in television; and this was real life just standing facing me.

Interviewer: Did you know why they were there?

2: No, not really, just when you see something in the news, and when you're at that age you're not interested in anything like that.

Interviewer: Can you remember the reactions of the grown-ups?

2: The grown-ups more-or-less welcomed them. I remember people used to bring them cups of tea and that.

Interviewer: But did that worry first time you seen them? **

2: The very first time I seen them, the grown-ups welcomed them, because the grown-ups thought that it was just a matter of time before other streets were burnt out and the Catholic people at the time thought that the soldiers were here to protect them.

Interviewer: Did you play with the soldiers?

2: No. I just kept away from them. Some kids – people younger, maybe 6 or 7 year-olds would have went up to the soldiers, but I didn't go near any of them. I was more-or-less scared of them. And when they did come in, I'm not too sure, you seen their berets and all – and their guns. I think it was the Paratroopers or something like that. Because my father, as he fought in the war, he was more-or-less welcoming of them too; he was able to tell you what regiment and all they were from. That type of thing. But definitely on the Falls Road they were welcomed for the first time.

Interviewer: and your father he was in the British Army too... during the Second World War.

2: Yeah, he was signed up – enlisted. He went all through the war – 6 years.

Interviewer: There was another thing you told us about, moving on a few years, as you get a bit older, one of the first bands you seen was Thin Lizzy. I'm just interested in what kind of entertainment was like in Belfast for you as a teenager?

2: In 1970, 14, 15... up to '73. Because of the troubles which were going on, and because it was at the centre of the town, there was all security gates and that type of thing... and you were young; you weren't allowed out. You were only allowed to go to a disco or round the corner or something. When I lived in Crocus Street we had a ground* behind St Paul's chapel... we had a hall; a band hall. A band used to play there one a Tuesday or Wednesday night or something like that. But another night of the week we used to hold a disco for the younger ones. So we used to go to the disco every week. As you get a wee bit older, you get insistent* in your music... '72, '73, and at one time, I think I just started working at Europa. I started in Europa in August '73. I think it was at the later part of '73, a couple of friends of mine said that Thin Lizzy were playing in the Romano's*; Romano's used to be used for leisure* or whatever it was, upstairs in Upper Queen Street. So four of us, having bought tickets we went down to it. XXINAUDIBLEXX It was all mineral water and that type a thing. That was the first concert I ever went to, and it was in the centre of town and I was only allowed to go because it was the top end of town; just off Castle Street. At that time I had an older sister and she used to go down to the likes of the Starlight, which was down in Ann Street I think. That was for the more-or-less older ones; people who were 19-20. But that's the first concert I was ever at, the Thin Lizzy concert – in '73.

Interviewer: So, what age would you have been then?

2: I was 16.

Interviewer: So, you were still quite young.

2: Yes, and I think it was just the time before 'Whiskey in the Jar' came out. That was out in '73. So that was my first concert; the Romano's you called it

Interviewer: So you were saying when the security gates came along or as they came along; that kind of made the City centre out of bounds for entertainment stuff, you know.

2: Yeah... It was too dangerous for you to go into it. You know most of the town closed anyway at ten or eleven O' Clock at night – there was nothing in the town for anybody.

Interviewer: And did you go to any other concerts in the town?

2: No, only... in about 1979 or 1980 I went to a Human League concert in the City Hall... whenever they were popular. I went to that concert.

Interviewer: The last thing I want to ask you is just about the whole experience of working in the Europa, as the Europa was infamous for being the most bombed hotel. What are your memories of working there?

2: When I worked there I was training to become a chef and I think while I look back at it, they were the best years of my life, despite the troubles and all those sorts of things. But you were meeting people of different religion...

Interviewer: I think you said it was the first time you'd met a Protestant was in the Europa...

