I.: I’m here in Clonakilty with Trish and John Kerr. It’s the 21 January 2017; a recording for the University of Limerick Oral History Project. Thank you very much for speaking to me today, can I invite you to tell me something about yourselves ... maybe some background?

T.: John, you first?

J.: Sure, well, I’m a native son of Clonakilty, born here, raised here, and educated here. Heard about the, what was then the NIHE back in 1972, in the early part of ’72 I think it was, by extraordinary means, referred to it by a chap who was a senior executive of, at that time, Bord Tráchtala in Dublin. I happened to know the librarian at the time in the, what was CTT, Coras Tráchtala, interviewed with him, had an idea that I’d like to go into business. Irish business was just starting up, with the entry into the EEC at the time, if you remember, and I met with this man, I think his name was Vivian Kilfeather, and there was a very short interview, and he said ‘look if there’s anything you want to do in terms of third level education, with an interest in business, there’s only one college to look at’. And Mr. Kilfeather later died with some of his colleagues in a terrible plane accident in Staines in London, if you remember. But in any event he referred me to Dr. Walsh and he referred me specifically to what was then the NIHE. That’s how I came to register there.

T.: I was born and brought up in Kanturk, primary school, secondary school was a boarder in Laurel Hill in Limerick and that’s where I heard about UL. I think it was Una Mansfield who came to the college, or to the school, and gave a talk on the new college. It sounded exciting, I wasn’t 100% sure at the time what I wanted to do but I knew it was something in business as well, and the whole thing sounded exciting and new and adventurous, and that’s how I started.
I.: Ok. Can you tell me about your enrolment, what did you have to do?

J.: As far as I can recall, now Catherine you’re bringing us back a little bit there; I think we had to make a formal written submission to begin with, I think that was assessed and as far as I recall there was an interview process.

T.: Yes, that’s right. There was an interview process.

J.: and I think it might have involved Peter Wolk and Una Mansfield, Dr. Walsh? ...

T.: There was a couple of others ... no...

J.: Dr. Petty, Dr. Evan Petty was part of the interview team ...

T.: And Leo Colgan

J.: And Leo Colgan, then the Registrar of the college, so there certainly was an interview process, and I don’t know how that was weighted, or what they were looking for, but we both registered that year anyway.

T.: We didn’t know each other!

J.: Do you remember your number?

T.: laugh... no

J.: 720078 was mine anyway, I think.

T.: I think I was 720092, so I must have been later.

I.: And can you remember your first impressions, when you went to Plassey?

T.: Ok, well mine were pretty impressive at the time. I was out of boarding school and I just thought this was wonderful! I loved ... all the people milling around and I loved to be surrounded by male company, again, and I just loved the whole cut and thrust of, just the thinking process I think. Suddenly the world looked interesting, and that was my very first impression. John?

J.: I still recall very clearly entering those gates and thinking I have arrived, because of that palatial mansion, then known to us as Plassey House, later known as the White House, but the drive up to it, the lands, the river, the environment captured me from day one. And just like Trish I thought the freedom of choice and living, being far away from home and having a choice to make decisions on everything we were doing every single day was outstanding- really excited by it. The educational
thing wasn’t as important to me then as it might be or should have been, but it was a new adventure for us and we were going off into a theme park that we thought was just a dream world.

I.: Where did you stay, John?

J.: Now that’s an interesting story. I stayed with a Mrs. Graham, who has long since passed away. She had a very large private house in Castletroy, one of the nicer houses in Castletroy. Her husband at the time had passed away. Possibly for economic reasons, she took me in, but she was not on any letting registry with the college, she had no interest in taking in a student. I, with my late father went to the door and some chemistry occurred at that moment in time, and she took me in. Four years later I was the last, the only man really that stayed the four years there, and I had the luxury of staying in a luxury home with a lovely lady who treated me like a son that she never had. She had three older daughters who had moved on, out of the house, and she just needed company. She needed somebody that she could feel comfortable with, she wasn’t into taking students or boarders or into the usual landlady thing, and if I can characterize how different it was for me than everybody else, a feature of every single night of my stay there was a glass of Sauterne with her before dinner. That didn’t normally happen for young students from West Cork, so it was an extraordinary thing, and a wonderful lady, and she became a great friend, a lifetime friend of mine afterwards.

I.: So that very much added to your enjoyment of your experience?.

J.: Oh sure I had a quality of life that nobody could match, a dream arrangement in place, and a very nice person. She liked me and I liked her, good accommodation, very close to the college, in Castletroy, walking distance away, obviously for lectures, I was always at lectures.

