Q: So, how long have you been in Edinburgh?

A: I’ve been here for about six years.

Q: Oh right, okay. What brought you to Edinburgh in the first place?

A: I came here to do my undergraduate degree and then just stayed and carried on doing more graduate studies.

Q: Oh right, okay. Do you remember the first time you heard that there was going to be a referendum?

A: Yeah. It was-, it must have been about three years ago or so. I mean, pretty much when it was announced.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: What were your feelings at the time?

A: Very mixed.

Q: Okay.

A: They still had basics then, really. So, I liked the idea of an independent Scotland just instinctively, but I’m quite suspicious of the SNP.

Q: Oh right, okay. So, what instincts?

A: Probably-, so partly just dislike of the UK and the feeling that it would be funny to watch it split up.

Q: Okay.

A: Also, just that the politics in Scotland are so different to England that it would make sense for the people of Scotland to be able to run things themselves.

Q: Yeah. When you said just like the UK, do you mean Westminster rule?

A: Westminster rule and just the UK and the history of it, but the whole thing, but that’s more emotional and not really particularly well thought out.

Q: Okay, okay. Do you think for most people that the referendum was emotional?

A: Yeah, definitely. I think it was, yeah.

Q: More so than particular policies or things like that?

A: I think the question of whether or not Scottish people would be better off financially made a big impact, but it was really-, there were points either way of that. So, it was hard to decide based on that alone.

Q: Yeah. I mean, were there-, so, how did you end up voting in the end?

A: I voted yes.

Q: Okay. Were there any things at all from the no campaign that resonated with you at all?

A: So, not from the official no campaign, but from left wing people I know campaigning for no, the idea that just putting up more borders wasn’t a good idea. That did appeal to me and I could see the sense in that.

Q: Okay. That’s interesting. So, you knew people that were campaigning for no?

A: Yes.

Q: As part of the official no campaign?

A: Kind of. Most of them were very left wing, Labour party members. So, they weren’t-, they were really on the fringes of the official campaign, I guess.

Q: Okay, okay. Right. Do you think that the no campaign, in general, ran a good campaign?

A: No, not at all. I think they-, they didn’t have positive message at all, basically. Yeah, I think they only really won through inertia in the end and if there was to be another vote in 20 years, it could go differently.

Q: Okay. So, do you think it’s more likely now as a result of-?

A: Yeah, yeah. I think it’s very unlikely that either central ruling party will make Scotland happy with what’s going on.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think that it was-, I mean, to me, it feels like a lot of the-, I guess a lot of the stuff that was coming out of the yes campaign was anti-tory party and anti-austerity and stuff like that. Do you think it would be more difficult if Labour, even New Labour is slightly more left wing were in-?

A: Very slightly more, but the SNP are definitely more anti-austerity than even the Labour party, apparently. So, I don’t think it would make that much of a different. I think as a side effect of how the Labour party conducted themselves, they are going to really struggle in May to get Scottish votes.

Q: Yeah. So, why do you think that’s been?

A: I think people in Scotland just felt patronised, frankly. So, whenever I went back to England, people would say things like, “oh, it would be a real shame if Scotland left because it’s part of our cultural heritage”, and they-, so people in Scotland felt like they were just treated as a tourist site, basically.

Q: Okay.

A: A quaint odyssey which everyone in the UK or in England wanted to keep and I think that just really irritated people in Scotland. They were trying to have a sensible debate, but they didn’t feel like anyone south of the border was really taking them seriously.

Q: Yeah. What do you think about the media coverage?

A: I think it was very pro-no, but in a subtle way, if that makes sense.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. I think the BBC in particular was playing a seemingly equal but pro-Westminster position. Exactly.

Q: Right. What even-, what was it like do you think in the Scottish media more specifically?

A: I’m not that sure. So, I know that The Scotsman was pretty openly pro-no and The Herald was pretty openly pro-yes, but as far as I can tell, The Herald was the only big media institution which was pro-yes openly and everyone else seemed to be pretty much on the no side, as far as I could tell.