2: Yeah more-or-less I socialised with Protestants in the Europa. That's the first time I really socialised with Protestants... because, you know, we were never brought up to be bigoted in any way; just treat them the way you meet them. That's the way my family were brought up. Even through the generations. So that was the first time I had actually met Protestants and actually socialise with them – have a drink with them and that kind of thing – get to know them. Working there was like one big happy family. At the same time too, you were trying to learn your trade – and it was hard work. But, through the times it was bombed you did your best to get into work, and no matter what, through the companionship with those with whom you worked, you just got through it. I loved working there.

Interviewer: Can you remember any particular time when bombs went off?

2: I remember one time we were told to get out. There was a bomb scare – one of the bombs didn't go off. Somebody had driven with a bomb into the delivery bay one time and we were all told to get out, and the thing went off while we were standing outside it on the other side of the street just down at the back of Ramsen's* there; down near the tech . But when I worked there I actually went through three or four of the bombings. It was just a part of... you know, you get used to it. It didn't faze you in any way. You know you were never scared to go to work; the only time you were afraid to go to work was maybe walking to work or something because of a drive-by shooting or something like that – because I remember going to work one morning and I walked down the Grosvenor. Whenever I got into work, I was told that there were two postmen shot dead on Northumberland Street on the Falls Road and that was the same time I was coming to work.

Interviewer: What are your memories of actually working in the Europa? Was it a particularly happy time?

2: Yes. It was hard work, you were training and you did split-shifts. You'd start in the morning at 10 O' Clock and maybe get the preparation ready for lunchtime, and after lunch, we got the preparation ready for that night. We took our break at half two/three clock then back again for half six for services, then start again at seven o' clock to half ten and you wouldn't get home to 12 o' clock at night.

Interviewer: So it was a long day...

2: It was a long day. It was a split shift.

Interviewer: And how did it work out?

2: In the afternoon we maybe used to go to the pictures or something like that. You know, if three or four of us were working on split shifts, maybe we would have went to the ABC and watched a film...

Interviewer: Yes, just down the street really.

2: I remember actually going to watch the sting in it; the sting was out in, I think, '74.

Interviewer: If you were out of work at 12 O' Clock then, how would you have travelled home?

2: I would usually get a taxi home.

Interviewer: Was that just for convenience or safety?

2: Safety – staff taxi. They usually provided us a taxi free. *

Interviewer: Well, they understood...

2: They understood that it was later on... it would have been risky. Maybe two people were going to the Falls and two people were going to the Shankill.

Interviewer: And one taxi took you all?

2: One taxi took the lot – took the four of us. I remember I had a good lot of friends there.

Interviewer: and do you think the actual experience of the hotel being under attack and that sort of tough environment... I get that sort of sense from you that it pulled people together.

2: It put people together. I think it made the people there stronger... that no matter how many times they bombed it, we were going to work on. In no time at all the Hotel was back up and running again. Even through the Loyalist strike...

Interviewer: You stayed open during that time?

2: It stayed open during that time. I remember one day we actually had to with candles and make salads and that type of thing. We used to meet some of the... Martin Bell – I remember meeting him a few times and I saw Ian Paisley and people like that. Sometimes the politicians were in – they dined in the B theatre as well. Harper Berne* was manager then. You saw some famous people there – I enjoyed it. Sometimes we used to go round to a disco where British Home Stores was. Louis Small was the DJ there. I can't remember what you called the place. Some of the staff used to go round there.

Interviewer: So despite the fact that there were the security gates and the town was very quiet... there were still these kinds of places...

2: ...but you were still out at 11 or half 11 at night.

Interviewer: It closed up at that time?

2: Yeah. There was a pensioner's part upstairs as well.*But it was experience I was getting through cooking – it was good experience.

Interviewer: Did you serve food in the penthouse?*

2: Yeah, you served food to the pensioners; after you got the pensioner's pocketful. There was a programme on television a year or two ago about the pensioners pockets; some of them were actually in their early sixties, and they were talking about it. Gummy bears we would call them.

Interviewer: Did you like working up there?

2: Yes. Just... for the experience.

Interviewer: So like a nightclub was it then?

2: It was like a nightclub. Well that closed about 12 o' clock at night. It wasn't every night, maybe once every couple of months or something.