T.: Mine was using the list with my parents, that was given by the college. And this was really the first time that Limerick had ever welcomed students and there was just a pretty short brief list, and I ended up out, way out the Ennis road, miles away, and I do remember the ladies name, Mrs. Noonan, she took in one other student, Barry Corbett. We had, it was her first time, she was an elderly lady; we were allowed to use the sitting room downstairs, that’s where everything for us took place, including our meals. We had, obviously, two bedrooms upstairs, and a bathroom and that was it. It was grand... ish ... [laugh]... I felt it was too far from where the action was in Limerick, you know. So ... by the ... and she fed us well, she was very sweet but I know that I had left there by, by the following, I’d say Easter, I had found alternate accommodation that was nothing to do with
Mrs. Noonan, it was just, I suppose, just the excitement of other places beckoned and closer to Limerick where all the action, social life was taking place.

I.: And was this digs in somebody’s house as well?

T.: As it happened, one of the girls I had become friendly with, her parents were leaving and going back to Brazil, and the house where they had lived was in South Circular Road?

J.: It was, I can’t remember the name of it

T.: ... was free, the rent had been paid until the end of term, or June or something and she, my friend invited me to stay so that was very exciting. And moved in, lock stock and barrel, I had never known such freedom in my life. It was really wonderful, there was just the two of us there, in this lovely house and then for the second year, I moved into a guesthouse with the same girl, on the Ennis road, just opposite Jurys Hotel at the time, and it was called Ennismore. I don’t think it’s a guesthouse any more,

J.: It’s a private dwelling now I think

T.: ... but I spent the next three years there. There were lots of other people there too, it was always an exciting place to go, and I was actually the only student because this other girl did not complete the course, she left, and went back to join her family in Brazil. But I spent the three years, the next three years in Ennismore guesthouse, on the Ennis Road, perfect.

I.: And were there others, Trish from your class in Laurel Hill who went to NIHE?

T.: Yes, I think this girl, this Brazilian girl, Louise O’ Donovan, and a Dorinda Burke, there were three of us who started but I was the only one who finished, they both left in the first year.

J.: And Mirette

T.: Oh and Mirette Butler,

J.: four of them started but you were the only one who graduated ...

T.: Yes I was the only one, they all left within the first or second year ... second year, some of them. Mirette got called to Nursing, she wanted to nurse, she had a preference to, or decided she didn’t like what she was doing, and ended up going to St. Vincents, when she got a late call. The other two left later.

J.: And to be truthful, there was a lot of uncertainty about the courses that time.

T.: There was

J.: It wasn’t as structured as it is obviously is now, there was a little bit of movement going on that time and people were losing a little bit of confidence in terms of what might be on offer.

T.: It was in the media a lot at that time too.
J.: It was, the student marches in Dublin and all sorts of things going on, and the structure, nature and purpose of the college was being challenged right up to parliament.

I.: Were you the only one from your school John? Did you know anybody else when you went to Limerick?
J.: I knew another lad from Clonakilty, but I was the only one from our school yes.
I.: So was that difficult for you or was it easy for you to make friends when you went there?
J.: Not at all, the freedom, free at long last, I loved every moment of it ...
T.: There was a great atomosphere ...
J.: ... had a great sports programme going there, established great friends, lifetime friends, still friends today, forty years on, not at all, I don't ever remember having one moment of boredom.

T.: How many started? Was it about 120 or something that very first year?
J.: Yes, 110, something like that.
T.: But everybody knew everybody so it was really, the atmosphere was something else, it was fun. The first day in there, if you liked it you stayed, you did have a good time.
J.: And we had a unique kind of arrangement and relationship with the academic staff as well and the administrative staff. Everybody knew everyone on a social level ...
I.: You were on first name terms?
J.: You were on first name terms with everybody, yes, yes, and access to everybody, there was no formal requirement to make appointments or to go and see anybody; you met everybody every single day, and everybody knew everybody else, from the lecturers all the way down to the first year student
T.: And lectures in the East room, tutorials upstairs and so on, it was just, it was great, it was good.
J.: And we all ate in the same place, we were all in the same building. We were all in the White House.

I.: Someone described to me going down to the river and catching fish, which was cooked for lunch!

T. and J.: [Laugh] ... I never knew that!
T.: I knew the river very well. John and I met, our first year there. By February we started to date so that would have been 1973, so we knew the river, it was a lovely walk, it was ever so romantic! you
know, you met lots of couples down there, that was the place to go, walk down to the river, walk along the banks, and it was gorgeous.

J.: I didn't know anything about the fish story though!

T.: I didn't either, no I didn't know anything about the fish story, but you'd never know, many things took place, yes.

J.: I think the catering firm at the time, year one was …

T.: Campbell catering

J.: Before that I think it was Noonans …

T.: I don't remember that, I remember Campbell catering.

I.: So you had all your meals there?

T.: Yes, yes.