Q: Was there any different-, I don’t know if you interacted with-, did you watch any of the TV stuff?

A: I don’t think I did.

Q: Okay. Like any highlights or anything?

A: No, not that I can recall, I’m sorry.

Q: Okay. No, that’s fine. That’s fine. So, who were you generally-, were you generally quite open talking about the referendum?

A: Yeah, yeah. So, I guess, more of my interaction would have come with talking to people who I know and friends of friends and stuff at parties or in coffee shops or anything like that. I probably got a slightly biased view of it because I think a lot of students living in central Edinburgh probably tended towards voting yes.

Q: Why is that?

A: I think it’s just the kind of person. So, there are a lot of left-wing bias amongst students and universities anyway. I don’t think that necessarily means you’d vote yes, but it would definitely head that way, I think, because they were seen partly as a Tories versus Scotland kind of thing, amongst some people anyway. So, I got the impression that a lot of Scottish people were pro-yes, but that might just be because of the Scottish people who I know.

Q: Right. How did you feel that living in Edinburgh was during that time?

A: Very mixed. So, Edinburgh, as you know I’m sure, is fairly wealthy compared to the rest of Scotland and I think there are a lot of people who work in London or work with people in London. So, I think particularly in central Edinburgh, a lot of the more professional people were probably no voters or going that way. So, yeah, but much more mixed than somewhere like Glasgow or Dundee, I think where it was more of the yes vote.

Q: Do you feel that there were people in Edinburgh that would vote for Labour if they were independent?

A: Yeah, definitely. So, there is a reasonably large green movement in Edinburgh and they were all mostly pro-independence and there was a green campaign for independence, and there was something called the Radical Independence Campaign, which was partly based in Edinburgh and in other cities, which was campaigning quite a lot.

Q: So, what was their kind of platform?

A: Basically to make independence less about nationalism and more about the kind of society we could have in a non-Westminster rule Scotland. So, less about Scotland being great and more about decentralising governance and stuff like that.

Q: Yeah. Okay. Did you do any campaigning yourself?

A: No. No, I wore a badge, and put a sign up but I suppose that comes back to me feeling ambivalent about it. I didn’t really think it was worth putting a lot of energy into campaigning. Even if yes had won, there would have been a lot of campaigning to do to get the SNP to do what we wanted it to anyway. So, even if we were in a slightly better situation, it wasn’t going to change things that much really, because the SNP are still essentially a centrist party.

Q: Yeah. So, is that generally your problem with the SNP? Just before you were kind of discussing it.

A: Yeah, I also know there is a reasonably large right wing quite conservative part to the SNP, so my prediction really would be that if there was independence, the SNP would split quite soon into at least two different parties.

Q: Oh wow.

A: I’m not sure they could stay as one party post-independence.

Q: No. How do you think the SNP have done in general out of the referendum?

A: Very well. I think, yeah-, I think it looks like they are going to get a lot of seats in May and I think they’ve come out looking the best. I think particularly Alex Salmond carried himself very well and came out looking like more of a reasonable person than any of the others. People I know in England would say, “Oh, Alex Salmond, he’s just a big nationalist idiot”, but everyone in Scotland, I think, even if they were voting no can see that he was a capable politician and quite genuine in what he was saying.

Q: Do you think it hurt the SNP that he’s stepped down?

A: No, I think it was good actually. I think it let them have a fresh start and have a post-referendum new image kind of thing.

Q: What do you make of Nicola Sturgeon?

A: I think she is great as heads of political parties go. I would rather have her running the whole country than any of the other candidates.

Q: Okay.

A: If anyone was going to.

Q: Okay. Do you think that she is going to be able to keep the party together?

A: Yes. I reckon so. I think if they do badly in May there will be problems, but they all seem to be trying to do quite well. So, I think it will be okay.

Q: Okay. Why do you think that for most people the SNP has suddenly grown so fast?

A: I think-, so I think even a lot of no voters, they actually agreed with a lot of what the SNP say in terms of social policy and in some degree the taxation policies, and were maybe hurt by some of how the Labour campaign during-, what Labour’s done. So, I think a lot of more traditional Labour voters probably identified with SNP policies a lot more now. So, even if they wanted to stay in the UK to support people to have the border or something like that, they might vote SNP now.