J.: I had dinner, I had dinner above at Mrs. Grahams, but certainly you could have had breakfast, we certainly had lunch there.

T.: Lunch was served and you know, coffee in the morning, and coffee in the afternoon, but not dinner, or, in the evening or …

J.: But there was a little mini canteen that would keep going until about four or five o’ clock

T.: … in the cellar

J.: downstairs in the cellar, next to the old library.

T.: Very cosy.

I.: So facilities were centred in Plassey House?

T.: Completely.

J.: Exclusively … there were no other buildings. They had started the … the pile driving for the foundations for what was then Block F, I don't know what it would be now, Block … it was the one that if you sat in the East Room and looked out the main, the east windows there, onto the lawn, there was a new structure being built and adjoining Plassey House at that time. That was the first block, nothing else had been built, nothing.

I.: So your lectures were in Plassey House?
T.: Yes, they were all, their offices, if I remember correctly, were in the attic or the Penthouse, whatever you like to call it, they all had small offices up there, and then the other rooms, other than Dr. Walsh’s, and that was always on the first floor, and his secretary ... Anne Sadlier, tutorial rooms were all on the first floor ...
J.: And the Registrar was also on that floor ... on the top of the stairs on the right hand side which is now the link room with the rest of the complex, that's where ... the Registrar, you mentioned his name earlier ...
T.: Yes, Leo
J.: Leo Colgan had his office.
T.: And there was a Reception downstairs ...
J.: Reception and Administration were all the one area there ... yes, and then you had the ...
T.: ... in the basement
J.: A couple of small rooms down there too, bathrooms I think and then the other end, under the stairs you had the Main Entrance which was closed, I think, locked up permanently -You had the student centre which was situated two caverns under the main entrance ... laugh ... we used to call it the 'beerkeller'!
T.: And everybody gathered there.
J.: That's where the centre of the universe was!
I.: That's where everyone gathered, in between lectures?
J. and T.: yes,
T.: Yes, absolutely, if you weren’t in the canteen, then you were there!

J.: And we used to come in and out a side door with our dirty football boots and gear and tack and everything else, and no-one knew, well we had no sports facilities, we played outside on the lawn.
I.: Ok, so you played ... was there training out there? Did you have teams or was this just informal?
J.: Oh yes. Well, informal because we thought we were so good we decided we’d go ahead and form teams and there was Gaelic teams, well, particularly football, because we were near Limerick, there was more of a rugby thing. We played soccer as well out there on the lawn and also rugby and then we claimed to be inter-varsity quality, so we went to Galway and got ‘destroyed’ up there, so we moved out of that league in a hurry! That’s a story! That first rugby game! And then we started
playing more frequently. When the second year came by, and the College at Thomond, which was the NCPE opened, we feared they would be top notch players but in fact we began to show them we were as good as them. So we started competing with them quite a bit, and then we went into a local league, with the army in Limerick and so on and so forth, so we played quite a bit throughout those three or four years.

I.: So that was quite a busy time then, you were playing quite a bit in those years?

J.: Oh yes, we had yellow jerseys, I don’t know if anyone has ever told you that, but I remember the yellow. I don’t know where we got them, borrowed or stole them, I don’t know, but yellow was a feature. That was our first, before the current maroon colour came into play, yellow was the dominant colour; it hadn’t been established what colour it should be, but yellow and white were the two colours that we chose or were given to us. I think maybe SFADCO might have been the sponsors, the first set of jerseys, Shannon Free Airport Development Company ... because their Chairman, was the chairman of our Governing Authority at the time. Mr. Paul Quigley, that was his name, if I recall.

T.: And a very active drama club there as well, very active, you know, we put on concerts, we entered the ... whatever they had, I remember us going to Athlone to compete, and most of those there were involved. There were those who were acting, those who were involved in make up and directing. And then there were all the supporters you know,

J.: And drivers!

T.: And drivers, exactly, you got cars, transport from anywhere you could. I don’t think we ever hired anything, it was, you know, begged, borrowed ...

J.: There were a few of us who used to do part-time relief work driving for Kennings Car Hire in Shannon at the time, so we had access to vehicles, so we did the runs to Dublin, and to Dundalk, do you remember we went to Dundalk?

T.: That’s what I was thinking, it was Dundalk, it wasn’t Athlone, where the drama was held

I.: That was quite a distance from Limerick?

T.: Oh it was great fun,

J.: Wonderful time!

T.: Yes, we did, it was a good year, a very good year.

J.: You won some awards for that too?
T.: Of course we did
J.: Yes, the records of that play, that year... you were in that
T.: I think we saw something when we went back for the twenty-fifth, there were some photographs of those, yes.
J.: They showed some clips, yes.
I.: Can you remember any of the productions?
T.: I remember the actors, I was make-up ...
J.: Was it Juno and the Peacock?
T.: There was Jimmy Storan and ... Joe who died, Joe O' Connor, yes.
J.: Fionnuala Lyddy, she was in it
T.: Fionnuala would be ... she would let you know the, whatever ... but everybody who was in the college pretty well was involved. I can't remember at this minute in time ...
I.: And of the plays, or things that you put on?
T.: No, but I know that I was back stage, I was not an actress
J.: You used to sing Trish too, do you remember, you used to open the thing with Louise and yourself playing the guitar, singing 'Slievnamon', and various other things! ...cringe! Cringe! ... [laugh] ...
T.: [laugh] ... don’t remind me!
J.: You weren’t terrible! There were three of them who were guitarists, so they would sing and play the guitar ...
T.: But there were some, there was the Dundon brothers who were great ... There was always music in the college, Gerard and John Dundon ...
J.: ... passed away, John too
T.: And all of that group were super ... played wonderful music
J.: Declan McDaid
T.: Yes, so you would go for a night on the town on a Thursday or Friday night and the sing songs would go on all night long, and they were good, really good.

I.: Where did you socialise in Limerick?
T.: We socialised in the ... what was the name of that pub down in the, it's not the Hunters...
J.: The Hurlers
T.: That was the place; they made a fortune down there,
J.: Well we don't know that,
T.: Well they should have had!! ... [laugh]... that was the only place you could get drink or go for a
night out.
J.: Jed’s mother, do you remember him, Jed was the son, his mother had it that time, she was a lovely
woman.
T.: We loved it, thought it was great! It was the closest pub to the college. And everybody walked.
J.: And it was thatched, a thatched roof, that’s all I remember about it.
T.: But it was ... otherwise you had to go into town, and ...
J.: I remember well we canvassed for about a year and a half to try and get Dr. Walsh to agree to
allow us to bring alcohol on the campus, it was absolutely forbidden initially, and then we set up the,
what do you call that thing again, in there, the Stables, but they were literally stables, not what you
have today. They were, they started out as stables, and then we were moved into a student centre,
we canvassed for that and we got a couple of pre-fab buildings, so we used to bring in our beer in
there and sit on the floor and drink beer ... [laugh] ... act very cool!
T.: it was pretty basic.
I.: So you had to buy it elsewhere because there was no bar there or anything ...
J.: Yes, we brought it ... there was no licence, there was a thing about only having alcohol sold ...
there is now obviously, there was no alcohol sold on campus that time, and it might have been for a
real reason, they probably couldn’t get a licence.

I.: What staff members stand out for you both?
J.: Oh, I know mine anyway, Trish, do you want to name yours?
T.: Ok, my memories are Roy Hayhurst, Leo Cogan, Una Mansfield, I think there was a John Barrett,
there, who wasn’t there for very long, but he was there that first year. There were a couple of other
ladies too; I can’t remember what their names were.
J.: Who was teaching me French? ... Olivia ...
T.: Olivia Healy, yes, you continue ... everybody knew, oh, ... Terry Moran ... who else?
J.: Well I can add a few I think, certainly the one I would have been closest too would have been Roy
Hayhurst, he would have been Head of, later Dean of the College of Business, so he was our man. A
very affable character, I don't know where he is now, do you know him? Is he in the college?
I.: He’s not in the college no.
J.: Leo at the time was Registrar, he later went into ... he used also lecture in Accounting, do you
remember, so I don't know whether he moved out of the Administrative role of being Registrar of
the College, and became a full time lecturer, I don't know, but he was there. Donal Dineen came in
first year, Evan Petty, Dr. Evan Petty, was Engineering, a lovely man, we were all very fond of him and there was another guy, he just retired a few years ago, with a northern accent from Belfast, quite the character, he, in later life …

T.: Paula remembered him as well, she loved him … one of our girls

J.: … Terry Moran, and his wife Olga, ‘from the Volga’, she was there, we used to say and there was also the girls in the Reception were a very big part of our lives, because they, we were really new to the whole scene and didn’t quite know how it was all to be structured and they were very helpful to us. And there was an Orla in there and there was the tall fair-haired, blonde haired lady, what was her name? Rose, Rose … sorry Catherine, I can't remember her name now … Rosarii, Rosemary … But the person I think I was most fond of, of all, who had no contact with the students directly but was of great assistance to us, was Anne Sadlier. She was Dr. Walsh’s private secretary, private assistant and she was a lovely person.

T.: And Matt?

J.: Oh and Matty Sharpe of course, Matty Sharpe, caretaker for the whole thing, he was our …

T.: … He knew everybody and everybody knew him.