Q: Right, okay. What do you think that Labour did wrong?

A: Well, I mean, it’s just a bigger instance of what they’ve been doing wrong over the last four or five years, which is that anytime the Tories say something, they say something very slightly to the left of it, but still pretty right wing basically, and that’s how they really hurt themselves. They try to follow the Tories in what they’re doing rather than having their own identity.

Q: Do you think that’s been through Scottish Labour in Holyrood as well?

A: Yeah, it is. Yeah.

Q: I mean, do you follow very much of the Holyrood politics?

A: Not that much, but a little bit, but not particularly closely.

Q: Yeah. Do you have any contact with your local MP?

A: No.

Q: Local peers or MSP?

A: MSP. I don’t actually know who the MSP is. I don’t know.

Q: Fine, fair enough. Do you think that the no campaign generally ran a good campaign?

A: Yeah, I think they did. Yeah.

Q: What did they get right?

A: It’s hard to say off the top of my head. So, I guess-, so one thing they got right, but they got wrong was trying to lay out what was their case for why they thought Scotland would be better not independent, but then they didn’t answer that and I think if they’d-, so one thing people were concerned about is that they didn’t seem to give a very clear picture of what would happen post referendum and I think maybe they could have emphasised that more and done more.

Q: In terms of detail?

A: Yeah, the detail of it, they were maybe lacking.

Q: In economic areas or social policy?

A: Yeah. So, I think they had the details, but they didn’t want to pin themselves down to anything. As soon as you’ve done that it’s very easy for someone else to see that some of the numbers are wrong or something and turn it against you.

Q: Okay. What do you think for most people the strongest message from the yes campaign was?

A: I guess around the austerity stuff. So, particularly what has become known as the bedroom tax, which has been a really big issue in Scotland. People have been really concerned about-, and a lot of SNP councils, I think just the SNP in general have said that they are going to basically stop that as far as they can by just giving more money to fund second bedrooms and that kind of thing, I think that message really does appeal to people.

Q: Yeah. Do you think that generally this referendum has been good for Scotland?

A: I think it’s been good for the UK actually. I think its revitalised politics to some extent. I guess the down side to that is that UKIP’s got stronger but there has definitely been a move away from Labour and Tories and to see voting for other people is more possible. I think Scotland on mass potentially voting SNP in May has helped change that, but certainly in the more fringe elements I’m involved with its-, so it was possibly bad in that it was a distraction from maybe more important campaigns, but it did get people thinking on quite a large scale how Scotland and how the UK could be governed differently. There is something called the Common Wheal, which you might have heard of…

Q: Yeah, I think I-.

A: It was like a manifesto, I guess, for a more social demographic Scotland and which was being supported by this Radical Independence Campaign and other people from the Green party. So, I think the emergence of those groups has been quite positive. I think the problem will be to stop the nationalism question in the future. So, people obsess about-, so there has been these people calling themselves the 45%, the amount that voted yes and I think that’s really stupid. Firstly because it labels you as being in a minority, a minor group, which isn’t a good label to have, but secondly it just makes you look bitter, basically. So, I think if all the social groups which have grown up around the campaign can move forward and come up with new stuff it would be very positive.

Q: Did you feel that there was-, aside from the nationalism thing, do you feel that because of the issues that came out there was actually a greater consensus about policy?

A: Yeah, yeah. I think most of the people voting yes or no agree on the kind of Scotland they want to see. So, the only reason I think no won was because of concessions which were promised at the time, so taxation powers and so on. So, I think the problem could be if Scotland gets granted enough powers to look like its responsible, but not enough powers to actually improve things, and just be given enough rope to hang themselves kind of thing. Yeah, but there was definitely some agreement, I think, on both sides of what it’s going to be.

Q: Do you think those concessions have gone far enough?

A: Not to my knowledge. They seem to be very slow to deliver them, and particularly on taxation things, I think there are risks in giving Holyrood tax money raising powers, but not have control of foreign police, stamp duty control and how the money gets spent.