J.: He took on a kind of a custodial role for all of us, a custodian role for all of us. He looked after everybody. Nobody ever fell down, nobody ever got sick, Matt looked after him or her all the time. He was an extraordinary individual. He drew no attention to himself other than the fact that he could light a cigarette with one hand and strike a match in the same hand, that was a famous trick of his. Other than that … Trish has named them all I think. Wish I could remember that Rose’s name, she was Rose I suppose …

T.: Yes, I don’t remember. I do remember, they were really fantastic.

I.: Did you have much contact with Dr. Walsh?

J.: I did, because I was involved in student politics in year one, we set up a student council, John Redington and myself. He was the first President, I was the first Vice-President, then we had an election the following year and we reversed roles, he was Vice-President and I was President. I topped the bill with the popular vote that year, so we were in and out to Dr Walsh quite a bit. And at the time, I remember doing an interview in ’73, with John Bowman, for RTE, and I think John Redington did that interview as well, we’ve never seen it again, it’s a televised interview so it’s still in the records there; our views of the college during that first year and second year. I think there were two sets of interviews done at that time so they were certainly quite persistent. I had lots of
access to Dr. Walsh, for two reasons; one was because I had this role of student council player and
secondly, he was a Corkman. He was very proud of this Cork connection with me and I with him, he
had this thing going, I think he was actually from Trish’s home town, Kanturk.
T.: That’s where his family were from.
I.: That’s where his family were from? I think he grew up in Sundays Well ...
J.: I think he did.
I.: So you had that initial ...
J.: But it was so informal that time, Catherine, it was easy, everybody knew him, you wouldn’t claim
to have been the only one, he would have known you too ...
T.: ... he would have known everyone ...
J.: John O’ Connor was the other one
T.: John O’ Connor, yes
J.: He was the Secretary, the Company, College Secretary at the time, the legal secretary, he was the
enforcer, he was very austere, in our mind he was austere, during the first rag week he was not all
too pleased with our antics but would you expect him to be?
I.: Another Cork man also
J.: Yes, yes, I met him many times down here afterwards, I think he was actually a west Cork man
was he?
I.: Boherbue.
J.: Oh is he? Around your country ...
T.: Yes.
J.: Is John still with us? He had been in poor health after he retired.
I.: Yes he is. He has just actually written his memoir and just donated it wonderfully to this archive
as well, to the university archive, just before Christmas ...
J.: Oh that would be very interesting. He would have been there longer than anybody I’d say, he was
the longest serving member of staff up there, ever, even longer than Dr. Walsh, I’d say in the end.
I.: Yes, forty years, he retired in 2012.
J.: Did he really?
T.: Was it 2012 when he retired?
J.: Yes, that’s interesting and he was a lovely man, he really was a good character.

I.: So there was that great camaraderie?
T.: Huge.
J.: That was a feature of the place, that one to one relationship with everybody, and I don’t ever remember a single incident in the four years we were there, certainly with the first years, and the second years integrated very well with the first years, that ever gave any cause for concern to the college or vice versa to the parents of the students there. Now we had long forgotten our parents because we were independent, yes, flapping our wings for the first time, so that wasn’t a big thing, but I don’t ever remember any issue arising that would have given any concern for public debate.

T.: We were there also for the inauguration of the college, you know the very first college ball and that was really, sort of, I think it was about a day before the college actually officially opened, so we all registered.

J.: That was a black tie event

T.: That was a black tie event

J.: And we all went, sipping sherry! ... [laugh]...

I.: Do you remember where that was?

J.: I do.

T.: Yes, yes, right in, literally in a marquee, where the fountain is now.

J.: A huge marquee where the fountain is now, exactly.

T.: There are lots of photographs of us all together earlier, you know, standing on the steps, all the gang who were to go, we had a great time altogether, that was quite something. And nobody knew anybody at that stage!

J.: But we felt very important didn’t we?

T.: Of course we did. The feeling was fantastic and even still when we get together for reunions, I think that’s the thing that surprises me always, it’s like we met them yesterday. Yes, everybody was very friendly with everybody and there was a really lovely dynamic.

J.: And as the years rolled on, and our kids went there and they still say the same thing, that the connections and the friendships they developed in UL as it became, stayed with them. It was extraordinary.

I.: A lot has been written about the pioneering aspect of, you know, the early days in the NIHE. Did you feel you were in any way pioneers?

T.: The only thought that probably was in my head at the time when I decided, when NIHE accepted me, but also when I decided to make the, to choose NIHE, was I was from a family of entrepreneurs so they all ran their own small businesses, and that was the, you know, if you looked at the other
established colleges, it was Commerce, or B. Comm., whatever, it just seemed a little different, it was if you could spread your wings a little bit better. Was it pioneering? It just seemed so American to me and I just felt, ok, there was something about that. My grandmother was from New York, and I always felt that that was a huge draw at the time, it was such a, a, foreign maybe, North American aspect to it.

I.: How was that evidenced Trish?
T.: It was evidenced in the staff. Dr. Walsh had come from, I was very impressed with where he had come from and I was very impressed with his credentials, and I remain so to this day, very impressed with the man. There was the, there was Peter Wolk, who was just …

J.: He was ex-MIT.
T.: Yes, who else was there from? It was just such a foreign staff that you know … I was brought up in boarding school, and in a small town and you really never met anybody who wasn't Irish, with probably, I say this with respect to parish pump attitude, and it just seemed such a big open feeling and it gave off that atmosphere as well, so. I’m trying to remember about the other American, we had such a strong, we had visiting lecturers, and they were from all over the world, and it was just very impressive, very exciting, the whole thing was just very exciting and open.

J.: Well I certainly never felt like a pioneer, certainly not in the abstinence sense.
T.: … yes, maybe not, it was just that it had … an open feel.

J.: My sense was that we were at the front end of all innovation in this country. It was hammered into us that we had just joined the EU, we had to look outwards to an export driven market economy, it was an open economy, language and business was going to be intertwined over the next thirty, forty years. We had this new outlook, we were away from protectionist politics and all the rest of it, getting into foreign trade. We were absolutely convinced that we were being set up as the engineering school and the business school of the future of Ireland. And we believed it. And I still do believe that they were right. They did it. They delivered what they promised to deliver and that that whole concept of innovation, innovative thinking, new thinking, new approach, none of the old hang ups of the old traditional university; liberal arts or whatever, it was brand new, every thought process was different there.

And even the manner in which they structured the courses, the manner in which they credited the courses, the manner in which they were being assessed and how they were to be assessed in the future, that was all new. The whole modular system, the term system, the trimester system, what was it?
All the work experience, the excitement of all that.

The work experience and the co-op, this was a brand new sandwich for all of us to enjoy. And we certainly put up with the pleasure of that whole experience. I loved it. I can never say anything bad about it.

I.: You participated in Co-op?
J. and T.: Oh yes
J.: Oh very much so, yes. Did we ever, we were the first students to really go for it. We went overseas, we were the first students to leave Ireland, on Co-op.
I.: And where did you go?
J.: Well Trish went; well you can speak for yourself, please
T.: I went to Montreal to the Aluminum Company of Canada (t/a Alcan) headquarters. Alcan had come in to start up the Foynes thing of ...
J.: ... Alcan set up on the, north shore ...
T.: ... the Aluminum Company of Canada. In Foynes in Limerick, they had a plant there, Aughinish.
J.: Aughinish, that was it
T.: So I approached, they tried, this was the very first time so they encouraged us students to see if we could find placements ourselves, which was quite a challenge.
J.: There was no Co-op office that time.
T.: No, there wasn’t a Co-op office but some of the lecturers, they had found a few placements for people, so I approached Alcan, and asked them if they would be interested in a ...
J.: ... rising star! ... [laugh]
T.: Well they were! ... [laugh]
J.: ... you charmer! ...
T.: And my six months co-op in my second year there was in Montreal. They flew me over, they put me up and I had six months of amazing, I mean, really terrific ... it was my first time in North America, so it was quite an eye opener and it was a great experience. And then, by the ... the co-op period was sort of divided at that stage, it was six months in second year, three months in third year and three months in fourth year, or three months through the summer going into fourth year.
J.: That’s correct.
T.: But Alcan at that stage, had their offices in the, what was the Ardu Ryan hotel, they had taken over all the ground floor so for the second Co-op I worked with them in Limerick. And the third Co-op, I got a placement with a consulting firm, a management consulting group, Eukon Associates in
Dublin, on Baggot Street. So it was fantastic, you know, great experience and very exciting. Lovely. You John?

J.: Through contacts I had already established myself, I headed off to Canada in the first and second one, worked in Cana Construction Co Ltd in Calgary, later in Edmonton, Alberta, and later again in Richmond, BC - same firm, a construction development company. Loved every minute of it. Couldn’t believe how my luck came in. My ship was in port for the four years I was in Limerick. It was great. And of course being in Calgary I could visit ‘herself’ in Montreal, which was beyond the level of imagination at the time.
I.: Fantastic.
J.: We were already dating at that stage, weren’t we?
T.: Were you! … [laugh] …

I.: And then of course you both spent four years … your degree?