Q: Alright.

A: Yeah, it should be more accurate.

Q: What did you think about the engagement, in two ways? Do you have a particular view point on votes at sixteen?

A: What was that?

Q: Votes at sixteen?

A: Oh yeah. I think that’s definitely good. Yeah, I think people at sixteen are perfectly able to express themselves and it would encourage them as-, because obviously very few people who are young are voting in general and I think it could encourage people to vote. Not that I think voting achieves that much all round, but it gets people engaged in a way that’s quite beautiful and I think-, yeah, I think getting young people voting would be good.

Q: Yeah, and what about the turn out on the day?

A: I think it was fairly amazing. I mean, it’s the largest turnout ever in the last 50 years in the UK. I think it does demonstrate the strength of debates about what’s going on in Scotland. I guess the challenge is to carry that interest forward and get people thinking about these issues, which needs to happen. It’s not easy, but it’s one thing to get a lot of people engaged on one day, but taking that forward has got to happen.

Q: Yeah. Why do you think the turnout was so much higher than it’s been for a general election or a local election even?

A: I’m not sure, really. I was pretty surprised, to be honest. I didn’t think it would be quite that high. I guess it felt like a once in a lifetime opportunity to actually make quite a big difference. I think because it was so close, both sides had been putting a lot of effort into signing people up to vote. Whereas in the normal election, there are so many seats where you don’t really need to bother getting people going out to vote.

Q: Yeah. How are you doing for time?

A: I don’t know, I don’t have the time on me.

Q: It’s ten to.

A: That’s okay.

Q: Another five minutes?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, great. So, what organisations are you involved in and how would you like to see these policies being taken forward in Scotland?

A: So, mostly the organisations I’m involved with are non-parliamentary. So, I’m involved in a libertarian socialist organisation who are more likely to be interested-, so we were a little bit in debates about the referendum and where it really mattered and this kind stuff. It’s really important, I guess, it’s for social issues we would like to focus on. So, things like bedroom tax and problem landlords, particularly in Edinburgh. There is a very good rental campaign going on at the minute. So, those issues, more on the ground stuff which I think-, yeah, groups like Common Weal did quite a good job at getting people stirred up again in useful ways.

Q: Do you think-, you mentioned that it was not really part of one group or party or anything like that. Do you think that we are increasingly going towards a system where people are more interested in the policies than the parties?

A: I hope we are. I would be happy to see a party system fall apart. I don’t have much faith in the parliamentary system, but if we did have something more like independent MP’s voting on individual issues, I would be for that. I think it remains to be seen where that goes. There is so much large scale funding that I think it would be hard to move things that way, but people have definitely lost faith in the model of politics we’ve had for the last fifty years. So, hopefully we’ll move towards something else…

Q: Do you think it’s different in Scottish parliament?

A: I think the hybrid system makes a bit of a difference in the sense that people feel more able to vote for smaller parties because-, so voting for the greens isn’t just completely discarded because they might get a MSP in. So, that helps people at least change their mind set a bit about party politics more towards individual issue politics, but it’s still fundamentally a 4 party system. So, I don’t think that much.

Q: Yeah. Do you think people are temporarily swayed by the characters and the leaders of the parties?

A: I think that was a feature of the independence campaign to some extent. Alex Salmond is very charismatic and a very good speaker, so be made it about him to some extent, which was maybe a mistake. I don’t think in the long run that is going to be necessarily something that matters so much.

Q: Okay. You don’t think it’s-, I mean, you had Ed Miliband.

A: Yeah. He has a similar image problem, I guess. Yeah. I think it’s what the media chooses to make of it. So, there seems to be-, if there are papers with him looking silly, it becomes about him. I don’t think it has to be. I think it’s-, yeah, it’s just up to what people make of it to some extent.

Q: Yeah. Okay. I think that’s covered pretty much everything.

A: I hope that was okay.

Q: No, that was fantastic. That was perfect. Thank you so much.

**[Transcript Ends 00:21:04]**