T.: It’s in Commercial Studies, that was the degree, and it was a year after we graduated because there was so much controversy about the awarding of our degrees, for our year … we finished in …
J.: … 1976
T.: July ’76, and we were not awarded with the degrees until September ’77. We were abroad at that stage, and we had just married and we couldn’t afford to come back for the … the conferring, which was really, probably, one of the big sadnesses of our lives, we couldn’t come back and meet everybody, and, but we didn’t, and they sent our parchments in the mail to us. Yes, they awarded us Bachelor of Commercial Studies, I’ll have to check …
J.: I’ve to check if it was Business Studies, B. BS. Or B. CS?
T.: I know, you got B. BS, I got B. CS., Bachelor of Commercial Studies.
J.: I can’t remember.
T.: Because my, course programme had completely changed around and Admin. Systems was no longer there, so that’s what I ended up with … Bachelor of Commercial Studies.

I.: John you must have been involved in some of that … controversy, and, you know, trying to get recognition for the degrees and things. Can you describe some of that time?
J.: Yes. I can’t remember the detail of it, because it was … we were very careful … now, as you’d expect with students, it was a question of charge on, get attention, march on the streets and so on
and so forth ... but I had to take on a more responsible role, when I was representing the students. Redington and I would have been in frequent contact with Dr. Walsh, and we really had to follow the, what the policy of the college would be, rather than what the students response to the policy might be, which was slightly different. So I remember meeting with, I think it was Minister Burke, at the time, was there a Minister of Education called Burke?

T.: Yes, there was.

J.: I don’t remember his name, I think he went to Europe afterwards...

I.: Richard Burke.

T.: And Garret Fitzgerald.

J.: Richard, that’s the name, in Dublin, and Garret Fitzgerald, yes, absolutely, very definitely on a number of occasions. And ... I don’t think we ever had a full appreciation of what was happening in the body politic and what was going on legislatively that time. I didn’t know the history that led to the opening of the college; I knew the effort that went into it by the Limerick group itself, the whole endeavour. And we didn’t quite appreciate the difficulties that Dr. Walsh and his Board of Governors were having, what was it, the Academic ... the Board of Governors, the Governing Authority had, now with respect to, I suppose, recognition, accreditation, and the ultimate desire and need to award their own degrees. We, as young students probably didn’t understand all the nuances behind that and the politics behind it. And indeed the legislation absent, that was a big thing we didn’t understand, there wasn’t a university to actually allow it to be set up at the time, that followed many years later. Yes, there were a lot of meetings and, you know, as I said we were a kind of a little unsure of ourselves. I was never clear fully of what the message might be to the students, so we kept that as much as possible away from the student body, and concentrated on on-campus activities believing that this thing would have to be sorted out at a more senior level beyond the student body. So I didn’t, I couldn’t claim to be an expert in that field at all.

I.: Your degree comes from NUI Maynooth?

J. and T.: No.

I.: No, sorry, beg your pardon, NUI?

J.: No, NUI, National University of Ireland, signed by a man who passed away just last week

I.: Who was that?

J.: Whitaker ...


I.: As Chancellor, of course.
J.: He was the one who actually signed all the parchments, he was the Governor, he was the Chairman of the National University of Ireland, the wrong term. Anyway he was the Head of the National University of Ireland, he was the one. And I’m not even sure; we were away, so we missed that opportunity.

T.: We missed it, yes.

J.: We never met him.

I.: And was there a lot of resentment then, in your fourth year, you know, knowing that it might have been possible that you wouldn’t graduate?

J.: Catherine, I never got a sense that we wouldn’t graduate and you know, honestly, it was inculcated in us that we actually were good enough to hold our heads high. None of us felt a sense or got the impression …

T.: And everyone was working so hard, we were doing the exams … you were, they had really put the push on and … I mean …

J.: Yes, and we were striving for goals and we thought …

T.: we were … [laugh] …

J.: … we thought we were going to be great ambassadors for Ireland … full of confidence

T.: … [laugh] … no, there wasn’t, and everybody was working … you know, the earlier grades of first year, because, you know, if you didn’t build up your grade, you were in a bit of trouble, and many of us, I only can speak for myself here, but certainly I needed to work very hard in third and fourth year, to maintain grades.

J.: On this cumulative assessment basis

T.: Because first year certainly when I think about it was right up, I just was in cloud cuckoo land in terms of studying, and it did fall by the board a bit, but yes, and I think an awful lot of people were like that. We were really studying hard, it was, and that was the feeling, you’ve got to get through these exams and I think maybe the feel was to … to … to have such amazing results.

J.: We didn’t know much about the engineering side of the house, but certainly this side of the house, I recall at one stage either third or final year, we were tested against students at Trinity, allegedly taking the same course, and we stood up very well. And we thought yes, we were able to stay and win the course, as far as we were concerned it was a match and they were playing to win. And we weren’t going to let ourselves down and we certainly weren’t going to let the parents or the college down, so there was a great sense of team work going on all the time. I don’t know whether we were
cuddled across the line or whether we were encouraged across the line, we actually did the work and had enough breadth and scope of course work done, to do and get what we did, but it was certainly assessed by the NUI as being satisfactory. I think everybody was quite pleased.

T.: I don’t know if other, you see, we might be wrong, that was the way we looked at it and the group we were moving with, so maybe other groups felt differently, I don’t know.

J.: We had no sense of put down, at all.

T.: No

J.: Far from it, we were very confident. And not being brash about it or arrogant about it, I think we just were disappointed if we didn’t get the job done.

I.: And did that come from the staff down?

T.: Yes it did, it came from the Head down,

J.: From Dr. Walsh down.

T.: From Dr. Walsh down. He was a great leader.

J.: Yes, he was great to assure us and put our minds at ease. And then he just said ‘don’t believe everything you read’, you know, just get on with it, do your work and we’ll look after the rest. And he did.

T.: That was really it, do the work and we’ll look after the rest.

J.: And we certainly had a sort of common theme and purpose. We were one single-minded group the whole lot of us up there. I can speak for the first year, I don’t know what you can say about the second, third and fourth, because their experiences would certainly have been different, although I do believe the second year were very much in line with our group; they seemed to have the same spirit, the same approach and the same friendships and the same thing going, but that obviously diluted and morphed into something else. Year two, year three and year four, we wouldn’t even have known the first years when we were filing out in the last year.

I.: Personally, you got married, when was that?

T.: February. Yes we graduated or we left in, we finished in ’76, you headed off to Canada because you had a job right away, in Canada. I didn’t, I had one in Ireland, in Dublin, and ... so you headed off right away to Calgary, and we ...

J.: We were engaged when I left.
T.: Yes, we were engaged. And then we were married in February ’77, and I went out, I couldn’t go out, you know to join John until the permit situation, was pretty strict in Canada and remains so. So I had to have, be married. But yes, you went out, so we got married very quickly afterwards, I think we were the first of the group to get married in ... we were ahead of Mick and Bridget Laffan, ahead of ...  
J.: Oh, definitely were, I know that, there was quite a long gap between our wedding and the next one.  
T.: Yes, so.  

I.: You stayed in touch with a lot of your colleagues?  

J.: We did, we were involved from day one and became very involved again when we came back to Ireland with the Alumni Association, so ...  
T.: And that was because our girls were going through, we have three girls and they were all, are all graduates of UL. So of course we got back involved again, on the alumni and the ...  
J.: The guy who drove on with the concept of the alumni, forming it and the alumnus would have been Roy Hayhurst. Again we were very close to Roy so he encouraged that from day one. He said you will enjoy it, you will benefit from it, the college will benefit from it. It’s the only mechanism known that works, so develop it, support it and keep going with it. Here we are forty years later still doing it  

I.: When you look back, what would you consider the highlights of your time there? Aside from meeting each other obviously and your degree and everything as well, the educational achievements.  

J.: Not so much a highlight for me by the way of a manner of thinking. They brought in a visiting lecturer, who was in business in UK called John Flannery. He was the director of a very well established, famous, multi-national construction group called George Wimpey PLC. John happened to stay in the same house that I referred to earlier, Mrs. Grahams, for the term or two terms that he might have been over there in Castletroy. He became my mentor in terms of how to look at business and how to think laterally and to think outside the box. I think meeting him, and his influence on how to approach management generally and more particularly, business challenges, was such a
significant influence over my life. By chance, I met him, and it formulated views that I still have today in terms of managing businesses, opportunities and challenges.

T.: And many of those lecturers but John Flannery in particular, stands out, because he was a riveting lecturer and he came from industry, and he was still, you know, involved, he wasn't an academic. And it was so different and so fresh and so exciting and they brought, the college brought in quite a number of those visiting lecturers who were from industry, and that was all ... that was just so exciting and so refreshing. So ...

J.: Yes, top of their league players at the coalface of industry, coming in, chatting with us, and it wasn't just a lecture, it was more engaging with us. We were often consulting with them, they weren't consulting with us. It was a great opportunity for us to get a look at what we might do going forward. So that then I suppose, the fact that they had introduced co-op which was such an important part of our character building, our confidence building, you know, anything that we were going to do later on was based on that sense that we had a little sharp edge over some other students in the third-level colleges around Ireland.

Co-op was the key to success as far as we were concerned. It gave us a little bit of a competitive advantage over the others. We loved that. We came back probably young, not only brighter but more confident people because of it. And we had money in our pocket which was nice too. You know, there wasn't anybody obliged, or I think employers were not obliged to pay us but I can't recall any employer that didn't, and most of those co-op employers took on the students later on if they were available to them. So there was a very nice synergy going on there which was quite unique, at least we thought it was unique, we didn't know about anywhere else at the time. I don't recall it being touted in UCC or UCD or Trinity or anywhere else for that matter.

I.: Ok, thank you very much.